EXPLORING PERU'S ICY ANDEAN TEETH

The story of my late arrival and early departure (due to limited vacation time from my job as mountaineering instructor at the North Carolina Outward Bound School) June-July 1968 on the New Zealand Expedition to Cordillera Vilcabamba, Peru. Expedition members were Dick Cowan, Paul Green, Bob McKerrow, Peter Goodwin, Mac Riding, Allen Higgins and Ken McNatty as leader, all of New Zealand.

1. Joining the expedition:

As an itinerant Brit, after climbing Mt Cook in New Zealand with Ken McNatty, I learned to respect his amazing rangey strength and cool capacity for getting organized, and knew I wanted to climb further with these amazing kiwi mountaineers. Tough as teak, modest, funny, and hugely energetic, it was to me unsurprising that New Zealand's very own beekeeper had strode on ahead of all others along with the inimitable Tensing to the summit of Everest.

On May 5th, 1967, Ken wrote me from Wellington, telling me about an explosion that had unsettled him, along with wisdom teeth removal, but inviting me to join his 1968 Andean Expedition to the remote Vilcabamba region of Peru. On 26th September, he wrote again regretting he had seen me on NZ TV playing Bach to a weddell seal in Antarctica, but repeating the offer. There was no difficulty in replying to this amazing opportunity. Ken was representing another sample of the world's best climbing companions (as I had learned in the NZ Alps and Victory Mountains of the TransAntarctic Range,) and dangling in front of me a then entirely new area of unclimbed 17-20,000 foot peaks deep in unmapped Andean Peru. No contest.

So I obtained leave from my job at the North Carolina Outward Bound School, through gracious acceptance and support from the Board. The letter of April 8 1968 from the Board Chairman of the Operations Committee, Lloyd Borstelmann, said the following:

This is simply to confirm approval for your annual leave from May 28 to July 9. We wish you good fortune and success on your venture with the NZ Andean Expedition. We look forward to having you back with us for the June course and many more.

These folks on the OB Board were terrific. They had come together under the amazing leadership of a small crew of visionaries, including Marjorie Calloway, Dick Borden, Watts Hill Jr, Tony Mulvihill, Dave Mashburn and others who saw the promise of TableRock and the Linville Gorge as a resource for the nation's young people. As a result, the NCOBS had become a reality, as a bellweather for OB progress in America, and I was lucky enough to be a part of its construction and operation. I carry the scars to this day.

I took off on the first day of my leave, with well-wishes from Outward Bound, a few instructions from Ken and friends, an equipment list, and a vague itinerary. Jack Shirey drove me down to Charlotte, and Roddey Dowd, a Board member and strong supporter saw me off from the airport, giving me at the last moment an engraved stainless steel US Marine pocket knife which I still have. Delta promised Atlanta-

Miami, and thence via Equitoriana to Lima. On arrival in Lima I was supposed to follow scribbled back-of -the-envelope notes to contacts via the Hotel Claridge thus learning how to go on via Cuzco.

On arrival at the Charlotte airport in May in North Carolina, Roddey Dowd , scion of Charlotte Pipe & Foundry, refused to be embarrassed by association with the intense-looking englishman clad in high altitude boots, long socks and woollen pants, in early North Carolinian summer, but clad for the Peruvian winter. He waved me goodbye. I made my way confidently to the counter, and when excess baggage charges appeared imminent, karabiner necklaces and an additional climbing rope were added under my jacket. All of this became more brutally intrusive on arrival in Miami (85°), when the Equitoriana agent informed me, after interminable shrugs and sighs, that I had no reservation, and the next flight would be tomorrow, via Panama, and Ecuador. So I wandered around clinking audibly, but slept fitfully in the airport, and stumbled onto the Electra 2 aside a tired and bad-tempered flight attendant who brought a swath of paper cups on board, opened a filthy-looking locker and rammed the long tube of cups in with his foot and a curse in spanish.

