

Patagonian Ice-cap 1971-72

Members of the Johchi University AC

(Translation: I. Yoshizawa)

Three members of the Johchi University AC made a successful first crossing of the central part of the South Patagonian Ice-cap during November 1971 to February 1972.

Although there are few mountain groups which exceed 3000 m in Patagonia, it can be said at present to be one of the most fantastic and attractive mountain massifs remaining in the world, having the world-famous worst climatic conditions and gigantic glaciers twice the size of those of the Karakoram. The other reason for our Patagonian expedition, why we attached so much to this 'Yearning for the Unknown', was that we must do it by ourselves. Here we could employ no porters and Sherpas as in the Himalaya and there are no dog sledges as in the Antarctic and Greenland. The key for the enterprise, whether it ended successfully or unsuccessfully, rested only with ourselves.

The members of the expedition were Toshio Takeuchi (leader, 29), Takeo Tsuzuki (26) and Takeo Yoshizawa (27) (who is the third son of the translator I. Yoshizawa).

On 1 October 1971 Yoshizawa and Tsuzuki left Haneda as the advance party. They were expected to smooth the entry of baggage which was sent from Yokohama early in September. But when they reached the spot, they found that they had to spend many hours dealing with the problem of mountaineering permission rather than concerning themselves with entry affairs. We had not realised that we might have to get permission to climb in the Andes, and to tell the truth when we visited the Chilean Embassy in Tokyo, the officers there did not mention permissions. So we were very much puzzled when we arrived at Santiago.

Since 1970 relations between Argentine and Peru had become worse and boundary disputes were in progress, so that the problem of mountaineering permission, especially for Patagonia, was being strictly controlled. Luckily in the end the recommendation from our university was very effective and on 23 October we had at last officially been given the long-awaited mountaineering permission. As Chile was then an out-and-out bureaucratic State like a country in the Far East the mountaineering permit issued by the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs exercised its authority in every way and place.

Eight hundred kilograms of baggage passed rapidly through the Customs on payment of only 300 escudos (Y4000). Furthermore, the Chilean Navy gave us a hand and transported us to Puerto Eden, which was to become our base station for the crossing of the Hielo Continental.

In the beginning we expected our baggage to be carried by train as far as Valparaiso, Santiago and Puerto Mont and from there to Puerto Eden by a regular liner. But to our great astonishment and pleasure the kindness and generosity of the Chilean Navy greatly simplified our plans.

