

Antarctica

ELLSWORTH MOUNTAINS

Sentinel Range, overview. The 2003-04 season saw a record number of people reach the summit of Vinson Massif (4,897m). A total of 75 people attempted the mountain and 74 were successful. This surpasses the previously most successful season, 2000-01, when 73 people summited out of 78 attempts.

Last season also saw the first Sherpa reach the summit. Lhakpa Rita summited twice while guiding clients, as did two other guides. At least 10 women reached the top, the most ever in one season, and one of them was one of two summiteers over 70 years old.

However, at one stage in late 2003, it looked like a Vinson season might not happen at all. *Adventure Network International* (ANI) had been the only operator of flights to inland Antarctica and had operated successfully every year since 1986. Around mid-year they decided to suspend operations this season for various reasons. Shortly after, the company, including the camp at Patriot Hills, was bought by a consortium that consisted mainly of ex-staff and owners. The new company—Antarctic Logistics & Expeditions (AL&E)—made their first flight in late November, and the experience and competence of their personnel resulted in a very successful and safe season.

The only new route last season was a variation on the long summit-day plod. Alain Hubert, of Belgium, guiding Christine Joris and Joao Garcia traversed east from the usual Camp 3 site on the col between Vinson and Shinn, then angled up to the eastern edge of the Vinson summit plateau. They followed this south over some minor ridge points before reaching the main summit pyramid from the east. This gave a very scenic outing, though slightly longer than the normal route.

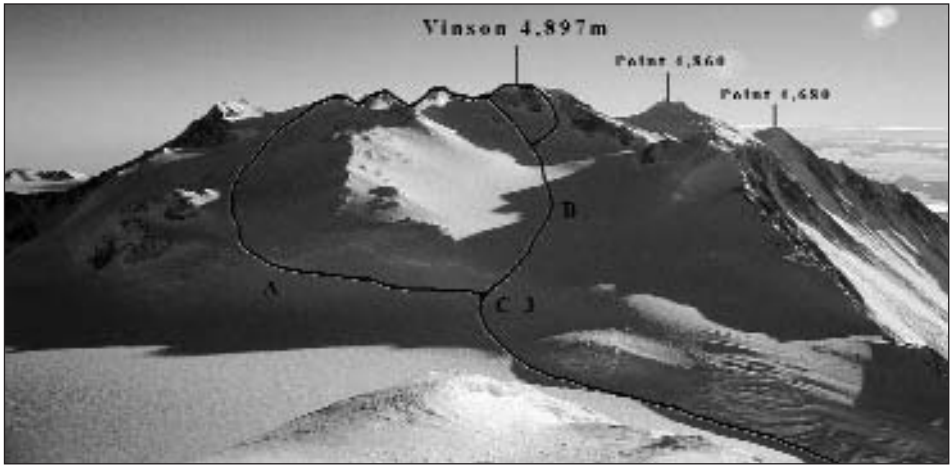
Luis Fraga, Ramon Portilla, and Miguel Angel Vidal of Spain made an ascent of the right-hand side of the West Face Ice Stream, a moderate but sustained snow and ice route that is one of the faster ways to the summit of Vinson. The route had been climbed twice by Conrad Anker in 1999, the second time up to and over the summit. On his first ascent Anker skied the route from the top of the ice stream.

Three groups also reached the summit of Mt. Shinn (4,661m), the third-highest mountain in Antarctica.

