

# Tayapampa in the Alpamayo Valley

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OUR small party met in Miami International Airport late in the evening of June 10; our objective: enjoyable mountaineering in the Alpamayo valley in the northern Cordillera Blanca; our party: Donald Morton, Richard Wylie, David Atherton and myself.

We travelled very light, carrying all our gear with us by air as excess baggage. This avoided the time-consuming and frustrating delays which plague so many parties. We passed through customs at Lima airport in the time it took to move our bags from one end of the bench to another.

With the help of César Morales and our two porters, Juan Zúñiga and Marcelino Vargas, we fairly soon found ourselves sleeping in the hot dry dust beside a terrifying wire rope by means of which we had to cross the Santa river to the Hacienda Colcas. From this point to our base camp at 14,600 feet in the upper Alpamayo valley took three days of dawn to dusk slogging. The trail to Alpamayo rises from 6000 feet, crosses two 15,400-foot passes and drops to 13,000 feet. Much of the way is waterless and there is no shade. The harrowing details can be imagined by the reader.

Fortunately there are compensations on the road. The extensive Ruinas de Hualcayán were quite unexpected, although we had done some homework on Peruvian archaeology. Signs of elaborate terracing are to be seen up to 14,000 feet with forts and aqueducts, stretching over a lateral extent of 20 miles or more. Throughout this vast area landslides and erosion have left but a small fraction of the original structures. This is evidence for an extremely great age, for the climate of Peru is kind to ancient buildings and workings. The city appears to be older than Chavín, which is usually and perhaps erroneously placed at the beginning of the Transitional period.

The site of Base Camp was the first convenient knoll in the upper valley. A mile further we could see the blue-green tents of the British expedition to Alpamayo led by Dennis Gray. At the head of the valley stood Abasraju\*, a beautiful, unclimbed, and rarely mentioned peak between Quitaraju and Santa Cruz.

\*According to local information *Abas* denotes a red and white flower, like the iron-red cliffs and white icefalls of the mountain, giving a very pleasing simile.

One of our objectives was to explore and climb the Pilanco group. Since the geography was unknown our first move was to climb Pilanco Sur, a 16,900-foot peak, the only one of the group visible from the Alpamayo valley. We set up a new camp, carrying our gear down to the river at 13,000 feet, and up again to 15,250 feet, to a bleak campsite between two small lakes. The view of the Santa Cruz group, Abasraju, Quitaraju, Alpamayo and its long northern ridge was a reward for suffering this cold and windy site, which we named Campamento Dos Lagunas (see map for camps and routes).

On June 22 we climbed a broken and enjoyable granite ridge, up a glacier to a steep snow cone forming the summit of our peak. David produced the Brunton compass and started his measurements for the map which we hoped would explain this complicated area. To the west stretched the Milluacochas. To the north two more Pilancos seemed to be somewhat higher than our summit, but they required yet another camp.

We returned to Base Camp and prepared to attack Quitaraju. It was not obvious how to get to the final slopes. We spent a day investigating the northwest icefall from the head of the valley, and found it feasible but dangerous. Next we crossed the Dru up 2000 feet of steep and loose scree, to see Ortenburger's Camp and the British Camp I a few hundred feet below us.

On June 26, accompanied by the porters, we packed Camp I onto the glacier close to Ortenburger's Camp. We passed up this well-made site out of respect for the séracs hanging a half mile above our heads. The glacier was also more convenient for water.

The following day we established Camp II at 18,050 feet, below Loyacjirca, and prepared for an assault on Quitaraju the day after. But despite an early breakfast we made a slow start, and an equally slow ascent to the long west ridge, where the difficulties began. Soon the ridge narrowed to an alarming 12 inches, overhanging slightly on both sides. It became clear that we would not reach the summit in time for a safe return, and that it would be wiser to try again.

After a rest day at our high camp Don and I managed to make a really early start on June 30 and we were on the west ridge looking down on Alpamayo as the sun rose. Exposure and the narrowness of the ridge maintained our interest, and one 50-foot ice step presented real technical difficulties. Don's belay on this pitch, if it can be correctly so called, was an ice axe whose shaft projected 18 inches below a cornice, making a hole through which loose snow funneled like the sands of time. I think my morale would have been better if Don had not drawn attention to his precarious stance.

At eleven A.M. we reached the summit (19,825 feet) and sat for an hour in still air and blinding sunshine, changing our gaze from the brilliant blues, reds and greens in the Santa Cruz valley to our temporary home in the harsh glare of the great Quitaraju icefield.

We descended to Base Camp and gorged ourselves for two days. The British group told us of their plans to make a television film of their ascent of the west ridge of Alpamayo. But the upper sections of the climb looked so dangerous that they changed their objective to the north (Kogan) ridge.

The time had now come to place a camp at the base of Pilanco Central and Pilanco Norte. The first stage was to re-establish Campamento Dos Lagunas. From there we explored the long north ridge of Tayapampa\* (18,700 feet). This is the highest peak north of Alpamayo and can be seen in the middle of the third panel from the left in Ortenburger's pull-out in the *American Alpine Journal*, 1960. The west face hangs over Laguna Jancarurish, and is swept by ice avalanches as well as being impossibly steep.

