

Nevado Pucahirca

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THE Cordillera Blanca of Peru was the objective of our expedition in the summer of 1955. This great range, lying almost on the equator, contains the highest mountains in the world in the tropical zone. It is difficult to describe the beauty and charm of these peaks situated in a land rich in history and a blending of Spanish and Incan cultures. The mountains rise directly from their base, at an altitude of 7,000 to 9,000 feet in the picturesque Santa Valley, to steep ice-covered summits reaching 22,200 feet. Long canyons or quebradas extend into the range where the climber can walk in the lush mountain grass at 12,000 to 14,000 feet and gaze up at the white peaks towering 6,000 to 10,000 feet above the floor of the quebrada. This area has seen extensive mountaineering activity, yet at this writing there still remain untrod summits of over 20,000 feet. These were our goal.

Our expedition had its beginning in the fall of 1954 when David Gagliardo, after two and a half years in South America, returned to the United States determined to make an old dream of an expedition to the "Glorious Cordillera" become a reality. By November preparations were well underway in Boulder, Colorado, with the following men already members of the expedition: Dr. Raymond Hopponen (who as a professor of pharmacy was our medical officer), Dr. William McMannis, Dr. Harold Walton, and the author. In this formative stage we were very fortunate to have the advice and encouragement of many others and especially David Michael who had been a member of two previous Andean expeditions. At this time we also received essential help in Lima from the U. S. Embassy. Dr. Arthur Campa, the Cultural Attaché, was particularly helpful. Nick Clinch, Andrew J. Kauffman II, and David A. Sowles joined the expedition just before our 3,000 pounds of equipment and supplies were packed and shipped from Boulder for the port of Callao, Peru.

Gagliardo, Hopponen, and McMannis left the United States by air on June 13 as an advance party. By June 19 they had accomplished the trying and frustrating task of getting our equipment through Peruvian customs, purchasing additional supplies, making reservations for the main party, handling a hundred last minute details, and finally, in one continuous 28-

hour ride, trucking everything up to Caras (7,251 feet) in the Santa Valley.

The rest of us flew into Lima one week later and found everything well arranged by the advance party and Braniff Airways. We were able to go directly by car from Lima to Caras, where, on the night of June 23 our entire expedition was assembled for the first time. We were fortunate to have as porters the three Angeles brothers, Emilio as head porter, Eugenio, and Victorino; together with Juan Ramirez, who acted both as porter and interpreter. We found all four men very willing and of good spirit, and the Angeles brothers were particularly competent porters on the mountain. These three have learned a lot from previous expeditions, and this combined with their natural endurance and strength has produced very good men whom we wholeheartedly recommend to future expeditions.

We had waited until arriving in the Santa Valley to select our objectives and there decided to climb in the Nevado Pucahirca area. This is actually a small range in itself, containing at least four separate and distinct summits close to or above 20,000 feet and running roughly north and south. The southernmost was climbed in the thirties by Erwin Schneider. Also part of the group is the beautiful and as yet unclimbed Taulliraju (19,128 feet) located to the south across the great ice field that lies at the foot of the Pucahirca peaks. Schneider made his ascent of the south peak from the Jancapampa Valley on the east and indicated that the other peaks should be accessible from the Jancapampa. Aside from this, we had almost no information on the peaks and the only picture we had seen was in Kinzl and Schneider's book *Cordillera Blanca*. Although only a distant view from the west of the top 2,000 feet, the picture did show that if, from the east, we could reach either of the high cols between the northern peaks, the summits on either side of the col would go. We could tell from the map that these peaks were some of the most inaccessible of the Cordillera and we knew that being the easternmost of the range they would be the first to be covered by the clouds and storms that move in on the prevailing winds from the Amazon basin. We also expected and found a slightly lower ice line than on the western side.

