



AAC Publications

Pico Negro, Eterno Optimista

Mexico, Nuevo León, La Huasteca

In the fall of 2019, I headed out to the limestone area of La Huasteca in search of a new-routing adventure. My dream team consisted of Kai Jacobson (Canadian photographer extraordinaire), Will McEvoy (English rope ninja), and me, the one who came up with the daft idea. We spent a few days getting accustomed to the limestone and learning the local ethics before settling on an objective: the southwest face of Pico Negro. Only one other full-length route is known to exist on the steep, blank face—it was put up in 2003, but there is little information available and it's believed to be out of commission.

The peak was satisfyingly intimidating, towering over the valley. It also had access to the top, making it possible to bolt on rappel. We hoped this would help us to pick the best line and create a masterpiece—it was the first route we'd ever bolted.

Each day for the next two weeks we hiked 3,000' up through a cactus forest, a boulderfield, a relentless scree slope, and a ridge leading to the summit. From here we rappelled down the face, armed with all manner of hardware, to dislodge monster blocks, loose flakes, and cacti. The days were both brutal and utterly incredible. Every day was a riddle of how to make progress and endure the weather—unrelenting heat one day, icy rain the next, with thunderstorms sending us fleeing from the face. We cut it right down to the wire, with only one day left and absolutely no time to rest between preparing the route and attempting to climb it.

So, on November 20, after a solid night of three hours of sleep, we got to the base by sunrise. I started up the crux first pitch, a techy 5.12b corner. (Our route begins from a broad ledge that can be approached by four pitches of bolted 5.10.) The climbing was just beyond my limit—I tried as hard as I ever have, but still fell on the final move.

We continued up the pocketed wall with more straightforward climbing that still required focus due to the variable rock quality. A second crux came on the fifth pitch, which required a bit of aid, and pitch eight delivered a final bold slab that Kai heroically led in the dark. We made it down to the car 21 hours after leaving—and with only six hours to get to the airport.

We named the line Eterno Optimista (350m, 5.11 A0) due to our team's consistent ability to drastically underestimate timing. And, yes, we did make it to the airport in the nick of time.

— Sally Lisle, England

Images

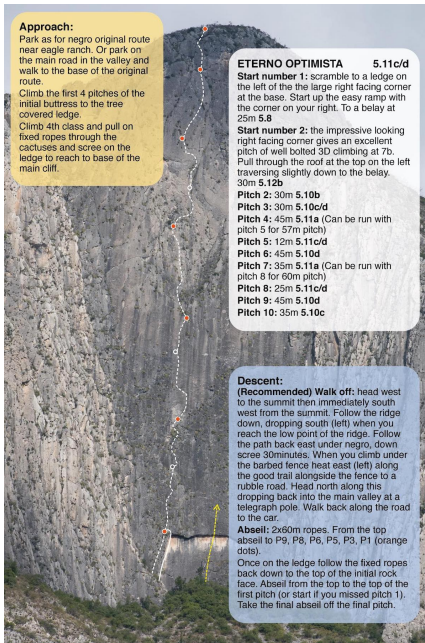


Photo-topo for Eterno Optimista on Pico Negro.



Eterno Optimista on the southwest face of Pico Negro. An earlier route (Medina-Vera, 2003) climbed this face, but the location is unknown.



Sally Lisle drilling a hole high up on pitch seven of Eterno Optimista (350m, 5.11 C1).



Will McEvoy clipping the final bolt on pitch eight of Eterno Optimista (350m, 5.11 C1).



Sally Lisle following pitch eight of Eterno Optimista (350m, 5.11 C1) on the team's last day on the wall.



Will McEvoy leading exposed face moves on pitch seven of Eterno Optimista (350m, 5.11 C1).

Article Details

Author	Sally Lisle
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	98
Page	188
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions