

*Desmochada, Puerta Blanca.* On February 7 Mario Walder (Austria) and I hiked in from Campo Bridwell to Niponino, the camp directly below El Mocho. In unstable weather we waited another day and only hiked to the base of the route to check everything out.

At 6 a.m. on the 9th we hiked to the base of the Desmochada's west face. Our route starts at the left end of the face and follows the obvious ramp system to the beginning of the snow and ice couloir that separates de la Silla from Desmochada. From the narrow col atop the couloir, the route follows the north buttress (the descent route from the Bridwell line, El Condor) directly to the summit.

We climbed the first 300m of easy low-angle ramps to the start of roped climbing, on a beautiful, grey pillar of the best granite. After six pitches we gained easy terrain and continued to the big ramp. Seven wild pitches brought us to the couloir between de la Silla and Desmochada. The couloir, with 40-50° snow and ice, is not hard, and we reached col—the "Puerta Blanca"—where we spent the night.

The next morning we climbed the 250m buttress that leads directly to the summit. First, two pitches of mixed climbing in iced-up cracks, then four pitches of beautiful and pleasant climbing, and at 12 noon we reached the top of Desmochada. After many rappels we reached our tent at Niponino in late afternoon and returned to Campo Bridwell the next morning.

We climbed the route without previous exploring, fully alpine style. Most of the route had been climbed during previous attempts, but, as far as we know, nobody had reached the summit by this route. Because of the snowfall in the days just before our ascent, some of the wall was iced-up and made for difficult climbing. Due to the cold and icy conditions we didn't redpoint all the pitches.

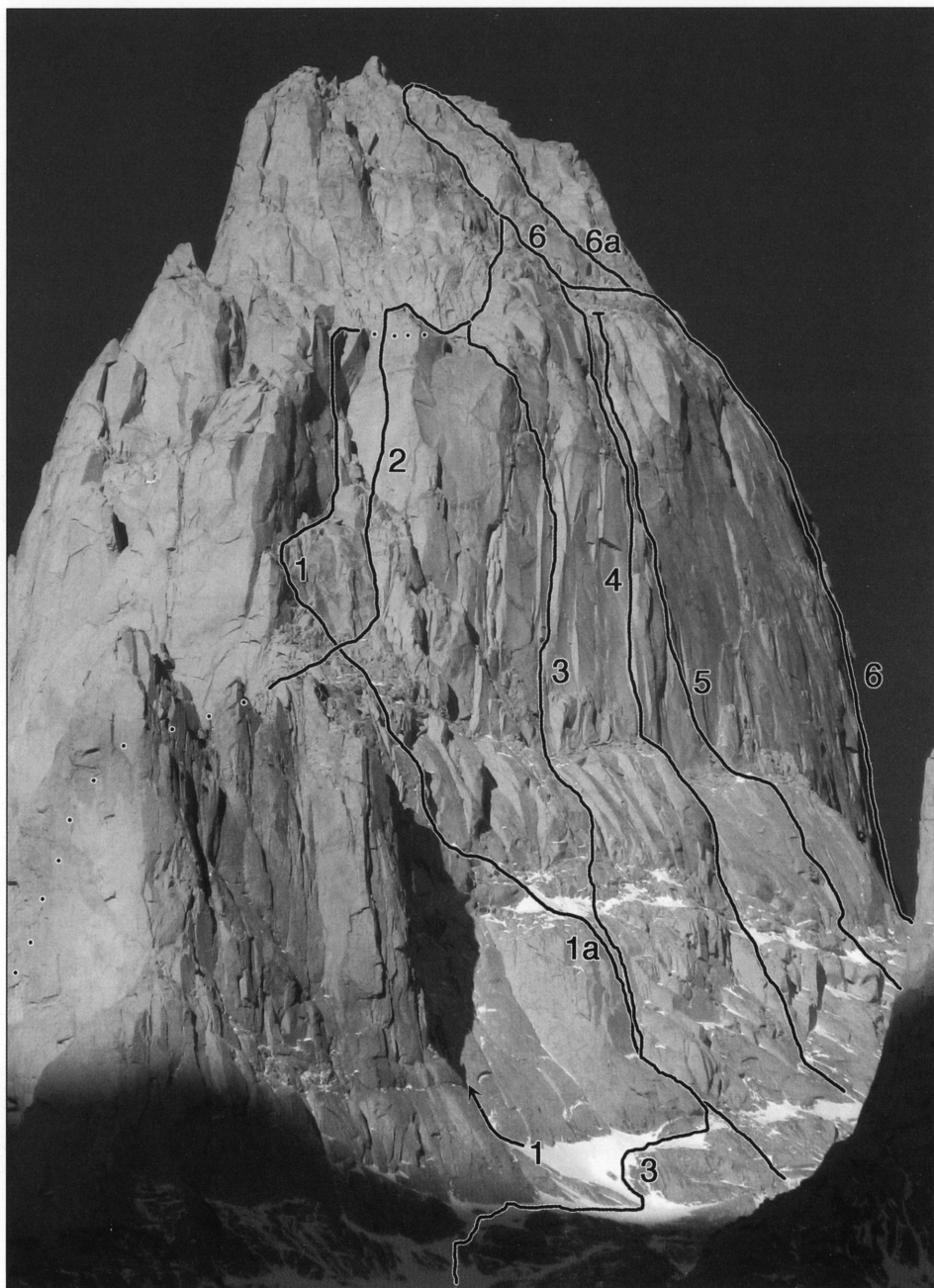
Although not hard technically, the route is highly alpine, challenging, and long (1,300m, 5.10 A0). It is exposed to objective dangers, especially low. Due to its ever-changing terrain, the climbing demands experience, logistically and tactically. To repeat the route, we recommend bringing Camalots 0-4, a full set of stoppers, three ice screws, crampons, and ice axes. A small set of pitons might help, though they aren't essential. Aside from the rappel stations, there is no fixed gear on the route.

