

# Graham Silvertre Patagonia Expedition Report



## Introduction

In January and February 2014 we (Peter Graham and Ben Silvestre) visited the Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre massifs in the Patagonian Andes in Argentina, with the aim of attempting new routes and repeating existing routes in the range. The season even on Patagonian standards was considered to be a poor one with most breaks in the weather lasting less than 24 hours. Despite this we managed to summit 3 mountains. We came to Patagonia with many ambitious objectives. All rock routes requiring dry relatively ice free conditions. Unfortunately for almost all of our time in the area cold and snowy conditions prevailed, hence we had to change our objectives to mixed and ice routes. Only at the very end of the trip were we able to finally put on our rock shoes.

## Summery of Climbing

- Attempt of Exocet on Cerro Standhardt.
- Attempt of Todo y Nada on Aguia Mocho (Ben Silvestre with Hazel Findlay).
- Ascent of Super Domo on Dome Blanco.
- Attempt of Supercanaletta on Fitz Roy.
- Ascent of Exocet on Cerro Standhardt.
- Ascent of Mate, Porro y Todo lo Demas on Fitz Roy.

## Exocet, Super Domo and Super Caneletta by Peter Graham

### Exocet Attempt

On arriving in El Chalten the word on the street was that there was a small weather window in a few days time. This seemed perfect, just enough time to get settled in before getting on a smallish objective to get "warmed up." Having not yet mastered the art of reading the meteogram we were mostly relying on the

advice of more experienced Patagonian regulars, which tended to vary with the positivity of the individual.

On first arriving in such a vast climbing destination for the first time it is often difficult to decide what to get on first. But me and Ben were quite unanimous that that the obvious choice was to climb in the Torres. Being the most iconic, unique and out there set of mountains in Patagonia, there was no point in messing around. Standhardt seemed like the obvious choice with the shortness of the weather window, being the smallest of the Torres. We decided to attempt either Festerville, a mostly rock route that climbs the north ridge or if conditions were too snowy for rock climbing try Exocet, which climbs leftwards trending ramps below the ridge to a steep ice chimney.

We had a sociable walk in to the Niponino camp, with my girlfriend Hazel and American friend Mikey, who were going to attempt a route on Raphael, and fellow Brits Caff and Tim who were planning on trying Exocet. We were fortunate to have Mikey with us, who had walked into Niponino countless times before, to show us the way, which was not obvious, navigating our through complex moraine.

It took us about 7 hours to reach Niponino with our heavy bags. Although a lot of time was probably spent stopping and staring at Cerro Torre. The sight of which for the first time does not disappoint. It turned out that the bad weather in the days that we arrived had plastered the Torres with rime, so Exocet it was.

We got up at 1 am and after a quick brew set off. Passing Caff and Tim who were uming aring about the temperature. Exocet starts from the col Standhardt, which is a long 1200m approach up the Torre glacier from Niponino. We reached the col just after dawn and after a tricky couple of pitches above the col, involving rime up slabs, we reached the ramps. We moved together up these for about 300m to an abseil near the base of the chimneys. Up until this point the sky had had been filled with a thin blanket of cloud, but as we reached the end of the ramp this cleared. The temperature change was quite dramatic. We went from being a bit cold wearing full Scottish winter gear to having a strip off to thermals. Unfortunately the stripping affect was also taking place on the mountain above us. The thin layer of rime ice was detaching and falling at an alarming rate. We hid under a slight overhang and considered our options. The thought of entering a funnel like chimney with so much falling debris was not an appealing one. We considered waiting several hours for the sun to go round the corner, but after being hit by some quite sizeable chunks it became obvious that this was not the place for hanging around and we descended. Making several abseils down the route "Scud" to reach the glacier.

On returning to base camp it turned out Hazel and Mikey had had to retreat because it was too cold to rock climb on the other side of the valley. Too warm to ice climb too cold to rock climb! It seemed like good conditions in Patagonia were going to be a rare thing.

## **More Failures**

On the walk back to El Chalten we felt optimistic. There would be a new weather window soon and we would return and climb Festerville, which wouldn't fall on our heads. On seeing the meteogram our optimism faltered. No good weather on the 10 day forecast.

