



## AAC Publications

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### **Cerro Huinay, Northwest Face, Futa Chao**

Chile, Northern Patagonia, Región de Los Lagos

**Cerro Huinay (1,430m; 42°23'59"S, 72°5'59"W) has a beautiful, 1,000m granite wall hidden in the Northern Patagonian jungle.** The name Huinay means “curved because of the strong winds” in the Mapuche language and refers to the massive alerce trees (*Fitzroya cupresoides*) that grow throughout the area. I learned of Cerro Huinay only after Nicolas Gutierrez showed me an article in a local climbing magazine, which described Francisco “Pancho” Herrera, Claudio Vicuña, and Erick Vigoroux’s attempt to climb it a decade ago. The three made it 750m up the northwest face over five days, stopping because of poor weather 300–400m below the summit. They left the valley in a helicopter and never returned.

The photo of the place struck me: It was wild and pristine, a valley full of life. Millions of years of evolution with just a few people walking through it. I called Pancho, who was part of the first expedition and is a very talented filmmaker. His words were simple, “The place is amazing. I’m in for another try!” The idea quickly turned to obsession, and Pancho, Nicolas, Sebastian Rojasspent, and I (all Chile) spent the next three months planning the expedition. Thankfully, the Chilean outdoor clothing brand, Lippi, supported our expedition with some help from Raimundo Olivos.

Cerro Huinay is in the Región de Los Lagos in Northern Patagonia, a remote labyrinth of fjords and islands. The area was colonized at the beginning of the 20th century by loggers keen to exploit the alerce, trees similar to the giant sequoia, which can both live for more than 3,000 years. Though they eradicated the trees close to the coast, the upper valleys remained intact, due to the seemingly impenetrable vegetation, rivers, and big lakes. That is where we wanted to go, searching for granite giants.

Today, the area around Cerro Huinay encompasses 34,000 hectares of protected land, administered by the Fundación San Ignacio del Huinay, an organization dedicated to researching and conserving the flora and fauna unique to 30km-long Fiordo Comau. The research outpost of Huinay, on the shore of the fjord, is tiny. With no trail to the wall, 30km to the east, one choice was to open a path from Huinay through the jungle, potentially a month of work. After some consideration, we decided to fly in by helicopter to the upper valley and, instead, spend all our days devoted to the singular task of opening a line to the summit.

The climate is a major hurdle in this region, with average annual rainfall of 630cm and 300 wet days per year. Our biggest concern was getting several days of good weather to allow us to climb. We decided to pack food for 30 days and brought two portaledge, 500m of rope, and 80 bolts.

After a day of driving from Puerto Varas to Hornopirén, followed by four hours of sailing, we arrived at the outpost of Huinay on February 9, 2021. Ullrich Pörschmann, the administrator of the Fundación, gave us a very warm reception. (Though, looking at us, he could not believe our group of smelly gypsies could ever climb a mountain.) Early the next morning, a small Robinson helicopter arrived. It took five trips to transport all our food and gear to a snowfield at the base of the wall (ca 430m). The views were impressive. From the sky, looking down on the wall, it finally seemed possible. However, standing at the base, we realized how massive it was, full of crazy-looking features and a headwall that just stretched upward.

We soon settled upon a long and direct line up the center, just left of a large nose that divides the

wall. This is located well to the right of the snowfield where the helicopter landed, which is also where the 2010 team began their attempt. Knowing the good weather would only be with us for the first five days, followed by eight days of rain, we tried to make quick progress.

The first 10 pitches required a lot of vertical gardening, climbing through vegetation and searching for protection in mud-filled cracks. The rock quality, though, was amazing—super solid. The middle of the wall became cleaner. We carried all our gear (portaledge, food and water for five days) to a high point 500m up, the length of our ropes. From here, we returned to the foot of the wall to rest and wait for our next weather window. At base camp, we realized the locals' stories were true: It rained hard! Rivers flowed down the wall. It was incredible scenery.

After eight days, the weather finally gave us another chance. We ascended to the portaledges and committed to the summit. We spent the next three days climbing and fixing ropes for 400m above our portaledges. In general, the climbing followed a singular crack and corner system for the first 800m, very similar to routes in Cochamó. On pitch 16, we made one 20m traverse to the right to reach a secondary crack system. The fourth day, we jumared to our highest point and started climbing through an ocean of pure, white granite to the summit.

