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## Cordillera Quimsa Cruz, Bolivia

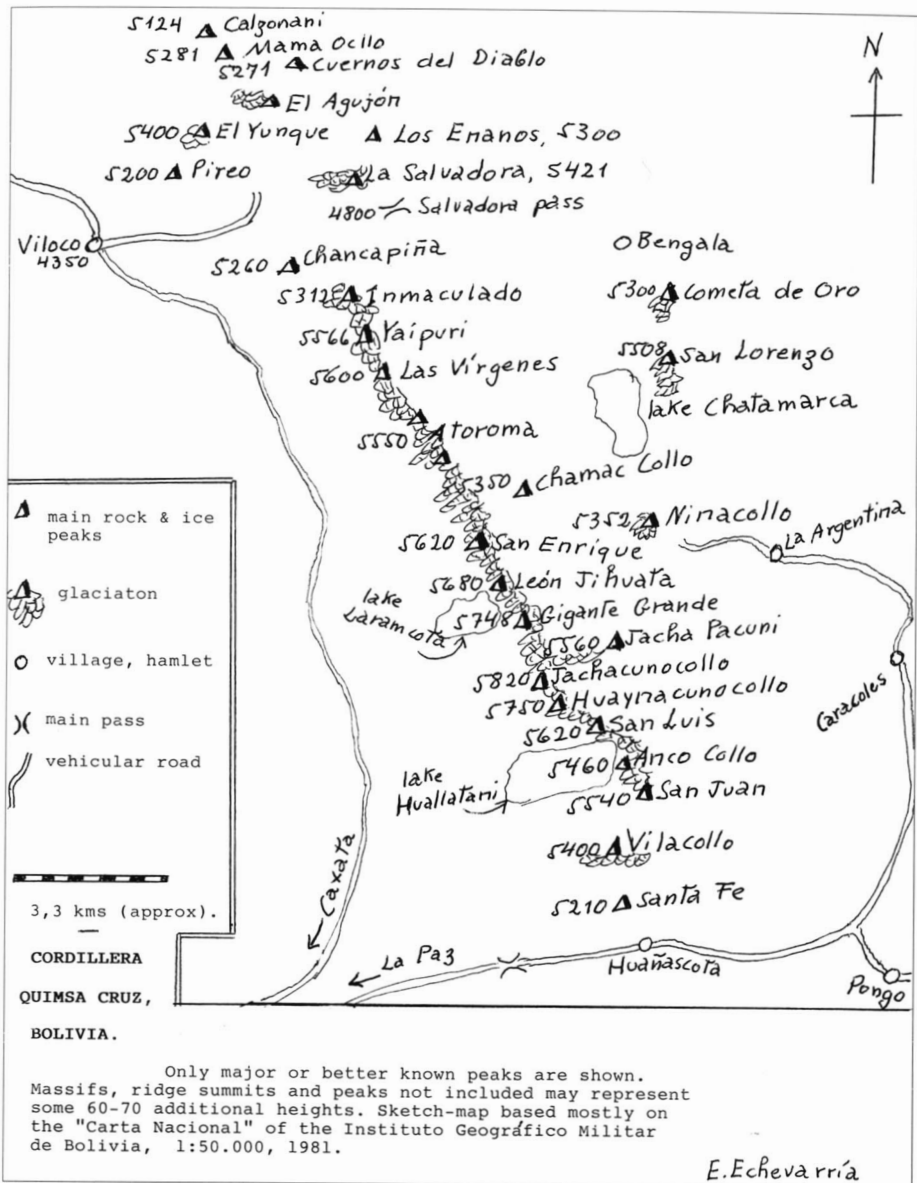
Were it not for the intervening bulk of Illimani, a range of rock and ice peaks up to 5800m would be visible from the southern streets of La Paz. Illimani blocks out most of the mountain scenery south of the highest capital city in the world, so that barely a distant glimpse of the attractive Cordillera Quimsa Cruz can be discerned. Only when one travels south of the city for some 50km do the silvery Nevados that form the central part of the range come fully into view.

