

Mount Burney, Patagonia

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MOUNT Burney is a volcano standing near the northwest corner of the Muñoz Gamero Peninsula, which is about 2000 square miles in area. Though a familiar landmark seen from ships passing through Smyth and Union Channels between Punta Arenas and Puerto Natales, very little was known about the mountain. In 1910 it was reported by a ship's captain to be in a state of violent eruption; and in 1971 further activity was alleged to have been seen by fishermen in the vicinity.

In March, 1962, after our expedition¹ to the Cordillera Darwin, Tierra del Fuego, Cedomir Marangunic and I spent a fortnight attempting to reach Mount Burney from the southeast. This entailed an amphibious journey across the hitherto unvisited interior of the peninsula. From the northwest corner of Seno Skyring we carried our rubber boat (*Zodiac*) across a narrow isthmus known as Paso del Indio to a system of freshwater lakes shown on the Chilean map (plotted from aerial photographs). On reaching the northern extremity of this, we left the boat and started walking towards our objective, still some 12 miles away. But we found our way blocked by another lake system not shown on the map, and we were obliged by lack of time and provisions to abandon the project.

The following January, I repeated the journey with Jack Ewer and John Earle.² This time, by carrying our boat to the new lake system, we succeeded in reaching the foot of the volcano. The weather was atrocious with almost incessant rain, heavy wind and occasional snowstorms, and though during the next sixteen days we made our way right round its base we saw nothing of the upper part of the mountain.

In 1973, with Roger Perry and Peter Radcliffe, I made a third visit to Mount Burney, this time approaching it from the west. On March 1, the Chilean naval patrol ship *Lientur* landed us on the shore of Puerto Muñoz Gamero, a deep bay off Smyth Channel. Less than a mile inland the dense coastal forest gave place to more open country, though our progress was impeded by areas of swamp. Judging by Patagonian standards the weather was reasonably good and we had several views of the

¹ *A.A.J.*, 1963, 13:2, pp. 514-5.

² *A.A.J.*, 1964, 14:1, p. 222.

upper part of the mountain, which is heavily glaciated. On March 7, we established a camp at 2000 feet on one of its western spurs. Two attempts on the summit were frustrated by heavy wind, but on March 10 there was a break which enabled us to reach the top in clear, still weather.

The semi-circular summit ridge is crowned by a number of spectacular ice pinnacles based on an agglomerate of tuff and lava blocks of which the crater rim is composed. From breaches in the crater two large glaciers flow west and north. Subsequently, we found the latter to be advancing into the forest. We saw no fumarole activity though a small crater lake on the southern slopes of the mountain appeared to be of recent origin.

After climbing the mountain, we marched to the northern shores of the peninsula (*Uncón sin Salida* of Pedro Sarmiento), and returned to the west coast on March 23. Throughout this period the weather was bad and we never saw the upper part of Mount Burney again. On March 25, we were picked up by helicopter from H.M.S. *Endurance*.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Southern Patagonia, Chile

FIRST ASCENT: Mount Burney, 5700 feet, March 10, 1973 (Eric Shipton, Roger Perry, Peter Radcliffe).

