



## AAC Publications

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### **El Hermano, Cenizas a Cenizas**

Chile, Northern Patagonia

**In the summer of 2011, Mike Ybarra cornered me inside the tourist-laden Yosemite Lodge cafeteria and asked me if I wanted to go open a new route with him in Northern Patagonia. Controversial landowner, conservationist, and businessman Doug Tompkins (about whom Mike was writing a book) had given him a picture of what looked like a taller, more feral brother of El Capitan.**

By the time the expedition finally took place in February 2014, a lot had changed: Mike had died soloing in the Sierra in 2012 (AAJ 2013), and Gil Weiss, another one of our original expedition partners, had perished on Palcaraju in Peru only a few weeks after Mike (AAJ 2013).

Armed with two Yosemite friends from my YOSAR days, Niels Tietze and Althea Rogers, our trip began in the volcano destroyed town of Chaiten, Chile which borders the Tompkins' 715,000-acre preserve, Parque Pumalín. With little knowledge of the wall, valley, or approach—beyond what Doug Tompkins had seen from his airplane years ago—we were shuttled by Chaitur Excursions an hour south of Chaiten to Lago Yelcho, a blue-colored, salmon-filled, glacial lake that guards the entrance to Valle Correntoso. Our local connection had arranged a motorboat to take us across the lake and drop us at the mouth of the river where we expected to be on our own.

A mile and a half into the roughly 15-mile approach, we came across a year-round ranch and asked to rent a horse the following day. They graciously agreed and took us to a seasonal ranch another 3 miles up. This second rancher agreed to take us as far as his horses could the next day. After unexpectedly traveling by horse for 10 miles on ranch trails, we said goodbye to the locals and began hacking our way through thick, temperate rainforest to the base of our less-than-vertical but taller and more remote El Cap sibling.

We forged trail through stubborn bamboo barricades and over elevated, decomposing tree lattices for about four miles to a "clearing" where we set up our advanced base camp. To gain the wall required another mile of hiking with 1,800' of elevation gain. The rock is located in a large, lush drainage called Cañadón Huillín (43° 07'08.39" S, 72° 12'33.37" W). As far as we know, the only other traffic here was by Damian Benegas (Argentina), who hiked through the area a decade prior but did no climbing. In total, our slog to the base of the wall took nine days.

Our first push—in which we planned to reach the top in two days—quickly ended in failure on the first day, owing to the continuous cascade of heavily vegetated, rain-forested cracks, and an impending ark-worthy storm. We rappelled, leaving lines fixed, and slept on the ground. We juggled up the next day to our high point about 900' feet up. This time we came prepared with our green thumbs—and a trowel! Above our fixed lines, Althea took the first leads, taking us up to and beyond a nice natural ledge through some very slimy, wet, and vegetated corners. Fixing lines above, we rappelled back down to the ledge and bivied that night.

From our new highpoint around 1,500' up, we encountered progressively less plant life and occasionally sparkling-clean crack and corner systems. After sleeping on another natural bivy ledge on the fourth day, we blasted to the summit, climbing another 2,000' of chimneys and splitters before taking off our climbing shoes and taking the "mountaineers finish" to the summit. We hauled halfway up the wall, leaving out kit on the higher of the two natural ledges on which we slept. With meticulous cleaning, the route would likely go free at around 5.12. We climbed the route about half free.

We rappelled the route over two days, leaving single nuts and slings for anchors. We placed only one bolt on the 4,000' climb to protect 5.10+ slab climbing above a ledge on the second pitch. In all, we climbed 18 rope-stretching pitches, ranging from 200-230'. We called the wall El Hermano and the route Cenizas a Cenizas (4,000', 5.10R A3), which means "ashes to ashes." The route name came from all the ash we found on the summit from the recent eruptions of Chaiten, in honor of Niels' two brothers, whose ashes he released on the summit, and for the memory of Gil and Mike.

