



*Cerro Piergiorgio, showing Esperando la Cumbre (Cerro Pollone is to the right). GIANLUCA MASPES*

day we descended to the Piedra del Fraile.

On December 8, I made the third solo ascent of Aguja Guillaumet's entire northwest spur (following the 1990 Giordani variation plus the 1965 Argentine route) (VII- AO, 1000m) in five hours, self-belaying on only the most difficult pitch.

GIANLUCA MASPES, *Italy*

*Cerro Marconi Norte.* It was reported that Maurizio Giordani climbed a new route (5.5, 500m), solo, on the north flank of Cerro Marconi Norte, on December 9, 1996. (*High Mountain Sports* 176)

*Effects Of El Niño On Patagonia's 1997-'98 Climbing Season.* Briefly explained, El Niño is a sporadic warm water current that flows clockwise from west to east along the equator and then south along South America's west coast against the normal polar current. In an "El Niño year," water temperature on the South American coast rises about 3°C, increasing rainfall significantly. Peru usually is the most severely affected country and influences in Chile decrease with higher southern latitudes.

According to locals, the winter of 1997 was mild and warmer than usual, and spring was rainy, also with temperatures above average. But then, after a still rainy January, almost three continuous weeks of good weather followed in February! El Niño revealed itself not only as a long period of good weather, but also with higher temperatures during 1997. The snow line on the Southern Patagonian Icefield was much higher this year than usual. Crossing the Icefield became a painful adventure. In February, Soames Flowerree (Chile), José Vélez (Ecuador), Derek Churchil (Chile) and Ralph Rynning (Norway), who crossed the Southern Patagonian Icefield from Jorge Montt Glacier to Paso del Viento, had to work very hard under

lots of rain in January on Jorge Montt to make any advance over an awful crevasse labyrinth until they reached the plateau. Then, in February, good weather returned, and the sun soon melted what little snow was left, turning the usually flat icefield into an irregular suncup and crevasse-covered surface. Sometimes, they advanced as little as one kilometer in three hours.

The explanation for the good weather was a strong high-pressure system that positioned itself over the Southern Pacific Ocean in Patagonian latitudes, obstructing bad-weather fronts on their way from west to east toward Patagonia. The origin of this high-pressure area might be very related to El Niño. Weather in central Chile is mainly regulated by a high pressure area over the Southern Pacific Ocean in front of the Chilean coast. It moves north in winter and south in summer. This year, probably due to the influences of the higher temperatures brought by El Niño, the high-pressure area moved farther south than usual, bringing good weather to Patagonia.

The climbing season in Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre areas also was different than usual. Although good weather was by itself a blessing for climbers, approaching the peaks was unusually difficult because of the low amount of snow on the glaciers, as well as the lack of ice holding together rotten rock sections on the approaches to some walls.

Torres del Paine, on the other hand, was not as affected by the conditions, as it is at a lower altitude than the Fitz Roy area. There was good weather during the first three weeks of February, too, but the most important influence of El Niño occurred during the last week of the month. Unprecedented rain and thunder flooded the park, forcing local authorities to evacuate people and close the park entrance.

CHRISTIAN OBERLI, *Club Alemán Andino, Chile*

*Cerro Gorra Blanca, Ascent.* Well-known Argentine climbers Jose Luis Fonrouge and Alfredo Rosasco ascended Cerro Gorra Blanca (2907m). The ascent was an ice climb that ended with a summit mushroom. Other details are lacking.

MARCELO SCANU, *Buenos Aires, Argentina*

*Argentine Patagonia, Various Activities.* The 1997-98 climbing season in Patagonia began in typical fashion, with frustrated climbers sitting in huts for most of November, December, and January. However, an unprecedented three-week weather window in February enabled many teams to climb impressive routes in the Fitz Roy regions.

Argentiniens David Albert and Gatito Dura climbed the 1974 British route (5.10+, 13 pitches) on Rafael Jaurez in late January. Gatito followed this up with a rapid rope-solo ascent of Aguja de la S. He then teamed up with Albert for an ascent of Poincenot's Whillian's route. On the summit, the team met up with Gatito's brother Marco Dura, and a Spaniard who had just made the third ascent of the lengthy Carrington-Rouse Route (5.10). Finally, on February 18, David Albert and Marco and Gatito Dura climbed the Kearney-Harrington route (5.10+) on the north face of St. Exupery, in 26 hours round-trip from the Polish Camp.

MARK SYNNOTT

*Argentine Patagonia, Various Ascents.* On December 31, 1997, thanks to a three-day spell of good weather, Spanish climbers Manel de la Matta and Hugo Biarge climbed Cerro Torre via the Maesti route. They started from a snow cave in the glacier at the base of Cerro Torre and Torre Egger at 2 a.m. on the 30th. That same day they bivouacked at the ice towers, and the next day they completed the climb, reaching the summit at 4 p.m. on the 31st. They didn't