

Cordillera Carabaya Expedition 1971

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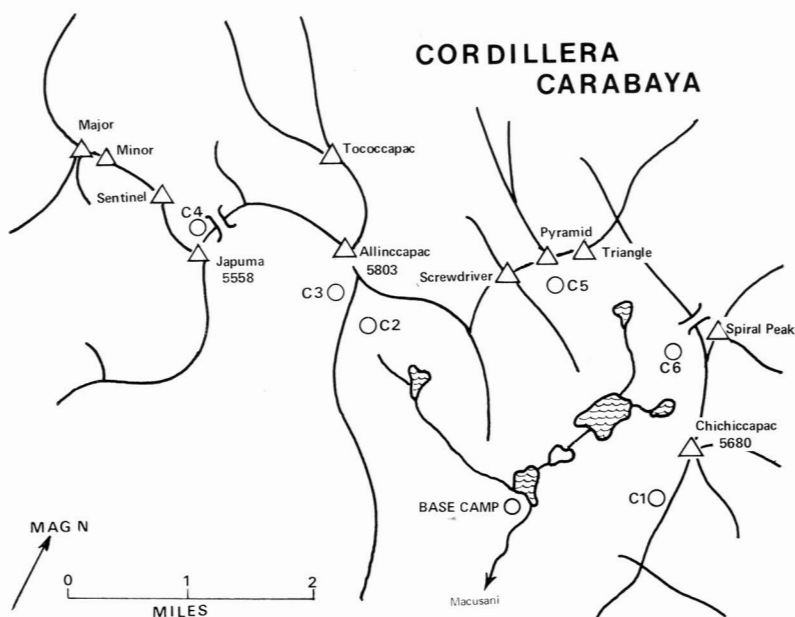
The Andes had always been a dream, large and inaccessible, until a year ago when I heard of a charter flight going to Lima. I decided to go. I booked the flights and then looked around for friends to join me and an area to visit. The friends were as enthusiastic as I was. Our party consisted of five women, Kate Dilworth (leader), Barbara Spark, Mollie Porter, Carol McNeill and Janet Richards. All of us worked as mountaineering instructors and between us we had climbed in many mountain ranges abroad from the Arctic to the Himalaya.

The area we chose was called the Cordillera Carabaya in South-east Peru. This is an isolated mountain group, separate from the main chain of mountains to the west, and on the fringe of the Amazon jungle. The peaks rise to a height of 5800 m and were first visited in 1954 by a British expedition (*A.J.* 65 85). In 1965 a party from Keele University climbed there (*A.J.* 72 124) and they were followed in 1967 by a New Zealand expedition (*A.J.* 73 253). The only map of the area is one made by the members of the Keele party. Our aim was to travel to the north-west part of this range, which was least well known, and to attempt new peaks in this area.

The problem of transport to Peru was taken off our hands by obtaining seats on a charter flight to Lima organised by the Andean Society. This proved to be much the cheapest way of getting to South America but it had two disadvantages: 1. We were limited to five weeks in Peru. 2. Our luggage allowance was restricted to 60 lb each. On advice of friends who had climbed in South America, we decided to take everything with us on the plane, thus avoiding customs delays. Like American and New Zealand parties, we took only the equipment we use in the Alps, and we wore a lot of it on the plane. We also took a minimum of dehydrated food with us as most foods are easily obtainable in Peru.

The flight was exceedingly pleasant in spite of a delay of several hours in Antigua and we even managed a swim in Bermuda. We arrived in Lima during the 150th anniversary celebrations of their independence. We had arranged to fly from Lima to Cuzco to save time and two and a half days after leaving London we were in this capital of the old Inca Empire. In Cuzco we bought the remainder of our food and then travelled south on the railway to Ayaviri. It was here we encountered our first difficulties but a day of effort and confusion resulted in several lorry journeys and we at least reached Macusani on the south side of the Cordillera Carabaya.

We are for ever indebted to Senor Alberto Zavala, a school teacher who spoke excellent English and arranged for ten llamas to carry our loads into the hills. He also obtained the help of two Quechua Indians, George and Pio who were to



act as guards at our Base Camp. On 6 August, Carol, Mollie and myself set off to find a suitable site for Base Camp while Barbara and Jan followed the next day, accompanied by George and Pio, the llamas and the gear. Our Base Camp, a six-hour walk from Macusani, was situated by one of the lakes under Chichiccapac at a height of about 4480 m. The day after our arrival, Carol and I made a reconnaissance, looking for a suitable way over the intervening ridges between Base Camp and the unknown valley we were seeking. On return, the others had arrived and camp was organised. The following day the five of us set off and set up Camp 1 at the foot of the glacier under Chichiccapac at about 4970 m. At 7am on 9 August we left camp and started up our chosen route on the South-west face. After a couple of hours we were halted by a large system of crevasses and spent some time in finding a way across. We were suffering badly from the altitude and progress was very slow. At 2pm when at about 5425 m (250 m from the summit), we decided to return. Darkness comes very suddenly at 6pm and we knew that if we continued, a bivouac on the descent would be inevitable. We spent that night at Camp 1 and returned to Base the next day.

