

(9-11 February), praising the quality of the climbing. This would also appear to be the first time that the route has been climbed to the summit of Fitzroy (a total of 44 pitches).

The Slovenian female mountaineer Monika Kambic, with fellow Slovenian Klemen Mali, arrived at Chalten on the last day of January, just as the weather was beginning to clear. The pair failed on Fitzroy, climbed the *Cochrane/Whillans Route* on **Poincenot** on the 11th, and then on the 13th climbed **Fitzroy** in a continuous push from Base Camp. They reached the summit on the 14th then descended to Paso Superior in a total of 33 hours. As so few women mountaineers have been successful on the major summits of this region, Kambic's ascents of both Fitzroy and Poincenot merit considerable attention.

**Cerro Moreno** Canadians, Rick Brouwer and Dag Fjeld, made a circular ski tour from Chalten, 22 October – 1 November, which included a ski ascent of **Cerro Moreno 3505m** on the Hielo Patagonico Sur, 26 October, first climbed in 1958 by Bonatti. They used the novel 'polypulk', a large sheet of one-millimetre-thick polyethelene with brass reinforced lacing holes that weighs only 500 grams, to drag their loads across the 20km+ of the Southern Ice Cap.

## Bolivia

**Apolobamba** After an unprecedented amount of activity in the area in 1997, 1998 saw three commercial trips and perhaps only four significant climbing trips. Conditions were good early in the season but *nieve penitentes* developed in June presenting familiar time-consuming problems. Topographic maps have finally been produced to the area by the US Defense Mapping Agency at a scale of 1:100,000 but are not for sale in Bolivia or elsewhere.

The **Chaupi Orco Norte-Chaupi Orco** traverse 26 May was completed for the second time by British La Paz residents Yossi Brain and Pete Grosset. The route, first done in the other direction in 1969 by a German expedition, links the two 6000m peaks by crossing four intervening peaks 5860m-5960m. Grade AD+ and, at 17 hours, quite a long day above 5200m. In the Sunchuli valley area Italians Marcello Sanguineti and Alessandro Bianchi put up three hard new routes: E Face of **Cavayani 5700m** (D), SW Face of **Corohuari 5668m** (ED1-), the hardest route yet recorded in the Apolobamba, and the S Face of **Pt. 5550m** (TD), 14-21 August.

**Real** The dry conditions meant easy and fast ascents of the normal routes on Bolivia's two most popular peaks **Huayna Potosí 6088m** and **Illimani 6439m**. However, the increasingly popular 1000m W Face of Huayna Potosí had very few ascents as did **Cabeza de Condor 5648m** which was devoid of snow, and the few ropes that attempted it reported extremely dangerous conditions due to the peak being made of rotten loose rock. The Tres Marias, a triple-peaked ridge east of the distinctive **Chachacomani 6074m**, was visited by Phil Amos and Adam Thomas (UK). The pair climbed new routes on the northern **Pt. 5500m** via the W Ridge (AD) and the southern **Coco Rico 5600m** (TD-) via an ice tongue to séracs and then hard dinner-plating ice to the summit, 16 and 19 July. They then traversed Chachacomani's SE ridge (a new route), bivouacked in a col at 5750m and climbed Chachacomani's SE Buttress (D) and descended off the west end of the mountain, 23-24 July.

The five-peak traverse of **Illimani 6439m** was done by Bianchi, Brain, Grosset and Sanguineti, from north to south (D-), 25-30 August, including three days and nights above 6100m. The route, probably the best expedition outing in Bolivia, was first done in 1978 by Anton and Ria Putz (Germany) and then in 1997 by Bernard Francou and Patrick Wagnon (France), both ropes starting in the north.

The 1998 season saw some hard rock routes. The potential for rock-climbing is massive as long as you stick to the north of the Cordillera Real (the Illampu-Ancohumá massif) and to the north of the Cordillera Quimsa Cruz. There is some good rock at the head of the Zongo valley south of Huayna Potosí but the rest of Bolivian rock is loose and rotten and/or covered in vegetation. The hardest rock route yet done in Bolivia (French 7a, 160m, 5 pitches, equipped with 23 bolts) was done in July in a somewhat artificial style by Thomas Lehmppuhl, Florian Schöffel and Robbi Rauch (Germany). They climbed the W Face of **Punta Badile** (marked as **Pt. 5342m** on the DAV Illampu map and situated 4.5km NE of Illampu) and then abseiled down the E Face, bolting as they went, to within 100m of the ground to start the route. The highest pure rock route done in Bolivia was put up by Erik and Grigota Monasterio (Bolivia-New Zealand) on the W Face of **Pt. 5750m** on the same DAV map, 26-27 August. The brothers put in a high camp at 5250m SW of Laguna Glacier. They fixed the first three pitches on the first day, including the crux which was the third pitch (French 6c/A2). The next day they climbed the ropes they had fixed and another seven pitches to the summit.

