

As a prologue to the analysis of Mr. Tamayo's aseverations, I want to say we never had kept any direct discussion with him.

Our total disagreement is against Mr. Sebastian Alvaro, director and main responsible of "Al Filo de lo Imposible", the TV show who sponsored and produced that trip. Mr. Alvaro had continued promoting the idea the spaniards were the first (let's say he always had refused to admit to the public they weren't); that reason explain why we had been involved in several discussions with him about this issue in differents magazines and web sites.

Even we had had nice words for Mr. Tamayo and his partners:

"I want to make myself clear... there aren't any bad attitude against the spanish team. Their members had enough talent and experience to have solved this patagonic problem. Moreover, with the years, they had traveled around the world opening the borders of the present mountaineering, contributing to the global understanding of our activity with interesting climbs...."

(Fica's letter to Desnivel Digital, November 2001)

<http://www.desnivel.com/deportes/expediciones/object.php?o=3276>

"The Chileans... are the first to admit that they owe at least part of their success to the previous teams that paved the way, especially the greatly respected '93 Spanish-Argentinian expedition..."

(High Magazine, January 2000)

<http://www.planetfear.com/climbing/highmountainmag/mountaininfo/jan2000/mtninfojan2000.htm>

"... it's true Juan Carlos Tamayo (member) said with a sincerity who honour himself they weren't the first..."

(Besser and Fica 's letter to Desnivel Digital, January 2002.

<http://www.desnivel.com/deportes/expediciones/object.php?o=3220>

And, as an additional reference material to you, as you will see clearly in the own words of Mr. Tamayo, below, the spanish group weren't the first one, which is something to keep in mind all the time because, now and then, poor accurated reports (in the web and in the media) continue repiting that falacy (just now, please check this report of Patagonia Dreaming: 1993, First Full Travesy, S-N....; http://www.freerider.it/Patagonia/patagonia_web/pagine/percorso_storia.htm)

With those introductory notes, let's go to my answers. As usual, they are included below Mr. Tamayos' sentences:

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- 1/ We never claim for any "first". In the only report (that I wrote myself) about the expedition (Desnivel Magacine N° 87 September/93) I was very clear " ... The first? no, we weren't. We design that route by pleasure and for filming, without paying attention to the previous not the future crossings. I'm not going to give that crossing any adjective not any special

importance. If somebody has the courage is the people who, as Juan Nahuel, live on such places all the year round."

Yes. This is true. Mr. Tamayo never had affirmed that. At least not directly.

2/ In the report that Rodrigo Fica sends to Desnivel Magazine on 10 February 1.999 he says textually: "...At this point (Tyndall Glacier) we went to the South by the French Plateau, going over two cols. Between the first and the second we discovered that the Icecap stopped,We had to carry our sledges by hand about 100 meters over nunataks exposed by the retreat of the ice. After that, we went over the last col and went down to the Balmaceda Glacier." So his point of view is clear. I don't understand why now they say the Icecap ends at Balmaceda Glacier and not at this point. Perhaps is the same point Borge Ousland marks on the aerial photograph?.

Yes, this reference is true. I wrote that 10 days after we left the icecap and it represented exactly what I thought in that moment (Mr. Tamayo's translation is essentially correct).

But that sentence is only part of the story.

Pretty soon, because that affirmation, I received critics from the Chilean SPI lovers (scientist, glaciologists, climbers) about my asseveration, which was found "easy" and "made in the heat of the return" (I have to admit the rest of the group also criticized my "ignorance" about this matter).

After analyze the facts and, with the help of new material, some days later we realise we had missed a couple of right pass (which, by the way, are just snow corridors); the reason of our mistake was we were walking in that day in foggy conditions and we did a wrong turn (in those days we did the travesy without satelital pictures and, in those particular days, even without aerophotographies). After that I admitted my affirmation was wrong, not only because the existence of that continuity, but the reasons you will see below (glaciological, mountaineering and cultural point of view).

Ok. That was the plain explication. But it's obvious it requires some argumentation from my part because it could look like a great argument to Mr. Ousland's situation.

