

THE READING UNIVERSITY ANDEAN EXPEDITION, 1962

BY RONALD H. F. HUNTER

(*Two illustrations: nos. 19-20*)

THIS mountaineering expedition from one of the smaller provincial universities visited the Cordillera Real, Bolivia, during the months of July, August and September. The party consisted of four graduates and two undergraduates, all with varied climbing histories in the Alps, each possessing an average of three such seasons' experience. Aided by a generous grant from the Mount Everest Foundation and donations of persons interested in the expedition or the University, we prepared for South America with an approximate overdraft of £160 per person.

The expedition had been planned during the preceding two years, and so the early months of 1962 saw the fulfilment of this preparatory work with stores and equipment literally flowing to the University. It was indeed fortunate that we had been furnished with excellent premises for our packing and the three members of the expedition resident in Reading worked hard at the customary preparations, eventually stowing the equipment in wooden packing cases specially made for the purpose. Contrary to literary evidence, and unusual as it may seem to perennial expedition men, very few snags were encountered in either the planning phase or during the course of the expedition, save that of writing an enormous numbers of letters by hand. Such was the penalty of the personal touch!

The whole of the expedition equipment, suitably documented, left Reading at the end of May on the first stage of its journey to Bolivia; and for an expedition including in its numbers five agriculture students, it did not seem inappropriate that the packing cases should travel to the docks by cattle truck. One of our party became fully redundant some two months earlier than the rest of us, for the good cause of the expedition, and, sailing from Liverpool on June 3, enjoyed a luxury cruise through warm Caribbean waters on the pretext of watching over valuable equipment. Apart from the fact that he arrived in La Paz less fit and considerably heavier than when he left England, we were nonetheless immensely grateful to Edward Quicke for appearing in La Paz, together with the equipment, within an hour of the arrival of the remaining five of us. We had flown out from England via New York and Lima just one month after Quicke's departure, and yet were to arrive in La Paz exactly in time for a full expedition reunion.

During the next five days, whilst enjoying the generous hospitality

of Mr. Ernest Warder, the delicate business of extracting our equipment from the Customs was attended to, with kind assistance from the staff of the British Embassy. At an altitude of almost 13,000 ft., these few days were invaluable for the commencement of our acclimatisation, the pace being suitably stepped up with vigorous walks on the dusty altiplano. Within the week, all of our equipment was out of the packing cases and replaced in canvas kitbags, appropriately stocked with regard to meals, and coded on the basis of the contents of four kitbags providing nutriment for the six members of the expedition for a week. For the excellent dietary calculations, and judged by the fact that we all came out of the mountains fighting fit and without loss of weight, our thanks are extended to John Floodpage.

Unpacking and repacking completed, the expedition employed a truck for transport across the first fifty miles or so of the altiplano and into the foothills. Our intelligence sources, with reference to how close the truck could drive to the mountains, proved considerably inaccurate, and we were dropped some twelve or fifteen miles farther from them than we anticipated. Without porters, and with some four dozen loads weighing eighty to a hundred pounds apiece, this inaccuracy cost us several days and considerable perspiration, but was an excellent if brutal means of getting fit.

The Club Andino Boliviano had been most kind and helpful to us in La Paz, especially with respect to various transport arrangements, and it was agreed that some of their members would join the expedition for the first week. In fact they reached the proposed site of our first Base Camp before us, and despatched an enormous herd of llamas together with attendant Indians to transport the expedition in to camp. This was accomplished in one day of strenuous marching, of over twenty miles, to our first Base Camp situated at the snow-line at 15,600 ft., under the Casiri and Calzada peaks. A few days were then spent on the glaciers and snow-slopes getting the feel of ice-axe and crampons once more, followed by assaults on the two lower peaks of Nevado Calzada, both of over 18,500 ft. Quicke and myself had the pleasure of roping up with Señor Alfredo Martinez, one of our Bolivian friends and, with the death of Douglas Moore, probably their leading mountaineer, and we were duly impressed by his agility on steep snow and ice slopes. However, once the rocky summit pitches were reached, we were courteously ushered into the lead, and later confirmed our suspicion that rock climbing is little practised in Bolivia.

