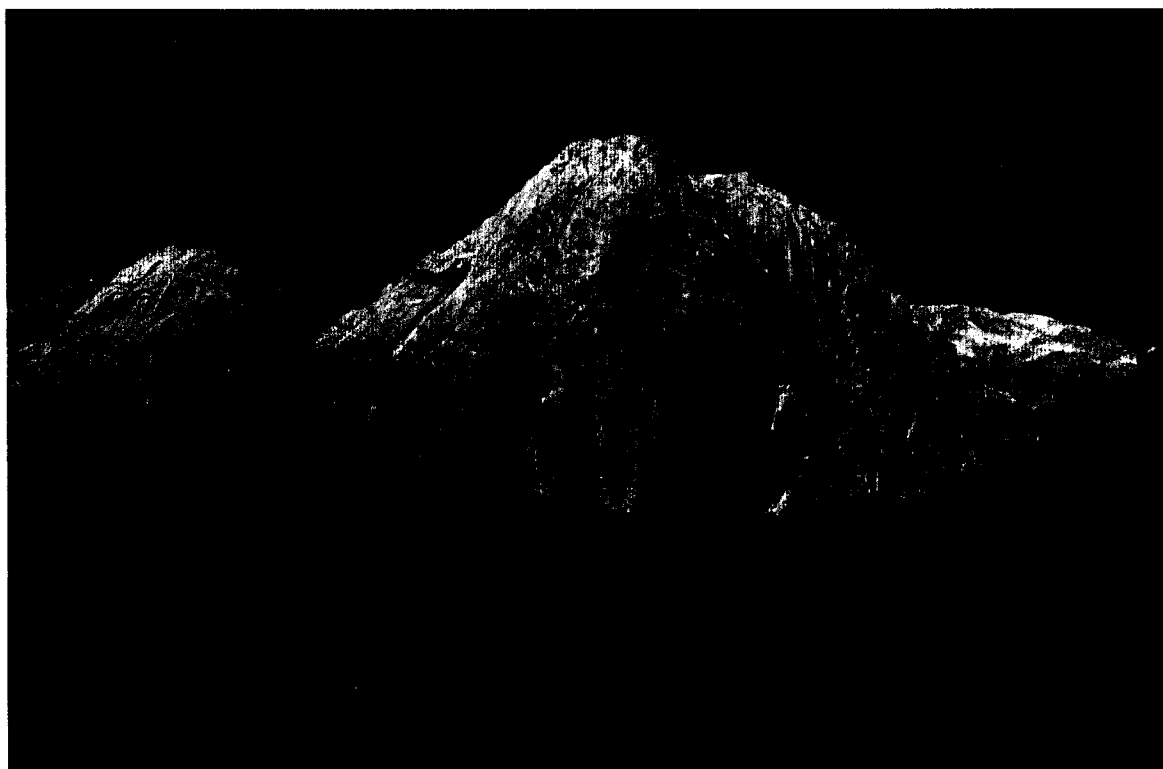


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Cochamó Big Wall and Alpine Expedition Report Chile

28th December 2000 – 27th January 2001



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Acknowledgements

This expedition was jointly funded by the Mount Everest Foundation (MEF) and the British Mountaineering Council (BMC). The expedition members recognise and would like to show their appreciation of the value of these contributions in encouraging exploration and innovation.

We would also like to thank Noel Craine for his succinct and entirely sufficient directions to Mount Trinidad – “Fly to Santiago, go to Puerto Montt, take the bus to Cochamo, follow the river, turn right at the meadow up the hill and you’re at the base of the routes”

The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that all or part of it may be copied for the purposes of private research.

Summary

We describe the planning initiation and execution of the Cochamó 2001 big wall and alpine expedition to climb Mount Trinidad in southern Chile. On the month long expedition all three team members made an attempt on a new big wall line on the 700m north west face of Mount Trinidad. After reaching a new high point at 9 pitches and encountering some very slow aid climbing on dirty cracks in the interim the team decided to abandon the attempt due to bad weather and lack of available time. The second part of the initiative was to complete an alpine style traverse of the Trinidad horseshoe. This was completed successfully over 3 days of excellent weather and encompassed 4 peaks that we believe have not been climbed and 2 that have been climbed by alternative routes. In general the standard of climbing was very straightforward with difficulties up to HVS on excellent granite and was given an overall alpine grade of AD+. The ridges proved absolutely stunning with views into Argentina and for many miles around as well as provoking some interest from the local wildlife.

