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The Cordillera Huarochirí, Peru

(Plates 14, 15)

It is commonly accepted that the Andes of Peru comprise 24 well-defined districts or *cordilleras*. Expeditionary activity has, on the whole, been quite well reported and recorded, but there is an exception. Orographic and expeditionary information about the Cordillera Huarochirí of central Peru has been confusingly reported and documented and there has been no attempt to correct this situation. Even the very name of the range may come as a surprise to many aficionados of the Andes; names previously known are all erroneous.

I have to start by saying outright that this Peruvian cordillera badly needs a few studious, dedicated souls who would take it under their wing and endeavour to solve the geographic and mountaineering problems that have hampered exploration. One was the problem of having an important mountain range without a definite name. Another was the problem of how to gain access to the higher peaks and valleys. So it is comforting to learn that these two problems have been almost completely solved by Peruvian climbers. But the third riddle, unfortunately a major one, has so far no solution in sight: existing maps differ widely as to the names and location of peaks, which, in turn, leaves us unable properly to survey the mountaineering history of the range.

First, a brief introduction. The Cordillera Huarochirí, also locally called Cordillera Pariacacca, is located south of the mining town of La Oroya (pop 41,000; 3700m). La Oroya is 187km east of Lima and sits astride the well-paved central highway running between Lima and Huancayo. The range, so far as peaks over 5000 metres are concerned, is estimated to be some 35km in length, north to south, and 18 to 20km in breadth. There are a few isolated massifs here and there. Streams that descend from the heights flow into the Canete river to the south, the Mantaro to the north and the Rimac to the northwest. Population in the higher valleys is extremely small. The village of Yuracmayo (population 400) exists only to provide the work force for a major dam. In the highlands one seldom finds hamlets of more than ten people. These highlanders, descendants of the Quichua race, are now wholly Hispanised. They tend their flocks of sheep and llamas and also do some fishing in the bigger lakes that dot the area. In their rather cold uplands there is very little natural life. Stunted bushes exist only near lakes and streams. The coarse *ichu* grass grows abundantly everywhere. Services in the district are scarce, owing to the reduced population.

The mountaineering season during the dry Peruvian winter is from May to October; halfway, by the end of June, the cold becomes intense and in some years, a persistent icy breeze roams the higher valleys. Good water can be found everywhere.

Names and access

In the last decade, several Lima mountaineers entering the district's valleys learned that the current, widely accepted local name for the range was Cordillera Huarochirí (Quichua: *huayra*, wind; *chiri*, cold). A second local name, Cordillera Pariacacca, was also discovered. Names used by mountaineers other than Huarochirí and Pariacacca are unknown to the local inhabitants and should therefore be discarded. 'Nevados de Cochas', after a local farm, was the name applied by some German surveyors. 'Cordillera Central' was the name consistently used by the 1967 Munich expedition, and this unfortunate denomination, actually belonging to another Peruvian range to the west of the Huarochirí, has been repeated everywhere. Still other names like 'Tunshu Group' and 'Tullujuto Group', after some major peaks, were applied to the entire range. They were equally inappropriate, since they referred to massifs known only to the inhabitants of a few valleys. And so on.

The best policy is to refer to this range with either of the names in use by the local population. Incidentally, Pariacacca, the second name found, is locally given both to the entire range and to the twin Tullujuto or Pariacacca Nevados (5700m and 5751m) located at the southern end of the range. Pariacacca was an Andean titan who, in a fierce struggle, defeated the perverse cannibal Huallallo and forced him to abandon the Inca lands.

The second confusing problem, finding ways of access to the peaks, was also solved by Lima climbers. Before the end of the last century, books and guidebooks suggested some less practical approaches. No wonder, since the authors of such books had never visited the range and one of them had never been in South America at all, let alone in the Andes! The San Mateo-Huayca valley, a long march over trails, and the long, devious Huarochirí town to Tanta route, in the south, were ways listed by such authors. Both, and indeed every other route, should be discarded in favour of any of the following, which have been opened and well-reconnoitred by Peruvians:

1 Lima-Pachacayo – a station east of La Oroya. Taxis carry passengers to nearby Canchayllo, where vehicles can be hired for the run to the hamlet and dam of Huayllacancha (also called Jailacancha); the cost of a vehicle is about 80 soles (\$1 = 5.20 soles). This route yields access to the south and east sides of the range, where the highest peaks are located (*see map*). The Pachacayo-Huayllacancha gravel road may have been the route used by the earliest mountaineers who visited the region, perhaps in the year 1927. It has been repeatedly used by Peruvians and by some foreign expeditions.

2 Lima-San Mateo. From the latter large village, a van travels once a week through the Yuracmayo (or Rio Blanco) valley en route to Lake Paccha and the hamlet of Carhuasmayo. The cost is about 15 soles. This route leaves most western valleys open to visitors. It was discovered and used by the Peruvians Jose Pinzas and Alberto Murguia.