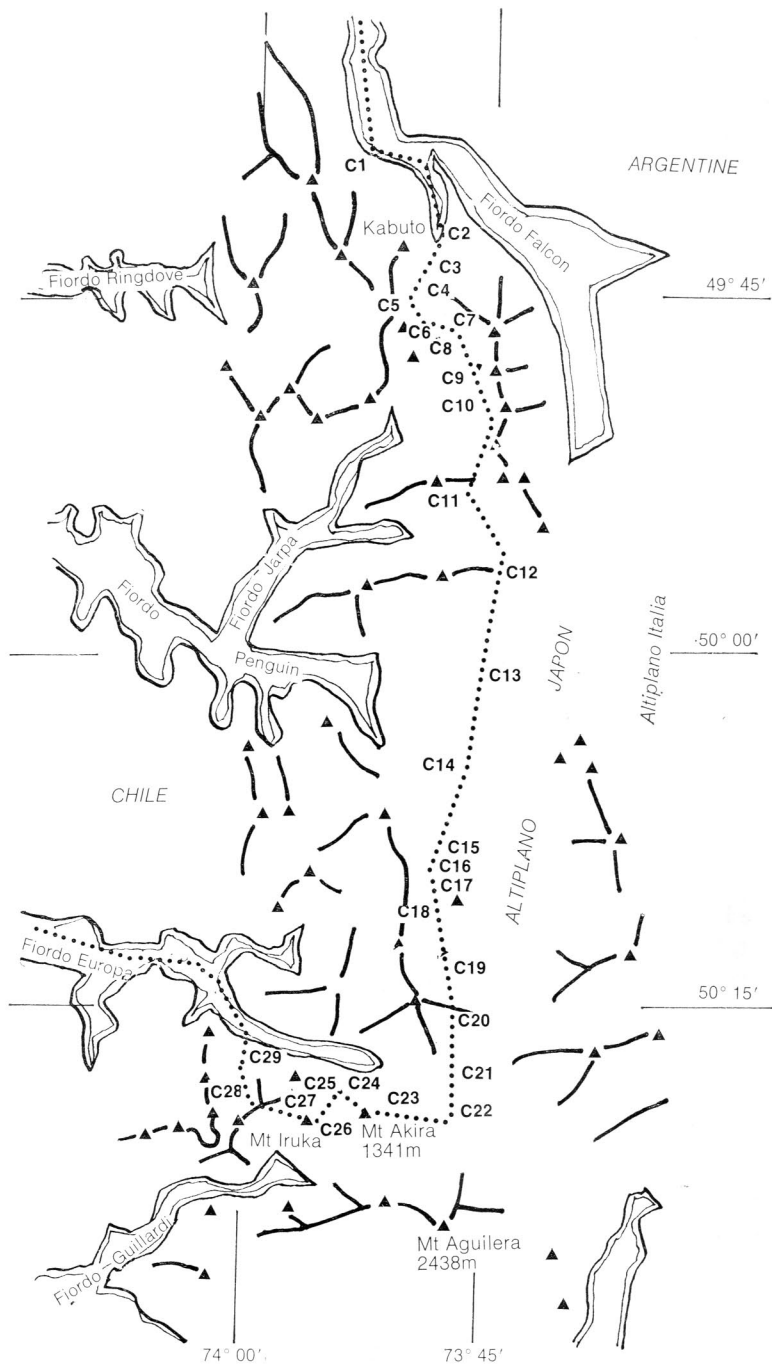
On 4 November *Pirot Paldo*, one of the ice-breakers bound for the Antarctic, left Valparaiso for Puerto Eden, taking us on board. It was a stirring 2000-km voyage against the violent Humboldt Current. Blue sky above and purple sea below expanded without limit, and the brightness of the Southern Cross at night set us free from sea-sickness. But the colour of the sky began to change into lead by the third day, and as we came near the Antarctic Circle the weather deteriorated gradually. The up and down of the bow reached 7-8 m and we had the illusion of sitting on a swing. At 11.30pm on 8 November, the fifth day after leaving Valparaiso, we reached our base, Puerto Eden, at last. We were transferred from the *Pirot Paldo* to a small steam-boat of *caravintero* (policemen) and landed. We were given rooms in the hospital, supposedly a result of communication between Santiago and Puerto Eden via Punta Arenas. Everybody who met us said that they had had no days without rain for six months. It was very wonderful to have this fine starry night just on the day we reached them. We supposed that they wished to say that we had brought the stars with us.

Puerto Eden has only 40 families totalling 140 persons, who come of Mongoloid stock. That is why we were thinking of Puerto Eden as the 'Land of Paradise' during the period of ferrying loads and crossing the horrible Altiplano.

Receiving a kind send-off from the *caravintero* family, we started for the Europa glacier on 11 November. Although they are used to having here only a few fine days in a year, today we could luckily see a patch of blue sky. An utter miracle! Have the three done something good in their past?

Now firing on its one cylinder, the small boat began to move. They call such a boat 'pata pata', instead of 'pon pon' as in Japan. It was good to see the Chilean and Japanese flags fluttering in the wind. From Eden to the Europa glacier it took about 30 hours to go through a channel at a speed of 10 km/hr. During this voyage, dolphins guided us from back and front.

