



AAC Publications

Cerro Mariposa, La Vuelta de los Condores

Argentina-Chile, Northern Patagonia, Turbio Valley

Paul McSorley initially told me about the Turbio Valley in the summer of 2008, after seeing a photo of Cerro Mariposa in the refugio at Aguja Frey near Bariloche. “Where’s that?” he inquired. Nobody would tell him. However, blessed with fluent Spanish and a gregarious, charismatic nature, Paul eventually pried it out of the reticent locals: The wall was located deep in Rio Turbio valley, near the hippy farming town of El Bolsón. Back in Squamish, Paul relayed the rumors to me: endless machete-assisted bushwhacking, red-wine-guzzling gauchos, river rafting, and stacks of virgin walls. The place was just too intriguing. We had to go.

In February 2009 we went into the valley with Andrew Querner. A boat ride across Lago Puelo, followed by two days on horseback, led to about a week of thick, prickly bushwhacking. Intimidated by the rumors of rockfall on Cerro Mariposa, we switched our objective to the Piritas Valley—appetizing rock towers that weren’t capped by a threatening glacier. It was a great trip, and we climbed two new lines on the Piritas. [The first climbs in the Piritas Valley likely were climbed by Bicho Fiorenza (Argentina), who visited in 2006 with Pedro Lutti and in 2007 with Morsa Degregori. See AAJ 2009.] After we were done climbing we rafted out the river in marginal, kiddie-pool rafts. The whole experience—from the horsemanship to the climbing to the rafting—was like being in a different world. I knew we weren’t done with the enchanted valley.

In January 2014 I returned with Matt Van Biene, Marc-Andre Leclerc and Paul McSorley, intent on attempting Cerro Mariposa. Wary of the glacier on top, we desperately hoped to find a protected line on the northeast face. This time we came armed with burly rafts—on top of floating the river, we would have to cross a lake to reach the base of the wall. After the gauchos dropped us off, a week’s worth of load shuttling saw us primed and ready below the very remote face. And after a half-day of fixing a few lines, we were ready to attempt the wall.

Aside from a couple of stomach-churning core shots on our ropes, the route went smoothly. We found a line more or less unthreatened by rockfall, left of the steepest section of wall, in a large corner system, accessed by some difficult, glacier sculpted slabs. While on route, giant condors flew overhead, as if, we think, to encourage us. The hairiest lead came right at the top, where 21-year-old Marc tagged up the aid gear, then high-stepped on a marginal, upside-down knifeblade. We all held our breath, but the youngster showed us his repertoire of skills and led us safely to the rim. After another 45 minutes of snow plodding, we crested the sun-drenched summit. Following an open bivouac near the top, we rappelled for a half-day back to our sleeping bags below the wall.

After a few days of hiking and rafting out, we clinked Heinekens on the banks of Lago Puelo. Miraculously, we had been blessed with a two-week spell of perfect weather for our climb. We didn’t have a SAT phone, so we did weather forecasting the old-school way: squinting at the clouds. By the time we drained our first beers, the archetypal Patagonian winds and rain had returned. This was the first ascent of the wall and we called our route La Vuelta de los Condores (700m, 5.11 A2).

[Editor’s note: Cerro Mariposa lies on the Chile-Argentina border and is accessed from Argentina. Climbers are known to have visited the Mariposa valley at least as far back as 2001. During that year, as American Jerry Dodrill reported in a comment at Climbing.com, he and Willie and Damian Benegas scoped routes in the valley but were prevented by weather from attempting major ascents. While they were there, an Argentine team had an epic in which the leader on a big-wall attempt popped an aid hook

and dropped his drill, which speared the belayer's leg, requiring an arduous evacuation down the wall, through the boulder-filled forest, and out the Rio Turbio by pack raft, where, according to Dodrill, "they capsized and nearly drowned." A report by Ryan Huetter in **AAJ 2011** documents several ascents and attempts in the valley, including a repeat of the "Brazilian Route" (550m, 5.10+) on a formation called La Oreja.]

Will Stanhope, Canada

Images



Paul McSorley leading clean granite on Cerro Mariposa.



Condors flying as the team makes their way up Cerro Mariposa.



If you're climbing Cerro Mariposa, there's only one approach: Will Stanhope and Marc-Andre Leclerc paddle out from the wall.



Summit of Cerro Mariposa.



The final snowfield to the summit of Cerro Mariposa.



La Vuelta de los Condores, on the left side of Cerro Mariposa.

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