



AAC Publications

La Travesía Doble M: A Solo Traverse of the Four Torres del Paine

Chile, Southern Patagonia, Torres del Paine

The complete traverse of the Torres del Paine went from southwest to northeast over (A) Torre Sur, (B) Torre Central, (C) Torre Norte, and (D) Peineta. The line and bivouacs are marked. Photo by Francisco Bedeschi.

On February 22, Seán Villanueva O'Driscoll walked to Campo Británico in the French Valley. It rained all night. In the morning, his sleeping bag, rope, and other gear were wet. He spent a slow morning drying things out, then, around mid-day, started hiking into the De Agostini Valley.

The forecast predicted four days of stable weather, but it was cold and there was ice and new snow from the previous night's deluge. It was not quite the kind of weather window that suggests the amount of climbing that Seán had in mind, but he has never been short of poetic faith, the ability to suspend disbelief and to allow oneself to, against all preconceptions, walk forward, one step, move, or pitch at a time. The dream of traversing the four Paine towers spurred him on.

While a number of traverses of the towers have been done, only on one occasion had the skyline been followed continuously: Pedro Cifuentes did it in 2013, going from north to south. No traverse had included the fourth tower, La Peineta. Discussing options with a friend, Seán concluded a southwest-to-northeast traverse made the most geographic sense, starting via the west ridge of Torre Sur and then tackling the south faces of the Central and North towers and Peineta.

As his first climb, Seán had set his sights on Il Lungo Sogno (900m, 5.10 A2 60°), a beautiful climb that initially tackles a prominent corner on the north side of the west ridge of Torre Sur. He climbed two pitches to a recess and another up the corner, then rappelled back down to spend the night. The freezing line was quite low, and the ice and snow from the previous night had not melted out. Conditions did not improve in the morning. A steep, iced-up section, which normally would be free climbable, required aid using a Pecker and a few micro-nuts.

After a few more pitches, he reached the crest of the ridge, where conditions improved, allowing him to make faster progress. He belayed every pitch and followed with a heavy pack, carrying a light tent, food for five days, two gas canisters, two light ice tools, crampons, a light sleeping bag, and a good bit of clothing. He reached the summit of Torre Sur in the evening and quickly started rappelling the Aste Route along the north ridge. Two-thirds of the way down, he turned on his headlamp and continued to Col Condor, at the base of Torre Central, where he set up the tent and slept for a few hours.

On the morning of the 24th, the Kearney-Knight Route (850m, 5.10 A2) on the south face of Torre Central beckoned—a climb that has seen only a few ascents. The original topo was unclear, so he took some time to identify the start, and more time to find the splitter through the steep middle headwall. On two pitches here, he resorted to aid. In the upper third, he made faster progress, scrambling up to reach the summit. Without delay, he tackled the descent to the north, via the Bonington-Whillans Route. Three parties bivied partway up that route were surprised to see their favorite bearded bard descend upon them from the heights.

Night had already fallen when he reached Col Bich, but he was aware that the new day would bring some marginal weather, so he continued, climbing the Monzino Route (200m, 5.10b) on the southwest side of Torre Norte to bivouac one pitch below the summit. He slept only two hours, and

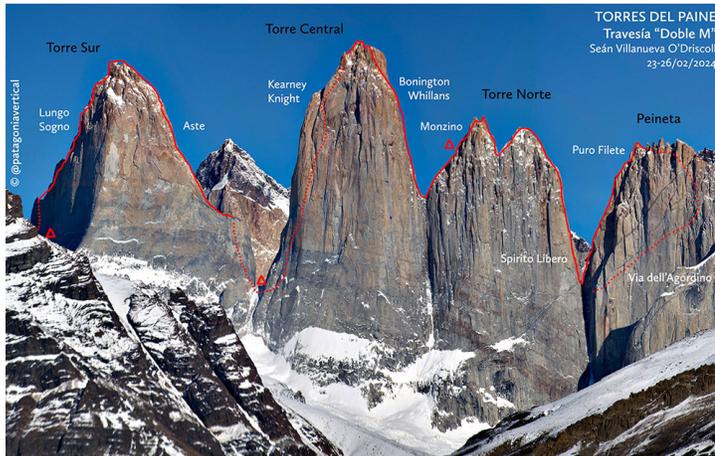
with the first light of February 25, he tagged the summit, then began downclimbing to the north, crossed over the north summit of Torre Norte, and descended Spirito Libero to the base of Peineta, the fourth tower.

The best bit of climbing on this traverse turned out to be the last. Puro Filete (300m, 5.11 A1) follows a striking splitter on the south face of Peineta, a queen line. Seán did the seven-pitch route in four long pitches. The climbing is challenging, with two cruxes: a thin crack in the lower part and an offwidth near the top. He aided the lower crux and French-freed two moves elsewhere. At the top of Peineta, with clouds already covering most of the summits, he could finally take a short break. After a chat with two climbers there, he traversed north along the ridge, then descended northwest, partially down the Via dell'Agordino, making several steep rappels to reach a ramp that led back to the base.

In a weather window that was far from promising, with challenging climbing conditions, and in spite of fatigue from having just spent 18 days on the east face of Torre Central free climbing Riders on the Storm ([see story here](#))—and while still recovering from a broken elbow suffered in November—Seán navigated a seemingly endless roller coaster of golden granite, entering the park via one valley and exiting at the opposite end via another. He named his line the Travesía Doble M, a nod to other Paine traverses and treks named after their appearance, including the popular W hike and the W Traverse of the Torres del Paine (pioneered by Steve Schneider in 2002). It had taken 90 minutes short of 72 hours to ride the longest and most complete traverse of the Torres yet. [See [Pataclimb.com](#) for more history of Paine traverses and details on the individual routes.]

— **Rolando Garibotti, with information from Seán Villanueva O'Driscoll, Belgium**

Images



La Travesía Doble M from the east. The traverse went from left to right.



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On the summit of Torre Central during the second full day of the traverse.

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