At gam on the 12th we found emerald-coloured floating ice, surely pushed out from the Europa glacier. As we entered the depth of the fjord the ice floes became larger and more numerous. We could not gaze as long as we would have liked upon the great scenery of the glacier tongue and beauty of the floes, even though we were seeing them for the first time, for it became clear that we might not be able to land at the planned point owing to the number of floes. We reached the landing place after consulting the 1/250,000 map. We would not be able to cross Hielo Continental successfully without completing the ferrying of our loads. Finally, we decided on the mouth of a river which flows in near 74°w as our landing point. It was 20 km in a straight line from the place we had hoped to reach. Without doubt, in this Patagonian glacier area this distance of 20 km would enormously affect our planned activities, but all we could do was to push on from the possible landing point and do our best in the circumstances.



Our little 'pata pata' came alongside the point $73^{\circ}58'W$, $50^{\circ}17'S$ at last. Does this creek run out to the ridge which connects with the 1341-m peak just as we saw and thought from 'pata pata'? Worried somewhat by the prospect we carried ashore about 250 kg of loads. Our small boat left the landing point as if she wished to run away as fast as possible. There was some uneasiness among the three left behind . . . supposing she could not come back on the 27th as promised . . . supposing something went wrong on her return journey?

We were brought back to the present by the softly falling rain and impatience to start the ferrying. Now where is our camp site? In Japan, we could manage to pass a day if we considered the wind direction, but it is completely different here. The precipitation in a year reaches 7000 mm. Mosses which had accumulated in thousands of years gushed water when we stepped on them. Rains attacked from above, water invaded from below, comfortable camping was out of the question. In spite of these things humans try to make life as pleasant as possible. We went around therefore in search of a better camping ground even though we knew it was the same everywhere. Thenceforward we continued ferrying and reconnoitring for fifteen days. At various times we made a way by cutting with a hatchet, we paddled across the glacier lake and built a bridge over a stream which blocked our path. During these times we only saw the sun for a few hours. Truly did we taste the sternness of Patagonia to the utmost extent! We crossed two glacier lakes between Camp 1 and Camp 2 by rowing which could only be called timid. The surface of the lake was coal black seemingly bottomless. 'This is just like that of Loch Ness in Scotland. A dinosaur would appear and swallow us all at once.' Thus we murmured to each other. We were puzzled by several swamps between Camps 2 and 3 and troubled by bushes from Camp 3 to Camp 4. To tell the truth, Patagonia demands from us all known mountaineering techniques. During these conditions we met rains every day. At times we were surprised by some sudden gusts stronger than we had ever previously experienced.

There is no sudden change of temperature here as in the Japanese Alps in winter, but in place of that the cold attacked by slow degrees. The rain and cold soaked all our clothing from the surface inwards so that the body temperature was gradually reduced.

On 21 November we had a tough experience. The reconnaissance to the 1341-m peak had ended in a complete failure and we had returned to Camp 4 when in the night we were upset by one of the notorious Patagonian sudden gusts. Camp 4 was situated at the end of a cirque just under the ridge, like the smaller-scaled Karasawa valley in the Northern Japanese Alps. The wind whistled wildly; we clung to the pole frantically and put our bodies firmly on the swelling tent, but such resistance was all in vain. The Patagonian wind went on to tear the tent to pieces mercilessly. It tore in half as if cut by a knife.

Ten days had passed since the beginning of the ferrying and together with the worry that we could not yet assure the route to the expected depot, the damage to our tent cast a dark shadow upon us. The remaining ferrying might be done by staying in a snow-hole, even if it would not be comfortable to live in when the

