

and we had two days of sun. On January 12, Carsten and Andy climbed the 900-meter east face of the easternmost Grupo la Paz in seven hours. The rock quality is poor compared to the typical Patagonian granite. It seems to be a young granite with a lot of loose rock. Nevertheless, the south faces have quite a lot of demanding climbing possibilities. The established route has 14 pitches and is called *Cuando Cambia la Luna* (V 6a). The following day, Carsten, Anke and Vicky went to the summit of a mountain east of the Grupo La Paz via the southeast face. The route follows a ca. 50-degree ice field in the lower part. In the upper part, the rock climbing is quite easy (fourth class).

CARSTEN VON BIRCKHAHN and ANKE CLAUSS, *Germany*

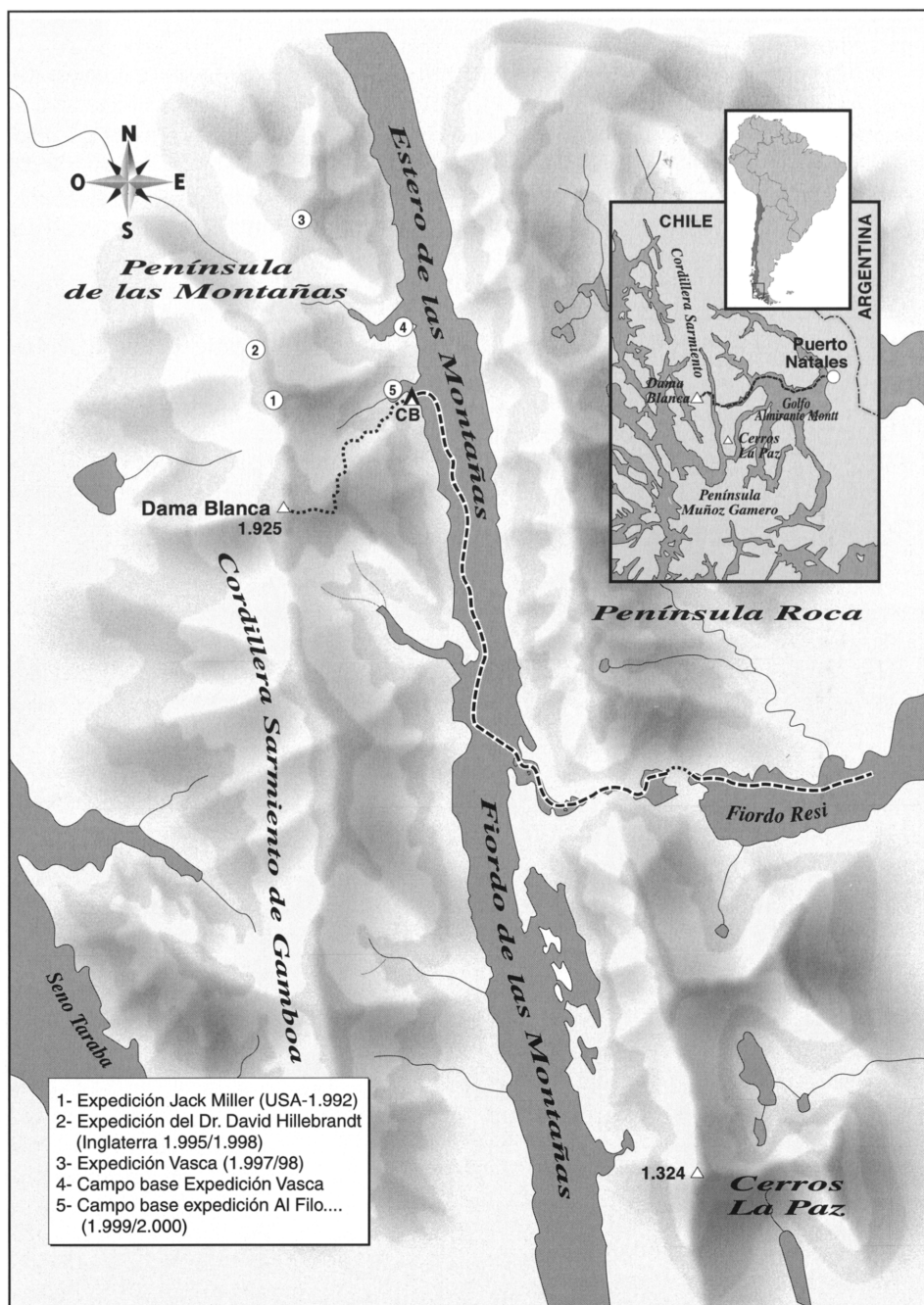
*La Dama Blanca and Grupo La Paz, East Summit, Ascents.* Jose Carlos Tamayo and I left Puerto Natales on November 13 in our sea kayaks, pointing our bows toward Resi Fjord. The Cordillera Sarmiento de Gamboa was our final destination. Meanwhile, our climbing partner, Jesus Martin, got under way on the fishing boat La Katita with all of the equipment to survive for two months at the foot of the virgin mountain called La Dama Blanca (the White Lady), the highest summit of the range.