"Well it is Patagonia." We quickly got into the swing of hanging out in El Chalten, a constant repetition of socializing, eating and bouldering. We fattened up on steaks and a variety of chocolate treats and enjoyed lots of world class bouldering.

One particular boulder problem, which I gave several attempts. Involved a deep drop knee combined with a powerful long reach/ slap. Trying this move several times with my long inflexible legs, would later turn out to thwart the next few weeks of mountaineering.

After 2 weeks or more of frustratingly checking the meteogram every day. A tiny window appeared. Some people were calling it a "non window" or a "cat flap." About 6 hours of mediocre weather. But we decided that we wanted to at least try and get up something. We planned to climb Guilamet in a day from the valley, so as to not have to carry bivy up and not have to sleep out in the awful weather before the "cat flap." We got a taxi up the valley to the Rio Electrico bridge where the walk in to Guilamet begins, at 10 pm. Planning to approach though the night so as to get on the climb in the early hours of the morning, when the cat flap was forecast. On starting the flat walk though the forest my knee felt a little stiff, but I thought it was the sort of thing that would go away after half an hour or so. The stiffness however escalated into pain, which after about an hour and a half of walking became unbearable. It obviously wasn't worth pushing on for a weather window that might not even happen so we decided to turn back. Unfortunately with it being the middle of the night and there not being any means of getting a taxi back down the road El Chalten was many hours walk away. We found a cosy spot on some mossy ground put on all our clothes and curled up till morning.

Over the next few days I struggled to limp around El Chalten. I was pretty upset to have injured myself near the start of trip. But after a few days and lots of icing my knee seemed to be on the mend. The weather was looking up too. With a slightly bigger cat flap on the horizon. Hazel was short of a climbing partner. So we headed into the Torre valley to climb as a three. With an open mind as to what to climb. About 3 hours into the walk however my knee started to play up again. We sat down while I debated with myself as to what to do. It seemed like I should go back, but I didn't know when the weather would be good again. I might not get another chance to climb for a month. Following my stubborn nature I decided to continue.

The next few hours of walking became gradually more and more agonizing. And on reaching Niponino I was basically weeping with every step. I obviously wasn't going to go climbing. We had got into Niponino quite late due to me being so slow, so Hazel and Ben set off late the next morning to try Todo o Nada. An ice route on El Mocho. They return after not too many hours. The route had come into the sun and started falling down, a common theme.

### **Super Domo Ascent**

On returning to town I focused on getting my knee back into working order. I got some advice via email from my physio friend Nina in the uk and from Colin Haley who seems to have a definitive geeky knowledge of anything related to alpinism. The consensus was that I had tendinitis of the IT band. And after lots of icing and stretching it started to feel better again. When the next weather window/ cat flap appeared about a week later, I was still quite nervous as to how it would perform.

This time however I made it to Niponino with some, but not too much pain. Conditions were still pretty wintry, so we had come in with an open mind. In the previous window our friends Mikey Schafer and Joel and Neil Kauffmann had climb a new ice route on Cerro Domo Blanco, which they reported as being excellent and sheltered from the prevailing westerly wind. As cold and windy conditions were forecast this seemed like a good option. We were joined on the route by Caff and Tim as well as Australian Owen and American Mike. The route made for a fantastic 10 pitch outing with excellent mixed and ice climbing. Culminating in a three pitch vertical ice chimney. After reaching the top of the proper climbing there is an easy slog up to the summit. As we topped out the weather took a turn for the worse. The wind picked up and it started snowing. The summit plateau became spindrift hell and we struggled to stand up. After spending about an hour crawling around we eventually found the anchors which Mikey and the Kaufmann had abbed off and returned safely to the glacier. Feeling pleased to at last have summited something.