But it's not, because:

- a) after that episode, we (and here I'm talking in plural!) we ALWAYS had repeated and we ALWAYS had been strict about this: the Patagonian Southern Icefield finish, from a scientific, sport and cultural point of view (more about this later) in Balmaceda Glacier. There are many examples about this in comments, reports, letters, forums and others through the years:

*"... we smell the end and it put us more nervous yet...
Almos falling, we arrived to the col where Balmaceda Glacier
birth, final point of the travesy...."*

(Al Borde, Argentinian Magazine, December 2000)
<http://www.alborde.com.ar/monta/trek22bis.htm>

*"... because 'Al Filo' didn't cross fully all the SPI,
because they left 80 kms. before its real end, Balmaceda
Glacier, Ultima Esperanza Fiord..."*

(Pablo's letter to Desnivel Digital, November 2000)
<http://www.desnivel.com/deportes/expediciones/object.php?o=3275>

b) the decision of Mr. Ousland and Mr. Ulrich to leave in Pingo Glaciari wasn't taken because they were informed about my report in that magazine. In fact, they didn't know. If they left there was because they had another reasons: or they received bad advise (it's possible), or they were lazy (I don't think so), or they were anxious to use their kayacs soon (very probable), or they really didn't make a good investigation about the area (very, very probable) or they were tired (it could be) or they were running out of food (sound logic) or because all of the previous reasons together.

c) I would like to add to Mr. Tamayo's reference part of the things I also said in that magazine:

*"At this point we went to the South by the French Plateau,
going over two cols. Between the first and the second we
discovered that the Icecap stopped... making useless to
discuss if the SPI finish IN THE BALMACEDA GLACIER OR IN
"CANAL DE LAS MONTAÑAS"*

As you see, in that moment, even wrong, I was arguing about the polemics existed in those days between two possible exits: in Balmaceda Glacier v/s Canal de las Montañas (a long "fiord" existing southern) which was, in those years, the real discussion about the real end of the SPI. In any case my opinion can be used to justify an exit in Tyndall... or Pingo!!!!

Ah! Remember Mr. Ousland and Mr. Ulrich left in Pingo, which is northern to Tyndall.

d) you still have the fact we continued in our way to the south. Let's think for a moment. After 95 or so days of expedition, we, really tired, hungry, weak and oversaturated with the experience... if we really thought the SPI finished there... why we didn't leave right there? It had been so easy to take the course of Geyke River and reach the warm forest of Serrano River...

e) we weren't the only group who had crossed that section. Hémon '83 expedition pass by there 16 year before, coming from the south; they "solve" the problem the area has and all the members of that expedition (at least Hémon, Roquefere and Hourcadette) always had

kept their opinion about the extension of the SPI: Jorge Montt to Balmaceda.

- f) finally, and maybe the most obvious, Mr. Ousland and Mr. Ulrich didn't reach that section. Let's suppose (just for fun) the warmer planet we are living right now had caused a wide retreat in that area. The correct attitude had been to go there, to see it, to photography and, then, to manifest new definitions, as to say "here the SPI finish". But they didn't do it; they didn't make the effort to corroborate anything.

And, I don't believe the "warmer planet" theory apply in this case, because they were travelling in the edge of the spring, close to the end of the winter, when there a lot more snow. We were there in the heat of the summer, and even in that moment there were continuities.

3/ About support Pablo says: *"Before the expedition, we traveled on a Navy vessel, then carried food and equipment in our backpacks for 8 days (4 persons) and placed a cache"*.

That is a lie. They had their store at sea level; on 14 December 1.998 they went down to the Fault Reichter and from a camp at a height of 700 meters, at the edge of Garcia Glacier; up to 22 December (8 days) they carried up their cache from the seashore (again from Rodrigo Fica's report).

Mr. Tamayo must be careful with free insults. It's better to be sure about exactly what we are talking about before to qualify.

With Pablo we were reading the sentence and we are not sure if he was referencing that *"at the beggining of the expedition we traveled on a navy vessel and THEN (after walk the northern part of the SPI) we carried food and equipment in our backpacks for 8 days (4 persons) and placed a cache"*, or if he was talking about the begining of the expedition, when *"we traveled on a Navy vessel, then carried food and equipment in our backpacks for 8 days (4 person) and placed a cache (a temporary one, who was used while we were in our base camp)"*.