The largest of the Calzada group of peaks, 19,270 ft., had been unsuccessfully attempted by the Chileans in 1958 and was seen to be an altogether grander mountain. The assault was aided by an advanced camp placed at the snout of the glacier at approximately 16,750 ft., and an early start the following morning saw us high on the mountain

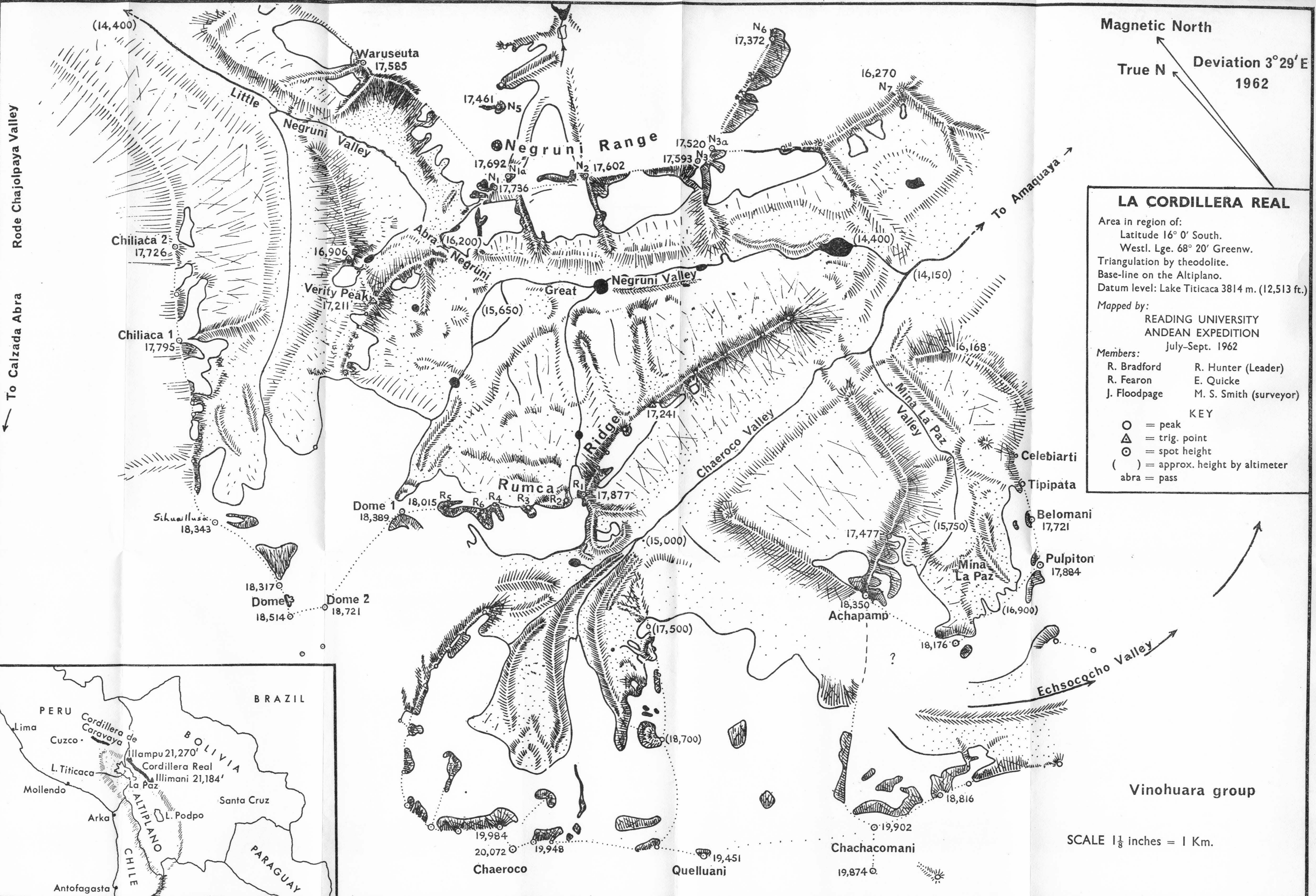
Magnetic North
 True N Deviation 3° 29' E
 1962

LA CORDILLERA REAL

Area in region of:
 Latitude 16° 0' South.
 Westl. Lge. 68° 20' Greenw.
 Triangulation by theodolite.
 Base-line on the Altiplano.
 Datum level: Lake Titicaca 3814 m. (12,513 ft.)

Mapped by:
 READING UNIVERSITY
 ANDEAN EXPEDITION
 July-Sept. 1962
 Members:
 R. Bradford R. Hunter (Leader)
 R. Fearon E. Quicke
 J. Floodpage M. S. Smith (surveyor)

KEY
 ○ = peak
 △ = trig. point
 ⊙ = spot height
 () = approx. height by altimeter
 abra = pass



Vinohuara group

SCALE 1 1/8 inches = 1 Km.



