



## Chaltén Massif and Torres del Paine: 2018–2019 Season Summary

Argentina-Chile, Southern Patagonia

**THIS WAS THE THIRD** season in a row with fairly poor weather and conditions. After having anomalously dry seasons in 2012, 2015, and 2016, it has come as a bit of a shock to go back to average Patagonia weather. The only extended windows of good weather were at the start and end of the season, in November and in March.

Other than Martin Elias, Francois Poncet, and Jérôme Sullivan's phenomenal climb in the Cerro San Lorenzo area, the big news from the Chaltén Massif involved Jim Reynolds (USA), who free soloed up and down Agujas Rafael Juárez and Saint Exúpery, and Cerro Fitz Roy. In the early 1900s, Austrian climber Paul Preuss, considered by many "the father of style," preached and practiced free soloing up and down peaks as the "honest, sporting" way to climb (his words). He argued that one should "overcome difficulties with your own strength, on ascent and descent alike," explaining that, "If there is someplace you can't go down, you should also not go up." One could have never imagined that Preuss' maxims would one day be applied to a peak like Cerro Fitz Roy. One could conceivably make a stylistic argument that Reynolds' ascents were the first free ascents of these formations. If rappels and pendulums are not considered free climbing on a wall such as El Capitan, why should an ascent of a jagged peak be considered free unless the descent is also done free?

On Aguja Rafael Juárez, Jim soloed the complete west ridge (1,000m, 5.10) and downclimbed the Anglo-American (350m, 5.10), while on Aguja Saint Exúpery he free soloed Chiaro di Luna (750m, 5.11) and downclimbed the Kearney-Harrington (550m, 5.10c). On neither of these two climbs did he carry a rope or climbing gear. On Cerro Fitz Roy he free soloed the Afanassieff Route on the northwest ridge (1,500m, 5.10c), taking 6 hours 38 minutes to reach the summit and 8 hours and 30 minutes to downclimb the same route. He carried a rope and some gear, which he did not use, but he also forgot his harness and belay device. All ascents were completed onsight except for a short section of the Anglo-American on Rafael. He described his approach as the "best possible form of the art" he could come up with.

There were a few other noteworthy ascents in the Chaltén Massif. On Aguja Poincenot, Siebe Vanhee (Belgium) completed the first free ascent of Patagonicos Desesperados (500m, 5.12), which was onsighted a week later by Leonardo Gheza (Italy). There were two ascents of the southeast ridge of Cerro Torre, by French and Czech teams, the seventh and eighth ascents of the route since many of the Maestri bolts were removed.

Elsewhere on Cerro Torre, Jorge Ackermann, Tomas Aguilo (both Argentina), and Korra Pesce (Italy) attempted a difficult line on the left side of the north face, climbing 23 pitches in all, nine of them on the north face and three above Aguilo's 2013 high point on the same line. They reached a small rime mushroom two-thirds of the way up, at the base of the last headwall, which will likely be the crux of the route, before high winds and high temperatures forced them to retreat. They hope to try again next spring.

Several smaller new routes were put up in the Chaltén Massif. On Cerro Solo, Pedro Fina (Argentina) and Gustavo Tomaschewski Netto (Brazil) climbed Alpinisisima (500m, 5.8 50°) following the north ridge. On El Mochito, Matías Korten (Argentina) rope-soloed El Camino del Guerrero (280m 5.10c A1); Christopher Koppl (USA) rope-soloed Straight Outta Nipo (300m, 5.7 A3+); and Koppl, together with

Vitaily Musineko (USA), climbed Mosca para Mujer (300m, 5.7 A3). On the north face of Aguja de la Medialuna, Kiff Alcocer and Jordon Griffer (USA) climbed Harvest Moon, (250m 5.10d).