**Quimsa Cruz** Rock climbing activity continued in the northern part of the range but there is a lot of confusion over names of peaks and the number of local climbers, especially from the Oruro area; climbing and not recording means it is virtually impossible to tell what has been climbed. The only thing you can be sure of is that if there is a sling at the top of your route then someone has been there before. Frank Van Herreweghe (Belgium) and Marc Gavaldá put up two hard rock routes on minor peaks way to the left of the Obelisco and Halcon peaks: *Kawsachun Coca* 6b/A1 and *Ukamaki* 6b, 10 and 12 June. The Monasterio brothers put up a number of routes in the Laguna Mamaoclo area up to French 6b, 19-25 July.

Tony Barton, Ken Marsden and Tom Wiggans (UK) did four new routes from a base camp at Laguna Chillhua Khota 4300m at the end of a miners' track two hours walk from the village of Viloco Max V, 1-5 July. (*Further details page 277.*)

## Chile

**Torres del Paine National Park** Due to its lower altitude the Paine generally receives a few more days of good weather than Fitzroy. Climbers in the Park enjoyed almost three weeks of fine weather during February but in the last week of the month storms returned in force and, accentuated by the effects of El Niño, produced torrential rain at lower levels. Climbers at the Japanese Camp were completely flooded as the Paine River burst its banks and various trekking groups were evacuated by helicopter and boat. The Park was temporarily closed while the waters died away and the resulting chaos (missing bridges etc)

assessed. A number of new routes were claimed this season, though it is noticeable that most not only failed to reach the summit but in many cases stopped a little short of the top of the face.

One new route and several important repeat ascents were made on the double-summitted **North Tower c2260m** (to date no surveys within the Park have claimed exact measurements of altitude, hence heights of all peaks are approximate). Two experienced Patagonian activists, Trento climbers Fabio Leoni and Elio Orlandi, climbed a new route on the N Spur, alpine style in one day.

American Steve Schneider returned to the Park for a three months visit. On 17 December, he and Peter Mayfield made the second ascent of the 1995 Italian Route *Giorgio Giannaccini* (VII and A2), which lies on the W Face left of **Ultima Esperanza** and close to the depression that falls from the gap between the two summits. This was also the first one-day alpine-style ascent of this previously sieged route.

Taking advantage of the brief spell of fine weather at the end of December, the well-known Yosemite speed climber, Hans Florine, soloed the classic *Monzino Route* on the S Ridge in 1½ hours from the notch between the Central and North Towers.

**Central Tower** There appears to have been little or no activity on the E Face of this famous c2454m edifice but a number of interesting ascents from the west. On 19 February 1998 Schneider and Zegers achieved the second ascent of *La Tarde Roja* (700m, VIII and A3) on the W Face in 22 hours and 45 minutes. The first ascent in 1986 took 8 days. This is most probably the first time that any line on the Central Tower has been completed in a single push on the first attempt. As they were approaching the summit, Schneider and Zegers were lucky to escape serious injury or worse, when the increasingly warm, dry weather (due to the effects of El Niño) triggered a huge rock fall. Fragments ricocheted around them but the main mass fell past into the approach couloir, where unluckily two Basque climbers, Antxon Alonso and Gaizka Razkin, were just starting their descent. They were swept the full length of the couloir to their deaths.

There were a number of ascents of the *1963 British Route* which has become more popular in the last few years. However, the most impressive performance came from Hans Florine and fellow American, Steve Smith. This pair left a bivouac site near the base of the approach couloir at 6am on 30 December, reached the beginning of the N Pillar at around 11am, started on the route at 1pm and reached the summit in 6¼ hours.

As with all routes in Paine pitch grades tend to vary from year to year depending on the amount of ice in the cracks. This year was particularly dry and hence the climbing generally more straightforward.