*The mixed crux of Superdomo*



*The ice upper ice chimney of Superdomo*



*The crux ice pitch of Super Domo*

## Super Canaleta Attempt

The next weather window appeared to be slightly more like a proper window than the ones we had previously encountered. Still too cold and snowy to rock climb, but big enough to possibly get up something big. The Super Canaleta on Fitz Roy seemed like the obvious choice. We had all our gear stashed at Niponino so we had to make the longer approach to the west side of Fitz Roy from the Torre valley. We woke up at 1 am and headed up the Torre Glacier and up the ramps on what is called the Filo de Sendero Hombre (sitting man ridge). These are about 700m of vertical gain from the glacier to the top of the ridge and were quite slushy and tiresome. We then descended from the ridge to the base of the route. We started up the route just after dawn and with already quite tired legs having already gone up about 1000m and down 300m. Not an approach I would recommend. We could see two parties ahead of us in the couloir, but passed them quickly as we chose to solo rather than move together on the initial 1000m of easy snow and ice which forms the lower part of the climb. After this the couloir steepens and the route heads off right. All the rock pitches were rimed up and were slow going but provided good Scottish style mixed climbing that we both enjoy. We got to a point about 10 pitches below the top where the route joins the ridge, which leads to the summit. It was getting late and it was obvious the weather was coming in. We decided that we would carry on to the ridge and see what it was like. Ben lead out up an easy ramp towards the ridge, but by the time he reached the belay things were looking decidedly worse. The wind was battering the top of Fitz Roy creating a noise like jet engines of a fighter plane and the clouds were building fast. The temperature had dropped markedly and I was getting quite cold on the belay on only a short pitch. I tried to shout to Ben that I thought it we might just be digging our selves into a deeper and deeper hole, but the jet engines were too loud for him to hear. Eventually after much miss communication I simply pointed down. Ben made a thumbs up and reversed the pitch. As we started the many abseils back down to glacier around 1300m below, it started snowing hard. We were pleased to be ratified in our decision, but less pleased about the snow funnel we had to abseil down. The abseils seemed to go on forever, but eventually the snow eased and the glacier appeared.

It got light again as we headed back up and over the Filo de Sendero Hombre. And we eventually staggered back into Niponino at around 10am. 35 hours after setting off.



*Retreating off Super Canaleta*

## Exocet Ascent

Two days after getting back to town from our Attempt on the Super Canaletta the weather was looking good again. We headed back into the Torre valley with the intention of having a rematch with Exocet. This time we decided to set off at 11pm. To hopefully get to the base of the chimneys early enough before it got too warm. When we got up it was snowing lightly, but we decided to set off anyway. As we got onto the upper Torre glacier the snow picked up. The forecast however was for things to improve my morning so we pushed on in the hope that things would clear up by the time we reached the base of the route. Navigation up towards the col was extremely difficult due to the white out conditions and there were many big crevasses to be negotiated. I'm not sure quite how we managed it, but we reached the base of the couloir leading to the col just as it got light. Much slower than last time. The couloir then turned out to be horrendous. Filled with waist deep snow it probably took an extra couple of hours to reach the col. Way behind schedule, by the time we reached the top of the ramp the sun was already in the chimney but fortunately it was cold enough that nothing really seemed to be falling so we pressed on. Some of the easy climbing up to the base of the chimney was very slow going due to the amount of snow that had accumulated. The chimney provided steep, sustained and challenging ice climbing. In some sections the ice was only boot width wide at the back of the narrow chimney which made things quite awkward. We reached the summit well after dark feeling pleased to have made it to the top of our second Patagonian summit despite all the extra difficulties we had encountered. The abseils back down the route were very cold as we struggled to keep moving enough to stay warm. We were also very dehydrated as we only took about a litre and a half of water between us. Hence we were quite elated to reach the bag, which we stashed at the bottom of the route with spare water just as the sun rose to warm us up. After a quick nap in the sun we staggered back down to Nipponina feeling totally spent and on reaching our tent shoveled down a small amount of noodles and collapsed. This turned out to be a big mistake. Not eating enough when I got down meant that I hardly recovered over night. And it was our second 35+ hour push in 4 days. The next morning we woke up to vicious winds, so with out thinking packed up and attempted to make our way back to Chalten. What followed was one of the most exhausting experiences I've had. My body was basically completely broken and my legs failed me. Fortunately Ben was in a much better way. It probably took us almost 20 hours to get back to Chalten.