ALEXANDER HUBER, *Germany*

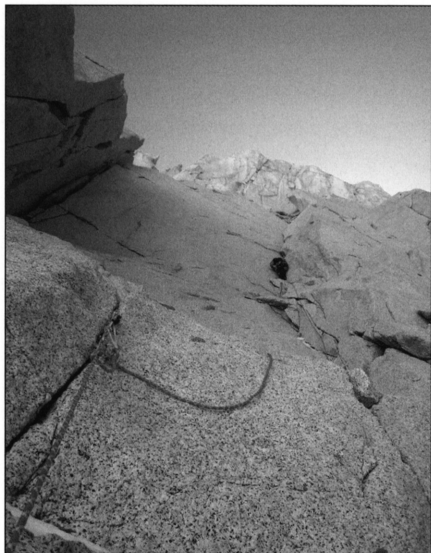
*Poincenot, El Sacrificio del Raton.* At its best, alpinism challenges not the heights of distant mountain ranges, but the limits of human cognition, our ability to dream, create, and remember a reality that perhaps never existed anywhere but in our minds.

December, 2006: For 40 days and 40 nights, the west wind blew and a solemn curtain of gray clouds obscured the granite spires of Patagonia. Climbers came and left empty-handed, some without ever having seen the summits of the Fitz Roy range. We drank coffee and bouldered, drank beer and danced. The Bridwell Hut was torn down, and mice snuck into our tents and food bags. A rash of injuries sidelined many friends: a pulled back, a sprained wrist, a tweaked knee. A quiet desperation stirred through the base camps and the town of El Chalten.

Rumors of good weather circulated, but nothing materialized. Something had to be done. Some small act of defiance, some symbolic show of fortitude. One rain-soaked afternoon I discovered that a particularly plump mouse had begun nesting in the stuff sack that served as my underwear drawer—I stunned him with an overhand toss of Peter's paperback copy of *Shogun*, tossed him outside the tent, and finished him off with a blow from our cooking stone. We



Poincenot from the southwest: (1) Fonrouge-Rosasco (1968), original start unknown but likely on left. (1a) Leoni-Salvaterra start (1994). (2) Southern Cross (Copp-Taylor, 2002), bottom hidden from view. (3) El Sacrificio del Raton (Sharratt-Wilkinson, 2007). (4) Judgment Day (Gerberding-Smith, 1992). (5) attempt ("Historia Interminable," Cobo-Murcia, 1987). (6) Whillans Route (Cochrane-Whillans, 1962), with (6a) alternate finish (unknown, 1980s). *Freddie Wilkinson*



The soft-spoken hardman Dave Sharratt, off on a short-fix lead on El Sacrificio del Raton. *Freddie Wilkinson*

hung his bloodied, stiff body by the tail outside our tent as an offering to the Torre Gods.

And, miraculously, the weather improved. In early January 2007 Dave Sharratt and I, with a half-dozen other parties, raced up the valley toward high camp. Dave and I were on our second Patagonian campaign together. He is tall, thoughtful, and a remarkable technical climber—different from me in all respects. But perhaps differences, rather than similarities, make partnerships successful. Our chosen climb was a crack system on the south face of Poincenot, to the left of Jay Smith and Steve Gerberding's Judgment Day (1992). We began climbing at 6 a.m. from the Niponino bivy, summited at 2 p.m. the following day, and descended via a combination of the Fonrouge and Southern Cross routes, arriving back at our tent by 3 a.m. that same night. Unfortunately, the crack system we climbed, aesthetic and alluring from afar, ended up being a bit gravelly and went at a rather ignoble 5.11 A1, with plenty of scrappy

groveling. We named our climb El Sacrificio del Raton. Sorely missed was our friend Peter Kamitses, who was sidelined by a wrist injury but nonetheless held down the fort at high camp while we were climbing, guided us back through the moraine by flashing his headlamp, and had a big dinner of tortellini waiting for us. The memory of my two friends' faces, illuminated by headlamp in the dead of night, with the stars and summits of Patagonia twinkling overhead, will remain long after the other details of our climb are slowly, inevitably, erased.

FREDDIE WILKINSON, AAC

*Aguja de la S, The Art of War.* With rumors of a weather window opening, Crystal Davis-Robbins, a 24-year-old also from the Durango area, and I frantically schlepped loads to our high camp at Niponino. A few Canadians, not as influenced by the bad weather as we were, had just attempted a new route up the unclimbed south face of de la S. They reported a "super steep overhanging headwall, with several splitter crack systems." This was all we needed to hear. From the east de la S is much shorter, as the north ridge can be climbed in four pitches, but from the west (which gives access to the south face) the peak starts far lower. The upper headwall on the unclimbed south face of de la S forms a tidal-wave-like feature, vertical to overhanging on every pitch.

On the morning of February 11 I took the first block: four or five 70m pitches up the perfect splitter buttress. Starting with good moderate pitches, mostly 5.10 and maybe a 5.9, I reached a techy thin 5.12a face and crack pitch. This led me directly into a thin, mossy corner with sparse gear and ledge-fall potential. I aided it (A2), but if the crack was cleaned it would probably be 5.12b or c. Crystal then led a splitter 5.11 that gained the ridge, joining The Thaw's not Houlding Wright (1,300m, 5.10, Houlding-Thaw-Wright, 2004) for two pitches, to the ledge