The Cordillera Quimsa Cruz is the continuation of Bolivia's Cordillera Real and begins at the Asiento pass, just south of Illimani. It extends roughly in a north to south-east direction for some 40km and comes to an end in another wide pass, the Paso Tres Cruces, which separates it from the much smaller Cordillera Santa Vera Cruz. The Quimsa Cruz offers very pleasant mountaineering and is the most easily accessible range in Bolivia, sometimes enabling climbers to have their high camp in place the same day as they have left La Paz. This range has been treated fairly well in international mountaineering writing, and perhaps even better in the short notes appearing in many climbing journals. However, all this information is widely scattered and the range itself has received no recent biography. The last known ones date back to 1913 and 1932. Furthermore, part of the available information about the range is either incorrect or has not been brought up to date. In this short monograph I have attempted to unify and modernise the existing information, making use of my own first-hand knowledge of the range, derived from having climbed there in nine different seasons.

### Mountains

Quimsa Cruz is a mixed Aimara-Spanish name meaning Three Crosses. The dimensions of the range are somewhat smaller than previously believed: some 35-40km from the north to the south-east and about 12km at its widest point. It is composed of four fairly well-defined regions. The first, locally called Nevados de Araca, is composed of three or four clusters of sharp peaks and aiguilles between some 4800m and 5421m, the latter figure being the official height of the highest point, Nevado de la Salvadora. The rock is excellent and the glaciers very small, but the south-east faces are extremely steep. The Salvadora Apachita pass marks the southern end of this interesting massif.

The next massif is the main one and is called Quimsa Cruz, the name also given to the entire range. It begins with the rocky ridges of Inmaculado or Corichuma (5312m) and extends south-east all the way to the Huallatani basin. This district includes numerous rock and ice peaks, among which



99. Cordillera Quimsa Cruz, Bolivia, 1:50,000, 1981. (Sketch map by Evelio Echevarría based on the Carta Nacional of the Instituto Geográfico Militar de Bolivia.) Only major or better known peaks are shown. Massifs, ridge summits and peaks not included may represent some 60-70 additional high points.

rise the five highest in the entire range: Jachacunocollo (c5820m), the 'Grand Ice Peak' of the Aimas, Huaynacunocollo (c5750m), Gigante Grande (5748m), erroneously stated in guidebooks as the highest in this cordillera, León Jihuata (5680m) and San Luis (5620m), the latter forming a showy background to the frigid Huallatani lake.

The third district lies further east of León Jihuata and is Amazonian. It is called the Choquetanga group (Aimara: 'Golden Comets'). Since access to them is somewhat complicated, its peaks are not well known. Its easternmost points, over 5200m, rise above the warm hills of Quime, a subtropical area.

The Quimsa Cruz comes to its southern end with an undistinguished cluster of dark brown rock peaks, unglaciated, some of which are fairly rugged. Its main point may be Santa Fe (5210m). On the wide pass of Tres Cruces is located the hamlet of Huañascota (4080m).

Glaciers occupying high valleys occur mostly in the main or central district. Particularly extensive are the Laramcota, Atoroma and Chococota glaciers. Hanging ice can be seen on many south and east faces of the first three districts. Local ice is unbelievably firm and hard, so that often my greatest fear when visiting this range was whether my crampons would bite into that granite-hard ice. The exceptional hardness of the ice results from the low temperatures typical of the Bolivian Andes. An average of  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  can be expected in June and July, the coldest months of the year. The rock is good to excellent. Most peaks offer a brown, solid granite and only the group around Gigante Grande has slate walls and ridges.

There are numerous small lakes and some big ones, including the Huallatani, well seen from the western vehicular roads, and the Chatamarca, located between the main district and the Choquetanga group. Water is found everywhere on the western slopes, but in some lower valleys it is mildly polluted by llamas and, in a few places, polluted more seriously by mining. Water is likely to be scarce on the eastern or Amazonian slopes, since it is absorbed by the porous ground.

The natural environment of the Quimsa Cruz is desolate and the human population scarce. There are only two important settlements, one in Viloco (between the Araca and the main massifs) and another in Pongo at the south-east end of the range. But resources are limited and these settlements have difficulty in offering anything more than basic necessities. Even fresh bread is rarely found here. Human encounters are not a problem in the Quimsa Cruz region. Miners are usually friendly, but the few Aimara highlanders one may come across are rather aloof. On the trail, if a hiker meets one of the local people, a friendly hand raised in salute with a 'Buenos dias' or 'Buenas tardes' (evening) will suffice; then continue the march unconcernedly. Good Spanish is a necessity in this region.



100. Cordillera Quimsa Cruz, Bolivia. The two highest peaks in the range, Jachacunocollo (c5820m) and Huaynacunocollo (c5750m), from the south-west. (*Evelio Echevarria*)



101. Abandoned mining constructions and the northern flanks of unclimbed Cerro El Aguilar (c5450m) and Nevado Vilacolco (c5400m), ascended in 1911 by Dr T Herzog. (*Evelio Echevarria*)

## Mountaineering

Mountaineering/climbing in Bolivia is better done between May and September, the country's cold but generally dry winter. After October, precipitation, with higher temperatures, begins.