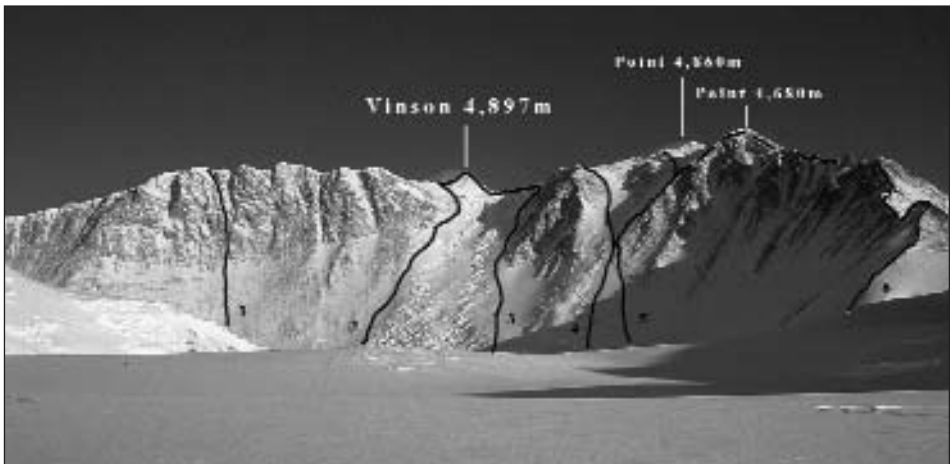
DAMIEN GILDEA, AAC, *Australia*



Vinson Massif, West Face Ice Stream, repeat ascent. As reported above, on December 23 Luis Fraga, Miguel Angel Vidal, and I made a rare ascent of the 2,000-meter high West Face of Vinson (4,897m). We repeated the line first climbed in 1999 by Conrad Anker. Starting out at around 4:30 a.m., we unroped above the rimaye and progressed about 60 meters apart, worried



Vinson Massif from the summit of Mt. Shinn. (A) Hubert et. al., 2003; (B) normal route up Vinson from C3. *Damien Gildea*



The west face of Mt. Vinson, with all known routes: (1) Linear Accelerator, Jay Smith, 1994; (2) Rudi's Runway, Rudi Lang, 1991; (3) Central Ice Stream-Right Side, Conrad Anker, 1999; (4) South Ice Stream, Jay & Jo Smith, 1993; (5) South Ice Stream to Point 4680, Alvarez-Juez, 1995; (6) West Ridge, Conrad Anker, 1999. Repeats: # 3 by Spanish, 2003; # 4 by Slovenians, 1997; # 5 partially repeated and skied by Anker and Anselme Baud, 1998; # 5 partially climbed in 1995 during unsuccessful attempt on Point 4860. *Route info and photo courtesy of Damien Gildea*

by wind slab in the middle section of the route. The first 800 meters were straightforward 45-50° but then it got steeper and the last 200 meters were on 55-60° hard bare ice. Fraga arrived at the top first, taking around eight-and-a-half hours, while I brought up the rear in 10 hours. The following day all three of us reached the summit and on Xmas Day descended the original 1991 Rudi Lang route on the far left side of the Central Ice Stream. The 2003 climb was my second ascent of the face. My first, and the most southerly of the five existing routes, followed an easier line up the right side of the South Ice Stream (though not to the summit), and was completed around the 18th January 1995 with the late Manolo Alvarez.

RAMON PORTILLA, *Spain*

An exploratory journey through the Ellsworth Mountains in 2002-03, and first ascent of Mt. Segers. On November 10, 2002 four Chilean mountaineers, Pablo Gutiérrez, Eugenio Guzmán, Ernesto Olivares, and I started a journey of over 400km through the almost unexplored east side of the Ellsworth Mountains, with the aim of finishing at Patriot Hills. We first flew by Twin Otter from Patriot Hills to the Newcomer Glacier, where on our first night the temperature dropped to -35°C . The next day we began pulling our four pulks, each one weighing 140kg. After four days we reached the first pass that would lead us into the heart of the Sentinel Range. We named it Light Pass and the crossing to the Embree Glacier proved easy.

By contrast, sledging up the Embree proved steep and strenuous. We had to haul the pulks and on one day traveled less than 400 meters. Our first crux came toward the end, where we had to cross to the Ellen Glacier. On route we had hoped to attempt Mt. Todd, but after inspecting the pass we had to cross, and seeing the difficulties involved we decided to concentrate all our efforts on reaching the Ellen Glacier.

It took a full 14 hours to rappel and lower sledges down the far side of Crocodile Pass, at one point negotiating a vertical ice step. Still hoping to bag a virgin summit we concentrated our efforts on one of the two remaining unclimbed 4,000m peaks of the Sentinel Range, Mt. Giovinetto. We left most of our supplies on the glacier and detoured for seven kilometers to camp at the base of the mountain. Unfortunately, once there we realized that the climb would take far longer than we anticipated, and we were not carrying enough food or fuel. Reluctantly we abandoned the idea.

Another difficult pass led to the Patton Glacier, and after 21 days we had our first official day-off to rest. We then continued along the glacier, at one point camping at the foot of 4,852m Mt. Tyree, and crossed a pass to the Crosswell Glacier. The traverse of the col was so straightforward we name it Angel Pass.



Shoveling terraces was essential to descending the passes safely. *Rodrigo Jordan*



The first camp on Ellen Glacier provided this view of the highest mountains in Antarctica. *Eugenio Guzmán*

On December 6 we completed 26 days of travel. We had consumed nearly half our food yet had only traveled 112km, a little more than one quarter of our intended trek. It seemed stupid to waste our meager resources on attempting a virgin peak, but our motivation to do so was still strong. We took two days out to try Mt. Segers and were rewarded with an outstanding view from the summit, which lies in the very heart of the Sentinels.

