



## La Gloria, Rezando

México, Nuevo León, Sierra Madre Oriental

The south pillar of La Gloria (9,688 feet), west of El Salto, showing the 1,500-foot route Rezando (13 pitches, 5.11+). Photo by Zach Clanton

**The first time I saw La Gloria, it was just a dreamy nameless pinnacle high above the ponderosa pine country of the Sierra Madre Oriental, 30km to the west of the popular sport climbing destination of El Salto. It wasn't until we stood on the summit after two months of effort that we learned its name, from a note in a glass jar on top.** Although our new route on the south face was the first rock climb up the peak, Dave Henkel (Canada) and I were the fifth party to sign in at the summit. According to the register, La Gloria was first climbed in 1981 by a group from Saltillo, who ascended the third-class west ridge, followed by three other Mexican groups in later years.

But in January 2019, when I saw the peak from the road near the small town of San José de las Boquillas, I knew none of this. To me, the southern pillar of this peak was the Mexican Beckey-Chouinard, a line of perfect blue-orange limestone just begging to be the range's first alpine sport climb.

Of course, it wasn't all that simple in the beginning. It took countless trips up the steep, cactus-riddled hill to create something resembling a trail, stock a base camp, and equip a route of this size. Starting in late 2019, Dave and I managed to haul up 96 lead bolts, 13 anchors (two bolts with chains for each), 280m of static line, cams, hooks, a drill, and an ungodly amount of food and water. For all of that effort, we were rewarded with immaculate stone from the first move to the last, and a fantastic ground-up adventure on every lead.

Although we used all sorts of trad trickery to create this sport climb, we did not simply go where gear was available—we followed the coolest looking grips. As we leap-frogged leads up the giant pillar, there was an indescribable sense of freedom and excitement every time we arrived at a new belay. Looking up at the massive expanse of rock, it was thrilling to launch into the unknown and create the next pitch. Mexican limestone can be quite the muse.

Less inspiring were the local coatimundi, similar to ringtail cats but bigger and more dexterous. Over the course of our route development, these animals tampered with our packs and hanging food caches, stealing many meters of exposed straps, draw cords, and cordelettes, along with slings, a headlamp, scissors, and needle and thread. They unzipped bags and emptied the contents of our packs across camp. We have reason to believe the coati are working on their own route, so be on the lookout for that.

Our route, Rezando, ended up having 13 pitches in 1,500' of rock, with climbing up to 5.12b/c. All that will be required to repeat it is a 70m rope and 13 quickdraws. After the last anchor, you can take off your harness and go on a short third-class jaunt to the summit of La Gloria (9,688'). The climbing is mostly in the 5.10–5.11 range, with two 5.12 pitches in wildly exposed positions. [See the editor's note below about grades.] The central pillar makes up the first nine pitches, with nothing but small stances and ledges for belays. Once you crest the summit ridge, there is an excellent bivy spot for two under a pair of giant cactus trees.

After countless nights at the base of the mountain, establishing the first nine pitches, we spent two nights at this 9,300' bivy during our final push. We reached the top on January 30, 2020, and lingered

in the warm sunshine for hours, reading old accounts by fellow summiters, taking pictures, and looking into the distance at future adventures. After six 35m rappels, we made it back to high camp just in time to build a campfire and shoot bottle rockets in celebration. During our work on the route, we had frequently signaled the villagers in Las Boquillas with our lights, and they would blast mariachi music in response. When we shot bottle rockets into the black abyss after our summit push, the whole town seemed to come out for the celebration.

– Zach Clanton, USA

**Editor's Note:** While establishing this route, the climbers free climbed all but one move but were unable to complete a single-push free ascent, after high winds and frigid temperatures arrived in the area at the end of January 2020. Clanton returned to the area in early 2021 with Michael Perry from Texas, and on January 26 they redpointed the route. By February, the climb had already been repeated at least once, and the consensus grade for full route has settled at 5.11+.

## Images



The south pillar of La Gloria (9,688 feet), west of El Salto, showing the 1,500-foot route Rezando (13 pitches, 5.11+). Photo by Zach Clanton



Dave Henkel bolting pitch four of Rezando. Each pitch on the route was established ground up.



An exotic bivy ledge, nine pitches up the south pillar of La Gloria.

## Article Details

Author	Zach Clanton
Publication	AAJ
Volume	62
Issue	94
Page	
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions