



AAC Publications

Cerro Torre, Southeast Ridge, All-Female Ascent

Argentina, Southern Patagonia, Chaltén Massif

Fanny Schmutz, Maud Vanpouille, and I all came to El Chaltén for the first time around ten years ago. When I first saw Cerro Torre (3,128m), I knew that one day I'd stand on top of that mountain. Cerro Torre is quite intimidating, but our previous trips to Patagonia had helped a lot in getting us used to the range, the style of climbing, and the long waiting game in town. This year, we felt more than ready to climb it—we just needed a chance.

We arrived in mid-January and made a gear cache at Niponino, focusing our attention on the **Southeast Ridge (AAJ 2012)**. [The Southeast Ridge, or Filo Sureste, is the line established to avoid the bolts on the southeast face placed by Cesare Maestri in 1970. After several attempts, the route was finished in 2012 by Hayden Kennedy and Jason Kruk, who then removed more than 100 of Maestri's bolts. The 800m route has a few variations and goes at around 7a+ C2 WI5 or free at 7c.] **After a month of mostly bad weather, we thought we would go home without even having the chance to give it a try. But finally, ten days before our flight, a good window arrived.**

With all the new snow that had fallen in the previous weeks, and after seeing conditions in the mountains, we left our camp at Niponino with the idea of taking it one pitch at a time. On February 23, it took us 11 hours to get to the Col de la Paciencia, our first bivy site, at the foot of the ridge. Breaking trail with fresh snow on the glacier and cleaning the pitches while climbing was time-consuming. Fortunately, we shared the task with two other parties.

After arriving at the col, we could see snowy cracks and a very frozen headwall high above. We planned a leisurely morning, starting around 8 a.m., so the temperature could rise a bit and the rock could dry. One of the teams decided to bail, as they were not optimistic about the conditions.

The first pitches in the morning were cold and took us quite a while to get through. However, after three pitches, the terrain eased and the temperature rose, so we managed to get back in the flow. We could hear the other team ahead of us, and it was a very nice feeling to be with another party on such a big route. It was still daylight when we reached our bivy spot on pitch 15. It took us an hour and a half to create an adequate ledge on the ice, where our shoulders could fit while lying down.

On the 25th, we opted for the same strategy as the day before—not starting too early. We were ready to climb by 7:30 a.m. The ice chimney above was absolutely unique: 50m in a steep, narrow corridor that barely allowed you to swing your axes and crampons into the ice. This pitch brought us to the base of the headwall. The hardest was still to come.

We changed boots for climbing shoes and nervously started up. The first pitch, a 5c, was a good warm-up for the 6c pitch: wet, flaky, and intimidating. So, when we arrived at the 6c pitch, although it was still wet and flaky, it was a little less intimidating.

And then came the last two hard pitches. We opted for the right variation, climbing to a belay to the right of and level with the famous compressor that Maestri used to drill all those bolts. Leading up to this moment, there had been a lot of fear and worry about these pitches. Yet somehow they didn't

even feel that hard. You still have to have focus and climb, but when you reach that point, it feels like you're flying to the top.

It was 7 p.m. on the 25th of February when we stood on top of Cerro Torre and realized our common dream. Some tears were shed, some laughs were shared, and a selfie was made. We started rappelling soon after, as our goal was to make it down to our previous bivy. Going down the headwall, we could see the meltwater begin to freeze. The path we had taken up to the summit was now closed.

When we reached our bivy ledge atop pitch 15, the platform we'd chopped had shrunk in the heat of the sun. But we still decided to set up the tent, which was a good call because it snowed that night much more than predicted. We felt lucky to be on our way down and thought of all the lights we could see in the Fitz Roy massif and our friends up there.

Fortunately, we had good weather on the 26th, so we took it easy on the descent. When we reached Niponino at 6 p.m., the call of our comfy beds was too strong, so we decided to hike all the way back to El Chaltén. As always, the way back from the Torre Valley felt quite long, but this time, it had a slightly different taste.

– **Lise Billon, France**

Images



Fanny Schmutz climbing the first pitch of the headwall on Cerro Torre's Southeast Ridge.



Fanny Schmutz leading the first 7a+ and third pitch of the headwall, with Cesare Maestri's rime-covered compressor and the summit visible above.



Maud Vanpuolle overcoming snowy conditions en route to the Col de la Paciencia.



Lise Billon on the second day on the Southeast Ridge of Cerro Torre, just before the bivy.



Lise Billon on the last 7a+ pitch of Cerro Torre's headwall, leading to the summit.



Maud Vanpouille climbing on the headwall of Cerro Torre's Southeast Ridge.



Maud Vanpuolle climbing in rimey conditions on the third day on Cerro Torre's Southeast Ridge.



Fanny Schmutz following the wild ice chimney just below the headwall on Cerro Torre's Southeast Ridge.

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