We then crossed the Dater Glacier to the Thomas Glacier, and to our dismay found the second crux of the journey: an immense crevasse field that took considerable time and effort to negotiate. We finally reached the Minnesota Glacier and crossed it to the Heritage Range.

On December 28, after climbing to a gap we called Non-steep Slope Pass, we could see the Union Glacier with its beautiful blue ice surface. By the 30th we had reached the last pass on our journey, Eureka Pass, already named by one of the members of the 1989-90 Trans Antarctic Expedition. From this pass we were delighted to see Patriot Hills, 60km distant. Our last camp was about 17km from the Patriot Hills Base and we covered the ground easily to arrive on January 2, 54 days and 403km after starting our journey.

RODRIGO JORDAN, AAC

DRONNING MAUD LAND

Fenris, Orvin Fjella Mountains, first ascent. In December 2003 Mike Libeck and I were landed at an altitude of ca 1,200m close to Ulvetanna in the Orvin Fjella mountains of Dronning Maud Land. Base camp was established at 71° 51,264 S, 08° 22,552 W. We first circumnavigated the Orvin Fjella range, on route repairing an unmanned weather station for Stanford University and NASA. By climbing a few moderate ridges, we discovered most of the rock to be highly decomposed.

After our ski tour we decided to attempt the unclimbed 600-meter west face of Fenris (2,680m). The first pitch proved the most difficult; over 70 meters of A4 on which no bolts were placed. Above, a crack system appeared to split the remainder of the wall, so we started up the face in capsule style on January 2, 2004. On the 15th we reached the knife-edge summit and began a series of 14 rappels back down the wall. Only bolted anchors were left behind. A full account of this climb by Mike Libeck appears earlier in this Journal.

JOSH HELLING, AAC

THE DRY VALLEYS

Mount Dido, first ascent of South Ridge. During a SAR training exercise in February 2002, Thai Verzone and I had the opportunity to make the first ascent of the South Ridge (IV 5.9) of Mt. Dido (1,976m) in the Olympus Range of Victoria Land's Dry Valleys. The first half of the route was straightforward and primarily low to mid 5th class climbing. The second half required careful route finding with two crux sections of 5.9. The ridge ended before the summit, and the final three pitches were on the exposed south face.

In total, we climbed 12 pitches in plastic boots on sandstone of varying quality. According to our best research, the tower had seen only one ascent previously, via the north ridge by a New Zealand party in the early 1980s. Before then, only a helicopter-borne survey team had touched the summit. Descent involved rappelling and down-climbing our line of ascent.

The Dry Valleys have an immense amount of climbing potential, with rock climbs like ours and other climbs more alpine in nature. Access is tremendously challenging, and the commitment factor is extremely high. This is also an area of high scientific interest, so special care must be taken with the environment.

CHRIS SIMMONS, AAC

Historical note: the first recorded ascent was made by New Zealanders L. Main and R. Millington in November 1981. During the 1984-1985 summer, a four-member New Zealand team led by the late Rob Hall attempted the south ridge but was beaten by technical difficulties.

ANTARCTIC PENINSULA

Antarctic Peninsula brief summary. The Antarctic Peninsula was surprisingly quiet this year, with only two expeditions attempting mountain objectives. During November and December the Omega Foundation conducted its fifth Antarctic expedition in as many years, this time on Livingston Island in the South Shetland Islands. Later, in January, a group of Israeli and Palestinian adventurers sailed down the Peninsula to make a first ascent in the name of peace.

Livingston Island, South Shetland Islands, second ascent of Mt. Friesland and New

Altitude. Livingston Island is around 60km long and much of it is gentle terrain. However, at the eastern end rises an impressive range of snowy peaks that I had first seen while visiting the area in 2001. Though mapped by the British Antarctic Survey in the 1950s, there was some ambiguity over the height, names and locations of some of the peaks. Myself and John Bath of Australia, with Rodrigo Fica and Osvaldo Usaj of Chile, sponsored by the Omega Foundation, aimed to climb several of the main peaks and ascertain their height (as Rodrigo and I had done on Mt. Shinn the previous year). In addition we wanted to match various peaks and features with names in existing Antarctic databases, such as the Composite Gazetteer of Antarctic Place Names compiled by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR).



