

enough to see until 10 or so. I made it back to the notch in exactly one hour and 30 minutes, rapping the whole way except maybe 20 to 100 feet of downclimbing here and there on 3rd-class terrain. I stashed my rope and gear at the top of the couloir and headed to my cave camp, which I reached by 11:15 p.m.

The next day, December 30, Steve "Lucky" Smith and I left the cave at about 6 a.m. We made it to the top of the couloir by 11 a.m. or so and started the Bonington route on the Central Tower at about 1 p.m. I lead the first two pitches and Lucky the next three, then we simul-climbed to one pitch from the top, switching leads once. We topped out at about 7 p.m., having done the whole route from the notch in six hours, 15 minutes. We made it back to the notch in about three hours and were back to the cave at about midnight.

Two days later, on January 1, Lucky and I started up the British/Strappo unfinished route (see AAJ 1997, pp. 260-1) on the Central Tower at about 11 a.m. We swung a few leads each. When we were about 100 meters short of the Brit's high point (where the booty bag is), snow was building up on my arms and protection. We decided to retreat, and did, without much trouble, other than messes of torn rope confusing us at times all down the route.

On January 12, Lucky and I started up the *Cave Man* route in the French Valley. It was about noon when we started the first pitch. There was snow covering the slabs leading up to the route and we had to belay four times before getting to the base of the route proper. We made it up six pitches; it was 7 p.m. We hadn't really intended on getting this far when we left camp, so we didn't have full bivy gear, or enough food. We opted to retreat. On the last technical rappel, we wrapped tattered rope around a thread and backed it up. Lucky went first; it held. Then I went, and, while "bumping" the knot around to avoid a snag, the thread of rock broke. I slid 30 feet, rolled onto the talus, and came out of it with a broken thumb and a bad road rash on each hip.

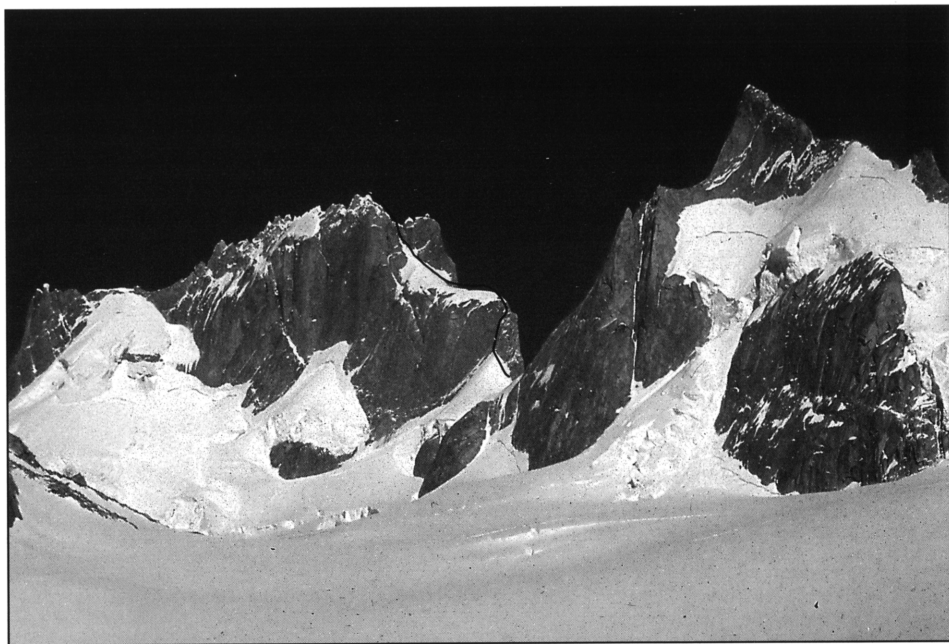
HANS FLORINE, *unaffiliated*

ARGENTINE PATAGONIA

Cerro Piergiorgio, Esperando La Cumbre, and Other Activity. Maurizio Giordani and I made the first ascent of the northwest spur of Piergiorgio (east summit) via *Esperando La Cumbre* (VI+ A1, 850m), which included couloir ice up to 75° (WI4) and mixed climbing using only pitons, with belays equipped on the ridge. We climbed it in alpine style on December 3, 1996. We approached the mountain and bivouacked in an igloo beneath the northwest face (the location of our 1995 attempt, *Gringos Locos*, which we intended to complete). We verified that the fixed ropes left on the wall the year before had been destroyed by wind, and changed our itinerary.

On December 4, we departed across the glacier between Piergiorgio and Cerro Pollone. We began to climb a glacier and mixed couloir that brought us to the snowy col between Pollone and Piergiorgio (VI- A1 WI4, four pitches). We bivouacked at the col after having climbed the eastern foresummit of Cerro Pollone (easy).

On December 5, we began the northern spur of Piergiorgio, where we found traces of previous attempts (Cesarino Fava and Augusto Mengelle, 1963). The first part was on rock and couloir ice (VI A1 WI3, five pitches), then easy snow (passing the point where *Pepe Rajo* on the north face ends), then up three pitches of rock (VI+) to the summit crest of Piergiorgio (East Summit). We descended the route to the col, then began the long traverse beneath the east slope of Piergiorgio toward Fitz Roy. We followed all the ice of the Pollone Glacier, reaching the Cuadrado Pass at around 1 a.m., a little beneath which we bivouacked. The next



Cerro Piergiorgio, showing Esperando la Cumbre (Cerro Pollone is to the right). GIANLUCA MASPE

day we descended to the Piedra del Fraile.

On December 8, I made the third solo ascent of Aguja Guillaumet's entire northwest spur (following the 1990 Giordani variation plus the 1965 Argentine route) (VII- AO, 1000m) in five hours, self-belaying on only the most difficult pitch.

GIANLUCA MASPE, *Italy*

Cerro Marconi Norte. It was reported that Maurizio Giordani climbed a new route (5.5, 500m), solo, on the north flank of Cerro Marconi Norte, on December 9, 1996. (*High Mountain Sports* 176)

Effects Of El Niño On Patagonia's 1997-'98 Climbing Season. Briefly explained, El Niño is a sporadic warm water current that flows clockwise from west to east along the equator and then south along South America's west coast against the normal polar current. In an "El Niño year," water temperature on the South American coast rises about 3°C, increasing rainfall significantly. Peru usually is the most severely affected country and influences in Chile decrease with higher southern latitudes.

According to locals, the winter of 1997 was mild and warmer than usual, and spring was rainy, also with temperatures above average. But then, after a still rainy January, almost three continuous weeks of good weather followed in February! El Niño revealed itself not only as a long period of good weather, but also with higher temperatures during 1997. The snow line on the Southern Patagonian Icefield was much higher this year than usual. Crossing the Icefield became a painful adventure. In February, Soames Flowerree (Chile), José Vélez (Ecuador), Derek Churchil (Chile) and Ralph Rynning (Norway), who crossed the Southern Patagonian Icefield from Jorge Montt Glacier to Paso del Viento, had to work very hard under