The objective of this expedition was to try to arrive at the summit of the mountain, filming the entire endeavor for the Spanish television program, "Al Filo de lo Imposible." For that, the film team, made up of Sebastian Alvaro, Esteban Velez, Manolo Rojo and Daniel Salas, intended, aside from surviving the climate, to film the kayak crossing, the set-up of Base Camp and the approach to the mountain. Fortunately, the weather did not prove to be too severe, and, after some intense experiences, we managed to accomplish this objective.

On November 15, the film crew made the return trip, leaving the three of us with everything ready for the climb. We had the luck of living through a spell of very adverse weather



*La Dama Blanca. The Quesada-San Vicente route climbs up the glaciated slopes from the left to the summit. IÑAKI SAN VICENTE (courtesy of DESNIVEL magazine)*



*Fiordo de las Montañas is actually Canal de las Montañas. Map courtesy of DESNIVEL magazine.*

that did not leave us the slightest possibility of trying the route. After various attempts at setting up intermediate camps, the severity of the conditions made it clear to us that it did not make sense to fight against the great elements.

At this point, the day arrived when Jose Carlos and Jesus had to leave. On December 28, we abandoned the Canal de las Montañas aboard La Katita. We left a tent installed at BC in anticipation of new reinforcements. On January 18, with a new climbing partner, Rafael Quesada, we left Puerto Natales aboard a fishing boat. We used a local ferry to arrive at the Canal de Las Montañas. With our kayaks, we soared up the canal in two days and were able to paddle right to BC. The weather continued without respite and was so cold that we were only able to explore the lower surrounding areas and paddle around in the kayaks.

On February 8, we left at 3 a.m. from a bivouac at 715 meters above sea level. A calm night of high clouds permitted us to climb to the plateau at the foot of La Dama Blanca to see a beautiful sunrise at 1330 meters. The route was obvious; a spur that begins between the south and north summits kept us safe from the sunbathed seracs. The north summit is the higher of the two, and only the last 120 meters were difficult. After numerous bergschrunds, we arrived at a 60-degree scoop with more vertical sections. The final 80-degree couloir put us on the secondary summit eight hours after leaving our bivouac. The summit and the landscape were worthy attributes of the savage, Patagonian beauty. The reading we got at the summit (1925m) was a bit higher than our map from the Chilean Maritime Geography Institute, but this inspired more confidence in me in view of the rapid atmospheric pressure changes.

In a few hours we had put an end to the excuse of occupying this peninsula. After gathering up BC, we left, towing our equipment to the Grupo La Paz on the rock peninsula—rock towers that had accompanied us in this country for so many days. The barometer reached its highest point on the trip and on February 15 we climbed the east summit on the first splendid day of the whole season. In a twisted landscape, an easy climb permitted us a lovely view of the panorama of these savage mountains. One more time, the exacting governess of Patagonia invited us to return.

IÑAKI SAN VICENTE, *Spain*

*Cerro San Valentin, Ascent, and Hielo Patagonico Norte, Traverse.* Two of us, Tomasz Schramm and Andrzej Smialy, had as our goal to make a traverse of the northern part of the Hielo Patagonico Norte as well as to climb the highest mountain in Patagonia, Cerro San Valentin (4058m). We were asked many times if we were mad and were informed, by the way, that there are better ways to commit suicide.

After landing on the shore of Laguna San Rafael, we started our pilgrimage toward San Valentin on November 23, 1999. Because of nasty crevasses in the lower part of the San Rafael glacier, we proceeded on the rock of the glacier bed. This took six days, at which point we were welcomed by the crevassed surface of the glacier. We had heavy loads, so we were forced to walk the same distance several times, which is why it took us until December 4 to reach the main plateau. Our pulkas helped to turn our walk on the glacier into a pleasure. After we survived on a huge, steep, fog-covered, crevassed ice field, the way to the top of San Valentine was open. So we used it. We hugged one another on a summit after a nine-hour climb in a blizzard. Then we headed toward Cerro Cristal on the main ridge of the Andes. Unfortunately, "El Respiro" (our name for the blizzard on Hielo) had the same plan. We quickly made one another's acquaintance and in six days of struggle we walked just over ten kilometers. In very poor visibility, we got lost a bit (our GPS was helpless—there *are* white spots on a map) and at last