Following Ortenburger's panorama, we started from Dos Lagunas to the left of the second panel from the left, traversed behind the two rock peaks, with the small glacier and came out on the ice col to the right of the second panel. The route then lay up an icefall on the far side of the ridge. It was an unhealthy place and we spent an anxious half hour among freshly fallen ice blocks.

From the top of the icefall we could see Tayapampa. It was transformed into a graceful ice needle above sheer cliffs; an appearance also presented from the south according to Sr. Ames. It was clearly no walk to the summit. We considered the problem further while returning to the Pilancos.

On July 6 we crossed the ridge forming the east side of the Alpamayo valley and set up a new camp at 15,400 feet on the east flank of Pilanco Central. The only site near water was on a fine red dust, which soon filled our clothes and food and colored everything a brownish-red. It was appropriately christened Campamento Colorado.

On July 7 we climbed to the col between Pilanco Central and Norte, and ascended Central (17,400 feet) without difficulty. On July 8 we ascended Norte (17,225 feet) from the same col. The ridge was not without interest. Near the summit it developed dangerous foliated cornices with large holes. Fortunately they could be by-passed by means of a 200-foot descent and the ascent of a steep snow slope to the summit.

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\* According to Sr. Alcides Ames, *Taya* denotes an alpine plant and *pampa* is a field. The same name applies to the *Quebrada* to the east below Alpamayo.

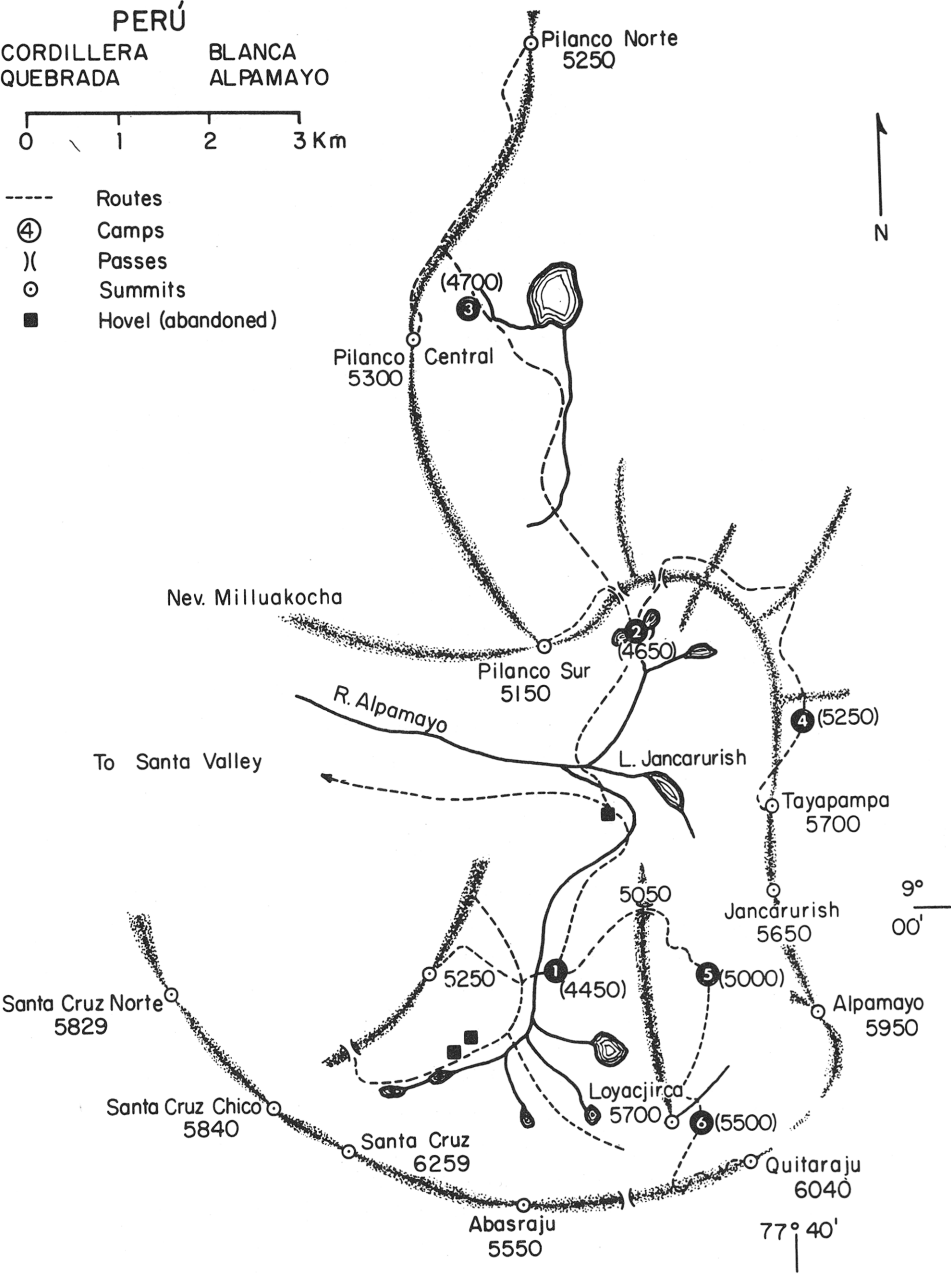
In perfect weather, which we experienced on all but two days, we looked across the Quebrada Quitarasca to the rarely visited Champará group and the small unmapped group to the north. We had accomplished a useful task of exploration; but Tayapampa looked more impressive with every view from the north and we were anxious to try its difficulties.

