

Negra Este and Oeste and of Cerro Laguna Bonita (all 4950 meters, 16,240 feet), camping that night on the edge of the lake. Two days later, we were back in San Juan.

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*Cerro de la Coipita (or de la Lagunita), Cordillera de Colangüil.* This range lies in northern San Juan province, parallel to the Argentine-Chilean border. The Cerro de la Coipita is the northernmost peak of the range. We were Swiss Raphael and Stéphane Joliat, Frenchman Jean-Yves Piffard, Argentines *baqueano* (local hillman) Carmelo Martínez and I. On January 26, we passed through Angualasto with its interesting pre-Columbian ruins after making a check with the Gendarmería Nacional (Border Police) because we were entering the Llanos de San Guillermo Provincial Park and Biosphere Reserve. At the nearby ranch of Rodeo del Toro, we met our *baqueano*. On January 28, we ascended the Quebrada del Molle in incredible heat but little humidity. That afternoon, we got to the Vega de los Médanos on the river of the same name. We finally entered the Arroyo del Fierro and camped at 3750 meters. On January 31, horses took us to 4310 meters. We continued on foot, but I got only to 4800 meters because of pain in my knees. The Swiss and French climbers climbed the east ridge and then the summit ridge to complete the first ascent of Cerro de la Coipita (5423 meters, 17,792 feet).

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*Mercedario, First Winter Ascent.* Many parties had attempted the winter ascent of Mercedario (6770 meters, 22,212 feet), fourth highest in the Americas, but all had had to retreat under extreme conditions. In June, Mauricio Fernández, Carlos Domínguez and Esteban Arellano met Humberto Campodónico, who was making a solo attempt. They joined forces. Separately, they had walked from Borreal by the Río de los Patos, Río Blanco and the old houses at Los Molles to the Quebrada de la Laguna Blanca, where they met at Ojos de Agua. Snow fell that night, but the next morning they continued along an old road. The Laguna Blanca was frozen. They camped in the old shelter of Laguna Blanca at 3100 meters. On June 21, the first day of southern winter, they passed the day organizing equipment. The next day, they climbed to camp at 4100 meters and built snow walls against the fierce wind, but the wind ripped one of their tents and so they retreated to Laguna Blanca. On June 25, they made a new attack, leaving at eight A.M. and reached the Inca ruins at Pircas de Indios at 5000 meters at six P.M. At six A.M. on June 26, they set out for the summit. They climbed past La Hollada (5800 meters), El Diente (6100 meters) and finally the summit ridge with its numerous false tops. The main summit was gained at 4:50 P.M. with a  $-22^{\circ}\text{C}$  temperature. The descent was fast. At ten P.M., they were back at Pircas de Indios and the day after they reached Los Molles.

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