Access into the Quimsa Cruz is by the two existing gravel roads that remain open all year. At the La Paz bus terminal there are two *flotas* (rural bus companies) that use them on a daily basis. One runs to Viloco and the other to Pongo-Quime. The latter provides access to the eastern (Amazonian) side, but at Pongo it is necessary to enlist a ride with a passing mineral-loading vehicle in order to reach the high-mining hamlets, almost abandoned, of Caracoles, La Argentina and Carmen Rosa (c 4700m). All forms of transportation will drop visitors off somewhere high, always above 4000m – a definite advantage. Valleys are short and camps can be placed where water is at hand. Very cold nights – about 13 hours long in the high tropics – must be anticipated.

The mountaineering history of this range began in an unknown time when hillmen ascended some lesser, unglaciated peaks. They were followed by mining and military surveyors who left their ascents, if any, unrecorded, but who did leave local sketch maps and charts. Between the years 1968 and 1981 the Instituto Geográfico Militar de Bolivia, the main geographical authority in the country, produced its Carta Nacional on sheets on a scale of 1:50 000. These are quite acceptable, one feels, since the heights are accurate, even if a good many mountain names are not.

Sport Climbing per se began there with Henry Hoek, a Freiburg geologist, who, in 1903, visited the Viloco mining district. Along with a very young Aimaran 'with cat feet', he climbed the 5260m Chancapiña (in Aimara: 'rough and savage'). Dr Theodor Herzog, a botanist-skier-climber of the University of Jena, followed in 1911. He and a companion re-climbed Chancapiña and made the ascent of several other peaks, although with much discomfort due to a snowy November at the time of their visit. Herzog produced two excellent books (in German) and the first map of the Quimsa Cruz, scale 1:200 000.

Twenty years later Dr Federico Ahlfeld (1892-1982), who was to become a much honoured citizen of Bolivia, also climbed there and produced another good monograph and a sketch map. His contemporaries, all German residents in Bolivia, also climbed a number of peaks, among which are the two highest in the Quimsa Cruz, Jachacunocollo and Huaynacunocollo (c5820m and c5750m).

Two interesting cases pertaining to the earlier Quimsa Cruz climbing remain in need of investigation. We do not know exactly what several enterprising German residents in Bolivia climbed between, say, 1915 to the early 1930s. El Yunque (c5400m, Spanish: 'Anvil'), of the challenging Araca towers, was certainly scaled by Overlack and Schulze. But what else did those enterprising pioneers perform in the region? And then there was the mysterious case of T Ifor Rees, chief British diplomat in Bolivia during the



102. Cerro León Jihuata, also called Torre Jihuata (5680m), west side. (*Evelio Echevarría*)



103. The Salvadora massif (c5400m) seen from the Salvadora apachita (pass). Typical unclimbed south flanks in the Viloco group. (*Evelio Echevarría*)



104. The Nevado de Atoroma (c5550m), with typical west-slope glaciers. (*Evelio Echevarría*)



105. The Huallatani lake basin: Nevados Piroja (5440m), San Luis (5620m) and a spur of Huaynacunocollo showing in the centre. (*Evelio Echevarría*)

Second World War and after. One of his companions, Alpine Club member E de la Motte, and a Bolivian climbed the sharp ice pyramid of Ninacollo Grande (5352m) in or before 1946. But what else did Rees and companions do? In his book *Sajama* (1960), a copy of which I was once able to hold in my hands, he apparently showed that he knew much about local climbing and about regional mountain lore. But this work was published in Welsh. So far we do not have a clear evaluation of the Rees performance in the Andes.

In March of 1946, six Bolivians, led by the ever-present Federico Ahlfeld (founding member of the Club Andino Boliviano), skied on the Laramcota glacier and made the first ascent of Gigante Grande (5748m), third highest point in the range. Bolivian participation there was at its best. Strong German parties climbed here in 1969 (Bayerische Naturfreunde, Möhldorf) and 1987 (Bayreuth). Their impressive accomplishments were recorded in text, sketch maps, and black-and-white photography.

