



# 1 MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION

## 1.1 Patron: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh KG KT

### Final R E P O R T

#### FROM AN MEF - SUPPORTED EXPEDITION

**Expedition Report: South Avellano Tower Attempt, Northern Patagonia, December 2014 -  
January 2015**

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## 1 Summary

The circa 900m high North-East face of the South Avellano Tower (-46.428865,-72.527817) sits at the top of the Est. El Ventisquero Valley. This is a small tributary valley of the Est. El Avellano Valley, on the north side of Lago General Carrera.

An attempt at climbing this North East face was previously attempted by Dave Brown and John Crook when they explored the area in January 2014, but without success. Dave and John invited Will Harris and Andy Reeve to accompany them for a better-equipped attempt with more time available. The approach the team took required two days of travel from the nearest road and included a boat, horses and innumerable river crossings. On the wall we opted for a big wall approach, and first fixed about 250m of rope in preparation for a capsule-style attempt. A storm and subsequent unsettled weather prevented us from commencing a big-wall style approach for the remainder of the time we had available. In spite of this John made an ascent of a nearby summit during a brief spell of calm weather.

## 2 Introduction

The team was comprised of four members: Dave Brown, John Crook, Will Harris and Andy Reeve. Dave and John had previously visited the Avellano Towers in January 2014, when they were shown into the range by the American alpinist Jim Donini. The Western end of the Avellano Towers had only been visited twice previously and only one team had done any climbing. This meant unclimbed objectives abounded. Dave and John achieved a successful first ascent of one of the neighboring spires in the Avellano Tower range and a new route on a second spire.

This trip was written up for the American Alpine Club Journal Vol 57, Issue 89 and is available <http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201212839/Avellano-Towers-The-Tooth-Crown-Tower> online at:

From their bivy located on the col to the East of the South Tower, Dave and John believed that the unclimbed North-East Face of the south tower could possibly provide a suitable objective for a fast and light approach. However due to the foreshortening created by this perspective, they were surprised to find themselves beneath a 900m high granite face. Additionally, the nature of the rock on the South tower was (low down at least) much more compact and glacier-polished granite than they had encountered on the neighbouring towers, which made for more difficult route-finding and slower climbing. Consequently they descended upon realizing that they were not equipped to tackle an objective such as this.

During research for our expedition to the area, we came across information on an American climber's blog ( <http://patagonia.jaredspaulding.com/avellano-towers-2015> ) detailing

their proposed expedition into the area for the same objective. Fortunately, they were not due to arrive until just after we had left!

### 3 Approach / logistics

Descriptions in this section relates to the annotated map below.

#### 3.1 Previous Approach from Bahia Murta

In February 2014 Jim Donnini had showed Dave and John into the Avellano Towers, by walking from Bahia Murta. This approach is shown in Figure 1

This approach whilst the shortest on the map is hard. It was by all accounts, quite an adventure, and required multiple river-crossings and walking through pathless dense forest, culminating in a slog up a talus-field, crossing a snowy col and descending ice filled couloir to access the El Ventisquero and the North East face of the South Tower.

The route from Bahia Murta is estimated to be approximately 17 km and involves 2000 m of height gain.



Figure 1 - map showing approach from Bahia Murta

### 3.1.1 Route description

Bahia Murta is easily reached from Coyachique using Route 7. This is accessible without using 4x4 but a small section of the approach will be removed if a 4x4 is used. From playing fields in Bahia Murta a steep 4x4 track leads up to some meadows on a hillside overlooking the Rio Resbalon. See Figure 2 and Figure 3.

