

*Torres Del Paine, Various Ascents.* Andy McAuley of Australia and Carsten Birckhahn of Germany climbed in a climbing area called Grupo la Paz, four spectacular towers without names or topos, four hours from Puerto Natales by boat on the shore of Canal Santa Maria. They made a first ascent on the east tower. (*The Grupo La Paz, a.k.a. the Torres del Diablo, lies in the Canal Santa Maria. A parallel fjord, the Canal Las Montanas, holds the Cordillera Sarmiento, an article about which can be found in AAJ 1993, pp. 109-113. The two fjords are about an hour apart by boat.*)

Alexandre Portela and Sergio Tartari from Brazil climbed the Bonington route on February 15, reaching the summit at 4:30 p.m. The route took them 20 hours from bivouac to bivouac.

From February 8 to 17, Andres Stambuck and Jose Pedro Montt of Chile climbed the central summit of Paine Grande (3050 meters) and Punta Bariloche. Janus Golab, Jan Muskai Ryszard Pawlowski and Adam Potoczek of Poland climbed the North Tower via the Piola/Sprungli route on March 13, and went on to climb the Central Tower via the Bonington/Whillans route.

Claudio Retamal and Andres Labarca of Chile climbed a new route on the southwest face of Cuerno Principal. *Junto a Vasquez* (5.10d A2+, eight pitches) was climbed in one 17-hour push on March 18. They reported excellent rock quality. Their advanced camp was one hour from the wall and three hours from the Italian camp.

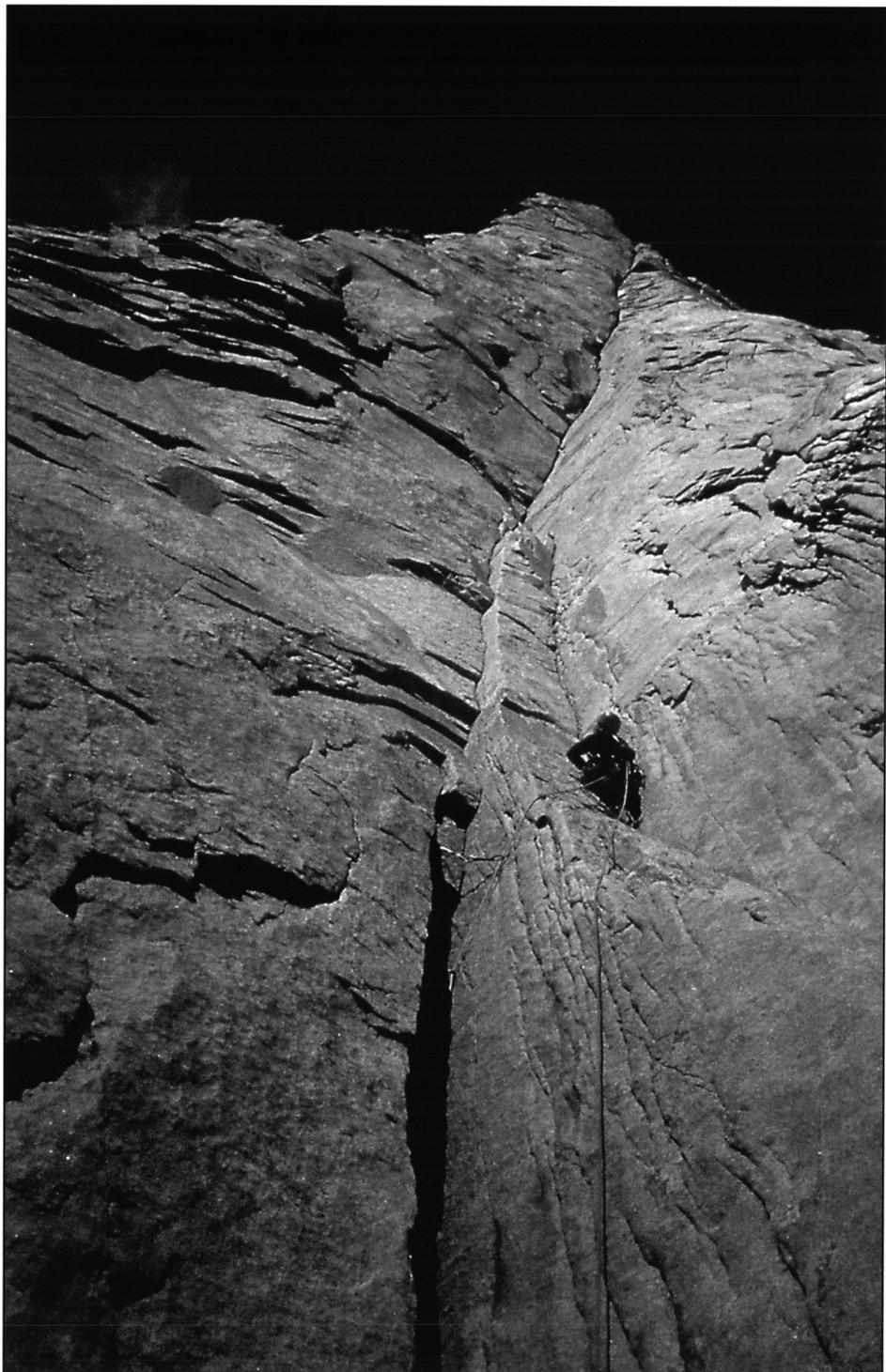
Erich Mueller and I from Chile climbed to the col between Mascara and Cuerno Norte via the west face (5.9+, 16 pitches to high point) in one 19-hour push from base camp in Valle del Frances on March 15. This is the beginning to an excellent climb on La Mascara or Cuerno Norte; for such a climb, be prepared for a night on the wall and a good rack of aid climbing gear. From here, the views of the Valle Bader and Frances are amazing. We also tried, on February 15, a new route on La Mascara's west face, but after eight hard pitches the night arrived and our sleeping bags were so far away that we rappelled in a beautiful and clear night to cook spaghetti. The route is a nice project for speed climbers and looks like it would go at 5.10d A2 in 15 pitches, with excellent quality granite. The base camp is one and a half hours from the wall, with water, some boulders problem, no tents necessary and a beautiful view of the walls.

