

North Wales Expedition to South Tower of Paine 2006

Members: Mike Twid Turner and Stuart McAleese



Dates 14th November to 16th December 2006

The Team made new route as proposed by the initial plan but unfortunately didn't summit. Both the team felt it was one of their most successful expeditions and most harrowing! Their new route was called 'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly'.

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Overview of Trip

The Good the bad and the Ugly'

South Tower of Paine. 800m A3+, E2. (Summit not reached....to is completed in the future!)



It was Stuart McAleese and mine 15th day climbing on the face. The winds regularly gusted 100mph, this was ok we felt as we were just aiding and well attached! The climbing, 800m above the glacier, was now becoming mark ably easier. Our summit was tantalisingly close. One good day and only 300m of 35 degree snow led to the summit and a month's hard effort would all be worth it.



Stuart clipped into the top belay. He looked down. We didn't need telepathy to tell each other that the weather had worsened. It was time to bail, down to our bivi kit 500m below. As we descended our situation became more serious. Both of us had experienced winds over 100mph many times before in Scotland and Patagonia. But the funnelled Patagonia winds between the South Tower and Paine Chico now increased to gusts of 150mph. It was impossible to do anything, but hang tightly while swinging horizontally in the gusts. The wind had total control over us we hung like puppets. Had we pushed too hard!



During the short respite between gusts abseiling was only possible by pulling yourself, down the iced up ropes. Uncomfortably, every 2 minutes our eyelashes would be welded together due to rime build up. Breathing into the wind was difficult, you had to look away. After much effort and time the bottom of our ropes were reached, 100m from our bivi kit. A simple solo snowy climb normally was now a terrifying grovelling crawl. Gusts tried to send us spiralling over the ridge 300m onto the glacier below. Eventually we were swinging off our anchors inside a bag of gortex, covered in snow; we now knew we would now survive.



The South East face of the South Tower of Paine was still unclimbed. The kilometre wide and at least kilometre high wall had no obvious linking lines that led to the summit. A 200m grey belt of compact granite blanks any cracks short halfway, up the face. Our chosen line wandered up the right hand side of the face, left of excellent Canadian route 'Hoth' route climbed in 2000. Our proposed line linked hanging grooves and cracks between these blank walls provided hard aid, mostly on hooks. During our climb we encountered only 8 hours of

good weather in 4 weeks. It was constantly windy and often snowing. We had resigned ourselves to aid climbing as exposing flesh and wearing rock boots would bring certain frost bite. Every day on the face we clad ourselves in every stitch of clothing we had. Gloves never coming off to climb. It was only like Scotland in winter, we kept repeating, so we had to keep going!

Climbing capsule we had stretched our ropes 600m up from our bivi, 200m up from the glacier. Our final days of climbing had left all our climbing equipment high above us. Stuck in our bivi we had no choice but to wait for 4 days during a massive storm. The 5th day was our last chance to descend otherwise we would miss our flights home. We had no choice to battle back up to our kit at the top of the lines, rescue sufficient gear and ropes and then make our escape. The winds where not quite as vicious as our earlier frightening descent but still created equally epic conditions. Descending to a hanging snow patch I triggered a sizable avalanche only saved by a safety line from above.



Back on the glacier we waded out to our advanced camp and started home. We had survived the mountain and Patagonia weather but only just. We were happy with our efforts but saddened not to summit. The climb in perfect warm weather would go free but the situation of the route generally means cold days and wind.

Mike Twid Turner (IFMGA Guide) and Stuart McAleese (Aspirant Guide) are both from North Wales would like to thank sponsors DMM, Mammut, Boreal, MEF, The BMC and the Welsh Sports Council.

Twid has climbed 3 routes in the Bader valley in Torres Del Paine. 'For a Fist Full of Dollars' on Curnos Norte in 1991. 'For a few Dollars more' on the Mascara both with his wife Louise. Now he has completed the Spaghetti Western!

Permit

We pre arranged through our agent/Friend Christian to get our permit with CONAF. The National park organisation that owns the Park. Our permits where gained from the Park Head quarters at the end of the road! They required photocopied from us our personal details, insurance details and proposed route, camp etc. They issued us a permit which was no problem as we had all the right info.

To enter the Park everybody pays a standard fee to stay in the park. All are checked in and out by Rangers. All CONAF staff where very helpful and approachable.

It is always worth writing to John Rees in Punta Arenas. He is welsh! And is the British consulate there. He is a great help and could help with any problems. He is always available for a brew!

Travel to Torres Del Paine

We travelled to Manchester Airport to find that British Airways had just told all of there ground staff that they were out of a job from the next day! Lucky for us our 90 kilo excess and £1500 bill was waved off with a good luck and no bill. Not so lucky on the way back! We flew via Madrid, Santiago and Puerto Mont direct to Punta Arenas! At the airport I had arranged with our Agent Christian to have a bus waiting it was there. A couple of hours later we where in Puerto Natalas the quickest transfer from Wales ever. Just over a day to the furthest place on the planet.