3 Lima-La Oroya-San Cristobal. At La Oroya, vans, locally called *combis*, can be taken to Yauli and the active San Cristobal mine. The cost is about 20 soles. This route offers access to the icy Chumpe group (5250m) that rises steeply above the mine, as well as to the northernmost peaks of the range. It was inaugurated in July 2000 by Alberto Murguia, accompanied by the writer.

Maps and peaks

Now for the main riddle. In 1969 the Deutscher Alpenverein, Munich section, published a map of the area known as 'Cordillera Central', scale 1:60,000, with names of peaks its expedition ascended and the subsequent routes. A few years later there appeared in Lima the Carta Nacional del Peru, scale 1:100,000, which, in comparison, showed a much larger number of peaks, with names, heights and location so vastly different to those of 1967 that it is not possible to reconcile one map with the other. Very few of the peaks ascended by the Germans, and indeed by all expeditions before 1967, can be located on this Peruvian map. And yet the latter, besides being the official national chart, is in my opinion far better. The Peruvian Alberto Murguia, at present the finest connoisseur of the range, and I, in our own forays into several valleys, were able to verify its accuracy in every respect. But how to reconcile names and, therefore, to rewrite the history of Huarochiri climbing according to the numerous new names found on the good Peruvian chart?

It is certain that Nevado Shallanca (5400m), on the German map, is the same as Nevado Yantayo (5300m), on the Peruvian work. The Twins, or Zwillingen of the Munich group, seems to correspond to the Nevados Putca, of the Peruvians. The German Nevado Tembladero (5595m) could well be the Peruvian Nevado Ninaucro (5550m). But what about the rest? On their map the Munich climbers showed 35 named elevations. The three Peruvian sheets covering the Cordillera Huarochiri included some 40 named summits, plus some 50 other unnamed elevations over 5000m. In all, less than half of the 100 or so peaks that make up this district seem to have been ascended.

With its proper name now established and its valleys of access well tested, there remains the unpleasant job of identifying, on the spot as well as from photographs, the peaks ascended before 1967 and reconciling their names, heights and locations with those that appeared on the Peruvian chart. There is much work ahead. The need is not for pure climbers but rather for dedicated souls endowed with characteristics that the pioneer alpinist

History after 1967

In my surveys of Andean ascents, published in the *American Alpine Journal*, I covered all reported ascents that took place before the year 1970; and those ascended after that date were often noted in the same journal. Therefore, I am referring readers to the Bibliography and am listing below the little unrecorded activity that should be added.

- In 1979, a French-Peruvian group entered the range by the not-recommended route of the extreme south town of Huarochiri-Tanta and repeated ascents of the two Nevados Tullujuto and Pariacacca (5700m and 5751m, the latter is the highest in the range) and of Colquepucro.
- Before 1985, the Peruvian José Pinzas, perhaps alone, made the first ascent of Nevado Vicunita (5500m), located in the southwest part of the range. On this occasion, access by the Yuracmayo, the second option detailed above, was probably pioneered. It was repeated several times by Lima climber A. Murguia.
- My own experiences: in May 1999, alone, using the Pachacayo route (see above), I made the first ascent of Cerros Surao (5150m) and Uchuctunshu (5050m). A week later, June 1999, Alberto Murguia and I made the first ascent of Cerro Chuctuc (5000m), and an attempt on Cerro Entabladas (5100m) whose smooth, steep rock wall easily repulsed us. A year later, in July 2000, Murguia and I inaugurated the hitherto untried north access via the San Cristobal mine, the third route outlined above. Without proper acclimatisation, I was dragged by my enthusiastic companion to the top of Nevado Jatun Jaico (5302m). Murguia then had to return to Lima and after three days marooned in my tent by snowstorms, I climbed Chujupucro (5150m), and Pt 5200, which I christened Yurachucllu (Quichua: 'White Cricket'). All three were first ascents of very attractive ice peaks. Finally, a week later, still in cold July, alone, I entered via the San Mateo-Yuracmayo route and made the first ascent of rocky Cerro Riguis (5000m), and climbed two other 5100-metre rock peaks, crowned by cairns, probably erected by highlanders.
- In July 2000, Murguia and Guillermo Portocarrero climbed Nevado Paccha (5350m). Two weeks later, Murguia returned alone and made another first ascent, that of the ice peak located between Paccha and Vicunita (c5300m).
- several purely rock peaks, not above 5100m, may also have been ascended by local highlanders, who erected on their summits cairns or piles of stones. These ascents have gone unrecorded.

Some advice to future visitors to this range could be drawn from the experience accumulated by my Peruvian comrades as well as by myself. This is a range that offers mountain climbing only. There are no attractions for tourists, trekkers, hunters or archaeologists. The small amount of available fishing should be left to the highlanders, since it is a part of their

sustenance. Small groups are recommended, owing to the lack of steady transportation and the scarcity of services and supplies in the high valleys. Very light equipment should be taken, since everything will have to be carried on one's back. There are no porters. As for horses, to my knowledge, only in the hamlet of Huayllacancha could a few be found, the owner being the capable *arriero* Moises Morales, whom I warmly recommend. Finally, in Lima, members of the Club de Montaneros Americo Tordoya could be contacted: the current president, Gonzalo Menacho; Guillermo Portocarrero, an active member of the American Alpine Club; and my good friend Alberto Murguía, will all give advice, as well as good companionship.

