
ERIK MONASTERIO

Bolivia 2006

Thanks are due to the following contributors to these notes: Lindsay Griffin, John Biggar, Nick Flyvbjerg, Juliette Géhard, Arnaud Guillaume, Moira Herring, Alain Mesili, Charlie Netherton and Katsutaka Yokoyama.

Favourable weather conditions arrived early in the 2006 season with a premature end to the austral summer monsoon. As usual, most climbing activity was on the normal routes on Huayna Potosi, Illimani and Condoriri, but it was gratifying to see more trekking and climbing activity in the northern Cordillera Real, which has been quite neglected in recent years. Glacier conditions on the approaches to the western routes of Ancohuma and Illampu were by far the best seen over the past 10 years, as there were few crevasses and penitents, but the overall trend is still for rapid glacial recession. Unseasonably early snowfall arrived later in the season, substantially increasing the avalanche risk. Local guides say the climbing season is moving earlier each year. In 2005 the weather was almost continuously bad throughout September.

The political situation is always important when it comes to planning a trip to Bolivia's Cordillera. The February 2006 democratic elections were unprecedented in terms of voter turnout, and for the first time elected as president an indigenous leader from a non-traditional party. Evo Morales won by a clear majority and formed a government with strong ideological affiliations to Venezuela and Cuba, rejecting US influence. This brought initial stability to the nation and the political demonstrations and strikes that in previous years paralysed the nation were not a problem during the May-September climbing season. Unfortunately political tensions have once again resurfaced and a struggle for autonomy in the Eastern Provinces may well lead to serious unrest in the years to come. Despite the political and social stability during the climbing season, visitor numbers were below those seen in previous years. This may well have been due to the often misleading press coverage given to Morales' government.

CORDILLERA REAL

Southern Real

In June, Japanese climbers Fumitaka Ichimura, Yuki Satoh, Tatsuro Yamada and Katsutaka Yokoyama established four impressive new routes on the S face of **Illimani**, the highest peak of the Cordillera Real. They made a base camp at Mesa Khala (4700m), the site of an old mine, below

the S face. On 14 June Satoh and Yamada climbed one of several obvious ice streaks left of the big central (and sérac-threatened) depression on the S face. This gave eight technical pitches up to WI 4+ to the upper snow slopes left of the séracs. A further 500m led to the straightforward upper SW ridge, by which the pair gained the **South (Main) Summit (6439m)**. The new route, christened *Phajsi Face* (Moon Face in Aymara), has 1200m of height gain and is TD+. The pair descended via the W ridge. On 22nd they added *Inti Face* (Sun Face: TD+) up the parallel ice runnel immediately left. This gave six technical pitches of WI 5 that were steeper and of better quality than those of the previous route. After 600m the pair joined *Phajsi Face* on the upper snow field and rappelled. Yamada notes that they named the two routes after the sun and moon, because like those objects, their spirits rose with the adventures.

On 22 June Ichimura and Yokoyama added *Puerta del Sol* (1200m ED1 WI5R and M5) L of the two previous lines. From c5200m they climbed a relatively straightforward 300m gully to the base of the first large rock wall. This was split by a thin goulotte, which the two climbed in the dark via thin ice pitches to gain the crux headwall. The headwall proved very steep with a thin runnel of ice that petered out, producing run-out climbing with dry tooling up to M5. The pair continued up the slopes above to the summit. They descended the same way, experiencing rockfall low on the descent. Ichimura and Yokoyama also climbed a hard new line on the S face of **Pico Layca Kholu (6159m)** well right of Illimani's main S face. Layca Kholu is the furthest SE of Illimani's summits and was originally named Pico de Paris. The two began climbing on 14 June, negotiating the lower 500m before dawn. This proved mostly straightforward but poorly protected. The headwall above was vertical and appeared quite loose but was split by a beautiful thin ice runnel. The 13th pitch proved the crux at WI5, with thin and fragile ice bulges, giving taxing climbing due to the altitude (above 6000m). The new route was named *Acalanto* (950m; ED1 WI5R). From the summit Ichimura and Yokoyama descended east to gain the glacier that flows south-east (the descent route from the N-S five peaks traverse). They walked down this to 5600m and made four rappels down the west flank to regain their base camp.

