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Patagonia Today

The Torre Traverse and the Wave Effect in One Day Each

Torre Traverse in a Day: Alex Honnold and I had only one sure goal for the season: the Torre Traverse in less than 24 hours. We had nearly succeeded on this awesome objective the year before, retreating two pitches below the top of Cerro Torre—the final summit. With a good forecast and good conditions, we hiked into the Torre Valley on January 29.

Alex likened our Torre Traverse to El Cap speed climbing. We knew exactly who would lead what, where we would simul-climb, and where we would short-fix. We knew that Alex would lower me on the first 30-meter rappel while being pulled up on counter-balance. We knew the order in which we would tag each summit. For one of the belays, on Torre Egger, I was even able to tell Alex exactly which three cams to place, in order, having soloed the route less than two weeks earlier. For all but one rappel we planned to simul-rappel. Approaching our first bivy at Niponino, we reviewed our strategy out loud.

On January 30, we hiked from Niponino to a second bivy below the east pillar of Aguja Standhardt. We started the timer at 1:42 the next morning. Carrying four liters of water each, we headed up to the Standhardt Col. I started up the first pitch above the col at 3:20 a.m., and we continued simul-climbing and short-fixing up the Exocet route with only seven total ice screws.

From the top of Standhardt we made excellent time to the base of Spigolo dei Bimbi on Punta Herron. We changed into rock shoes: Alex's turn to lead. We simul-climbed all the rock of Spigolo dei Bimbi in two pitches. At the top of the rock we snacked, sucked water out of a puddle, and switched back into crampons. I led one pitch of simul-climbing to Punta Herron's summit and down the other side to our rappel anchor.

We made a double-rope rappel, and while Alex pulled down the lead line I tied into it and led up to the base of the Huber-Schnarf on Torre Egger. In rock shoes again, Alex led off. We simul-climbed all the rock in one pitch, and soon we were dangling from an overlap, awkwardly changing back into crampons at a hanging stance, where I kept reminding us how fucked up it would be to drop a boot. I then led the summit mushrooms of Torre Egger in one pitch.

Rappelling the south face of Torre Egger felt full-on as usual but went fast with simul-rappelling. After the final rappel into the Col de la Mentira (the Torre Egger–Cerro Torre col), while Alex pulled the ropes, I tied into one end and led a mixed pitch to reach Cerro Torre's north face. We took a fairly relaxed break here before Alex started up the first pitch of Directa de la Mentira. Many of the cracks now were gushing torrents of water, and the ice mushrooms above were raining rime chunks. We were now getting the full experience that the Torres usually deliver. Alex did a predictably amazing job of leading the pitches quickly, taking huge runouts and going monstrous distances between belays.

At the belay below the last rock pitch on the north face, which usually is plastered in rime but now was less covered, I asked Alex if he wanted to keep leading. "Fuck that, I'm done," he replied. At this point we stopped speed climbing and simply suffered our way up in classic fashion. Alex juggled up to the belay at the top of the rock, we both put on crampons, wrung water out of our clothes, and prepared ourselves to battle hypothermia en route to the summit. I led one last pitch of rime on the north face, Alex juggled off my belay loop, and then I lowered him 20m down the other side to join

the Ragni Route (west face of Cerro Torre). I downclimbed behind and short-fixed up to the base of the last pitch.

The last pitch of the Ragni was a steep, slushy mess, so Alex got comfortable at the belay. There was no protection for the first half. Higher, I was relieved to get several decent ice screws before a traverse on vertical rime. The last crux was thankfully on good ice, but was slightly overhanging and desperate after so much climbing. Alex juggled up and we climbed to the summit, arriving at exactly midnight, 20 hours and 40 minutes after leaving the Standhardt Col.

We spent the rest of the night and the first part of the morning rappelling Cerro Torre's southeast ridge. Like many nocturnal rappelling sessions in Patagonia, the memory is a blur of anchors and dehydration and shivering. We reached our tent on the glacier a little more than 30 hours from the Standhardt Col. By the time we arrived in town we had done an enormous amount of exercise and been awake for about 45 hours.

I feel that the Torre Traverse in a day was a beautiful "redpoint" of alpine climbing. Alex and I made a great partnership, a very efficient symbiosis of alpinist and rock climber, as neither he nor I would have climbed the Torre Traverse in a day without the other.

Wave Effect in a Day: Alex and I arrived back in El Chaltén late on February 1. Not surprisingly, Alex insisted we climb a multi-pitch 5.12 sport route on one of our two rest days. On February 4—though we had wavered about trying another big traverse because we were both tired—we began hiking back to Niponino. Although not as famous as the Torre Traverse, the Wave Effect (Magro-Opp-Wharton, 2011) is also a badass enchainment of towers. It links the southern aspects of Aguja Desmochada, Aguja de la Silla, and Fitz Roy.

Exercise rejuvenated us. After a night at Niponino, we scrambled to the base of Desmochada at a leisurely pace, in effect a half rest-day. While the Torre Traverse had been about half rock climbing and half crampon climbing, the Wave Effect is a pure rock climb, and there was no doubt that it would be Alex getting us up Aguja Desmochada and Aguja de la Silla, while I would lead the more moderate California Route on Fitz Roy. Of course we would simul-climb as much as possible.

On February 6 we started up Golden Eagle shortly before 5 a.m. We simul-climbed 5.10–5.11 often with only two pieces between us, which set the tone for the day. We arrived on the summit of Desmochada five and a quarter hours after starting and immediately started our descent to the col between Desmochada and Aguja de la Silla. For this next spire, we chose on the spot to climb the unrepeatable Il Bastardo (Huber-Huber-Walder) instead of Vertical Current, as the Wave Effect's first climbers had. Alex Huber's topo showed several pitches of 6c A0, and Alex figured that it wouldn't be too hard to free climb the whole thing. I was more skeptical, but since we had both freed all of Aguja Desmochada, I decided to give it a shot.

Il Bastardo got intense quickly. Sometimes on the verge of falling, I was thankful we had brought two Micro Traxions to help protect the simul-climbing and that Alex put me on a real belay above a sustained wide crack. On our second simul pitch, fortunately not as difficult, Alex linked seven topo pitches into one. The terrain got progressively snowier and icier as we climbed. Our time from the base of Il Bastardo to the summit was 4:11, and we made the first free ascent of the route. Considering the runouts and heavy packs, Alex's lead up this route was the most badass block of rock climbing I've ever witnessed. Freeing all of it, while simul-climbing, was a huge challenge for me as well. No one forces you to rise to the occasion quite like Alex does!

We descended to Col de los Americanos (the col between Aguja de la Silla and Fitz Roy) to reach the California Route. It was my lead and I took us to the end of the fifth-class rock in three moderate but long pitches of simul-climbing, where we unroped and started scrambling to the summit. We arrived on the summit of Fitz Roy just past 10 p.m. (17:07 from the base of Desmochada), right at dusk, and promptly started down.

Our descent of the French Route went quickly. Once at La Brecha (the col between Fitz Roy and Aguja Poincenot) we descended west, over a serac and down a couloir, the most dangerous portion of our climb, making rappels on terrain that one could easily downclimb in steel crampons but not with aluminum crampons on tennis shoes. It was a relief to make the last rappel and scramble back toward our bivy, reaching it after a 25:17 round trip.

The whole hike out was windy and rainy. The door was closing on what had been a truly incredible week of climbing.

Summary: The first one-day ascent of the Torre Traverse (crossing Aguja Standhardt, Punta Herron, Torre Egger, and Cerro Torre), completed by Colin Haley and Alex Honnold in 20:40 (Standhardt Col to summit of Cerro Torre), January 31, 2016. The only previous ascent was made over four days in January 2008, by Haley and Rolando Garibotti. The first one-day ascent, all free by both climbers, of the Wave Effect (crossing Aguja Desmochada, Aguja de la Silla, and Fitz Roy), completed by Haley and Honnold in 17:07 (base of Desmochada to summit of Fitz Roy), February 6, 2016. The only previous ascent was made over three days in 2011.

About the Author: Colin Haley (31) has made 13 trips to the Chaltén Massif, totaling a bit less than three years of his life. He considers most of his best climbing achievements to be those done in the Chaltén area, and the one of which he is proudest is the first solo ascent of Torre Egger, made only 12 days before the one-day Torre Traverse described in this article.

Images



The Wave Effect, as climbed by Colin Haley and Alex Honnold during their one-day ascent in 2016.



The Torre Traverse, as climbed by Colin Haley and Alex Honnold during their one-day ascent in January 2016.

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