After a shopping trolley extravaganza rush we got the bus the following day with our porters to Torres Del Paine. Twid sorted the permit out while Stu sorted the horses and porter loads.

To base camp and the wall.

After an early start we walked 5 hours to our base camp in the Bader valley with our 2 porters. We carried monster sacks of kit and were glad to arrive. We hired 4 horses for the rest of our kit. Horses organised by Christian from Puerto Natalas. Our Gaucho Andreas was the son of Pepe our Gaucho from 1989. He was a great help and limber himself. Andreas lived in a Cave in the Park, all year round!

Base Camp

We where disheartened to find a lot of rubbish left by previous Italian team. We both spent a rest day clearing up the mess plastic, rubbish, tins etc. All our rubbish was carried out and disposed of in Natalas. We pitched our two tiny tents at base camp. The same day we arrived at the base camp we all did a carry of equipment up the valley to below the wall. A big day with 25 kilo bags. Not bad though Saturday morning to Tuesday and at Advanced base camp.

Advanced base camp an above

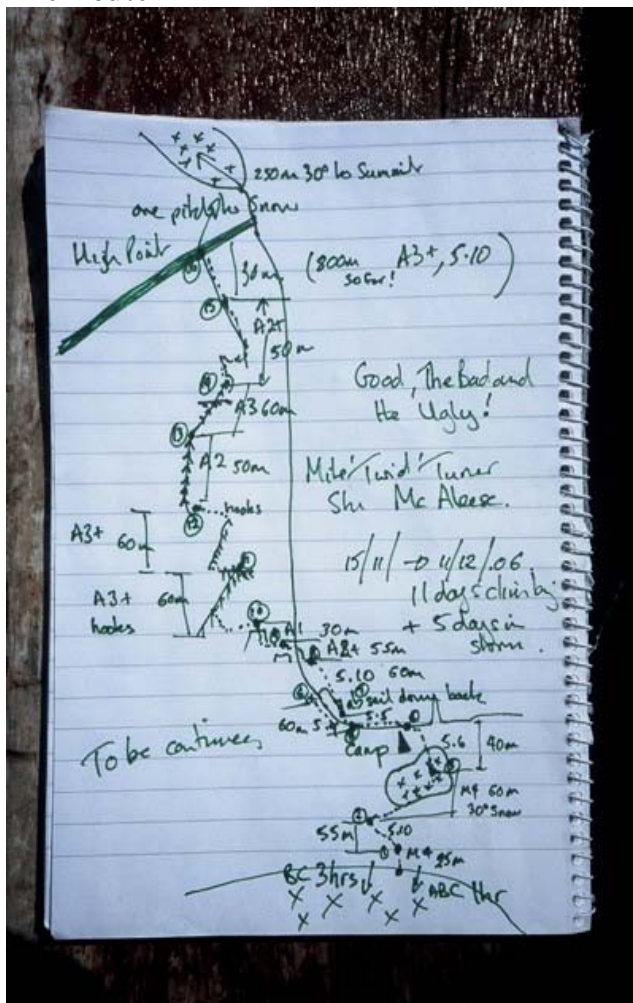
We set up a small bivi tent below a boulder at the snout of the glacier that led up to the base of the wall.



An amazing spot with awesome views of the wall. The glacier above was a dream to walk up. Hard ice and no snow covering it. Crevasses were not a problem low down but once high above the snow line where an issue. On last approach to the climb Stu fell in a crevasse without a rope on. We had fixed all our ropes on the face for our final push. Twid managed to pull Stu out of the crevasses which were quite sizable! Feet dangling in space. After this we connected ourselves with all our slings and etriers which worked a treat. A good reminder never to be blazy on a glacier! For most of the trip we spent at base camp while not on the wall. All our food and kit had to be transported here about 10 carries each. Hard work.

After leaving abc all rubbish and gear returned to base camp. All walls destroyed and we tried to leave it as it was.

The Route



Initially we couldn't see a possible line up the face. My memory had dwindled from 1991 when I last stood looking at the wall from this angle. The wall was as blank a

wall as we had ever seen. After a couple of hours we spotted a line which led from the col over to some corners and eventually into a clean line. It was always difficult and had many gaps of blankness.

Day 1 climbing. Stu lead a mixed pitch up to a snow belay Scottish V. A very cold day. Twid lead a free pitch in his rock boots, run out but easy climbing E1ish. Poor belay. Stu lead through up some mixed and through a snow patch to a block. Stu led to the col in appalling cold. An amazing view over to the 3 towers. We returned to abc.



