

Argentina—Central Andes

Aconcagua, First Female Ascent of the South Face. In January my wife Titoune and I climbed the south face of Aconcagua by the French route, using the Messner finish. This is a superb climb on a par with great classics like the Eiger North Face, El Capitan and the easier long free routes in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. We spent five nights on the face which included 24 hours of waiting out bad weather and avalanches 300 meters from the top. An acclimatized team could easily climb this 3000-meter face with two bivouacs or less, but the great attraction of the climb is that it can be done in less than three weeks from USA to USA, no small concern to gainfully employed technical climbers. Here are some tips which might facilitate the climb. A permit is required and must be obtained in Mendoza at a location which seems to change yearly. Going without it involves a serious risk from the police or military. Mules are helpful to get from Puente del Inca at 9000 feet to Plaza Francia Base Camp at 13,000 feet and can be arranged on the spot. The lower section of the wall has many old and frayed lines; we felt that any advantage of using Jümars was greatly outweighed by the likelihood of the ropes breaking; the rock is only 5.8 anyway! The sérac band separating the middle snowfield from the rock varies from year to year and ranges from moderate snow ramps to 80° ice. We rested two nights on the snowfields to help our acclimatization. The summit is a full day from here and so it is smart to get a good rest and then go for the top and avoid a bivouac on the final icefields, which are swept by avalanches in bad weather. The descent is entirely non-technical and is roughly 30 miles (one day) to Puente del Inca.

JOHN BOUCHARD

Aconcagua, Normal Route, Youngest Person to Ascend. On February 14, Tony Martin, Berkeley Tilton, Richard Garrett, and Ron Garrett reached the summit of Aconcagua by the normal route, the northwest ridge. The ascent was special in that Richard Garrett, at 14 years of age, became the youngest person to climb Aconcagua. After resting two days at Plaza de Mulas Superior, camps were placed at 16,000, 18,000, and 19,800 feet (Berlin). Each camp was occupied two nights for acclimatization. The summit was reached from Berlin in approximately eight hours. The Gran Canaleta was almost completely void of snow which made scrambling up the last few hundred feet to the summit an ordeal of sliding and slipping on loose rocks.

RONALD C. GARRETT, *Talkeetna, Alaska*

Aconcagua, South Face. Sharon Wood and I have just returned from what strikes us as an extraordinary experience. We climbed the French route on the south face of Aconcagua from December 17 to 22. All we can say is that Robert Paragot, who led the first ascent, is an amazing man! We found the route very challenging. I believe that Sharon is the second woman to have climbed the face.

CARLOS BUHLER