

## Mexico

### CHIHUAHUA

*El Pilar, La Cruz de Navidad.* This route climbs the long diagonal crack on the east face of El Pilar. El Pilar is an isolated tower of solid volcanic rock (rhyolite?). Look for the beautiful dihedral halfway up. Start behind trees on boulders at the northeast corner of the tower. The route required no cleaning and was climbed onsite in December 2003 by Alex and Nathalie Catlin. There is a lot of loose rock on ledges. (There was natural rockfall while we were there.) Our rack consisted of small wires, including double micro wires, and double cams to three inches.

Pitch one follows a steep, wide crack to a belay where the angle kicks back. On pitch two stay left of the crack. Belay on the last good stance. Pitch three continues up the crack to the dihedral, past horizontals and another crack, to a good ledge. On pitch four traverse left to the only large pine tree. On pitch five climb the three-tiered face above the pine tree. Finish by scrambling up through trees. Descend by rappelling Cindy Tolle's route on the south face (20m, 40m, 25m). (Tolle's route is 5.8, 5.9, 5.9+, 5.8. Run one and two together. The third pitch is excellent. Standard rack.)

ALEX CATLIN



### PARQUE NACIONAL CASCADA DE BASASEACHIC

*Summary of climbing on El Gigante.* This year saw at least two repeats of Logical Progression and the establishment of two new long routes (described in the reports that follow this one). Neither ascent of Logical Progression was clean, so the route remains without a free ascent and grade confirmation. Both parties called the route “very hard” and both complained of lichen.

The two new routes were established by the same core group, but in different styles. The first, Man On Fire, was climbed ground-up, with all the bolts drilled free, on lead. This purist tactic was possible because of the route's 5.10d grade and the climbers' willingness to climb through very loose rock. The route required extensive subsequent cleaning to make it safe. The second and fourth pitches still need another pass, which they will hopefully get in March 2004 (caution until then!).

After this post-ascent cleaning and careful readings of Jeff Achey's, Kurt Albert's, and Royal Robbins' statements (*AAJ 2003*), we decided to clean the second route from the top, and climb it ground-up. All did not go as planned. The first rap bolts went in to make possible the descent of the 18th pitch traverse. Then we had the good fortune to run into Carlos Garcia. Of the people who objected to rap-bolting El Gigante, his opinion counted the most with us, as he has been the most active local first ascensionist. Hauling the drill back up to drill off hooks was a huge hassle, and we felt that the end result would be the same if we just put in the bolts on the way down. Carlos gave us the okay, and so pitches 15, 16, and 17 were bolted in this style. We do, however, agree with Achey that rap-bolted and sport-bolted are not synonymous. I doubt many climbers will find the route overprotected. Below the 15th pitch we could follow crack

lines down to the 7th pitch of Man On Fire.

Two additional words on the style debate: As for freedom, I am with Robbins. There will be more rap-drilling in Candameña Canyon; I hope that those who do it have the dedication to clean their routes well. Nathalie Catlin and I, however, having tried rap-bolting, are going back to ground-up ascents. Finally, I was saddened by Rodulfo Araujo's suggestion that some of Candameña's first ascensionists come to Mexico "to do what they don't dare do in their home country." From what I have seen, this has not been the case, and I hope it never will be. Many of us come to Mexico because of our love for the country and its people. I hope the trust and respect we have been building in many climbing areas continues to grow.

ALEX CATLIN

*El Gigante, Man On Fire.* This 21-pitch route (5.10d/A0 or 5.12a) was established by Alex and Nathalie Catlin, Cindy Tolle, and Bobby Longoria, Katie Bluementhal, and Tony Scott, in September 2003 (FFA later in September, by Alex and Nathalie Catlin). The bolts, except for two, were drilled on lead and entirely free (no hooks or other aid). On pitch six's safe variation, however, two bolts were drilled on aid. Superpurists can take their chances with the loose blocks. We drilled approximately 70 lead bolts and 60 anchor bolts. All anchor material, except for tree rappels, is metal, not slings. The route was established in two phases. We worked from the ground for five days, fixing seven pitches, and then spent three days climbing to the summit and another day descending and cleaning. Although the rock quality was good overall, the 2nd, 4th, 11th, and 12th pitches contained significant loose rock. The 4th required gardening as well.