Further information

Club de Montaneros Americo Tordoya, at Avenida Tarapaca 184,
Barrio Magdalena, Lima.

Instituto Geografico Nacional, at Avenida Aramburu 1190,
Barrio Surquillo, Lima.

Books

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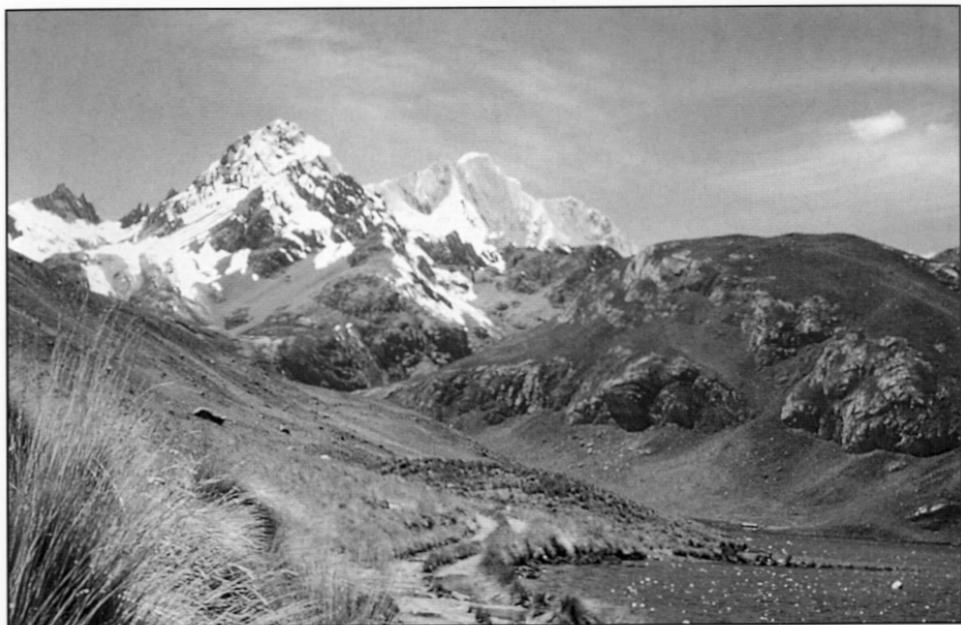
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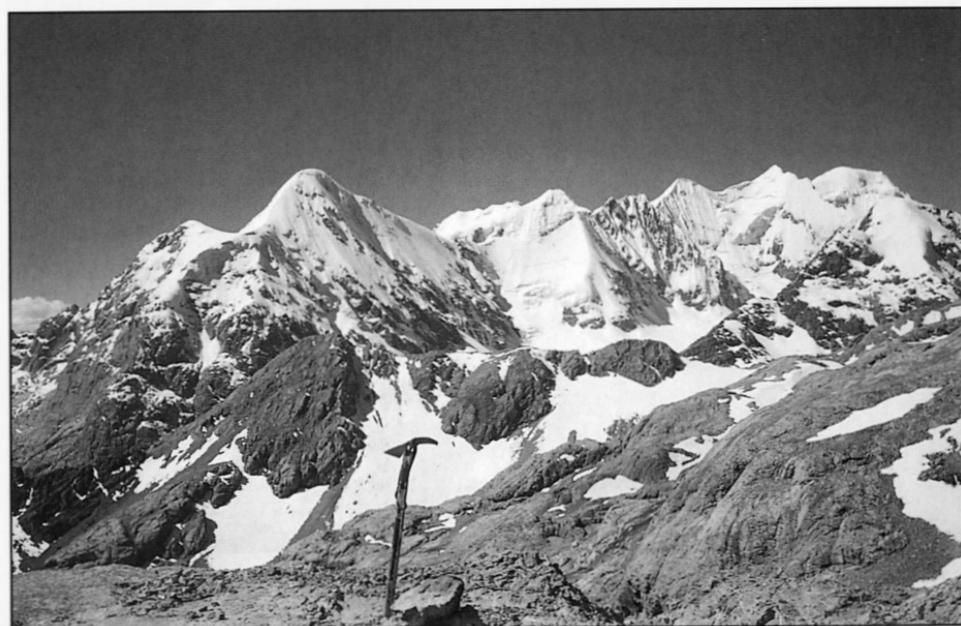
Current maps

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14. The Cordillera Huarochiri, Peru. Nevados Panchacoto (5450m) and Tranca (5250m) from the south. (*Evelio Echevarría*) (p83)



15. Cordillera Huarochiri, Peru. The Paca-Antachaire group seen from the west. (*Evelio Echevarría*) (p83)