As well as mystery there has been confusion. Without proper maps in earlier times, confusion was probably inevitable. But at present, we are unable satisfactorily to identify several peaks ascended, such as those by the Mexican expedition of 1964 and the Japanese expedition of 1968. The first of these claimed three first ascents, 5850m to 6000m high, and bestowed upon the mountains inappropriate names. In my researches in La Paz I ascertained that this party had indeed made two second ascents and the first of a *nevado* still unlocated. Was it Princesa Blanca, c5600m, in the Gigante Grande group? The same confusion can be expressed about the large 1968 Japanese expedition. This party climbed seven peaks, six of which were probably first ascents, and proposed unsuitable names for Bolivian and Andean peaks, such as 'Shimotsuke', 'Tochigi', 'Nikko', etc. However, credit must be given to this expedition for having been the first to be active in the Choquetanga group and to have included a sketch map and good accompanying photographs.

It is also pleasant to record several expeditions we could describe as exemplary. In August 1974 the Italian Bergamo expedition, led by the accomplished alpinist and explorer Santino Calegari, entered the Laramcota and Mallachuma valleys and glaciers and ascended six peaks. One great mountain in that area had undergone a name change, which caused an involuntary mistake: León Jihuata (5680m) had been won by two La Paz climbers in 1952. By 1974 its name had been locally changed into Torre Jihuata, which led the Calegari expedition to believe that this was a different peak. But, even so, leader Calegari bestowed upon the newly-climbed mountains names that fully respected local traditions and furthermore produced a report exemplary in both its text and illustrations.

The same could be said of the smaller and very recent Spanish expedition (1998), led by Javier Sanchez (Madrid). His group of four friends entered the Chococota valley and ascended three *nevados*. In his fine reports, Sanchez described well the mountain area, the peaks won and the new names the

group imposed (in the vernacular Aimara). The main objective had been Nevado de las Vírgenes (c5600m). A previous party, led by the American Dakin Cook, had already climbed it, but the reports this group produced twice misidentified the peak, so it was natural for the Spaniards to have been misled. Only when Yossi Brain published a photo of the mountain could everything be explained.

Another expedition deserves mention: Anton Putz (Regensburg), like Bergamo's Santino Calegari a constant visitor to the Andes, could not have missed the Quimsa Cruz. His party, which included his wife Ria, traversed the entire ridge of ice peaks, descending south from Jachacunocollo, and accomplished other ascents in 1982. Putz simply listed the peaks won as 'RAV' plus numbers. His efficient report proved that he correctly interpreted all the local heights.

With such diversity in the field of expeditionary activity, there remains the question: what is left for future visitors? Plenty, in my opinion, provided visitors do not seek the rewards of glory or profit. These mountains are not famous. The answer to the question lies in making a choice between rock and ice. For rock, Quimsa Cruz candidates will have two fields: one would be the search for new routes and even new peaks and needles in the Araca district. The other would be to tackle the higher east faces, nearly all rock, in the main and Choquetanga massifs. To my knowledge, none of these has been reported as climbed.

Ice is also found on the south faces of the southern Araca peaks but, above all, in the main or central area and in the Choquetanga massifs. As for exploratory mountaineering, all four areas seem to have a number of unascended summits. An entire ridge of unknown ice peaks (c5200-5300m) are visible at the north-east end of the Choquetanga district, above the Bengala mine.

And there is yet another side to Quimsa Cruz mountaineering: simple travelling, hiking, learning, adventuring, climbing. To me, these activities reveal the Quimsa Cruz at its best.

### **Appendix A: Quimsa Cruz journeys by the author**

I have visited this range in nine different seasons because it offered the unique advantage of comfortably reaching over 4500m by means of rural buses or other vehicles. I always climbed alone since in those days this range attracted very few parties, but excellent (and inexpensive) Aimara porters sometimes carried my pack to high camps.

**Dec 1983** Ascent of Cerro Colorado (5280m) and Don Luis (5360m), north-west and south, respectively, of Lake Huallatani. A cairn on the latter.