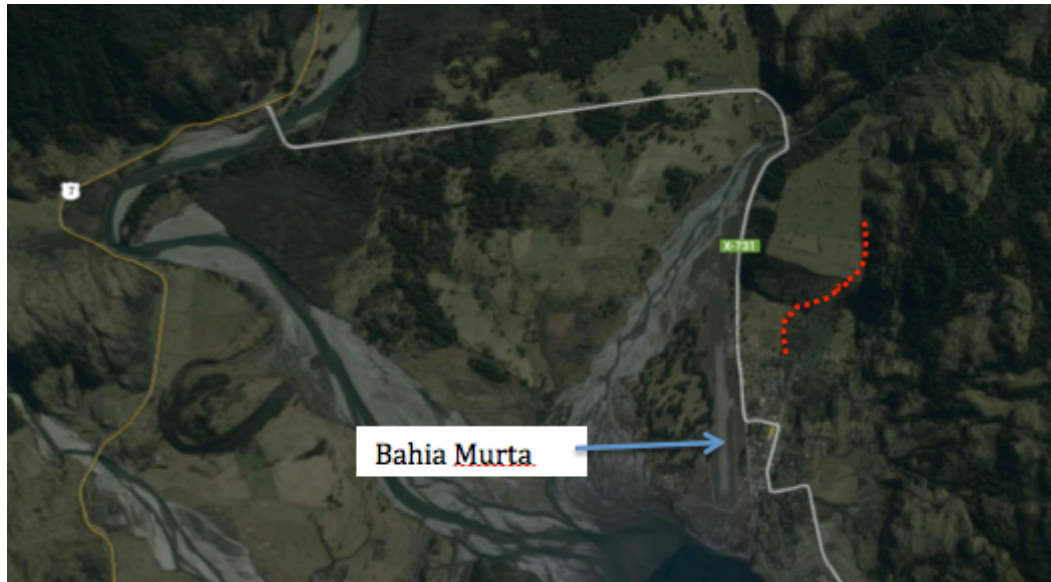


Figure 2 - Bahia Murta with approximate location of 4x4 track



Figure 3 - Bahia Murta with 4x4 track detailed

The track terminates by some gates into fields and some rusting farm machinery. A 'cow trail' leads east, up into the mountains following the Rio Resbalon. Local farmers maintain this 'cow trail' and cows may be seen. It is not however easy going with height gain, loss, river crossings and route finding difficulties apparent.

At the confluence of the Rio Resbalon and the Est. Sue the path finishes. From here follow the Est. Sue south into the Avellano Towers. There is no path and the valley is steep sided. It was found to be easiest to follow the riverbed in the river. This proved difficult when the river was in spate.

After several km a cliff band becomes visible with a large waterfall falling 70 m down the centre of the cliff band in a gully/canyon feature. To the left of the waterfall (as you look up) a diagonal tree covered ledge is visible. The route follows this to gain access to easy ground above. The last section of this involves difficult route finding. If done correctly it involves no real difficulties. If done incorrectly it involves easy but dangerous scrambling on granite slabs with a large drop below.

Although this approach had proved possible both Dave and John believed that this approach would be too slow and difficult for the amount of equipment we envisaged using in a big-wall style ascent of the wall.

### **3.2 Approach from Lago General Carrera up the El Avellano**

With much speculation and perusing googlemaps aerial images we opted to approach from the longer, flatter valley, which winds eastwards from the South Tower down to the lake. This is labeled as approach 'B' on the map. This involved following the El Avellano from Lago General Carrera until the El Ventisquero splits and leads up to the base of the Avellano Towers. This approach is 30 km long but the height gain is only 500 m.

This approach is detailed within Figure 4.





Figure 4 - map showing approach up Rio Avellano

To complicate matters however, this valley terminates at the shore of Lago General Carrera, one of largest lakes in South America, at a point with no road access for about 30km. We were not certain how exactly this would work, but were fortunately put in touch with Pascual. Lito Tejada-Flores put us in touch with Pascual who is a local mountain guide and fixer. Pascual does not speak English and we conducted all our negotiations through Lito.

