



AAC Publications

Pirita Central, El Conono

Argentina-Chile, Northern Patagonia, Turbio Valley

Planes, buses, taxis, truck beds, boats, horses, and feet—it was an exciting and lengthy journey just to get into the Piritas Valley, and it was all worth it for the stunning landscape, impeccable granite, and remoteness of the valley. It was January 26, 2016, and Tess Ferguson and I had just begun our 17-day exploratory climbing adventure into the Turbio Valley of northern Patagonia.

With the invaluable assistance of our local contact, Iván Larsen, we were able to arrange all the logistics needed to carry out our expedition. We began in the town of Lago Puelo and took a private boat to the far side of the lake. There we met our gauchos, and after a 24-hour delay due to high river levels, we continued deeper up the Turbio River on horseback.

Two days later, the gauchos dropped us off and we began shuttling gear up to the Refugio Osvaldo. Upon arriving, we were surprised to find a kind and welcoming Argentine couple living there. In addition to making renovations and expansions on Osvaldo, they were working on a new refugio in the Mariposa Valley (see AAJ 2014 for more info on this area). They also informed us that a four-person climbing team was currently exploring the Rio Turbio. While this area is far from having an active scene, it is surely growing in popularity.

The next morning we started off for the Piritas Valley. Two long days of hiking, bushwhacking, and scrambling were required to reach the Piritas massif. [Piritas is a tri-summited granite spike. Pirita Central was first climbed in February 2006 by Pedro Lutti and Bicho Fiorenza via its east corridor. See AAJ 2009 and 2011 for more info on past trips and routes.] A comfortable bivy spot afforded us a brief rest before our ascent. To access Pirita Central, it was necessary to climb a 400m “approach.” We found the first three pitches to be dirty and difficult. Four points of aid were required for us, though past parties have freed them at 5.11. The remaining terrain we found to range from third class to easy fifth class.

Upon reaching the base of Piritas Central on February 1, we began climbing our intended line up the center of the prow: pitch after pitch of clean, compact granite with plenty of gear placements and thoroughly enjoyable climbing. We shivered through a rather uncomfortable bivy just shy of the summit and topped out the following morning. We decided to name our route El Conono (800m, IV 5.9 C1) after one of our gauchos. We utilized five points of aid on the route, which could likely be freed at 5.11.

The Pirtas massif showing all known routes, with El Conono (800m, IV 5.9 C1) in blue.

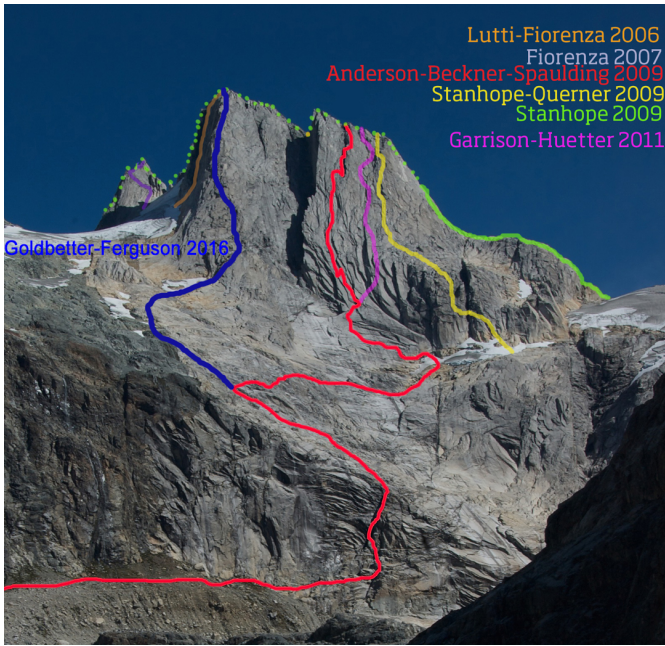
Our descent was more difficult than anticipated. After an all-day rappel session that involved limited anchors, rockfall, and many stuck ropes, we reached the glacier. More scrambling, talus, and a sketchy river crossing had us back at our bivy site well past midnight. Following our climb we descended from the Piritas Valley and explored the Mariposa Valley. We climbed nine vegetated pitches on a feature called the Earlobe before deeming it not worthwhile. Many of the cracks in the Mariposa are vegetated and closed off. While there is certainly more rock to be had there, I believe it is better suited to harder lines, harder climbers, and a bolt kit.

We exited the valley on the Turbio River, using inflatable kiddie rafts and paddles fashioned out of sticks. The paddling was also more difficult than anticipated, though more likely due to our inexperience with whitewater and our inadequate boating setup than the river itself. After nine hours

of rafting, the river spit us into Lago Puelo on February 11.

Alan Goldbetter, USA

Images



The Pirtas massif showing all known routes, with El Conono (800m, IV 5.9 C1) in blue.



Alan Goldbetter racking up beneath the Pirtas.



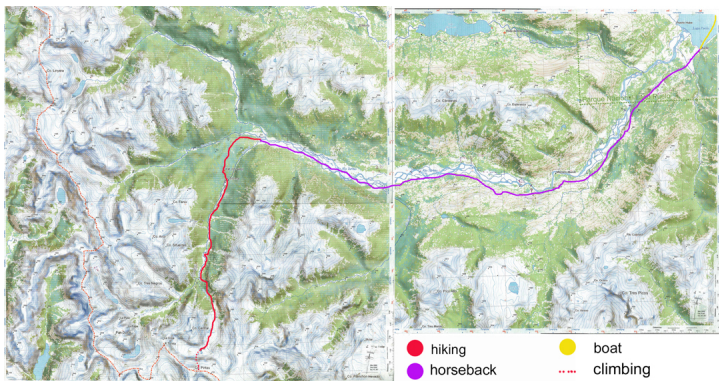
Awe-inspiring view of the Mariposa Valley.



Riding horseback on the approach along the Rio Turbio.



Tess Ferguson topping out on the summit block of Piritas Central with peaks and valleys to the west in the background.



A map with line drawing of the team's approach route to Piritas Central.

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