In summary we have discovered a number of potential new walls to climb in the immediate vicinity, all of which are likely to give high quality aid climbing or hard free climbing, whilst novel alpine style routes of relatively easy grades on unclimbed peaks abound. It should be noted however that the weather in Cochamó can be somewhat damp.

Introduction

Background

Mount Trinidad is a granite dome (c1750m) situated in the Patagonian Andes approximately 100 km west of Puerto Montt. Team members Brian Bigger and Lucy Regan had approached this mountain from the village of Cochamó in April 2000 with the intention of establishing a novel route up the 700m north west arête. After enjoying 8 days of good weather and some dirty aid climbing to A3+, autumn arrived with six days of rain and snow. We retreated from pitch 5 after establishing the basis of an independent line that pendulumed for 40m across the blank slab guarding the lower section into a discontinuous seam that appeared to continue to the summit via the northwest arete.

Aim/Objectives

- 1) To complete our new big wall route up the northwest arête of Mount Trinidad.
- 2) To establish an alpine style traverse of the Mount Trinidad horseshoe.

Map – see Annex 1 for map of region

Achievements

The team successfully achieved one of the two objectives. The big wall route was pushed 4 pitches above our previous high point before inclement weather and time pressures forced a halt. We did however establish a 2 day Alpine style route (The Mount Trinidad Horseshoe) crossing Mount Trinidad and 5 other peaks in the Trinidad range, 4 of which we believe are unclimbed, at a relatively amenable grade of AD+.

Expedition Members

James Marshall, BSc – Software Engineer, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Age: 24, Nationality: British. He has rock-climbed in the United Kingdom and Europe for over 3 years and leads E2. Typical ascents include Deranged, Pembrokeshire (E2, 5b), Spacewalk, Lundy (E2 5b) and Kitten Claws, Pembrokeshire (E3, 5c). He has also enjoyed a season in the Alps and winter climbing in Scotland, leading Scottish III on ice. The Cochamó 2001 expedition was his first taste of big-wall and aid climbing. He has been President of De Montfort University Milton Keynes Climbing Club, Secretary of the North London Mountaineering Club, and is currently Vice-President of the North London Mountaineering Club.

Dr Lucy Regan, PhD, MS, BEng – Senior Consultant, Safety and Environmental Risk Management, Age: 33, Nationality: Irish
First Ascent on the Sphinx, Cordillera Blanca, Peru (Here Comes the Sun, 700m, E3, A3)

She has completed other big wall ascents in Yosemite (Half Dome NW Face Regular Route, Half Dome NW Face Direct Route, Mount Watkins, Lost Arrow Direct). She leads E2 (~5.10) and has over 10 years rock-climbing experience, having climbed in Britain, France, Germany, the US, Chile and Peru. She has extensive alpine climbing experience and typical routes include the Brenva Spur (France), the Anoch Eagach (Scotland) and the Matthes Crest (Tuolomne, US). She leads waterfall ice up to Grade IV.

She is also a Telemark ski mountaineering enthusiast and has toured in the Sierras (Mt. Shasta, US) Chamonix Alps and the Pyrenees. She competes in mountain bike orienteering and has won events at national level. She is qualified in Mountaineering First Aid.

She has been President of the North London Mountaineering Club and University College London Mountaineering Club.

Dr Brian Bigger, PhD, DIC, BSc – Research Associate, Gene Therapy Group, Imperial College, London, Age: 27, Nationality: British
First Ascent on the Sphinx, Cordillera Blanca, Peru (Here Comes the Sun, 700m, E3, A3)

He has completed other big wall ascents in Yosemite (Half Dome NW Face Direct Route, Mount Watkins, Lost Arrow Direct). He leads E4 (5.11) and has over 10 years rock-climbing experience, having climbed in Britain, France, Germany, Pakistan, S. India, Bhutan the US, Chile and Peru. Typical ascents include Bloody Sunday, Pembroke (E4 6a); Fast Lane, Joshua Tree (5.11a); Ticket Danger, Verdon (Fr7a+). He has extensive alpine climbing experience and typical ascents include the Aiguille Dibona (France), Rocheforte Arete/Aiguille combination (France), winter traverses of the Anoch Eagach (Scotland) and the Cullin ridge (Skye). He leads waterfall ice up to Grade V.

