

Aconcagua, 2002-2003 season overview. Aconcagua Park saw a record 5,519 people enter for trekking or climbing, 20 percent more than last year. This increase can be explained by the devaluation of the Argentine peso and by a series of improvements in the park. Two million pesos collected as fees had been reinvested in the park, a considerable amount, though the Gendarmeria Nacional (Border Police) helicopter had more work. There were 208 evacuations (153 the previous season) and, unfortunately, three deaths are a reminder that, while the normal route is easy technically, the altitude, climate, and other factors make the ascent dangerous. In one day in January there were 11 evacuations. On the other hand, there are seven additional rangers, and 180-kg barrels have been installed in the bathrooms to collect organic waste. Despite this ecological improvement, there are no such facilities in Nido de Condores and Berlin camps, and human waste there is a real problem.

The traditional wine feast, Fiesta de la Vendimia, attended in Mendoza, also took place in Plaza de Mulas this year. Also, there was a reality show! It was produced by TV3 from Cataluna, Spain. These people threw a big party in the Geotrek pub in Plaza de Mulas. Other climbers couldn't sleep until 4 a.m.! The pub was banned.

A 74-year-old woman reached 6,000m, and a 14-year-old reached the summit, the youngest girl to do so. On some days there was a line of climbers in the Canaleta, waiting their turn to summit. On January 27, 40 climbers reached the top. Even as late as the end days of March, out of the regular season, climbers, including a well-known Argentine actor and his guides, summited Aconcagua.

A remarkable ascent was achieved by Frenchman Bruno Sourzac. He climbed the French Route, Messner Variation, on the south face. He was alone in base camp beginning December 1, but bad weather and snow prevented him from attacking the route. Finally, on December 12 he climbed the route nonstop, without assistance, from base camp in Plaza Francia to the end of the difficulties at the Filo del Guanaco, between the summits, in only 22 hours. He reported that the face, due to the middle seracs, was very exposed and dangerous, and recommends getting information from rangers or local guides before deciding to try the route. (*In spite of poor conditions and continuous avalanches in the upper part, which forced him to stop for several hours in the Messner exit before continuing, Sourzac's ascent was likely the second fastest of Aconcagua's south face, and his time includes the approach. Although Austrian Thomas Bubendorfer climbed the face in 15 hours in 1991, he received considerable support from other climbers, who carried gear and broke trail for him on the first half of the route—Ed.*)

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*

CENTRAL ANDES AND NORTHERN PATAGONIA, CHILE AND ARGENTINA

Various ascents and ski descents. A dry winter in several areas James Bracken and I were interested in required us to adopt a "go where there's snow" approach. Unfortunately, where there's snow in the Andes, there's often prodigious wind. Bariloche, Argentina proved to have the right stuff in terms of terrain, but a warm, dry late winter left the snowlines high on the peaks. Off we went north, to ski volcanoes in the central cordillera en route to a reconnaissance of the South American ski mecca, Las Leñas. First the great volcano Lanin spit us out like watermelon seeds, then the spectacular Valley of the Volcanoes, home to over 20 3,000m-to-4,000m ski peaks and no skiers to be found. We found fabulous objectives but winds as a savage and cruel as those in