



AAC Publications

El Obispo, North Face (Second Ascent and First Free Ascent)

Ecuador

El Altar (a.k.a. Kapak Urku) is a large, extinct stratovolcano located on the western side of Sangay National Park in central Ecuador, 170km south of Quito. Comprising the massif of El Altar are nine major peaks that rise over 5,000m and form a horseshoe-shaped ridge about 3km long, surrounding a lake located in the volcano's crater, known as Laguna Collanes (ca 4,200m, a.k.a. Laguna Amarilla). The north face of El Obispo (5,319m), the highest peak in the Altar massif, is located at the southern end of this lake.

This incredible but dangerous wall was first climbed in 1984 by the Franco-Ecuadorian team of Guilles de Latillade and Oswaldo Morales (AAJ 1986). After failing on two attempts, they managed to reach the summit in an epic multi-day battle up the left-hand side of the face. Thirty years later, after many attempts by numerous climbers, Felipe Guarderas and I made the second ascent of the wall and the first free ascent in January 2013. Despite the conditions, we followed the original line for the most part, doing some variations here and there (800m, VI 5.10d M4). We're sure the route is much drier now—less snow and ice, more loose rock.

From our car, we reached the mountain in one day, using burros for the approach. We left camp at 5 a.m. the following morning. This was my second attempt, and we reached the upper headwall by noon. Here we encountered face climbing with poor protection, for which I put on my climbing shoes, leaving my heavy boots behind. After a total of 15 pitches of climbing, Felipe continued with a long and exposed traverse to the right, where he encountered scary sections of icy rock before reaching the summit ridge. A short hike brought us to the summit by 3:30 p.m. It was a dream to be up there after climbing such a wall and knowing we could take the normal route down. After a long descent down the Italian route and a couple of hours of sleep, we reached our car the next day.

[Editor's note: El Obispo was first climbed in 1963 from the south (outside the caldera) and has since seen numerous ascents from that aspect. A new route was reported on the north face in **AAJ 1991**, but this is incorrect; the Culberson-Culberson is on the south face and believed to climb ground right of Arista del Calvario and share terrain with another route, Galeria de Tiro.]

– Roberto Morales, Ecuador

Images



NORTH FACE OF EL OBISPO (VI, 5.10d, M4) 800m
(FA) Oswaldo Morales and Guilles de Latillade (1984) (yellow variation)
(FFA) and second ascent, Roberto Morales and Felipe Guarderas (2014)

The north face of El Obispo showing the slight variation taken by Guarderas and Morales high the mountain.

EL OBISPO SOUTH FACE



Italian route (red)
El calvario variation (yellow)
El calvario ridge (Green)

Routes on the south face of El Obispo.



Arista del calvario (Green)

Culberson: "We climbed the face to the right of Calvario Ridge (Green) It was steep low, moderate in the middle and then a bunch of fairly steep runnels up high."

Galeria de tiro (blue) I am not 100% sure about this line. I know goes there but it can be a little more to the left or right.

Additional routes on the south face of El Obispo. The Culberson route is described.



Ecuador's "nordwand"? The north face of El Obispo showing the only known route.



Run-out rock climbing on the upper headwall.



About to start up the upper rockband.



The north face of El Obispo viewed from the approach.



Climbing loose rock low on the climb.



Traversing around a steep roof.



Launching up steep rock.



On the summit of El Obispo.

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