He is also a Telemark ski mountaineering enthusiast and has toured in the Chamonix Alps and the Pyrenees. He competes in mountain bike orienteering and cross-country racing and has won numerous events at national level. He is qualified in Mountaineering First Aid. He is also a keen photographer, winner of numerous competitions and the Bath University photographic prize.

Geography and Climate

Position

The climbing area centred around mount Trinidad lies some 20km inland (west) of the fishing village of Cochamó, near Puerto Montt, Chile. Mount Trinidad grid reference: 72° 05' W; 41° 25' 30" S.

Maps may be obtained from the Instituto Geografico in Santiago; Map: Río Cochamó 4115-7200.

Area

Mount Trinidad is situated in the Patagonian Andes of southern Chile. The highest mountains in the area are around 2100m falling to a lowest valley depth of 400m-sea level, whilst Mount Trinidad base camp is only at 1000m, so there are no special concerns. Due to the position of this part of the Andes relative to the Pacific coast they are subject to some rather unpredictable and at times very wet weather although generally mild. This, compounded by the almost total tree cover of the valley floors with dense temperate rainforest makes approaches to the bottom of climbs challenging.

Seasons

The extent of the "climbing season" can vary tremendously from year to year although it is generally accepted that late December to late March (summer) provides the most reliably stable weather. In the summer, valley weather is typically hot (25-30°C) and particularly in January and February horseflies abound in the valley. In the mountains temperatures can vary from 0°C-30°C depending on how high you are. It can and often does rain at this time of year – be prepared to sit out week long spells of constant downpour. Usually the wait is rewarded with a stretch of good weather but expect the unexpected: snow in January and sunshine in April! After April – according to the locals, it rains constantly, or if you're lucky it snows – it is also somewhat colder and the approach paths and particularly the rivers become extremely treacherous not to mention impassable.

As with most mountain areas there are two types of weather: pacific frontal systems from the west or northwest, or mountain generated weather with low creeping sea-fog/cloud that eventually swallows up the mountains. The former can be extremely dangerous as the walls generally turn into raging torrents very rapidly. The latter usually only gives misting drizzle with occasional rain.

Rivers

Near the end of the season (April) it is recommended to put a rope across the Cochamó river – Cosme lost a horse whilst crossing a much smaller river lower on the same path two years ago. If it rains for six days in a row (which it often does) you may be forced to wait for it to abate (usually within the day) before crossing

Rock

There are many granite domes in the immediate vicinity, of which mount Trinidad at 1750m is certainly one of the cleanest and most impressive. Climbing is characterised typically by smooth compact granite with lines restricted to dirty vegetated cracks or seams. This results in bold wall climbing with hard aid or harder free climbing. Surrounding domes provide long bold but relatively easy slabs and scrambling with short difficulties although there are still some steeper unclimbed lines waiting...

Often the quality of the climbing is excellent, and as climbs are cleaned and approaches established, more free climbing should be feasible.

Ethics

The ethics of the crags should be those of all mountain crags – minimal impact, minimal bolting, pack in packout. Although the crag area is not in the Alerce Andino national park it does contain a number of very impressive Alerce trees that probably rival the oldest in the park, including some very inquisitive condors and the odd puma. These are all protected species under international law. This mountain environment is fragile to human intervention and should be treated with respect. It is unlikely that Cochamó will ever become a very popular climbing venue, however: Do not let Cochamó become a tip!

Expedition Planning

Logistics

Flights to Santiago may be bought from most major travel agencies. Note that January is in the high season and therefore requires advanced booking for cheaper flights. It is also possible to fly to Puerto Montt (LanChile). Flights via the USA permit a luggage allowance of 64kg per person in two bags. Direct flights from Europe permit 25kg per person, as do internal flights within Chile. Given the cost of excess luggage charges it is more sensible to fly via the US when travelling with wall gear and to take the bus to Puerto Montt from Santiago. A number of very salubrious and safe bus services run to Puerto Montt, the most luxurious of which is Turbus's Salon Cama service with extra-wide fully reclining seats and steward service (14hrs). For those who feel this is missing the point; try taking the classico (18 hrs). Buses to Cochamó village from Puerto Montt run 2 or more times daily, however there are limited spaces at weekends on the large buses (Buses Fierro) (3h). Cochamó is a fishing village and has one restaurant and one reliable hostel – just ask a local.

Horses and horsemen for packhorses or riding or both may be hired cheaply from the friendly and hospitable Cosme Rojas (on the right on the way into town), or for more than double the price from Campo Aventura two miles west of Cochamó. It is also possible to stay at the latter.

