

Peru: Cordillera Vilcabamba 1971

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The usual point of entry to the Eastern Vilcabamba and Salcantay is from Limatambo in the s. Our party, preferring a northern approach through little-visited country, crossed the Urubamba river (on 5 August) at Chillca, the terminus of the road from Cuzco. We were equipped with the Club Andino Peruana sketch map, based on a map by M. Bues of 1936, and the Instituto Geografico Militar map (1 : 200,000). Both proved grossly erroneous. The delusions to which they gave rise have since been largely dissipated by Mr John Ricker, who is now mapping the area.

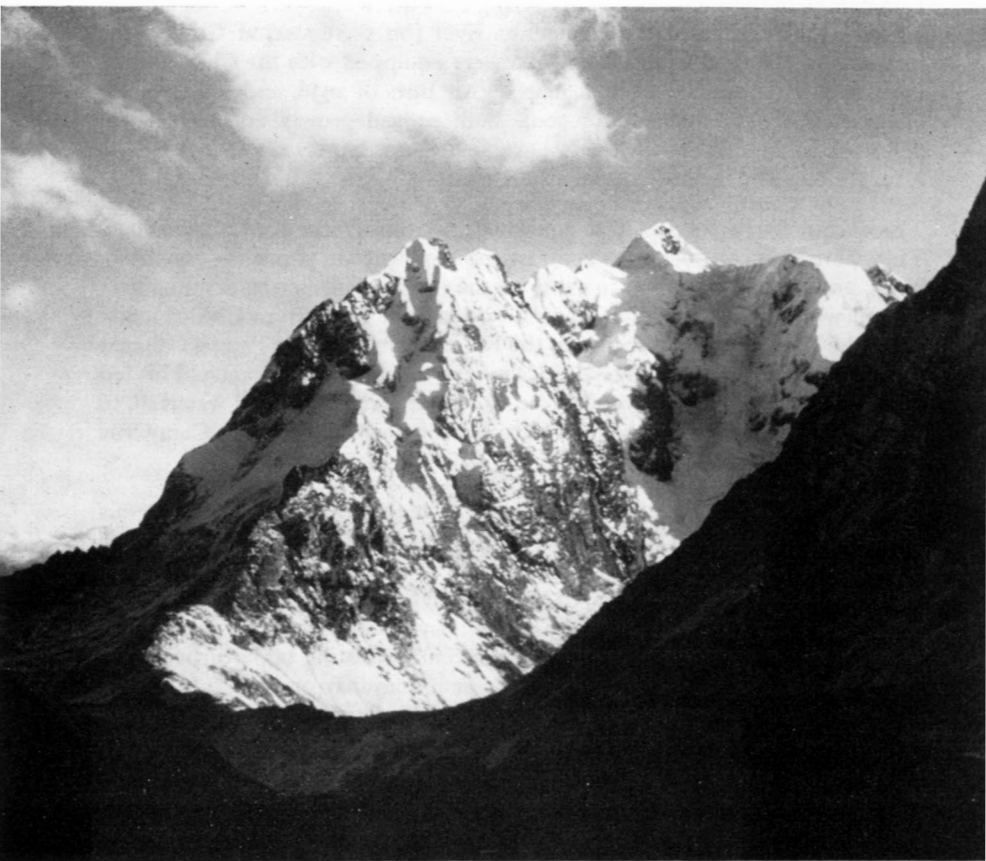
Three days' march brought us to Nevado Cara Cruz, almost due E of Salcantay. They were days of astonishing contrast and took us from parakeets, humming birds, orchids and begonias, to geese on the fringe of glacier-lakes and a bare upland whose only vegetation was ichu grass. The route from Chillca led w along the Urubamba, and then s up the Rio Salcantay (Rio de Pampa Cabana: Ricker). Where the river divides (Inca ruins) we took the SE branch. This led past an Indian hamlet (Moyoc Moyoc?), a great rock cirque and waterfall, to further Inca ruins (c 4300 m), and so to camp below the lip of the Cara Cruz glacier (4600 m).

Cara Cruz, possibly first climbed (from the s) by the Section Lyon-St Gervais of the CAF in 1966, is a splendid belvedere of snow and ice, but presented no problems other than the 'bottomless' powder so often met with in the Andes. The three summits were traversed, and the highest gave an altimeter reading of some 5100 m (Ricker 5180 m; Section Lyon-St Gervais 5219 m). The summit ridge provided a superb view of a condor floating unperturbed some 30 m below us. (Cara Cruz is wrongly named Huayanay on the Club Andino Peruana sketch map, where it is given an altitude of 5500 m.)

Running N from Cara Cruz, and separated only by a high pass (altimeter reading 4550 m) leading into the Rio Silque valley, stretches a chain of five good peaks. This is the true Huayanay group. Huayanay I, the most southerly and nearest Cara Cruz, was climbed in 1966 by the Lyon-St Gervais expedition (their estimated altitude 5484 m). Crossing the pass and descending the Rio Silque, we established a camp and attempted Huayanay IV by the NE glacier. We were turned back 30 m from the summit by powder snow to our waists on a slope where further progress invited avalanche. Our altimeter registered 5130 m, a reading that was probably too low.

This attractive group of peaks thus remains virgin, but for Huayanay I. It is situated in fine country, and the lower gorges of the Rio Silque, with their lush, semi-tropical vegetation, are spectacular. The approach to the most northerly of the group, Huayanay V, is by a valley, situated between the valleys of the Rio Salcantay and Rio Silque, that is as yet unvisited.

We returned to Chillca and the road-head on 17 August. It was late in the year for flora and good weather. Both would have been better in June. Our party of mixed nationality consisted of three climbers (Renée Fedden, Carl Nater and Robin Fedden), and of three who came as amateur botanists or for the pleasure of trekking through little-known country (the Duke of Devonshire, André Choremi and Patrick Leigh-Fermor).



36 *Huayanay I* Photo: R. Fedden