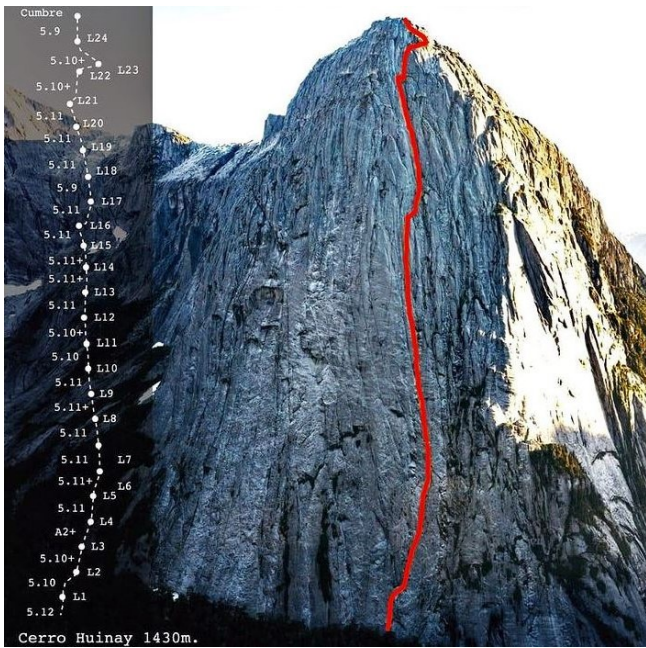
At day's end, the summit was close, but we were dehydrated. We held onto the idea of finding water at the highest point, or at least some snow. As I readied myself for the final 60m separating us from the summit, two small, mammalian heads appeared above us, which made for four loud and frenetic monkeys. We know now that they were black Patagonian vizcachas (rodents that look like rabbits), well north of their predicted range. The intrigue was mutual. This was their habitat, a place unknown to men, and men surely were new to them as well. They showed us the way to the top.

Our feelings upon reaching this huge summit can be described as maximum happiness and eternal gratitude. We embraced the magic scenery and, best of all, lots of water! To descend, we rappelled our route in the darkness under a full moon. After three to four hours, we were cooking and laughing in the portaledges, admiring the moon: What a gift to encapsulate our 20 days above an impenetrable jungle of larches and manio trees, chilcos (fuchsia), and mosses, where every centimeter of soil contains a lot of life.

Our 25-pitch route, Futa Chao (1,300m climbing distance, 5.12 A2+), is set up for free climbing and has two bolts at each belay (all about 55m apart), along with a few pitons and bolts to protect face climbing sections. In 10 days on the wall, we were able to climb every pitch free (mostly 5.10–5.11) except for a 10m section of A2+ on pitch four. Standout pitches include the beautiful finger crack on pitch 1 (5.12) and an enduro corner on pitch eight (5.11+). The name of the route means “the big father,” god and creator of all living things, to honor the great spirit who rules these wild places. We are truly believers in the perfect synchronicity of nature, and we admired that the natural elements allowed us to climb a route of pure quality, a king line in our opinion.

— Hernán Rodríguez, Chile

## Images



The northwest face of Cerro Huinay (1,430m) with the 25-pitch route Futa Chao (1,300m climbing distance, 5.12 A2+), climbed by Francisco "Pancho" Herrera, Nicolas Gutierrez, Hernán Rodríguez, and Sebastian Rojasspent in February 2021.



The northwest face of Cerro Huinay (1,430m), showing (1) the 2010 attempt and (2) Futa Chao (1,300m climbing distance, 5.12 A2+). The snowpatch helicopter landing pad can be seen at the foot of the wall at far left.



The small snowfield at the base of Cerro Huinay (1,430m) provided a landing spot for the helicopter. Prime-time access came with months of planning and a high price tag.



Hernán Rodríguez writes, “The first 10 pitches required a lot of vertical gardening, climbing through vegetation, and searching for protection in mud-filled cracks. The rock quality, though, was amazing—super solid.”





"In general, the climbing [on Cerro Huinay] followed a singular crack and corner system for the first 800m, very similar to Cochamó," says Hernán Rodríguez.



The team's high camp, about halfway up the northwest face of Cerro Huinay (1,430m).



Climbing above the clouds on the upper part of the 2021 route Futa Chao on the northwest face of Cerro Huinay (1,430m). After fixing ropes on the first 500m, the team climbed the upper half of the route from a high camp on the wall.



Francisco “Pancho” Herrera, Nicolas Gutierrez, Hernán Rodríguez, and Sebastian Rojasspent on the summit of Cerro Huinay (1,430m) after making the first ascent. Hernán Rodríguez says, “To descend, we rappelled our route in the darkness under an amazing full moon. After three to four hours, we were cooking and laughing in the portaledges, admiring the moon: What a gift to encapsulate our 20 days spent above an impenetrable jungle of larches and manio trees, chilcos, and mosses, where every centimeter of soil contains a lot of life.”

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