The path to the meadow under mount Trinidad is roughly 6 hours on horseback or on foot. It is often knee deep in mud. From here, the wide (50m) and sometimes dangerous Río Cochamó must be crossed before attaining a narrow and steep path that winds its way up to the base of the north west face of Mount Trinidad through temperate rainforest (1-3h depending on pack size). This covers some challenging terrain – watch out for the Rhubarb – it bites!

Santiago and Puerto Montt have excellent supermarkets where most tastes can be catered for (try the honey in Puerto Montt).

They also both have a range of camping, hardware etc shops where most non-specialist equipment can be bought. Some climbing gear can be bought from Climbing Planet climbing wall in Santiago.

Language

Whilst it is possible to survive without any knowledge of Spanish in the Cities, the country is not so straightforward. An intermediate grasp of Spanish is preferred for better enjoyment and peace of mind – nobody in Cochamó speaks any English and the

accent is a little difficult. However we survived on an 8 week basic Spanish evening class, so anything is possible...

Transport

Expect to haul all your own gear. Once at Cochamó the availability of anybody to carry your stuff is limited. Packhorses can be hired to haul gear and food to the head of the Río Cochamó (see logistics section).

Equipment

Wall gear

We carried roughly two standard climbing racks with two full sets of friends (micro – 6) and nuts (rps – 9). Aid gear was a set each of: jumars, etriers, daisy chains, fifi hooks harnesses, kneepads etc. Pegs were: LAs 2 sets, KBs 2 sets, angles 1 set. Most useful were long thin LAs and long KBs for the flares with tie off loops. Hooks 1 set all sizes, copperheads 10, mostly No2, birdbeaks and rurps (2 each) essential. Bolt kit also essential unless you're extremely brave/foolish/damned good.

2 portaledges

6 ropes

Alpine gear

About 1 small rack with tat and hexes for rappels

Camping

Sleeping bags rated to 0°C, 2 tents, one large, karrimats, cooking gear 2 sets, 5l benzina blanca (Coleman's fuel)

Walk in

Tough boots, some rope for fixing /river crossing (about 50m!)

Food and First aid

On trips of this nature we try to eat roughly what we eat at home. Simple food that tastes nice. Pasta, potatoes, rice as staples and sauces, choritzo, tinned tuna and many fresh veggies. We also took eggs flour and powdered milk for extended pancake sessions. Remember beer may taste nice but it weighs a lot.

We also carried a fairly comprehensive first aid kit and amused ourselves by reading the gory chapters of "Medicine for Mountaineering" out to the leader on the hard pitches.

Photography

I took a Canon Eos10 on this trip with 3 lenses: 28mm; 50mm and 70-200mm. I also carried a tripod, film (Fuji Velvia 100 was best, Kodachrome 25, NPS160 and NPH400), many zip lock bags, a polarising filter is essential and a waterproof Minolta compact 28-80 zoom for walls in the wet. A zoom is obviously more versatile but in this case the picture quality doesn't come close to the 50mm. A longer lens is recommended for wildlife although the condors usually come to you...

On this trip due to the initially poor weather I only shot around 7 rolls of film – normally it would be more like 12.

Account of big wall climb

In April 2000 Lucy Regan and Brian Bigger came to Cochamó with the intention of putting up a new big wall route on the 700m northwest face of Mount Trinidad. One thing that struck us immediately was that there had been more activity than reported in the magazines and that most obvious lines had been climbed on this face. The only remaining line that looked feasible but still covered some impressive ground was a seam starting high on the northwest slab, steepening to cut through the overhangs at 1/2 height and continuing up the northwest arête. There was a good reason why this line had remained untouched, namely that the slab below was 100m of smooth rain-washed granite at an angle just too steep to climb, especially considering the poor quality of the flaky edges. On this occasion we established an independent start up the right hand side of the central pillar of the north face, following an arching crack rightwards at 90m with difficulties up to E1 and A3+. From here we firstly attempted to pendulum rightwards to the seam in one long 40m sprint. This proved unfeasible, and Brian took a 20m fall when a flake snapped whilst attempting to tension traverse the last 10m. We then split the pendulum into 2 athletic and dynamic 20m pendulums, each of over 45 degrees; considerably harder than the A3 pendulums on the south face of Mount Watkins, Yosemite, for example.

