

South America 1986

Evelio Echevarría

During 1986 Andean mountaineering continued to develop at much the same pace as in the last few years. The opening of new technical routes and the increase in trekking have been the dominating factors since the early eighties. In the last two years two new kinds of activity began to be slowly added: high-altitude traverses and winter expeditions. These new activities belong mostly to the Argentinians. All-woman climbing parties have also been on the increase, usually under official sponsorship. In the notes below, activities belong to the year of 1986 unless otherwise stated. A few events of importance that occurred in previous years have also been included.

Venezuela and Ecuador

A Venezuelan woman, Dora Ocanto, with José Betancourt, opened a new direct route up the NE wall of Pico Bonpland (4883m). Two other women, Ana M Díaz and Rosa Pabón, made the first all-woman climb of the N face of Pico Bolívar, which has yielded the best routes on mixed rock and ice in Venezuela (8 March).

In a 13-day round trip from Britain, Jan Solov and Lindsay Griffin visited the Sierra Nevada de Mérida of Venezuela. They made the first complete ascent of the WNW rib of Pico Bolívar (5002m), a 'Kenya-like' mountain and the country's highest peak. The rock encountered was disappointingly poor except for the summit ridge; however, the snow and ice conditions, and the weather, proved excellent. Descent was via the Ruta Weiss on the S face. Two bivouacs were made, and the route was considered alpine D-. Somewhat better acclimatized, Griffin followed the main Toro (4755m)-Leon (4750m) Crest, a 7km classic ridge traverse with continuously exposed scrambling and pitches of II/III on excellent granite. There is considerable scope for short but difficult rock routes in this area. Since a number of first ascents by George Band, Douglas Busk and friends, temporary residents in the early sixties, Mérida appears to have been relatively neglected by British climbers. Easy, 'hassle-free' access plus predictably good winter weather make this an ideal choice for a short visit.

In Ecuador, although new routes have been inaugurated on several peaks, it was on the flanks of the Altar massif where the main events of the last two years have taken place. New routes on the S face and SW ridge of Monja Grande (c 5200m) and the second ascent of the twin peaks of Fraile Central and Fraile Oriental (both c 5180m), all in 1985, were the main events in Ecuadorian mountaineering. Local climbers have also been active in mountain ranges abroad.

Peru

The famous S face of Alpamayo has been reclinbed several times. The Frenchman D Pirot (28 June 1984) and four Argentinians under G Raynié a month later followed the Ferrari route. On 27 August 1985 the Ecuadorians

O Cevallos and R Yépez ascended the face by a variant, an ice-flute well to the left of the Ferrari route, to get to the summit ridge and main summit of the mountain. Other new routes in the Cordillera Blanca were the SE face of Rinrijirca (5810m) and the 'rightmost of three obvious couloirs running the height of the SE face' of Caras de Santa Cruz (c 5950m), both by British parties; Quitaraju (6040m) by the E face and Chopicalqui (6354m) by a new line between the 1981 and 1982 routes of the N face, both by the Yugoslavs D Tić and M Romiha. A Colorado party, on the other hand, aimed at unclimbed lower peaks. Members of the group made the first ascent of the attractive Yana Raju de Cotush (5185m) and of the two well-known rock peaks of Huirucancha (4995m) and Huachucancha (4970m).

The Cordillera Huayhuash saw the same kind of activity as its sister northern range, although new routes on the peaks of this district seem to be more exposed to dangers beyond the control of the climbers. An international team of Central Europeans with the Peruvian A Callupe climbed the SW face of Nevado Sarapo (6143m), exposed to avalanches. Britons M Hair and R Payne ascended the S face of Rasac (6040m) on 14 June, while two Dutchmen climbed the left buttress of the W face on the same mountain, perhaps a new route. In the southern end of the Cordillera Huayhuash another British team under J Nixon made the first ascent of *Nevados* 5314 and 5410m, while also repeating ascents to other peaks. Fearing terrorists, this party had to maintain a well-hidden Base Camp near Lake Viconga.

In the Cordillera Vilcanota, Italians under Mario Cottichelli made a new route on the N face of Huiscachani (5720m), known to climbers as Huayna Ausangate, and the first ascent of Quiru II (5550m).

Bolivia

An all-woman South American expedition attempted Chearoco, but the fall of an ice-block left a Bolivian climber injured, and she had to be evacuated to La Paz. Later on, several expedition members made the first all-woman ascent of Huayna Potosí (6088m) by its normal route (Zongo pass). Participants were Luisa Gallardo (Ecuador), Victoria Reaño (Colombia), Rosa Pabón (Venezuela), Carina Vaca (Argentina) and Narda Wurth (Chile). The expedition had the sponsorship of the Unión Panamericana de Montañismo and was organized by the Federación de Andinismo de Chile.

Argentina

In this country mountaineering has been developing in a more even manner than in the other six Andean nations. The following events are noteworthy.

In the bleak Andes of northern Argentina, local mountaineers ascended Icomán (5490m) and Rumibola (5420m), finding on their summits, as expected, traces of Indian, or pre-Columbian, occupancy. Llanaleri (5300m), also ascended, may have been a first ascent.

