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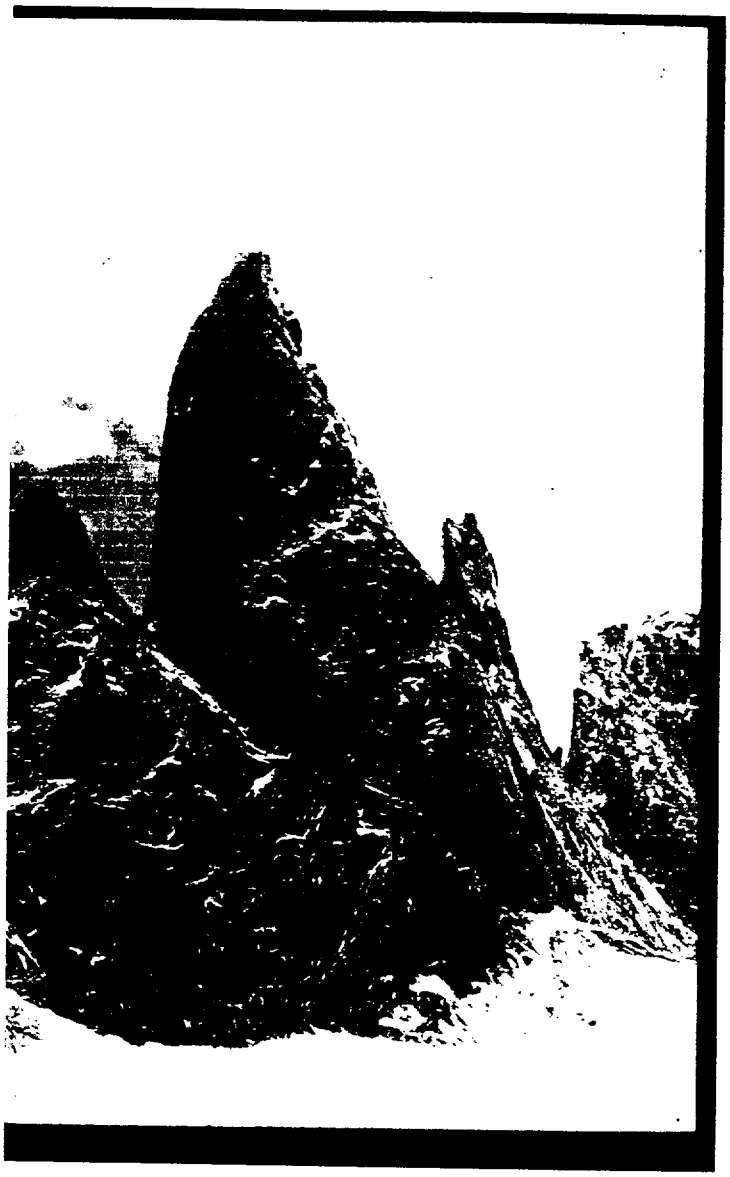
North Wales Expedition to Torres Del Paine 2001

'For a few dollars more'



North Wales Expedition to Torres Del Paine 2001

Mike Turner and Louise Thomas travelled to Chile in early december 2000 and over a period of seven and a half weeks suffered seasonally bad weather, attempted to climb the South Tower, got 12 pitches up a new route on the East Face of the Central Tower and on the last day of the expedition summitted on a new route on the Mascara. This report is the story of their expedition.

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For purposes of research anybody can use this document as they so wish to do. We hope this information will help with all future expeditions.

The Team.

Mike 'Twid' Turner Louise Thomas Guides (UIAGM)

Rockclimbing We have climbed extensively in Britain, Europe, North and South America, Mali, Madagascar, Jordan and Thailand.

Twid accompanied by Louise has established many adventurous new routes on natural protection up to E8 (British grading)

1996/97 we were part of a small team to visit team to climb in Mali. We were the first British climbers to visit this beautiful area. Twid and Louise made many British First ascents including The Hand of Fatima We also put up some stunning new routes including 600M ED+ 'GRAINS OF SAND' The first route on Suri Tondo's north face.

In 1999 we were the first British team to climb in Madagascar creating ALWAYS THE SUN 7C+600m.

At home we climb at every available opportunity

Winter climbing Twid climbs grade 7/8 on ice and mixed ground, Louise grade 5. Over the last twelve years we have climbed in Scotland Wales, Italy, France, Switzerland, Canada and the USA.

Alpine climbing We have climbed extensively in the Alps.

Louise becoming one of the few British females to UIAGM guides.

Twid made an early British ascent of Divine Providence as well as a free ascent of the Brandler Hasse and The Fisch. He became a Guide 7 years ago.

Expeditions

1992 Patagonia: Torres Del Paine. Twid and Louise made the first ascent of the Southwest face of CUERNOS NORTE 'CAVEMAN' ED+(E5 AI) 700M. The route was climbed alpine style.

1994 We returned to climb the first route in the Pingo valley, Torres National Park. The route 'A FIST FULL OF DOLLARS was climbed 16 days 800 A4 E5

1996 Tasmuit fjord Greenland Here we made a new route 'UMWELTEN' on NULAMASORTOQ 700M E5 A2 .We started the trip by making the second ascent of MOBYDICK 1300mon on the impressive ULAMERTOSSUAQ.

1997PAKISTAN, Hushe Valley. Louise organised a small female team to attempt a route on the unclimbed Southeast face of BEATRICE 5900m.

This team climbed 'HATEJA'750m ED+ A3+completing the route on the last possible day before returning home .Simultaneously Twid with Steve Mayers and Grant Farquar was climbing a parallel line THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF BILL AND TED.

