

Mexico

CHIHUAHUA

BASASEACHIC WATERFALL NATIONAL PARK



El Gigante, La Conjura de los Necios. As we boarded the plane for Mexico at the beginning of November, we had one desire: that this trip would not turn into another epic. The goal was El Gigante. It was late at night when our seven-man team reached the village of Basaseachic, setting up base camp at the San Lorenzo Ranch, a few miles from El Gigante—as the crow flies. The only thing missing was a sign saying “Welcome to Climbers’ Paradise.”

The next morning Kurt Albert, Hans Martin, and Mariucz set off down the canyon to the base of El Gigante, equipped with bivy gear and a video camera. By the next afternoon they were back. Hans Martin put the camera on the table, and we peered at the monitor. We could make out Kurt in front of a thicket of bushes. Slowly the camera swung upward, and the thicket was replaced by a jungle. Bizarre cactuses and palm trees towered overhead. Lianas were draped over them like snakes. “Terrific plants,” commented Holger, “and where is El Gigante?” The camera swung farther upward, and Kurt explained dryly, “That’s El Gigante.” A vertical jungle. We thought of opting for an easy escape, maybe a cute little first ascent at the entrance of the gorge. The discussion was ended by a secret poll the next morning. Kurt put his helmet on the table. Everyone wrote “Yes” or “No” on a slip of paper. Not even Steven Spielberg could have produced more suspense than our voting procedure. The first three slips said “No,” the next three, “Yes.” The last slip would be the tiebreaker. And the winner was...El Gigante! This last vote sealed our fate. No relaxed climbing, no floating up immaculate, sunny rock.

Everything then went downhill, literally. Kurt’s suggestion had sounded exciting back at the ranch—that we rappel to the base beside Piedra Volada, Mexico’s highest waterfall, with a 1,600-foot drop. First we would tie together 500 meters of caving rope (also our rappel line) and lower our 300 kg of haulbags in one big bunch. As I leaned cautiously over the edge, I realized that this might be quite serious. Only a few feet below the face curved away in a huge overhang. The canyon bottom was hidden in mist. Kurt was hanging at the belay by the drop-off, the wind blowing his hair upward. He looked like the devil himself at the entrance to his preserve. It was dark by the time the baggage, Mariusz, Holger, Klaus, and I reached the floor of the gorge. Hans Martin wanted to toss the rope and come to our gorge base camp with Gunda via the more conventional route the following morning. The next day before Kurt started rappelling he wrote Hans Martin a note and left it at the belay: “Hans Martin, it is 7:00 a.m., and I’m starting down. Please don’t cut me off. Cheers, Kurt.”

Wielding machetes Klaus and I cleared a way to the start of the climb. Instead of the customary missiles, the leader sent down a bizarre selection of plants. But we couldn’t leisurely swing from branch to branch up the wall. On the contrary, the climbing was hard from the start, with lots of sections of 5.11 and 5.12. Except that here the leader first had to unearth holds, while dirt poured onto his face and into his clothes. He soon looked like a miner. I asked myself which was worse, sailing through the stormy Drake Passage or climbing these hanging

gardens. After cleaning and protecting each pitch we climbed it free. Believe it or not, the hard pitches offered the best climbing. The days were short and it was dark by six o'clock. We never did more than three pitches a day. Until we were halfway up the wall, we rappelled back to base camp every evening, leaving fixed ropes. The next day another team jugged up and struggled a little farther. Only after a week of hard work was the haulbag up at half height.

It couldn't go on like this. One morning Holger, Kurt, Klaus, and I ascended the ropes with a minimum of gear, food, and water for three days, wanting to go for the top alpine style. While we tried to escape upward, Mariucz, Gunda, and Hans Martin took down the fixed ropes and packed gear out of the gorge. The climbing became worse the higher we got. The rock was dangerously loose. Kurt was leading a body crack when a pillar the size of a phone booth he was leaning against suddenly moved. Instinctively he swung to the other side, and only a pillow-sized block whizzed past Klaus, Holger, and me. If it had been the phone booth, we would have joined its downward trip. We were engaged in a war of nerves. Night was coming fast as we traversed around a leaning pillar the size of a church tower in a near-vertical hanging garden. Kurt crawled behind man-sized palm trees jutting from the face. Their leaves, sharp as knives, cut our hands and arms. We rigged a rope bridge from the tower to the garden and hauled our packs and haulbags across to a bivy spot. Holger wedged himself behind a palm bush, and Klaus huddled on a sloping grass shelf, while Kurt and I wedged ourselves between a tree and the rock. The situation might have fulfilled a botanist's dream, but for us it was a nightmare. Our only goal was to get off this face as fast as possible. Holger crawled up the next pitch, done in from the bivy. Loose rock crumbled under his feet. Five pitches below the summit we came upon Carlos Garcia's route and followed it up the only logical line through the headwall. When we topped out just before dark, after nine days on the wall, El Gigante had its first free climb and the madness a name: We called the route *La Conjura de los Necios*—The Conspiracy of Fools (880m, 23 pitches 5.13a).