Day 2 Climbing. Twid lead along easy ridge vs ish. Stu lead a long free pitch hvs up to a belay. Great slab climbing in an exposed position. Twid pendulum o a hanging belay out rt. Twid lead a long free pitch in rock boots. Snowing and ice and snow on all ledges. Very cold and very loose! Good ledge. Twid started an aid pitch out left up to another ledge. Tricky aid with some hooks.



Day 3 climbing. Twid finished aid pitch off and Stu lead a short pitch to an exposed ledge. Great pics taken here! Stu started the '3 day pitch'. He took a wide traverse out left. Height hard gained here/

Day 4 climbing. Twid aided all day into a corner. 5hrs for 50 feet. Hard aid and hooking. Weather really bad

Day 5 climbing. Stu lead a great lead up the corner to a ledge finishing the 3 day pitch off. Very cold and poor rock.



Day 6 climbing. Twid lead out rt to a corner and crack and up to blank wall. Bat hooked left to a belay. 8hrs a long day. Snowing and windy



Day 7 climbing.

Stu lead up a corner easy aid with odd peg. Twid lead through a blank corner odd bat hook here. Weather appalling.



Day 8 climbing. Twid finished off the pitch up a corner. One leader fall.



Day 9 Stu lead a great pitch up and across into the clean line. Weather really turned bad, we had to return to the Bivi in strong winds. Very dangerous conditions worst we both had experienced!



Day 10 to day 14. Stuck in 100+ mph winds in bivi tent. Desperate conditions with masses of snow. Stuck impossible to move up or down. Food very short.



Day 15 We re ascended our ropes to the top. Very frightening as ropes had had a hard time in the incessant winds. In a few places the rope was badly gashed. Another epic descent back to the col and after a packing our kit. Started to abseil from col. Twid triggered a wind slab avalanche. 150m wide and deep. Lucky on rope! Wadded down our glacier which was now 5 feet deep in powder. Not easy. Returned to base camp with monster loads. 5 hrs walking instead of 2hrs! Back at base camp alive.



Next day we walked out and fetched horses to bring our kit out. After a night in a cave we returned by bus to Puerto Natalas. The following morning we flew home. It was a great trip for maxing our time climbing. Never have I spent so much time climbing in Patagonia. The trip was always o a pressure of time and this made us climb in some terrible weather. In the whole time in Patagonia we learnt nobody else was in Torres Del Paine climbing. We heard that there was over 60 folk in nearby Fitzroy area. There nobody had left the base camp. We felt proud to have dome what we did in the weather we had.

Base Camp and food



Shots here of base camp and Twid cleaning up mess left by other trips.

Food

All provisions bought in Puerto Natalas from Local supermarkets. We found that we could buy most things that we have in the UK in the local shops. Prices similar to UK prices. We lived off noodles, smash, rice and pasta as staples. We also supplemented this with dried meats and cheeses. Soups and hot drinks for each day. For hill food we had biscuits, chewy bars and chocolate. We hit it perfect with food and didn't seem to have much waste. We wouldn't do anything different next time, just buy it in Chile. If you got short, which we didn't you could use a small shop at park entrance.

Gas

All cooking was done on gas stoves we didn't bother with an msr. It was perfect with the Jet boil stove, everybody must get one! We took in about 18 canisters from Natalas. Easily bought there and about same price as UK.

Accommodation in Natalas

It was Twid's 4th Trip to Paine and each time he has stayed with Christians family in there family hotel El Mundial. It's clean very reasonable and extremely friendly. Why go anywhere else! It is placed near the port and a short walk into town centre where we eat out each night in town. Best take a taxi first time as it's hard to find. All taxis are very reasonable and we used them to move provisions after shopping. All very reliable.

Bus to Punta Arenas airport. worth noting the bus goes straight there from Natalas.

Agent

Our agent Christian from Fortalez was great. He helped organise bus tickets, accommodation, horses and porters. He lent us ropes and helped with the Permit. Great thanks must go to him for his and his brother's help. Well recommended.



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www.kayakenpatagonia.com



Stu after 4 days in the biv tent. His turn to brew up!

Rescue Needs if need be

We did not need any rescue but for interest. Conaf will organise any rescue with the help of local climbers. We stayed with the rescue lads in there cave! They had stretchers but not much big wall experience. They would I feel help constructively with any rescue. A helicopter is available from Punta Arenas free with the military , but would take a day to arrive. We aim to return and offer free training to the team



next time we go.

Insurance

We both had cover that covered us for new routes in remote palaces. Twid had Snow card Stuart BMC. Note the BMC cover is far too expensive we felt for what we required. £350 for the Expedition.

