



AAC Publications

La Travesía del Oso Buda

Argentina-Chile, Chaltén Massif, Torre Group

For this past season in Chaltén, my 12th trip to these mountains, Marc-André Leclerc and I blocked off three weeks together from January 15 to February 7. Marc is quite young, but already a very accomplished technical climber. He arrived in Chaltén just before the longest weather window of the season, and we headed straight for the business: a “reverse traverse” of the Torres.

The original Torre Traverse, which Rolando Garibotti and I completed in January 2008 (AAJ 2008), linked Aguja Standhardt to Cerro Torre via Punta Herron and Torre Egger. In 2010, my longtime climbing partner Bjorn-Eivind Artun first illuminated the idea of a Torre Traverse in the opposite direction, starting with Cerro Torre and finishing with Standhardt. At that time there were two missing segments: a direct ice route on the south face of Torre Egger (to avoid the time-consuming aid of the American route) and the south face of Aguja Standhardt. In the 2011-2012 Patagonia season, both of the missing segments came together. That December I teamed up with Argentine climber Jorge Ackermann to complete the often-tried south face of Aguja Standhardt, naming our route El Caracol (AAJ 2012). Three weeks later, Bjorn-Eivind and Ole Lied completed the ice line up the south face of Torre Egger, creating one of the most amazing ice climbs on Earth: Venas Azules (AAJ 2012).

In late January 2011, Bjorn-Eivind teamed up with Chad Kellogg for the first real attempt on the reverse traverse. Their attempt ended before Torre Egger, but they did make the first complete descent of Cerro Torre’s north face, which is daunting in and of itself. Unfortunately, Bjorn-Eivind died while climbing in Norway shortly after this attempt, and two years later Chad Kellogg was killed by rockfall while descending Fitz Roy.

My first attempt was in late December 2012 with Canadian Jon Walsh. We started with the Ragni Route on Cerro Torre and descended the north face, but made it only halfway up Venas Azules before our weather window abruptly ended. The reverse traverse not only was unfinished business for me, it also was tied to two good friends and climbing partners I had lost.

Marc and I approached the west side of Cerro Torre via Standhardt Col on January 18, 2015, and bivied just below the Col de Esperanza. On January 19 we started up Cerro Torre’s Ragni Route before first light, following two other parties. We soloed and simulclimbed the low-angle ice to the base of the first technical pitch, and then switched leads several times for the upper rime pitches. We reached the summit of Cerro Torre—my sixth time and Marc’s first—at 11:50 a.m.

We rappelled back down the top three mushroom pitches of the Ragni Route to reach the top of El Arca de los Vientos. Sleep is precious in Patagonia, so while we waited for the north face to go into shade, we pitched the tent and napped. Around 6 p.m. we buried a stuff-sack full of snow in the mushroom and started rappelling down the north face. By 10 p.m. we were settled into our tent, on a platform of chopped snow at the base of Cerro Torre’s north face, one pitch above the Col de la Mentira (a.k.a. Col of Conquest).

On January 20 we started up Venas Azules on Torre Egger around 8:15 a.m. I led the first three pitches, the third of which is one of the most awesome ice pitches anywhere. Marc led the fourth and fifth pitches and started up the sixth, with blue ice leading to full-on vertical rime climbing. Time started to slip away as Marc hacked at the rime. Down at the belay, I suddenly realized we were making a big mistake.

For years I had theorized about the possibility of climbing the first pitches of Venas Azules and then traversing on a ledge system to join the upper pitches of the American Route (Bragg-Donini-Wilson, AAJ 1977). But I had neglected to notice that the upper portion of Venas Azules was significantly more rimed this time than when Jon Walsh and I tried it. I called up to Marc and he made a V-thread and lowered off. We then rappelled one pitch to a ledge system that I thought would lead to the American route. I rushed off across the traverse and then led the upper half of the American route to the summit. We reached the summit of Torre Egger at last light and made our third bivouac just a few meters below the top.

On January 21 we had our fourth pre-dawn wake-up in a row. We rappelled off of Torre Egger's summit mushroom from another dead-man anchor and then quickly made our way down the Huber-Schnarf Route. Aside from a couple moves of M5 climbing, the south side of Punta Herron was short, quick, and easy. As we rappelled down Spigolo dei Bimbi, on the north ridge of Punta Herron, the wind began blowing our ropes around and we finally got one stuck—Marc did a great job climbing up to free it.

It was noon and we were excited to be at the base of our last mountain, Aguja Standhardt, but a fair amount of uncertainty remained. The stretch above the col had never been climbed; I always assumed it would be the crux of the traverse. To save weight we'd brought only Marc's rock shoes, since rock climbing is much more of his forté than mine. Marc led four pitches from the col to join El Caracol. This turned out to be much more benign than I'd feared, but was certainly not cruiser. Marc seemed to have become faster and more efficient each day of our climb.

I took us up the last block, with one last fight. The final pitch of El Caracol is perhaps the most involved pitch on the entire traverse, with some tricky mixed climbing followed by a long section of slightly overhanging thin aid. It was all plastered in thick rime ice, which had to be hacked off for each placement. For the first time in a few days, though, I finally relaxed and took my time, as we were so close to our goal that I knew we could stick it out. At 11:10 p.m. we were both on top of Aguja Standhardt. We spent the night rappelling Exocet and Desarmada. To some degree, the reverse traverse must have been for me what the Torre Traverse was to Rolo Garibotti in 2008—the culmination of years of planning and development as a climber. I finally got to play the same role, doing most of the leading and masterminding the strategy. Marc was a superb partner, and aside from a small route on El Mocho, the reverse traverse was Marc's first climb in Patagonia. We named it La Travesía del Oso Buda (1,200m, 6a+ 90° M6 C1) in remembrance of Bjorn-Eivind and Chad. In Norwegian "bjørn" means bear, and bear in Spanish is "oso." Chad was Buddhist and his demeanor reminded me of a Buddha. I wish I could share our success with them.

Colin Haley, USA

Images



The reverse Torre Traverse: La Travesía del Oso Buda (1,200m, 6a+ 90° M6 C1), which climbs right to left, starting on Cerro Torre and ending on Aguja Standhardt.



Colin Haley on the upper Ragni.



Colin Haley leading pitch three of Venez Azules.



Marc-André Leclerc leading the second pitch of Aguja Standhardt's south face during day three of the "reverse" Torre Traverse.

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