
MARCELO SCANU

Argentine Andes 2008

The reports are ordered from North to South. **Chañi Chico** (5571m) in Salta, North Argentine Andes, is a minor summit in the **Chañi** (5896m) massif. The highest summit was sacred and 100 years ago, an Inca mummy was found and extracted from there. Its incredible south wall has been a dream for many generations of Argentine climbers, so this ascent is very remarkable. Argentines Humberto Vázquez, Fernando Gutiérrez and Facundo Juárez opened the line called *Siete Dolores* (*Seven Pains*), 960m 6c (min. 5+), on 9 September. They completed the ascent in 12 hours. The rock was rotten and had much rockfall, and many cracks had hard ice. They bivouacked on the shoulder next to the summit and rappelled the route the next day.

Cachi is another important sacred 6380m mountain in Salta. Nicolás Pantaleón and Nicolás Yannito, both from Salta, ascended the virgin north face in November. They began on the 8th, camping at 3300m and camped twice more at 4000m. On the fourth day, at 4935m, they reached snow that they could melt for water. Otherwise, the mountain is dry. Switching onto the ridge, they erected two more camps on the long route, one at 5578m and the last one at 5830m, where they had heavy snowfall during the night. Finally, on the sixth day, 13 November, they reached the summit at 10.45am. They descended quickly, reaching Salta the next day.

During the year, climbers made the first descent of the crater of **Bertrand's Volcano** (5207m). No-one had previously descended to the crater's bottom as it was sacred from Inca times. This volcano lies amongst the highest volcanoes on earth and in one of its driest zones. The crater is an incredible 4.5km in diameter and more than 300m deep. The Incas made the first ascent of the volcano. In 1965 the European couple of Verena and Anders Bolinder with the local hillman Víctor Bustamante made the first modern climbing ascent. Thirty years after their ascent, Marcelo Scanu solo climbed the summit and found the papers left by the 1965 party. From then on, he had in his thoughts the descent to the deepest point in the crater.

In January-February 2008, José Luis Querlico and Marcelo Scanu travelled to the high barren zone in Catamarca province. They camped west of the crater in an area with little volcanic cones 10-20m high and a lagoon that was red from volcanic minerals. From there they ascended to the crater rim at around 5000m and descended through a dry creek full of enormous rocks, walking virgin territory to the crater's bottom at c4850m. The crater was like a lost world: rock, stones and volcanic ash with virtually nothing



203. The line taken by Siete Dolores (960m 6c) on Chani Chico (5571m).
(*Nono Vázquez*)

living. The crater's walls fall steeply from the main summit and from the north summit (5188m). Scanu solo climbed the north summit (his companion had to descend because of work), finding a modern cairn at the top but nothing else. Before going to Bertrand, Querlico and Scanu had explored the region, especially the conic and beautiful **Peinado** (the combed one) volcano. Scanu also ascended here solo a virgin volcanic cone of c4900m called by the locals **Hijo del Peinado** (the Peinado's son). In its summit is a 15m diameter crater. They had lots of snowfall and minus 15°C.

On 11 July (southern winter) Argentines Guillermo Almaraz, Nicolás Pantaleón and Javier Echenique made the first absolute ascent of elegant **Cerro Pabellón** (5331m in Argentine maps) by the south face. They began



204. Crater view from the north summit of Bertrand's Volcano (5188m).
(*Marcelo Scanu*)

their ascent from Las Grutas, the border police post near the border with Chile. Almaraz states that the mountains in this region are higher than the maps report. They measured 5405m with STRM (Shuttle Radar Topography Mission) and 5424m by GPS. In 1913, the German geologist Walther Penck claimed to be the first to ascend in the region a mountain called Pabellón of more or less the same height. As the modern group didn't find any trace of Penck (nor of the Incas), surely he ascended another nearby mountain. Pabellón is a common name for mountains in the region.

Incahuasi (6638m) lies on the border between Chile and Argentina, being one of the highest volcanoes on Earth. It was one of the highest points ascended by the Incas for religious purposes. On 19 April, Guillermo Almaraz, Eduardo Namur and Nicolás Pantaleón opened a new route, the south-east. They approached by the Valle (valley) de Las Peladas up to the mountain's base at 4600m. Previously two expeditions had visited the south face, but this one took instead a canal in the south-east. The climbers camped at 5200m and 5750m and ascended the south-east nevé with 50° ice and short passages of climbing to reach the summit plateau at 6250m. They continued to the 6638m summit that emerges from the snow and is part of the huge crater rim. The last metres consisted of loose rock where a simple Inca temple was erected 500 years ago. Prior to the climb, they ascended virgin **Cerro de las Peladas** (4650m), near the place of the same name.

In the Central Argentine Andes, Argentine Herman Binder and Spaniard Alex Gárate made the first traverse of some of the highest volcanoes

on Earth. This traverse included the highest volcano on Earth **Ojos del Salado** (6879m), **ATA** (6527m), **Walther Penck** (6682m) and **Nacimientos** (6463m). The unsupported traverse was 21km long (from the base of Ojos del Salado to Real del Rasguido) and never went below 5800m. Binder and Gárate completed it in six days during February 2008, finishing in a lunar eclipse.

On **Aconcagua**, there were fewer climbers on the mountain during the 2008-9 season (4041 against 4548 in 2007-8). A high proportion of the climbers came from outside Argentina. The two first weeks of January were the most popular with 590 and 533 climbers respectively. Unfortunately, there were nearly 300 rescues compared to 278 last season, and a higher death toll at six people. An Argentine guide and his Italian clients had a big accident that led to a major rescue and an unpleasant media circus. The guide and an Italian woman died. There were several interesting climbs by some Aconcagua porters who are also leading climbers in Argentina. Ariel di Carlantonio, Fernando Arnaudi and Mariano Galván made the second ascent (30 years after the first by Argentines Vieiro, Porcellana and Jasson in 1978) of the 2800m *East Glacier and South-east* route, also known as *English Glacier*. The last camp was at 6600m near the Polish Glacier's exit. Mariano Galván also made a new route to the right of the Polish Glacier. He went from Plaza Argentina to the summit alone in 14 hours for 2800m. He had ice and mixed terrain with 6th grade rock. He named the route



Los Porters because of his and his friends' activity in Aconcagua. Ariel and Fernando meanwhile ascended the south face of nearby **Ameghino** (5883m), on which they had up to 80° ice and rotten rock. They finished via the normal route to the striking little summit. It is likely that this was a new route, although apparently Pizarro and one of the Benegas brothers earlier ascended part of the route.

205. Reaching the lowest part in Bertrand's Volcano's crater. (Marcelo Scanu)