



AAC Publications

La Espada, Arma de Doble Filo

Chile, Southern Patagonia, Torres del Paine

At the end of February 2024, after a season of bad conditions and weather, a spell of high pressure appeared in the forecast for Southern Patagonia. I prepared to make my third foray into the Bader Valley of the season, hoping to finish a line I had spotted in the spring. When powder snow coats the enormous east faces that line this cirque, it reveals features and textures that otherwise camouflage into the immensity of steep granite. After reading about Jimmy Haden, Sean Leary, and Russel Mitrovich's first ascent of the east face of La Espada (Under the Knife, [AAJ 2001](#)), and having stood below the face during other trips into the valley, a direct line on the left side of the face had piqued my curiosity.

Hernán Rodríguez and I had already ventured to this far end of the valley during a windy 30-hour window in early February, and we'd managed to climb to just below the steep, golden headwall before the impending front of bad weather—and the considerable difficulties ahead—convinced us to descend.

As we trudged up to the Welsh Camp once again, we contemplated the stunning east faces of Los Cuernos, La Mascara, La Hoja, and La Espada, all plastered in snow that had fallen in the last 48 hours. Our line started about 100m to the left of the 2000 route, on lower-angle slabs. A system of flakes and rooflets would funnel snow and water onto us, and we doubted whether we'd even be able to reach our high point. Fortunately, the following day we were able to resolve these first six pitches before the sun turned our line into a torrent of snowmelt. We dug out a bivy site on ledges halfway up the face, just big enough for two.

The east faces in Torres del Paine receive sunshine as soon as the sun crests the horizon. Bathed in amber light, we began the upper pitches of our route, with amazing 5.10 and 5.11 free climbing for five pitches up a corner system to reach the top of a pillar that provides access to the golden-red headwall. From the valley floor, through binoculars, I had barely made out a fissure that snaked through this dead- vertical panel. The climbing here proved truly spectacular, as the 100m crack went straight up and then horizontally, with one beak move to switch systems at half height.

After two more rope lengths, we had escaped the east face. We connected with the scrambly south ridge to the summit and basked in sunshine on top. A small can of muscle relaxants glistened among the rubble at our feet. Inside, we found a roll of paper and a perfectly sharpened pencil, along with the signatures of the South African team that had made the first ascent of La Espada in 1972.

We traveled back to 1972 in our minds, envisioning their six-man team fixing lines and questing up the west face from the French Valley, and then to the year 2000, when Russel, Sean, and Jimmy had embarked on their voyage. We added our names to this small roll of history, buried it back where it belongs, and descended our line to high camp on the slabs below.

We named our route Arma de Doble Filo (800m, 5.11+ A1), which translates to “double-edged sword,” a metaphor for anything that possesses a certain duality, such as alpine climbing, thin taglines, slung rappel blocks, and many other elements of our adventure.

— Sebastian Pelletti, Chile

Images



Sebastian Pelletti leading pitch six of Arma de Doble Filo (800m, 5.11+ A1). The climbers would bivouac on the big ledge just above, then continue up the headwall in the morning.



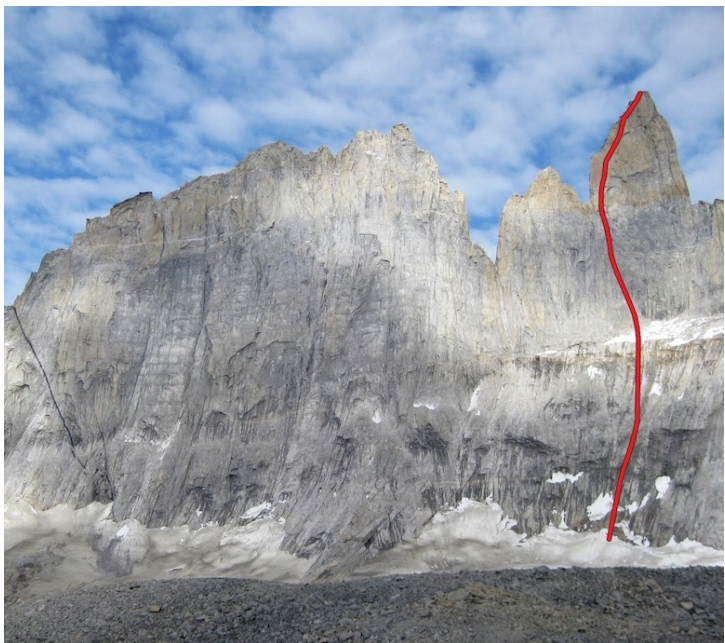
Hernán Rodriguez leading the second headwall pitch on Arma de Doble Filo (800m, 5.11+ A1).



Looking down the headwall during the ascent of Arma de Doble Filo (800m, 5.11+ A1).



Sebastian Pelletti and Hernán Rodríguez on the summit of La Espada.



The line of Arma de Doble Filo (800m, 5.11+ A1) on the east face of La Espada. The original route (Haden-Leary-Mitrovich, 2000) was to the right. The peak to the left is La Hoja.

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