In the alpine district of central Argentina Aconcagua, as usual, received the lion's share of attention. It was traversed via the SW ridge to the summit, descended by the Glaciér de los Polacos and around the northern side of its base to Plaza de Mulass by the Mendoza professional guide Gabriel Cabrera (17-27

January 1986). It was also ascended for the first time by its N face direct by the Italian Claudio Schranz (25 January). The S face also received visits from several expeditions, some successful. A clean-up operation of Aconcagua was undertaken by 18 students of the Universidad de Cuyo, at Mendoza, seven of them women. They collected rubbish and trash spread from the Confluencia and over the normal route to the very summit of Aconcagua. Most of the rubbish collected belonged to expeditions from Western European countries, which have a well-established tradition in conservation and national parks. The behaviour of these expeditions has made inevitable the imposition of fees in order to finance clean-up operations in the state park of Aconcagua.

Other expeditions of note were the winter traverse (September 1986) of the peaks connecting the Plata with the Tres Mogotes groups (5000 to 5850m), by the Mendoza guide mentioned above, and another by A Randis and M Sánchez, also from Mendoza, who traversed the 3km-long ridge between Rincón and Vallecito, always above 5300m (December 1985). A large Italian-Argentinian group operated among the lower, lesser-known peaks of southern Mendoza. Members of this group, almost 20 members strong, climbed the S face of Risco Plateado (4920m) and other lesser peaks, and attempted the E face of El Sosneado (5189m), highest in the district. Two other attempts on the fine cathedral of unclimbed Cajón Perdido (4660m) were defeated by steep walls of unstable rock.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Club Andino Mercedario (San Juan), several groups of members opened new routes on the flanks of the Mercedario group of peaks. Besides repeating several high ascents, the San Juan mountaineers climbed the S wall of Cerro Negro (5500m), the N face of La Mesa (6230m) and the E face of Pico Polaco (c 6000m), all in early January 1986.

Chilean and Argentinian Patagonia

The little exploratory work that was undertaken in Patagonia fell to the Chileans. By way of the Fiordo Exmouth, five members of an expedition under C Gálvez marched toward Volcán Lautaro and reached the summit (3380m) on 10 February, this being a third ascent and a new route, the W face. A Chilean-British group, jointly led by F Medina and M Hickman, with nine other mountaineers and scientists, marched toward Cerro 'Aguilera' (unofficial name) 2400m, and reached a height of some 1200m before having to retreat. Expedition members declared the mountain to be a volcano. (November 1985 to January 1986.) Also, in late December 1985, the Chileans Gino Casassa and Rodrigo Mujica, with the American Bonnie Schwab, traversed the northern ice-cap from Ventisquero (glacier) Soler to the shores of the Pacific and back in 17 hours on skis. In the course of this expedition the skiers accomplished the first ascent of Pico Naranja (c 2700m), in the Cerro Largo massif.

As usual in Patagonia, technical climbing took place on the peaks located on the periphery of the ice-cap. San Lorenzo Sur (3250m) and Hermoso Este (c 2400m) were climbed by the Italian Buscaini expedition (late 1985 to 15 January 1986). The highest summit of San Lorenzo (3706m) was reached for the first time from the Argentinian, or E side, by a South African party in an ascent on which it took four days to complete the last 2000m. In the Chaltén

group of peaks, six Italians almost reached the summit of Fitzroy using a new line situated between the French (1979) and Polish (1984) routes. 50 metres below the summit the Italians had to retreat. The well-known Italian climber Casimiro Ferrari, with G Maresi, climbed the extremely difficult ENE buttress of Cerro Norte (2950m), on 1 January.

There were several other important climbs, some of them perhaps new routes, in the same district, but the main event of the entire Andean year 1986 belongs to two very young Argentinians. S de la Cruz, 17, and G Ruiz, 21, climbed Fitzroy by its 'supercouloir' in winter (25 July). The two climbers had made an ascent of Fitzroy in the summer months and knew the mountain well.

Scottish Winter 1985-86

Ken Crocket

The winter season of 1986 was a productive one, with a probable record number of first ascents being recorded, particularly from the Northern Highlands. Of necessity, and to allow many of these routes to be accorded their due merit, following a decent interval and subsequent re-ascents, this is a summary of the harder climbs from each area, from November 1985 to April 1986.

Starting with a very light fall of snow in December 1985, the winter moved into a very cold and sparkingly clear spell just before the New Year. This built up an impressive amount of ice, not all of which was removed by the regular January gales. In January, indeed, the ice continued to build up, many new and classic routes being climbed. February saw another cold spell, unbelievably lasting for several weeks. Much of the snow was then unconsolidated, but ice prevailed, giving the happy hookers many severe ice problems. March was as March often is, and the season extended right into April, allowing routes with long approach walks to be tackled in the long daylight hours.

On Arran, (where, to give away a well-kept Scottish secret, there are many plum lines waiting to be climbed for those of an energetic and masochistic bent), Graham Little continued his list of first ascents in February with the major line of the 350m Once in a Lifetime (V/VI), on the NE face of Cir Mhor (with D Saddler). This line is sufficiently independent of the summer line Silo to deserve a different name. Certainly, the start took to an ice-filled groove right of the normal start, which was virtually snowless. The route then moves left into the top of the chimney line of Silo, climbed on relatively snowless rock on this occasion. Difficult mixed climbing above finishes what is undoubtedly a major mixed route, on a face mostly repulsive in summer, but transformed in a good winter into a superb climbing arena.

On the Isle of Skye, two parties made an attempt on Waterpipe Gully on Coire a'Mhadaidh. On 24 February, B S Findlay and G Strange avoided the thawing lower section of three pitches, while four days later C Downer and D Scott made a complete ascent, the crux pitch being the first. Despite its