Central Real

New Zealand-based climbers Nick Flyvbjerg and Erik Monasterio visited the Chekapa Valley east of the Negruni and north of the Condoriri massifs. These mountains are sometimes referred to as the **Chekapa (Chikapa)** or Lico Group. The pair approached via a six-hour jeep ride along the road to Laguna Jankho Khota and then over the Mollo Pass (5100m) to Mina Fabulosa. Monasterio had climbed in the region 10 years earlier and was staggered by the amount of glacial recession.

On 26 July the pair climbed a new route on **Cerro Choque Santuro (5160m)**. They made a straightforward crossing of the Chekapa Jahuirá

river and climbed south up the opposite side to the base of the peak. The 350m route started up a rocky vegetated gully on the right side of the N face. Three 60m 5+ pitches led to easier ground on the NW ridge/face and another 5+ pitch on the summit obelisk. It is not clear whether this summit had been reached previously. After this ascent, on 28 July, the pair climbed a central gully on **Cerro Chekapa West (5418m)** to reach the NNW face at c5100m. Above, the climbing, at first grade 4, became increasingly difficult and loose. The pair roped for three final elegant pitches to the summit (6a max). Although these two routes were certainly new, Rudi Knott's 1969 Bavarian expedition made the first ascents of seven summits in this group of peaks. Later, Flyvbjerg and Monasterio followed the main valley south to its head (along a pre-Hispanic stone trail), crossed the c5100m pass west of Cerro Chekapa West and descended to the Palcoco mine and the altiplano.

On 19-20 May, Denis Levailant and Alain Mesili climbed the east pillar of the south summit of **Chearoco (6127m or 6014m)**. This is possibly the first route on the vast E face of this remote triple-summitted massif south-east of Illampu and Ancohuma. The 550m pillar gave difficulties of 5+ on good granite, with sections of mixed at 75° (M5) and some 80° ice. From the top, 150m of narrow ridge, with unconsolidated snow, dramatic cornices and no worthwhile protection, led to the summit. The pair climbed the TD+ route from a camp at 5200m, three hours' walk from the face.

Northern Real

Three new routes were added to the SW face of **Pico Schulze (5943m)**, the fine fluted snow and ice pyramid north-west of Illampu (6368m). In July Catalans Pau Gomez, Faust Punsola and David Sanabria climbed a new route on the right side of the face leading to the 5850m col between Schulze and Huayna Illampu. Starting on 22nd from Laguna Glaciar (5038m) south-west of the mountain, they did not continue to the summit but descended the far side of the col and made their way north down to Aguas Calientes. Their 400m route was rated TD+ WI 5- M5. A little later, a French Alpine Club expedition based themselves at Laguna Glaciar. On 11 August Perrine 'Perrinou' Marceron and Elisabeth Revol with Arnaud Guillaume climbed the couloir immediately left of the 1973 *Original Route* to gain the upper NW ridge. The 11-pitch route lies immediately right of a prominent spur on the left side of the face. It has approximately 550m of height gain and was graded TD- (80° and F4+). Four days later Toni Clarasso with Perrine Marceron and Juliette Géhard climbed the 550m couloir on the left flank of the spur. They found it straightforward apart from unstable snow at its top, and graded it D+.

The French party also put up two routes on Punta 5505m, a subsidiary summit of Schulze. The climbs took two parallel ice smears that flow from the left edge of a large sérac barrier through the rock below. Above the hanging glacier, gentle slopes led to a steeper snow face and the summit.



143. Laguna Glaciar with the locations of *Long Laguna Glaciar* and *Fly the Crack* on Pico Gotico (centre right), and of the *Flyvbjerg-Monasterio* route on Rumi Mallku (far right). The snow dome behind is Ancohuma. (Erik Monasterio)

The right smear was continuous and more pronounced, and was climbed on 9 August by Guillaume, Marceron and Revol (200m: WI 4+ M4). The left smear led to a shoulder before angling right through rocky terrain to the glacier. This was climbed on the 18th by Clarasso and Perrine Favier (200m: WI 4+ M5 F3c).