Time was precious so on 11 August we set off with food and equipment for eight days towards the unknown area of the north-west. George and Pio came with us for the first section, left their loads, and returned to Base. It took us three days to find a route and ferry loads across moraines and glacier. On the second day it snowed heavily in the afternoon and we camped early feeling rather depressed. On the third day we reached a col to see below us a deep valley bounded on the south-west side by a ridge with several unclimbed, unnamed peaks. Beyond the valley was a sea of cloud lying over the Amazon jungle, only a few miles away. The ranges of the Urubamba and the Vilcanota

were visible not far away. From the col we climbed Japuma, an easy snow peak of 5547 m. We cleared a space for our camp on a moraine at about 5120 m. This was to be our home for the next five days. To reach this valley we had traversed under the South face of Allinccapac, with steep rock walls capped by a 100 m ice cap. We hoped to be able to find a way round to the north side from which the mountain had been climbed. One day was spent in reconnaissance across the glacier towards Tococcapac, but it only served to convince us that we did not have the man-power to carry camps further in this direction.

The two days that followed were to us the most satisfying part of the expedition. On 15 August we set off to traverse the ridge on the south-west side of the valley to the first peak. The ridge rose and fell in pinnacles, the side near the valley being endless scree and the other side being soft deep snow. Eventually we arrived beneath the final slopes of the peak. A short section of hard *névé* and a few hundred feet of easy rock brought us to the summit of our first new peak, about 5335 m high. We traversed the peak, descending rock gullies to the west. We called the peak Sentinel which was translated into Quechua by Senor Zavala and is now called Orcco Ccahuac. Our ascent of the next two summits along this ridge involved several hours of traversing loose scree from Camp 4. These two peaks were joined by a bridge about 6 ft wide. Like Orcco Ccahuac, they were mixed routes, some steep snow and easy rock which was surprisingly sound. The highest of these two summits was about 5425 m. We called it Major (translated as Curac). The second summit, which we called Minor (Sulcantyn), was approximately 5335 m.

Lack of proper acclimatisation seemed to tell on us. Although we were definitely fitter than when we attempted Chichiccapac, we seemed to be deteriorating in



other respects. We all lost our appetites completely and became very lethargic mentally. Having made the best use that we could of this part of the range, we returned to Base Camp. We did the journey back in one day carrying loads of 45 lb at up to 5180 m and it felt like Everest.

Our time in the hills was running short and we decided to split into two groups for our final trip. Carol and I made an exploratory journey into the central part of the range. We headed up the valley past numerous lakes and put up Camp 5 under the South-east face of Pyramid. From here the following day, we got on to the glacier, which proved to be a fairly complicated business and crossed it beneath the face. We headed for a col between Triangle and Pyramid and it was here that we met the worst snow of the expedition. We fought for a couple of hours in soft snow, sometimes up to our waists, and near the top overlying crevasses. However, once we reached the col the snow was perfect. We made ascents of Triangle (5180 m) and Pyramid (5303 m), the latter providing some quite interesting climbing on snow and rock. From these peaks we were able to see the northern (easier) side of the main group and over to Incacchapac in the north-east. On return to Base we found that Barbara, Mollie and Jan had been to the area on the north side of Chichiccapac. They climbed a peak about 5180 m high which gave several hundred feet of sound rock climbing, probably the best rock we encountered. They chose the name of Spiral Peak which translated is Muyu Muyu Orcco.

Base Camp was fairly busy, for in our absence Pio had been to Macusani and came back with the farmer and six llamas for our return. George had been fishing and we had fresh trout for supper. We awoke at 6am to find Base Camp under several inches of fresh snow. We loaded the llamas and walked back down the valley to the village. Senor Zavala had offered to take us on a visit to the jungle. Consequently, the afternoon saw us in a Landrover travelling down a precipitous road with numerous hairpin bends. In less than twenty-four hours after leaving Base Camp at nearly 4550 m in the snow, we were at the road end at 915 m. We were below the cloud layer we had viewed from above and in the humid air of the jungle with sugar cane, bananas and pineapples in plenty. The change in vegetation in such a short time and distance (about fifteen miles) was unforgettable, as was our swim in the hot springs at Ollachea the same night.

Our few remaining days in Peru were spent trying to fit in as much as possible. We travelled to Lake Titicaca and then back north to Machu Picchu (lost city of the Incas). We also paid fleeting visits to the mission farm and clinic on the way, and the hospitality shown to us was wonderful. On 1 September we reached Lima where we rejoined the other members of our flight and heard of their visits to various parts of Peru and Bolivia. Fifteen hours after leaving Lima we were back in London with our photographs and memories of beautiful mountains and a fascinating country.