

Hansjörg Auer and Much Mayr open a new route through the east face of Central Tower/Torres del Paine in Patagonia ...

Route information "Waiting for Godot"

Mountain: Central Tower/Torres del Paine

First ascent: Hansjörg Auer, Much Mayr 01/2010

Length of route and difficulty: 750 m vertical gain; 7b/M6

Securing gear: 4 intermediate expansion bolts, 3 normal bolts, belay stances in upper part with bolts, nuts, cams up to 6

Excerpt from the journal—days 5 and 6 in the face:

We set the alarm clock for 6 o'clock in the morning. For nothing. For the last half an hour, the sound of rain has kept us from sleeping. It's unbelievable. And we wait again. Wait for our last chance. And look, at about 9:30, the sun parts the clouds. Out into the cold, wet shoes; time to start. We have to hurry.

At 11 o'clock we reach our turning point from yesterday using the fixed rope. The upcoming rope length looks very brittle. Much leads. He disappears behind a small pillar and then I hear a scream. A boulder smashes right in front of him, then shatters, and a piece the size of a dish hits him in the thigh. He was lucky—only two tears in his pants and a little bruise. I follow. An 80 m high, slightly overhanging offwidth crack system enables us to go further.



There's a loud whistle and we see how an ice formation several cubic meters large falls onto the lower belay station. We can already see the col. But the terrain remains steep to the last. Still four lengths of rope, including a 7b, that needs everything I've got in onsight. Steep crevices with ice mushrooms located in between. Much leads on the last length. He

fights courageously through the demanding, ice-filled groove and disappears on the west side. We've made it. It is half past six in the evening. We enjoy the moment. The approaching snowstorm and the strong wind can't touch us now. The evening mood is tremendous..

Descending in the last of the daylight, Much climbs just one last missing 7b rope length redpoint. Back at the portaledge, we fill our empty stomachs and play cards until well after midnight. We cannot sleep. Our thoughts are spinning round and round; what we have experienced is so profound.

The upcoming 24 hours once again demand of us everything we've got. The change of weather comes and suddenly we find ourselves in the line of fall of a little waterfall. The water patters for hours; the water high above from the face collects in the portaledge. Waiting and accepting the external circumstances permits us to reflect inwardly a bit. A feeling of indifference and unbelievable, ecstasy-like moments follow. In the late afternoon, we agree that we have to get out of here as soon as possible. The portaledge is downright underwater. Standing in the waterfall, we pack our haul bags, dismantle the portaledge, and get ready for abseiling. Finally, we reach the glacier. Pulling more than carrying, we bring our load back to the high camp. We are tired, empty, and drained. On the next day, snow once again. We descend further, cover every section twice, and are happy as Hannes approaches us at the end. He was concerned, had spent the past few days in El Chalten, and as he came back, no one knew where we were. Everyone thought we were in Puerto Natales.

Why, of all things, Central Tower? And the line? Where is the route?

Our plan was to climb a new route on the east face in the right part of the face. We had actually envisaged the crevice system to the right of the line "Una Fina Linea de Locura" (6b A3, January 1993). Examined at close hand, the crevices were much tighter than we had assumed. So we decided to take the line in the rightmost part of the face. The advantage was that despite the poor conditions at the beginning we were able to gain some height in the form of mixed climbing.

One of the most intensive experiences to date... because of what?

After five days in the face, in the night to the sixth day the complete onset of winter surprised us. Our portaledge suddenly was in the fall line of a small waterfall. First the hours and hours of the sound of the waterfall, packing everything together in the icy shower, fully drenched. Then abseiling, putting up belays, and back to the high camp.

What was the key moment during the route?

The point in time at which we were aware that we were able to reach the destination with a final push.

Patagonia—as expected?

Before you start, you expect that you will have at least a few good days within a month. The conditions were, however, very poor the entire time from the middle of December until mid-January. It was cold and windy with a lot of snow and ice in the east face. For both of us, it was a new experience climbing in such conditions.

Why didn't you stay longer?

Of course, it can happen that you leave and a week later, the window of opportunity in terms of weather opens. But exactly the opposite can happen. You stay longer and so does the poor weather. It's best to take a month of time in the hope that you might meet a few good days. Besides, waiting a long time in this region undermines your determination.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the rope team Auer-Mayr?

We don't just complement one another; we strengthen each other, in that we bring different characteristics to the table. It's an ideal symbiosis. There's Hansjörg the young wild one with unlimited motivation, and Much, the somewhat older, more realistic, experienced strategist A common strength, that can become a weakness very quickly, is surely a high tolerance for risk.