Late in the season, on 5 October, Thibaut Tournier and Muriel Zucchini made a rare ascent of the ESE ridge (c750m and probably TD) of **Pico del Norte (6070m)**, first climbed in 1972 by Roger Scull and Dave Steel. In 2004, thinking this ridge to be unclimbed, Mike Brown and Erik Monasterio climbed four pitches before they deemed further progress suicidal due to seriously unstable granite blocks. It seems likely that the more snowy October conditions are better suited to this route.

On 5 August Flyvbjerg and Monasterio made the first ascent of the NW face of **Punta c5982m**, a striking rock peak south-west of Ancohuma above Laguna Glaciar. Starting from a camp at 5500m, the pair climbed unroped up the loose lower walls to reach the start of a compact gully at 5850m. Two steep pitches on sound granite (6a+) led to unstable blocks and the summit. The pair thought they were making the first ascent of the peak but later discovered it had been climbed in May 2006 by a team headed by Bolivian guides José Callisaya and Gonzalo Jaimes. The team had split into two parties and climbed the easy W and NE ridges, meeting on the summit and walking down the S face. As the two ridges look like the outstretched wings of a condor, the peak was christened **Rumi Mallku** (Condor of Stone).

On 7-8 August Flyvbjerg and Monasterio added a third route to the 500m W face of **Pico Gotico (5750m)**. This monolithic rock peak west of Ancohuma was named after the shape of its N and S ridges, which resemble the incomplete arches of Gothic cathedrals. Monasterio had made the first ascent in 1998 via *Long Laguna Glaciar* (6c A2) on the right side of the face and had returned in 2002 to climb *Via del Arco* (6c and A2) on the left side. Flyvbjerg and Monasterio started 100m right of *Long Laguna Glaciar*, creating a more direct start to that route via marginally protected 6b+ climbing over resonant blocks. After discovering two bolt belays, the pair reached the original crux of *Long Laguna Glaciar*. Flyvbjerg led a free ascent at 6c, taking three hours to climb the 50m four-centimetre-wide crack, with two off-width sections, over a succession of roofs. The pitch had three in-situ bolts but also required a comprehensive rack. The upper face appears to have suffered rockfall and four more pitches (6b max), first right then left of the original route, led to the top of the face and a foresummit at 5600m, from which the pair descended (a boulder ridge leads to the main summit). *Fly the Crack* (6c) took 14 hours.

Controversy and confusion has surrounded the attempted second ascent of the *Long Laguna Glaciar* route by Spanish climber Cecilia Buil and the Australian guide, Jeff Sandifort in 2000. The pair terminated their ascent

at the top of the crux pitch. In 2001 during a visit to the region, Monasterio received information that his route had been bolted during the attempted repeat. A flurry of email communication between Buil and Monasterio failed to clarify the issue, as Buil steadfastly denied placing bolts on the crux pitch. However, following the recent ascent of Pico Gotico, Monasterio can confirm that a significant breach of climbing ethics did take place: a total of five bolts were found along the route, three of which were at key points of the crux pitch. Sandifort and Buil had information and a topo of the route prior to their attempted ascent, and local porters who provided support to the Buil team confirmed that a drill was taken up the route. For Monasterio, whose country this is, the use of drilled equipment on high mountain terrain is definitely taboo and he champions an ethic that attempts to preserve a traditional spirit of adventure in Bolivia's high mountains (as opposed to low-altitude rock walls). It is regrettable that such practices occur at all, but it is of particular concern that when they do it can take such a long time to clarify the facts.

On 17 August Monasterio and Flyvbjerg attempted the last unclimbed east pillar of Illampu. They encountered bottomless powder snow and a gaping rimaye at 6100m. Avalanche risk on the summit ridge looked to be severe, so the pair diverted their attention to **Aguja Yacuma (6030m)** an elegant pinnacle of graniodiorite at the north end of the Illampu Massif, just above the Mesili-Sanchez col. They climbed a new four-pitch route (6b max) on the ENE face up the main corner to the sharp summit: a three-star classic involving technical face climbing, overhung jam cracks, twin cracks and corner systems. In 2004 Monasterio and Mike Brown had put up *Ojo de la Aguja* (6b) just left on the E face. There is room for other routes on this flank. Two days previously, on 15 August, Perrine Favier, Arnaud Guillaume and Elizabeth Revel approached from the west side via the Huayna Illampu glacier and made a difficult (TD) S-N traverse of the Aguja, descending before reaching the lower rocky crest on which the pinnacle stands. It is not clear whether this traverse has been completed before, though the Aguja has certainly been climbed from the north and north-west.

