



Cerro Chaltén: First winter Solo, by Supercanaleta, and Alpine-Style Solo of Goretta Pillar

Argentina, Southern Patagonia, Chaltén Massif

On August 29, 2022, I arrived in El Chaltén with one objective: a winter solo ascent of Cerro Chaltén (Fitz Roy) via the Supercanaleta, a goal since my first wintertime visit to the Chaltén Massif in 2013. I returned in 2019, but never managed an attempt during that trip. I had only three weeks remaining in calendar austral winter, and I was missing most of my best winter mountaineering gear, having made a last-minute decision to come during a frustrating summer trip to the Canadian Rockies. Nonetheless, I felt psychologically ready to put in my best effort.

On August 31 and September 3, I made day trips to carry gear and got a fair amount of equipment cached at the base of the Supercanaleta, with most of the rest at the Piedra Negra bivouac site. On September 6, I hiked to the base of the route, hoping to make an attempt the following day, but very deep trail-breaking made the approach slow and exhausting. I arrived at the base of the route at 8 p.m., very tired. On September 7, I hung out in my tent, hoping to make an attempt the following day, but a weather forecast update by Inreach was not promising so I hiked out.

On September 11, I approached again with much easier conditions, and on September 12, I crossed the bergschrund at 7 a.m. and started up the initial 1,000m couloir of snow and ice. Winter conditions made for very little névé and a lot of cold, brittle ice, and slow, tiring climbing. Above the Bloque Empotrado, the climbing becomes more technical, and I started using some rudimentary self-belay techniques such as back-looping and daisy-soloing. On a step of steeper ice climbing, I badly bent one of my picks but was able to hammer it straight.

At 2:30 p.m., I arrived at a point where the route normally makes a short, diagonal rappel rightward and took stock: The weather was forecast to dramatically deteriorate that night, and I would be cutting it too close time-wise. I already felt psychologically exhausted, and felt that I no longer had adequate drive for these intense experiences on difficult solo climbs. I began rappelling, confident that I would not make another attempt, and reached my tent at 9:30 p.m. A couple hours later, the storm arrived. It was violent, and I was glad that I had bailed. Simply hiking out with all of my gear was a big challenge in the extreme weather.

My perspective rapidly changed back in the safety and comfort of civilization, and thoughts of another attempt crept back. The arrival of an excellent weather window helped persuade me, and on September 17, I hiked back in. My pack was extremely heavy, and with deep trail breaking, I spent two days on the approach.

On September 19, I crossed the bergschrund at 7 a.m., again climbing up 1,000m of interminable, hard ice. I felt more comfortable on the technical pitches than I had on my previous attempt. From my previous high point, the climbing was consistently technically challenging. I progressed mostly with careful free soloing, occasionally using a back-loop or daisy-soloing. Despite moving as quickly as I felt I safely could, I barely finished the fifth-class climbing before dark, at 8:05 p.m. The terrain above was less difficult, and I free soloed by headlamp through sections of easy mixed, 50° ice slopes, and some thigh-deep powder snow.

I reached the summit at 9:23 p.m. Being alone on top of Cerro Chaltén, in winter, at night, felt as

remote and exposed as anything I have experienced, despite the fact that I could see the lights of El Chaltén 3,000m below. I was extremely anxious about the 1,500m descent that separated me from continued existence, and I started down after just a couple of minutes. The descent went smoothly, and I was back in my tent at around 5 a.m. on September 20, roughly 21.5 hours round-trip from the bergschrund.

I departed El Chaltén in late September, but returned in the springtime, only five and a half weeks later, with a new objective.

The Goretta Pillar (north pillar) of Cerro Chaltén is, I think, the most iconic and aesthetic feature on the mountain. It was first climbed in 1979 by Renato Casarotto, solo. I think that Casarotto is the most accomplished solo alpinist of all time, and the Goretta Pillar was one of his most brilliant ascents. Despite the extensive use of fixed ropes, it was an incredible achievement for the time. Attempting to repeat Casarotto's solo in alpine style, without fixed ropes, would be a big challenge even today.

In mid-January 2023, a large enough window appeared for my attempt. I initially planned to attempt the original Casarotto route, but the east-facing approach gully, traditionally full of snow and ice, had melted out in recent hot weather. Instead, I planned to start on Mate, Porro, y Todo lo Demás, which is more sustained in difficulty but less problematic and dangerous in such conditions.

On January 15, I hiked to Piedra Negra and the following day over Paso Cuadrado and up long snow couloirs to a bivouac 300m below the route. On the 17th, I cramponed up the remaining snow and ice and started the route at 8:52 a.m.

In contrast to my winter solo of the Supercanaleta, which I ascended about 97 percent free solo, I planned to rope-solo essentially all of Mate Porro. Because it's much less efficient, this would require multiple bivouacs and thus a heavy backpack. I had to re-ascend pitches by jumaring (and switch constantly between rock shoes and boots), rather than by climbing, due to the pack.

Halfway up the Goretta Pillar, I arrived at some decent ledges with dwindling daylight, late enough and tired enough that I definitely would have stopped to bivouac; however, to my dismay, there was zero snow or ice left on these ledges for water. I continued for many more pitches and many more hours. At 5 a.m. the next day, I started arranging a bivouac platform on a terrace two-thirds of the way up the pillar. It had been a huge day, with 650m of technical climbing, 650m of rappelling, 650m of jumaring with a heavy pack, and an additional 300m of cramponing up ice slopes. I lay down to sleep, exhausted, with a rough expectation I would bail.

I was too tired to continue climbing on January 18, but I postponed descending because there was no imminent threat of stormy weather. Taking a rest day high on the Goretta Pillar felt very odd. I figured that with a good night of sleep I could perhaps continue the following morning.

Waking at 6 a.m. on the 19th, I felt far from fresh but recovered enough to justify continuing, and began around 8 a.m. By making very long pitches—at least 65m each—I was able to climb to the top of the Goretta Pillar in only five pitches, arriving there around 3 p.m.

I rappelled to the base of the upper headwall, which is the crux of any Goretta Pillar ascent, and started up around 4 p.m. This section is normally either icy or wet—in my case, extremely wet, with waterfalls running down some of the pitches. I climbed these as fast as I could, but nonetheless my clothes got drenched. A little past 11 p.m., I finally finished the fifth-class terrain and switched to crampons. For the second time in four months, I arrived atop Cerro Chaltén alone and at night, at 12:18 a.m. on January 20.

I bivouacked in a small nook immediately below the summit boulder and began my descent of the French Route at 9 a.m. the next day. The descent was stressful due to the hot weather and melted-out

conditions. Fortunately, it went without mishap. I reached the glacier a bit past 2 p.m. and was back in El Chaltén for a late dinner.

A winter solo of the Supercanaleta and a summer solo of Cerro Chaltén by the Goretta Pillar were both decade-long ambitions. It is only by coincidence that I finally succeeded in accomplishing both goals in a short time period. Although quite different from one another, they felt to me like comparable accomplishments, and I am very proud of both ascents.

– **Colin Haley, USA**

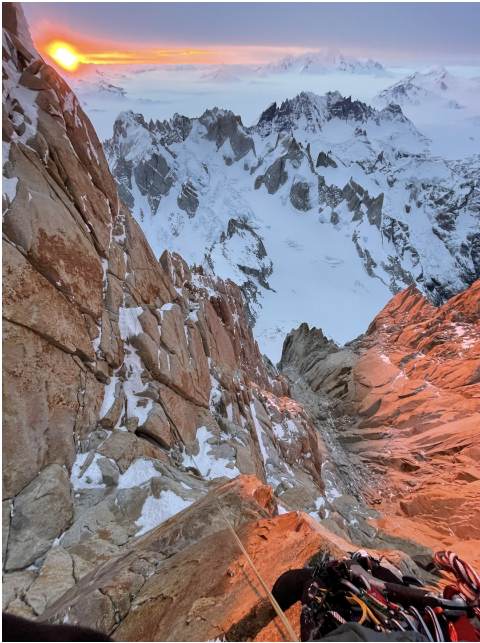
Images



Mixed climbing to join the upper southwest ridge on the Supercanaleta during the route's first successful winter, solo ascent by Colin Haley on September 19, 2022.



Looking back across a tricky traversing section on the upper Supercanaleta during the route's first successful winter, solo ascent, by Colin Haley, on September 19, 2022.



Looking down the last fifth-class pitch of the Supercanaleta in the last minutes of daylight during the route's first successful winter, solo ascent, by Colin Haley, on September 19, 2022.



On the lower part of the route Mate, Porro, y Todo lo Demás, having just climbed and rappelled back down a beautiful dihedral pitch and before jumaring back up it with the heavy backpack, a tactic used throughout the first alpine-style solo ascent of Cerro Chaltén by the Goretta Pillar on January 17–20, 2023.



Rappelling back down the first pitch of the icy and wet upper, north headwall on the first alpine-style solo ascent of the Goretta Pillar, by Colin Haley, on January 17–20, 2023.

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