But, who care? We always had said, even in the present polemic, we had a cache exactly as Mr. Tamayo's reference said. Here and there we had said the same thing:

"the team then spent a week at their camp on the edge of the Garcia Glacier, during which time they spent many days involved descending then re-ascending the 800m of ground separating them from the sea shore below, where they had previously cached a food and equipment supply"
(High Magazine, January 2000)
<http://www.planetfear.com/climbing/highmountainmag/mountaininfo/jan2000/mtninfojan2000.htm>

If I am giving more attention to this point (more than it deserve) is only to stop right here the presumption of "lies" in our words. Maybe we

are wrong, maybe there are mistakes in numbers, maybe we put too much passion in our arguments, but we never had lied.

To affirm here, or later, there are lies or we are liars... is a very, very, unappropriated conclusion.

4/ Their strategy was to throw sledges, unnecessary equipment, food, rubbish, etc. and go down with a rucksack each one and reach the deposit. There, they will find new sledges, new equipment, 300 meters fix rope, food, gas, etc.

Yes. We throw sledges, unnecessary equipment, food, rubbish... as any other expedition sacrifice style when they are focused to be the first in something.

Examples in mountaineering about this attitude are thousands. Mark Twaight threw everything they had, even stoves, in the Chez variation in the South Face of Denali, Admunssen kill dogs, the Everest expeditions in the 60s and in the 70s left everything in the mountain...

Do you want to know something ironic?

Until now, very few people had asked WHY we did that?, assuming, I presume, we did it in that way because it would make the travesy easier. But the real reason for our cache was... security.

Yes. It's true. Everything started when Pablo Besser spent 4 days in the descend of the northern rib of the Reichert Fault in 1995 with Arved Fuchs (who went down with all the equipment, even sleds). In that occasion Pablo saw how mad was that approach, because they were in constant danger of falling seracs and avalanchs. They were lucky and nothing happened to them, but Pablo learnt from that experience and concluded it would be safer to do it faster.

For that reason, in our first attempt, in 1996, we throw everything in the upper section and run down. We reached the "Corredor Chileno" in 5 hours. Two years later, in 1998, we repeated that schema and we arrived safely at the bottom in 4 hours. In both occasions we observed avalanchs debris and falling seracs, which ratify us our approach. For that moment, for that time, it was a successfully tactic, the best one.

Moreover, I want to ratify something else. The cache didn't make easy our life, because it wasn't put in our way to the south. The opposite. It involved we desviate our way and spent days of long and exhausting trips as porters.

Our original idea was to put the cache at the bottom of the Reichert Fault. In that way, we had got down the northern side, we had taken the deposit and then we had continued straight to the south, without waste time and efforts. But, do you want to know why we didn't do it in that way?

Because we didn't have money to do it; our only chance was to left it at sea level. I hate this kind of arguments (make references to the budgets of the expeditions), but at this moment of the debate, you have to know all the truth.

Our style was whichever it was, not because we don't respect style or because we lack knowledge about the discipline; it was just the result of two concepts: the money we had and the security we wanted.

If they need 8 days 4 persons to carry up the supplies, how big was the deposit? 800 Kgs at only 25 Kg per load/person/day? With such strategy they made not a supported crossing but two independent crossings.

It's possible in some of the comments, or in some of the articles, that number jump (800 kgs.), but it's not true. It was 370 kgs. in 9 barrels plus 4 sleds. In numbers of load/person/day, we did 20 trips (four of them were used only to transport sleds), because not everybody work everyday. We took to the high camp the following: 40 days food per person (total 160 kg.) plus one sled per person (total 60 kgs) plus 300 mts. fixed rope (I don't know how much it weights... maybe 20 kgs?) and other valuable things (60 kgs). Total: 300 kgs aprox. The difference between those numbers (370 in the cache, 300 in the camp) is the weight of the barrels and the food we used in the same days of the trips.

The affirmation of Mr. Tamayo (*"With such strategy they made not a supported crossing but two independent crossings"*) is absolutely questionable.

