



AAC Publications

Chaltén Massif: 2016–2017 Season Summary

Argentina/Chile, Southern Patagonia, Chaltén Massif

During 2016–'17, Patagonia witnessed one of the driest winters on record. By late November, the conditions were not unlike late February, with little snow in the mountains, ablated glaciers, and dry forests. It was so extreme that there were fears of forest fires, an unusual occurrence in these parts. At the end of the first week of December, everything changed: It started precipitating and, except for a few short stints, it did not stop until mid-March. The low pressure that encircles Antarctica had moved north 3 to 5 degrees of latitude, and that dictated wetter and windier conditions for the entire season. During the austral summer, with the exception of the Belgian ascent of Torre Central (see linked report), almost all climbs were limited to “consolation prizes.” Cerro Torre was climbed only once, via the Ragni Route, and all but one ascent of Cerro Fitz Roy was done via the Supercanaleta. Bad conditions did not allow for more.

In early September, in winter, Markus Pucher attempted to solo the Ragni Route on Cerro Torre, reaching the base of the last pitch. He encountered difficult conditions throughout, with copious rime and very hard, cold ice. The last pitch had a layer of rime a meter deep. (Cerro Torre has yet to see a solo winter ascent.) A few days later he made an attempt on the Supercanaleta on Cerro Fitz Roy, climbing to within a couple of hundred meters of the summit. Soon after, Pucher made the first solo and first winter ascent of Cerro Pollone, via the south face.

In late December, Chris Mutzel, Austin Siadak, and Jimmy Voorhis (all USA) climbed El Tiburón, a new line from the north side of Cerro Solo, following a ridgeline that leads to the west ridge, then climbing several small towers to connect into El Dragón (Haley, January 2016). The rock quality is in the less-than-perfect category, but it is still a worthy outing. About a month later, Siadak returned to Cerro Solo with Andy Anderson and climbed a line on the virgin south face. They approached via Paso de las Agachonas and soloed all but one pitch.

In early February 2017, on one of the rare good weather days, Eneko and Iker Pou (Spain) opened a new route on the east face of Aguja Guillaumet: ¡Aupa 40! (400m, 5+ M7 85°). The name is in reference to Iker's 40th birthday, which was the day of the ascent.

Soon after, Jonathan Griffin and Tad McCrea (both USA) climbed a new route on the virgin east face of Cerro Huemul (2,550m). The upper headwall is 400m high and, except for the last pitch and a half, offers surprisingly good rock. Their route El Tren Que No Puede Parar (“The Train That Cannot Stop,” 400m, 5+ M5 80°) was christened in memory of Iñaki Coussirat. This was a “blank on the map” that was begging to be filled. Barely a week later, the same pair climbed a new route on the east face and south ridge of Colmillo Sur. Their route Califlores (350m, 5+ 85°) had eight pitches of mixed terrain.

As the practically nonexistent season came to a close, Takaaki Nagato and Yusuke Sato (Japan) climbed a new line on the north face of El Mocho. They started up Grey Yellow Arrow, but after two pitches went left into an amazing-looking corner, which they climbed in four pitches (160m, 6c+). At the big break, they joined Bizcochuelo, free climbing through it (6b+) to rejoin Grey Yellow Arrow to the top, free climbing its last pitch at 6c+. They named their new line Moribito, which means “guardian” in Japanese, a reference to their favorite novel.

The season had been surprisingly devoid of accidents before ending on a very sad note, when two climbers fell to their death while climbing the Whillans-Cochrane Route on Aguja Poincenot. It's likely

an anchor pulled or they were traversing a ledge while roped up but without gear between them. This accident brought to the forefront, once again, the importance of seeking adequate insurance coverage for trips to areas such as Patagonia. Your policy should include at least US \$20,000 of rescue, search, and recovery coverage (including recovery of remains). Less coverage implies that, in case of an accident, you will put undue responsibility on your family, friends, and the local community.

– Rolando Garibotti

Images

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