We attempted an additional peak in the Valle Correntoso, chossaneering and climbing up to "jungle 5.9," but turned around with approximately 600' of glowing white, slabby alpine rock remaining to the summit. Massive potential for 4,000' first ascents still exists in this valley if you've got a green thumb and a strong back.

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## Images



Althea Rogers leads up an A3 pitch.



Althea Rogers on the summit of El Hermano.



Althea Rogers nears the summit of El Hermano on the fourth day of the climb. Unclimbed walls adorn the background.





El Hermano, showing the only route in the valley: Cenizas a Cenizas (4,000', 5.10 R A3). It took the team nine days to reach the base of the wall and six days total to climb and descend the route.



The huge "nose" feature of El Hermano (center) and unclimbed walls behind.





The team's first view of El Hermano on the jungle approach.



Libby Sauter, Althea Rogers, and Niels Tietze (from left to right).



On the approach to El Hermano through the Valle Correntoso.



Flying over the Valle Correntoso with Doug Tompkins on a reconnaissance flight.



An inversion settles over Valle Correntoso while high on El Hermano.



Lago Yelcho, the approach lake before the 15 mile approach.



Niels Tietze leading the final pitch of Cenizas a Cenizas on El Hermano.





The team used single nut anchors to rappel the entire 4,000' face.



Machetes out: Althea Rogers clears a path through the jungle on the approach to El Hermano.

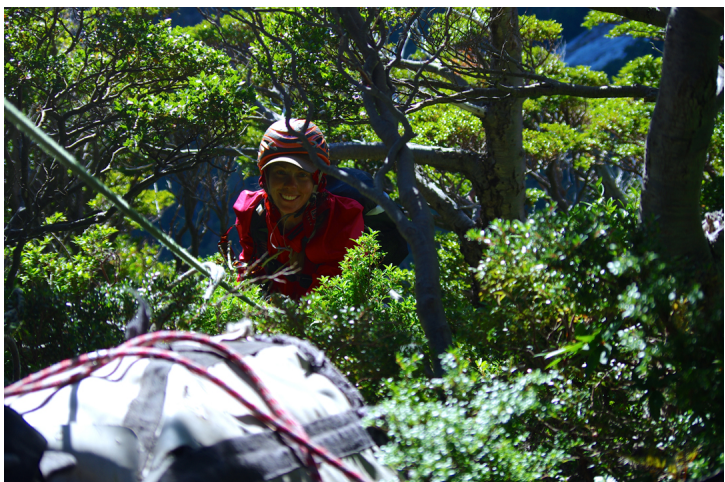


Niels Tietze ready for battle with goggles, screamers, and a metal trowel.





Althea Rogers rappels into the night.



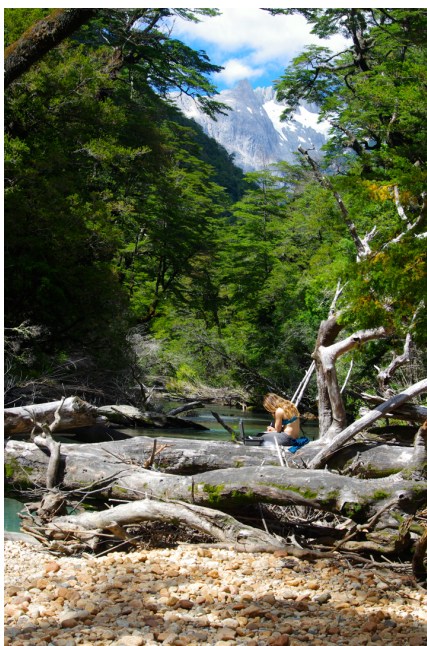
Climbing through thick vegetation on El Hermano.



: Niels Tietze leading up a river of green. There's a splitter crack under there...somewhere.



A river crossing on the approach.



Althea Rogers calls out via satellite phone with impressive unclimbed peaks towering above.



Chaiten volcano ash previously undisturbed from an eruption six years prior.





The team's second objective, where they turned around 600' below the summit. It is unnamed and unclimbed.



Virgin granite walls up to 4,000' in the Valle Correntoso.



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