In Caras that evening we decided to send a reconnaissance party by way of Quebrada Santa Cruz to find and mark a route to Quebrada Jancapampa, reconnoiter the peaks and select a site for base camp. The main group would follow a few days later from Yungay up Quebrada Yanga-

nucu with burros and all the equipment. This was as soon as we could obtain the necessary animals.

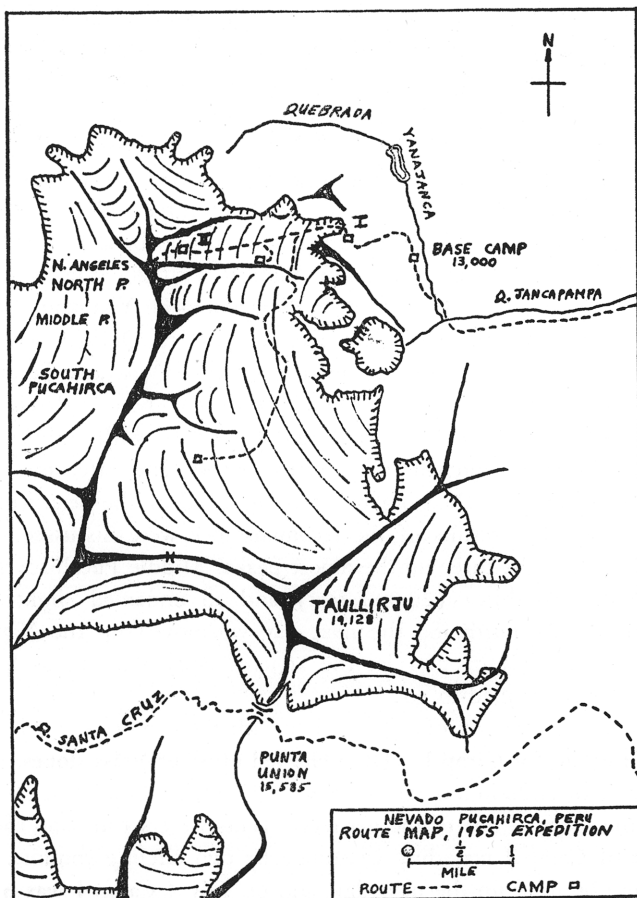
The next morning, June 24th, McMannis and I, with Eugenio, left Caras carrying eight days' supplies. We hiked up Quebrada Santa Cruz and on the third day crossed Punta Union (15,585 feet) and another pass over 15,500 feet. Enroute we had a close view of two of the three sides of Taulliraju and were very impressed with its beauty as well as the climbing difficulties it presented. Crossing another high pass we reached Quebrada Jancapampa the morning of the fifth day. Seeing the Pucahircas for the first time towering 8,000 feet or more above the Jancapampa valley was a magnificent and inspiring sight. After reconnoitering the range we selected a site for base camp about three miles up Quebrada Yanajanca in a meadow by a beautiful waterfall at about 13,000 feet.

On June 27 the main group left Yungay with 20 animals and proceeded up Quebrada Yanganuco over Portachuelo de Yanganuco (15,641 feet), down to Colcabamba, over another pass to Quisuar where they joined our route, and over the final pass into Quebrada Jancapampa. During the trip the arrieros either quit or proved to be completely useless, but the porters took over their work and performed with enthusiasm and dispatch. Everyone pitched in as burro drivers, and after five days of "passa burro" they reached our camp at the head of the beautiful Jancapampa Valley. The results of the reconnaissance were discussed, and we chose to attempt the three northernmost peaks: Middle Pucahirca (20,000 feet), North Pucahirca (20,000 feet) and an unnamed slightly lower peak still farther north. So the next day we moved up the Yanajanca, established Base Camp, and let the arrieros and their burros head for home. They were glad to go!

