

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 Rodolfo 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.

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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