

Several expeditions organized in the coastal Argentinean town of Mar del Plata between 1998 and 2005 opened new routes on Pissis (6,882m, from the north, actual normal), Tres Cruces Sur (from the south, direct), Vallecito (from the northeast), Antofalla (6,440m, from the north, with partners from Mendoza and Salta) [Antofalla's elevation differs depending on the map.—Ed.], and Bonete (from the west-southwest). They also achieved the first modern ascents of Aguada (5,810m) and Archibarca (5,629m), near Antofalla, and Inca del Mar (5,135m), near Laguna de los Aparejos. At the top of these three mountains they found Inca ruins. They also made the first ascents of the last remaining virgin local summits above 6,500m: Pissis's west summit (6,775m), Walter Penck's south summit (6,575m) and Bonete's west summit (6,501m).

While gathering information for the first climbing guide to the Andes' thirteen 6,500ers, between 2000 and 2003 Dario Bracali (Argentina) climbed all the local main summits higher than 6,500m in a simple and fast style. Meanwhile, he explored the area, helping to establish the most direct approaches, and made the first ascent of Lampallo (4,975m), in the Chaschuil Valley.

In a decade of exploration many of the most obvious routes to the highest peaks of the Puna have been climbed. Now it is time for first ascents of subsidiary peaks, harder or less accessible routes, and winter ascents.

GUILLERMO ALMARAZ, *Mar del Plata, Argentina*

CENTRAL ANDES, CHILE

Punta Italia, Direct West Face. This fine mountain had its first ascent in 1934 by Italians Gervasutti and Binaghi. Some routes were established on the 4,863m peak since then, the last being completed on December 21 by Chileans Andrea Garrido, Valentina Rota, Rodrigo Ponce, and David Valdés. They established base camp on the moraine between the glaciers Mesón Alto and Loma Larga. From there it took four to five hours to reach Camp 1. From Camp 1 to the summit, the route (800m, D 35° 5.8) begins with 400m of 35° snow and ice to the base of the west face. It then ascends a chimney and a 20m dihedral of class II/III rock, before continuing up the 400m face, with eight rope lengths up to 5.8 and a final 70m of II/III to the summit.

MARCELO SCANU, *Buenos Aires, Argentina.*

North Tower of Rengo, Séptimo Arte. In February 2005 Francisco Rojas, Dario Arancibia, and I opened a new route, using capsule style, on the North Tower of Rengo, an almost unknown granite peak located in the central Andes of Chile. It is the biggest tower in the valley, but there are other walls and spires around. In fact, just in front of the North Tower there is another huge wall called Solarium, which has trad routes up to 11 pitches, 5.11a, all of them characterized by perfect rock, little protection, and (because of its north orientation) no vegetation. Between these two main features is a little forest, which makes a kind of base camp.

Rengo is a little town 150km south of Santiago. From there it's another 50km to the east, by a very bad road, to arrive to the walls. The good news is you can arrive there by car, so the only walking you will do is 100m from there to the walls. The bad news is there are horses there, and they sometimes have the bad habit of walking over your tent.

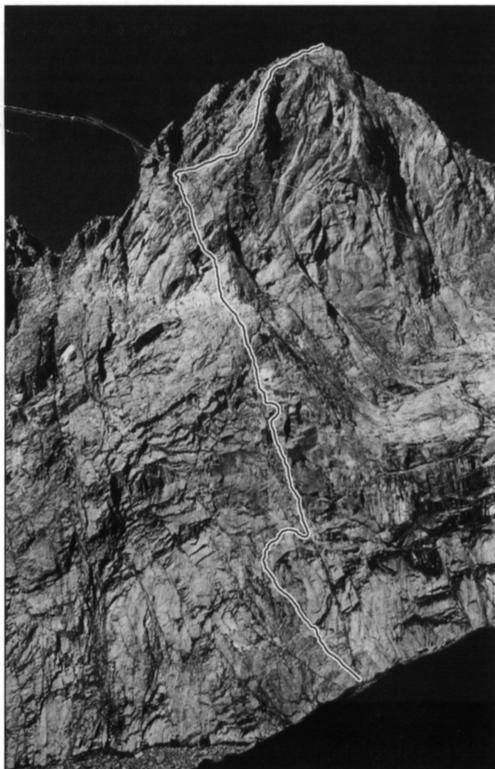
Up and down the valley are smaller cliffs, but still big enough to offer a lifetime of climbing. If you consider that at present there are at most only 20 routes, the potential of the area is clear.

It is en route to a copper mine that is still in the exploration phase. Further climbing development will depend on the mine's access policy once mining begins.

Our route's name is Séptimo Arte (19 pitches, 650m, 5.9 A2+). It's the fourth route in the tower, but the first on the hard left section of the wall (there's still lots of space for new routes to the left of our line) and the first to go from the ground to the summit.

We began February 10, fixing ropes to bypass overhangs and roofs, in rock of average quality. For the first two days we were helped by Felipe González Donoso, who led the most difficult pitch (A2+). After 250m we arrived at the middle section, where we established a bivouac in 5th-class terrain. Then we retrieved our ropes and fixed them again in the upper section, this time being able to climb free all the pitches. We summited on the 18th after a summit push from the bivouac.

RODRIGO FICA, *Abriendo Huella, Chile*



The North Tower of Rengo, showing its first route, Séptimo Arte. Rodrigo Fica

Torres del Brujo, El Condor. Elena Davila, Riccardo Redaelli, and I finally reached Santiago, Chile on December 20 after a long flight from Milan. Our goal was to open a new route in the Azufre River Valley, home of the extraordinary Torres del Brujo. We reached the town of San Fernando by train and bought provisions that would see us through the ten days we expected to spend at base camp. On December 21 we met Don Segundo, who provided two mules and accompanied us to base camp. Since we didn't have much equipment (a few friends, six pitons, nuts, and ten 8mm bolts), two mules would suffice. We reached base camp after two days of walking and a worrisome river fording. The place was fantastic!

On December 23 we reconnoitered the area and promptly observed a beautiful granite pillar furrowed by clean dihedrals and cracks. The pillar was about an hour and a half from base camp, on the virgin walls in front of Torres del Brujo. The approach was tortuous, but the trade-off was not having to cross the glacier, which would prove demanding and dangerous, because elevated temperatures triggered constant avalanches. The next day we fixed the first two pitches. The ascent seemed doable and the climb so far was both unhindered and uncomplicated. We decided to only use bolts to equip belays.

Christmas is a holiday, but for us it was mainly a day of rest. We had equipped 150 meters, halfway to the top of the pillar. From there, a ridge of huge, unsteady boulders leads to the summit. We decided to end our ascent by reaching the top of the pillar the following day.