South America 1990

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The number of visiting expeditions to the Andes seems to have remained static or, perhaps, suffered a diminution. However, this picture may be erroneous, since repeats of the old classic routes that are carried out routinely are often not reported. The search for new routes and for new peaks did suffer a reduction, undoubtedly because the great ranges and ice walls of Peru have been partially closed to climbers for political reasons. The weather picture is still not clear, since the seven Andean countries have climbing seasons during very different periods of the year, but it can be said in general that the weather is both opposing and co-operating with mountaineering. Drought, the great curse of the planet since 1985, continued through 1990. Andean rivers, locally regarded hitherto as unfordable during the climbing months, may now be crossed on foot, a great help to Chilean and Argentinian mountaineers. On the other hand, dry weather has prevailed during most of the various precipitation seasons, particularly in Chile and Argentina, the only Andean countries with an established ski industry. And waves of bad weather unexpectedly hit several Andean ranges at the peak of the dry season. This was particularly true in south-east Peru and most of Bolivia during 1990. In the latter country snow reached down as far as the streets of La Paz, an unusual occurrence. Intense cold and strong winds were also typical of the Peruvian and Bolivian dry seasons during June and July.

The political situation has remained fairly much the same as before, but climbers will be glad to learn that very popular areas such as the Cordilleras Blanca and Vilcanota of Peru, for several years regarded as unsafe, are now returning to normality. On the other hand, general costs have risen. Inflation in nearly every Andean country has been climbing faster than the exchange rate of the dollar, the currency foreign tourists use. The high cost of gasoline has affected transportation in general.

On the brighter side is the increase of the number of local mountain guides, now being controlled by an association, as well as of visiting expeditions from other Latin American countries which, because of the local support they receive, will create everywhere an atmosphere increasingly receptive to foreign visitors in general.

Activities listed below belong to the calendar year 1990, unless otherwise stated. Most of this information was supplied by Professor H Adams Carter, Editor of the *American Alpine Journal*, by friends from Venezuela (José Betancourt), Peru (Walter Lazo), Argentina (Marcelo Scanu, Claudio Bravo and Luis Alberto Parra) and at times some reports were collected by the author himself, when travelling in South America.

Venezuela

The Sierra de la Culata runs roughly east to west and is situated north of the Andean city of Mérida. It contains the largest number of peaks over 4000m in the country. On 12 December 1989 José Betancourt climbed alone the massive rock mountain Pico Mina de Hierro (4582m), located near the eastern end of the Culata. It seems to be a first ascent. Betancourt and a woman climber, Isabel Suárez, climbed the N face of Pico El León (4746m), a new route. The latter peak belongs to the Sierra Nevada de Mérida.

Peru

Apart from a good many repeats of very worthwhile classic routes, particularly in the Cordillera Blanca, the only reports on ascents of new peaks were filed by the Club de Montañeros Américo Tordoya, of Lima. Five of its members staged a traverse of the Cordillera de la Viuda, located east of Lima, and accomplished there in August 1989 the first ascent of Cerro Nevería (5050m) and of Cerro Azul (5100m). The traverse took the party from the railway station of Chicla in a north-west direction to the town of Canta.

Bolivia

Foreign visitors who hastened to Bolivian peaks a little too early were fortunate with the weather, since snow-storms repeatedly hit the great ranges of this country shortly after the beginning of the climbing season in June, and wintry weather continued to the end of July. The great peaks of the Cordillera Real, in particular, offered now a double challenge, due to the cold. However, no new ascents have been reported in that immense area. In the Cordillera de Quimsa Cruz, south of Illimani, two Britons, Angus Andrew and Neil Howells, made in the third week of June the first ascent of the S face of Nevado Nina Collo (5280m), also a third ascent. In the same district, Evelio Echevarría, alone, climbed on 26 June the square rock block of Cerro Chamacani (5200m), a first ascent. Chamacani is located on the WSW side of the big lake Chatamarca which overlooks the Amazonian basin. The same mountaineer made on 7 July the second ascent of Cerro Mamani (*c*5400m), in the southern end of the range. It had been climbed in September 1939 by the two athletic Germans Wilfried Kühm and Josef Prem, whose cairn was found on the top.

Argentina

As has become customary in the last few years, the greatest and most varied Andean mountaineering activities of the year took place in this country. In the north, eight members of the Club Andino Tucumán led by veteran Dr Orlando Bravo attempted to ascend the very respectable mountain put at 6660m and

located south of Ojos del Salado, in the Catamarca province. This mountain has been variously named Nevado del Cazadero, Cerro Walther Penck and Cerro Tunupa. The Tucumán climbers were chased down from a height of 6500m by deep snow. Daniel Villagra, one member of the group, made alone the first ascent of Cerro Pabellón (*c*5900m), situated east of Lake Laguna Negra (January 1989).

In the district east of the city of San Juan a large joint Argentinian–Italian expedition of 20 persons led by Dr Franco Cremonese headed for the Cocota valley and, from a camp at 4900m above its sources, a party of 10 members, including two women, reached on 3 January the summit of the little-known Cerro Olivares Sur (5850m). Other peaks also ascended by expedition members were Points 5500, 4600 and 4400m.