1998 we returned to Pakistan to the Nangma Valley. Louise to climb with another woman Libby Peter. Together they climbed a new route on Sotal Pa Peak 'Ramchikor'. This was also the first British ascent of the Peak. The route was on perfect Granite and mainly climbed free.Mean while Twid with Steve Mayers and Elfin Jones despite bad weather made a very impressive ascent of the right wall of Amin Brakk; Nawas Brakk. 1200m

1999 BAFFIN Stewart Valley. Twid and Louise along with Shaun Hutson and Jerry Gore were the first British team to visit this valley. They made the first ascent of a peak called the Citadel. The route THE LONGEST DAY A3+ 1000m was climbed in temperatures that never rose above minus 8.

2000 BORNEO, LOWS GULLY, KINABALU. We descended into Lows gully crossed its base then climbed a new route On Lows gully wall. It rained most days but the wall overhung so much that the route remained sheltered. The CRUCIBLE 750m A4.

2001 Patagonia . Made the first British ascent of the Mascara in Paine Chile. Over 3 days made an Alpine ascent of a new climb' For a few dollars more'. A3 E3 800M.

Big Walls Aswell as climbing big walls in remote places we have climbed walls in Zion, Yosimite, Utah and in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

The Area.

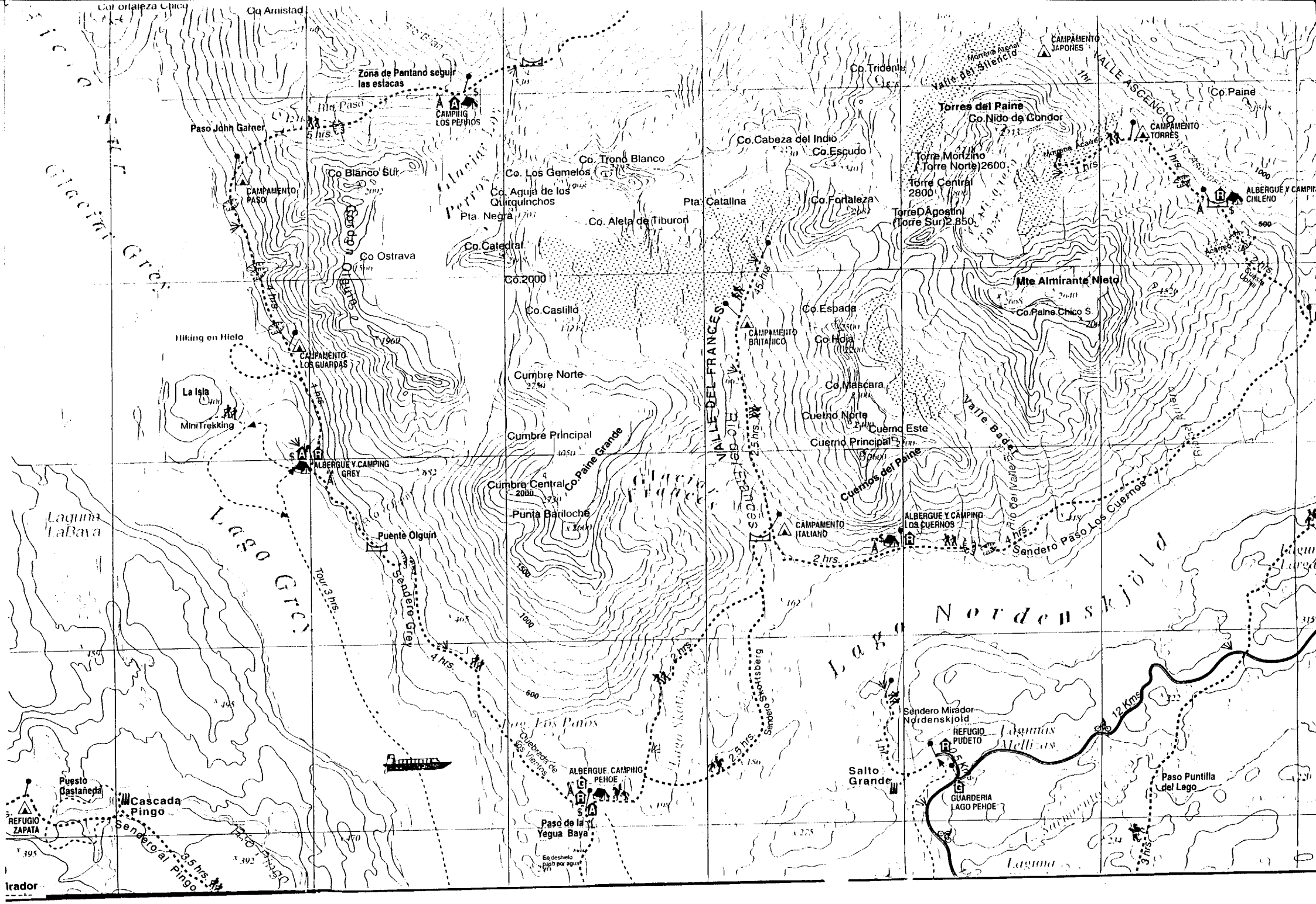
Torres del Paine is situated in the southern half of Chile. It borders the south Patagonian Ice cap. On one side of the national park is the ice cap, which stretches across to the Pasific Ocean, on the other are the vast pampas grasslands stretching over to the Atlantic. The area has been a National Park since the 1950's and is managed by CONAF. This goverment agency manages all the National Parks of Chile. CONAF has its main office in Santiago and has a regional office in Punta Aranas.

