

# Fitz Roy's Simončič Route

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**F**ITZ ROY, a colossus of granite and ice, is remarkable from every side. From far out to the east, from the flat, dry pampa, its dominant silhouette appears, defying comparison. Even the unearthly beauty of Cerro Torre loses its grandeur in its company. During most of the year this peak hides in a mobile dome of clouds, which continuously changes in color and shape. The few cloudless days shine in such glory that they remain forever in your memory.

If there weren't bad weather, there wouldn't be splendid weather either, since the latter would lose much of its meaning. Paradoxically, if Patagonian weather were worse, it would appeal even more to climbers. Everybody wishes to succeed. The more difficult it is to succeed, the more it means. Patagonian weather increases the difficulty and so climbing there can bring added satisfaction.

Bogdan Biščak, Rado Fabjan and I came there with the same desire. We made the plan, which seemed somewhat utopian, to climb the two beauties and to make a new route on one of them.

All the way to the Río Blanco Base Camp below Fitz Roy we hadn't decided which way to go. There were various suggestions about which route to take. We had to remember that in Patagonia the weather doesn't necessarily permit success.

The result of our discussions was the decision to try a new route on the south face of Fitz Roy. We would have problems with the cold since, being in the southern hemisphere, south walls get about as much sun as the north faces do with us. Also, the south face is exposed to hurricane winds from the west. The conditions are usually poor and the rock cracks are filled with ice. There was the problem of our being three. Even to get to the French Saddle (Silla), there is rather serious climbing. We had to bring a lot of food and equipment there, which meant losing some fine days doing that rather than climbing. All three of us climbed together. We had to descend every time we ran out of supplies, no matter how good the weather was. If there had been four of us, two could have brought the supplies up to the French Saddle while the other two were climbing.

During the first days of December we had bad luck with the weather. Quick changes led to a number of unsuccessful attempts. We dug a snow cave on the pass, Paso Superior (2000 meters). There we stored equipment and also found a perfect shelter during stormy days. This pass makes a relatively simple ap-

