

for three pitches to its end. The two final pitches on the north-northwest face led through cornices to the ridge just west of the summit (18,012 feet). This face is never in the sunlight and in certain parts we encountered very steep unconsolidated sugar snow.

WILLIAM MCKINNEY

### Venezuela

*Sierra Nevada de Mérida.* A stay in Mérida revealed that the long active Club Andino Venezolano has been disbanded. Presently there are three small clubs in the city. The most active seems to be Club Cóndor, Carlos Reyes, Presidente, Calle 24 #8-259, Mérida. There are also clubs centered in Caracas. Permission to hike or climb in the Sierra must be obtained from the Headquarters of the Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada and from the Comisión Regional de Defensa Civil. The refugio Pico Espejo, near the upper terminal of the *teleférico* (4765 m.), was falling into ruins, but still may provide some shelter. It was built in 1955. I was there in March, and made a solo ascent of Pico Bolívar (5007 meters, 16,427 feet) by the Garganta Bourgoin route. There has been a major contribution to the scant literature of Venezuelan mountaineering:

*Nieves y Riscos Merideños* by R.A. Romero Muñoz-Tebar (Caracas, 1976). Along with Carlos Chalbaud's *Expediciones a la Sierra Nevada de Mérida* (Caracas, 1959), this is one of the best sources of information on the history and routes of the Mérida peaks.

PIETER CROW, *Green Mountain Club*

*Cerro Autana.* In early November Jim Donini, Mike Graber, Beverly Johnson, and I established a new route on Cerro Autana deep in the Venezuelan jungle. We were accompanied by an ABC TV film crew of Mike Hoover, Peter Pilafian and Don Burgess. The expedition started months earlier when I was researching the so-called Guyana Shield—or Roraima Formation—looking for a rock tower suitable for climbing. The Shield is peppered with strange “Lost World” mesa towers and plateaus rising above the jungle floor. Eventually I located a suitable objective—Autana, a 2000-foot-high quartzite tower that looks like a giant tree stump. After searching for some pals willing to thrash about in the jungle, and obtaining backing from ABC, we flew to Caracas, and then to the jungle outpost of Puerto Ayacucho. Far and away the most enjoyable part of the expedition was the three days of navigating, in dug-outs, the rivers Orinoco, Sipapo, Autana, and Manteca. One more day hacking jungle brought us to the mountain's base. We chose a route on the west face that led directly to mysterious caves 400 feet below the summit. Our Indian guides warned us a dinosaur lived in the cave. Six days of climbing, much of it artificial aid on steep, sometimes over-

hanging, but always heavily vegetated rock, populated with giant tarantulas, brought us to the cave where we spent the next four days exploring. We didn't find a dinosaur, but we did count seven cave galleries, with ceilings up to 100 feet high, and 12 connecting tunnels. We continued on to the summit. We were nine days on the climb including the time spent in the caves. Grade VI; rock and root moves to F10; aid, including many tied-off plants, to A3.

RICHARD L. RIDGEWAY

### **Peru—Cordillera Blanca**

*Huascarán Norte, North Face.* In the latter half of June my brother Alan, Brian Hall and I were camped in the Llanganuco valley in preparation for an ascent of the French (Paragot) route of 1966. Alongside the large, well-organized expedition of Desmaison, we felt small and insignificant, but they were making a film and had more of a burden to bear than we. Two load-carriers to the foot of the wall at 16,400 feet and we were installed for a five-day acclimatization period. This was the minimum time we had planned for, but with no more load-carrying, we became bored and set off on the route not fully acclimatized. The lower part of the route had changed since 1966 and the lower ridge had large ice towers along its crest, which certainly increased its difficulty. We had planned to take four days over the ascent, but it was not until the seventh day on the wall that we finally emerged for a near-summit bivouac. On the eighth day we made it to the top and back to Huaraz. We all suffered from the rapid rise in altitude and from the lack of nourishment. One of the hardest days was the final one, where the rock climbing of UIAA V+ led to the summit slopes. We afterwards agreed that it was one of the hardest climbs we had ever done and compared it in difficulty to the harder mixed routes in the Alps . . . but longer!

ADRIAN BURGESS, *Alpine Climbing Group*

*Huascarán Norte, North Face, Solo.* Renato Casarotto climbed the north face of Huascarán Norte solo in sixteen days from June 5 to 21, cut off from direct contact with his base except by radio with his wife Goretta, who waited in a tent at the Llanganuco Lakes at the bottom of the climb. He described the climb as being of all grades of difficulty up to UIAA VI+ and direct aid. It was on snow, ice, smooth slabs, solid granite and rotten rock. Having some 90 pounds of equipment and food, Casarotto stated that he really had to climb the route three or four times, first to fix the route, then to carry his supplies up and finally to clean the route. The sun shone on only one day. Most of the time it was cold, snowy and windy. For the last three days he was without food. After completing the ascent late on June 21, in an hour and a half