

Natales. At 4:30 a.m. on New Year's Day Mike and I left the Rio Frances valley and reached the southwest spur four hours later. The broad arête was set at a pleasant angle. Nine ropelengths of easy fifth class led to a brief rest at a snowpatch below a headwall. Two more fun pitches of laybacking and 5.7 face climbing on immaculate rock landed us at a high notch and the *Chilean Route*. Our high point was the infamous black rockband. Like the British, who nearly bagged the first ascent in 1968, we were stymied by the devious routefinding on the mountain's final reaches. The immensity of the upper slopes were complicated by a veritable maze of crests and spires tilted at crazy angles. Having climbed 19 pitches in nine hours along with lots of loose third class, we decided to turn back. After a cold bivy, we arrived in basecamp 31 hours after leaving it.

TAD WELCH

*Fortaleza, Solo Ascent.* I was on my way to the Fitz Roy area, trekking in the Torres del Paine. At the suggestion of some Chilean climbers who had done the route, I soloed the *Original Route* on the Fortaleza. This route, on the west side above the Rio Frances Valley, was first done by a British team in the early 1960s. From my base at Campo Britanico I got a late start and found myself slogging up soft snow in the relentless gulley at the start of the route. The crux pitch above, the so-called "300-foot vertical ice shaft," was about 50 meters long and laid-back Grade 3 ice. Above, rock and easy mixed climbing, some sections still fixed with rope, led to a long, circuitous scramble to the summit. Climbing time was about seven hours. The route is littered with remnants of the first ascent, which was inexplicably sieged.

A few days later Peter Appel of Sante Fe arrived at Campo Britanico with his wife Sarah Wood. The next day was perfect, so Peter and I headed to the popular Aleta de Tiburon (the Shark's Fin). We completed a route, perhaps new, on the northwest face. We simul-climbed most of the 5.8, 1500-foot face, then rappelled the same line and were back at camp before dark.

CHARLIE FOWLER, *unaffiliated*

*Central Tower of Paine, Insumisoa.* It was reported that in February the Spanish team of Raúl Melero, Mikel Sáenz, Xabier Urdanoz and Pepe Rayo finished a route begun in 1994, *Insumisoa* (VI 6b+ A4, 1200 meters). Further details are lacking. (*Desnivel*)

*Torres del Paine, Various Ascents.* Eli Helmuth and I visited the Paine Towers area from January to February 20. After setting up basecamp on the Japanese Camp, we took advantage of some good weather and ascended the Via Monzino on the North Tower. Later, after one unsuccessful attempt, we went on to climb the Bonington-Whillans route on Torre Central, on which