Aconcagua had another new route inaugurated on its flanks. The SE ridge, which overlooks most of the S face of the mountain, was climbed for the first time by the Argentinians Carlos Domínguez and Mauricio Fernández, who placed six camps to reach the summit after laborious work, on 21 January. They descended via the normal route.

Luis Alberto Parra, the well-known expert on Aconcagua, submitted a report stating that 353 expeditions visited Aconcagua during the major part of the local season (December to February). Of 1244 participants, 121 were women. Three climbers perished in this last season, thus bringing the total number of victims of Aconcagua to 57. The Argentinian Daniel Alessio accomplished his fifth ascent of the mountain, now breaking the speed record previously held by the American Marty Smith. Alessio recorded the new time of 6 hours 7 minutes for his ascent from Plaza de Mulas to the summit.

Immediately south of Aconcagua and of the Mendoza river there was activity that concentrated on new peaks. The results were as follows:

La Jaula chain: the brothers Federico and Pablo González climbed four peaks, varying from 5200 to 5500m (estimated heights) in this district, located south of the railway station of Punta de Vacas (March 1990).

Las Cuevas district: Evelio Echevarría made alone the first ascent of Cerro Negro del Inca (4432m), situated south-east of the border settlement of Las Cuevas, and of Cerro Peñas Coloradas (4200m), north of the same place (December 1989-January 1990).

Cerro Sosneado group: another large Argentinian–Italian party, led by A Toujas and F Santon, carried out climbing and exploration in the southernmost Andes of the province of Mendoza. In the Sosneado group, team members made the first ascent of Cerro Pire (3850m), Cerro de la Natividad (3810m) and of an unnamed mountain 4250m high, all located on the north-east bank of the Atuel river (March 1989).

Chile

The main event of importance for the Patagonian year 1989 was the climb of the north-west spur of Cerro La Fortaleza (2754m). Italians Fabio Bristot, Roberto Cazan and Bruno de Dona were in the Paine district in the spring (November) for four weeks. They placed 300m of fixed ropes (which they removed on the descent) as they worked their way up the spur in bad weather. Taking advantage of an unusual windless day they climbed almost without stopping for 14 hours, reaching the summit on 26 November.

Also in the October–November months of 1989, a Japanese expedition engaged the company of the Chilean Patagonian veteran Eduardo García, a companion of Eric Shipton, and moved into the area where the Shipton party had been at work in 1962. Three of the Japanese reclimbed Cerro 2469m, highest in Tierra del Fuego, whose name is under scrutiny by the Chilean geographic authorities, since the name Darwin does not seem to apply to it. The party also made the second ascent of Monte Luna (c2300m) which the Shipton–García party knew as Darwin III.

New maps and new heights

Several Andean countries are mapping their territory on a scale of 1:50,000. A recent Argentinian official army map lists Ojos del Salado as 6862m high (thus confirming the earlier Chilean figures of 6863 and 6870m), and Nevado de Pissis, third highest in the American continent, as 6882m high. This would give Pissis the second highest elevation after Aconcagua. Chilean figures had given it 6779 and 6780m.

Until the methods used for this new survey are published, it seems only reasonable to recommend caution regarding the acceptance of these new figures.

H Adams Carter adds:

In South America Matt Culberson and his wife Julie made a very difficult new route on El Altar in Ecuador and then ascended the previously unclimbed western rib of the massive W face of Huayna Potosí.

Mark Nawrocki, Geoffrey Bartram and Robert Parker climbed a new route in the Cordillera Real of Bolivia, the W ridge of the N wing of Condoriri. In the Paine Towers of Chilean Patagonia, Jay Smith and Scott Cosgrove completed a remarkably difficult new route on the Torre Central de Paine. They named their route, which ascended the spectacular NW buttress for 18 pitches, the 'Wild, Wild West' route. They could climb on only four of the 62 days they spent in the region. They fixed rope in weather which was even more doubtful than is usual for the region. Before dawn on 7 January 1990 they climbed the fixed ropes to their high point and continued on to the summit after 18 hours of climbing. After a descent halfway down the route, they bivouacked. The next morning they completed the descent, removing all their fixed ropes.

Józef Nyka adds:

On 14 June 1990 the Yugoslav climber Pavle Kozjek made what was probably the first solo ascent of the American route on the 900m high S face of Chacraraju Este (6001m). Despite its steepness (55–65°), the bottom part of the face was covered with heavy snow. But the crux of the route was the 150m high summit wall, reaching 80–85° and cut by a rock barrier. The route was first climbed in 1978 by Steve Brewer and Mark Richey. Kozjek classified it ED with some V–V+ sections. The delicate corniced ridges of the mountain were very dangerous, and he was forced to descend by the ascent route.

Kozjek later made an eight-hour ascent of Artesonraju (6025m) by a 1000m high face of 50–60° where he had to fight against deep snow. Another objective was the 1500m N face of Huascaran Sur (6750m). Unfortunately, the central part was continuously swept by falling ice and rock, and the climb had to be given up half way.