Let's say in this way: from what quantity of kilos a cache split a travesy in two separate sections? 800? 250? Does the only existence of a cache a demand to separate a travesy? What happens if a group have two caches? Or three?

And what happens if, instead a cache, we have a flying cache (i.e. an helicopter)? Does it mean the travesy is invalid?

This is ridiculous.

The spanish expedition had, by far, more support for external sources than us in any possible way. The help we received from our cache was smaller than the help they received in Paso del Viento (10 days resting, resting!!!!, feeding by loads brought by two additional and external porters); they eliminated members (two official members left there); they had an helicopter who gave them food and lighter their sleds because it took their garbage; Mr. Tamayo had the option to explore Reichert Fault in helicopter one day before to arrive to the north side (being in the middle of the activity!)...

Using that logic, I could say they splited their travesy in two or three sections because the help received.

No. I think Mr. Tamayo is wrong. Our cache was small, it didn't give us rest, we didn't receive extern help to transport it and we didn't see anybody else. So it's unfair consider our travesy as two different ones.

5/ The South Patagonia Icecap has two different sections, separated by the Fault Reichert. To climb a mountain of 2.250 mtrs from a col at 1.300 mtrs. and then, to abseil a steep wall of 600 mtrs. is not the idea of an Ice Field.

There are three different point of view here: the glaciological, the mountaineering and the cultural one:

- a) glaciological: we already gave to you, Tom and Tina, enough scientific information about this issue. I think conclusions are clear. The SPI is from Jorge Montt to Balmaceda. If anybody else want to insist in this point, perfect, just tell us and we can continue sending reports to ratify this aseveration.
- b) mountaineering: we believed the third trip of Shipton (1960-1961) must be considered as the first who wanted really to cross the full SPI. Using it like a milestone, we can redact this list of "attempts" of crossing of the SPI (all of them before our first try in 1996):
 - Sipton, Marangunic, Garcia; England-Chile; 1960-1961
 - Mc Sweeney; New Zealand; 1979
 - Japaneses; 1981-1982
 - Hémon; French; 1982; entering entered by Balmaceda
 - Giongo; Italian; 1985
 - Couch, Del Castillo, Tamayo and others...; 1991
 - Rovedatti, Folini, Mura y Miotti, from Sondrio, 1992
 - Cavagnetto, Guelpa, Blumenberg y Falco; 1992: failed to cross Reichert Fault; they scape por Spegazzini
 - Al Filo de lo Imposible; Tamayo et al; 1993; failed to cross Reichert Fault; skipped by helicopter
 - Purto, Valle, Quinteros; chileans; 1993; entering by Balmaceda
 - Cavallaro, Giovanella, Berta, Marazzi y Salvaterra; 1993; failed to cross Reichert Fault; they left by Spegazzini
 - Dellatorre, Giovanoli; Swiss, 1993; failed to cross Reicher; they scaped by Upsala Glacier
 - Cosley, Houston, Parker y Schutt; USA; 1995; failed to cross Reichert Fault; they scaped to Argentina
 - Dellatorre, Giovanoli; Swiss; 1995
 - Fuchs; Germany; 1995; success to go down Reichert Fault
 - Tosas; Spain; 1995

This list doesn't try to be a summary of travesies. It shows, despite the glaciological point of view, at least 16 expeditions, involving sometimes world class climbers, demostrated with facts they believed the SPI was only one, from Jorge Montt to Balmaceda. If they didn't think that, why did they try to crossy fully?

The same argument works for Reichert Fault. Some of this trips reached it and tried to cross it, which demonstrate they were convinced that obstacle is integral part of the travesy. This is the mountaineering background we received when we started to think in to make the travesy. It's not our idea; we just take the knowledgement existing in that time. Ah!, yes. I forget something else. The spanish expedition were logisticly prepared to cross Reichert Fault, which demonstrate, at least, most of the group believe Reichert Fault was part of the travesy: *"we sollicite them (Toñín y Martin) to prepare ropes and snow pickets for the rapels*

in the wall of 500 mts..." (Sebastian de la Cruz, another member of that expedition, Anuario 1993-1994 Club Andino Bariloche).

c) cultural: this is also important, because all the people in the world see the SPI as a whole.