STEFAN GLOWACZ, *Germany*

El Gigante, Blade, Scars, and Stars. In November 2000 I returned to Mexico with Jakub Gajda and Gareth Llewelin to attempt El Gigante. The month-long journey was wrought with near-death encounters and bucketsful of snakes. But we succeeded in establishing a new route on the monstrous monolith. The line ascends the 2,800-foot southwest face, ascending to a huge ledge and then following the left-most waterfall stain. The climbing was sustained hard aid. This previously unclimbed side was a little looser than expected. We climbed wall style, heavy and molasses-slow, averaging a pitch a day. After we spent 14 days on the wall, *Blade, Scars, and Stars* (VI 5.9 A3+) was finished. The route tops out at a place similar to *Zodiac* on El Cap, 1,000 feet shy of the summit proper. We were probably the first Australian, Czech, and American team to climb El Gigante.

BRENT EDELEN, *AAC*

Basaseachic Waterfall, Soy Caliente. Morgan Black, Aidan Oloman, and Sean Easton established *Soy Caliente* (5.11, A1, 9 pitches) ground-up over two weeks in November and December. Forty 3/8-inch bolts and 20 rivets were placed. Thirty meters were A1, the rest free. Rock quality was variable. We don't recommend a repeat of this route. The route goes up the wall 100 meters right of Basaseachic Waterfall. It is the fourth route on this formation, the other three being left of the waterfall. There are many large formations in Basaseachic Waterfall Park, but much of

the volcanic rock is soft and loose. Topos, accommodations, information, and helpful assistance can be obtained from Don Fernando at Rancho San Lorenzo, located at the end of the road in the park. Thanks to the Canadian Himalayan Foundation for a grant.

SEAN EASTON, *Canada*

The Cascade Wall, Kola Loca. Zack Smith and I climbed a line, Kola Loca (V 5.10 A2+), on The Cascade Wall of Basaseachic. The route ascends the prominent dihedral system some distance left of the waterfall and the prominent black streak. Climbers since have called this a rappel route. We fixed the first three pitches, then spent two nights on the wall while climbing the last four pitches. The route was mostly aid, with a little dirty free climbing. Nel, the curator of the local curio shop, has the only detailed topo in existence.

BRENT EDELEN AAC

ELSEWHERE IN MEXICO

El Cerro Blanco, Irritilas (Nómadas) and Lluvia de Estrellas. This is a brief account about the lovely land and people of the states of Durango and Coahuila, México. Desert lands with multicolored sunrises and sunsets and incomparable beauty. The Peñón Blanco massif, better known as the Cerro Blanco, is one of the most accessible walls in México. It is a granite massif with 400 meters of vertical rise. Located in a desert zone where the temperatures in winter reach 28°C (85°F), it is best visited between the months of October and March. To reach Cerro Blanco you must take the national highway, Durango-Cuencame No. 40, to the town of Yerbánis where you turn toward Peñón Blanco until reaching Pueblo de Nuevo Covadonga and encounter the gap from the west of the rock massif. The Base Camp is two kilometers from the base of the wall. It is important to arrive with all of the food, fuel, and water you will need. This is a destination for adventure climbing. It is a one-hour approach to the base of the wall. All of the routes have been established and equipped in Yosemite style: Ground-up free climbing, placing bolts where there are no cracks for protection. There is trad, sport, and bouldering. There is vast potential here.