**Hielo Campo Norte** Alun Hubbard and Nigel Topping, with Paolo Cavagnetto and Lorenzo Nettuno from Italy, made a 200km N-S ski traverse across the Hielo Campo Norte from Laguna San Rafael to the Baker Channel. Two first ascents were snatched: **Co. Pared Norte, 3005m**, and another, unnamed peak (2970m). (*Further details page 278.*)

## Ecuador

Being on the Equator, believe it or not, Ecuador has 2 seasons – June-July-August and December-January. Conditions during the winter 1997-98 season were very dry with **Cotopaxi 5897m** (without doubt the most climbed mountain in the Andes) being bare of snow down the western side. A massive crevasse opened up 250m below the summit of the volcano. Local guides rigged up a home-made aluminium bridge but, due to continuing glacial movement, had to reset it more as a ladder with the base in the bottom of the crevasse. This gave clients expecting the easy but long (1100m vertical ascent) climb to the top a somewhat exciting finish as the ladder had a tendency to swivel along its vertical axis. Conditions during the summer 1998 season were better and by the winter 1998-99 season they were good.

The dry conditions have also changed the *Normal Route* on Ecuador's highest peak, **Chimborazo 6310m**. Since the opening of the hut in 1980 the normal routes have switched between the *El Castillo Route* (NW Ridge) and the *Whymper Route* (SW Ridge). The *Whymper Route* has been out of condition for some time due to rockfall; and the dry conditions have now made the *El Castillo Route* dangerous with the glaciated El Corredor access to the ridge being covered in rubble. Parties now start the Thielmann Glacier direct before cutting left to the NW Ridge. Conditions on **Cayambe 5789m** have been consistently good, especially given the mountain's record as the only place on the planet where latitude is 0° and so is the temperature and its reputation for having 0° visibility. The massive crevasse below the summit is now so big it is easy to descend into it, walk across the bottom and climb out on the other side at max 45°.

The *normal route* on Ecuador's third highest peak **Antisana 5705m**, starting W and then wandering across the glacier towards col between the Pico Sur and the Cumbre Máxima before going left/N, has become impractical again due to the summit bergschrund. It is now better to climb the W Face Direct (max 50°) and then go left/N to find an easy way across the bergschrund.

**Antisana** The most notable reported route was the traverse of **Antisana 5705m** by Bernard Francou and Hubert Sémioud (France) solo in December 1997. The pair climbed the SE Ridge of Pico Sur, followed the double-corniced ridge north, rappelled down over the difficulties to reach the col between Picos Sur and Máxima and camped. The next day they went up and over the Cumbre Máxima and down the other side. Grade AD+.

## Peru

Heavy but warm precipitation due to the effects of El Niño caused havoc on the glaciers. Many slopes that were teetering on the edge of stability have given up the ghost. Glacier recession was very marked in the Blanca, and some normally popular glacier expeditions were impracticable due to the appearance of huge crevasses. A direct consequence appears to be the increase in fatal accidents, especially on the ever popular *Normal Route* up Peru's highest mountain **Huascarán Sur**. In general vast quantities of snow and ice have simply been washed off the mountains and while Peru is still a worthwhile place to visit, climbers need to be realistic about what is involved. However, on the plus side the Gringo circuit has definitely returned to Huaraz.

**Cordillera Blanca** Spanish climber David Rodriguez soloed a new route on one of the (several) unclimbed faces of **5550m Abasraju** in the Santa Cruz Massif.

**Huascaran** The big news of the season is that despite poor conditions two climbers from the Czech Republic, Antony Poulter and Viri Stastni, appear to have made the long awaited second ascent of the *1977 Casarotto Directissima Route* (ED3) on **Huascaran Norte 6650m**. They reportedly suffered a bad accident during the descent but were eventually rescued. Success rate on Huascaran Sur's *Normal Route* was meagre. Reaching the Gargantua was relatively fine but, above, parties were having trouble negotiating huge crevasses. Poor weather and strong winds were also an oft-quoted reason for failure.

**Chopicalqui** One of the better achievements of 1998 was the ultra-light solo first ascent, by the well-known Slovenian Pavle Kozjek, of a new TD+ route to the summit of **6050m Chopicalqui Norte** via the NE Face on 19-20 July.

**Chinchey Massif Urus Central** On the 5495m central and highest summit of the three Urus peaks, first climbed by the Morales brothers in 1954, Argentine climbers Nahuel Campitellis and Mariano Santonato made the first ascent of the almost entirely rocky S Face, IV to V+.

**Ocshapalca** The S Face of this broad and heavily fluted 5881m peak in the Chinchey Group is now becoming a classic venue for steep ice-climbing. French pair François Allignol and Christophe Soulier completed the 500m *Rusula de Yungay* (ED1) to the summit ridge a little right of the West Top.

**Huanstan Massif** The most southerly group in the Cordillera Blanca containing summits above 6000m is well seen from Huaraz.