Photo: Reading University Andean Expedition]

THE NEGRUNI RANGE OF PEAKS IN THE BACKGROUND AND PART OF THE RUMCA RIDGE IN THE MIDDLE DISTANCE. TAKEN FROM THE SLOPES OF NEVADO CHEAROCO.

with much time to spare; and our two Bolivian friends on a rope just in front. They were making for the summit ridge by way of a long and strenuous snow-field, and so our rope enterprisingly took to a steep snow gully, imagining that this would enable the ridge to be gained more rapidly. However, it soon proved to be a very nasty place and, apart from a considerable amount of ice, was also treacherous because of minor avalanches. Nonetheless, we emerged unscathed some two hours later and our Bolivian friends were not to be seen. A few hundred feet of very unstable rock took us to the summit ridge in time to see our friends descending the ridge ahead! The snow-field had proved its merits, giving much more rapid access to the summit; though it is relevant to mention that we were not fully acclimatised to 19,000 ft. at this stage. A short while later we also gained the summit.

Two days later, our Bolivian friends left Base Camp to commence their return journey to La Paz, having left with us their most excellent cook and camp caretaker, Vernancio, who had accompanied the Imperial College expedition to the Nudo de Apolobamba in 1959. Vernancio was to remain with the expedition for the following four weeks, and proved supremely useful at the task of running our Base Camp, quite apart from showing appreciable merit as a mountaineer.

Our surveyor, Mike Smith, had been working hard over this northern segment of the Cordillera Real with his instruments and log tables, and whilst he finished his theodolite work in the region of our Calzada Base Camp, members of the expedition climbed two more peaks adjacent to Nevado Casiri. At this stage, a three-man reconnaissance party was despatched over the Calzada pass (16,400 ft.) to explore the area that was left blank on the 1929 map of Carl Troll's preliminary survey—an area of some seventy square miles. A suitable route having been prospected and a site for our second Base Camp chosen, the expedition became mobile once more with Vernancio descending to the altiplano and returning with a large herd of llamas. With much of our equipment perched on the narrow backs of these animals (and it was in this context that our kitbags were invaluable), our convoy set off into new ranges of mountains, all quite unexplored, and three days later established our new Base Camp between two ridges of peaks, both ridges being in the region of 18,000 ft.

Whilst Bradford and myself were climbing the first of the Negruni range of peaks, a three-man party set out for Nevado Sihuailusa, a beautifully sculptured peak reminiscent of the Weisshorn, which had been located between the area of our new Base Camp and Nevado Calzada. An advanced camp was established on the glacier of this mountain and, after much hard work in soft snow on the morrow, the ridge was gained, and later the inspiring summit. Meanwhile Mike Smith had been working hard in this surveyor's paradise, and having

discussed his accumulated statistics at the next full assembly in Base Camp, it was decided that we should attack the seven peaks of the Rumca ridge, which lay between Base Camp and the massifs of Chearoco and Chachacomani. The two highest of these peaks were climbed by a rope of Fearon, Floodpage and Quicke, whilst Bradford and myself were hauled to another part of the ridge by Vernancio—a tiger if ever there was one! Any lack of climbing technique was supplemented by his super-efficient lungs and great pluck, and the three of us made a harmonious rope for a ridge climb of four of these Rumca peaks.

The last peak in the Rumca ridge was considerably steeper than the others, and offered a mixed and exciting route to its summit. Bradford and myself enjoyed some yearned-for rock climbing for a couple of hours during the approach to the main ridge, and the exciting traverse of the 400 yd. knife-edge summit took several further hours after which we courted disaster whilst descending a remarkably unstable gully. Mike Smith had meanwhile, and for the previous couple of days, been sitting on the lofty rock spire named Verity observing our progress, and a good deal else, through the phototheodolite.

Before proceeding to the climax of the expedition, the assaults on the 6,000 metre peaks of Chearoco and Chachacomani, we climbed the remaining five peaks in the beautiful Negruni range, any of which could be reached with a very early start from Base Camp. Extra excitement during this period was provided when two members of the expedition were lost for a couple of days, but they duly returned in time for the big assaults. The latter were facilitated by the building up of a stores camp in the main Chearoco valley, our Base Camp being situated in a hanging valley leading into this Chearoco valley. The day after this operation was completed, the Chearoco rope of Floodpage, Quicke and myself descended to the stores camp, and the following morning climbed the long Chearoco valley and gained access to the mountain upon a vast and impressive moraine which was well in advance of the glacier; but considerable shrinkage had been observed in all the main glaciers of this mountain range.

Our advanced camp was placed high above the main glacier at 18,000 ft., and it was cheering to observe the Chachacomani rope of Fearon, Smith and Bradford install their high camp in a similar position on the corresponding moraine across the glacier the next day. Although they attacked their chosen objectives of Quellani and Chachacomani with vigour for the next two days, and reached some 19,000 ft., having cut steps most of the way, they reluctantly had to descend because of the many enormous crevasses which had blocked their route. The Chearoco rope, on the other hand, whilst appearing to have chosen a more formidable objective, was most fortunate in making good progress towards the summit snow-field by following a series of steep and icy



Photo: Reading University Andean Expedition]

NEVADO CHEAROCO (20,072 FT.)—THE HIGHEST PEAK CLIMBED BY THE EXPEDITION. (NOTE THE RETREATING GLACIER.)

