

I remember the first time I stood beneath the mountain, trying to make sense of it. There were no obvious splitter cracks, no clean, inviting features just a wall of steep, vertical rock streaked with greenery, broken by trees clinging improbably to its face. From afar, I had been drawn to El Cohete, captivated by the elegance of its winding ridge. But up close, that vision faltered. I couldn't see a line. I couldn't even convince myself it would go.

A quiet doubt crept in. I had travelled across the world, ridden horses, crossed rivers to arrive here. And this? A vegetated, seemingly featureless wall? I felt almost disappointed, which in hindsight revealed more about me than the mountain. I had been shaped by the clean granite of Yosemite, the dramatic scale of the Trango Towers, and the sharp alpine lines of Chamonix. I expected exposure, difficulty, maybe even wet rock but not this. Not dirt, lichen, and uncertainty.

Belén Prados, who knew the wall well, laughed at my reaction. She had felt the same on her first visit. Where I had imagined a fast alpine-style ascent, she described something entirely different: a slow, methodical process. Weeks of work. Fixing lines. Cleaning from above. The goal wasn't just to climb something new it was to create something lasting. A route that others could follow. Something safe, something beautiful.

Through binoculars, we found a faint weakness in the wall. It didn't look like much, but it was something. The climbing would be complex, technical, and likely uncomfortable. Protection would be hard to find. It would require patience and imagination. I began to understand that this wasn't about seeing what was there, but about envisioning what could be.

The project truly began when Belén set off on the first pitch. Progress was slow. I stood below in the heat, watching, curious and unsure. When she reached about twenty metres, I shouted up, "How is it?" There was a pause before she replied: "No holds, no protection..." Another pause. "But beautiful!" We both burst out laughing. In that moment, something shifted. This was going to be different and that was exactly the point.

Over the next four weeks, we worked as a team. We rotated roles: opening pitches, cleaning them, descending for supplies. It was a new dynamic for me. I was used to climbing with one partner, where decisions and communication are straightforward. Here, the process was shared. Not everyone climbed every day, but everyone contributed. There was a strong sense of collective purpose - each effort, no matter how small, fed into the larger goal.

We established a bivouac near the wall, beside a small lake that quietly became part of our routine. One morning, Ro pointed out how its colour shifted throughout the day reflective and calm at dawn, bright blue under the sun, dark and heavy beneath cloud. It was a small observation, but it stayed with me. Slowly, this place that had felt so uninspiring began to reveal itself.

The rhythm of the days settled. We climbed in the cooler afternoons and evenings, often returning to camp late. The style of climbing bold, uncertain, exploratory felt familiar in an

unexpected way. Growing up in the UK had taught me to move through terrain where protection isn't always obvious, where commitment matters. Here, that mindset became an advantage.

But this was more than just climbing. Much of our time was spent cleaning, scrubbing dirt from cracks, removing lichen, making the rock usable. It was painstaking work. Hanging for hours on static lines, brushing holds, clearing placements, it was often more exhausting than the climbing itself. My elbows ached, my hips bruised from the harness. And yet, I became strangely invested in it. I wanted the route to be good. I wanted it to be safe. I wanted someone else to experience it at its best.

It also gave me a new perspective on bolting. I had often been critical of bolt placements on other routes, questioning decisions made by first ascensionists. Now, I understood. The rock doesn't always allow perfect solutions. There are compromises, constraints, unseen factors. That awareness brought a quiet respect for the work others have done before.

Julia, meanwhile, saw the experience through a different lens. She reminded me to look beyond the objective. To notice the small things. A hummingbird hovering near an anchor. Ancient Alerce trees standing silent in the valley. Condors tracing wide arcs overhead. This wasn't just a climbing trip, it was an immersion into a rare and fragile ecosystem.

By the time we left, the valley had transformed in my eyes. Where I had once seen blank walls, I now saw possibility. Lines waiting to be imagined. The landscape hadn't changed my perception had. This place demands more than a quick glance. It asks for patience, openness, and a willingness to engage with uncertainty.

What we created there was more than a route. It was a process slow, collaborative, and deeply rewarding. I left feeling proud, not just of the line itself, but of the way we approached it. And now, the real reward lies ahead: in hearing the stories of those who will come after us, and experience something we helped bring into being.