

# NO TEOlvidaremos

*Rosemary Hohnen* on how it can be hard to be in a wild place

WORDS + IMAGE: Rosemary Hohnen

**Sometimes when I'm climbing I forget for a moment about my gear, about my belayer, my mind is clear and I move without hesitation. Sometimes though, I feel like inside me is a big dark space filled with the sound of a roaring canyon.**

Alex and I had been climbing in Frey, an alpine granite area in northern Patagonia, for a month. It was our last climbing day and we set out early to try No TEOlvidaremos, a six-pitch 7a+ (24) that snakes its way up the proud south face of Frey's tallest spire, Torre Principal. Alex had saved this route for the end of our trip, like a kid saves the steak on a plate of meat and three veg. I, on the other hand, felt like I could be heading into an exam I wasn't sure I was going to pass.

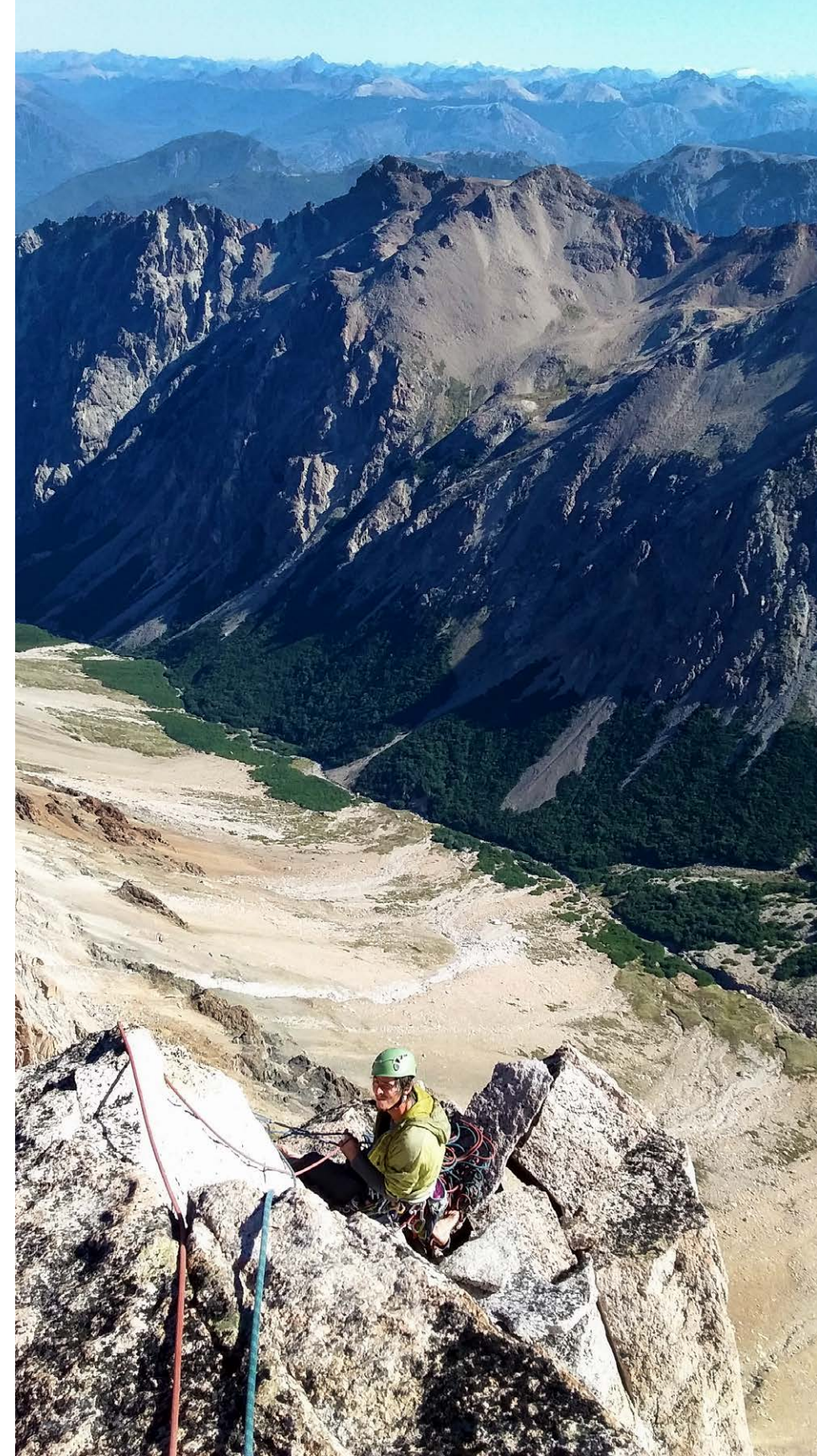
On dawn, after slogging for two hours up the hill we found ourselves at the base of the first pitch. It was a clear day and looking down we could see the valley dropping away from the peak to the distant plains below. The rough line on the topo said this pitch was 5+, the easiest pitch we were due to climb that day, and also mine to lead. The start looked dark and wide, offwidth style, and I remembered we didn't have a number 5. I racked up and started up the pitch wedging my body into the dark space. A few metres up a rock was wedged in the crack. As I touched it, it shifted with a hollow clunk. I slung it anyway and thrutched up a few more metres, to where I could reach another chockstone. That one moved too. A few metres above there was a small flake, maybe something I could get real pro in. I pulled out of the crack and shook my way up a few more moves till I could reach the flake, unclipped the small wires from my harness and tried to wiggle one in. As I tugged down on the wire to seat it, I could feel the flake gently expanding beneath the fingers of my other hand. The flake was fucked. I was a fair way up and there was nothing to stop me hitting the deck if I messed things up. The next move looked tricky. Above me I could see a piton poking hopefully out of a thin seam. Below me Alex smiled up, looking

optimistic. 'You got it, He said. 'Alex, I don't think I got this eh'. I was tired of being scared, the wire was shit, and the chockstones were worthless. Alex yelled up 'Don't sit on the gear eh, you gotta down climb it'.

Somehow I managed to shake my way back into the crack and then shuffle down the route. At the bottom I took my shoes off and stared at the ground. Alex quickly got the gear off my harness and started up. He wheedled in a few more shitty wires behind the expanding flake, laybacked the awkward crack, clipped the thin rusty piton and then hucked to a good hold. I followed him up feeling empty. The next 7a+ (24) pitch was a beautiful splitter corner that I trudged up like a kid in thick mud. The third pitch (6c/21) turned out to be an expanding crack and all my cams ballooned out the back. I bailed off that pitch too.

We reached the summit that afternoon and the Andes spread out below us like a rumpled blanket. We ate half a crumpled biscuit and watched a few condors hang weightless in the thermals. I was tired. We both were. When I think about that day now, I still don't know what to think. Always bring a number 5? Don't try things you're going to suck at? Don't be hopeful? None of those things seem realistic to me. It was probably the most useless I've felt on a route and as a climbing partner.

Up there, though, I wasn't beeping items through a self-checkout. I wasn't on Collins St waiting for the light to go green before I crossed the road. I wasn't at my desk on my 8th cup of tea before 10am. I was scared and out of my depth, but I was alive in a wild world and I can't regret that.



Alex Hartshorne belaying on the final pitch of No TEOlvidaremos, a seven-pitch 7a+ (24) on the windy south face of Torre Principal, at Frey in northern Patagonia.