The next morning six of us, together with three porters, carried heavy loads to the site for Camp I. The route led up steep grass slopes, through small bands of cliffs to a height of about 15,500 feet beside the séracs that formed the snout of one of the glaciers. Tents were set up, and the establishment of Camp I was duly welcomed by two circling condors. More loads were brought up the next day, and on July 4 Camp I was occupied by all eight of us. That same afternoon Kauffman and McMannis worked out a route up the glacier to about 17,000 feet. We all felt a great deal of satisfaction upon finally reaching the ice after all the months of planning and work.

The key to North Pucahirca appeared to be a high col between it and the lower unnamed peak farther to the north. From this col we felt certain both could be climbed. We also hoped to be able to traverse over or

around North Pucahirca and try Middle Pucahirca. To reach this high col, we selected a long, gently rising ridge which terminated in the col and appeared to consist of broad, easy snowslopes with an occasional small ice cliff.



The morning of July 5 found everyone eager to get out on the ice, so we all set out with loads to find a site for Camp II. We zigzagged up the glacier for several hours and then found some steep slopes that led up under rather threatening ice cliffs to the crest of the ridge we planned to follow to the high col. Here on the ridge at about 17,500 feet we dumped our loads and set up three Gerry high-mountain tents. About

50 feet of fixed rope was placed just before the peak of the ridge. Then we all returned to Camp I for the night.

The weather was misty that first day, although clear during the morning and evening. July in the Cordillera is the dry season and usually characterized by many clear days, but on the eastern peaks cloudy conditions continued during most of our stay. The mist was most welcome for working on the glacier, but a handicap for photography and route finding. We marked our entire route on the glacier with bamboo wands, and at times they were an absolute necessity.

On July 6 all eight of us again carried loads to Camp II and this time occupied it for the night. It stormed that night and the next morning, depositing several inches of snow. Despite this, Gagliardo, Kauffman, McMannis and Sowles worked on along the ridge, but encountered difficult ice formations that had been hidden from view. They returned at noon to report the ridge would be long and difficult. This called for more reconnaissance and supplies. That same afternoon Hopponen and I descended all the way to Base Camp to get the supplies going.

The next day while we were bringing the porters with heavy loads up to Camp I, two reconnaissance parties went out from Camp II to search for possible routes on either side of the ridge. Clinch and Walton went to the south and looked at the terrific ice cliffs under the precipitous face of Middle Pucahirca without finding and encouraging possibilities. McMannis and Sowles worked up through the glacier on the north and found a more promising route beginning at the head of the glacier. This meant we should move Camp II off the ridge and on up the glacier. Late in the afternoon Gagliardo and Kauffman descended to Camp I with this news, and on July 9 the entire party helped relocate Camp II near the head of the glacier at 18,000 feet.

On July 10 Clinch, McMannis, Sowles and Walton began to work on the new route above Camp II. They were able to get around the bergschrund in the steep slope above the camp and to the Lower Col, where they anchored a fixed line. That same day Hopponen took two porters from Camp I to Base Camp and returned with supplies especially needed above. On July 11 everyone in Camp I carried loads up the glacier to Camp II and on the way up the mist cleared for a moment, and we saw climbers high on the skyline apparently heading for the Upper Col. We continued to Camp II full of optimism. However, the climbers we had glimpsed encountered new difficulties beginning with a large bergschrund half way between the Lower and Upper Cols. While they were trying to cross the schrund, a small rock and snow avalanche fell

over them, and they returned to Camp II with doubts about the safety of the route. Those of us who had come up from Camp I remained in Camp II, while McMannis and Sowles took the porters down to Camp I.

