

ARGENTINA

CORDILLERA DE LA TOTORA

Ascents in the Cordillera de la Totorá. This big but little-known range in San Juan has many unclimbed peaks. There were some ascents in the late 1970s, including the highest peak, Cerro de la Totorá (5770m). Some years ago, a Spanish team climbed some minor summits.

In October, Nèstor Pèrez, Mauricio Bianchi, Bernardo Heredia and I were joined by veteran José Luis Fonrouge. We reached the abandoned mine of La Alumbra and continued with our vehicle along a precarious track. Next day we continued walking the Rio de la Alumbra and the Arroyo (Creek) Pedrazal. The rocky creek was the natural access to the heart of the range. We camped at 3000 meters. The next camp (3800m) was erected by a huge erratic block near the glacier of Las Totoras. Finally we continued via a moraine to a camp (4100m) in a cirque at the range's border. We left early on October 15. Pèrez, Heredia and I went to a 5180-meter unclimbed pyramidal peak. We climbed a snow line on the north face, then followed an unstable ridge. Pèrez gave up only 80 meters short of the top. Heredia and I stood on the previously unclimbed summit at 5 p.m. with an excellent view toward Mercedario, Aconcagua and other mountains. The other group ascended the long northeast ridge of Cerro Piramide (5593m), reaching its untrodden summit at 4:30 p.m. This was perhaps the highest unclimbed peak of the region. They descended directly via snow gullies. On October 16, we descended to our vehicle.

MARCELO SCANU, *Buenos Aires, Argentina*

Cerro Campanario, Attempt. In January, Diego Iglesias, Diego Socolinsky and Gabriel Brenta attempted Cerro Campanario (ca. 5400m), a rock spire they had tried in 1992 via *Yellow Pipi*, a difficult route first climbed in 1986. On their latest attempt, Camp II was established at 3700 meters, the last place with water. The next camp was at the base of the glacier. They discovered a dihedral in the southeast pillar, which they reached after climbing the glacier and a couloir (55°). They climbed seven pitches (6a A2) but were turned back two easy rope lengths short of the summit by the lateness of the hour and the fact that they did not have bivy gear.

MARCELO SCANU, *Buenos Aires, Argentina*

CENTRAL ANDES

Aconcagua, General Overview. The tallest peak in the Western Hemisphere had a tough season. The normal routes up the 22,832-foot peak are non-technical, and easy access to high altitude has proved increasingly deadly in recent years as more people have attempted the mountain and the weather has worsened. In the 1998 season, the mighty El Niño pelted Aconcagua with high winds, rain and snow, and as many as 15 climbers were killed. Unlike the heavily publicized Everest tragedy, these climbers died one to three at a time over a three-month stretch, and thus went virtually unnoticed by the public.

I worked as a guide on the Polish Glacier side of the mountain and was amazed at what I saw and heard. Teams were pinned in Camps I and II for a week or more by poor weather. Four bodies were stacked in Camp II. A German climber in his late teens lay frozen near the

summit on the Polish Direct. (He had been feeling tired and was encouraged by his partners to take a nap and catch up when he felt better.) Three Brazilians were avalanched off the technical and massive South Face, and an American froze to death while climbing alone in a storm on the Normal Route.

The official number of deaths could not be attained, because the Argentine permit office feared the impact on tourism. I was more-or-less escorted out once the officials learned of my request for information. However, rangers in Base Camp gave an unofficial estimate of 13 to 15 killed. Although all guides agreed the weather was worse then they had ever seen on Aconcagua, unsound decisions to push for the summit are behind most of the deaths.

KENT MCCLANNAN, *unaffiliated*

Walther Penck, Ojos del Salado Region. Walther Penck, near Ojos del Salado, is one of the world's highest volcanoes. In February, a group led by Jaime Surez climbed a sub-summit: Volcan de los Arianos (6562m). This was perhaps the first ascent of this summit.

MARCELO SCANU, *Buenos Aires, Argentina*

Ojos del Salado Area, Various Ascents and Observations. From February to March, I was in northern Chile and Argentina in the area south of Ojos del Salado with a group of seven, all from Germany: Martin Blumenstock, Fritz Felber, Michael Fuchs, Werner Geys, Alexander Hartlein, Bernd Tarnosky, and Manfred Unterholzner. Five of us (Blumenstock, Fuchs, Hartlein, Tarnosky, and me) climbed Veladero (6436m), a peak near Bonete Chico. We found only a pick ax on the summit, which had probably been left by Johan Reinhard in 1985 or 1986. Two days later, we tried to climb Bonete Chico (6759m) but failed to reach the summit due to a heavy storm. In Jagüe we met Sr. Urriche, who made the first ascent of Bonete Chico with Cicchitti in 1970. In 1954, Cicchitti climbed Pissis, but he thought he had climbed Bonete Grande. He wrote of a mountain with four or five very high summits and he saw a very high mountain south of the mountain he climbed. This means he was on Pissis and what he saw was Bonete Chico. Walther Penck, who said he had climbed Bonete in 1913, most likely reached the summit of a nameless mountain (6222m) about eight kilometers north of Bonete Chico. He came from the east along the Rio de la Tamberia. A sketch in his book, *Puna de Atacama*, shows the route to a summit north of what is now called Bonete Chico.

Later Felber, Fuchs, Geys, and Tarnosky climbed Ojos del Salado (6885m) while Blumenstock, Hartlein, Unterholzner and I reached the summit of Tres Cruces South (6749m), where we found a broken ski-pole, a note of Greg Horne's (1995)—and an old box with Paryski and Osiecki's calling card from November 26, 1937! So they didn't climb the central peak on this day as is written in Jill Neate's *A Survey of Andean Ascents, Second Edition*.

ALEXANDER VON GOTZ, *Deutschen Alpenverein*

TIERRA DEL FUEGO

Monte Sarmiento, Attempt. Nelson Bareta and Nativo Fransen of Brazil, and Eduardo Lopez, Mariano Sebesta, and Walter Rossini of Argentina departed December 14 from Puerto Bahía Mansa with the goal of repeating the 1995 route on Monte Sarmiento. During their 29 days