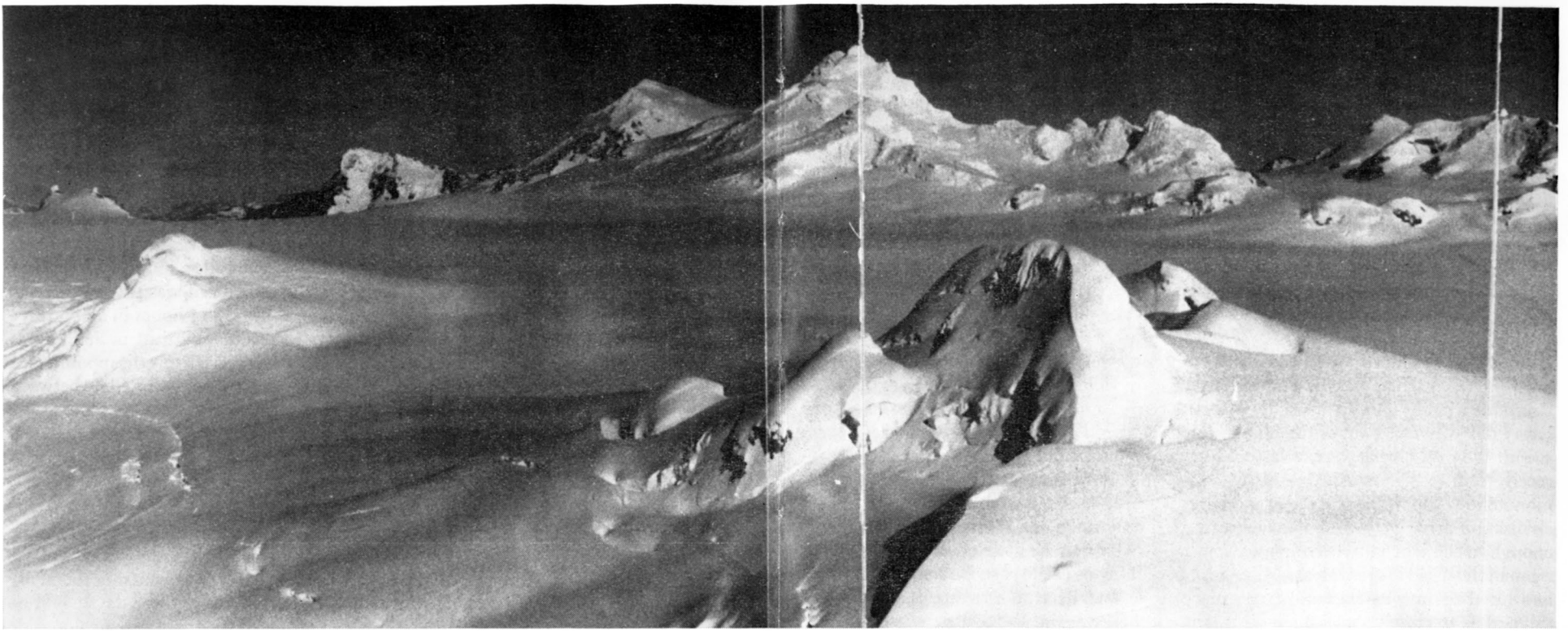
mountain snow became wet through with the continuous rain. But ferrying must be done as near as possible to the Hielo Continental. Only three days remained for the carrying of the remaining loads according to our planned schedule. To tell the truth, ten more days would be needed to ferry the 200 kg loads to the route for the continental crossing. 'As near the starting point of the crossing as possible for the successful trip' was our unchanging aim. Thus the transporting of the loads to 1341 m was done in the manner of an assault on a high mountain. On the 23rd we did it for seventeen hours without a break. We were very nervous of the big cornice which overhung the Guillardier glacier on the snow-ridge cut clearly by the U-type valley. Furthermore there were blizzard conditions on the ridge. Our fighting spirit was prone to shrink in contrast with the great scale of Patagonia. Working 45 hours in all on three hard days since the 23rd, the last depot was placed only just under Mount Iruka (Dolphin) at a site short of the expected one. The biggest disappointment was that we had to return to Puerto Eden without confirming the route between the Mount Iruka and the Ice-cap. Could we manage to locate the place at the end of the crossing route? Probably we would arrive here extremely fatigued. Plagued by these doubts it was not entirely a pleasure even when the 'pata pata' arrived on 27 November and carried us back to Puerto Eden as promised.