Cerro Blanco. *Luis Carlos García Ayala*

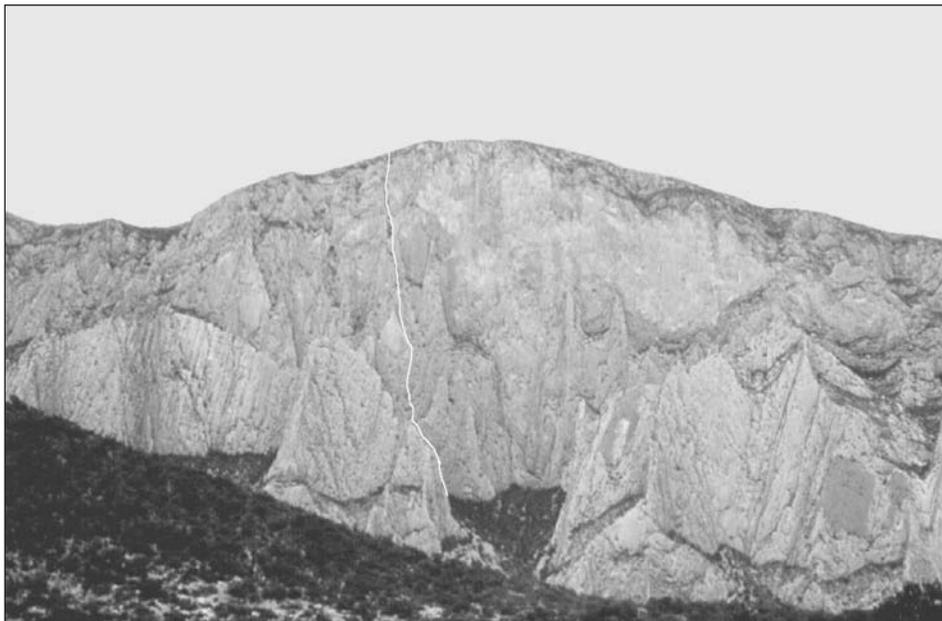
In December 2000, Jorge Colín and I climbed a seven-pitch route that we called Irritilas (Nómadas) [Irritated (Nomads)] (350 meters, V A1 5.11). Spending three days on the wall, we climbed with clean protection and bolts. Those who conquer the desert can experience excellent granite and feel the climatic contrasts. You can also contemplate the beautiful sunsets and share with the people of the States of Durango and Torreón.

In November (2001) I was drawn back by a strong attraction to the desert and especially to a massif of granite rock that rises between hills, spiny bushes, orange colored blocks of granite, and a night sky teeming with thousands of stars. This is the place to live a good adventure. This time I was accompanied by James Scarse, an American climber interested in getting to know the area and opening a new free route. We spent two days on the wall climbing some exceptional pitches with a few bolts and fascinating rock features. We made the first ascent of Lluvia de Estrellas (Rain of Stars) (300 meters, V A1 5.12+). In the Piedra Partida campground, where there is an enormous boulder perfectly split in two, waited some friends from Torreón, Monterrey, México (City), South Africa, and Switzerland. It's a magical place.

LUIS CARLOS GARCÍA AYALA, *Mexico*

Tatewarí, Cola de Venado. The Cumbres de Monterrey “la Huasteca” National Park (la Huasteca refers to the region around the Gulf of México) is located in the metropolitan area of the city of Santa Catarina in the state of Nuevo León. Once in the park you have to follow the paved road (3 km) until it turns to gravel. Once on the gravel road follow a sign on the ground that says “Virikuta.” This road enters another canyon that leads to the ranch of Don Simón Loera Correa. This Señor Simón is the rural Judge and it is important to let him know the length of your stay in the area.

The canyon is surrounded by a great massif of limestone rock that reaches over 500 meters in height. The area possesses vast potential for multi-pitch climbing and is only 20 minutes from the city of Santa Catarina. On the rock wall Tatewarí (Grandfather Fire), 550 meters tall, is the first route. Because it is a desert zone the best months to climb are October until April, the others being very hot. It is advisable to arrive with all of your food, water, and fuel when entering the park.



The Cola de Venado route on Tatewarí in La Huasteca National Park. *Luis Carlos Garcia Ayala*