## Mate, Porro on Fitz Roy by Ben Silvestre



*The route climbs the system of cracks and corners on the side of the pillar then the icy headwall above.*

Another day in El Chalten. Get up late, go to the shop for eggs and bread. Eat, read for a couple of hours, go and check the weather.

Nothing good on the horizon - no big surprises there, and no great disappointment. I'm too tired to entertain the idea of another trip into the mountains anyway. Last week we made an attempt on Fitzroy's Supercanaleata - approaching, climbing most of the way up, and then retreating in a vicious storm - in a more or less non stop 35 hour push, from camp to camp. Four days later we climbed the Exocet route on Aguja Standhart, Cerro Torre's little brother, in a push of similar length. We're literally broken, our muscles are badly emaciated, and we can barely go a day without having a lengthy midday sleep. I half heartedly act like I'm disappointed that the forecast is bad, but truthfully, I'm glad. The bad weather on the forecast is my holy grail. The idea of receiving another Patagonian whipping terrifies me, I'd almost rather go back to work. Almost.

Finish coffee, go eat lunch, have a sleep. Eat an afternoon snack, read some more, shower. Eat dinner and drink a beer, bed early. Rinse and repeat.

Life is easy here. The bouldering is great, but after last weeks efforts it seems unlikely that we'll be venturing past the perimeter of cafés and bakeries that make up the majority of this small town's buildings. Our days have been reduced to a cycle of minimal activity and effort - I never felt so justified in doing so little. I sit down on the sofas in 'El Relincho', our campsite, and laugh with the campsite manager Brian as he does one of his little dances. It's sunny in town; maybe I'll go for a little walk this afternoon, nothing too strenuous though. Perhaps I'll just make it to the ice cream shop.

I finish my breakfast and lounge back on the sofa, putting my feet up, and closing my eyes. My mind is still. I'm aware of very little, other than the blackness of my eyelids, and the faint murmur of Trekkers planning their walks. Most are here for only a few days, they've got to go out no matter the weather, not that it matters so much for them. The greatest misfortune bad weather will bring them is duller views. Having been here for a month and a half already, and with a fortnight to go, I quietly lap it up; the sound of plans being made makes me grateful that I have nothing to do, and have to do nothing.

The door to the hut opens and someone walks in. A half yawning American drawl drifts over. "Hey Ben." It's the trout man, up even later than I am, though Pete still holds the title. "You seen the meteogram today?" He continues, with a sort of strained and understated excitement.

"No, have you?" I reply, without expectation.

"No, but I just saw my buddy Sam. There might be a window coming, and it looks hot."

Such simple words, such heavy connotations. Good weather in Patagonia suggests such a broad range of experience that I don't really know what to feel. My stomach begins to churn a strange blend of fear and excitement, my limbs lighten and somehow become heavier at the same time. My breath fluctuates between fast and heavy, or slow and relaxed. Exhaustion is forgotten in the face of opportunity, though my need for rest is still apparent. We need to be on top form. Will this be our chance to go big?