David had been delayed in the UK and had agreed to make his own way into the Avellano Towers. Pascual took John Will and Andy from Coyhaique in his van and after a day waiting at his friend's farmstead was able to take us across the lake in a small boat with a temperamental outboard motor. On the journey out there was a strong wind and very choppy conditions on the lake, which is perhaps a common occurrence due to the lake's position at the confluence of several mountainous valleys. To avoid the worst of the conditions on the lake Pascual took a circuitous route across the water, which took about 3 hours for 40km, including a near miss with the outboard motor taking leave of it's fixings and almost falling into the lake from where it would certainly have sunk, and repeated bailing out of the boat to maintain it's buoyancy. A good adventure from the start! From here, Pascual had organised (via radio contact) for a local farmer / horseman to take our bags via horse up to the top of the valley. It took Louie and Kristian a (fairly leisurely) two days to transport our baggage with us walking behind, with a night's stop at his idyllic farm in the valley. To give a measure of the level of isolation that Louie and Kristian usually experience in here, there are only 3 other people who live in this 30km long valley. They did however point out that tourists were not uncommon, as they had seen some Polish trekkers in 1998.

The farthest point towards the base of the Avellano Tower that Louie and Kristian could take the horses was at a point where the El Ventisquero valley splits from the El Avellano: a

north-running and a west-running continuation. Louie indicated that a Spanish team had previously camped here, although it was unclear how long ago this was, or what they accomplished in the area. Nonetheless, we referred to this as 'Spanish Camp'.

This point was 6km from the base of the wall, and so required 3 trips of shuttling our gear to the a base camp we established about 1km from the base of the wall. This part of the valley was steeper sided, which meant we for a circuitous route, first uphill through the woods on the right (facing upstream) of the river, then with multiple river crossings and through marsh-land on the left of the river. This led to a rockier area where two small flat areas suitable for pitching tents were found with a bit of digging. As Dave had been unable to leave the UK until a week after the rest of the team, he made his way in to basecamp independently via approach A (coming in via approach B on his own was prohibitively expensive for another boat ride). Despite his previous knowledge of this approach, doing this solo was undoubtedly an adventurous and tiring experience!

### **3.2.1 Route description**

This route required crossing Lago General Carrera to Puerto Loas Alamos at the mouth of the Rio Avellano. There may be a scheduled ferry going between Puerto Ibanez and Puerto Los Alamos. It may or may not go on a Wednesday. We were assured it was not to be relied upon. Figure 5 shows a track running between Puerto Ibanez and Puerto Los Alamos. Local research indicated that this existed on the map but not on the ground. It may be passable to horses but it is apparently not suitable for a 4x4.



Figure 5 - map section showing Ibañez and Los Alamos

Pascaul provided boat transportation from Puerto Guidal to Puerto Los Alamos and arranged Louie to meet us with horses. Well established agricultural trails led initially on the right bank of the Rio Avellano and then the left bank. Crossing the Avellano in low water was possible but in high water conditions it was not possible.

Well trodden agricultural trails led all the way to the confluence of the El Ventisquero and Rio Avellano. The trail up the Ventisquero was much more difficult. There was evidence of an agricultural trail having been cut out of the jungle in the past. It was however not possible with horses without work. Multiple river crossings and traversing a swamp was required to access the base of the wall.

### 3.3 Alternative options

It is known that teams have approached the Avellano Towers from the North East. It may be possible to access the El Ventisquero this way.

On a Christmas day walk from Spanish Camp we walked north into this along the Avellano valley, which seemed to have a well used trail (well-used being a relative term given the isolation here) which would appear passable by horses also. This valley then winds northwards (we walked about 2-3km this way) until it eventually meets the Ruta 7 road. It



seems plausible that there is a connecting horse-passable trail in this direction, which may give a simpler means of accessing Spanish Camp, from where the South Avellano Tower can be accessed in the same way as we did from this point.

It is known that some teams have approached the eastern end of the Avellano Towers from the North East.

## 4 Attempt on the wall, and other objectives

### 4.1 Attempt on the South Avellano Tower

We spent one day ferrying climbing equipment to the very base of the wall and scoping out potential lines from a number of angles. We felt that there were two main options, a line based around the slabbier buttress on the climber's-right of the tower, similar to the line attempted by Dave and John previously. From their previous experience we felt that this would be slower to climb than expected low down (they had encountered dirt-filled cracks and difficult route-finding) but this was likely to lead to easier ground after the initial buttress. See Figure 6 and Figure 7.