On 3 December 1971, after four days' rest, we again left Puerto Eden. The same day we entered Falcon fjord, but we did not land straight away because of the many ice floes. Moreover, the master of the 'pata pata' was scared of them. By 4 and 5 December we could wait no longer, for the loss of three days could be serious for us. On the 6th, therefore, we persuaded the master to go alongside at a landing place 10 km from where we had planned. Here we forced a landing in two days. On the 9th we established Camp 3 by a glacier lake at the end of HPS-16 glacier. Now the main ferrying of our loads began.

In the beginning we planned to use HPS-16 glacier as our ferrying route, but it was soon realised that the upper area of séracs was completely unnegotiable and we took the neighbouring nameless glacier instead. Every day we repeated our route-making and ferrying in the face of a saturating attack by rain and sleet. With only three members we were forced to go up and down four or five times daily. On the 15th we set up Camp 5 (700 m) on the upper part of the nameless glacier. Thenceforward we were to live a snowy life completely different from everything previous. We felt more at ease now we had at last escaped from the loathsome rain.

But we could enjoy freedom only a short time. Hardly had we entered the snow world when the struggle against hidden crevasses began. It is very difficult to deal with crevasses covered by new snow compared with crevasses showing their pale open mouths. The leader walks on the snow like Zatoh-ichi¹ placing sticks. We continued for some hours but in the end, in desperation, began to force our way straight up. On 20 November we had a wonderfully fine day, unheard of in Patagonia. It seemed to us an illusion that we had had such terrible weather—blizzard, dense fog and sleet—till the day before. Partly as

¹ A star of T.V. drama in Japan at the present time.



91 *The Altiplano Italia looking across to Cerro Bertrand and Cerro Roma* Photo: Japanese Patagonian Expedition

reconnaissance, we carried up the fuel tanks to the site of Camp 7. The claws of our Japanese snow-shoes (not crampons) made a comforting noise when they sank into the snow. We followed a route downwards from Camp 6, then climbed up to a col on a ridge from the eastern peak. Camp 6 was set up after traversing the glacier head of a branch of HPS-16. Now we could see the long-hoped-for Hielo Continental which we were to cross. The two climbers, Yoshizawa and Tsuzuki, were taken aback by the wonderful view of the vast white Ice-cap. Gigantic peaks stood one after the other around Falcon fjord. How beautiful were the glaciers running down from them!

Unexpectedly an accident occurred to decrease our fighting spirit. On the 22nd when we went for a reconnaissance to the divide between the HPS-16 and Jarpa glaciers after assembling all the loads at Camp 7, Yoshizawa slipped and dropped a fuel tank into a crevasse. We had a bare minimum of food and fuel so that if we lost this 20 litres, the whole plan of our Ice-cap crossing had to be abandoned. Moreover, we still had not reached half way to the Ice-cap after more than fourteen days hard work of ferrying our loads. After searching for the lost tank for three days, putting on clothes as for a cave exploration, in a deep and complicated crevasse we luckily found it—the best possible Christmas present! After that our desperate ferrying continued for another week. The

promise that 1 January 1972 would be our New Year's holiday if we could reach the Ice-cap by the 31st was the prime mover of our earnest activities. But the Patagonian elements attacked continuously as if laughing at our fighting spirit. Rain, snow, wind and sleet as well, assaulted us with all their might. On 28 December we were favoured by a splendidly fine day after a long interval and could cut steps on a ridge at the head of the Falcon glacier. We now had an extensive view of the Ice-cap and beyond we could see Riso Patron, Altiplano Italia, Don Bosco and mountains on the boundary between Argentine and Chile.

On the 31st we had another fine day. It was a glorious day worthy of being the last day of 1971. Evacuating Camp 10, we succeeded in establishing Camp 11 on a col from which we could descend to the Hielo Continental. As we had to move our tent first, we left Camp 10 with personal effects and food. The sky over the Argentine was coloured pink but the Hielo Continental on the Chilean side was still showing dark blue before dawn. We gained 6 km, helped by the rare fine weather, the longest spell since we had entered the mountain area. But the days allowed for ferrying had been used already and no reserve remained for the future crossing. We must think of retreating because of the condition of our only sledge.