The next day Gagliardo, Hopponen, Walton and I got off to an early start from Camp II, resolved either to find a new and safer route from the Lower Col to the Upper Col, or make the other one do. The weather was clear and cold and we made good time up the fixed rope to the Lower Col. After studying the mountain, we decided that the route tried the previous day was better than anything else and proceeded up the broad ridge to the upper bergschrund. Here, Walton, who was familiar with the problem from yesterday, started by standing on the fragile lower lip and attacking the upper side while the three of us crouched under the overhanging ice. One ice piton and some good ice work were required to cross the schrund, and about 30 feet above it a rappel picket was placed with a fixed line. From there on we tried to prepare the way as we went up to facilitate our descent. The slope above the schrund was steeper (50 degrees) than below and consisted of very icy snow that would not chip or flake like ice. We continued up with Hopponen and Walton in the lead, placing fixed rope and cutting steps all the way. We climbed as close as possible to the rock to minimize the danger. About the middle of the morning, clouds moved in from the east, and we continued in mist for the rest of the day. Finally we came to a couloir of soft snow opposite a gigantic cornice and we knew we had it made. One easy rope length brought us to the Upper Col itself. We had finally broken through, and the expedition had the key to the peaks. We felt then that this was the real climax because the Upper Col had been our real objective these many days and both summits were so accessible from it.

It was 2:00 P.M. and too late in the day for us to attempt the final 500 feet on North Pucahirca, which we could occasionally see through the blowing mist; but Hopponen and Walton could not resist the lower peak to the north, and its first ascent was made July 12. We named it Nevado Angeles, after the father of our three porters who was killed in the Huaraz flood in 1941.

At 4:00 P.M. we began the descent from the Upper Col, and although we hurried we did not reach the bergschrund until twilight. By then the wind was spitting snow, and in the blowing mist everything was a dull grey. We could not distinguish any landmarks to guide us to the Lower Col, much less detect the steepness of the slope we were standing on except by feel. We put on our headlights and found them to be almost useless in the blowing snow. Worst of all, there were no wands on this

section because that morning we had saved the few we carried for higher on the mountain. The snow had been so hard in the morning that our crampons had hardly left a mark. By dead reckoning we began to crampon down the slope, and very soon it was completely dark. We all stopped, and Walton began a circle at about rope length to try to determine where we were. He was below and a little to one side of us when we saw his light suddenly drop out of sight and the rope went tight on Hopponen's ice axe belay. Gagliardo gave me a belay, and I ran down the taut rope. Walton had fallen over an ice cliff that lay directly below us, and very faintly through the wind I could hear him calling. I answered, but in the wind could not understand what he was yelling. I climbed back up to the others, and for a moment we considered what action to take. One thing was certain: he was on tension, and no man could live for long hanging in a chest loop at 19,000 feet. It took only a few seconds to decide to pull him up. A prusik brake was rigged with the other rope, and we began pulling up the rope. We had only taken in a few feet when the rope suddenly went slack. We took the rest in hurriedly and found the end unravelled for about a foot and nothing else. We were stricken with apprehension. But soon we saw a faint glow in the blowing snow and clouds below us. We called but heard no reply. Finally we could tell that the glow was moving across the slope under the cliff below us. At last we heard Walton call "safe" and ask for the rope again. We threw it down, and up through the darkness and storm came our friend. Our joy knew no bounds! His only damage was a scratched forehead, bruised ribs, and a broken strap on his rucksack. He recounted how he had dropped off the cliff, swinging down and across its face, and reaching the end of the rope with his feet touching soft snow, but still on tension. Unable to make himself understood and suffering from the tension on his waist loop while yet so close to a safe landing place, he had boldly cut the rope with his pocket knife when we tried to pull him up. Then in a nice bit of solo climbing, he had cautiously traversed under and around the ice cliff.

Now we knew there were ice cliffs immediately below and close on both sides of us. One close call was enough; we prepared to bivouac. We cut a ledge to stand on and began to dig a cave in the icy snow, cutting a small entrance and enlarging it with our ice axes as we went deeper. After almost two hours of digging, the hole was just big enough for the four of us. We put on all of our clothing, crammed ourselves inside, and pulled a block of snow into the doorway. We had enough candles to keep one going all through the long night, and had slanted our tunnel

and floor upward to trap whatever warm air our bodies and the candles might produce. The ceiling was scored with the cuts made by our ice axes, and throughout the night water collected on these points and slowly dripped on us; for crowded as we were we could not avoid it. Although we were chilly and uncomfortable, we did not suffer frostbite.

