



El Mocho, The Approach Team Line, First Free Ascent

Argentina, Southern Patagonia, Chaltén Massif

The long, sustained splitters on the north face of El Mocho provide some of the best free climbing in the Chaltén massif. If this were in the Sierra or Chamonix, it would be a major destination, but in the shadow of giants, the face is often an afterthought. Seán Villanueva O'Driscoll has been doing his best to change this perception.

In 2021, Seán put up two stunning free climbs: Chaltén sin Clecas (450m, 7b) and Chaltén sin Chapas (7a+; see [AAJ 2021](#)), and later he free climbed Grey Yellow Arrow (7a+).

After an early attempt at Sin Clecas with Mecha Rocamora, they rappelled the lower pitches of The Approach Team Line, first climbed in early 2016 by Martin Marovski and Viktor Varoshkin, at 6c A2+. Noting the quality, they could not help but try some of the pitches, giving them an idea of what might be in store.

A year later, Seán was back with Pete Whittaker and Julia Cassou, but the crux pitch resisted their redpoint efforts. They continued to the top to check out the rest of the climb, and a couple of weeks later, Seán returned with Pol Domenech. They worked the three crux pitches, then a storm plastered everything.

In February 2025, he returned with Florian Delcoigne. On February 15, they started climbing at 6 a.m. Seán sent the crux third pitch (8a/5.13b) on his third go: a physical boulder problem through a roof, protected with previously placed bolts. Flo was unable to send that pitch but managed to flash the following one, at 7c, a long technical dihedral with pods, tricky to protect and with a crimpy, run-out five-meter slab to the anchor. Seán was also able to send that pitch first go.

The second 7c pitch awaited. A tricky short pitch, it has two stacked boulder problems: a mantel onto a slab, followed by a powerful undercling move with feet on smears. It was soaking wet, so they sacrificed their toilet paper and Flo's socks, drying it just enough for Flo to flash it and Seán to redpoint it. They used two Peckers to protect the mantel.

With the hardest sections behind them, their climb turned into pure fun on splitters, including a stunning 60m offwidth to hand crack. At the top of the face, they put on crampons and reached the summit of El Mocho at 1 a.m. They quickly rappelled the route and reached camp at 4:30 a.m., 23 hours after departing.

Seán described the climb as being “really good quality, not too committing, but technically very hard.” He pointed out that a number of things had to align for the ascent: “a good window and conditions, being rested, and having good bouldering strength—on a multipitch route like that, you only get so many tries before your power levels go down.”

This is the hardest free climb of the massif to date. Patience, persistence, a fresh pair of socks, and spare toilet paper often pay off.

—Rolando Garibotti

Images

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