In late August the New Zealand pair added a second route to the steep slabs of the E face of **PK 24 (Peak 24th September)** aka Punta Badile, but became probably the first party to climb this face in its entirety from the ground up. From a camp at c5000m the two reached the foot of the SE pillar taken by the 1994 Lehmpfuhl/Rauch/Schöffel route, *Don't take the Long Way Home* (c650m, 6b). Here they climbed the gully to the right, which slants up to the mahogany-coloured granite wall that forms the upper section of the E face. Three pitches of 4+ and 5+ led to the big terrace below the wall. From here six pitches of chimneys, cracks and corners at sustained 6a to 6b+ led to the summit ridge. Three long rappels took the team back to the terrace. The route, which took 14 hours to complete, required a full rack and an assortment of pegs.

NORTHERN CORDILLERA APOLOBAMBA

Climbing on equal terms with Bolivian guide, Pedro Quispe, in early September Charlie Netherton attempted an integral traverse of the **Palomani Tranca** Group. They approached this rarely visited area from Paso de Pelechuco with porters, hoping to establish a base camp at Laguna Chucuyo Grande. They were dropped short of this and later discovered that a mining road runs from Apacheta Pampa to a point only an hour from their camp. Above the camp they climbed at III and WI 3 to the snout of the glacier south-west of the group. From here they climbed a loose rocky peak to the left that they felt was the furthest south of the group. Next day, they continued up the glacier to the SE ridge of previously unclimbed **Palomani Sur** (c5500m-5600m), which they traversed at II-III with one rappel. They continued north to the first of three similar-altitude summits of **Palomani Tranca Central**, and beyond as far as a foresummit of Palomani Tranca Main (5638m), before escaping the ridge and heading south-east back to base camp. They rated their outing Alpine D.

CORDILLERA QUIMSA CRUZ

The British party of Alan Dickinson, Sam Hawkins, Moira Herring, Ronan Kavanagh and Tom Stedall made a rare visit to the east side of the southern Cordillera Quimsa Cruz, approaching via Viloco and the c5200m Salvador Pass to a base camp below Nevado San Lorenzo. After reaching a high bivouac on 16 July at 4800m, Dickinson, Hawkins and Stedall made an ascent of **Pyramidal Peak (5508m GPS)**, the summit marked as San Lorenzo on the Bolivian IGM map, via the W ridge at PD-, finding signs of previous visits. On 22 July, Herring and Kavanagh repeated this ascent intending to continue south-east to the true summit of **San Lorenzo (5560m)**, but were repelled by the steep and extremely loose descent to the first col.

Starting on 16 July, Herring and Kavanagh ascended the narrow Cumbre Ventisquero (glacier) south of their base camp to the col at its head (c5400m). From here they turned left (east) to easy summit 5460m and continued east to dome-shaped top 5550m, struggling through penitentes the size of dinner plates. From the same col, on the 19th, Dickinson and Hawkins climbed the SE flank of **Atoroma (5560m)** on somewhat stable rock at PD. Later Herring and Kavanagh scrambled up peak 5112m immediately west of base camp, and Dickinson and Hawkins climbed **San Lorenzo (5560m GPS)** via the SE glacier (PD-).

In the Northern Quimsa Cruz, previously unreported from 2005, was a new rock route on the north pillar of the **Gross Mauer (c4900m)** in the Taruca Umana Valley. The pillar was climbed by the French guide Emmanuel Ratouis with C Aguil and Jean-Claude Razel to give *Un Train Enfer*; 200m and six pitches of magnificent granite at 6b+. They climbed the route with bolts at the belays and one or two per pitch, plus natural gear.