The area has had strong links with British mountaineers ever since Derek Walker was the Head master of the main school in Peurto Natalas in the 60's. Derek explored the area and then organised various British Expeditions. During these expeditions many of the main peaks where climbed and named. Most of the peaks names coming from a book the climbers were reading eg the sword, the fortress, the cathedral and the Blade. Many of the original base camps used by the early pioneers still retain the names of the climbers eg The British camp, The French Valley, The Italien camp, The Japanese camp and The Welsh camp. During an expedition to the area in 1994 we established the Welsh camp!

The most famous of all peaks is the central Tower of Paine, first climbed by Chris Bonnington and Don Whillians in the 1960's. This opitimises the style of climbing down in Patagonia. Firstly having to cope with some of the wildest weather in the world. Secondly to be motivated enough to cope with this frustration and finally to be able to climb quickly when the weather does come good. For those who persivere the rewards of climbing on such fantastic rock and in such an awaresum range of mountain spires are second to none. All who climb in Patagonia do return, but only after some of the frustration is forgotten!

Over the 9 years that both of us have travelling to this area many changes have taken place. What was once a quite mountain range sports a booming tourist industry. On our first expedition to this area in 1992 at most two coaches left Peurto Natalas for the park each day. Now there are as many as 12 or more. Most people travel to look for the day. But the ever increasing number of trekers has led to changes in the park. Due to the pressure of camping alpine style huts have been built. Some huts sleeping 60+ people which have showers and sell such luxeries as beer! or should I say essentials! These huts are expensive but do play a role. They help control bad camping practice and pollution. Unfortunately if you are looking for remoteness you have to travel a little further.When at our base camps we sore nobody for 6 weeks. Once away from the popular spots trekkers do not bother the climbers. Walkers are only interested in the famous circuit and the now popular w trek. CONAF monitor climbers and walkers closely but are not overpowering. We found that the wardens were all very friendly and took their work seriously. Each day checking litter on the paths and stopping erosion through path building. They work very much on the lines of the British Parks where the wardens are there to help and not police.

The are is well mapped at a scale of 1;100,000 and you can easily buy this map in the park or in one of the many


Col Fortaleza Chico
Co Amistad
Zona de Pantano seguir las estacas
CAMPING LOS PERROS
Paso John Garner
5 hrs.
Filo Paso
CAMPAMENTO PASO
Co Blanco Sur
Co Ostrava
Hiking en Hielo
CAMPAMENTO LOS GUARDAS
1 Hrs.
La Isla
MiniTrekking
ALBERGUE Y CAMPING GREY
Puente Olguin
Tour 3 hrs.
Sendero Grey
4 hrs.
Laguna LaBava
Lago GREY
Glaciar Grey
Puesto Castañeda
REFUGIO ZAPATA
Cascada Pingo
Sendero al Pingo
3.5 hrs.
Mirador
Co Tronó Blanco
Co. Los Gemelos
Co. Aguja de los Quirquinchos
Pta. Negra
Co. Aleta de Tiburon
Co.Catedral
Co.2000
Co.Castillo
Cumbre Norte
Cumbre Principal
Cumbre Central
Punta Bariloche
Co.Paine Grande
Glaciar Los Perros
Glaciar Grey
Co.Tridente
Co.Cabeza del Indio
Co.Escudo
Pta. Catalina
Co.Fortaleza
Torre Monzino (Torre Norte)2600
Torre Central 2800
TorreDAgostini (Torre Sur)2.850
Torres del Paine
Co.Nido de Condor
Monzino Argentino
Valle del Silencio
CAMPAMENTO JAPONES
VALLE ASCENCIO
Co.Paine
CAMPAMENTO TORRES
1 hrs.
Monzino Acarreo
1 hrs
ALBERGUE Y CAMPIN CHILENO
Acarreo
Mte.Almirante Nieto
Co.Paine Chico S.
Co Espada
Co Hoja
Co.Mascara
Cuerno Norte
Cuerno Este
Cuerno Principal
Cuernos del Paine
Valle Bader
Rio Bader
VALLE DEL FRANCES
45 hrs.
CAMPAMENTO BRITANICO
2.5 hrs.
Glaciar Frances
Secuencia
CAMPAMENTO ITALIANO
ALBERGUE Y CAMPING LOS CUERNOS
4 hrs.
2 hrs.
Sendero Paso Los Cuernos
Nordenskjöld
Lago Los Patos
Quebradas de los Vientos
ALBERGUE CAMPING PEHOE
2.5 hrs.
Sendero Skottsberg
Paso de la Yegua Baya
En deshielo pasa por agua
Sendero Mirador Nordenskjöld
REFUGIO PUDETO
Salto Grande
GUARDERIA LAGO PEHOE
12 Kms
Lagunas Mellizas
Paso Puntilla del Lago
3 hrs.
Laguna

Travel.

