



AAC Publications

Cerro Pared Sur, Southwest Face

Chile, Northern Patagonia Icefield

On December 19, 2022, Felipe Cancino (Chile) and Scarlett Graham, Mitchell Harter, Frank Preston, and Riley Rice (all USA) made the first ascent of Cerro Pared Sur (2,548m, 47°25'37"S, 73°27'40"W), located in the far southeast corner of the Northern Patagonian Icefield. It forms the southern high point of a jagged, icy, approximately 14km ridge that extends from Cerro Pared Norte (3,005m).

[Editor's Note: Cerro Pared Norte was first climbed in December 1998 by a British-Italian expedition, which also climbed a 2,970m peak 2km to the south, for which they proposed the name Cerro Cavagnetto (AAJ 2000).]

The idea to climb this peak came from a photo Felipe had taken nearly nine years ago, with just the top of Pared Sur visible, its snowy rime formations balanced on top of a dark rock face. Planning the trip took a year, and we relied on first-hand knowledge from team members, research done by Camilo Rada, and satellite imagery to put together our planned route. One other expedition had attempted to climb Pared Sur in 1974, led by Australian explorer David Neilson, who wrote about the trip in his 1999 book *Patagonia: Images of a Wild Land*. Neilson generously provided more photographs and information.

Our 24-day expedition started on December 6 with an eight-hour bus ride from Coyhaique to Cochran. The same day, we also took a 1.5-hour private transfer further south to Lago Vargas. We opted to approach the peak from the southeast via the Río Baker and Río Ventisquero valleys, and we hired two local gauchos, who were brothers, to transport our gear up the massive Río Baker using a motorboat. The gauchos hosted us for a few days at their campo (30m above sea level).

From the camp, we began a two-day hike upstream to Lago Guillermo, the headwaters of the icy Río Ventisquero. Though there was usually a horse trail to follow, we made multiple river crossings, some by foot and others by packraft. We carried full packs and also used horses to haul the rest of our gear. Crossing Lago Guillermo, we marveled at the floating, building-sized icebergs. From there, we hiked west toward the Piscis and Pared Sur glaciers. The travel was relatively mellow along the valley bottom, and we shuttled our gear in two loads. Condors frequently soared overhead.

To gain access to the icefield, we climbed the east-to-west ridge just south of the Piscis Glacier (the same route as the 1974 Neilson expedition). Finally, it was time to gain some contour lines! Once on top of the ridge, we made a low base camp at the snowline (1,050m). Despite trekking for over a week, we had not glimpsed Pared Sur due to constant cloud cover. Finally, on December 16, we got a clear day and pushed a gear cache 500m up the ridge, near the start of glaciated terrain. After waiting out a short storm for a day, we moved up to camp at the cache on December 18.

The next morning, we woke to clear skies. We had planned to move camp once more to the base of the mountain; however, the forecasted weather window had shortened. We made the last-minute decision to attempt the climb that day. The snow was frozen solid, and we roped up and walked to the base of the south ridge, where we hoped to traverse under the ridge and over to the west side of Pared Sur, onto the expanse of the icefield proper. The Neilson expedition reported a significant,

impassable icefall in this area, but it appeared reasonable to cross and had much more snow than in Neilson's photos.

Once on the west side of the mountain (1,980m), we followed a 40° snow ramp for 300m. From there, we headed slightly east over a short pitch of AI3, then onto more 40–50° snow as we snaked through beautiful, heavily rimed features to the summit, where our GPS recorded a height of 2,585m. (Our route gained 975m in all.) The views from the top were unbeatable, extending north as far as we could see, with giant peaks penetrating the otherwise pancake-flat icefield. To descend, we downclimbed our route, rappelling once over the ice step. We reached camp in the late afternoon, approximately 12 hours after we started.

The following day we descended the ridge to our low base camp. The weather was better than forecasted, and we sat in camp admiring and listening to the icefall echoing in the valley below. On December 24, we woke up to thick fog and nasty wet snow and started our hike out. After one long day, we reached Lago Guillermo, where our packrafts were cached.

To exit, we made a windy crossing of Lago Guillermo and then (mostly) boated down the Ventisquero and Baker rivers to a boat ramp along the Carretera Austral. The paddling days were some of the most exciting of the trip, and included a hike down the first 4km of the Río Ventisquero due to sustained Class II and III whitewater with icebergs floating by, a hasty boat repair, and a cold swim. Eventually, we made it back to the gaucho camp and warmed ourselves by the wood stove. We spent a night at the camp, then paddled the Río Baker to our takeout. The day was mostly sunny, but we fought a strong headwind, in case we had forgotten we were in Patagonia.