Having established ourselves at the base of the seam, the weather broke and we were forced to retreat.

We returned in January 2001 along with James Marshall with the intention of completing this route.

During the first six days at Mount Trinidad it rained almost incessantly. The team took advantage of a day of less than torrential rain to go up the valley and scout out the possibilities for a traverse of the Mount Trinidad horseshoe. As the weather finally started improving on the sixth day, the lower face however was still covered in run-off from the upper face, rendering the delicate and bold first slab pitch of the original line (previously led by Brian) unclimbable.

Given the availability of some abandoned fixed rope we decided to avoid the wet and bold lower pitches and save time by climbing the left-hand side of the pillar (Sundance) and penduluming from this high point onto the start of our old pendulum. The initial 3 pitches were much more rapid, although we were slowed by first rain on pitch 4, which forced a day long retreat and then seepage which forced us to aid much of this E3 pitch. Pitch 5 brought us to the top of the pillar where James was able to rappel and swing into the top of pitch 4 of our April 2000 route. This brought us to the start of the pendulums, which were luckily dry by now and accomplished after 3 or 4 attempts.

Fixed ropes to the ground were established here and the team (mostly Lucy) then took turns rope soloing the seam which provided good quality but slow A3 climbing on tied off KBs and LAs. This was followed over the course of 3 days to a steepening. The seam shallowed here forcing us rightward into a dirty overhanging corner, gained by some tenuous hooking (A2+)

Again the team took it in turns to rope solo up the next 50 metres, mainly on clean but very dirty aid (RPs, microwires and cams) with the occasional peg placement. Gaining height rapidly in the overhanging corner was difficult, as top-stepping while being pushed out by the rock ran the risk of pulling out any marginal placements, which James managed to do, resulting in a six metre fall. The corner ended in a grass overhang to gain a hanging ledge. This took some time to breach and the decision was soon reached that based on the slow climbing up to this point and the available time and weather, it would be better to concentrate on completing the second

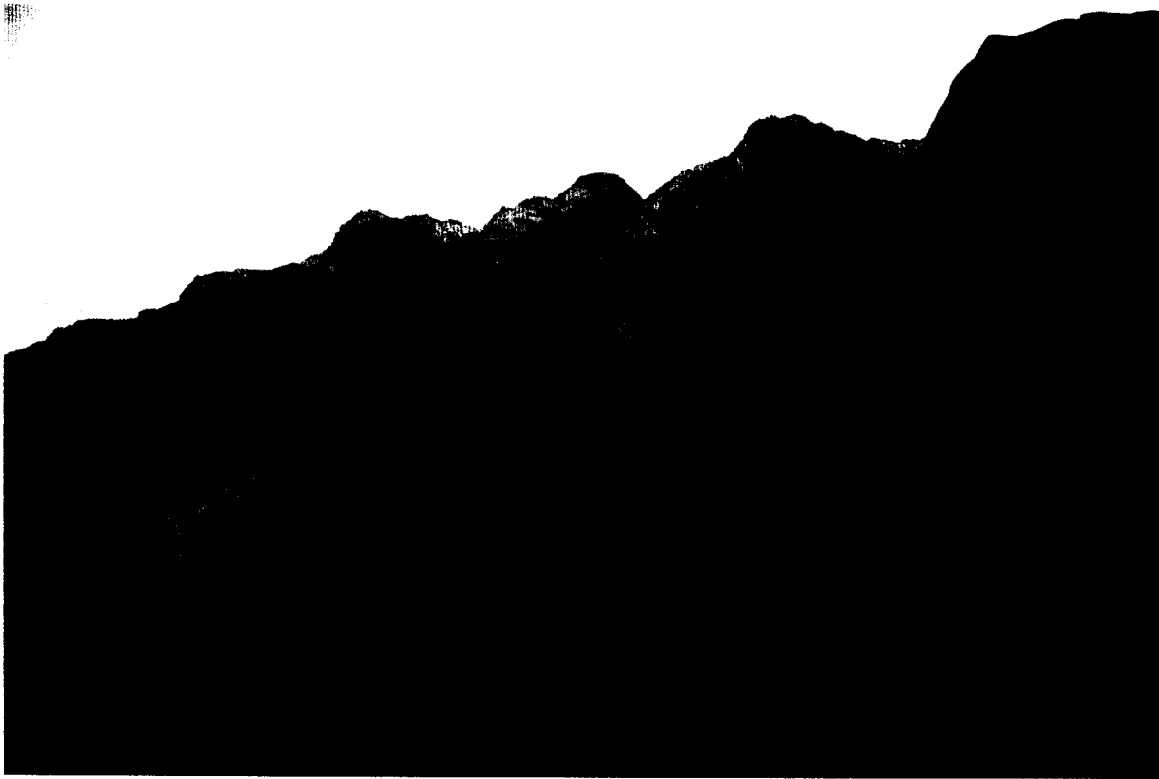
objective. We estimated that completion of the route would probably take a further 6 days and duly retreated from pitch 9.