Costing

Horses \$280
Porters \$480
Porters travel £300
Park fee \$200
Food for park \$500
Food in Natalas and Travelling \$185
Bus Tickets park \$240
Bus airport \$100
Accom \$120
Misc gas etc \$200
Total \$ 2405.....£1302.5

UK Travel £140
Flights to Chile £850

Insurance £550

Kit £800

Film £120

Total £4165

Grants in

Mef £750

BMC £250

Welsh Sports Council £1200

Team Profiles



Twid's Mountaineering and Climbing profile

Mike has had the nick name of 'Twid' since early school days! He was lucky to be brought into the mountaineering world by his father, who is still a keen climber. Through early trips to Wales, Peak and Wales he gains a love for the mountains that is still as passionate 30 years later. Climbing started on local outcrops around the Merseyside area such as 'The Breck and Pecks Hill'. North Wales provided a close training ground for multi pitch summer and winter climbing. Having survived the 'Easy Years' he took off to the Alps and Greater Ranges. First trip to the Alps with his Father climbed peaks in the Ecrin and around Chaonix where he now lives for much of the Alpine climbing seasons.

Rock Climbing Background

Developing strong fingers on the local sandstone allowed Twid to progress quickly through the grades. Climbing E6 at 20 and E7 at 21. He has climbed up to E7 each year since. Generally can onsight E5/6. Spending plenty of time on sports routes he has climbed many routes at the grade 8a. Twid spends most of his time pushing his climbing grade and finding new routes. He has put up hundreds of new routes all over the UK but mostly in North Wales. Some of his most memorable being Vitalstatistics E8 5b,6b,6b,6c on Gogarth, Perfect Monsters E7 5b,6c,6a,6a on Mingulay in the Outer Hebrides, Sole Train E7 6b, 6b in Pembroke, Follower of Hopless Causes E7 6a, 6b, 6c at Gogarth, Heart of Stone E7 6b in Ogwen Valley. He has rockclimbed extensively around Europe and the World. Places he has climbed included Lofoten, Mali, Madagascar, Morocco, Australia, Mexico, Venezuela, States, Greenland, Borneo, Pakistan and Patagonia

Expedition Profile

1989 'Caveman' Torres Del Paine, Chile Patagonia. ED 700M E5. 2 days alpine style

1991 'For a Fist Full of Dollars' Torres Del Paine, Chile Patagonia, ED 800M 12 days Big Wall.

'The Excellent Adventure' Beatrice, Hushe Pakistan. ED 850M 14 days Big Wall.

'Nawas' Nawas Brak- Amin Brak , Hushe , Pakistan. ED 1300m 18 days Big Wall.

'Endless Day' The Citadel, Baffin Island. ED 1000m 18 days Big Wall.

'Grains of Sand' Hands of Fatima, Mali. 650m E4. Free route.

'Always the Sun' Madagascar. 500m 7c+. Free route.

'For a few Dollars more' Torres Del Paine, Patagonia. 800m, E4 A1. Free route.

'Umweltern', Nalamortorsaq, Greenland. 700m E5, A1. Free Route.

'Moby Dick' 1200m ,Greenland, 2nd ascent Greenland. in one day.

'Norweign Pillar' Greater Trango, Pakistan. Stopped 500m from top. 21 consecative nights on portaledges.

'The Land that time forgot' Venezuela, 700m , E5. Free route.

'Off the wall Bonkers' Kitchatna Spires, Alaska, Big Wall ED 850m. Big Wall.

'The Supa Dupa Coulior' The Citadel, Kitchatna Spires. 1000m ED , 5+ French Ice. Alpine.

'The Perfect Storm' Mnt Nevermore, Klitchatna Spires, 1000m ED E4, A2. Big Wall

'Storm Pillar', Lofoten, Storen Pillar, 800m. Big Wall

'Like a Pig in Shit' Sardinia 500m Free route 7c.

Attempted a new line on the Central Tower of Paine

Attempted a new line on East Face of Fitz Roy.

Elbrus.

Stu McAleese has been climbing for 15 years with Expeditions such as ;Alaska 01,02,03 and 2004 Patagonia 2003and 2006 Changabang 2005 China 06.

First Ascents include Supa Dupa Coulior, Perfect Storm, Off the wall Madness and The Good the bad and the ugly. Attempts on the E Face of Fitzroy and The Boardman Tasker on Changabang reaching 6500m. Climded VII, E7, 7c and longing for my first 8a. First British and First Free Ascent of Omega. Nominated for the Piolet d'Or in 2003 for the Supa Dupa Coulior, Alaska.

Other Objectives

There are hundreds of new lines to climb and most routes in Torres del Piane are still unrepeatd. The weather we feel is better than Fitz Roy Area and there are better low level objective to climb in bad weather. In the Bader valley there are still unclimbed walls and plenty of scope. We will be back for more.....

If you need any topo info best get in touch with Fortalaza. They have all the current tops.

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