We bounced through Panama, Cali and landed in Quito, when I deplaned to take an airport meal, again clinking noisly with all my climbing hardware (would never have made this post-911), and didn't hear an announcement in Spanish as to my flight, and thus missed the plane. Next flight two days hence. But Equitoriana paid the bills for my hotel, since they seemed distressed that they hadn't found me. At last I felt accepted, and anyway this hiatus presented a chance for a little acclimatization. Quito is at almost 10,000 feet, and Rocco Pichincha stands 15,000' plus above the city. So I ran up, via quite serious ridge climbing, made the summit, and came back down in pouring rain, with a spectacular headache from the altitude. On arrival back at the hotel reeling from effort, and in soaking wollen clothes, I succumbed to the sweet folks who undressed me, taking my clothes to dry them, bringing me underclothes and pajamies, and I climbed shivering into bed. A Pilsener lager assuaged my headache, and let me sleep,

The morning brought hastily dried vetsments, and a big burn-mark on my trousers evident in all subsequent photos. I smelled like a walking forest fire which resulted in wide berths around the airport, and an empty seat beside me on the plane to Lima. On arrival, through the usual difficulties with baggage, it became a sort of clue-driven game of pursuit of the expedition. I followed previously mailed written directions from the team, and somehow made it to Hotel Claridge at US $3 per night, where I found Don Whillan's name in the guest book as he was on his way to Huandoy, and I met the scotsman Brian Robertson of the same expedition. I called the UK Embassy as a precaution to notify them this smelly brit was now part of their responsibility in Peru, and went to bed.

In the morning, following directions, I took a bus for 3 soles to Miraflores and the home of Salvador Gandolfo. An amazing, beautiful apartment, two ice-axes crossed on an immaculate white wall. Churchill and naval history books on the bookshelf. He handed me mail, told me of his previous engagement with NZ expeditions and gave me instructions for the hard days ahead to catch up (now several days behind) with the others. Went out that afternoon for more beers with Robertson and his Australian girlfriend, and then back, and slept gratefully, with the prospect of an early morning start for Cuzco.

So, June 1, and heading down to meet a beaming Cesar Falcon with a cross above his rear view mirror to see us through Lima traffic to the airport for my flight to Cuzco, a brand new 727 with no marks on the seats, and the most alluring flight attendants yet. Cuzco is surrounded by high escarpments, and I remember the acceleration, as if the plane might flip over onto its back as it climbed so sharply. My former, magnificent and beloved Vincent Black Shadow however was more than precedent for a Peruvian takeoff, even for this awesome flight. It seemed we were in bad mountain weather as we emerged like a wet squeezed soap out of clouds into sunlight. Flight attendants suddenly appeared to lean towards me and breathe heady requests into my beard. Coca Cola? Is that all? The cotton sea below still obscured the Andes I had worked hard to gain a window seat to observe.

Finally it cleared. Huge gorges below, ending inevitably in spectacular spires. Vast, knife-edged and scary. What a miraculous vista.. *cómo increíble*. Almost as appealing as those lovely flight attendants .

trouser burns on the Cuzco

sad goodbyes

many backward glances

Landed in Cuzco with all my stuff, said a reluctant farewell to the crew, grinded over to the local train, bought the last seat, and took off again, everyone, of course, shouting `*Vamos*'. As we climbed on our six hour journey out of the valley, when we got to the `Z' section up the slope, the train driver hopped out of the cab, changed the points as we slid backwards, and jumped back in, to collect tickets in between jumps. We passed someone having a haircut on the side of the rail line. People are passing out beer, but the large charming señora beside me who has taken total responsibility for me and all my straggly mountaineering baggage says `No' , pointing to her head and rolling her eyes. She gleams for me, intoning that I'm no ordinary gringo.. *no esta tourista, es alpinista*... none of which I understand. The Vilcanota river appeared, big and green, with deep side valleys. All of a sudden, the terrain changes to jungly green, foresty, with all the peaks steep, damp and heavily tree-covered. My respect for the mountain folks, following my experience with Nepalese sherpa families grows and grows, and I determine one day to do them justice with bringing their livelihood styles and strategies into more prominence. This especially in recognition of the ones that are not so fortunate, healthy enough to withstand the rigours of the high Andes .

