

Argentina

NORTHERN ARGENTINE ANDES

Cerro El Cónдор and Cerro Vallecitos, exploration and ascents. In January 1998 I directed an expedition to the high barren zone of the Catamarca province, in the northern Argentine Andes. We opened trail in virgin territory with a Ford XLT F-100. The route was difficult, but we managed to ascend to 5000m on the northern slopes of Cerro El Cónдор, an enormous volcano near the Argentine-Chilean border. This was the highest virgin peak outside Asia—or so we thought. Argentine maps mark its north peak as 6373m and its south peak as 6350+m. We erected a camp at 5400m. The next day I reached 5700m, and Ruth Reynoso managed to reach ca 6,000m on the crater's rim. We descended for a break before the second attempt. Unfortunately, we had to abandon our attempt because of problems with logistics and the support team. On the way down we found motorbike trails that made us wonder about a previous ascent or attempt. Some time ago later I received word from a French resident in Argentina, Henri Barret, who gave me important information, previously unreported, about El Cónдор. In April 1996 he made a reconnaissance using motorbikes and a pickup with a man called Walter. In October 1996 he came back with Walter and his wife. He erected a camp at 4200m and from there made the second ascent of Cerro de la Laguna Amarga, 5007m (AAJ 1997, p. 242). He ascended to 5,000m on El Cónдор's northern slopes with a quadrocycle (four-wheel ATV). From there he departed early in the morning, ascended a steep slope, and reached the crater's rim at 6000m at 3 p.m. At 3:30 p.m. Barret and Walter reached the south summit, the highest they say, without finding traces of previous ascents. They stood 30 minutes at the summit looking at the enormous crater and the lunar landscape. The next day they had a difficult descent with the pickup. On October 1998 they attempted the north summit, reaching a glacier, but were stopped at 6000m by chaotic blocks and snow patches. So El Cónдор wasn't virgin, as we thought. In April 1997 Barret solo (Walter was sick) ascended Cerro Vallecitos (6168m, also a volcano), which lies entirely in Argentina, near the border with Chile, some kilometers North of El Cónдор. He found traces of a pre-Columbian ascent but not of modern ones.

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Aconcagua, overview. The official season for climbing Aconcagua is from November 15 to March 15. The Parque Provincial Aconcagua had had 4,434 visitors as of March 7, 2002. Nearly 88 percent of the climbers were non-Argentines, and 410 Argentines tried for the summit. Unfortunately, there were three casualties and 120 rescues and extractions. The first death was German Herbert Springer, who had a heart attack. The same problem struck Englishman Paul Whitehouse on February 15, 2002, when he attempted the Polish Glacier route. Argentine guide Gustavo Lo Ré was found dead on February 28. He was last seen on the 22nd when he tried to reach the Horcones zone by a nontraditional route, alone. He fell 200 meters. The mountain,

