

*Southern Continental Icecap, exploration and ascents.* Chilean climber Camilo Rada, interested in classical andinism, asked me in 2001 for details of the 1986 and 1999 exploration and climbing visits I made to the Riso Patrón Range and Dos Hermanos Range, which lies west of the Riso Patrón Range. Specifically he asked about the unclimbed Cerro 3,018m (as is named in the Chilean maps), which rises above the Falcon Fjord at the western border of the Southern Continental Icecap (49°33'10"S, 73°34'30"W). An icy fortress a few miles northeast of Cerro Riso Patrón, it was believed to be one of the last unclimbed Patagonian 3,000m mountains. The late Casimiro Ferrari once told me that when he summited Riso Patrón Central (3,019m on available maps), Cerro 3,018m appeared higher. His comments and the report of Rada's expedition, giving Cerro 3,018m an elevation of about 2,800m, raise questions about the accuracy of measurements in these remote cordilleras. As for climbing Cerro 3,018, my advice to the Chileans was to tackle it from the Pacific Ocean, via the Exmouth Fjord, thereby accessing the Icecap by a known route, then going south. I suggested trying the north side of the mountain, since I had noted on my visits that the south face looked steep and exposed to objective dangers.

Rada, the leader, and the other four members—three young women, Maria Paz Ibarra, Fiorenza Marinkovic, and Viviana Callaham, and Sebastian Varela, all from the Universidad Catolica de Chile and in their early 20s—first tried to reach Cerro 3,018m in January 2002. They decided, because of their limited budget, to approach from the east, crossing the Icecap from Paso del Viento in Argentina, thus avoiding the expensive sea approach. Some weeks and several storms later, they were at the foot of the east summit of Cerro 3,018m East, a lower summit but an attractive pyramid of rock and ice. From there they had to retreat due to weather, which happened to be worse than at the same latitude on the eastern side of the Icecap.

The team made a second attempt on Cerro 3,018m, with a similar approach because of icy channels, in the last austral winter. They left Santiago on July 11, reached El Chalten on July 15, and installed a camp at Paso Marconi on July 18. Despite bad weather they continued and established successive camps, the fourth at Nunatak Witte. They progressed to the south, between Nunatak Viedma and the Mariano Moreno Range. Some days later, at the southern end of this massif, they turned west. In poor weather but with the help of a GPS, they climbed to the Rokko Pass and set up Camp 8. From here they continued toward Cerro 3,018m, having fantastic views of Cerros Riso Patrón Central and Gaviota. On July 29, after climbing to a lower pass and abseiling 90 difficult meters to a plateau not far from Cerro 3,018m, they set up Camp 10 and converted it into a sort of base camp.

On July 31 Camilo and Maria Paz (Pachi) decided, instead of exploring the presumed easier north side of the mountain, to try the south face, deciding that with the intense cold and permanent shade it looked safe. They installed 60m of fixed rope on the wall, while Sebastian, Fiorenza and Viviana climbed a nearby, unnamed mushroom summit which they called Mirador Callaham. On August 3, after several days of storm spent at camp 10, Camilo and Pachi—observing no traces of avalanches on the face—began an alpine-style push, jumaring the fixed ropes and then climbing another 200m to their first bivouac at an altitude (GPS) of 2343m. The next day, Camilo and Pachi climbed another 300 difficult meters, over ice up to 90°, and placed the second bivouac on the face at around 2649m. On August 5, after climbing more pitches, and at 2750m and only a few meters from the top, Camilo took a 10m fall. Caught by

another sudden storm and with the final mushroom still to climb, they decided to descend. On the south wall, they had climbed 600m (12 pitches, 5.6 AI4+ 70-90°). After abseiling for the rest of the day, they arrived very late that night at base camp, which had been collapsed by the wind, forcing them to dig a cave. Also on August 5, Sebastian, Fiorenza and Viviana made a second virgin mushroom summit which they called Mirador Marinkovic.

The entire group then rested for some days, waiting for the storm to stop, then began their return to Argentina. They successfully managed their way back up the difficult 90m step on their way to Rokko Pass. At this time they decided to leave the Icecap thru Paso del Viento instead of Paso Marconi, and were back to El Chalten on August 15. They officially proposed the name of Cerro Buracchio for Cerro 3,018m. (Christian Buracchio, who died in a plane crash in 2001, was one of the most active Chilean climbers and a member of the successful 1992 Everest Kangshung Face Chilean Expedition).