



AAC Publications

Cerro La Sombra, Jardines de Piedra, and Two Notable Free Ascents

Chile, Valle Cochamó

Sundance: Second Ascent and First Free Ascent

Upon arrival in Cochamó in December 2019, I partnered up with local climber Diego Diazaguilera. Talking about potential climbs to free, he pointed out the route Sundance, which goes up the northwest face of Cerro Trinidad. Established in 1998 by Grant Farquhar and Simon Nadin (22 pitches, 7a+ A2+), the route hadn't seen any repeats. It was perfection to my ears!

Sundance climbs the center of the steepest part of Cerro Trinidad. The five aid pitches are steep and challenging, and the first two each took me two tries to free climb. After this, pitch nine was a big fight through dirty, flared, and steep cracks. Sending this pitch required overhanging chimney and stemming skills to avoid using the closed, dirty cracks, and some incredible willpower not to fall or give up. My legs and lower back burned from the body tension necessary to stay on the wall. After this crux pitch, three more similar but less steep aid pitches led us to easier ground.

I led all the pitches free while Diego gave me all his confidence, patience, and support. We reached the summit of Trinidad in 16 hours. Although this ascent felt incredibly hard to me, the crux pitch may only be 7c if cleaned; as it is now—hard to protect and use the cracks—it could easily be 8a. In general, the whole climb is sustained and not a single pitch will let you catch your breath!

Siebe Vanhee leads the 8b crux pitch of El Cóndor Pasa. *Max Didier*

El Cóndor Pasa: Second Free Ascent and First One-Day Free Ascent

Together with Max Didier (Chile), in the beginning of January 2020, we tried what is supposed to be the hardest established free climb in Cochamó, El Cóndor Pasa (20 pitches, 8b) on Trinidad Central. We arrived at the crux pitch very quickly. I was not able to onsight the pitch, though managed to reach the anchor. From that point on we saw the weather was changing so we decided to continue to the summit just to have a look. Once at the summit we descended quickly to the base of the crux pitch for another try. We had originally planned to spend one night on the wall, on the ledge below the crux pitch, but the weather looked too threatening, so we descended that same day around 8 p.m.

We returned in mid-January and were able to make the full free ascent. We climbed switching leads up to pitch 14 (the 8b crux pitch) with me leading most of the hard pitches. Thankfully, we arrived early at this point, which gave me enough time for two tries on the crux before the sun hit the wall at 1 p.m. Max didn't try to free this pitch and offered to support me. I nearly climbed it first try without a single fall; unfortunately, a handhold broke at the very end of this technical 50m crux pitch. After a 15-minute rest, I tried it again, racing with the sun and nearly bonking. This time, it worked: no misplacements, no stress, and no broken holds! Easier pitches lead to the summit. We accepted the burning sun and made it to the top, reaching the summit in about 9 hours.

El Cóndor Pasa was put up in 2016 by Slovakian climbers Martin Krasnansky, Jozef Kristoffy, and Vladimír Linek. They free climbed it in six days after the ground-up first ascent. The route is almost entirely slab and face climbing and is well protected by bolts. Although the line sometimes favors bolted slabs over nearby cracks, these are likely bottoming, flared, and dirty. (Vegetation in Cochamó is for sure very stubborn.) The bolts don't take away the uniqueness of this technical climb!

Jardines de Piedra: The First Ascent of Cerro la Sombra

At the end of my stay in Cochamó the desire to climb an unclimbed wall was high. Valle de la Luz is wild and full of rock. Max Didier, Ian Siadak, and I walked into the valley past Cerro Capicua and scouted some walls from the river. It didn't take long to decide the unnamed and unclimbed peak north of Capicua would be a great objective.

Jardines de Piedra (16 pitches, 7b+ A2), the first ascent of Cerro la Sombra. Siebe Vanhee
From the river valley, one hour of dense, sometimes vertical, jungle hiking brought us to the start of our route. We planned to sleep at the base and climb the next day, but lack of water or a comfortable bivy forced us to move over to the gully on the left side of the wall. Here we found something akin to Japanese rock gardens: an amazing 20-square-meter platform surrounded by cascades, pools, and flowers. It was one of the best bivouacs any of us had ever seen.

The next day, we managed to climb our new route Jardines de Piedra (16 pitches, 7b+ A2) in 16 hours. Although the start of this west-facing wall looked easy, the ledge systems alternated with interesting vertical and technical climbing. On pitch four, I was challenged by a very thin crack in a dihedral. The first 30m went all free at 7b+; unfortunately, the next 30m were very dirty and steep, and I was forced to aid through (A2, with technical piton placements). This pitch was the biggest challenge of the climb.

In the middle of the wall, we chose the main dihedral (three pitches), which brought us up to the lip of the wall. This dihedral went almost free except for a few dirty and wet meters. From the lip, where it looks like the climbing is almost over, there are still six pitches to the summit. Pitch 11 was a big challenge, with some slab run-outs and a steep, flared, and dirty crack. I made a big effort to free climb but, again, aided the last few meters because of the dirt. Pitch 12 looked intimidating. Max made a proud lead of this one: a sea of slabs with little to no protection. When he ran out of rope, we climbed 20m simultaneously until he was able to make an anchor. The final four pitches are smooth climbing to the summit.

The descent was an interesting but efficient journey. We descended on the north side of the wall into the gully, making six rappels and zigzagging our way down to base camp. On day three, we made the hike back to La Junta, ending an amazing adventure shared in good company. We propose the name Cerro la Sombra for this summit.

- **Siebe Vanhee, Belgium**

Images



Siebe Vanhee leads the 8b crux pitch of El Cóndor Pasa.



Jardines de Piedra (16 pitches, 7b+ A2), the first ascent of Cerro la Sombra.

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