

itches (up to 5.10d) and around 300m of a snow-and-ice ramp (up to 60°). On our last attempt Nejc injured his hand from stonefall and was unable to climb for a week.

Later in January and in early February I went to the Chalten Massif, where I climbed *Aguja De L'S* via the Josh Aike Route (450m, 6a) with Slovenes Mojca Zerjav and Nastja Davidov, the Benitiers Route on El Mocho (500m, 6c A2) with Mojca, and the Franco-Argentine route on Fitz Roy with Israeli Jhonatan Ben Noshe. So that was my three-month trip to Patagonia: full of bad luck and not as I expected, but fine anyway.

TOMAZ JAKOFCIC, *Slovenia*

*Central Tower of Paine, South African Route.* A team of six Mountain Club of South Africa members—Alard Hufner, Mark Seuring, Michael Mason, Dermot Brogan, Marianne Pretorius, and Voitec Modrzewski—spent December 2003 and January 2004 climbing the South African Route on the Central Tower of Paine. The east face of the Central Tower was first climbed in 1973/74 by a South African team of Paul Fatti, Mike Scott, Art McGarr, Mervyn Prior, Roger Fuggle, and Richard Smithers. At the time it was one of the largest rock faces ever climbed and a milestone in big-wall climbing. This route stayed unrepeated for 30 years. The route follows the obvious corner just right of the center of the tower, and is graded 5.10 A3. We free climbed the slabs of the first 400m and then aided most of the way to the shoulder, where we could free climb again.

Our first day on the rock was December 15, and we reached the summit ridge on January 13. During this period 15 days were spent actually climbing and the rest of the time was spent hauling gear and food or waiting for better weather.

We fixed lines most of the way, to about 250m below the summit of the 1.2km-high face. Ropes were cleaned on descent, but sections snagged on flakes, so we had to cut and leave them. It was fascinating to find sections of iced-up rope and old gear left by the pioneers 30 years ago. Mark, Marianne, Voitec, and I topped out on the summit ridge of the Central Tower. Dermot and Mike were unable to be with us, due to injuries and early flights home. Marianne was the first woman to climb the east face of the Central Tower. We reached the summit ridge at 19:00 in howling winds, gusting mist, and light snowfall. Due to these conditions and the long way back to the portaledges, we decided it was not safe to continue to the summit [only a few easy pitches remained to reach the summit—Ed.]. The joy of finally standing on the top of the South African Route was overwhelming. For 20 minutes we savored our excitement, as wind would clear the mist, revealing breathtaking views of beautiful scenery below.

ALARD HUFNER, *The Mountain Club of South Africa*

*South Tower of Paine, east face, Self Right to Suicide.* In January and February 2004 Boguslaw Kowalski, Wojtek Wiwatowski, and I found ourselves in deserted Torres del Paine. Since we had heard much about bad weather in the area, we came ready for hard conditions. Either the reports are exaggerated, or we were lucky. With so much rock and nobody in sight, we had numerous options. We decided on the South Tower, since it has the highest summit and is the most remote of three towers. Besides, it hosted only three routes and a number of unfinished projects, compared to tens of routes on the other towers. At first we wanted to climb on the

unclimbed south face, but it turns out to be several hundred feet shorter than the larger east face. Therefore, we shifted our interests to the east face and began our climb in the middle of the wall, intending to put a direct line to the top.

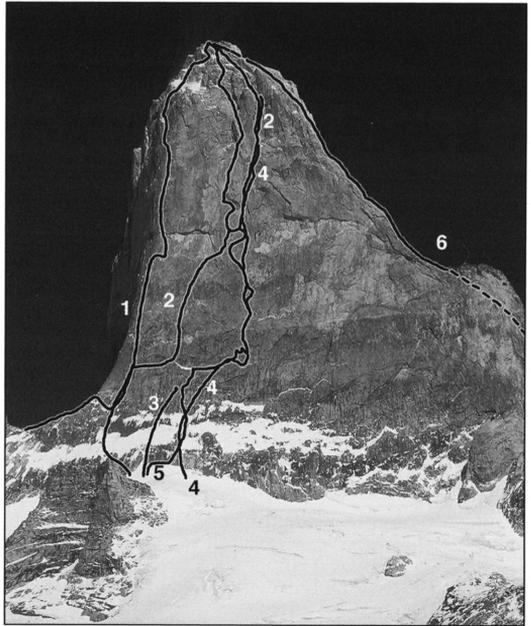
There was an old Swiss line (Piola-Sprungli, 1992) running through the middle of the wall until the upper portions, where it bears slightly to the right. We more or less, having no information on this route at the time, followed it for several pitches, though also climbing harder ground to the left and right of the Swiss line. Only higher up, where the wall became steeper and more compact, did we head through the most monolithic rock on the face, leaving the Swiss line to our right. We came across trashed gear and rappel stations in the middle of nowhere, obviously from past attempts on the east face *direttissima*.

After eight long days of a good fight we covered the crux four pitches leading us to the "Roof of Hope," the most prominent roof on the wall. It was the only hope for us, struggling through a featureless sea of granite, as it seemed that beginning at the roof we would find a continuous system leading to the summit.

Once we placed our hands in the cracks above the roof and put the crampons into the hard ice of the final headwall, we were on top in no time. Drinking beer, of course!

We climbed in capsule style, with a week of fixing and 13 days on the wall. We reached the summit on February 12. We named our route *Self Right to Suicide* (VI 5.10 A4 55°). It gains 825m vertical, but the climbing distance, with traverses, pendulums, etc., is about 1,100m. We hand-drilled dozens of bat-hook holes to connect disappearing cracks and to hook around fragile features. A few bolts, besides the belay stations, were placed as well. Most of the route was an excellent *expando* adventure, and the entire trip was a first-class course in wall logistics. It took us two weeks to get our loads to the base, and a week down. The three weeks of climbing were challenging as well, with snow-swept slabs of the lower apron, waterfalls running through thin *expandos* in the middle wall, and freezing dihedrals on the upper headwall.

Incidentally, the South and Central Paine Towers are smaller than has been claimed. Their east faces at their highest are about 825m and 1,100m high, respectively. The unclimbed south face of the South Tower is therefore no more than 700m high. Although its base is lower than that of the east face, its steep portion ends much lower.



The east face of South Tower of Paine: (1) Hoth (27 pitches, 5.10+ A4 WI2/3, Amelunxen-Easton, 2000); (2) attempt (22 pitches to within 150m of summit, 5.10 A4, Davies-Gordon-Peer, 1985); (3) Slovenian attempt (1987); (4) *En el Ojo del Huracán* (18 pitches plus 250m easier terrain, 6b A4, Piola-Sprungli, 1992); (5) *Self Right to Suicide* (23 pitches, VI 5.10+ A4 55°, 2004); (6) North Ridge (27 pitches, VI- A1, Aiazzi-Aste-Casati-Nusdeo-Taldo, 1963). Route lines and information provided by Chris Belczynski. *Boguslaw Kowalski*