

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.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*



CENTRAL ARGENTINE ANDES

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,

by its normal route, isn't difficult, but the weather (this is an El Niño year) and high altitude make it dangerous. Next year should see an increase in outsiders because of the Argentine peso devaluation. The park will be open this winter (Southern Hemisphere), but no rangers or rescue services will be available, so anyone challenging the mountain in winter will be on his own. A strange "record" was achieved in the first week of February. A New Zealand party had supper on the summit! They were dressed for the occasion, and the record was accepted by the Guinness Book of Records as the "Highest Supper on Earth." It's a strange world.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*

Cordillera de Olivares, Nevado de Bauchaceta. A group composed of Miguel Beorchia Nigris, Luis Pontoriero, and I arrived at the post of Tocota in the last days of January 2002, thanks to the help of Gendarmeria Nacional (Border Police). From there we had a bad mule ride to the Quebrada de Chita. After the awful ride, which resulted in scars in unpleasant places, we retreated because of doubtful weather and bad conditions. However, I found a beautiful paleolithic spear point.

From Chita we went to Las Flores, where a Gendarmeria unimog took the group to the Quebrada Pismanta and the post of the Muñoz family. On January 26 the group began the ascent to base camp. The next day Beorchia Nigris quit because of a stomach disease, but we others continued, reaching base camp at Dos Quebradas (3825m) on January 28. This creek is beautiful, with much animal life (we saw guanacos and seven condors at the same time) and petroglyphs. On January 30 we attempted Nevado de Bauchaceta. At 4400m my companion descended due to fatigue. I continued, ascending the great massif and reaching the minor northwest summit of Nevado de Bauchaceta (5,036m S30°28'16.7" W69°38'23.1") at 4:20 p.m. This was the second ascent, and I took a variant to the first ascent 13 years before. I continued to the highest (southeast) summit despite fierce winds. After descending to a col, I ascended a ridge that ended in the big broad summit (ca 5100m, 5158m by GPS, S30°28'55.8" W69°37'38.1"), reaching it at 6:20 p.m. This was a first ascent, correcting a misunderstanding in the 1990 AAJ (p. 202). I descended, reaching camp at 9:30 p.m.

Afterward we had bad weather, certainly because of the El Niño phenomenon. On February 3 my companion descended because of illness, and I attempted another mountain, but descended because of bad weather that continued for two days, with rain and snow. On the 6th Mr. Muñoz and his 10-year-old son rode by horse to their post, where I rejoined my teammate. We ate goat barbeque, drank wine, and smoked Havana cigars, raising our cholesterol, alcohol, and nicotine levels to Argentine standards.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*

Cordillera de Colangüil, Cerro de la Quebrada Seca. A group from the nearby city of San Juan was active in this mighty and relatively untrodden zone in mid-January 2002, having as a goal the highest summit, Cerro del Lavadero (6122m). They took the Rio Lavadero route, but bad weather prevented them getting higher than 5,000 meters. They did ascend four virgin 4000m peaks, the highest of which was the Cerro de la Quebrada Seca (4735m).

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