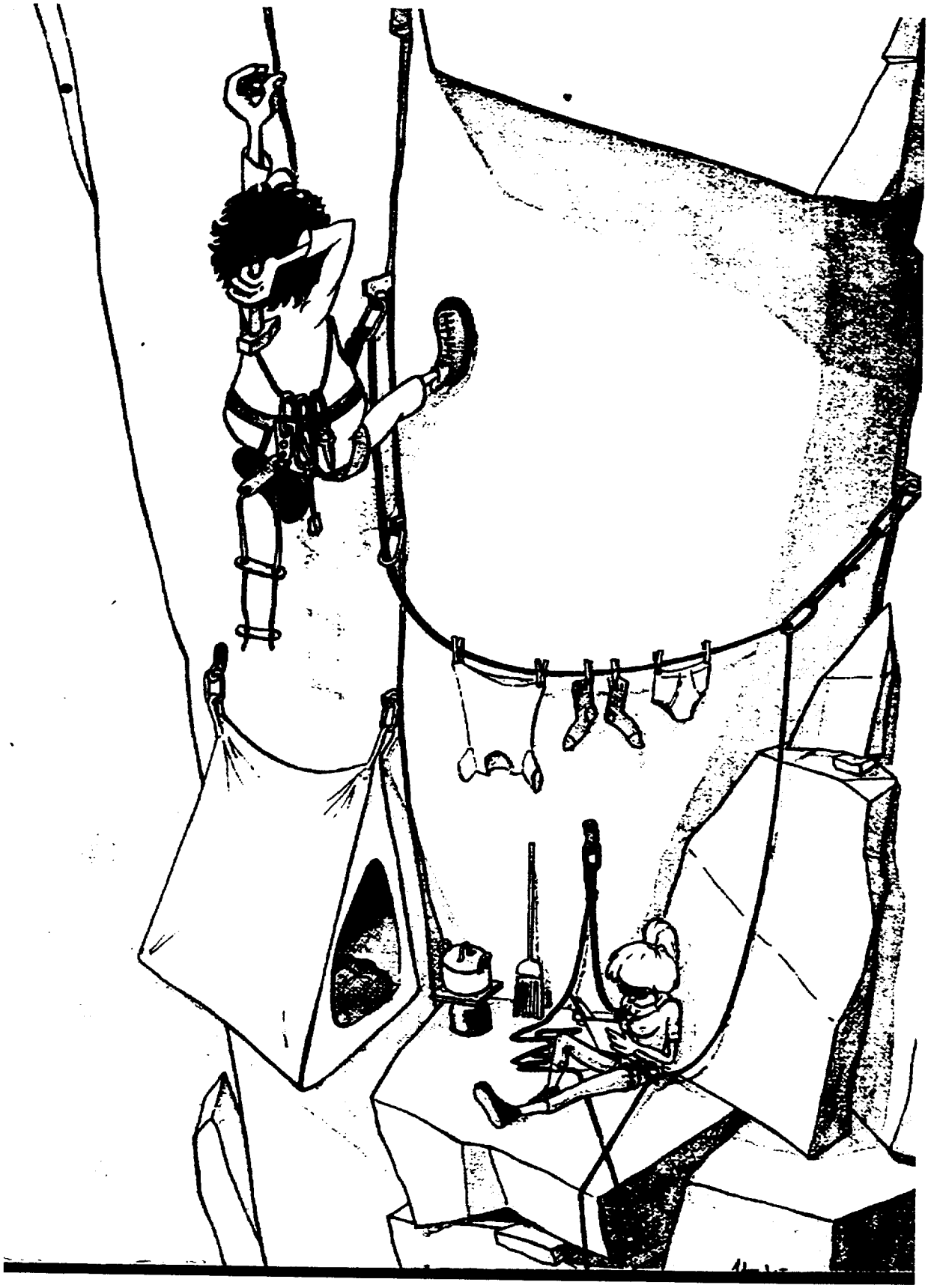
Getting to base camp is a very long journey! Firstly you have to fly to Punta Arenas, Chile' and the world's most southern City. Then you have to travel to Peurto Natalas by bus. Next travel to Torres del Paine National Park, with your permission and finally walk into your base camp. If you are supper slick you can get there in 6 days at worst two weeks!

Flying to Punta Arenas. We opted to fly via Washington , Santiago and then with a quick stop in Puerto Mont down to Punta Arenas. If you fly through the States you can get a States style luggage allowance, of 2 pieces of 30kg each person. We had get written confirmation of this ,through Journey Latin America, from LANCHILE that this would take our luggage all the way down to Punta Arenas. With Big Wall kit we normally carry up to 100kg each! so this is a real need. Flights to Santiago are easy to book and relitvely cheap, not so for the hop down to Punta. November to March is prime travelling season and it is hard to book the flight. We booked 6 months prior to leaving in early December and still found it hard to book the right flight. Book early. Travelling back is a night mare as only a few flights travel to Peurto Mont but many on from there. This causes a huge block at the Punta Arenas end. To fly home and change your flight details as we found out is not that easy and cannot be counted on, due to so many flights back home.

Punta Aranas to Peurto Natalas. This is the easy bit of the journey. Take a taxi into town and go to Bus Fernandaz, they have Buses leaving every hour for Natalas. Buses fill up so do not expect to get on anyone. They might charge extra for lots of luggage, we did not. The buses are comfortable coaches with toilets. The journey takes a couple of hours.

Natalas to the park. Book with your accomodation. The bus will pick you up from your hotel.

Park entrance to Estancia. Take a local pick up to the start of the walk in.



They think its all over!
An account of climbing in Patagonia 2001

Bill Ruthven from the MEF had laughed when I explained that Twid and I were intending to go back to Patagonia 'You must have a short memory' he chuckled, I laughed too.
On week six of our trip and day four of the most recent storm I was not laughing. The tally so far one good day, five half good days mixed with the usual and unusual rain, snow and Patagonian winds.
We had returned to the Torres del Paine to climb the South Tower. It is the biggest of the three and its true south face is huge, immaculate and still unclimbed.
We, Twid and myself know that climbing in Patagonia takes patience, opportunism and a bit of luck. The often quoted 'Four seasons in one day' being locked in our memory from earlier visits

