

a snowstorm. We called our route Crux del Sur (520m, 6c).

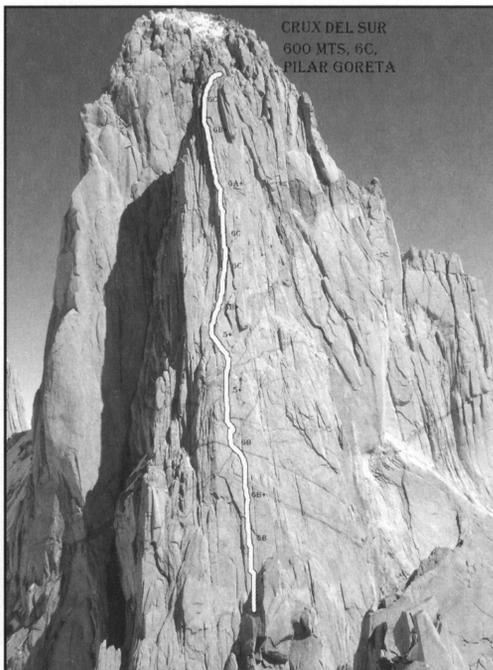
In March Jony Jorzuk, Diego Simari, and I ventured to the northwest pillar of Aguja de la Silla, a virgin line that was on climbers' radar after Rolo Garibotti noted on his website that someone should go climb it. We approached Filo del Hombre Sentado from the north, and without a doubt the crux of the route was the approach. We did part of this traverse unroped, then followed a diagonal line left of an area threatened by stonefall. This got us to the base of the pillar, where we bivouacked, leaving everything there so as to climb light. The climbing turned out to be excellent, with many cracks and wind-worn holes. We carried photos, so as not to lose the line in a labyrinth of cracks and dihedrals that surprised us until the end. We established rappel anchors down the route, which we called Destreza Criolla (500m, 6b+).

LUCIANO FIORENZA, *Argentina, translated by Rolando Garibotti*

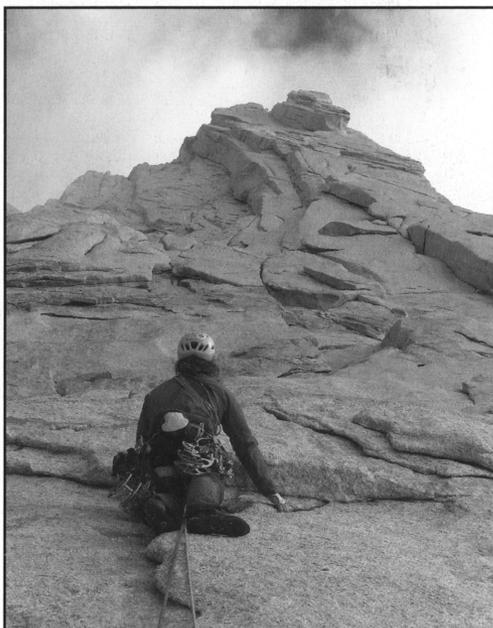
*Mermoz (2,723m) northwest ridge, to Fitz Roy (3,405m), north pillar, link-up.* I opened my eyes to see the wall above us glowing in frozen predawn. Cheyne and I had laid down at our cramped bivouac a few short hours before, sharing one sleeping bag as a blanket and huddling on a pile of ropes, packs, and squares of foam pad. Only 300m of Fitz Roy remained, but our route stretched 1,700m below and a year into the past.

Coming back to Patagonia for a second season, I had one objective, Fitz Roy. The biggest mountain hereabouts, King Fitz dominates its satellite peaks. So while climbing on Agujas Guillaumet, Mermoz, and others is a fun experience on beautiful rock, no alpinist can help but dream of touching Fitz Roy's summit.

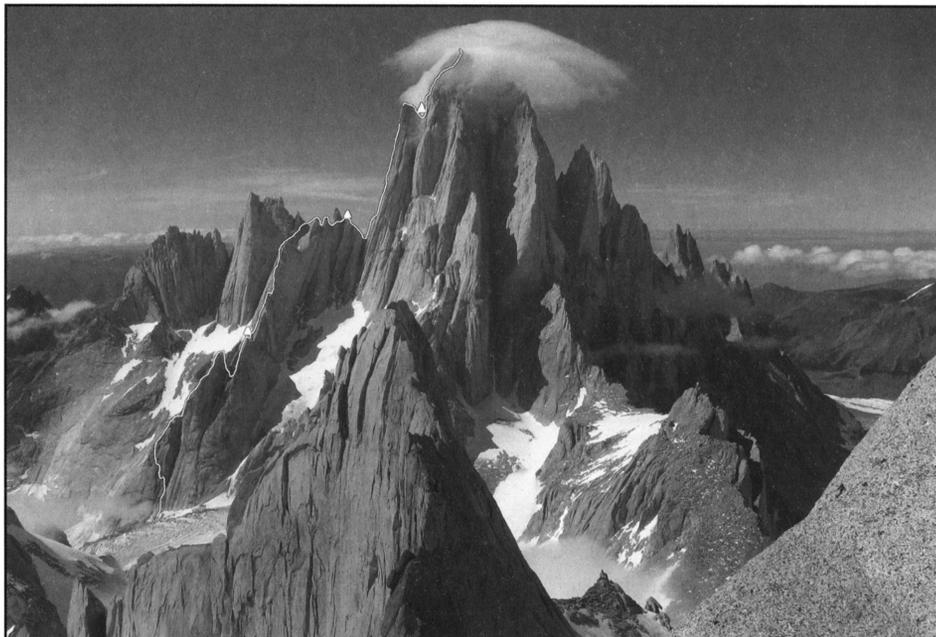
Last year, with Blake Herrington on Cerro Pollone, we could view the entire