Thai Versone leading one of the harder pitches on the final south face. *Chris Simmons*



The south ridge of Mt. Dido. The ridge is gained at its lowest point by a series of traversing ledges from the west, and follows the sunlit skyline for 12+ pitches. *Chris Simmons*



John Bath and Osvaldo Usaj approaching the summit of Mt. Bowles (822m) on Livingston Island. In the background, left to right: Falsa Aguja, Levski Peak, and Lyaskovets Peak. Mt. Friesland is out of picture to the right. *Damien Gildea*

The Omega team first flew to King George Island in a Dash-7 aircraft chartered by the Chilean airline DAP as part of their expansion of tourist activity in the area. We then transferred to a new DAP BO-105 helicopter and in three flights were transferred to a predetermined base camp site on Livingston. During the 26 days we spent on the island, only three days were really suitable for climbing. Two of those days were taken for flying in and out! The other good day was spent making the second known ascent of Mt. Bowles, a rounded peak north of the main range, which the Omega team measured at 822m. After the work on Bowles, we spent nearly two weeks unable to climb high due to combinations of wind, light snow, constant low cloud and fog, and two periods of severe blizzard conditions lasting several days. During this time some short ski journeys were made in the vicinity of the plateau and also to make a cache at the start of the ramp that led up to the east ridge of Mt. Friesland, the primary objective of the group, as it is the highest peak on the island.

Friesland was first climbed in December 1991 by two Spanish climbers from the nearby King Juan Carlos I base. Though Bulgarian scientific personnel had been active in this part of Livingston in the intervening period, they confirmed to us that they had not climbed any of the high peaks.

On December 19 John, Rodrigo, and I left camp in the evening to make a final attempt on Friesland. The long snowy ramp up to the ridge was much more crevassed than we had assumed and took time to negotiate in visibility that was usually around 20 meters or less. Upon reaching the ridge the weather deteriorated further, but we continued up until we came to a point where we could not see the way ahead due to low light levels (it was 2 a.m.) and a light

snowfall. We then spent a cold and uncomfortable night bivouacked in a two-man tent with no sleeping bags, then continued to the top later that morning in slightly better weather. The ridge was severely crevassed and corniced, but otherwise held no difficulty. Fortunately, the weather held for around three hours while we were on the summit, enough time to run the GPS and eventually obtain a new height of 1,700m for Mt. Friesland. At various clearings in the weather, and on the spectacular helicopter flight out on December 22, we were able to confirm visually that Friesland is indeed the highest peak on the island. The Omega Foundation will use the new information from this expedition and other sources to produce a new map of Livingston Island later in 2004. More information can be found at www.theomegafoundation.org.

DAMIEN GILDEA, AAC, *Australia*

Unnamed Peak, First Ascent, Prospect Point, Antarctic Peninsula. A group of eight Palestinian and Israeli adventurers—the *Breaking The Ice* expedition—with another eight support crew, traveled well south down the Peninsula aboard the well-known yacht *Pelagic* and the new *Pelagic Australis*. Their aim was to make a first ascent of a virgin Antarctic mountain in the name of peace. The eight team members were Ziad Darwish, Doren Erel, Yarden Fanta, Olfat Haider, Suleiman al-Khateib, Heskell Nathaniel, Nasser Quass, and Avihu Shoshani. Most of the team had never climbed before, but were guided by Skip Novak (skipper of *Pelagic*), Doren Erel, and Denis Ducroz of France. Erel and Ducroz had both visited the Peninsula in January 1994 when, with Novak and sailing aboard *Pelagic*, they made the fourth ascent of the beautiful Mt. William on Anvers Island.

On January 16 all team members eventually summited a non-technical peak at the head of the glacier above Prospect Point. Their handheld GPS gave a height of 882m and a location of 66 01.08S 65 11.36W. On the summit, Nathaniel read a declaration that the team had prepared and called the peak *The Mountain of Israeli-Palestinian Friendship*. More information can be found at: www.breaking-the-ice.de.

DAMIEN GILDEA, AAC, *Australia*

SOUTH GEORGIA

Mount Paget, Alladyce Range, North East Spur. In November 2003 a Spanish team including José Carlos Tamayo made a rare ascent of Mt. Paget (2,935m), the highest peak on the island of South Georgia and the highest on British soil. They repeated the North East Spur, first climbed in 1980 by a five-member French expedition led by Philippe Cardis (traveling in the yacht *Basile*) during the second ascent of the mountain. The Spanish ascent of Paget was probably the fifth.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *High Mountain INFO*