Account of alpine traverse

The team recuperated for the afternoon and prepared for the alpine traverse. We left base camp at approximately 07:30 with the intention of climbing the entire Mount Trinidad horseshoe over the next 2-3 days. Skirting the base of Mount Trinidad, we scrambled up the loose descent gully on the mountain's Northwest side. James led the HVS pitch of Stirling Moss in very cold conditions with much cursing, to breach the difficulties on the north face of Trinidad. Meanwhile Brian climbed the northern subsidiary peak (unnamed, almost certainly climbed – 1479m) by some bouldery moves and returned to second up Stirling Moss. After some inquisitive attention from one of the condors some easy scrambling led to the summit of Cerro Trinidad by about 11:00 (1720m) (This incorporates Torre Norte with the bulk of climbing, Torre Central and Torre Sur, all spurs finishing at the same summit.) The summit domes of Trinidad and its neighbouring peaks are relatively flat and rounded, however they are separated by deep gullies, which required abseil descents onto knife-edge ridges, then easy but exposed climbing and scrambling up the other side. Heading southwards along the crest, two other peaks (1703m, 1717m probably unclimbed, which we named Cerro Concepcion, Torre Norte and Torre Sur respectively) besides Mount Trinidad were climbed in this manner before reaching the third and final Southeastern peak of the horseshoe, near the col at its centre. Tricky route-finding at the end of the day led to scrambling and a 50m abseil down to a suitable bivvy spot on the shoulder of this mountain (unclimbed, we named it Cerro Romané). In the morning, the team scrambled easily to the southeastern summit (1678m) and enjoyed some fantastic early morning views over the Patagonian Andes, before descended its western ridge, reaching the southern col (1390m) by about midday. Much like the Alps, the midday temperature was very high, with direct sun posing serious risks of heatstroke and sunburn, aggravated by the incessant attention of the horseflies coming up from the tree-line just below the col. The team decided to sit out the hottest hours of the day, using some convenient snow for refreshment. Views south from here reveal an apparently untouched and hidden valley with great potential for more big wall and alpine routes. To the southwest an incredible curtain-wall style rock bridge links the southwestern most peak of the Trinidad horseshoe to an unclimbed and snowbound peak (1897) and eventually to Cerro Torrecillas (1809) and Cerro Estraido (2098), both unclimbed as far as we know. By about 14:00, the team crossed the col and started up the first mountain on the west side of the horseshoe. After crossing some deep banks of snow, which contained fresh puma tracks, the first 15m step was encountered. An excellent VS pitch up the rightmost arête of the buttress, provided the solution with great exposure from the deep gully just below. At this point Lucy returned to the col suffering from illness, leaving Brian and James to continue the traverse. Easy scrambling led to the second step giving a corner pitch of severe before breaking right up a layback crack and through a short overhang at about HVS and HS. From this point it was a short distance to the first summit (unclimbed, 1747m, which we named Cerro Alerce). Brian and James then traversed to the remaining subsidiary summit, via an easy abseil and some easy scrambling around large blocks. On reaching this last summit, Cerro Laguna (1708m) a cairn was discovered, which we later realised marked the first ascent of this peak by a line up its slabby northeast face (Velho Alerce).

The final northern peak in the horseshoe (Pedro de Gorila) (1761m – climbed more than twice by the northern wall) was protected by a south facing wet and overhanging wall (80m). Aid climbing this was not feasible with our lightweight rack, nor was it in keeping with the rest of the route. At this juncture Brian and James re-traced their route, and descended to the col by about 19:00. In the morning the team descended from the col north into the valley, following the river with some entertaining wading and jumping before regaining base camp.

On this occasion we were lucky that the snow had melted sufficiently over the period of our stay to permit climbing in light boots without crampons or ice axes. We were not able to attempt some of the higher peaks further west due to lack of cold weather equipment, although a single axe and crampons would have sufficed for most of these. Bearing in mind that some of these peaks are granite domes with unstable seasonal snow packs – timing is essential.