Crux del Sur, to summit of Goretta Pillar on Fitz Roy. *Luciano Fiorenza*



Luciano Fiorenza in middle section of Crux del Sur. Route follows right-hand of two arcing corners above. *Sasha Gal*



Guillaumet, Mermoz, and Fitz Roy from west, showing Mermoz's northwest ridge, Fitz Roy north pillar link-up, and bivouacs. *Scott Bennett*



Lempe following northwest ridge of Mermoz on day two. *Scott Bennett*

Fitz Roy massif from the west. From that perspective one line jumped out as the obvious line of strength: a link-up of the northwest ridge of Mermoz with the north (Goretta) pillar of Fitz. I was convinced this was the route to attempt, perhaps one of the last remaining unclimbed lines in the group.

Leaving El Chalten on January 18, 2012, with perfect weather forecast, Cheyne Lempe and I crossed Paso Cuadrado the following morning and, via the North Fitz Roy Glacier, reached the base of Mermoz's northwest ridge. Starting up a major weakness, I eventually used a pendulum and aid to gain

the ridge crest, after which we enjoyed many exposed pitches on good rock. We simulated and soloed on the easy ground and pitched the many steep steps and towers, reaching a nice ledge for our first bivouac.

The second day dawned clear, as it did throughout the climb. The crest steepened above and didn't seem to offer climbable features, so we poked around to the left and found leaning cracks on the north flank. Another half-day of enjoyable, occasionally difficult, ridge climbing brought us to the junction with the main ridge of the Fitz Roy massif. We turned south, following the Care Bear Traverse. We picked a path around little gendarmes, then bypassed Aguja Val Biois on its steep west face. We made our second bivouac just below the Goretta pillar.

On day three I started up perfect splitters in a T-shirt, reveling in the morning sun, but we soon turned a corner into the shade, and I was slowed by wet, icy cracks. Halfway up the pillar Cheyne took the lead and made a diagonal rappel left onto the Casarotto Route, where he battled up wide, wet cracks. This was our longest climbing day; it wasn't until after midnight that we reached the top of the pillar and bivouacked.

The wall above glowing orange, we'd put ourselves in position for success. With 1,700m of climbing below us, and a year of planning and dreaming, we were within striking distance of the summit. However, the icy headwall looked intimidating. Cheyne, having more experience with mixed climbing, changed to boots and crampons, grabbed our tools, and started up. Kicking into brittle ice, he sent showers onto my belay. A few moments of hesitation preceded each move, as he made sure to find solid pick placements in the poor ice. He soon discovered a passage to the right, off the ice and onto rock, and we were back in business.

I led two more long pitches on perfect granite, and soon we gained the final snowfield. After scrambling to the summit, Cheyne and I stood silently, giving thanks for the opportunities, daydreams, and hard work that brought us to the summit of King Fitz.

The North Pillar Sitz Start had free-climbing up to 5.11, with numerous points of aid, pendulums, and rappels. The elevation gain is nearly 2,000m, though with rappels and downclimbing the total gain may be 300m more. We avoided the summits of Mermoz and Val Biois. We descended the Franco-Argentinean Route and, after a final bivouac at Lago de los Tres, reached Chalten on the morning of the 23rd.

Cheyne Lempe, 21, thanks the AAC for a generous Mountain Fellowship grant.

SCOTT BENNETT, AAC

*Editor's note: this was the first continuous ascent of the northwest ridge of Mermoz, the ridge having been climbed in two sections, during November 2001, by Zlatko Koren and Vasja Kosuta as far as a col 100m below the summit. Bennett and Lempe made a significant variation, climbing over 500m of new terrain at the start, left of the original.*

*Poincenot, southwest face, Rise of the Machines.* Over the years Jens Holsten, Mikey Schaefer, and I spent hours studying a high-resolution photo, picking out a line on this aesthetic face. It looked like high-quality, straight-in cracks to where it would join established lines. We were wrong.

We took our time on the approach and even laughed our way up the initial seven free pitches. The laughter stopped at the base of the headwall. The headwall had looked as if it would offer perfect hand cracks. However, this expectation was squashed when Jens led the first pitches of a steep, exfoliating, and all but closed crack. His high-stepping from a 000 C3 to a hook move off an ice tool and Mikey's run-out .75 Camalot crack and subsequent crack switch (read large pendulum), earned them both medals of honor. We repented our optimism often during the three days it took to complete the route.

Mikey led a huge aid block on day two. When the terrain finally broke down, Jens led into the night, arriving at an Ahwahnee Ledge at 1 a.m. The ledge was spacious and the night short.

At 5 a.m. we sat up simultaneously, after dreaming of suffocating and putting in ear plugs because of increasing wind. I led into broken crack systems, with the idea of eventually breaking right to join the established lines. We simul-climbed on moderate terrain and traversed on a red, chossy dike before seeing signs of other routes. I connected lines between tattered anchors