



AAC Publications

Cerro Calingasta, east face; Pico Maida, east face

Chile-Argentina, Central Andes

In December 2011, Martín Neimark, Code Raguet, and I explored the barely visited western area of the Cordillera de la Totorá. This beautiful range is located in San Juan Province in the Central Andes of Argentina—a remote area with lots of potential for moderate climbing on high peaks. A relatively new mining road allows a less tiring approach, if you get permission to use it. On our first trip, we ascended an often admired but unclimbed peak: Cabeza de León (5,045m). We also made the first ascent of a neighboring mountain that we named Alfil Peak (5,170m).

In December 2013, captivated by the area, we returned. This time we focused on two unclimbed peaks south of Alfil Peak. We drove from Calingasta, following the mining road to ca 3,700m. From that point, we hiked east to the complex Calingasta Glacier. At the upper part of the glacier we established camp at ca 4,600m, 7km from the road. From camp, we chose the more northern of the two peaks and climbed a straightforward snow slope (700m, 60°) up the east face to the ridge. After 150m, we reached the summit via a short but exposed section of loose rock (UIAA III). We named the peak Cerro Calingasta (5,330m) after the glacier. It took us five hours to ascend and three hours to descend the route (AD).

Unfortunately, the north face of the other peak wasn't in good condition and we decided to attempt another aspect. We first descended to the mining road and then hiked east for 8km through a valley, following a creek to establish a new camp at ca 4,300m, at the base of the mountain's east face. On December 19 at 8 a.m. we began ascending a snowfield (900m, 40°) to reach the upper part of a broken glacier. After a 350m traverse, we climbed the final portion to the summit, about 150m of easy and exposed mixed terrain. We descended by the same route (AD), reaching the road 14 hours after starting our climb. We called the mountain Peak Maida (5,291m).

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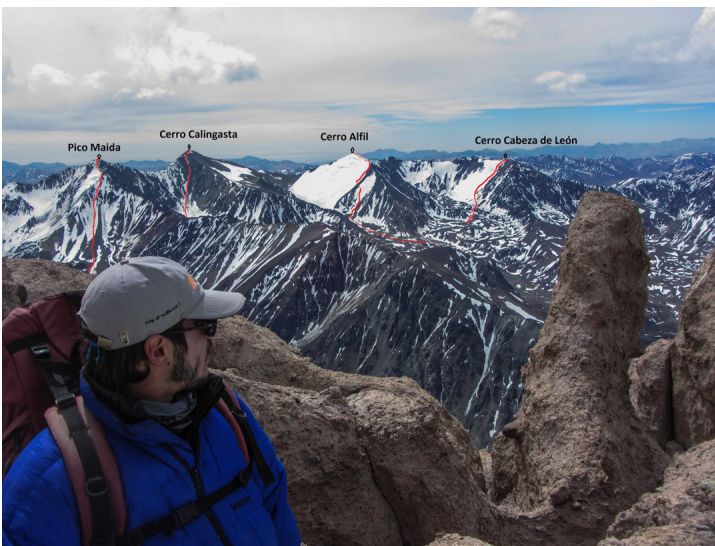
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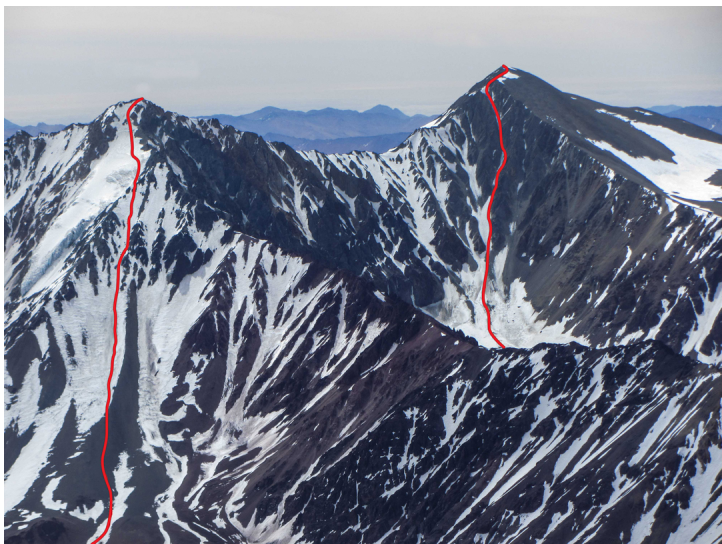
Pico Maida and Cerro Calingasta



The east face of Pico Maida.



Looking out at Cordillera de la Totora.



The east face routes on Pico Maida (left) and Cerro Calingasta (right). Cerro Alfil and Cerro Cabeza de León lie out of picture to the right of these peaks.



Cerros Calingasta and Alfil from Pico Maida's summit.



Typical snow penitente climbing.

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