A section of the traverse route

Calendar/ diary

28th December – Team flies to Santiago from London, Heathrow.

29th December – Team arrives in Santiago, essential purchases of heavy materials – we catch the overnight bus to Puerto Montt.

30th December - Arrive in Puerto Montt – purchase large quantities of food and fuel. James is suffering from food poisoning.

31st December - Bus to Cochamó. Arrange horses with Cosme (Horseman) for the 1st.

1st January – Cosme has a terrible hangover, so do we, arrange horses for the next day.

2nd January – Afternoon start – many horseflies, - arrive at meadow below Mount Trinidad late evening

3rd January – Cross Río Cochamó, Horseman leaves, - start ferrying 2 loads up to basecamp at 1000m

A hut of bamboo and plastic sheeting has survived the winter (with some damage)

4th January – Rain starts – continue ferrying last load, repair hut, temperature plummets in rain.

5th January – Rain, Reconnoitre the routes. Wall is unfeasible in rain, Alpine traverse unfeasible due to large quantities of snow above 1300m

6th January – Rain, Explore descent routes from Trinidad, sort gear

7th January – Torrential rain, Tentbound still cold (5°C)

8th January – Torrential rain, Tentbound

9th January – Rain, In-hut circuit training class started.

10th January - Rain

11th January – Weather breaks, rock drying, start the big wall route, decide to avoid hard early pitches of our original April route and climb the initial pitches of Sundance instead to save time – rains again after only two pitches, forced to retreat

12th January – Dry and sunny Start climbing again, 3rd pitch is wet and aid climbing takes all day.

13th January – Finish 5th pitch on pillar of Sundance – Do a large pendulum to reach the top of pitch 4 on our original route. Repeat the original pendulum across the slab in 2 parts both of 20m. This pendulum involves athletic and dynamic swings of >45°.

14th January – Established at base of seam, this leads through some overhangs onto the NW arête and upwards to the summit, begin cleaning and aiding seam

15th January – Slow aid climbing on seam (40m/day) alternate rope soloing

16th January – Slow aid climbing on seam (40m/day) alternate rope soloing

17th January – Seam peters out, tenuous hooking leads right round overhang to another seam and overhanging grass.

18th January – Overhanging grass proving difficult to breach to ledge. Eventually climb through. Continuation seam looks equally slow. Estimate as 6 days to summit. Weather still holding. Decision made to retreat and continue with second objective in view of limited time and weather.

19th January - Start alpine climb – begin on the north side of Mount Trinidad by climbing the original descent route, a subsidiary peak, over Trinidad and along the ridge covering two other peaks to end of the east side of valley – sleep there.

20th January - climb final peak on Southeast corner then descend west to col– very hot – sit out middle of day in shade, observe fresh puma tracks. In afternoon climb 2 peaks on the west side of valley. 7th and final peak has a wet overhanging 100m wall protecting it. Unable to complete this without some of the aid rack. Return to col via other peaks and sleep there.

21st January - descend to river floor – trailbreak down river to valley – rain starts in afternoon
22nd January - Ferry loads to valley in rain crossing river with fixed rope
23rd January - Descend on horseback in rain, stay night at hostel
24th January - bus to Puerto Montt
25th January - bus to Santiago
26th January - climbing and rafting in the Maipo valley
27th January - Fly back to UK

Budget for team of 3 (GB pounds)

Costing	Income	Outgoing
Grant from BMC	800	
Grant from MEF	500	
Personal funding	2810	
Flights x3		1950
Buses to Puerto Montt and Cochamó		180
Equipment in Santiago		40
accommodation		110
Expedition food		150
Restaurant costs		120
Hire of horses and horsemen		250
Incidentals extra equipment (ledge + pegs)		700
Insurance		510
Film cost and processing		100
Total	4110	4110

References/Bibliography

Lonely Planet Guide: Chile

High Mountain Sports, No 193 December 1998 pp 10-14, Greenshires Print, Sheffield, UK.

High Mountain Sports No 192 November 1998, pp 27 (Mountain Info), Greenshires Print, Sheffield, UK.

Noel Craine (personal communication)

Map 4115-7200 Río Cochamó, Instituto Geografico, Santiago, Chile.

Desnivel No 169 January 2001

Annex 1: Map of region showing traverse route

