

Mount Howson. A cairn, containing a bronze plaque, has been erected on the south col of Mount Howson in memory of Major E. R. Gibson, formerly president of the Alpine Club of Canada, who lost his life in the summer of 1957 in an attempt at the first ascent of Mount Howson (9060 feet) by the west ridge.

After the completion of the cairn, the first ascent of the mountain was made by Adolph Bitterlich (leader), John Owen, and A. W. Lash, of the A.A.C., on July 16, via the north col and north ridge. Part of this ridge had been reconnoitered by Major Gibson and R. A. Schluter in 1956, but because of heavy avalanches it was not accessible in 1957. Following the north ridge from the north col involved traversing two rock-towers, separated from each other and the peak of Mount Howson by steep ice-gullies. The first tower was not difficult. The key to the second was a rather insignificant crack attained by descending the ice gully on the west side about 10 or 15 feet. There was a long and steep ice arête between the second tower and the final ascent to the peak. The approximate time taken from camp above the icefall in Sandpiper Valley to the summit of Howson was 12 hours.

A. W. LASH, *Alpine Club of Canada*

SOUTH AMERICA

Argentina

Austro-Argentine Atacama Expedition. Towering above the Puna de Atacama, already at an average of 13,000 feet, rise glacier-flecked volcanos to over 22,000 feet (Ojos del Salado, 22,591 feet). This naked salt and gravel desert, with its moonlike landscape embraces the Andean chain along the northern Argentine-Chilean frontier and up into southern Bolivia. Nowhere else on earth does the snowline lie so high as in the Atacama Desert, one of the world's driest. Twenty thousand-foot peaks usually are free of a complete cap of snow.

The waters melted by the singeing sun provide at the foot of the volcanos the few fresh-water springs and oases in this dessicated and sterile desert plateau. They are the fountains of life for the hamlets at their edges. They must have appeared to the sun-worshipping highland Indians as beneficent divine gifts and inspired them to set up sacrificial altars on these barely glaciated and easily climbed mountains, which lie close to the sun. Indeed masonry was erected on a number of such volcanos. Since the buildings could not have been only for habitation, they must have had a cultural meaning.

The objective of my last expedition, as well as previous ones, has been to investigate this puzzling, ancient Indian stonework on the high summits of the now nearly uninhabited Atacama Desert. Under my leadership, Gustav Lantschner and Emo Henrich, both of Innsbruck, took part in the whole expedition. We were joined for part time by Yosko Cvitanic, Milenko Jurcich, and José A. Robles, of Salta, Argentina, and by my old friends, Sergio and Jorge Domicelj, of Buenos Aires.

Two years ago (*A.A.J.*, 1957, 10:2, pp. 163-164) we dug up out of three rubble-filled masonry squares on the summit of 19,000-foot Cerro Gallan small, silver idols from Inca times, burnt bone fragments, charred branches and stone axe-heads. It proved that the Incas had established a primitive place of worship with sacrificial burnt offerings at this altitude! On the Chilean side a similar sacred compound was found on the Cerro Plomo at 17,350 feet. This site contained, among other things, the mummified body of a boy and figures identical in style to those on the Cerro Gallan, but golden. This gave further proof of ancient Indian animal and human sacrifice on mountaintops.

Continuing our previous work, we investigated on the present expedition the already known-about stonework on the summit of Llullaillaco (22,058 feet) (*A.A.J.*, 1954, 9:1, p. 203) as well as some hitherto undiscovered house-ruins which I discovered on a solitary excursion on a shoulder at about 21,650 feet. The outside walls of the ruin of one house were, for example, 20 feet long, 10 feet wide, in part 10 feet high and 3 feet thick, double, with grass insulation between the two layers. The wooden roof had fallen in but was still preserved. I had to quit investigating one room in snow flurries at dark. After I had removed a three-foot layer of ice and blocks of stone and had placed to one side half of the roof timbers, I ran up against another bone-hard layer of ice and rubble, which I could not hope to excavate then. If I can return, I should be able to work this layer since it no longer has its insulating layer, especially earlier in the year. In a corner I dug down and found kernels of corn, potsherds, and wood ashes. Another room is still untouched. These rooms were doubtless inhabited for some time. The partial remains of a stairway with a fallen protective wall led from there to the walls of two smaller huts 100 feet below the summit of Llullaillaco. These huts were certainly once occupied if only for short periods at any one time. We had to overcome great difficulties there. Just as we were about to start work on the summit, a meter of snow fell. Although the work was exhausting in this oxygen-poor altitude and despite great cold and continual high winds, we were able to dig out valuable archaeological

objects. After three days of exhausting solitary digging at 21,650 feet, I nearly froze to death in my 20,000-foot camp during a very windy night, with the added complication of carbon monoxide poisoning from solidified alcohol. Because of this stormy weather, I had to give up further work there and descend with frostbitten hands and feet.

Similarly we found on other summits of the now nearly peopleless Atacama peculiar rock alignments and frequently carefully bundled wood, obviously pre-Columbian. These we found near the Salares (Salt Flats) of Arizaro and Antofalla on Aracar (19,718 feet), Tebenquicho (19,029 feet), and Antofalla (given as 21,000, but according to my impression closer to 20,000 feet). (The first two were the first modern ascents and the latter the second.—*Editor.*)

The objects found, particularly the wood samples, have been given to scientific institutions for careful examination. It is hoped that their age (from Carbon 14 dating) and kind will give the key to the epoch and culture from which they stem.

MATHIAS REBITSCH

Nevado de Famatina. The second ascent of the Nevado de Famatina (20,506 feet), in La Rioja province, was made on November 24, 1958 by Dr. Luis Vita, Elio and Raúl Vergara, Dr. Marcelo Pensa, Aurelio Castelli, and Miguel Conte, of the Club Andino Córdoba. The first ascent took place in 1947.

Pirámides Range. Anselmo Weber, Mario Piccoli, and José Luis Ronrouge climbed the highest needle of the Pirámides range, west of Esquel and some 200 miles south of their home in Bariloche. They named it "Torre Slavko" in memory of a friend, Slavko Bavdaz, who was killed a month before. The range, situated between Lakes Futalaufquen and Krüger, on the north, and Lakes 1, 2, and 3, on the south, had previously repulsed climbers from here and Buenos Aires. It consists of five rock-towers, the highest (Torre Slavko) being at the southern end and about 8000 feet high. The climbers took five days for the approach from Lago Krüger, the reconnaissance, and the climb. They found a feasible route up the southeast glacier and bivouacked on December 28 in an ice cave. It dawned cloudy on the 29th but after it cleared, about 11 A.M., they made the climb and arrived at the summit at 6:20 P.M. Weber calls the climb moderately difficult. It had to be done free as it was impossible to place pitons because of the nature of the rock. They descended by the same route, reaching the bivouac spot at 1 A.M.

VOJSLAV ARKO, *Club Andino Bariloche*