**Cashan Este** On the unclimbed SE Face of **5723m Cashan Este** above the Rurec Valley, Peruvian climber Richard Hidalgo soloed a new TD/TD+ route

**Cordillera Huayhuash** On **Yerupaja, 6634m**, the highest summit in the range, the S Face and SW Ridges are still possible, though the various descent routes on the W Face have become too chaotic, with unstable sérac barriers, and cannot be recommended. The N Face of **Rasac, 6040m** appears to have fallen away and the various gully lines are now isolated *penitente* remains in the middle of a rubble-strewn face. Most of the NE Ridge is now quite unstable rock. The Siula peaks were also unrecognisable, with copious amounts of newly exposed rock and serious objective danger thwarting both an American team, plus the British mentioned below.

**Siula Chico** Mick Fowler and Simon Yates attempted the first ascent of the W Buttress of **Siula Chico** over two days during May. Yates, who was on the adjacent W Face of Siula Grande over a decade ago with Joe Simpson, was amazed by how much the mountains had changed since then due to the recent effects of El Niño. Access to the region was complicated by the El Niño summer storms but the rainy season had ended abruptly on 6 May leaving perfect but very warm weather thereafter.

The W Buttress is an impressive formation but the rock is very loose and the easy lower snowfield had dropped away to leave thin streaks of ice over granite slabs. The pair started up the 900m face on the 14th. On the following day, at a height of around 5700m and after a total of 10 pitches on the face, the two judged the risk of rock and ice fall too great to continue and a safe retreat was made.

**Cordillera Raura** Alberto Murguía and Evelio Echevarría attempted **Nevado Pichuycocha (5215m)**, NE of Lima, but were defeated by the glassy ice left by droughts. On 16 June they made the second ascent of **Cerro Puyhuáncocha (5062m)**, south of Pichuycocha, a long rock ridge situated between two icefalls. On the summit they found a surveyor's cairn.

**Cordillera de la Viuda** Evelio Echevarría also made two forays into the Cordillera de la Viuda in the Lima hinterland, making four first ascents. On 26 May he climbed **Pt. 5000m**, which he named **Cerro Calcuchima**. On the 27th he climbed **Pt. 5050m**, which was baptized **Cerro Quizquez** (both names represent historic Inca generals). The same day he traversed the three summits of **Cerro Carhuac Loma (5150m)**. In a second trip he travelled to the north end of La Viuda and climbed **Cerro Chuluscocha (5000m)**.

**Nevado Pariacacca Norte traverse** Gonzalo Menacho and Alberto Murguía reached by car the area of lake Huaylacancha (4250m), some 60km east of Lima, where they camped in order to acclimatize. They then climbed above the Tembladera lake and placed a high camp near the ice. On 20 May they ascended **Pariacacca Norte (5701m)** by its N Ridge, following a few variants up a rocky rib. They then descended by the S Ridge, thus having accomplished the traverse of this peak.

## Venezuela

American climber Scott Lazar was evacuated by helicopter from the Amazon jungle, after a misjudgement in navigation left him badly injured. Lazar, who two years ago was a member of the group who made the first free ascent of the vertiginous and vegetated rock walls alongside the Angel Falls, was returning to Venezuela to attempt a new line on the SW Face of El Autana in the jungle region. His partners were the accomplished Venezuelan climber, José Pereyra, who had previously climbed four routes on El Autana, plus fellow countryman, Andrea van Campenhoub, and the (obligatory) photographer, John Burcham. After an involved approach – a long boat journey up the Orinoco followed by 20km of jungle bashing – the team ferried their equipment to the foot of the wall where, late in the day, Lazar and Pereyra decided to check out possible lines. The pair split up and when it got dark Lazar decided to return to base camp. On the ascent the climbers had avoided several rock bands and once Lazar thought he had descended below the level of these cliffs, he decided to speed up his descent by embarking on a sitting glissade down steep jungle. Unfortunately he had misjudged his whereabouts and shot over a 20m high cliff to land in dense foliage, breaking both legs, one quite badly. Lazar crawled about 300m before Pereyra found him. A few hours later the two were met by Burcham and Campenhoub who formed the search and rescue party. Campenhoub carried Lazar on his back for nearly two kilometres before reaching a portaledge which was subsequently used as a stretcher. Campenhoub then set off for help while the remaining three waited at base camp. Late on the second day he reappeared with a helicopter and Lazar was airlifted to hospital in Caracas for surgery on a now very badly infected lower leg.