Figure 6 - The south Avellano tower from the coll with the location of insert

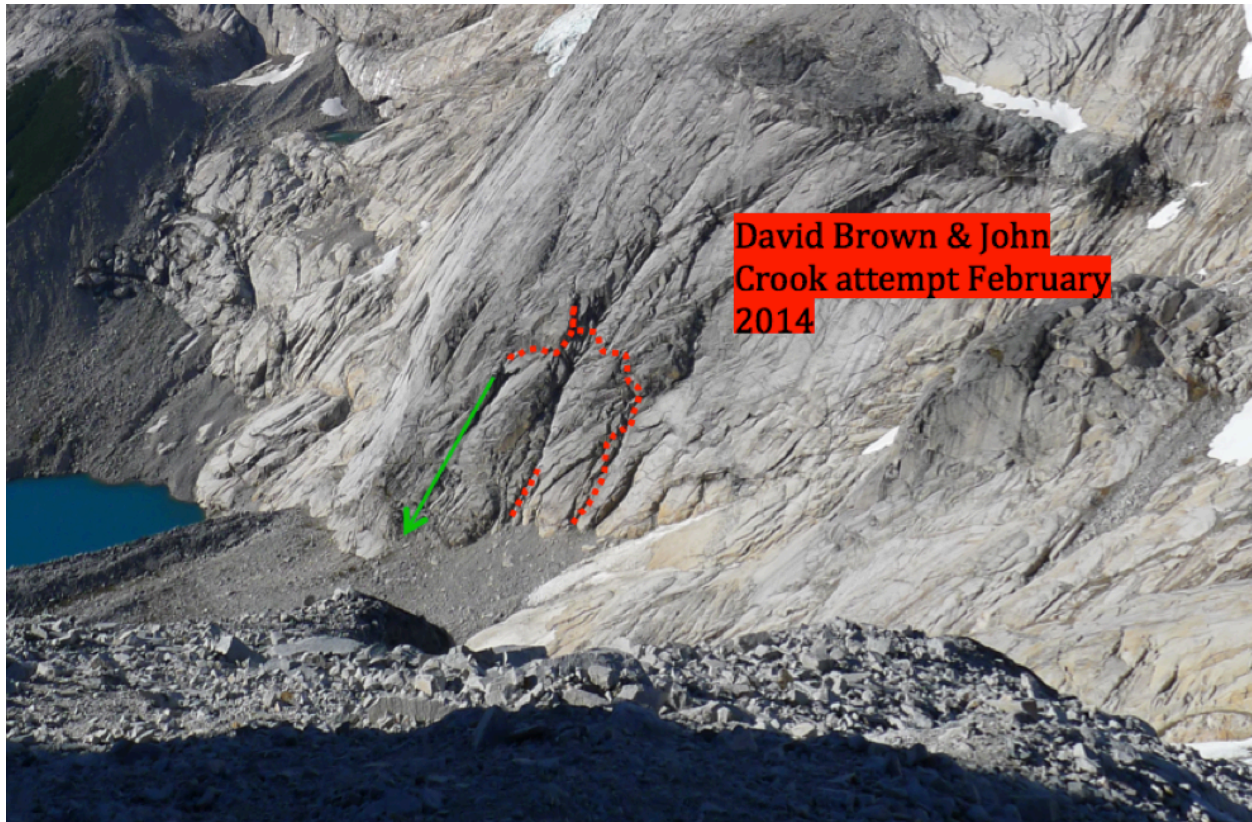


Figure 7 - line taken by Dave & John in February 2014

A second potential line took the crest of the central buttress, which linked a few cracks through steeper and more hostile looking terrain. We opted to try this latter option, because despite appearing harder, it looks way more rad (dude). Figure 8 shows the line attempted.