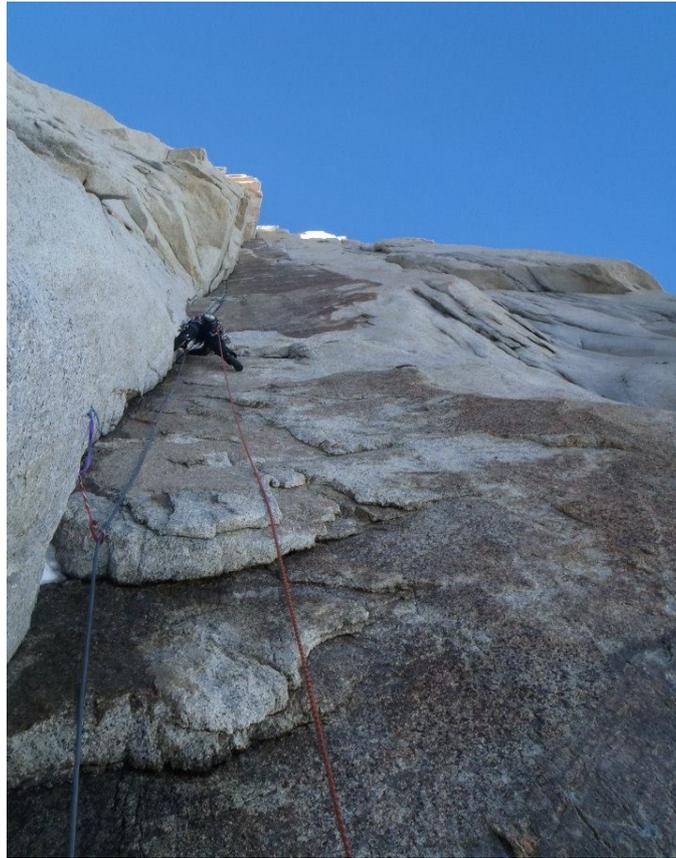
Most of us have practically given up on the idea of climbing a long rock route in the mountains. Until now the weather windows have been thirty hours max, usually much less, with the weather far too cold to climb rock. A lot of people have left and many more are leaving; we decided to stick it out until the end of our trip, just in case. This could well be it. Checking the forecast (several times daily now) we see the pressure bending upwards, the temperatures rising, and the precipitation falling. The next few days reveal the forecast everyone was hoping for. The window of the season.

Our plane is due to leave the day after the window ends. Going big means risking missing it, but it's a chance we're willing to take. As the forecast improves our plans grow, until eventually we settle on a route. We'll try and climb the 'Mate, Porro' route on Fitzroy's awesome north pillar; reputedly one of the best routes on the mountain, with consistently perfect rock, and very little if any fixed gear. It'll be a big undertaking for our tired bodies, so we break the climb down, telling ourselves that we'd be happy to top just the pillar out, though we both know that given half a chance we'll be gunning for the summit. Tales of icy horror shows on the head wall make butterflies in our stomachs flap, but we know we can do it. We just need to try.

The next few days follow a fairly ordinary course. We discuss our plans with other climbers, and try to figure out where they're going. El Chalten is busy nowadays, we want to avoid getting stuck behind others on route. We try to readjust our bodies to exercise, and do a few pull ups to remind our arms what it is they're there for. We sort gear and re-sort it, making sure we have exactly what we need and nothing more. Once everything is ready we rest and demolish mountains of mayonnaise, and wait, until eventually the alarm clock rings and it's time to move out.

We share a taxi down the road with two Americans, Sam and Luke. They're going to try the north east ridge, one of the longest routes in the massif (excluding link ups) at 1500m long. As we walk in the four of us hide our excitement and terror beneath a veil of small talk and reassurances, though loose bowels suggest what our mouths don't say. It's Fitzroy after all, the mighty, and we've no room to let our fear take over, though acknowledging it quietly to ourselves is mandatory.

After an exhausting twelve hour slog, Pete and I arrive at the bivy below the north pillar, which we share with three very excited and friendly Russians. They're going to try the same route as us, and the five of us spend a long time staring at the route, growing increasingly nervous and excited beneath the still warm evening sun. The line is beautifully obvious and we do our best to work out where the cruxes lie. Behind us the icecap shines brightly in all of its magnificent white. Eventually night begins to fall, and the temperature drops, forcing us into our foil blizzard bags. The alarm is set early and we're ready to give it all we've got.



*Awesome corners low down on the pillar.*

A few easy pitches lead us to the start of the real climbing. A kilometre of corners and cracks loom above us; it's going to be a big day, and a damned good one by the looks of it. The Russians speed off ahead of us; they're extremely good climbers, and the fact that their gear is divided into three means that they can second the pitches simultaneously rather than jugging. Soon they're out of sight, leaving Pete and I alone on the side of that terrific monolith of soaring orange granite. Pete leads up cracks and corners that wouldn't be amiss in Yosemite, I jumar after him with most of the weight. The climbing looks amazing and I can't wait to take over.