**April 1985** Laramcota Chico (5380m), a surveyor's cairn on top; Cerro Don Luis (5360m), third ascent.

- July 1989** Curicampana del Sur (5200m) and the pure white Nevado Anco Collo (5460m), first ascents; Cerro Nuñucollo (5215m), second ascent.
- July 1990** Chamacani (c5200m), first ascent; Cerro Mamani (c5400m) second ascent.
- July 1991** Nevado San Luis (5620m) and Cerro Santa Rosa (5540m), first ascents; Nevado San Juan or Altarani (5540m) and Cerro Chamac Collo (5350m), second ascents. On the summit of the latter, a cairn erected by Britons Angus Andrew and Neil Howell, who later distinguished themselves in the Nepal Himalaya. A comment about Nevado San Luis: it is the handsome background of Lake Huallatani. It is always recognised as a mountain but it is actually only a long ridge, running east from Putz's RAV 7 (5680m). I climbed San Luis, a long corniced ridge, by its north side.
- July 1992** Cerro Chancapiña (5260m), third ascent after the pioneers Hoek and Herzog (a ridge with numerous pinnacles); Cerro 5300m to the east, which I christened Curumiña ('precipice'), first ascent.
- July 1993** Nuñucollo (5215m) again; its vassal Cerro Chumpi (c5100m), a first, and Laramcota Grande (5400m), second ascent.
- July 1994** Pusicota (5220m), a well trodden peak; Cerro Huilucu (5200m), first ascent; Chiar Huyo (5500m), second ascent.
- July 1995** Nevado Imantata (5380m) and Cerro Copagira (5300m), second ascents.

### Appendix B: Climbs and Expeditions

For recorded ascents between 1903 and 1970, refer to Evelio Echevarría, 'A survey of Andean ascents', *AAJ* 36 (1962), p191, 'A survey of Andean ascents, 1961-1970', *AAJ* 87 (1974), p87, and 'Ascents in the Quimsa Cruz', *AAJ* 44 (1970), pp55-57. The two surveys include bibliographic sources. The last entry was a summarised list.

The present editor and former editors of the *American Alpine Journal* have taken special care to publish short but useful notes on international climbing. For the Quimsa Cruz area the following have appeared:

Vol 14 (1965), 455-6	vol 25 (1983), 205
Vol 16 (1969), 444-5	vol 26 (1984), 213
vol 20 (1975), 180	vol 28 (1986), 195-6
vol 21 (1978), 579	vol 30 (1988), 176-9
vol 24 (1982), 190	vol 32 (1990), 200

vol 33 (1991), 193	vol 38 (1996), 218-9
vol 34 (1992), 157-60	vol 40 (1998), 263-4
vol 35 (1993), 174	vol 42 (2000), 258
vol 36 (1994), 169-70	vol 44 (2002), 312-13
vol 37 (1995), 199-201	vol 45 (2003), 315-17

### Appendix C: Bibliography. Publications after 1969:

- Evelio Echevarría, 'Cordillera Quimsa Cruz, Bolivia', *Pyrenaica* 162, 211-215, Bilbao, 1991.
- Hoy, 'La Cordillera Quimsa Cruz fue exitosamenta explorada', *La Paz*, November 16, 12, 1971.
- Ekkehard Jordan, *Die gletscher der Bolivianischen Anden*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991.
- Rudi Knott, *Anden Expedition 1969*. Altmuhler: Bayerische Naturfreunde, 1969.
- La Razón, 'Miembros del Club Andino Boliviano realizaron una travesía por la Cordillera de Tres Cruces', *La Paz*, March 8, 1946.
- Alain Messili, *Los Andes de Bolivia. Guía de escaladas*. La Paz: Producciones Cima, 1996.
- T Ifor Rees, *Sajama*. Aberystwyth: C L Ceredigion, 1960.
- Javier Sánchez, 'Quimsa Cruz. Los nevados de Choco Cota'. *Desnivel* 151, 32-37, 1999.
- Hermann Wolf, *Cordillera Quimsa Cruz, Bolivien*. Bayreuth: Druckerei Lorenz Ellwanger, 1987.
- Yossi Brain, *Bolivia. A Climbing Guide*. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1999.
- Santino Calegari, et al, 'Ande boliviane-Cordillera Quimsa Cruz', *Anuario* 1974, 122-141, Bergamo: Club Alpino Italiano, 1974.

### Appendix D: Cartography

The Jordan work entered above includes a separate carpet of glaciological maps. 'Karte 16' corresponds to the Quimsa Cruz, scale circa 1:70 000, executed by personnel of diverse German and Bolivian scientific institutions. Height and location of major peaks should be regarded cautiously. Glaciological and photographic detail is remarkable.

**Sketch maps:** Calegari, op cit, for the Laramcota area; Knott, Messili and Wolf, op cit, and *AAJ* 30 (1988), p167, and 37 (1995), p200, for the Araca area.

**Maps:** Instituto Geográfico Militar de Bolivia, 'Carta Nacional', hojas (sheets) 6043-I, 6142-IV, 6143-III and 6143-IV, scale 1:50 000, La Paz, 1981.