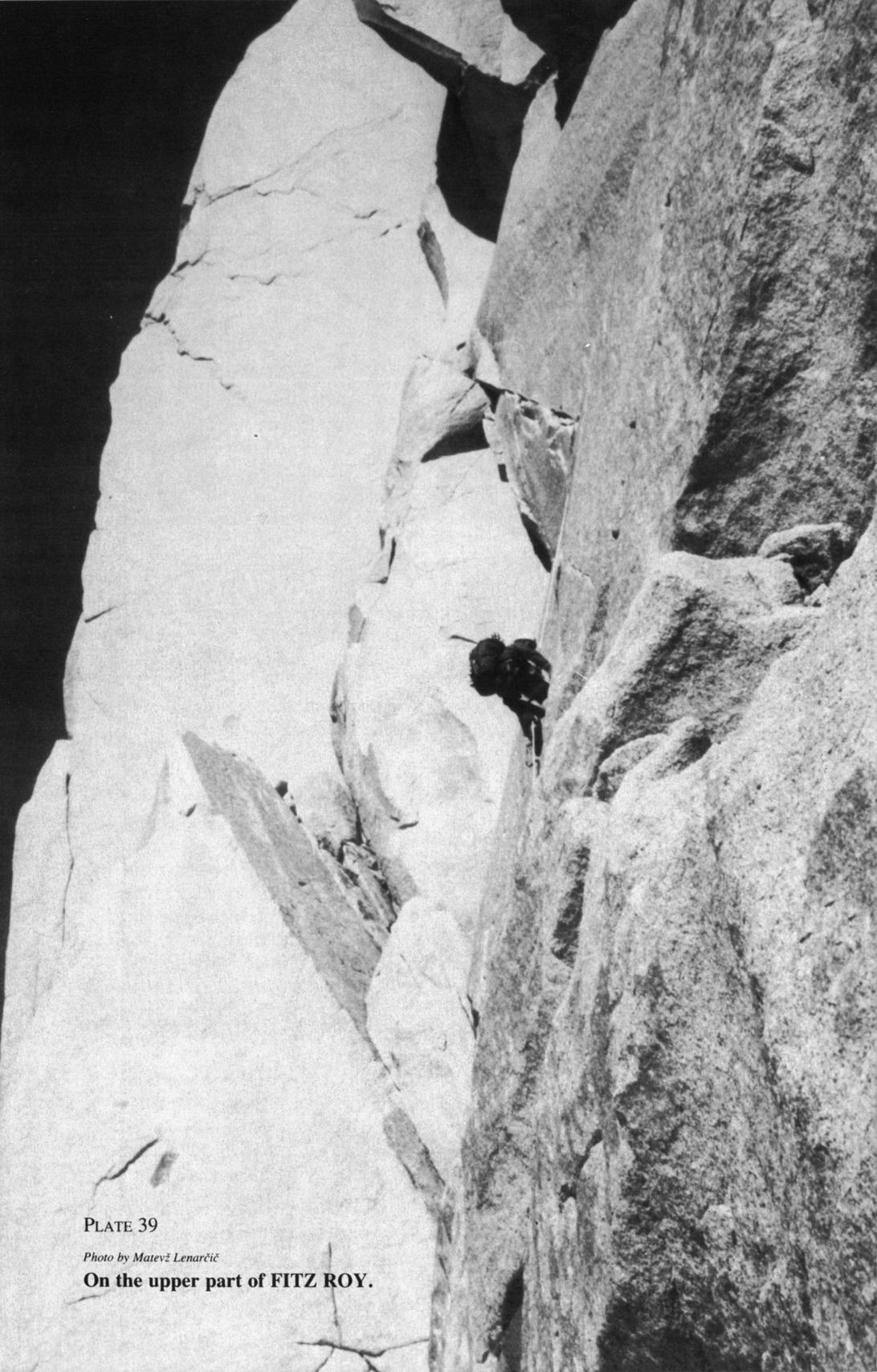


PLATE 39

*Photo by Matevž Lenarčič*

**On the upper part of FITZ ROY.**

PLATE 40

*Photo by Matevž Lenarčič*

**Descending in storm from FITZ ROY.**



proach to the glacier under the east face of Fitz Roy. A main depot was placed about 80 meters below the French Saddle on the wind-protected east side under a granite block frozen into the iced wall.

During two fine days we fixed rope 400 meters up the south face. Before dawn on the third, there were bright stars in a clear sky, but by morning the weather changed completely. Strong winds blew; the sky was covered with clouds. All thoughts of the summit disappeared. Even so, we expected only a short period of bad weather. Wrapped in sleeping bags, we sat in a small crack under the boulder in the middle of the icy wall below the French Saddle. Hope for quick improvement kept morale high, but the storm raged with much more force than expected. After two days, we hitched our bodies, stiff from long hours of lying in the ice, back to the valley, escaping into the green world. New snow covered our equipment, which we left right there, hoping to come back soon.

A few days later we were back on the French Saddle. Early morning sun found us high on the ropes of the south wall. We had already come a long way. We had left Base Camp the previous evening, walked all night and climbed the bottom of the wall. Today we'd get all the way to the summit! We had to make it to the top since while we were gone from the valley, our food had been stolen and we were left with just enough for this last try.

Since the weather was fine, we made good progress on the fixed ropes and soon reached the top of our previous attempt. The wind picked up. We lost a lot of time searching for the best route in the smooth and overhanging wall, but by four P.M. we reached the easier part. The weather was getting rapidly worse: snow, wind, fog. We did manage to get to the double-headed summit of Fitz Roy within the next hour, struggling hard against the wind and growing fear. We were seriously worried about the descent.

And rightly so. Our escape of the wall was a true adventure. Without the luck which was our constant companion, we would never have reached the bottom. At midnight we were finally in our bivouac: dry sleeping bags and insufficient protection from a granite block in the Brecha de los Italianos. The expensive equipment left in the higher bivouac on the first attempt lost all its value; our lives were much more precious. Base Camp welcomed us only late the next afternoon after 44 hours on the go. We were totally exhausted, famished but wildly happy and excited.

I kept wanting to name the route after my best friend, Boris Simončič, with whom we had tried this peak two years before. The weather then had turned us back 150 meters below the top. Three months after returning from Patagonia, an avalanche in the French Alps took his life. Somehow, I feared to make this very personal suggestion to my friends. My fears proved wrong. Bogdan and Rado had had the same idea.

We still had a month before heading for home. We hoped to climb Cerro Torre by the Maestri route. Our food shortage was solved by friends from another Slovene expedition which was attempting the east face of Cerro Torre.

On our first try, we got to within 200 meters from the top and were turned back by the weather. Two weeks of rain and snow followed. Just when our hopes were flickering out, the weather improved. Luck was with us again. We climbed all afternoon. The next day it took us 18 hours to reach the summit, where we bivouacked. In the morning we descended the upper wall, where we met six climbers from the other Slovene expedition. We used their ropes to descend.

*Summary of Statistics:*

AREA: Patagonia, Argentina.

ASCENTS: Fitz Roy, 3441 meters, 11,289 feet, via a new route on the South Face between the Californian (1968), and the Anglo-American (1972); summit reached on December 22, 1985 (whole party).

Cerro Torre, 3128 meters, 10,263 feet, via the Southeast Ridge; summit reached on January 15, 1986 (whole party).

PERSONNEL: Bogdan Biščak, Rado Fabjan, Matevž Lenarčič.

PLATE 41

*Photo by Matevž Lenarčič*

**Aguja Poincenot and Fitz Roy. The Yugoslav Route on Fitz Roy ascended the face in shadow at the left.**