– **Mitchell Harter, USA**

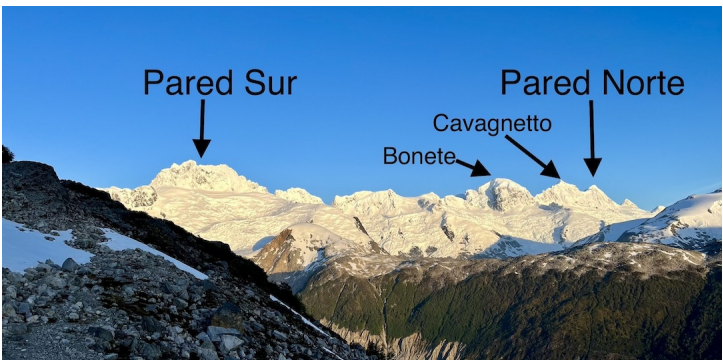
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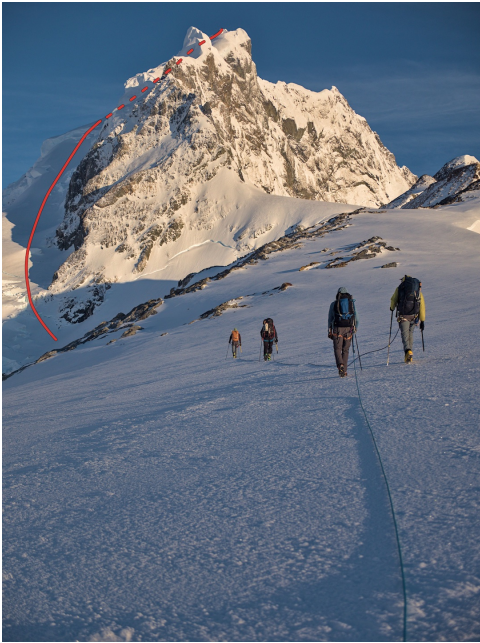
Cerro Bonete (left), Cerro Cavagnetto (right), and Cerro Pared Norte (far right). Note that some maps label a minor peak to the south Cerro Bonete; however, this may be a mapping error since the Cerro Bonete pictured is, indeed, capped by a bonnet-like glacier.



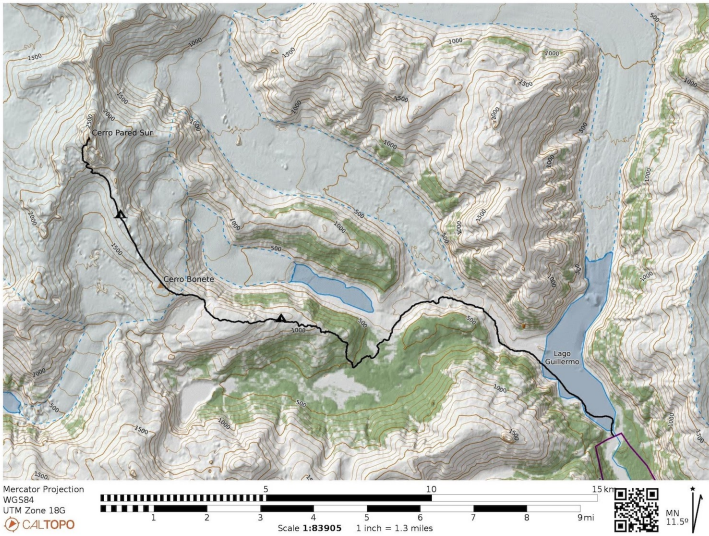
The east-southeast side of two unnamed peaks (far left), Cerro Pared Sur (center), Cerro Bonete (right), and Cerro Cavagnetto (far right).



The east-southeast sides of Cerro Pared Sur, Cerro Cavagnetto, Cerro Bonete, and Cerro Pared Norte.



Approaching the gothic-looking Cerro Pared Sur (2,548m) with the 2022 route up the southwest face partially visible.



The approach to Cerro Pared Sur (2,548m) from the southeast via Lago Guillermo.



En route on the upper southwest face of Cerro Pared Sur (2,548m).



Packrafting across Lago Guillermo.

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