(No. 20)

slopes and ridges. Optimism was high as the summit snow-field drew closer but then we reached the impasse—an overhanging ice-cliff that was falling out of the upper snow-field and barred all further progress by normal techniques.

However at 19,700 ft. we were not prepared to be defeated, and using our stock of ice-pitons and spare ropes, the cliff was attacked by means of artificial techniques. Cutting a route along the strata of the ice and under overhanging ledges, we reached a corner at which the angle of the ice relented. This was taken for some seventy feet further, and a belay point was established by means of an ice-axe. All circulation was becoming feeble due to the intense cold under these cliffs, and having abseiled back down a fixed rope we raced to our advanced camp just as the sun was setting. Early the next morning we retraced our steps up the mountain, performed a swinging Hinterstoisser traverse to the corner, and gained the summit snow-field by midday.

A beautiful and exposed ridge of the three summit peaks of Chearoco greeted us, and some hours later we had completed the traverse, having for the first time in our lives stood astride a summit of some twenty thousand feet. And what a magnificent view it was—to Illimani in the south, to Illampu in the north, to the great Lake Titicaca in the west, and the cloud masses billowing up from the tropical valleys of the Yungas in the east. Some day we should like to return.

The expedition duly congregated in the Negruni Base Camp, and spent the next few days engaged in amateur botanical, geological and photographic work, whilst Vernancio had been despatched in search of a suitable herd of llamas. These were loaded with our accumulated specimens for the University, and with the very considerable quantity of expedition equipment remaining; and in three days of very strenuous marching we reached the altiplano once more. Here a final night was spent camping under the stars; and then by an Indian truck containing some forty-six other persons apart from the expedition and its equipment, we returned to La Paz.

And so, what had been the first major expedition from Reading University returned home with a feeling of considerable success. However, it is only fair to mention that this was due in part to the very significant assistance of our friends back in England, all of whom had helped, in diverse ways, our journey to South America. And a final word to those who may follow us to the Cordillera Real. Much of the success of the climbing aspect of the expedition was due to the perfect weather conditions obtaining in this mountain range from early June to the end of August, the only disadvantage being the rather short days. After August, the spring rains arrive, and a daily fall of snow can be expected in the mountains; and with the warmer temperatures, danger from avalanching is considerable.

APPENDIX

Members of the expedition

R. H. F. Hunter—Leader	J. Floodpage—Quartermaster
R. G. Bradford—Cameraman	R. J. Fearon—Director
E. F. J. Quicke—Travel secretary	M. Smith—Surveyor
Dr. M. L. McGlashan—Treasurer and agent	

List of ascents

Nevado Chearoco	1	20,072	19.8.62	Floodpage, Hunter, Quicke
„	2	19,984	19.8.62	Floodpage, Hunter, Quicke
„	3	19,948	19.8.62	Floodpage, Hunter, Quicke
Nevado Calzada	1	19,270	27.7.62	Bradford, Floodpage, Hunter
„	2	18,790	23.7.62	Bradford, Fearon, Floodpage, Hunter, Quicke, Smith
„	3	18,781	25.7.62	Bradford, Floodpage, Hunter, Quicke, Smith
Unnamed 'Dome II'		18,721	5.8.62	Fearon, Floodpage, Quicke
Unnamed		18,700		Bradford, Fearon, Smith
Unnamed 'Dome'		18,514	5.8.62	Fearon, Floodpage, Quicke
Unnamed		18,460	29.7.62	Floodpage, Hunter
Unnamed		18,441	29.7.62	Floodpage, Hunter
Unnamed 'Dome I'		18,389	5.8.62	Fearon, Floodpage, Quicke
Nevado Sihuailusa		18,343	7.8.62	Fearon, Floodpage
Rumca 5		18,015	5.8.62	Bradford, Hunter, Vernancio
Rumca 1		17,877	6.8.62	Bradford, Hunter
Rumca 2	} approx.	17,750	5.8.62	Bradford, Hunter, Vernancio
Rumca 3			5.8.62	Bradford, Hunter, Vernancio
Rumca 4			5.8.62	Bradford, Hunter, Vernancio
Nevado Negruni 1a			17,736	7.8.62
„	1b	17,692	7.8.62	Bradford, Hunter
„	2	17,602	9.8.62	Bradford, Floodpage
„	3	17,593	11.8.62	Bradford, Floodpage
Nevado Waruseuta		17,585	10.8.62	Fearon, Hunter
Chico Casiri		17,240	31.7.62	Floodpage, Tichauer
Verity		17,211	29.7.62	Fearon, Quicke, Smith