

CENTRAL ANDES

Cordillera de la Ramada, Cerro Mercedario (6,770m), east face, A Contramano. During November 2010 Fernando Daneri (Argentina) and Edgardo Liberman (Panamá, but resident in Buenos Aires) climbed a new route, A Contramano (1,300m, AD) on the east face. They had spotted the line during an evacuation of a corpse. They spent two days acclimatizing at Laguna Turqueza, a rare turquoise lake at 4,200m. They then moved up to 4,800m, where they spent three more days, before starting up the Paduszek Glacier on the east face. They began by climbing 40-50° ice, then a scree slope in the middle section, then snow and ice to an exit by the rocks of El Diente, at 6,300m on the Normal Route, just below its junction with the northeast ridge. The weather was cold and windy, and they spent three days there until they could continue to the summit via the Normal Route. They descended the Normal Route and spent a night at their top camp.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*

Cordillera de la Ramada, Pico Polaco (Cerro de los Polacos, ca 6,000m), southeast face, Acecho Felino. While the highest peak in the Ramada is Mercedario, the most attractive is Polaco, immediately south. In January Javier Giuliani, Juan Manuel Leániz, and Fabrizio Oieni (Argentina) were active in this area. From the standard base camp at Pirca de los Polacos (3,600m), they first climbed a nice icefall (100m, three pitches, W14) close to the col between Mercedario and Cerro Negro.

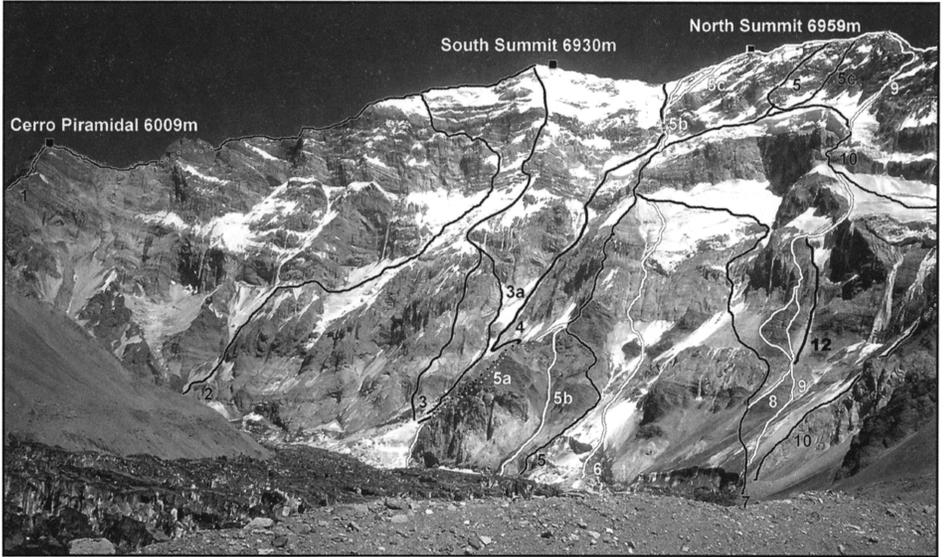
After a rest day Giuliani and Oieni started up a new route on Polaco. They established a camp at the edge of the glacier below the southeast face, where they endured a very cold night. Next day they rested and left the following morning at 5 a.m. After crossing five bergschrunds they followed obvious 40° couloirs, climbing quickly to avoid rockfall. At 5,500m Oieni gave up, leaving Giuliani to continue alone. After snow, ice, and a vertical icefall, he reached the summit, naming his 1,100m route Acecho Felino (90°). Descending the south ridge toward La Mesa (6,230m), he was involved in a small avalanche. After rappelling the bergschrund, Giuliani rejoined Oieni in camp, 14 hours after leaving.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*

Aconcagua, south face, alpine-style ascent of French Direct, with variation. December 20 Andres Zegers (Chile) and I are at the Plaza Francia, and the weather is fantastic. We are watching the face, noting the fall lines of avalanches and seracs. There appears to be the possibility of a new variation to the 1985 French Direct. Andres would like to climb the awesome ice column, left of the French Direct, through the rock barrier. I prefer a more amenable icefall to the right. But in reality I would like to run away, like a thief in the night.

We are both nervous and admit it. We decide to follow the easiest, quickest line. We'll climb the lower slopes a little right of the French Direct, avoid the difficult pitches on the rock buttress via the icefall to the right, reach the Pasic Glacier where the 1966 Argentinean route comes in from the right, follow the latter, and finish up on the original 1954 French route.

December 22. At 3 p.m. Andres asks, "Would you mind leaving now?" At 5 p.m. we leave Plaza Francia. The approach to the face is quick. We climb the initial slopes, then the 250m W14 icefall. Above, an easier gully leads back to the top of the buttress, where we join