Number of days with good weather (in terms of climbing conditions) in Paine during the 1997-98 season: October: 5; November: 6; December: 4; January: 3; February: 20; March: 5.

HERNAN JOFRE, *Amerindia Concept*

*El Escudo, Et Si Le Soleil Ne Revenait Pas. . .* On December 18, 1997, Swiss climbers Jean-Daniel Nicolet and Jean-Michel Zweiacker climbed a new wall route on the east face of Escudo. *Et Si Le Soleil Ne Revenait Pas. . .* (VI 5.10 A4) takes a line to the right of the German route on the far right side of the face and is 900 meters long. The pair spent nine nights on the face in mostly bad weather. The route had been attempted the previous season by a Swiss team that included Jean-Daniel Nicolet. This is the third route to be established on the wall. A complete story on the climb appears earlier in this journal.

*Torres Del Paine, Various Activity.* On December 12, I arrived in Patagonia for what was to be a three-month stay. The weather had been bad for the last month with no recorded climbing activity. Amidst the usual foul weather patterns were occasional windows of nice weather. December 16 and 17 found decent climbing conditions, as did December 29-January 2 and February 1-3. During February 9-23, a two-week spell of mostly perfect weather settled in on the Towers. But along with warm temperatures came melting couloirs and vastly increased



*Andreas Zegers on pitch three, the Italian route, Central Tower of Paine. STEVE SCHNEIDER*

rockfall that made approaching the normal routes of Torre Norte and Torre Central a suicidal proposition. Afterward, a 30-year flood hit the park, which was closed to all trekking activity. Climbers were left scrambling to save their tents from rapidly rising floodwaters, and the hut in Camp Japanese had a high water mark of six inches inside the structure.

On El Escudo, Chileans Rodrigo Fica and Dario Arancibia were unsuccessful in pioneering a new route up the south ridge. Based in a snowcave during the bad weather of January, the pair only managed two pitches.

Americans were especially active in the Paine. Steve “Shipooi” Schneider climbed the 500-meter west face of Torre Norte three times. *Via Giorgio Giannicci* (V 5.10 A2) with Peter Mayfield, on December 17, was especially entertaining as their ropes became hopelessly wedged in a fissure on their second rappel, and they were forced to descend with just two 50-foot ropes for the remaining 1,300 feet in gradually deteriorating weather. *Taller del Sol* (V 5.10+) fell to Schneider and his wife, Heather Baer, on February 10. This route, established two years ago by Americans Paul Butler and Eli Helmuth, is a great all-free route up the west face, as well as being the best descent route down the west face with good anchors every 45 or 50 meters. Both of these climbs were second ascents. *Ultima Esperanza* (V 5.10 A1) received its fourth ascent from Schneider, Chilean Andreas “Chili Dog” Zegers, and American Sean Plunkett on February 23.

On nearby Peineta, on February 14, Heather Baer and Schneider made the first free ascent (second overall) of *Duraznos para Don Quijote*, finding the crux section to be mid-5.11.

On the west face of the Central Tower, Schneider, again partnered by Andreas Zegers, made the second ascent of the Italian (DeFrancesco-Manica-Stedile) route in 22 hours, 45 minutes, summiting at 1 p.m. on February 19. The route (VI 5.11 A3) features more than 400 feet of wide cracks from four to ten inches. Schneider, lacking a number six friend, made a mandatory 25-foot runout on a 5.11 offwidth section of pitch 5, and was “glad for every inch of offwidth I’d ever done.” It was the first on-sight push of a Central Tower route besides the normal route. Near the top, the pair was bombarded, without injury, by a huge rockfall that swept the entire approach couloir to the North and Central towers. Tragically, Basque climbers Antxon Alonso and Gaizka Razkin, who were beginning to descend the couloir, were swept 3,000 feet to their deaths. Alonso and Razkin were attempting to repeat a line just established by their countrymen Gerardo Tellechea, Andoni Areizaga, Josetxo Rodriguez, and Martin Zabaleta. Their new route, *Anton eta Gaizka* (VI 5.10d A2) is a 12-pitch direct to the Bonington-Willans. The foursome summited on February 18, and placed two bolts with fixed carabiners at every anchor, probably making this the easiest descent from the Central Tower’s summit.

STEVE “SHIPOOI” SCHNEIDER

*Chilean Patagonia, Various Ascents.* On Monday, December 29, I crawled out of my cave at 5 a.m. I didn’t think the weather was terrific, so I went back to sleep. I woke up and started to the gear stash cave at 9 a.m. I organized things and at noon decided I might head up the couloir and see how things would go, figuring I would just stash my rope and gear for better weather later. At 4:30 p.m. I arrived at the notch between the Central and North towers. I began up the *Monzino* route on the North Tower, combining the first three pitches in one 70-meter rope length—climbed, rapped, and jugged it in maybe 35 minutes. I soloed over some 4th class for about 150 feet, then stashed my pack and much of my gear rack, figuring I would go for it. I soloed to the top from there with the rope on my back for retreating. I topped out one hour and 31 minutes after starting at the notch (it was 6:21 p.m.). I knew it was light