



AAC Publications

Aguja Volonqui, east buttress, El Lobito; Cerro Marconi Central, east face, La SuperWhillans; Cerro Pier Giorgio, east face (first complete ascents)

Argentina-Chile, Chaltén Massif

During several of the short, cold and snowy weather windows in the 2013-2014 season, I turned my attention to neglected, smaller, but still fantastic peaks.

On December 4 I hiked into the Marconi Glacier with Sarah Hart to attempt an obvious ice gully on the east buttress of Aguja Volonqui (ca 2,200m) the following day. The route contained steep snow, moderate mixed climbing, one pitch of steep ice, a bunch of mellow ice, and one pitch of tricky, thin ice. The hardest climbing was on the final pitch (M5 A0), which involved one move pulling on a cam and then a mantel onto the ridge just 10m from the summit boulder. From the summit, we descended the Carrington-Rouse route (east face and south ridge, 1976) by rappelling and downclimbing. We named our route El Lobito (400m, AI4+ M5 A0), and I'd recommend it. Carrington and Rouse were turned back just below the summit by a rime mushroom, so this is likely the first ascent of the peak.

I hiked into the Marconi Glacier again on December 18 with Rolando Garibotti to attempt Cerro Marconi Central (ca 2,380m) the following day. We hoped to climb an obvious ice and snow ramp up the east face that I had attempted solo in September, before turning back because of poor ice conditions. Our ascent was enjoyable and fairly casual, with awesome scenery and excellent conditions. The rock is fairly compact and was rime-covered, so pitons are recommended. Our ascent took roughly five hours from the bergschrund to the summit at a moderate pace, and our descent took about five hours as well. We named the route La SuperWhillans (600m, AI3 M3) for its strong resemblance in form to Aguja Poincenot's famous Whillans Ramp, and also a play on the local classic La Supercanaleta. La SuperWhillans was repeated the very next day by Argentine climbers Carlitos Molina and Iñaki Coussirat and is recommended if conditions are right.

The only previous known attempt on Cerro Marconi Central was in 1966 by Argentine climbers Edgar Köpcke, Avedis Naccachian, and Enrique Triep, from the west side. Their attempt ended somewhere at or near the summit ridge, likely making ours the first trip to the summit.

With another weather window, Rolando and I left Niponino on January 23 at the leisurely hour of 8:30 a.m. to attempt the Skvarca-Skvarca route (AAJ 1963) up the central east face of Cerro Pier Giorgio (ca 2,700m). The first part is a chimney with mostly very enjoyable mixed climbing. There were two sections of A1, which would have been a time-consuming affair except that earlier attempts had left many pitons in-situ. After five pitches in the chimney we simul-climbed easy ice up and left toward the summit. One more pitch of mixed climbing brought us to the col just south of the summit, and about 25m below the top, where a wooden wedge in a crack marked the highpoint of the Skvarca brothers. We first tried to climb to the summit directly, but found 30cm thick rime ice covering blank rock. Looking to the right, we found a flake and made a 15m diagonal rappel to the east side. From here we climbed directly to the summit via a narrow ice chimney—a bit like a mixed-climbing version of the Harding Slot, but fortunately easier! We reached the summit at 8:30 p.m., 12 hours after leaving Niponino.

Only after some days of research did we realize this was the first complete ascent of Cerro Pier Giorgio. In addition to the Skvarca brothers' ascent, a handful of other routes had been climbed to the summit ridge of Pier Giorgio, but no one had managed to traverse the gendarmed ridge to the summit. In this way Cerro Pier Giorgio is a bit like Chaltén's version of Les Droites: The summit ridge

is very long, technical, and gendarmed, and traversing to the summit is in many cases just as difficult as the climbing up to the summit ridge. [Editor's note: Cerro Pier Giorgio has also been spelled as "Cerro Piergiorgio" in recent reports. The peak was named after Pier Giorgio Frassati, a young climber in the early twentieth-century. The west-northwest wall is home to one of the sheerest big-walls in the area with 800m of vertical relief and few ascents. The east face also hosts future big-wall-style opportunities to the right of the Skvarca route.]

These three ascents were by no means particularly difficult or significant climbs by today's standards, but it is astounding that in 2014 such prominent summits remained unclimbed. More than anything else, they are worthwhile simply because the peaks are wild, beautiful, and much more "alpine" than many of the mountains on the Chaltén Massif.

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Images



The east and south faces of Aguja Volonqui, showing the Carrington-Rouse (left, not to summit) and El Lobito (right).



The west-northwest wall of Cerro Pier Giorgio. It has very few ascents.



The east face of Cerro Marconi Central. La SuperWhillans climbs the obvious snow and ice ramp.

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