After about seven pitches it's my lead and I set off. More fantastic cracks lead to a tricky corner change, followed by a nasty wet pitch, and shortly after that the crux. I don't bother trying to free climb it and aid through easily enough, and by the time Pete reaches the belay night has fallen. For the sake of speed I continue leading, and after a slight route finding error we finally reach the big terrace two thirds of the way up the pillar. We were hoping to find a good bivy here, but the Russians have taken one spot and some Argentines the other, so we make a single abseil down the last pitch to a large but sloping ledge. It's nearly dawn by the time we get to sleep and we wind up having a naughty alpine lay in, which isn't saying much.

The following day is much harder, and the fun makes a quick transition from type one to type three. On day one we were sheltered in the depths of the corner, both from the sun and falling objects. We were fresh and able to enjoy the climbing. Now the sun burns our skin, and mushrooms of rime ice at the top of the pillar collapse as the sun loosens their grip on the rock. The climbing at this point is some of the steepest and best so far, but it's hard to appreciate when large chunks of ice shower down every few minutes. Our battered shoulders begin to ache, our tired limbs hang heavily by our sides. Turning back is barely an option, we're about 20 pitches up and the lack of fixed gear means that we'd run out of kit to abseil from long before we reach the ground. Besides, we don't want to turn back. The only way is up.

A couple more pitches and I take over from Pete again. He's taken a couple of bad hits and it's up to me to get us to the top of the pillar. Fortunately the climbing begins to ease and we're there a little before dark. As we approach the top we catch our first glimpse of the head wall. Steep, wet, and covered in gravity defying rime formations, it looks like the biggest undertaking of the route. The Russians are already on their way up it, clearly gunning for the summit that night, and we exchange hoots and cheers as they race upwards. Atop the pillar I bump into three American friends who are attempting the north pillar sit start. I chat to them about the route while Pete jumars up the rope; it's strange to have such an ordinary social exchange in such a

hostile environment, but it helps to make me feel safe again. They direct us to a large snowy bivy right at the top of the pillar, where we gladly claim a few precious hours of rest.

We wake early the following morning. No lay ins this time, we're going to give the head wall everything we've got, and we want to climb the first pitch before the sun hits the rime poised menacingly above it. A couple of abseils brings us to the bottom of the head wall, and seeing the amount of snow and ice on the pitch I mistakenly decide to tool up. This proves useful for the first half, but the second half requires some icy aid and smearing, and I wind up slipping off and badly hurting my finger. Pete has to take over, and by donning his rock shoes he manages to smear through the crux, making for a very impressive lead.



*Ben doing his best Leo Houlding impression.*



*Moving up the headwall.*

My finger means that I can no longer lead, and exhaustion is starting to make me feel nauseous. The head wall pitches are quite overhanging, making juggling very hard work with the pack on - each movement of the jumars makes me retch slightly. I need to eat but a hollow feeling in my abdomen prevents me, despite us having plenty of food, so we give away spare biscuits to the passing Americans to lighten our load. Their momentary company does little to alleviate the loneliness of our position. The view is staggering but I'm in no mood to enjoy it. Fun has been surpassed by necessary action - we do what we must. Soon the worst is over and all that remains is a slog up slush to the summit.

After what seems like an eternity I reach Pete on the small summit ridge and collapse against a block. The summit is 30 metres away and Pete makes a final lead to stand on top of it. At this point I honestly couldn't care less about following him, all I want to do is go down, where I'm sat is good enough for me. The 30 metres to the summit feel like a kilometre, but I muster the strength to follow him and I'm glad I did. We sit on the summit for a moment and eat what we can while we take in the view. We can see El Chalten in the distance, it's hard to imagine that we were ever there, that we could ever return. In the opposite direction lie the Torres, pointing into the sky like dragons teeth, the clouds swirling between them its smokey breath. Behind them lies the ice cap, revealed to us now in all its vastness, open and barren like nothing I've ever seen. For these few and precious moments the pain is somewhat forgotten, until the darkening sky forces us to press on. In total we spend about five minutes on the summit, and feeling incrementally recharged we begin the descent.