Juan and Marcelino came the next day to help carry our gear back to Dos Lagunas. They were in great form and set a tremendous pace, but we were not left too far behind. Marcelino and David went on to Base Camp where David stayed. Marcelino returned with more food and some celebrational Pisco.

On July 10 we set out with the porters carrying two laden Kelties with four days' food and supplies for two, and soon after mid-day we reached the top of the icefall, which had been the limit of our exploratory trip. Here Don and I found ourselves abandoned, while Dick took the porters back. The day was hot and the loads heavy, and we seemed to be a long way from Tayapampa. After lunch we felt more enthusiastic and shouldered our packs onto a large icefield which we crossed in two hours. An excellent campsite was found at 17,225 feet, free from any avalanche danger and within striking distance of the summit.

The eleventh of July was another perfect day. We started soon after dawn and an hour later were at the foot of a steep snow slope leading to the north ridge of Tayapampa. We crossed a large bergschrund and climbed a 200-foot snow wall with strange formations which could be used as steps. From the col the north ridge looked very difficult and so we traversed the exposed west face to the south ridge. The idea was good, but the execution was hampered by the notorious soft powder snow of the Cordillera Blanca. We arrived at the south ridge exhilarated by the exposure and the tricky snow conditions. Fortunately it was not as steep as the north ridge and Don led two moderately difficult ice pitches bringing us — or at least our heads — to the summit. The summit ridge was doubly corniced and extremely unsafe. On a secure belay Don looked over the high point, but we did not stand on it.

Tayapampa was our last major ascent. Three days were spent exploring, mapping, feasting with the successful British party and swapping memories of the Parón valley with a party from Munich. On July 17 we found ourselves once again in that familiar Peruvian posture: sitting by the roadside waiting for something to turn up. Once again it was hot and dusty. The water of the Santa was unsafe to drink and there was no beer to be had. But we had the memory of four new summits and a fine 6000-meter peak to sustain us.



*Note on Map*

The ridge map is a cooperative effort. The triangulation by David Atherton uses a base line from the 1:200,000 map of H. Heckler, H. Kinzl and E. Schneider. Heights are mostly based on elevations obtained by Leigh Ortenberger. Contributions from A. Ames, C. Morales and others are also gratefully acknowledged. Compilation is by David Atherton, who assumes responsibility for any shortcomings. The original Heckler, Kinzl and Schneider map is a fine tribute to outstanding work, though there are shortcomings. However, Andinists require more detailed topographical information. We hope this will be available soon when the Peruvian cartographers plot the excellent aerial photographs they have. The present map is merely intended to assist mountaineers in the Alpamayo valley in the meantime.

Of particular interest on the new map are the heights of Alpamayo and Quitaraju (incorrectly located on the previous map) which confirms the opinion of most climbers that Quitaraju is unquestionably the higher and also that Alpamayo is unfortunately just below the 6000-meter mark.

The campsites of the upper Alpamayo Valley may be reached with mules and donkeys in three days from the river crossing (cableway) to the Santa Valley road at Colcas (2000 meters). The descent takes two days. The track crosses two wearisome 4700-meter passes.

*Campsites:* (1) Base Camp, (2) Dos Lagunas, (3) Colorado, (4) Tayapampa, (5) Quitaraju I, (6) Quitaraju II.

*Summary of Statistics.*

AREA: Northern Cordillera Blanca, Peru.

ASCENTS: (All altitudes are approximate.)

Pilanco Sur, 5150 meters or 16,900 feet, June 22, 1966 (Atherton, Goody, Morton, Wylie) — First ascent.

Quitara ju, 6040 meters or 19,825 feet, June 30, 1966 (Goody Morton).

Pilanco Central, 5300 meters or 17,400 feet, July 7, 1966 (Atherton, Goody, Morton, Wylie) — First ascent.

Pilanco Norte, 5250 meters or 17,225 feet, July 8, 1966 (Atherton, Goody, Morton, Wylie) — First ascent.

Tayapampa, 5700 meters or 18,700 feet, July 11, 1966 (Goody, Morton) — First ascent.

PERSONNEL: David Atherton, Richard Goody, Donald Morton, Richard Wylie, and Peruvians Juan Zúñiga and Marcelino Vargas.