South face of Aconcagua. Photo taken in 2003 but conditions similar to those in late 2011. (1) Sunline on South-southwest ridge (Sveticic-Romih, 1988). (2) Johan (Humar-Kozelj, 2003). (3) South pillar, Slovenian Route (Podgornik-Podgornik-Rejc-Zlatko, 1982). (3a) Polish start (Cichy-Kolakovski, 1987). (4) Central couloir, Medicine Buddha (Kellogg, 2009). (5) French Route (Bérardini-Dagory-Denis-Lesueur-Paragot-Poulet, 1954). (5a) Slovenian start (Biscak-Cernilogar-Skamperie-Sveticic, 1982). (5b) Messner Variants (Messner, 1974). (5c) Japanese Variant (Kamuro-Yamamoto, 1981). (6) Ruleta (Romih-Sveticic, 1982). (7) Argentinean Central (Fonrouge-Schonberger, 1966). (8) French Direct (Chassagne-Dufour-Raveneau-Vallet, 1985). (9) Slovenian Variation (Romih-Tic, 1986). (10) Argentinean (Aikes-Pellergrini, 1966). (11) East Ridge (Horak-Rocker-Sause, 1966). (12) Chilean-Italian variant (Di Donato-Zegers, 2011). Tomaz Humar, supplied, with caption, by Peter Podgornik

the French Direct. Just before reaching the Pasic, we bivouac on a snow slope at 5,400m. It is 10 p.m., the weather is excellent, and we manage to make contact with a friend by radio.

December 23. The night was passable, and we climb easily up the left side of the Pasic on rock and snow. A wall of hard mud and a few short gullies lead to an easy icefall. Above, after more rock/mud we arrive at a smooth section below the frightening upper glacier. We traverse right to the exposed edge of the glacier and spend five hours crossing it. One km of climbing for a vertical gain of just 200m, a fight with snow-covered penitentes. At 7 p.m., exhausted, we bivouac at 6,200m, just below the spur of the French Route.

December 24. It's difficult to get our legs moving. We climb a vertical pitch to snow/ice slopes left of the spur. A quick glance at the Messner finish: respect! Above, doubt: should we go right to a snow spur or follow a gully up left through rock? The topo mentions grade V chimneys. We go left, and below a loose chimney I find an old peg, which I remove by hand. The rock is still like hard mud. Farther on Andres suggests going right and, when I do, am surprised to find sound rock with protection. I belay on an in-situ corkscrew ice peg in the rock. Another pitch on rock and a snow slope lead to a ridge with a huge overhanging spur above and a doubtful fixed rope anchored to a Simond ice axe, buried like a deadman. Easy snow and a gully take us to the exit at 6,700m. The technical difficulties today have been a maximum of 60° and UIAA V. It is 5 p.m., and in two hours we are on the summit, 50 hours after starting up the 2,800m face. We stumble down the Normal Route to Nido di Condore,

where friendly lights greet us. Argentineans, who are preparing supper, extend their hospitality. What a Christmas, guys!

ANDREA DI DONATO, *Italy, translated by Luca Calvi*

Editor's note: In 1985 Jean Pierre Chassagne, Jean Marcel Dufour, Pierre Raveneau, and Bernard Vallet climbed a direct line through the lower face, to join the Argentinean Route, fixing rope on the lower slopes (climbed in 1966 by Fonrouge and Schonberger, as an alternate but more dangerous start to the 1954 route), and adding 14 pitches on the rock buttress (V, with a short section of A1). The next year Slovenians Milan Romih and Danilo Tic made an alpine-style ascent, creating a variation in the lower section and adding a more direct finish, through mixed ground to the ridge right of the summit.

Cordon del Plata, Cerro Vallecitos (5,475m), east face, De Paso...Canazo. On September 23 Luciano Fiorenza and Pablo Pontoriero (Argentina) opened an important new route on the impressive east face of Cerro Vallecitos. They started from Salto base camp, with high winds that prevailed during the previous night stopping when they reached the face.

Initial 60° slopes led into a couloir and to small icefalls. At 5,000m, mid-height on the face, they hit the crux, a two-pitch icefall, followed by a third pitch on snow and mixed terrain. The ground above was easier, though the snow was bad. They exited onto the summit ridge via a 60° couloir and reached the central summit, which offers an impressive view of Aconcagua. They claim that this summit is the highest but traversed the exposed ridge (one 20m rappel) to the south summit. They named the route De Paso...Canazo (1,000m, MD, WI4 M3) and descended the normal route, reaching the Salto camp 14 hours after setting out.

The south summit has a cross and is the summit normally reached by other routes. The normal route to this summit is relatively popular, due to easy access, both from Mendoza (the Cordon is an hour's drive), and the standard Salto base camp, at 4,300m. The mountain is more or less snow free in high summer, there is an easy path most of the way, and there is only a short scramble to reach the top. It is therefore often the first mountain for local aspirant climbers, and the area provides excellent acclimatization before one heads to nearby Aconcagua.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*

Cordon del Plata, Cerro Plata (5,968m), east face, Falto la Gorda. Cerro Plata is the highest summit of the Cordon del Plata and for a long time was considered to be over 6,000m. It lies south of Vallecitos, but both normal routes are generally accessed from the Salto base camp. On September 25 Rodrigo Maique and Sebastian Ruiz (Argentina) climbed a new route on the east face. They approached on the 22nd, via Quebrada de la Angostura, and thoroughly acclimatized before setting off from camp at 3:30 a.m. Climbing through scree and penitentes, they reached a couloir. Where it split, they took the left branch. (The right branch had been climbed in 1980 by Alessio and Mon.) At first the angle was 40° over iced scree, then it steepened to 55° snow and ice. They eventually emerged onto the east ridge and reached the summit, which has marvelous views northwest to Aconcagua. They descended a couloir of less than 40° to regain camp and named the route Falto la Gorda.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*