On the west face of Torre Egger, Alessandro Beltrami, Mirko Povinelli, Giorgio Roat, and Ermanno Salvaterra (all Italy) made a valiant attempt in the center of the west face, climbing two-thirds of the way up a very steep and fairly blank big wall. Over two attempts, they spent 21 days on the wall on portaledges. On the east face of Torre Egger, Brette Harrington (USA) and Quentin Lindfield Roberts (Canada) climbed the first three pitches of Titanic, then climbed nine new pitches on the steep pillar to the left, rejoining Titanic at the obvious snowfield halfway up the wall, where they stopped. They called their line Marc-André's Vision (to 5.12+), as it was the late Marc-André Leclerc who envisioned this line and had hoped to attempt it. On Aguja Bífida, Juan Canale (Argentina), Jonathan Larrañaga, and Oriol Baro (both Spain) climbed six new pitches connecting the Siren to Cogan, while Jon Griffin, Tad McCrea (both USA), and Luis Scheinkman (Argentina) climbed a five-pitch alternate start to Cogan (5.10c C1).

On the west face of El Tridente, Martin López Abad, Julian Ferhmann, and Diego Simari (Argentina) climbed El Hedonista, six new pitches starting from and connecting to the Secret of the Mountain, following a very good-looking line on the central pillar (to 5.11a). On the west face of Aguja Rafael Juárez, Ryo and Sayaka Masumoto (Japan) climbed a direct finish to Quilombo, finding difficulties to 5.11+. On Aguja de l'S, Iker and Eneko Pou (Spain) climbed Haizea, five new pitches in the center of the east face.

To the southwest of Lago Viedma, and to the east of Cerro Moyano, Daniel Pons (Argentina) and Steffen Welsch (Germany) did the first ascent of the southernmost summit of the chain comprising Cerro Huemules. They started from Estancia Helsingfors, walking along the Moyano fjord, taking a side valley immediately west of Cerro Huemules. They established camp at 1,300m, after walking six hours. The next day, February 2, they walked to the base of the northwest face of the unclimbed peak, started their climb at 2,100m, doing eight short pitches with difficulties to 5.8 and A0, and reaching the summit around 3 p.m. They measured the summit at 2,348m (with no GPS) and observed that it is clearly higher than Cerro Huemules itself. They rappelled the line of ascent and reached camp around 10:30 p.m., returning to Helsingfors the next day. They christened the peak Nahumaday.

## **TORRES DEL PAINE**

The Torres del Paine Massif also saw some new routes. In June 2018, Max Didier and Cristobal Señoret (Chile) climbed Estilo Andino, a new route on Cerro Paine Grande's 300m southwest face. Their line is to the far left of existing lines, reaching the heavily rimed west ridge, which it follows to the summit. They found difficulties to 90° and WI4. This was only the fifth ascent of this imposing, beautiful peak, which, at 2,845m, is the highest in the Torres del Paine massif.

In August, during the winter, Felipe Bishara and Christian Barra Muñoz (Chile) climbed a new route on the southeast face of Cerro Almirante Nieto, which is reported elsewhere in this journal. Also in August, Nicolás Secul and Cristobal Señoret did the first ski descent of the east face of Almirante Nieto (to 50°), following the line of Genesis, a route put up in 2015. During the summer, Secul and Señoret climbed a new route on the southwest face of Peineta that they called Puro Filete (nine new pitches to 5.11 A1). On the east face of Cuerno Este and ON a golden pillar to the right of the route Tchoa Pantin, Secul and Leon Riveros climbed seven new pitches, finding difficulties to 5.10+ C1 and stopping some 50m below the shale band, at a point where the cracks petered out.

On the left side of Aleta de Tiburón's east face, Max Barlerin and Kevin Sturmer (USA) climbed the 600 lbs Amoeba, a line that ascends 150m of easy slabs followed by five pitches to 5.12- before joining the classic south ridge. The same pair climbed a new line on the east face of Aguja de los Quirquinchos, to the right of a prominent dike: The Skidmark (5 pitches, 5.10-).