We spent four days fixing ropes, climbing in pairs. We fixed the entirety of our static and spare ropes, totalling 250m of ground covered. On these lower flanks of the face the quality of the rock was remarkably hard and glacier polished, but the cracks were often dirt filled. This combination lead to slow progress. These pitches were climbing 'mostly-free', with aid used sporadically for rest, cleaning the next section of crack and occasionally for progress. An appropriate grade for these pitches would probably settle at about 5.10- if clean. The section of climbing above our highpoint was thought to require a free-climbing approach, as the crack sealed up to a blind seam at the back of a pod, and so would most-likely require a section of bold free climbing to pass.

After fixing the available rope, we received a weather forecast which indicated a storm for the next few days. We opted to sit this out at basecamp, which given the amount of precipitation we received throughout 36 hours was probably for the best. When the storm cleared it was immediately clear that the North-East face was covered in snow, and so was not suitable as a rock climbing objective at present. We were not equipped for Scottish



style winter climbing (our winter equipment extended to a walking axe and crampons for each team member, to descend the snowfield from the col). Frustratingly, the weather was not stable or warm enough to melt the snow and dry the face in the time we had available. As such, we were not able to make any further progress.

Dave and John made a great effort to collect all of our fixed ropes and descended from our highpoint leaving the minimum of gear to abseil safely. Their difficulties in doing this were compounded by a large overnight rockfall having stripped one of our fixed ropes, and most of our rack being at the highpoint of the ropes making it difficult for them to reascend the lower section of the face in order to regain the fixed ropes.

