



AAC Publications

El Monstruo, La Presencia de mi Padre

Chile, Northern Patagonia, Cochamó

I felt an instant attraction to El Monstruo when I saw one of the few existing pictures of the biggest, most remote wall in the Cochamó region. The details merely confirmed the aptitude of the name: There were no trails to its base, nor to the valley, nor even to the adjacent valley, Valle Trinidad. A switch was flipped in my brain, as if by Dr. Frankenstein; I was programmed to see this project through, not in spite of the challenges it posed but because of them.

After 30-plus days over four years of concentrated route-finding and trail-breaking, mostly solo (a slow death by bamboo), I forged a trail that takes the truly committed from Cerro Trinidad to a high saddle (provisionally named El Paso Querido del Caso Perdido), across a sweeping rocky traverse to a serene high-altitude lake, down a vertical Valdivian forest to the valley floor, and then across some marshy terrain to the base of the wall. I finally began opening a free route on El Monstruo in March 2012 with my dad, Michael Conroy. After several weeks confined by heavy precipitation to trail work and quality tent-time, my father and I decided we hadn't come so far to be turned back by a little moisture. So we racked up and began climbing, cleaning and equipping the first three pitches and an alternate first pitch in the persistent Patagonian rain. With only one day before we absolutely had to pack out to make a plane home, we opened pitches four through nine amid hummingbirds under a bluebird sky.

I opened the rest of the route in February 2013 with various partners, including Brian Stuenkel, Sean Willis, Jaimie Rault, and Nick Foster, over the course of 16 days. Highlights include toe-tingling hand-drilling on exposed, unprotected terrain, pulling a roof 800m up, amazing bivouacs, the summit snowfield, and, of course, numerous condor flybys. I called the route La Presencia de mi Padre (1600m, 28 pitches, 5.10+). Shortly after the successful ascent, friends Chris Moore and Cooper Varney made an incredible second ascent of the route in a whirling seven hours, confirming the grades and the overall adventure of getting to the wall and then up it. Time to the base varies with the hiker and load—anything from a record 2:46 to over 12 hours, with six to eight hours being about average.

One older route ascends El Monstruo. The obvious corner/chimney that begins on the north side was opened in 2006 by two Polish climbers, Boguslaw Kowalski and Jerzy Stefanski, and named La Gran Raja (The Great Crack, 1,300m, 7a). However, I have been informed there was aid on the route (A1), which would make mine the first free ascent on the face. Jerzy and Boguslaw are the only other climbers to reach El Monstruo, and they did so in alpine style. They went light and fast, pushing through dense forest and bamboo, streams, and then leaving their cooking and sleeping comforts behind to do the route in only two days. This is how I first explored the approach; hence, I have gained much respect for the fast and committing style of the two Poles.

Images



Steep, vegetated terrain on the approach.



Traversing a high snowfield helps gain access to the wall.



Steep approach slabs lead up to the wall.



Leading pitch 9 of La Presenica de mi Padre.



Heading up clean granite on pitch 11.



Leading up pitch 12. Sweeping granite continues for many more pitches to the summit.



La Presencia de mi Padre ascends the left side of the remote El Monstruo in 28 pitches. With a trail finally built and only two established routes on the massive formation, there's much more to do.

Article Details

Author	Nathan Conroy
Publication	AAJ
Volume	55
Issue	87
Page	217
Copyright Date	2013
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions