



AAC Publications

Cordillera Riesco, Grupo la Paz

Chile, Southern Patagonia

After a chance encounter with Don Guillermo, a generous local fisherman, Jose Navarro, Nicolás “Nico” Secul (both from Chile), and I sailed west from Puerto Natales into the Canal Santa María on October 28, 2021. After a six-hour boat ride, we made base camp on the east shore of Península Roca in a lush forest surrounded by swamp. Our objective was Grupo La Paz (51°58'59"S, 73°12'18"W; a.k.a. Los Dientes del Diablo), a mystical looking group of three rock towers situated in the southern Cordillera Riesco. The towers are seldom seen, and we had only a few photographs for reference.

After a storm broke on day two, we walked northwest for approximately 4km in deep clouds and camped below the northeast face of the east tower, Aguja Este. On day three, we began our climb by traversing up and left along a glacial ramp on the northeast face. At the upper rock portion, we climbed rock and mixed terrain up a left-trending weakness to reach the east shoulder and then followed a snow ramp to the summit.

Descending west from the summit, we decided to bivvy on a small ledge above the col between the east and central towers. The next morning we rappelled to the col, and from there climbed the right side of the east ridge of the central tower, making the summit by early afternoon. We later learned this was the first ascent of Aguja Central. We descended by rappelling and downclimbing along the north ridge.

We named our enchainment El Poder del Ahora (700m, 6b M4) after a book that Nico was reading in base camp. The route feels like a traverse, but with significant vertical gain and moderately technical terrain.

I remained drawn to this group of towers and hoped to complete a full traverse. So, on February 20, 2022, Antar Machado, Hernán Rodríguez, and I left Puerto Natales with captain Hector “Chino” Diaz and disembarked on the shore of Fiordo de las Montañas on the west side of the Cordillera Riesco. That evening, we made a high camp below the west ridge of Aguja Oeste, ready to start a complete west-to-east traverse of Grupo la Paz’s four summits at sunrise.

We first tackled the westernmost subtower (150m, 5.7), reaching it by 7:30 a.m. We thought of calling it Aguja Yequé (meaning “small” in Kaweskar). We then rappelled to the col between it and Aguja Oeste and continued up a white pillar (300m, 5.10), generally following the upper part of the Quesada-San Vicente route (2000). We reached the summit by early afternoon, blown away by the beauty of the Cordillera Sarmiento to the west.

We descended east toward the col between Aguja Oeste and Central with five rappels down the Chouinard-Donini route (1988), then two traversing pitches and one rappel on quite bad rock to finally reach the base of Aguja Central. A dry summer yielded little available water; however, we managed to find a trickle and spent two hours hacking a ledge into the steep moraine for our tight two-man tent. At nightfall, clouds began to form unexpectedly on the summits of La Dama Blanca and Cerro Trono to the west.

A restless night made for an even gloomier morning, as we awoke to thick clouds, intermittent rain, and tent-shaking wind. We decided to wait patiently and begin climbing the two remaining towers at

midnight. The wall remained totally soaked, but the weather report was promising, and so we ventured up the first pitches of wet, abrasive rock, immersed in the 5m bubble of our headlamps. The improbable-looking third pitch was a smooth, wet slab, with no gear and little holds, guarding the entrance to another crack system (5.11-). One more steep pitch, scrambling, and a long traverse with two steep sections brought us to the top of Aguja Central at first light.

We made three rappels to the col below Aguja Este. From there, two high-quality pitches (5.10+) got us to its summit. For a moment, we basked in the beauty of this place: turquoise lakes, rumbling glaciers, and shimmering fjords. To complete our line, we descended the steep east face, making eight rappels. With our gear dwindling, we make it to the valley floor, exhausted, hungry, sunburnt, and euphoric. Still, we hoped to make it to Canal Santa María on the east side of Cordillera Riesco before nightfall. Some trail running ensued, our legs on autopilot. Our captain Chino, faithful as ever, rendezvoused with us on a small, pristine peninsula at sunset, and we cruised back to Puerto Natales.

We called our traverse Ayayema Wesqar (1,000m, 5.11-), which means something to the effect of “spirit of the mountains” in the language of the Kaweskar, who still inhabit corners of this Patagonian archipelago in total harmony.

– Sebastian Pelletti, Australia

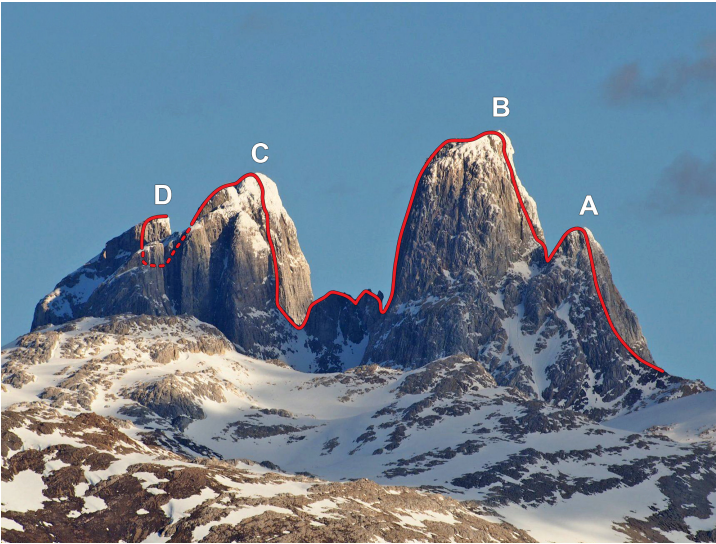
Historical Notes on Grupo la Paz: These mountains are in the Cordillera Riesco, on Península Roca, which is formed by Fiordo de las Montañas to the west and Canal Santa María to the east. The Cordillera de Sarmiento lies just west across the Fiordo de las Montañas.

Aguja Oeste (1,190m) is the highest in Grupo La Paz. The tower was first climbed in 1988 by Yvon Chouinard and Jim Donini. They approached from the south to reach the large col between Aguja Oeste and Aguja Central and then climbed seven pitches to 6a (AAJ 1988). Rafael Quesada and Iñaki San Vicente made the second ascent of Aguja Oeste in 2000 (not Aguja Este, as stated in AAJ 2000). They began on a north-facing snow ramp, climbing a narrow couloir to reach the col on the west spur. From there, they climbed three pitches of rock and mixed terrain (5+) to the summit.

Aguja Este was first climbed by Carsten von Birckhahn and Andrew McAuley in 1998. Their 14-pitch route, Cuando Cambia la Luna, climbs the east face with difficulties to 6a (AAJ 1998). In 2020, Erwan Le Lann, Marko Prezelj, and Gerald Veniard made the second ascent of Aguja Este via a new route (450m, 6a) on the east face, parallel and to the right of Cuando Cambia la Luna.

– Erik Rieger, with information from **Rolando Garibotti** and the AAJ.

Images



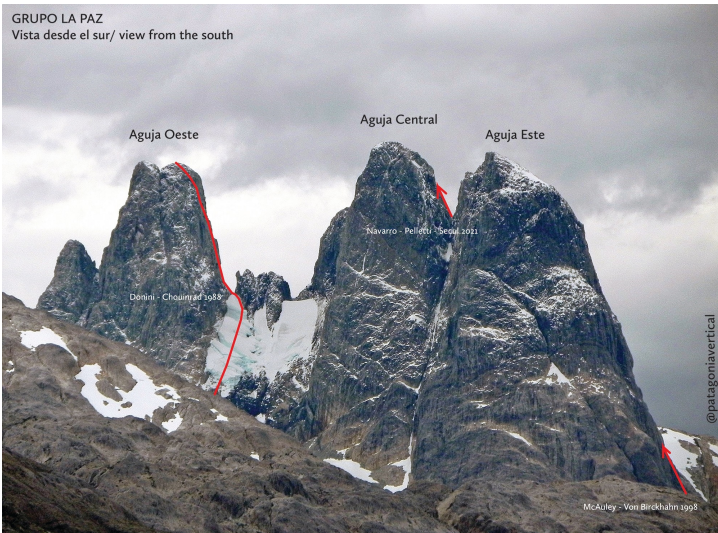
The north side of Grupo La Paz, showing the west-to-east traverse over (A) Aguja Yequé, (B) Aguja Oeste, (C) Aguja Central, and (D) Aguja Este. The traverse was named Ayayema Wesqar (1,000m, 5.11-).



Mixed terrain on the upper northeast face of Aguja Este.



Starting up the east ridge of Aguja Central on day two of the traverse.



Grupo La Paz from the south, showing the upper portion of the 2021 route up Aguja Central. The Chouinard-Donini (1988) route is shown on Aguja Oeste. The routes Cuando Cambia la Luna (1998) and the Le Lann-Prezelj-Veniard route (2020) climb the east wall of Aguja Este, as indicated by the arrow.



On the summit of Aguja Central looking west to Aguja Oeste and over Fiordo de las Montañas to peaks of the Cordillera de Sarmiento.

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