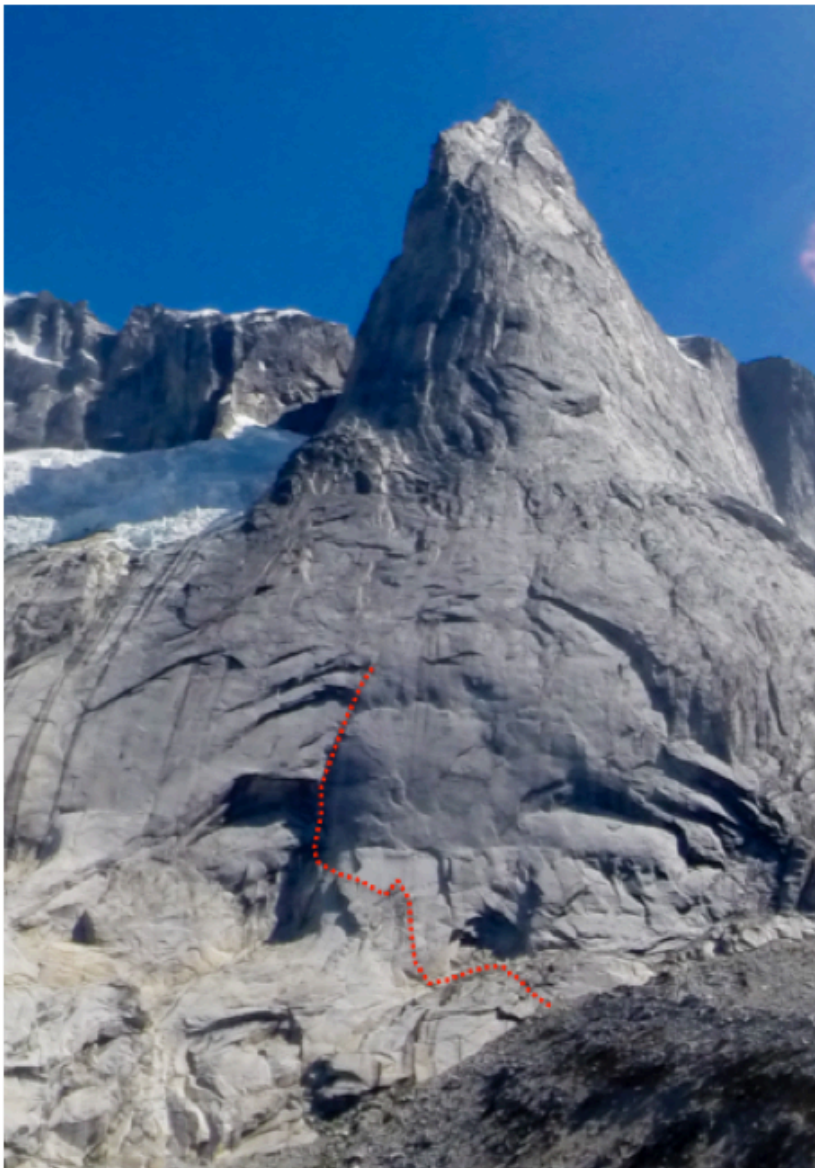


Figure 8 - line attempted by John, Dave, Will and Andy in December 2014



## 4.2 Attempts on secondary objectives

Whilst we were awaiting and hoping for adequate conditions in which to rock climb on the North-East face, there was a 20 hour weather window forecast. This was not sufficient for our plans for the North-East face and additionally the NE face was plastered with snow. Instead the team split into two pairs to attempt new routes on the surrounding Avellano towers. Both pairs went up the snow slope to the col between the towers. From here, Dave and John circumnavigated the 'Tooth' and dropped down between this and the Avenali Tower. After crossing below Avenali Tower on a hanging glassier they attempted to climb the glassier between Avenali Tower and Crown Tower to gain access to the northerly aspect of the towers. It proved impossible to climb the glassier due to a huge overhanging crevasse blocking access up the glassier and incessant rock fall caused by the rock faces shedding snow and ice due to the sun.

Andy and Will meanwhile attempted to find a route through new ground on the South face of the Tooth. Unfortunately this face, despite having plenty of space for new routes, was covered in hoar-ice and snow, and the ground proved to be too steep for an ascent with the equipment available to us.

## 5 Equipment

The following is not an exhaustive list of the equipment we took, as much of this will be obvious to anyone interested visiting this area. Specific pieces of equipment requiring mention are elaborated on below.

Satellite phone - given the remote nature of this area and the small number in the team, this provided a greatly increased degree of safety should an accident have occurred. Additionally, we used this to telephone a pre-arranged contact in the UK for weather forecasts.

Big wall and aid equipment - we took two 2-person portaledges which were originally thought necessary for the style in which we envisaged climbing the face. These ultimately were un-used by us, and their use for any prospective future attempts would obviously be governed by the style in which the face is attempted (big-wall seige style versus in-a-day or two).

Binoculars were very useful to scope out a potential line, although the compact nature of the granite meant that many features remained hidden until they were highlighted by snow cover.

We bought a pair of wire brushes from the hardware store in Coyhaique for cleaning out the cracks on the lower aspect of the face. These were really very helpful for both free and aid moves.

We were easily able to buy sufficient food for the three weeks in the Avellano valley from Coyhaique. Chile Chico also has a supermarket albeit a smaller one. There are no sizable shops in Porto Guadal.

## 6 Sponsorship

We had generous support for this trip both financially and in terms of supplied equipment.

The British Mountaineering Council sponsored us £1,200 and the Mount Everest Foundation sponsored us £1,650. Without this support we would have been unlikely to be able to attempt the face in the style that was available to us.

We were also kindly sponsored by the British equipment manufacturer Rab, who provided each team member with a full set of technical clothing and Lowe Alpine rucksacs. We were all impressed with the high quality of the Rab and Lowe Alpine equipment we received.

The total income was £2,850.

## 7 Costs

International Flights: £3500

Internal flights: £1100 (this was inflated due to Daves flight to Santiago being delayed and being forced to purchase a new ticket to Coyahie)

Excess baggage: £95

(Pascual) Local fixer for transport and boat and arranging of logistics: £600

Horses for transport up and down the Avellano Valley: £380

Food: £750

Satalite phone hire: £216

Other in country transport: £75

Hostels/ in country accommodation: £275

Insurance: £400

Total: £7,391

## **8 Photos**

Photos of approach and route.