All this reasons rebate Mr. Tamayo's idea. It's not share with the rest of the world.

For me, it would be better to talk about the Nort (San Valentín area), the Central (from Jorge Montt Glacier to Fault Reichter and Cerro Aguilera) and the South (from Fault Reichter and Mayo Glacier to Monblano and Tyndall Glaciers).

This is mountaineering-fiction. As good as to say there are four. Yeah, why not include Darwin Range?

Even the Central and the South Icecaps should be crossed in a single unsupported trip as Borge Ousland and Thomas Ulrich had showed. Others had tried to cross the North, Central and South ones without success. I suppose they will do it in the future, first supported and later unsupported.

Mr. Ousland and Mr. Ulrich didn't cross fully and they didn't do it unsupported.

6/ I do not agree with your point of view about the use of sails on this kind of crossings. Supported by the wind?. Every one chooses oneself equipment, deciding what is worth for the weight you carry and if useless you must transport it anyway . Sledges and skies are also support? GPS and comunication systems also? (we didn't use them on 1.992).

The very reason why we support your point of view about the sails is (and I don't know if we agree in this) because it's not easy to draw a limit line between the use of the pair ski-sails and catamarans-big sails.

Just to put an example. I don't remember in this moment (and it is not an issue in this discussion) but, if I'm right, a couple of europeans did an amazing cross in greenland using special "sleds" (in fact, they were vehicles) with huge sails, advancing hundreds of kilometers per day.

How must be the definition? where is the limit between man and machine? May we obligate to use only skis to be named "unsupported"? But

then, what is a ski? etc., etc., etc. I think to search a solution in that direction is useless.

It's better approach to see if the external factor we are talking about is an "apreciable" advantage or not. The clothes are, of course, external factors who give some kind of support; but the question we have to make about this factor: is it a radical help?

Using that criterio, yes, the wind is too much radical.

For example when we cross from Exmouth Fiord to Estancia Cristina across Rokko Pass (coming from Puerto Eden and going to Puerto Santa Cruz) we decide to use snowshoes instead of skies (easy and light to carry in kayak), but we found that the small sails (not kites) that sometimes we used for navigation on the fiords or on Argentino Lake were also useful on the ice. And nobody benefits from the very same wind that stopped the chileans. Or it is good on the back for all or it is bad on the face for all.

That exactly what we are talking about. Let's say it's unfair for a party to go ahead 30 kms. using that source of energy, while the others were barely able to go 5 kms. because the cold.

And 20 years later a guy will use a special sled (similar to a boat) where he will be seated in the middle (without walk) and he will advance 400 kms. in one day thanks to the wind.

To say all of them are unsupported is unfair.

Since the Shipton age, with piramidal tents of 27 Kgs or Leo Dickinson on 1.974, using a parachute as a kite, many things and many equipement have changed and the chileans know about sails. Minimun, since they helped Arved Fuchs on 1.995.

Only to remember to everybody something I wrote on 1.993 in Desnivel's report: *"about waste: The suggestion is obligatory. Take out all the rubbish and all the equipement you bring into the Icecap, trying not to leave marks of your passage"*. This has not change.

It's easy to say that when you have an helicopter behind you... reason which his opinion, an ideal target everybody wants, lack moral. It's ugly to say, but everybody knows the expedition who try travesies in long distances and/or remote ranges always left some garbages.

7/ About media, Pablo saids: *"We live in a age when media owns the power to kill the truth, ... and the best example is the spanish expedition in 1.993. ... their media power was so consolidated"*

that it took 10 years of efforts to convince people they didn't do it."

Pablo Besser is not fighting with us for 10 years, nor convincing people we didn't do something we don't claim. He and Rodrigo Fica have been trying to discredit our expedition for the last four and half years (since they finished their crossing) just to exalt theirs.

Our answer was a valid defense against the desinformation Mr. Alvaro had continued making. Every time we solícite him to ratify they didn't do it the cross, he refused like a stubborn boy. Even now he had not corrected long wrongly aseverations existing in web sites under his responsibility. Like this:

"AL FILO DE LO IMPOSIBLE had made the first integral travesy in the SPI..."