Nathalie and I returned in November. We cleaned pitches 9 to 18 on rappel, making them safe if not perfect. With Matt Greco we climbed a prettier variation to the 19th pitch. Nathalie and I also added a new finish (pitches 20 and 21). These were all climbed in the original style.

**Suggested Access:** Drive to the plateau above El Gigante. (If you need guides or porters, ask for Lalo at Las Estrellas in Basaseachi; he will hook you up.) Walk down the gully that runs northeast along the north side of the cliff to the river, good bivy caves, and the trail up to the northwest shoulder of El Gigante. There you will find a large camping spot (Rancho Santiago). The route climbs the buttress immediately above camp. Walk up the ridge from Rancho Santiago for three minutes to the base of the route; there look for bolts.

Climb past three bolts to a dihedral. On pitch two pass between two palms. On pitch four traverse right from a bushy corner past bolts. On pitch six, climb a seam and follow bolts right. (The original line continued up the seam to a palm, but involved dangerous blocks.) To the right of pitch eight is a bolted bivy ledge. Pitch nine leads past bolts to an overhanging crack, the top of a pillar, and another bivy possibility. Pitch 12 zigs out left past an arête, then zags back right to the arête. On pitch 14 climb left to a gully and ascend it, before angling left to the top of a garden/ledge with a bivy site. A fixed rope may help you find your way. From the left end of the ledge begin climbing again at a small corner with oak trees. Climb a crack until palms force you to the arête. Climb past rappel anchors up to a nice ledge. Pitch 16 climbs a perfect crack to a cool cave. Pitch 17 climbs the arête to the left to a garden. On pitch 18 climb the right wall and finish by angling farther right. Pitch 19 follows a way cool thin crack, pitches 20 and 21 an arête that leads to the summit.

**Descent:** Rap anchors enable you to descend east from the summit to the saddle between the two summits. If you left a second rope and/or haul bag at the top of the 19th pitch, you can

walk down west from here to retrieve it. You can then follow a good trail east along a ridge to your car (one hour). Alternately, three tree rappels (20m, 25m, 50m) get you down to the pitch 15 rappel-anchors, then a 40m rap to the bivy. Descend the fixed line to the top of the pitch 13. A 40m traversing rappel gets you to the top of pitch 11. Rappels of 40m or less then get you to the ground.

Rack: Standard wires, double cams one-half to three inches, the three smallest tri-cams, slings, ten draws, and double ropes. I did not bring a larger piece, making the 16th pitch 5.9R, but I did wedge a few chockstones.

ALEX CATLIN

*El Gigante, Los Sueños del Gigante.* This 22-pitch route (5.11d/A0 or 5.12d) was established in mixed style, by Alex and Nathalie Catlin and Matt Greco, in December 2003. The route was cleaned on rappel over three weeks (and could use more). Many pitches required no bolts. Others are fully bolted, some bolts being drilled free, on lead, others on rappel. We believe the route justifies the style and hope that others who climb it will agree. A double set of cams and one dozen draws are needed. The approach is the same as for Man on Fire, and the first six pitches of the two routes coincide.

Pitch seven starts as Man on Fire's does but continues right past the anchors to the bivy bolts. Pitch eight follows a diagonal corner to a crack and the top of a pillar. Pitch nine takes a thin crack right around an arête to a hand crack. Pitch 10 passes a small roof. On pitch 11 climb an overhanging crack and traverse right from a bolt. Above, retreat would be complicated. Pitch 12 is another steep splitter crack. On pitch 13 follow a corner to a long ledge. Pitch 14 begins with a hard move to a thin crack that turns into a seam; eventually move right to a good bivy ledge. On pitch 15 we left fixed a short piece of cheater rope at the otherwise 5.12d crux. The next two pitches, in contrast to the crack pitches below, involve bolted pockets, and pitch 18 involves a traverse right to a bivy cave. On pitch 19 take the crack out the roof of the cave, then traverse right. Pitch 20 is more pocket climbing, with 2,000 feet of exposure. From a flat spot left of the belay (where you can leave your haul bag and spare rope, to be picked up on descent) finish the route with two pitches up the arête above. Descent: Scramble east from the summit to a saddle, and after retrieving your gear, follow the trail east to your car.