*Cumbre!!!*

Easy snow leads us down for a few hundred metres, until we reach a point where we need to begin abseiling. We want to descend the Franco-Argentine but we can't find it. I go for a look round a corner and find myself staring down the gaping scar of the Supercanaleta. I almost suggest descending there, not realising what had unfolded there the day before, but the warm unsettled weather and long hike out from that side of the mountain dissuade me. We continue searching and eventually find the correct descent. We make the first few abseils successfully, then make a wrong turn. The topo is confusing and we wind up in the middle of featureless virgin granite, in the dark. The bottom looks miles away and we're running out of kit to

abseil from, but fortunately we make it down without too much trouble.

We stumble across to the Brecha bivy and steal a couple of hours sleep before waking to ferocious winds. We have no gas left so we get going without stopping to eat or drink. First we make several abseils down an icy gully which is already pouring with freezing water, soaking us thoroughly. Having crossed the bergshrund all that remains is several hours of slogging through sometimes waist deep slush, until we reach the Lago de Los Tres, dry ground, and on the other side - people.

As we skirt round the edge of the lake, three huge condors land on a ledge no more than twenty metres away from us. We stand there stunned as they flap and squawk at each other, making strange hissing noises. Once again, we don't know whether to be scared or excited; each one is bigger than us, they could pluck us from the ground if they so wished. They soon fly away though, their beating wings making a deep bass noise as they tear through the air, and we continue the walk back. After an hour or so we ask a French hiker how far we are from town. He tells us that since we're tired and have big packs on it'll take us at least three hours. We take this as a challenge and storm back in two, reaching town about eight hours before our bus leaves. We say some goodbyes and give our condolences for the awful tragedy that we've by now been informed of. Chad was hit by a falling block in the Supercanaleta, only hours before I peered down it during our descent. The blatant truth behind the risks we take in alpine environments becomes glaringly obvious in the eyes of every climber that night, and none escape a feeling that it could have just as easily been one of us.

We wake after too little sleep and haul our bags to the bus station. One final effort. The three hour bus journey to El Calafate passes quickly and smoothly, and before long we're on the plane to Buenos Aires. Finally, we're able to take in our accomplishment, and feel some satisfaction, though such emotions are still deeply hidden beneath a veil of exhaustion. A whirlwind of power naps and activity which mirrors the past two months eventually deposits us in Manchester, where we say our goodbyes. We hug and make vague plans to go climbing soon - the Welsh sea beckons. Finally, we go our separate ways, quietly acknowledging the fact that it won't be a very long time before we're back, brandishing the desire for another Patagonian beat down.

## **Budget**

Expedition Costs:	Expedition Income:
Travel - £2640	Number of Members - 2
Food and Stores - £1000	Grants: MEF - £1000
Insurance - £1060	BMC - £1000
Gear - £400	Personal contributions – 2 x £1550
TOTAL: £5100	TOTAL: £5100

## **General Beta**

Most information about climbing in the region can be found in Rollando Garibotti's excellent guide book Patagonia Vertical or on his website [www.pataclimb.com](http://www.pataclimb.com).

On top of what's written there here's a few things that I would definitely recommend bringing when visiting El Chalten:

- Bring decent approach shoes and light weight crampons. On Mate, Porro I wore running shoes and strap on crampons and Ben wore mountain boots. It turned out we didn't really need the mountain boots but they might have been useful if it was any more icy. My running shoes gradually dropped to bits over the course of the route, so I would recommend taking some sturdy approach type shoe. Preferably high top style ones as these take crampons better.
- Bring stiff comfortable pair of rock shoes. After so much front pointing on the previous routes, our feet got very sore on Mate, Porro. All the Patagonian regulars where la sportiva TC pros. These provide a lot of protection and are stiff enough that you can climb hard in a larger size.
- If possible bring two sets of gear. Having gear stashed at two base camps will greatly maximise your options. In different lengths and types of weather windows you may want to choose routes on

different areas of the massif.

- American dollars can be exchanged for Pesos with the locals at a much better rate than you would get from a bank.

### **Support and Thanks**

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