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Pioneers of the Paine: A Supplement

In the 1992 volume of this Journal Sir Edward Peck made a valuable contribution to the exploratory and climbing history of the Paine massif in southern Chile.¹ These brief notes are offered as a complement to that article.

The name Paine originated in Argentina and is therefore not local. The Cerros Paine are a range of lesser hills located in southern Argentina and the name, in the original Tehuelche language, meant 'blue' or 'light blue'. Argentine army men, hunting for fleeing Indians, somehow decided that the Chilean rock and ice massif bore a resemblance to the lower hillocks of their country and gave it the same name.² This probably happened around 1880. The border controversy between Chile and Argentina that began around 1885 was solved when both nations agreed that their common borderline should run over the highest summits that form the continental watershed. Between 1896 and 1910 *comisiones de límites* (boundary commissions) were specially created to establish exactly where this boundary would run. Their work represented the first attempt to map the Andes running from parallel 22° to 55° S.

The Chilean commission was headed by the remarkable mathematician/engineer Luis Riso Patrón, who can justly be called the main mountain explorer in South America. He led the mapping of the entire length of the Chilean Andes from southern Peru to Cape Horn. In the course of their task, the members of the commission climbed many peaks, baptised even more and placed iron landmarks on the international border passes. Riso Patrón and his crew erected, along the Chilean Andes, a total of 488 two-metre-high iron landmarks, which are still there.

It was Riso Patrón and his second-in-command engineer Alvaro Donoso who measured the Paine. In a preliminary survey (1902) the Chilean surveyors established a height of 2734m for the highest point in the massif. In the first national chart of 1910 and its reprints of 1928 and 1945, as well as in his excellent *Diccionario Geográfico de Chile* (1924), Riso Patrón quoted a corrected figure of only 2670m for the highest point and much lower ones for the other peaks of the massif. Low as that figure may appear, it was accepted unhesitatingly by Father Alberto de Agostini and by Dr Federico Reichert who were the two principal explorers of Patagonia before the 1950s.³

Why modern climbers insist on a figure of 3050m is something I have been unable to determine. Perhaps it originated with the French glaciologist Louis Lliboutry in his book *Nieves y glaciares de Chile* (1956),⁴ where he stated that he was quoting this height because it so appeared on the maps of the Chilean Boundary Commission. But none of these maps in fact quoted a

Paine height above 2734m. The official Chilean chart of the Instituto Geográfico Militar cited (in 1966 and 1970) only 2730m. During the last few years the Instituto, the major geographical authority in the country, has undertaken the resurvey of the entire country at a scale of 1:100,000 and 1:25,000, and we will have to await their results concerning the Paine district. However, there should not be too much optimism, since nearly all the heights recently produced by that institution have closely confirmed the old figures that Riso Patrón's men obtained almost a century ago.⁵

It is my opinion, therefore, that when the new surveys have been completed by the Instituto Geográfico Militar de Chile, all Paine heights will be below 2750m. Moreover the lesser peaks, horns and towers of the massif will have to be lowered accordingly, since their heights have generally been obtained by estimates based on the former 3050m for Paine Grande.

Additional pioneer climbing and related events in the Paine area, to complement those quoted in *AJ97*, can be briefly summarised as follows:

1938, 8 March

The Club Andino de Chile, section Punta Arenas (capital of Patagonia, population 58,000) was founded.⁶

1947, December

Two members of the Club, José Floegel and Henning Willumsen, climbed the two highest points in the Cordón (chain) Barros Arana, 2250m. Willumsen, a Chilean of Danish ancestry, was instrumental in developing skiing, hiking and national parks in southernmost Chile.⁶

1954, January

An expedition of the Club Andino Bariloche, Argentina, attempted Cerro Paine, losing two men in an avalanche. Two others ascended Paine Medio, 2460m. This massive peak had been ascended in 1937 by the Bavarians Zuck and Teufel and was subsequently repeated by Chileans and Czechs.^{7, 10}

1955, January

The subsidiary southern and central peaks of Paine were ascended by a Chilean team under Eduardo Meyer. The Chileans named the former peak 'Punta Bariloche' to honour the two Argentines who had perished the previous year.⁸

1968, January

Two Italians climbed El Escudo (shield), probably 2400m. A Chilean group of four, led by Eduardo García, a veteran instrumental in organising Eric Shipton's expeditions to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, climbed the Cuerno Principal del Paine (probably 2100m).¹⁰

1969, January

The strikingly difficult peak called by climbers Paine Norte was ascended by a strong Japanese party under Yoshimasa Takeuchi. Three Japanese also climbed Cerro 2265m, highest in the Cordón Olguín.^{9, 10}

During and after the seventies came several daring new routes and at least one important first ascent, that of Cuerno Norte (c2000m) by South Africans. As late as January 1991 a French expedition made the first ascent of the Peineta (comb), also called Nido Negro de Cóndores (black nest of the condors), the spiky north tower attached to the Torre Norte.

Of all the mountain names that climbers mention in their reports, only Paine, Torres and Cuernos, Cordón Olguín and Cordón Barros Arana are official. The Instituto Geográfico Militar de Chile has refused to sanction any name so far imposed by climbers. There is no doubt that the poor quality of the names chosen by climbing expeditions in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego has prompted that institution to remain firm in its decision.

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1 Edward Peck, 'Pioneers of the Paine', in *AJ* 97, 222-225, 1992/93.
- 2 Araucanian mythology says that a part of Paine is actually the petrified body of chieftain Huincamal, killed, like so many inhabitants of their land, in a giant deluge. Rock peaks, peaklets and crags are called by them *huintralcún* and represent the many warriors that perished in that universal disaster.
- 3 Alvaro Donoso, *Demarcación de la línea de la frontera en la parte sur del territorio*. Imprenta Cervantes (Santiago) 1906. Luis Riso Patrón, *Diccionario Jeográfico de Chile*. Imprenta Universitaria (Santiago) 1924.
- 4 Louis Lliboutry, *Nieves y glaciares de Chile*. Editorial Universitaria (Santiago), 402, 1956.
- 5 The cherished figures of over 7000m for Aconcagua were always contested by Riso Patrón (and by the famous alpinist Paul Güssfeldt) as early as 1896, since Patrón had obtained a height of only 6960m (and Güssfeldt, 6970m) for that mountain. When the Argentine engineer Eduardo Baglietto finally resolved the controversy in 1959, he determined a final height for Aconcagua of only 6959.7m.
- 6 *Revista Andina* 62 (1948) was wholly devoted to the mountain sports of the Punta Arenas district.
- 7 Vojko Arko, *Un pionero de Bariloche: Otto Meiling*. Imprenta Bavaria (Bariloche, Argentina), 70-90, 1991.
- 8 Luis Krahl, 'Primera expedición chilena a los Andes patagónicos', in *Revista Andina* 81, 5-9, 1955.
- 9 Eduardo García, 'Expedición universitaria a los Cuernos del Paine' in *Anuario de Montaña*. Federación de Andinismo de Chile, 72-77, 1972.
- 10 In general, the following publications provide good coverage of activity in the Paine area:
 Gastón San Román, *Historia del andinismo en Chile*, Imprenta Quickprint Ltda (Santiago) 1989.
Mountain 16, 11-22, 1971.
 Club Andino Bariloche, *Anuario* 1955 and 1956.
American Alpine Journal, section 'Climbs and Expeditions', 1955 to date.