

4,800m at the base of the west face. On their ascent of Mercedario, they made two camps on the face, the first at 5,700m and the second at 6,000m. The terrain they ascended was mixed, with 60° ice and class 5 rock. They reached the summit on November 20, 1999, at 8 p.m. They pitched their tent at 6,600m at nightfall and descended the next day.

MARCELO SCANU, *Buenos Aires, Argentina.*



Mercedario's 1999 route.

*Nevado del Plomo, El Sendero del León and east ridge.*

A remarkable ascent has been made on the 6,050m (also given as 6,070m) Nevado del Plomo (a.k.a. El Plomo), a high peak in the Juncal Group, located east of Santiago on the Chilean-Argentinean border and 5km south of the better-known Juncal (elevation often given as 6,110m), which have the most extensive glaciers in the Cordillera. The first recorded ascent was in 1910, by German geologist and explorer Frederick Reichert. He reportedly climbed from the Argentinean side, which is technically much harder than an approach from Chile, where the west flank, above the Olivares Valley, is no more than a walk. Inca ruins remain just below the summit. In Jill Neate's scholarly work, *Mountaineering in the Andes*, it is noted that the mountain has an impressive southeast face, presumably unclimbed.

No more. In an 18-hour ascent on January 7 the resident German climber Jürgen Straub made a solo ascent of a direct line on this huge face. He reached the foot of the ca 2,500m wall with a Chilean partner early in the day, but before they had even come to grips with the ascent, the Chilean's crampon broke, and the pair was forced down. After some discussion, Straub decided to go it alone, while his friend made the probable first ascent of the much easier east ridge. After a glacier approach and mixed climbing interrupted by snow/ice fields, Straub came to the crux, a 350m rock pillar high on the wall. He climbed this, reporting difficulties up to VII, after which the angle relented, and easier climbing led to the summit. The route, christened *El Sendero del León*, was considered to be harder than the south face of Aconcagua.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *High Mountain INFO*

*Erika and Yanina, first ascents; Gemelos Este, possible new route.* Gemelos (The Twins) is a mountain near Las Cuevas and the Aconcagua area, near the Chilean border in Argentina's Provincia de Mendoza. A group directed by Glauco Muratti was active here in October 2002. There was much snow, and the approach was a long one from Quebrada de Vargas, passing the Portezuelo Serrata to the base of Gemelos. The group ascended two twin rock towers of ca 4,750-4,800m, both virgin, christening them Erika and Yanina. The steepness was 50°. They also summited Gemelos Este (5,180m) by a possible new route, the Glaciar del Vasco (Basque Glacier).

MARCELO SCANU, *Buenos Aires, Argentina*

*Aconcagua, 2003-2004 season overview.* This season Aconcagua beat its record for visitation. The estimated number of people in Aconcagua Provincial Park was 7,000 (87% foreign, 13%