

CHILEAN NOTES, 1963-1964

By EVELIO ECHEVARRÍA C.

THE 1964 mountaineering season in Chile only brought two events worth reporting; the first ascent of the much ambitious Torre Pangal, 14,830 ft., a splendid Matterhorn rising at the doors of Pangal valley, in Central Chile; this fine peak was climbed at the end of the season in 1963 by C. Cortés, C. García and M. Gómez.

The second event was the ascent of Láscar volcano, 18,507 ft., located in the barren, high plateau east of Antofagasta; it was thought that its top, because of its location near a cluster of Indian villages, could have been an Atacameñan or Inca shrine. An expedition of the Club Andino de Chile, section Santiago, placed a camp at 14,000 ft. after a long trek from Santiago, in which jeeps proved to be the best means of transportation. From this camp, W. Ihl and H. Tapia climbed the peak on November 16, 1963, but failed to find any traces of previous ascents; a strong wind and sulphur smoke forced them to beat a hasty retreat.

Of the 1963 season there should also be mentioned the first ascents of the South face (ice) of Cerro Freile, 15,750 ft., and the fourth ascent of the high Nevado del Plomo, 19,850 ft., both east of Santiago; and what is probably the second ascent of the Sierra Velluda, 11,320 ft., a three-peaked mountain located in Southern Chile and east of Los Angeles town.

The 1964 season was far more active; indeed, it saw the conquest of most of the remaining unclimbed peaks of Central Chile. Hitherto, peaks over 5,000 m. (16,404 ft.) were the main prize; today, even 13,000-ers are not disdained.

The main event of 1964 was the outing sponsored by the Club de Andinismo Mañke in the fine rock and ice ranges due east of Rancagua and San Fernando towns; participants made the first ascents of some twenty peaks between 13,000 and 16,400 ft., including the first ascent of the difficult El Portillo, 16,339 ft., which had to be traversed from the nearby Alto de los Arrieros, 16,404 ft. The latter had been ascended in 1950 by the Marmillod group. Most of the peaks climbed by the Mañke group were fine-looking pyramids, with rather good rock on their steep faces, and small hanging glaciers on the south. Apparently, after this activity, there remain unclimbed in this section only three peaks over 14,000 ft., all belonging to the Sierra Negra group, which was not covered by the outing. The climbers also located some fine-looking mountains on the Argentinian side, particularly those rising on the northern shores of Atuel lake.

In the same area, Central Chile, the following expeditions are worth mentioning: a group of the Club Andinista Internacional ascended eight peaks over 16,000 ft. in the Plomo group, near the famed ski resort of Farellones, of which Punta Verde and Punta Expedición are first ascents; a group of the state's university at Santiago climbed in the León Negro group, north of the Juncal massif, and traversed into Argentina, ascending five peaks between 16,500 and 17,000 ft. and accomplishing also the third ascents of Cerro Doris, 17,093 ft., and Cerro Central, 16,977 ft., all in February, 1964: and finally, another group of university students made the first ascents of Mirador de la Torre Flores, 15,912 ft., and Punta Ventisquero, 15,092 ft., in January, 1964, both peaks being located slightly north of the area of the Mañke outing.

Other areas. In Northern Chile, another expedition of the Club Andino de Chile, section Santiago, operated with the purpose of carrying out archaeological and geological studies; the group, of six climbers, reinforced by the German Wolfgang Foerster and by the Japanese expert on volcanology, Yoshio Katsui, travelled to the Arica section of the northern Andes, and attempted successfully the two highest peaks of the area, the twin Payachatas, located on the Bolivian border. The first Payachata, which the Bolivian Indians named Pomarata or Pomerape, 20,473 ft., was ascended on October 10, 1964, by Sergio Kunstmann and Claudio Maier, this being probably the first ascent of the mountain, although there are claims by a Bolivian group of having climbed the mountain in 1945 (?). At the same time, the second (southern) Payachata, named Parinacota in the maps, 20,768 ft., was ascended by Bión and Oscar González and Claudio Lucero (third ascent). The expedition stayed two weeks in the area making studies on volcanology, geology and ornithology. Indian traces (cairns) were found only on the lower slopes of these icy volcanoes, no higher than 14,000 ft., although there exists an Inca tradition that a number of subjects of Atahualpa ascended the South face of Pomarata and dumped into its crater the treasure of the Incas; the staircases carved in the ice for that occasion are still visible, according to the Indians.

An expedition of the Unión Española, made up of four climbers, entered Northern Argentina (San Juan province), with the intention of exploring a new route on Mercedario, 21,884 ft., but the long time wasted on the approach march left the party time enough only to ascend the peak via its easy north slopes; at about 20,000 ft. the carcass of a mule was found. The summit party was formed by R. Busquets and H. Comparini.

Patagonia. An Argentinian expedition, including European mountaineers, operated in the area slightly north-west of Cerro FitzRoy, in January, 1964; its plans were to climb in the Gorra Blanca group and on Lautaro volcano. Cerro Gorra, 9,580 ft., was ascended, by all the four members of the expedition, led by the Slovenian, Peter Skvarca,

only to find that another Argentinian group had the same plan. This second group did ascend Gorra Blanca, under the leadership of A. Comesaña. Meanwhile, the Skvarca group marched towards Lautaro on skis and after a long traverse of the flat glacier (26 miles) they ascended the peak, 11,089 ft., on January 29, 1964. The summit party—P. Skvarca and L. Pera—found an active crater of reduced diameter some 150 ft. below the top.

The two expeditions led by Mr. Shipton should be added to these notes (1963 and 1964).

Other notes. The Federación purchased a building in the business district of Santiago, to house its offices; in this building will be quartered several mountain clubs, as well as the projected Museo Nacional de Andinismo (National Mountaineering Museum), at present in formation. The building can also lodge visiting expeditions.

A tragic note in 1963 was the death of the German mountaineer Karl Eberhard Meier, who will perhaps be considered one of the foremost in Andean mountaineering. Victim of an assault for robbery, Meier died when he was preparing a solitary trip to the mountains of Southern Chile. He was born on October 2, 1909, and had settled in Chile in 1931; devoted only to mountaineering and to photography, he had accomplished a remarkable number of ascents, including seven peaks over 20,000 ft. and fifty-eight between 13,000 and 17,000 ft. most of which were first ascents. Among his main achievements were the first ascent of Cerro Alto, 20,050 ft., and the completion of the Güssfeldt route on Aconcagua. The Chilean Federación de Andinismo chose for him a grave site in the mountain town of San José de Maipo.