



## AAC Publications

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### San Isidro Canyon, Hard Very Cactus

Mexico, Nuevo León, El Salto Area

Patrick Hill high on the walls of San Isidro Canyon during the first ascent of Hard Very Cactus. Photo: Matt Reeser

**El Salto is known primarily for sport climbing. However, on December 15, 2023, Matt Reeser (USA) and I established Hard Very Cactus (5.11 R or E5 5c), a 400m traditional route on limestone in nearby San Isidro Canyon.** The ascent was completed without bolts or pegs, relying entirely on traditional gear. With seven pitches following an initial 100m scramble, this is the first multipitch climb in the canyon.

Our climb followed a natural weakness on the east side of the canyon, linking crack systems, arêtes, and exposed traverses with sections of appalling rock. Cacti were present throughout, making protection and movement more difficult. After pitch five, a cactus spine got lodged into my eye, and Matt led the remaining two pitches to the canyon rim.

The descent along a steep, vegetated spur proved to be as challenging as the climb itself, involving several hours of difficult bushwhacking through dense vegetation. (Be sure to preview this from the road before attempting the climb.) Reeser, an experienced route developer at the Black Canyon in Colorado, described it as the worst bushwhacking he had encountered. Both of us spent the next two days removing countless cactus spines from our bodies and faces. If any climbing biologists are reading and want to record cacti variety, this is the climb for you.

Hard Very Cactus is a committing and adventurous route with significant vegetation and poor rock. After pitch five, retreat would be problematic due to a big traverse, heavily vegetated walls, and poor anchors. It remains the only established traditional line in the area. If you're wanting a nice holiday, then stick to the sport routes or sport multi-pitches in El Salto, La Popa, and El Potrero Chico.

—Patrick Hill, U.K.

## Images



The line of Hard Very Cactus (7 pitches, 5.11 R or E5 5c) in San Isidro Canyon.



Patrick Hill on pitch three of Hard Very Cactus.



Patrick Hill finishing Hard Very Cactus with a cactus spine lodged in his eye.



Matt Reeser navigating a variety of cactus species during the descent from Hard Very Cactus.



Patrick Hill high on the walls of San Isidro Canyon during the first ascent of Hard Very Cactus.

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