A short history:
We first visited Patagonia in 1992. Then we had lots of time, little money and borrowed kit. After battling with the North Tower of Paine we set off to explore the then quieter French Valley
We were amazed by the potential and beauty of the multiple granite faces, peaks and towers.
After the odd hiccup of lost food and intimidation by condors we successfully climbed a new route from the French valley. This was a stunning line on the south west arete of the Cuernos Norte. We called our route Caveman (700m ED UK E5)
From the summit we had fantastic view into the valley that lies between the Rio Ascencio and the French valley. The valley was named the Pingo on the old maps but is now called the Bader. At the head of this valley is the very impressive South face of the South tower.
After much investigation it became apparent that this valley had received the odd visitor but had no routes on any of the faces. An opportunity not to be missed.
In 1994/5 Twid and I, along with Martin Doyle and Olly Sanders returned to Paine with the intention of attempting to climb the still unclimbed South face of the South Tower. Bad weather forced us to change our plans. The consolation prize could not have been better. We were privilaged enough to climb the first route in the Bader Valley 'A Fist full of Dollars' on the east face of Cuernos Norte. The ultimate Patagonian route as it is both sheltered and over hanging!
The south face of the south tower remains and is what had drawn us back to a much changed and developed Paine.
We passed quickly through Puerto Natales. One day to organise and buy food then straight on to the park. We chose to use the classic approach from the Rio Ascencio.
The world of big wall climbing becomes a small social circle. We met Rollo Garibotti and Bruno Souzac who were escaping from the unusually bad weather in the park. We exchanged enthusiastic accounts of other walls, mountains and adventures and they being generous, fit and frustrated carried some kit up for us!
We could hardly be called a team as there was only the two of us. Our only chance of success was to be as close as possible to the face so that we could take advantage of any break in the weather. This meant that we could not afford the luxury of a base camp in the shelter of the woods
The tourism and trekking has become well developed. The old climbing approaches now well marked tourist trails, trampled daily by hundreds of feet. We left the main trail and mass of trekkers above the old Torres site and in 100m we were alone.
Home became a little tent surrounded by the defences of a huge split boulder and 2 walls. Although only a couple of hours from the Torres site we could have been miles for in six weeks we encountered only one other person.
It took 2 days and 4 helpers to lugg our loads up to camp. The rain was persistent but the wind waited until we unfolded our tent the snow followed swiftly.
For two weeks we struggled through increasingly worsening blizzards and irratic temperatures trying to make a start on the wall. Adding to our difficulties the normally dry glacier was wet and decaying. As we carefully tracked to and fro with our hefty sacks huge holes began to open and bridges droop and collapse. The distance to civilisation was irrelevent. I knew if we failed to hold a fall down a hole or injured ourselves there was no easy way back. It made me long for the safety of a hanging camp on the wall. After 2 weeks of frustration with the weather we decided that we might stand a better chance on the slightly closer Central Tower.

Following a night of storms the wind dropped at 9am. We picked up our waiting sacks and headed for the wall. Plodding through the deep snow weaving a careful line.
We dug out our now buried loads and headed across the slopes to the tower.
The sky was perfectly clear and the sun warm. Suddenly we both stopped there was no discussion just acknowledgement and agreement. Lets get off this slope. We turned and ran.
Back on a rocky ridge we watched the sunny rock and the warming snow slopes.
Later the day as the slopes cooled in the shade we returned. The slope had avalanched across our path and flowing into the mouth of a gaping crevasse below.
Late but alive we had started on the wall.
But the weather would not give. We would wake before dawn to cross the snow in the cool of the morning but the storms would not pass till late. We would try what ever the weather and sometimes we were lucky but some times only just
It was clear but windy. I have spent every winter of my life in Scotland so wind I am familiar with and wind I have full respect for. We set off across boulders on to the glacier. The wind buffeted us and retreated. As we roped up the lulls became less and gusts stronger. One bridge had collapsed forcing our route across a slither of ice.
I tensed in the wind and stepped on to the ice when the full force of a gust hit. I dropped on to my axe. My body rocked in the wind, below me was a cathedral to my right and a chasm on my left. I looked down and noticed tears dropping on to my glove. They were mine.
New years eve we opened the wine but could not drink. We were tired from lack of sleep caused by the constant battering wind during the night. We toasted the weather and fell to sleep in relative calm.
Unusually Twid woke first. ' Its Calm" he said half as a wake up call and half in amazement. A perfect start to the New year
The glacier was hard and quick to cross. We gained the wall quickly and began to climb the warm rock. It was 11am and we were moving fast. Twid set off on our third pitch that day. As I sorted ropes on the stance I hardly noticed the grey swathes of cloud enveloping the surrounding peaks and the splatters of moisture on the rock. I tusselled with my waterproof bottoms. Twid yelled safe as the backup rope jammed and the storm began.
I fought with tangled ropes and struggled with gear all the while watching jumar line rubbing on the sharp roofs above. The pitched traversed where Twid had climbed, I had a waterfall and a rope going horizontal. There was no room for fear, it would not help. Above Twid was waiting I was carrying his waterproofs and clothes Much to my relief Twid was in a little cave and relatively dry. We retreated urgently down walls flowing with water.
On the snow Twid shouted I moved. We knew that we could not loiter on these slopes. Our new hazard was a once snowy couloir off a rocky ridge. It now flowed with rocks. We scuttled side to side avoiding the flow stopping only to psyche up to jump the enlarging bergshrund. Absolutely soaked we reached tent. How could it happen so cold and fine then so utterly wet.
Fortunately as the rain passed the wind began so we dried our kit. Feeling positive once more we planned between games of hangman and eye spy how and when to get on to the portaledge. The lower walls on the tower are not immaculate granite and they are exposed to rock fall and weather. We were pushing towards a large ledge above the angle kicked steeper: We were convinced it would be sheltered, convinced that it would make a good base sure that it would be better.
We woke to huge black clouds but that was nothing new so we decided to try. On the wall it was freezing but perhaps better cold than wet and we were making progress. By the end of the day we were close enough. Tomorrow we could go with the ledge. Full of hope and enthusiasm we set our watches for an early start and slept.
We were woken not by the alarm but by the rain thumping the tent. For the next four days the storms came in quick succession
We had spent nearly 6 weeks and had climbed only 350m mostly in poor weather and mainly on poor rock. Eventually the longing for safety and thoughts of home came too strong. We had been battered and the passion for the mountain had faltered.
We made our final crossing of the glacier and struggled up frozen ropes to retrieve our equipment. After as we left our wind hammered home I felt full of emotion but non was regret there was only relief.