<http://www.rtve.es/tve/program/alfilo/hacemos/traves/index.html>

This polemic, about the spanish expedition, is very easy to finish: the only needed thing is to convince Mr. Alvaro to reconice the obvious. Maybe Mr. Tamayo could talk with him and convince him how wrong he is and how much damage is doing.

In our age, anybody can libel and do it again and again, and this becomes reliability and nobody pays attention to compare the original and reliable sources. For example, in the Annals of Patagonia Institute, Magallanes University, Volume 29 Year 2.001 about Southern Patagonia Icefield : Its History, pages 70 and 71, (It looks a very serious work !!!!) they explain our 1.993 expedition as: *"Full supported style, with porters, change of members and use of helicopters..."* (pay attention to the plural)... *"They went fast because they carried light weight on their sledges"* (30 days food instead 45 of the chileans, but 40 Kgs of extra weigth for filming equipement including 1 Arriflex SR camera, 1 Bolieu camera, 1 cinema tripode, batterys, solar panels, accessorys and many rolls of 100 mtrs and 30 mtrs of 16 mm film; and we also spend a lot of time recording the film) ... *"They went out of the ice for 12 days across Paso del Viento where they rested"* (we were 9 days out of the ice on Paso del Viento Hut, without crossing the Pass, some days carring supplies to the glacier and the last 5 days waiting for the rain to stop, before we were allowed to leave the flooded hut, with water up to the knees)...*There 2 persons lelf the traverse"* (right, the director and the cameramen; this is not a change of members, so, why the falsehood at the beginning if they knew the truth?) And so and so for.

And it's sad that they don't write this by ignorance, because they refer this information to my report on Desnivel Magacine !! (and chileans also speak spanish). Later on, somebody will copy this information and will add whatever they want and, in a few years time, the helicopter will be carried our rucksacks all the way from camp to camp.

This report is not mine and it's the first time I see it. It could be wrong or accurate, but it just another report in the web with the same virtues and defects as any. But I understand the idea of Mr. Tamayo and even I can share the feeling of sadness about all the whole thing.

But, BUT!!!!, our answers (and others like the above) arised not like provocations, but as an answer to the continuous offenses of Mr. Alvaro.

Don't forget that Mr. Tamayo (the capital letters are from Mr. Alvaro):

"In this way, WITH BAD INTENTION, WITH THE SOUL OF CONFUSION AND MANIPULATION, i.e. with bad faith, this person (Besser)..."

<http://www.desnivel.com/deportes/expediciones/object.php?o=3106>

"What opinion you can have from somebody (Besser) who try to lye?"

<http://www.desnivel.com/deportes/expediciones/object.php?o=3106&p=noticia.3/noticia.3.2.php&print=>

"In my long story as a journalis, it's hard to me to remember to somebody (Besser) so imprudent, boring and fool"

<http://www.desnivel.com/deportes/expediciones/object.php?o=3106&p=noticia.3/noticia.3.2.php&print=>

"The only thing he can demonstrate is his ability of manipulation, his prepotent soul and his bad faith"

<http://www.desnivel.com/deportes/expediciones/object.php?o=3106&p=noticia.3/noticia.3.2.php&print=>

I can reference another insults of Mr. Alvaro in the web, if somebody wants...

Yes, yes, we did used a deposit in Paso del Viento Hut A deposit we didn't carried ourselves that year (I carried it myself in 1992 and we didn't used it that year because we lelf the traverse at this point); and we did used a helicopter to cross the Fault Reicher (we were lucky because at that time there was an helicopter at Perito Moreno Glacier and we contacted with our friends outside with a VHF radio from the camp near the fault, not in the previous Italian Plateau or in the Japanis Plateau, and after 8 days stucked in that camp and exploring the area was clear we had no chances to cross the fault, and we decided to use the helicopter in order to follow exploring) and I never regreted it.

We are the first to admit the importance of the spanish expedition. We had said it, mainly in the past. But also we are not going to permit the profusion of lies or unaccurate facts. If any member of that expedition say we didn't cross, we were dirty, we were lazy, the SPI is split in two, we split it in two because our cache, etc., etc., etc., we have all the right to defense ourselves.

Rodrigo Fica

Marzo 2004, Chile