

their normal routes in as continuous a push as possible. I started climbing up the North Tower via the Monzino route at 8:30 a.m. and summited at 9:11 a.m., for a time of 41 minutes. (Two weeks earlier I had made the climb in 35 minutes.) I roped up only for the initial 70 meters.

After descending the North Tower I began climbing the Central Tower via the Bonington-Whillans route at 9:55 a.m. and summited at 5:14 p.m., for a time of 7:19. On the summit ridge I encountered newlyweds Mike and Allison Pennings, who were on their way down after summing a few minutes earlier.

A brief weather check on the summit revealed completely clear skies, with a view to the Pacific Ocean, so I began the committing rappels down the south face of the Central Tower. A 2,000-foot descent down the Grupo Ragni route, with 16 rappels and some scrambling, landed me on the big walkway that crosses the west face of the Central Tower at about 10:30 p.m. I hunkered down for the night in just my clothes. I do not think I slept, but I got some much-needed rest. At 7:00 a.m. on February 17 I got moving again under perfect skies. I continued my descent, pioneering a way down a 400-foot face that landed me in the large couloir between the Central and South towers.

At 10:25 a.m. I started up the Asti route and summited the South Tower at 7:50 p.m., for a climbing time of 9:25. After 15 minutes on top, with the weather still holding, I began my descent and arrived at the bottom six hours later at about 2:00 a.m. At 6:00 a.m. I staggered back into Campamento Japanese, for a round-trip time of 51 hours from base camp to base camp.

This was my fifth attempt to make the Tower Traverse (or link-up). Along the way I climbed the North Tower four times, the Central Tower twice, and the South Tower once. I also endured three open bivouacs, two full-blown epic retreats from near the Central Tower's summit, one life-threatening rockfall, and an emotional rollercoaster. It is the first traverse/link-up of the Towers of Paine, solo or otherwise.

STEVE SCHNEIDER, AAC

PINGO VALLEY

La Mascara, Ilusiones and Duncan's Dihedral; Paine Chico, West Face; Cuernos. In early January 2002 Englishmen Andy Cave and Leo Houlding did the second ascent of and free climbed the route *Ilusiones* on the east face of *La Mascara*. *Ilusiones* was first climbed in January 2001 by Spaniards Alonso, Martos, and Pelaez. Cave and Houlding found it not to be extremely hard, managing to free it all at around 7a (5.12a), with some bad loose rock. They fixed 140 meters of rope on a rainy, windy day and came back down, then two days later climbed to the summit in nine and a half hours, descending in four hours.

Also in early January 2002 Dave Hesleden and Simon Nadin (U.K.) did the second ascent of *Duncan's Dihedral* (700m, 6b+ A1) on *Mascara's* south face. This route was first climbed by J. Copp and J. Merriam (U.S.) in 1998. Hesleden and Nadin found very cold conditions upon turning to the south-southwest side, as well as much loose rock.

Later in January Hesleden and Nadin climbed *Paine Chico* (also known as *Almirante Nieto*) via a couloir on the right side of the west face and then a snow ramp leading back to the left. They also did a five-pitch route immediately left of the prominent gap between the *Cuernos*. They found belays in place for the first three pitches but not beyond.

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