At 6:00 A.M., when daylight finally came, the storm was still going strong. We crawled out of our hole, and our clothes immediately froze where they had become wet. There was about four inches of new snow. We climbed back up the slope and located the proper ridge slightly to the east.

Meanwhile, our companions in Camp II had spent an anxious night and as soon as it was light set out to search for us. We met in the storm on the fixed rope just below the Lower Col, and all returned to camp. The rest of the day was spent sleeping and making hot food and drinks in the excellent outdoor kitchen Kauffman had constructed of snow blocks.

We had climbed one big peak and were very close on the other, but it was now time to schedule the remainder of our stay in this area. So we set evacuation dates for all camps and decided that Dave Gagliardo, who acted as the expedition leader when necessary and was the only one of us who spoke fluent Spanish, would have to go to Pomabamba as soon as possible to obtain burros and supplies. I agreed to accompany him. Next day Gagliardo and I went down the glacier for Pomabamba while Clinch and Kauffman climbed up the route to attempt the other peak. They left Camp II an hour before daylight and making good time up the prepared route reached the Upper Col at 9:00 A.M. Soon the clouds closed in as usual, but they pushed up the steep slope, over the bergschrund, and on to the summit cornice¹ of North Pucahirca (ca. 20,000 feet), our second first ascent. However, they were unable to traverse over or around to Middle Pucahirca. Returning to the Upper Col they made another ascent of Angeles and descended to Camp II with a good day's work accomplished.

Going down the glacier to Base Camp Gagliardo and I found our old route had been wiped out by an avalanche from the ice cliffs above, and jumbled ice blocks now covered our route. Continuing from Base Camp the next day, we hiked down the Jancapampa Valley to Pomabamba. It

¹The highest point of North Pucahirca appears to be a large and dangerous cornice upon which none of the summit parties cared to venture. As stated by Kauffman (*Appalachia*, Dec. 1955), the summit parties were a mere 20 feet below the top of the cornice and probably higher than the true summit. It is because of this cornice that the traverse from North Pucahirca to Middle Pucahirca could not be completed.
—Editor.

was an interesting experience to come down to 10,000 feet and a semi-tropical climate, after living on the ice for many days at 18,000 feet and above. We found Pomabamba to be a town of over 5,000 inhabitants, situated two to three days' journey from the nearest road. The local people were very friendly and fascinated by our height (over six feet), our beards (abundant), and most of all by the size of our boots (Army ski mountaineering). After two days and nights of bargaining, delays, telegrams to the Santa Valley, and walking all over town, we finally got bread, native corn, sugar, salt, and beer; contracted for 10 animals to take the expedition back to civilization; and selected a new route for our departure. Instead of returning over Portachuelo de Yanganuco we would go north to the road head at Pasacancha. We were also well initiated into the local drinking customs (*Salud!*) and left Pomabamba with many fine friendships.

Meanwhile, McMannis and Sowles had moved up to Camp II and on July 16, with Clinch, Hopponen, and Walton, climbed to the Upper Col. The cloudy weather we had been plagued with these many days finally ended, but in its place the climbers had to endure the strongest winds and greatest cold we experienced. From the Upper Col, McMannis and Sowles climbed North Pucahirca but were prevented by the cornice from traversing over the summit on to Middle Pucahirca. Clinch and Walton inspected the west face of North Pucahirca, but found a traverse out of the question there. However, there did appear a possible route up the steep slope to the east ridge of North Pucahirca, up the ridge to the south of the summit of North Pucahirca, down a steep slope to the col between the North and Middle peaks, then up to the summit of Middle Pucahirca. Obviously, this would require the establishment of a camp on the Upper Col. Since our supplies would not allow us to stay on the mountain long enough to do this, we would have to be content with ascents of North Pucahirca and Angeles. McMannis, Sowles, and Walton ascended Angeles, and then everyone returned to Camp II, leaving Middle Pucahirca for future expeditions.