Less than 24 hour after leaving the park we stood at the airport.

'I am sorry but there are no seats for six days ' We listened in dismay. We could fly home only 3days earlier than planned and it would cost £250.
Maybe it was a night with clean sheets and no wind or may be it was the beer and the company of new climbers but we were enthused and inspired again. We returned to the park for one last effort. The thought of repeating the trudge up the Rio Ascencio was too much so we opted to return to the Bader valley.
'Bent double like old beggars under sacks swam relentlessly through my mind.' Our sacks were too heavy to stop with out a rock to perch on and a friendly passer by to pull us back to our feet. But worst of all it was my fault for insisting that we had spent too much money already with out hiring a horse or a porter. I conceded my error as each step felt like a bench press and our walk in tripled in time!
Finally a day later than planned we arrived at our Welsh camp of 1995. It had hardly changed. A few flattened areas and frame of a small shelter but best of all our little carved sign 'Campio Welshio!' It felt like home it was so familiar.
An American team were making home this time.
We camped at our previous advanced base camp which put us an hour from the base of our new objective 'The Mascara'
Our arrival in the valley had heralded some of the strongest winds yet forcing a crawl, rush cower approach. Finally with our trustee terra nova securely tied down and surrounded with a wall that gave a whole new meaning to big walling we headed up to go climbing.
We made our way to the closest section of rock and began. It was immaculate granite compact yet featured with cracks, corners and roofs. We had climbed four pitches when the rain began so we tied our ropes and retreated to the tent. We were relax and tired. The climbing was good and it was only Saturday. We had a week.
Sunday it turned to winter with snow falling heavily. This was a disaster as we finished our new books and had to return to eye spy and hangman
Monday and Tuesday snow took turns with rain leaving the wind to be perpetual. We tried to climb and got soaked, we tried to explore and got flattened but now we were not alone.
Arrived at our little site were not one but two teams a Spanish and a French party. It was fantastic; the little big wall social circle kicked in as we discovered mutual friends and connections.
On Wednesday we had a choice pack up and go home or pack up and climb. We climbed.
The storms abated a little and we hoped that we would be sheltered from the strongest gusts but there was no hiding from the cold. However the rock was dry and features drew us on and up. By last light we had reached the top of the first wall.
By nightfall the snow had begun again. The good thing with snow is that one can dig a sleeping ledge. The bad thing about snow is that it makes getting up even worse than a Monday morning. The next day we climbed on agreeing 'If it gets worse we will just go down' but some how a mean rocky ledge and night time arrived before our decision. The snow stopped but the wind came sweeping in, cracking ferociously through the col below us.
We woke knowing that something was different. The silence had disturbed us there was no wind, no patter of snow.
We hardly spoke all day just climbed. By five the face was climbed but a ridge remained to the summit. Twid handed me the rope to belay and on we went. At 8pm on Friday the
we hugged precariously on the summit of the Mascara. Too late and too tired to descend we returned to our bivvy ledge in darkness.
It was our first 24hours of good weather

For A few Dollars More 800m ED+
Climbed by Mike Twid Turner and Louise Thomas January 2001
First ascent of the route and first British ascent of the East Face of the Mascara from the Bader Valley

Logistics
With the aid of Internet travelling to remote parts of the world has become a whole lot easier. Torres Del Paine is no exception from this rule, but a few old bureaucratic customs still hang in. The previous year two Canadians had climbed in Paine, with some help from Lindsay Griffin I got hold of their email address. They provided up to date information on current day situation on logistics.

Permission to climb must be sorted out prior to going to the park. We spoke to the embassy in London who contacted the right office in Santiago. They also kindly translated the documents into Spanish for us. You have to contact the Advertising department in the embassy. Permission needs to be sorted from the border police and from CONAF. CONAF is the governmental agency responsible for the National Parks. It has been running since the 1950's. By writing/faxing CONAF in Santiago a letter of confirmation to climb will be sent. If you get it before you go to Chile life is simple. Once you arrive in the Park you go to administration pay your $50 each, receive your permit and go climbing. If you arrive without expect hassle and delays maybe 3 or 4 days. An agent can organise this permit for you as long as they can enough time. All they need are your passport details (photocopy) and your itinerary. Of cause they will charge for the service! When you arrive at Laguna amarga, the park entrance, you have to sign the arrival book everybody else. We found the CONAF guards very helpful and in no way a hindrance. Guards, whose main job is to help the trekkers, ward some of the campsites. You are strictly not allowed to cook on wood, so buy gas or take fuel for stoves. We bought blue gas cartridges epi gas style was not available. We also managed to buy white gas but this was not of good quality and we would recommend buying normal petrol.

