

*The Northwest Arête of the West Pillar of Punta Herron, La Gioconda.* The weather was always bad, even when we humped loads to Paso Marconi. On October 12, we decided to leave for the Circle of the Altares. The weather was beautiful, but after only two hours of walking we were in a storm. Since we had no desire to turn back, we kept going. It would be a long day on the Continental Icecap; the sled sank into the snow, the wind never stopped, we got lost in the snow many times. After 16 hours, we arrived at the red knife-edge arête.

The weather didn't look like it was going to get better, and after a week shut up in a snow cave we decided to attack the wall regardless. We also didn't have a lot of time left. Thus we began our trials and tribulations. One day we were able to climb 60 meters, another day only 20, then another 40, and every time we returned to the snow cave. Every time we were cold—very! When we descended from the wall it was always dark and the following day we would pass the hours trying to dry the gear out with a gas stove. By then we didn't have any more rope to fix (it hadn't even been in our plans to fix the wall). Our two static lines, the haul line and the 11-mm lead line were stretched out almost 300 meters on the route.

It was already November and we hoped that with the full moon the good weather would begin. And so it did! On November 4, we jugged the lines on the northwest arête of Punta Herron and in the evening bivied in the portaledge beneath the enormous overhangs. On November 5, the weather was beautiful and thus, with the last light of the day, we were almost out of the 250-meter overhanging face. But during the night the weather changed for the worse again. It snowed and the wind began to blow. Continue or give up? The greatest desire was for a warm bed, or for a beach on the Maldives, or a five-star hotel; instead, the most perverted part of our minds pushed us to climb another brief section in the tempest. Then, another bivy in our humid tent. Sometimes you can't understand what makes you go on. That day we overcame the last four pitches that brought us to the summit of the Pillar of Punta Herron, to the exact point where the route *Gracias a la Vida* arrives.



Mauro Giovanazzi on the northwest arête of the west pillar of Punta Herron.

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My idea was to climb to the summit of Punta Herron; Mauro wanted only to get as far as this. I would like... him, no! But I didn't insist. Even I was sick to death of this. I had had enough. There would be another 60-70 meters of rock, then the mushroom, a bivy, nothing to drink, nothing to eat, no sleeping bags, and we were already very cold...

We descended to the portaledge. The last night... the last day on the wall... the snowcave again... paradise.

We had climbed *La Gioconda* (ED, ca. 800m) on the northwest arête of the west pillar of Punta Herron from October 10-November 17, 1998. We were on the wall continuously from November 4-8. The climb was established in good part via aid, primarily because of the conditions of the cracks and the weather. In ten days of climbing, we had only two days of good weather.

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