On 3 January 1972 we trod for the first time on the Ice-cap, one month after leaving Puerto Eden. As we marched on towards the endless skyline we must have looked like tiny fleas swimming in a vast expanse of ocean; continuous and monotonous movement compared with the previous ferrying! Vaguely, we could see white peaks in the far distance. Now with none of the ups and downs experienced in the preceding days, idle thoughts passed through our heads. We repeated soliloquys without any answers; we counted time after time from 1 to 100. This monotony accelerated the speed of the sledge more than expected. Camp 12 was established due w of Peak 1524 m. Then followed four days' arduous march to the s under softly falling rain, steering by compass through dense mists. Now we were in the innermost part of merciless Patagonia and we realised the truth—retreat now would not be possible.

We were now held up for ten days until only two weeks' food remained. My diary of the 14th tells how snow-storms raged violently for all this time. Constantly in my mind was a fear of being buried under the snow for ever. Every day we looked out of the tent and found a world of unchanging fog and storm. We forgot what the sun looked like, thinking that our tent would never receive its heat again. All three became irritable and disorientated. Did the monotonous life in the middle of merciless Nature separated from the rest of civilisation drive us to complete taciturnity? If only there had been a clearing enough to confirm our whereabouts; how happy we would be if we could have a gap in the fog! Patagonia had always been beckoning us in the past. But once it had lured us into its innermost sanctuary it showed its true character and trapped us so closely that we felt we might not escape again.

The circumstances were as above for many days, but on 16 January we could see the Hielo Continental at last. We have done it! We have done it! Our cry of delight broke out and resounded all through Patagonia. In front of our eyes stretched the skyline of the Ice-cap clearly. This interval of fine weather settled our destiny—life not death. We could look over the head of Europa glacier which connected with our previously prepared depot. We would survive now. The first speck of blue sky for twelve days hurried us to evacuate Camp 18. Luckily, the days were long. Until 9.30pm we continued furiously southward. It is about 30 km to the head of Europa glacier. Again in our heads we began to count from 1 to 100. But the difference between the monotony of staying and of sledging was very great. We had not realised before how great was the pleasure of being able to move and stretch our limbs freely.

By the 20th, in spite of having no visibility we were at our ease because we knew that our course was due s. Peak 1341 m was to the sw but we had to go round largely because there were a lot of crevasses near the head of the Europa glacier. Gradually we steered ssw and soon met with the open crevasse area. The proverb says 'Go round if you must hurry', and we quickly turned the sledge to the s. Eventually we arrived at a point whence Peak 1341 m could be seen due w. Time would have permitted us to proceed further but we decided to set up Camp 22 here, because now we had to settle the problem of whether to go on s and cross the latter half of our objective. If we were to continue our crossing we must go down to the depot and fetch the loads, leaving the tent

here. But it seemed to us nearly impossible to continue our crossing when we considered the quantities of loads at the depot, the condition of the latter half of the route and our physical powers. On 21 January we established Camp 23 just under the Peak 1341 m (christened Cerro Akira), and thus our crossing of the Hielo Continental Sur was finished. The straight line distance was 100 km and the total was 400 km taking account of the ferrying. We christened the core of the crossing, the distance of which is 50 km between $49^{\circ}50'$ and $50^{\circ}20'$ as 'Altiplano Japon'.

It took seven days from Camp 23 to the depot site, thus Patagonia continued to trouble us right to the end of the enterprise. We studied the topography of the places around the depot until 18 February, when the 'pata pata' returned to carry us to Puerto Eden. At long last came the day to leave the mountain. On the night of 17 February the sky above the Europa glacier was full of stars for the first time. On the 28th the 'pata pata', the hoped-for envoy from Paradise (Eden), appeared in Europa fjord, which was full of floes pushed out from the surrounding glaciers. We congratulated each other in the rain; the skipper of the 'pata pata' was overjoyed to find us safe.