



## AAC Publications

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### **La Jungla: New Climbs and Exploration in the Río Alerce Valley**

Argentina-Chile, Northern Patagonia

**From late December 2016 through early February 2017, Josie McKee and I spent just over four weeks exploring and climbing in northern Patagonia's Río Alerce Valley.** This region is about 20–30 kilometers southwest of Chaitén, Chile, and east of Parque Nacional Corcovado. We were inspired to visit this relatively unknown (climbing-wise) region by hours of cerveza-fueled Google Earth searching. Photos from a local woman who had backpacked far up the valley eventually pinned down our choice.

On December 17, after securing a boat ride across the formidable moat of Río Yelcho, we tracked in a southwest direction along the Río Alerce, wading rivers and bushwhacking through dense jungle, braving the ubiquitous leeches and frequent (and fierce) flash floods, until we were able to establish a base camp below several 600m-plus walls.

We explored west to the headwaters of the Río Alerce, along with poking our noses up various side valleys. We found classic *siempre verde* forests with thick stands of *colihue* (bamboo) and ferns under moss-draped canopies of beech trees and old growth *alerces* (larch) along with the ever-present *nalca* (a giant rhubarb plant) poking out into the sun-bathed areas. Higher, we found classic alpine terrain of meadows, tarns, glaciers, and snowfields.

This valley plays host to countless craggy peaks, ridges, and canyons, which together could be said to contain a lifetime's worth of quality stone, graced with splitter cracks, featured faces, and excellent friction. Many of the lower portions of these cliffs, however, are cloaked in jungle, thus necessitating navigation over mossy, slick slabs, vegetation-filled cracks (usually good when gardened), and through dense brush, most of which can seemingly hold body weight. We believe the rock to mostly be diorite, with bands of whiter-colored granite showing up throughout the area. Regardless of elevation, the granite-like stone appears not to hold as much vegetation as the diorite.

We established two new routes of insignificant proportions. One ascends the northwest face of what is locally called El Trono (1,527m). [This formation's very large east face was climbed in 2007 by Mariana Gallego, Luis Molina, and Martin Molina, after an earlier attempt in 1999, and then soloed by a new route, in early 2012, by Silvia Vidal. She called the approximately 1,000–1,300m face "Serranía Avalancha" in **her 2012 AAJ report**, though this may refer to a broader ridge, range, or the nearby Río Avalancha located to the south. It is accessed via a valley to the east of the peak, starting from Lago Yelcho. See the attached map/online map.] **Our new route, Well, Here We Are (250m, 5.9+),** mostly involved linking ledges and wandering up slabs to the north shoulder of the peak.

Our second foray into the vertical yielded a possible first ascent of what may be called Cerro Desnudo (1,458m). We ascended a wandering linkup of slabs, jungle climbing, bushwhacking, walking, and alpine bouldering on the left side of the southeast face—Pollos de Selva (1,358m, V 5.7 JC1 J5 V0). What do those grades mean? JC1: Clean jungle aid (with straightforward slinging and weighting of suitable, secure vegetation). J5: Steep jungle free climbing (i.e., 5th-class jungle, compared with, for example, J2, which is 2nd-class jungle or rough jungle-y trail).

We also made a spirited, though unsuccessful, attempt at a route up what we dubbed Christmas Wall, as it was the wall that we first saw close up on Christmas Day. It cemented our desire to return and

further explore the valley. Our attempt was ultimately thwarted by lack of gear, time, and incoming weather. We climbed terrain with difficulties up to JC3 5.10+.

In the classic Patagonian style of “it ain’t over till its over,” we ended our expedition with a one-day load carry back to Río Yelcho, followed by a second day of bushwhacking another mile down the river in order to flag down a boat from the other side. After the boat ride, we hitchhiked back to Chaitén, reaching the town on February 5.

We would like to express our thanks to all those who helped us along the way, including the kind folks at the Puma Fishing Lodge (Patricio, Fredrico, and Adier) and Chaitur (Nicolas La Penna), Anna Haegel, Anne Peick, and the generous folks at NOLS Rocky Mountain.

– Jared Spaulding, USA

## Images



Josie McKee wading up Río Alerce below the Christmas Wall.



The east wall of El Trono/Serrania Avalancha, as visible from Carraterra Austral and Lago Yelcho. Both known routes climb the right half of the wall, which is obscured by a foreground hill.



Josie McKee loading the boat to cross the Río Yelcho.

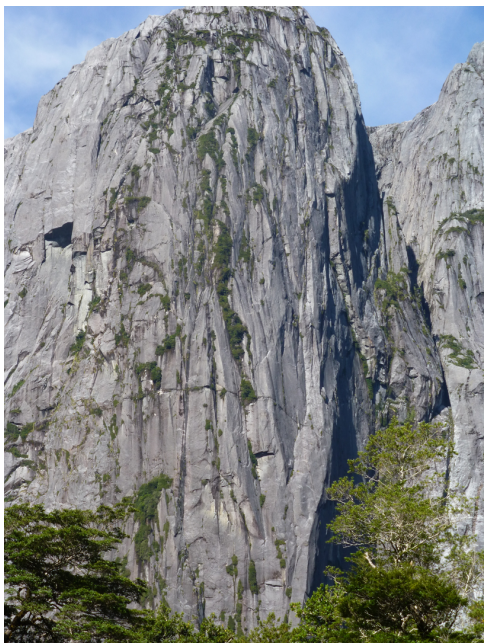


The Río Alerce Valley from the summit of Cerro Desnudo.

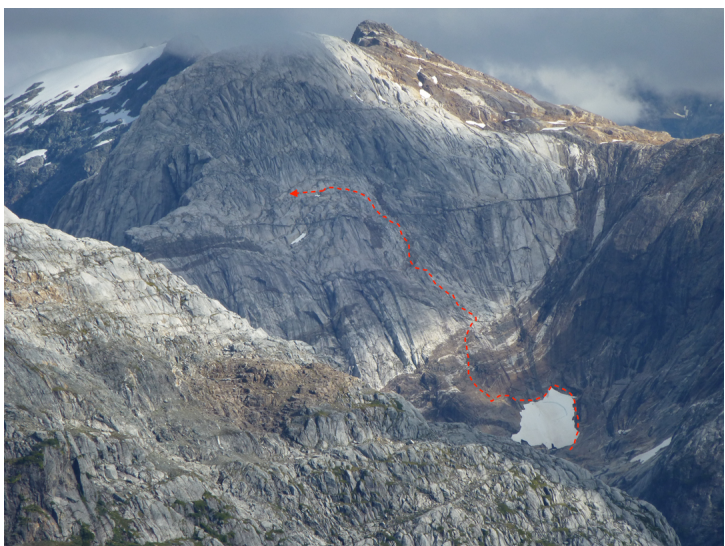


Josie McKee jungle climbing on the third pitch of the Christmas Wall.





Christmas Wall.



Approximate route of Well, Here We Are on El Trono/Serrania Avalancha.



Approximate route of Pollos de Selva on Cerro Desnudo.

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