On July 17 the evacuation of high camps began, and everyone in Camp II carried loads down to Camp I. On the 18th Clinch took the porters back for the final carry from Camp II. On the same day Kauffman and Sowles climbed a beautiful little peak above Camp I (*ca.* 17,500 feet).

Soon we were all enjoying the comforts of Base Camp, except the indomitable Walton, who with Clinch made a two-day reconnaissance across the great ice field. They found a practical route from our Camp I to the foot of South Pucahirca, where they spent the night. This in-

formation should be of value to future expeditions who might wish to use our camp sites and also place a high camp near Taulliraju and South Pucahirca.

We bought a sheep from the Indians in the Jancapampa Valley and when everyone was back in Base Camp opened the case of cerveza and indulged in lazy celebration. Once again it was wonderful to enjoy the evening camp fire, which as usual was enlivened by firecrackers and tall stories.

On July 22 our animals arrived, and we left Quebrada Yanajanca, on the trail for Pasacancha. For three days we hiked over country seen by few Peruvians and almost no foreigners, covering 40-50 miles. The travel was at an altitude of 10,000 to 14,000 feet, up and down hills and ridges that would be considered mountain ranges at home. Foot sore and weary we arrived in the little mining village of Pasacancha on July 24, where we discovered the resident engineer was a member of the Italian Alpine Club from Venice. Our friends in the Guardia Civil in Pomabamba had sent instructions ahead of us that we were to be given the first truck into Pasacancha. We got our truck at 3:00 the next morning, and after arriving in Yungay, many of us were convinced that climbing the mountains was the easiest and safest part of the trip.

Vacation time was now running out for many of us, and on July 28, Clinch, Gagliardo, Kauffman, McMannis, and I returned to Lima and headed for home.

Hopponen, Sowles and Walton stayed in Yungay to climb Huascaran (22,205 feet), the highest mountain in Peru. Base Camp was established on July 30, and Camp I the next day at about 16,500 feet, just below the Garganta ice fall which constitutes the main technical difficulty of the ascent. Camp II was established at slightly over 19,000 feet. During the ascent, they enjoyed the companionship of the Deutscher Alpenverein team who were at Huascaran at that time. On August 3 Hopponen, Sowles and Walton, with Porter Emilio, reached the South Summit at 4:00 P.M., after enduring severe winds and ground blizzards throughout most of the climb.

The ascent of Huascaran ended the climbing activities of our expedition. Hopponen spent some time processing and packing the specimens of medicinal plants he had collected; and with Sowles, packed up all our equipment for shipment to the United States.

We hope the results of our trip will encourage future expeditions to the Cordillera Blanca, for unclimbed peaks such as Chacraraju, Middle Pucahirca, and Taulliraju will certainly provide enough challenge. We

owe a great debt to those who had climbed before us. Without their prior experience to draw upon, the thorough planning and equipping of our expedition and the successful results it produced would not have been possible.

Summary of Statistics

ASCENTS: Nevado Angeles, *ca.* 19,750 feet, first ascent, July 12, 1955; Hopponen and Walton. July 14, 1955; Clinch and Kauffman.

July 16, 1955; McMannis, Sowles, and Walton.

North Pucahirca, *ca.* 20,000 feet, first ascent, July 14, 1955; Clinch and Kauffman. July 16, 1955; McMannis and Sowles.

Unnamed Peak, *ca.* 17,500 feet, first ascent, July 18, 1955; Kauffman and Sowles.

Huascaran, 22,205 feet, August 3, 1955; Hopponen, Sowles, Walton, and Porter Emilio.

PERSONNEL: Nick Clinch, Raymond Hopponen, Andrew J. Kauffman II, William McMannis, Harvey N. Platts, David A. Sowles, and Harold Walton.