On the first ascent of Cola de Venado, Tatwarí. *Carlos Garcia*

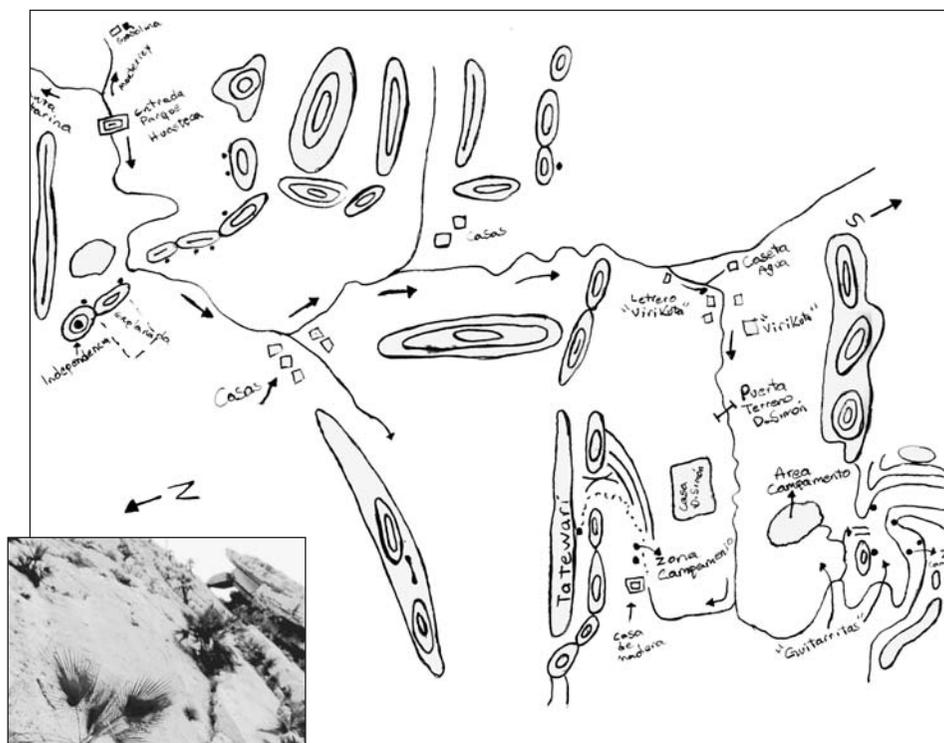
Last October I was invited to get to know the canyon. I returned in December with Francisco Trad to equip and do the first ascent of Cola de Venado (Stag's Tail) (550 meters, V 5.12d). The ascent was done from the ground up, placing bolts from hooks. The work took us five days of climbing and staying on the wall. There are 10 pitches of 55 meters each and 115 bolts on excellent, featured limestone. Rap the route to descend.

After the first attempt we left the route equipped and returned to México City. Last March I returned to free the route and confirm its rating. This time Rodney Blackmore, from the U.S., and I simulclimbed the route without falls in a total of five hours, greatly enjoying the climbing. From the summit the landscape is spectacular and you can see three enormous virgin walls awaiting their first route. There are two other areas of the park for sport climbing in the zone of Guitarritas and various others around la Huasteca. There is enormous potential for further climbing in the area.

LUIS CARLOS GARCÍA AYALA, *Mexico*

Iztaccihuatl, El Orgasmo del Cerdo and Oz. El Orgasmo del Cerdo is more than 700 meters high, but only 300 meters are technical, with 200 meters of scrambling and occasional 20-meter fourth-class steps. It rises from

the west glacier and was opened by Leonardo Torres, Gustavo Montalvo, and me in April. We climbed the route unroped, in less than five hours, because we found no way to safely use the rope we were carrying. You start at 4,500m on a 70-meter water-ice fall, with a 60-degree-ramp in the middle (WI3). You continue up a rocky ridge for another 300 meters, encountering fourth-class on two 20-meter steps. You then gain the base of a 40-meter icefall that is WI3. Once past the icefall, you ascend 80 meters of mixed terrain, which averages 50 degrees but is easy; pass more fourth-class terrain; and end on a 35-meter high serac, which may be AI3 or AI4, as it has 25 feet of vertical ice. From here to the summit is 120 meters of easy, though crevassed, terrain.



Tropical drilling during the first ascent of Cola de Venado, Tatewari (left), and a map of the local attractions. *Luis Carlos Garcia Ayala*

The summit is at 5,260m. The descent involves a 45-degree ramp for 100 meters before you gain a tricky ridge of sand and rock.

In October, with Salvador Camacho, I opened the route Oz from the northwest glacier. The technical part of Oz is 330 meters long (WI-4 M3), but to get to it you have to make an ascending traverse from 4,600m to 4,800m on 40-degree ramps. Above the 330 technical meters you ascend 60-degree ramps for another 200 meters to the top. The total altitude gain for this route is thus 730 meters, not including the approach.

For both routes there is an approach, starting at 3,600m, that takes about four hours. They are among the hardest routes on our Mexican mountains. Our ice is tropical ice, and the rock is volcanic and tends to be unstable. The routes on the northeast side of Iztaccihuatl are committing, as they lack belay points for a secure retreat.

ALEJANDRO PEREZ RAYON, *Mexico*