South of Torres del Paine National Park, Tomás Marusic, Nicolás Secul, and Cristobal Señoret (Chile) did what is likely the first winter ascent and first ski descent of the seldom-climbed Monte Balmaceda. They approached from the northeast.

## ACCIDENTS AND RESCUES

An unfortunate development this season was the number of accidents that occurred in the Chaltén Massif. Three climbers died on Cerro Fitz Roy, one on Cerro Solo, and there were three other major accidents that required rescues. It is unclear what might have led to this spike. Potentially, it could be related to over-eagerness after so much bad weather. The three deaths on Cerro Fitz Roy were due to exposure, and the two parties involved appear not to have read the forecast carefully enough, as it was clear this was not a day to climb on the high peaks. Neither of the parties had communication devices, which severely hindered the chances of a rescue.

On Aguja Rafael Juárez, a climber fell while simul-rappelling, suffering a severe concussion with displacement of some of the cranial bones. This party also lacked a communication device, and the partner mistakenly thought helicopter rescues were available in the area, so he rappelled down to get help instead of bringing his injured partner down. Fortunately, he ran into two strong parties that proceeded to climb up to the injured person and bring him down.

Another accident occurred on the west face of Cerro Torre, where a climber was hit by rockfall, breaking her leg. There were several parties present, and after calling for help they proceeded to take her down to Circo de los Altares, from which a military helicopter that was secured with some luck was able to fly her out just as a storm was moving in.

Climbing in Patagonia can be quite fun; however, being cavalier in mountains this big can quickly lead to tragedy. There are some important takeaways for climbing safely in Patagonia:

- Carry a communication device, either a VHF radio, a satellite phone, or an inReach.
- Learn to read more than one weather forecasting model.
- Learn to diagnose and address hypothermia. If your partner starts moving slower and has a hard time reacting, he/she is not far from dying.
- Consider climbing in teams of three for added strength and better decision-making.
- Be aware that helicopters are not usually available for rescue in this area: On 83 percent of the 120 rescues carried out over the last 20 years, there was no helicopter involved.
- If you want your partner to survive, you must self-rescue to the base of the wall. Learn and extensively practice essential self-rescue maneuvers, especially rappelling with an injured partner.
- Obtain adequate rescue and travel medical insurance coverage, at least US\$10,000 for the rescue itself and additional coverage for hospital and repatriation costs.
- Show empathy toward your loved ones and the volunteer rescuers by choosing objectives well within your skill level—a climb's real difficulty is not based on everything going right.
- Make plans based on current conditions, not based on objectives you set for yourself months before.

## Images



The east face of Aleta de Tiburón in Torres del Paine, showing: 1) Blad-Simmons. 2) Iron Joke. 3) El Sonido del Viento. 4) The 600 lbs Amoeba.



The east face of Mochito, above the Niponino camp in the Torre Group, showing: 1) Campagna. 2) No Bad Weather. 3) El Camino del Guerrero. 4) Mosca para Mujer. 5) Straight outta Nipo. 6) Luna de Miel.



Cerros Nahumaday and Huemules from the south. The new route by Daniel Pons and Steffen Welsch on Nahumaday climbs the northwest face, hidden from view. In the distance, Cerro Fitz Roy.



The Cerro Fitz Roy range seen from the west showing the three routes that Jim Reynolds free-soloed: (1) The complete West Ridge of Aguja Rafael Juárez, which Reynolds soloed on February 9, downclimbing the Anglo-American. (2) Chiaro di Luna on Aguja Saint-Exúpery which he soloed on February 11, downclimbing the Kearney-Harrington. (3) The Afanassieff on the northwest ridge of Cerro Fitz Roy, which he free-soloed up and down on February 21. The downclimbs are not indicated but can be easily seen from this angle.



Peineta, in Torres del Paine, seen from the west, showing: (1) En Cordee Sponsors. (1.1) The variation Durazos para Don Quijote. (2) Billy the Kid. (3) Puro Filete.

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