An agent is very useful for organising porters or horses. We used the agency called Fortalaza, which has an office near the centre of town. On our first trip to Patagonia we had met a boy in the French valley who gave us a bag of rice to eat. We had to survive on this bag of rice for 4 days as our food had run out. Christian now ten years older runs the Fortalaza. Quite a coincidence for us when we found out. He speaks good English and is a keen climber who has put up routes himself in the park. It is not easy to find locals who climb and have real empathy with climbers, who perhaps do not have loads of money. He is contacted by phone or best email. He advised us to take porters instead of horses, as we had done in the past. Horses will carry 70kg but could only go half way to our base camp. The porters will carry 25kg and would walk as far as you wanted. The porters were young men very keen but not as experienced as we were first led to believe. What they lacked in experience they easily made up for in enthusiasm. They were well worth their money and I would whole-heartedly recommend their use. If horses can be used they are the best option financially. Up to our base camp we hired 4 porters for 2 days. We carried 40kg each as well, and managed to get most of our equipment to our advanced base camp below the Towers. On the way out we carried all our kit down to the Chilean hut and hired horses. This took a grueling three days. We paid in **Dollars** for the porters. Most things are priced in Dollars but if you had Pesos you got a better deal. Change most of your cash at Santiago airport for local currency. Dollars we had changed in the UK. You can easily change cash, travelers cheques and credit cards in Puerto Natales. Sterling can also be changed but they prefer dollars. Expect to pay European prices for food, accommodation and beer. Transport by buses is very cheap and also extremely comfortable. Chile is not cheap so do not underestimate your budget!

Accommodation can vary hugely in price and quality. Most travelers stay in bed and breakfast type of accommodation. They are great value and plenty. Most have places to cook but it is usual to eat out. There are many locals who can help but have a good look at the accommodation prior to staying. We ended up opposite a Karioki bar! Which after 3 days without sleep was not what I was looking for! Accommodation in Punta Arenas is more expensive. Once in the park you can camp. Some camp sites like the one near the Estancia will charge for facilities, but they do have hot showers and flushing toilets. Many huts have sprung up around the park. These are run on similar lines to the huts you would fined in the Alps, but cater for the richer and lazy types!

Tickets for the bus for the park can be bought for the standard price from your accommodation. They will organise a pick up from outside your b and b. Some buses charge extra for excess luggage. We managed to spread our load amongst our trekkers going into the park. Buy a return it is best value. Buses go around

7pm and 12 in the morning and return at 3.30pm or 5 the last bus back is around 6. The journey takes 2 and half hours with a short stop.

Buy a **map** from town not in the park, it is not bad and has reasonable contour definition scale is on the large side 1:100,000.

The weather

They say that Patagonia has four seasons in every day. Over our three last expeditions to this area we tend to agree. Torres Del Paine is situated on the edge of the southern Patagonian Ice cap and effected by roaring forties. Weather fronts roll in off the Pacific Ocean with great speed holding vast somes of moisture. The front hits the cold ice cap, cooling the air and when this cooler air has to rise over the mountains of Paine precipitation occurs. The fronts travel very fast and can pass in a matter of hours. So one minute you have snow, next rain, next sun and cloud! The winds in the Patagonian summer are strong and tend to ease later in March. The answer to how do you cope is say chilled!!! You need patience. Over the 7 weeks we had in the park, we only had a handful of perfect days and only one perfect climbing day. Just as well it was our last day when we summitted! But when the weather if fine there is no better place. We have had spells of good weather in all months from November to March. It is always pot luck, but it does seem better later rather than earlier. During our stay we had endless snowfall, even the locals were saying it was a particularly bad season. Snow high up usually means rain low down. We also had winds well over one hundred miles an hour, on one occasion we had to lie down on the glacier for over one hour to wait for a lull. The big problem we had was avalanches. This was a new phenomenon for us down there as in the past it had snowed but not to this extent. We would get snow that would stick to almost vertical walls due to the temperature. (Also seen in Greenland) The weather would improve and the walls would turn into huge waterfalls. On one occasion we had to rappel off in one of these thaws, our line turned into a huge waterfall. We luckily got to the base of our climb but soaked. All the slopes around the glacier where avalanching with huge wet snow avalanches, we had to run. This was a cycle we had to endure for five and half weeks. Once you get onto the overhanging sections you are relatively safe! Winds on the wall can be so strong that it can be hard to breathe facing the direction of the wind. Climbing on an exposed face in these conditions is impossible; the answer is an east-facing climb. Our second to last bivi on the Mascara was a nightmare of gusting wind. We had to shout to each other even when we where only inches apart! Due not underestimate the wind. It can cut a fixed line in minutes and entangle you in a nasty web. Every day one of us would wake at dawn check the weather and brew up, any possibility of good weather and we went. You cannot afford to be apathetic, which is so easy if you have to constantly hang around. Never miss a good day you will regret it! The weather is potluck but you can still make some of your own!

Equipment

Big wall climbing does require huge amounts of equipment. For this reason we travelled down via the states to get the 70kg weight allowance. Even with this allowance the two of us were well over our 70kg. How much can you take is how much you will need! During this trip we used almost all our kit nothing could have been left behind.

Kit list

Gortex top and bottom
2 thick fleece
2 thin fleece
1duvet manmade fibre
2 thermal tops
1 t shirt
1 thin trousers
1 thick fleece
4 pairs of socks
Thermal hat
Sun hat
3 pairs of gloves
Leather gloves
Sleeping bag 4 season
bivi bag
Big sac
Thermarest
3 haulbags big
1 tent
portaledge plus fly
gas stove plus hanging primus stove
mugs, spoons, knife
head torch plus 4 batteries(lots of light)
books