ALEX CATLIN

*El Gigante, Bernat Pudent.* Last summer we flew from Catalonia to Mexico. We had seen pictures of the impressive west face of El Gigante and our goal was to open a new route. Although June seemed too late to climb this sunny wall, we decided to try it. We fixed the first six pitches in three days, before we left base camp. The temperature was about 40-43°C from 12:00 to 18:00, and we hadn't enough bottles to pull up enough water, so we decided to climb in minimalist style, hauling less than 40kg of water and food, one portaledge, and the climbing gear. Planning to stay one week or less on the face, we had to open three or four pitches a day, so there wasn't time to manage heavy haulbags. As it turned out we needed seven days to reach the top. We placed 20 8mm bolts and 17 rivets for belays, hand-drilled, and three rivets in pitches, two of them to avoid loose rocks hanging over a belay. We didn't drill any holes for hooks. The route begins to the right of Faded Glory, near a small group of trees, and follows a crack system to a

half-moon-shaped roof, easily seen from the bottom, situated in the middle of the cliff. From this roof the route goes to the right, following a small ledge with sharp, spiky plants; you have to jump from plant to plant. After this the wall is less steep, and there is less aid climbing. The route has 26 pitches and a difficulty of 5.11c, with precarious protection and A3+. We named it Bernat Pudent (1,160m, ED+ 6c+[5.11c] A3+), Catalan for the *Nezara prasina*—thousands of these small, stinky insects filled the cracks.

As practical information we think that June is too late to climb El Gigante. During the last three days there were soft rains. If you want to climb on good rock, El Gigante isn't the place. If you need the help of local people to reach base camp or return from the top, we suggest contacting Don Santiago in Huajumar or Don Rafael in Las Estrellas. They are excellent people who are very helpful and not only interested in money.

DAVID FONT I VENTURA *and* JORDI SERVOSA I ROCA, *Catalonia*

## NUEVO LEÓN

### PARQUE NACIONAL CUMBRES DE MONTERREY

*Trad at the Potrero Chico.* The bolt Mecca of northeastern Mexico was profaned by a series of long trad routes this year. The rock's poor quality made these very bold adventures. Dane Bass and Sue from the Gunks started things off with The Scariest Ride in the Park (30 pitches, 5.9X), which starts at the overlook in Virgin Canyon. They finished this 3,000' ridge on their second attempt, taking two days. Paco Medina and Alejandro Garcés climbed the ridge above Stairway to Nowhere, calling it Robin Hood. We lack details of this ascent, but it is 5.10X, over 3,000' long, and uses the rappel descent of Time Wave Zero (a 22-pitch route by Jimmy Carse and partner). Finally, Alex and Nathalie Catlin climbed Devotion, which starts 30 feet right of Pride (14 pitches, 5.11d), in a style known as Potrero trad. The rules are to climb ground-up, on lead, with a drill but no hooks. The result is a fully bolted route and lots of excitement for the first ascensionists.

ALEX CATLIN

*La Huasteca, Abuelo Fuego.* Tatewari is a stunning 550-meter limestone wall in the Canon de Escaleras, near Monterrey. After the 2001 sport-climb first ascent by Carlos Garcia and Francisco Trad, in June 2002 a group of locals (Francisco Medina, Paul Vera, and I, Jimmy Carse) ascended a new route in traditional style. The route follows a prominent crack system, with an incredible rock-pillar bridge, formed by the pillar having toppled against the main wall on the fourth pitch. There are several bivy ledges. Four bolts were placed on lead, as well as anchors, using a hand drill. The main sources of pro were angles, Lost Arrows, stoppers, and a few tied-off bushes and palm trees. There was one aid pitch: lots of hook moves, with one bolt and a sketchy pin. There were several loose freeclimbing leads as well, with poor protection and no falls. Who knows if the pro would have held? We slept one night on natural ledges on pitch five, accompanied by Rafa Cornelius and Adrian "Orejo" who juggled behind us with food and beer. They bailed early the next morning, due to constant rockfall caused by us climbing above. This route went at 5.10X A3+, was led in 12 pitches of 40-60 meters, and was lots of fun.

JIMMY CARSE, *Team Tzolkin*