



AAC Publications

El Toro, La Sombra de Muerte

Mexico, Nuevo León, El Potrero Chico

In January 2023, Sam Boyce and I bolted and freed a new route on the north side of El Toro over three weeks. La Sombra de Muerte (1,500', 16 pitches, V 5.12d) climbs the clean face about 100' to climber's right of El Sendero Luminoso (15 pitches, V 5.12d, Jackson-Smith, 1994) and summits the same feature, known as the Central Pillar.

The new route boasts sustained 5.11 pitches, a few 5.12- leads, and one 5.12d pitch. It climbs similarly to El Sendero Luminoso, with lots of fun and delicate limestone dancing. It also has some crack climbing, including a wildly overhanging 5.11d hand crack near the top. Pitch 13 is a wildly exposed 5.11d are te.

As we started bolting the route, ground-up, we spent a few nights on the wall so we could trundle rocks in the dark when no one would be climbing. We also rappelled a few times with rocks in haulbags, in an effort to be as safe as possible.

Sam and I both tried the crux fifth pitch on top-rope during a few days while sussing out the route. When we got there on our free push, the finger pods seemed to be a little smaller than we remembered, the crimps a little farther apart. But it was incredible, sustained, balancey climbing. On my first redpoint attempt, I surprised myself by hanging on all the way to the last bolt before the juggy finish.

We bivvied that night on the massive ledge at the top of pitch six—the same one used for El Sendero Luminoso. The next day, I whipped at the last crux of the fifth pitch once again. At that point, I was wrecked; I probably had only one more go in me. But at the final crux, I executed the tenuous move that never feels like it's going to work. I climbed the last few moves to the anchors slowly, wanting to savor the way my body was moving and the intense focus.

Sam sent this pitch, too, and the rest of the climb went much smoother. At the summit, we moved our ropes over to El Sendero Luminoso so that we could rebolt its top ten pitches, with gear courtesy of the American Safe Climbing Association.

La Sombra de Muerte is a slightly less sustained alternative to El Sendero Luminoso, and the 5.12 climbing is better protected, too. (It is also possible to bypass the crux on La Sombra de Muerte by climbing 1.5 pitches on El Sendero Luminoso, giving the new route a rating of 5.12b.) Later that season, a few other parties climbed La Sombra de Muerte, and the reviews were everything we could have hoped for.

—Lani Chapko, USA

Images



The north face of El Toro, El Potrero Chico. (Green line) La Sombra de Muerte (1,500', 16 pitches, V 5.12d), established by Sam Boyce and Lani Chapko in 2023; (Red line) El Sendero Luminoso (1,500, 15 pitches, V 5.12d), established by Jeff Jackson and Kurt Smith in 1994.



Lani Chapko at the top of the wildly exposed arete of pitch 13 (5.11d) on La Sombra de Muerte (1,500', 16 pitches, V 5.12d).

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