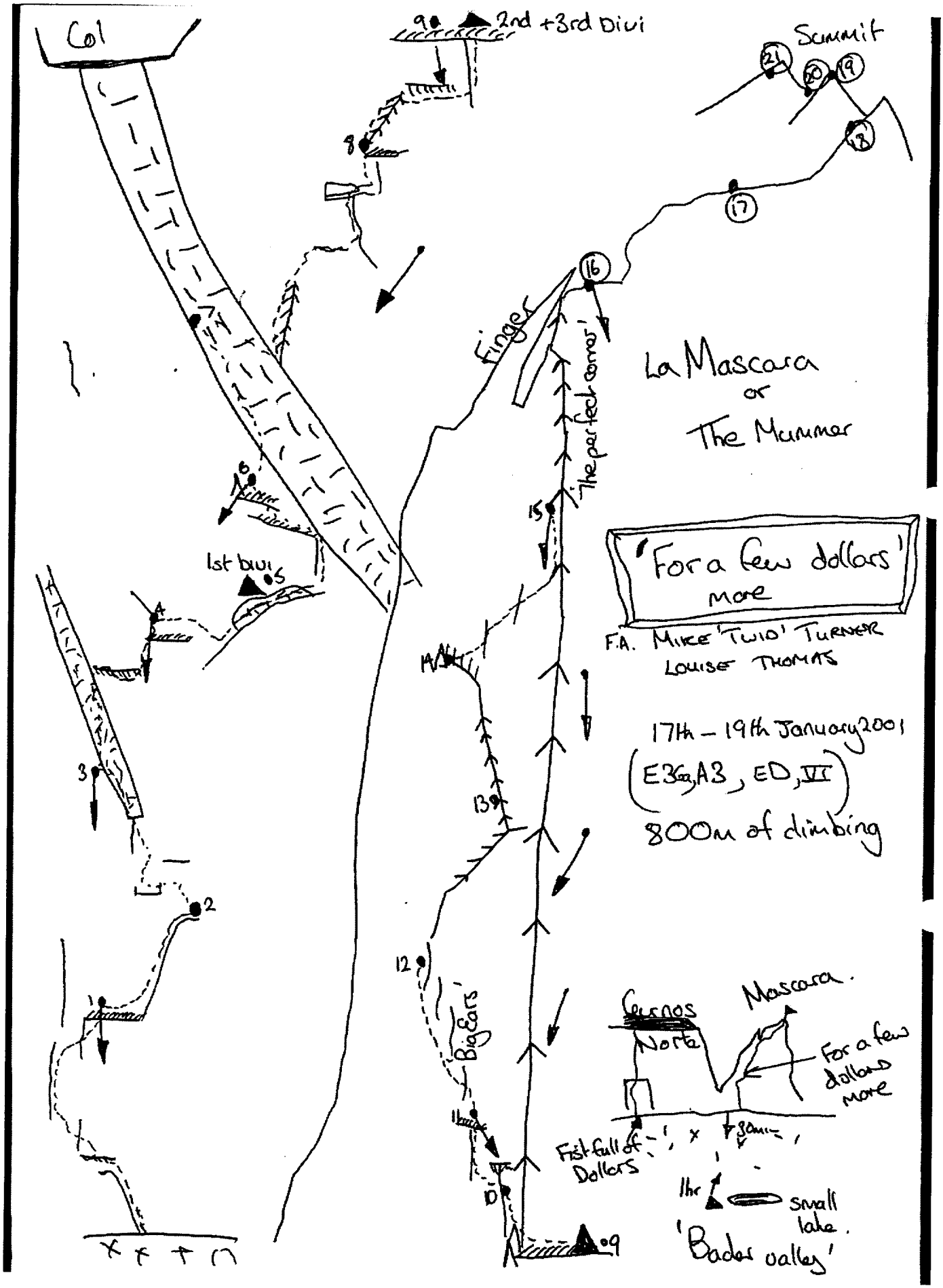
Climbing gear

Harness
Chest harness
Daisy chains 2
Belay device
Gri gri
120 karabiners
4 sets of wires
3 sets of all sizes cams
full set of hooks
full set of pegs(4 of each size of blade, lost arrow and angle)
hammers 2
axe and crampons
bolts (used only on belays and only 4 on the Mascara)
ropemen
minitraction
tat 40m
rope 60m dynamic 400m static

When you return to Puerto Natales it is very easy to sell used climbing gear and especially clothing to the local guides, not that they wanted much of our kit as it was well used!
It is possible to rent certain things in Natales such as sleeping bags, tents and stoves and at a push you could find some climbing gear. Many trekking groups are going to the glacier Grey for a journey, so you can find the odd crampon and axe. Best to take your own but if you loose any gear you could possible buy some replacement.

Insurance

As always we took out full BMC cover for the whole of the trip. It was not needed for the permit but it would be sensible to keep a copy at hand when going to pay for it. At a push a helicopter could be called from Punta Arenas, where there is a big navel base. This is not always possible and could never be relied upon. CONAF are very weary of climbers, due to previous climbing accidents. They are not prepared for big rescues, your only hope is other climbers. So be friendly you never know! The park guards would almost certainly help, but are not very well trained for such a case.
Medical care is generally very good and evacuation by road is not a problem. Although on the face of it Paine may seem a soft option, once in the hills you see very few people. In the month at advanced base camp we sure one person. There some radios at various points to help call for rescue if need be.
We wrote as we always do to John Rees the consulate in Punta Arenas, who on our first trip helped us immensely. This I think is a great idea as well as a courtesy call if you are passing. John's family is from Wales and he likes this connection. His is also an agent for one of the airlines and so a sound contact.


Col
9
2nd + 3rd Divi
Summit
21
20
19
18
17
16
15
13
12
11
10
9
8
6
5
4
3
2
1
1st Divi
Finger
The perfect corner
La Mascara
or
The Mummer
'For a few dollars' more
F.A. Mike 'Twid' Turner
Louise Thomas
17th – 19th January 2001
(E3 6a, A3, ED, VI)
800m of climbing
Big Ears
Cerros
Norte
Mascara.
For a few dollars more
First full of Dollars
1hr
small lake.
'Bados valley'

Costs

flights	1750
transport	150
Porters	500
Permit	130
fuel	35
Food	400
Accomodation	100
Meals	300
insurance	630
food in transit	120
travel uk	35
equipment	400
Admin	150
TOTAL	£4700-

income	
grants	2600