

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

we stood on a pass between Mocho and Cerro Fierro (perhaps the first to do so). During the next two days we struggled with blizzards and gravity on steep snow slopes, ice and rock cliffs, making seven rappels en route. When we set foot on the flat surface of a glacier, we called our newly opened route down from the Hielo "Desperado Pass."

A week-long trek back to human settlements led us through the rough and hazardous terrain of the Fierro and Leon river valleys. We crawled over house-sized rocks, through the green hell of Patagonian bush and across the Rio Leon at the end. Berries are common there, and we fed ourselves on them during the last days when our expedition food was gone. We spent 35 days on this walk (from Laguna San Rafael to El Pedregal farm) instead of the 26 we had planned.

ANDRZEJ SMIALY, *Polish Alpine Club*

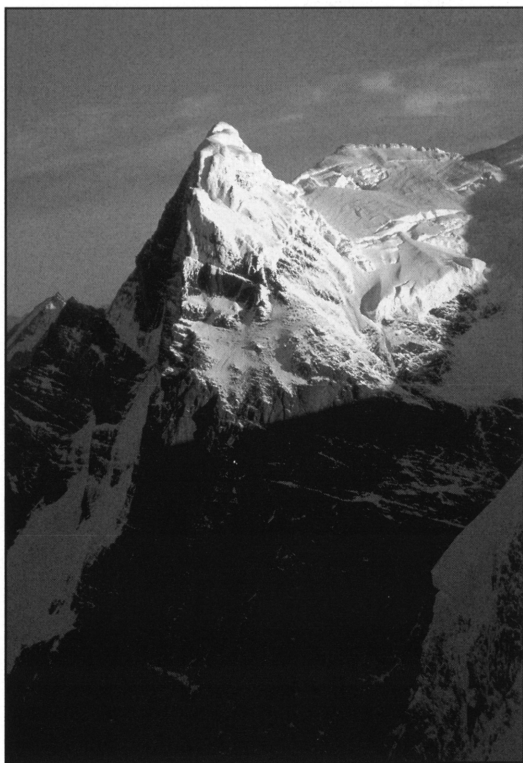
*Hielo Patagonico Sur, North to South Traverse.* Mostly unknown territory, the Hielo Patagonico Sur, 400 kilometers long by 80 kilometers wide, is the third-biggest ice plateau in the world. Its weather is the worst in the world and in the middle lies the infamous Reichert Fault.

Many have tried to cross it from north to south, but all met with failure due to the complex logistics, the extreme conditions and the commitment of walking 400 lonely kilometers. The most noteworthy attempts have been that of the Spanish team in 1992 and Arved Fuchs

et al (German) in 1995. In 1996, Pablo Besser and I made an unsupported attempt with Jorge Crossley (Chile) but failed due to inexperience. After climbing down the Reichert Fault, we left the Ice after 54 expedition days.

On October 24, 1998, Pablo Besser (expedition leader), Mauricio Rojas, José Pedro Montt and I stood at the starting point of the Ice Cap, the Jorge Montt Glacier. Without mechanical help or human contact, we began an almost-unsupported expedition (we had one cache in the middle) walking day by day, carrying 100 kilos each, combating humidity, crevasses, storms, wind and a stark landscape.

Fifty days later we arrived at the Reichert Fault, the most important obstacle in the traverse. We down-climbed to the bottom of the Fault, took our loads and made the first (and obligatory) ascent of East Bastion, climbing it because it stood in our way. Near the summit, we spent nine terrible days in a snow cave waiting for good weather. Finally we were able to rappel 620 meters (150 overhanging)



*The north face of the unclimbed Paredon Peak (2256m) as seen from East Bastion.*

RODRIGO FICA PÉREZ