I stop at Machu Picchu, with amazement at the strategic placement of observation posts above the valley below. No wonder this place has survived. The Urubamba gorge is truly a wonder. Beyond, the hint of ice beckons. I know I should resist local seductions, my purpose is the mountains beyond. Little did I realize what alluring prospects the valley had to offer further down.

So, finally the train arrives in Santa Maria. I have names, but no addresses. My señora helps me, since noone speaks English, and I have little spanish, but her kind energy works for me. Halfway along the empty tracks after the train leaves, the police pick me up, calling my name and hauling my bags. *Mañana der is a beeg party para ti señor!* Apparently Ken and the boys left word that they had a bloody englishman in their wake. After signing in at the local police station, I was ceremoniously ushered into a cell, and a bed, certainly not my first time in jail, but by far the most kindly reception. In a while, the arrival at my cell door of someone with limited english but lots of enthusiasm established quite clearly that this evening was far from over.

We went out along the tracks to another house, where a huge dinner was waiting. Halting conversation ensued during which I unwittingly disturbed the equilibrium by suggesting that Luis, my guide, was very handsome, and thus a big hit with the señoritas, which led him to explain tortuously that he was married. He was the most gentle and kind host, even swapping his full glass with my empty one (he thought without my knowing) when he knew I was thirsty and there was no more soft drink. Coming from North Carolina, I began to fear the town was dry, but the coffee made up for it.

I presumed bed before a strenuous mañana, but should have known better. On the way back to the jail from dinner, remembering my geography, I stopped to look for the Southern Cross, a true favourite of mine. Luis interpreted my stopping as reluctance to close the evening, and innocently enquired if his guest would like to spend *minutos* `looking round the town'? So we made our way along the railroad

tracks along a cobbled path, past sleeping bodies, and men pissing (Luis made disapproving clucking noises over that) until we went up some steps, and came out onto a sort of village green, where some kind of religious gathering was going on. There was an altar, with many big candles, and a tall cross draped with some shiny material, and surmounted by a crude, reverent picture of Christ. Women were praying in a large circle, and it sounded as though rockets were going off intermittently in the background.

A voice made announcements, and then music started, and all of a sudden, the party - that was supposed to be tomorrow - started happening. People dragged handkerchiefs out of their pockets, and began an elaborate, if not brilliantly executed series of sinuous movements to the music, at least reasonably easy to follow for a brit clad in singed pants and high altitude boots. Beer flowed extremely freely, brought round in wobbly glasses on a tray, and it was with a sense of premonition (I was unaccountably but continually flanked by two quite proper young policemen in uniform) that I was expected to perform alone. A curious, deprecating, bearded guy appeared from nowhere, with excellent english. He worked with a local cultural institute, and amid whispered explanations as to what was going on, started to introduce me to the prettiest of all the young girls in the crowd. As I noted in my log, `the band held its breath , and I sweated., but there was no mistaking the moment. The gringo was up before the multitude. Moths even suspended their suicidal wallops into the candles'. But I did an englishman's best, which my latina wife today will tell you is awful. I first asked permission of mami, then papi, then persuaded the shy but gorgeous girl formally into the center of the circle, waved the hanky thrust into my hand by my guide, and…. off to the races. We commenced a beery twist, with me clumping in size nine-and a half Cassins, to kindly polite but definitely not energetic handclapping. I gained in confidence with repetitive replacements of my beer glass, and it was not until a man came up and asked to dance with me that I felt it was time for bed, alone. A celebratory piss into the Urubamba on the way back, and I lurched to the first night under a Peruvian poncho in a free prison bed. I have never topped that since.

Woken at 6.20 am, I read the scrawls on the walls in the early morning sunlight. `*El trabajo significa - la ociosidad denigra'* . So inspired, I forcefully grabbed my gear, and went to the local truckstop to hitch a ride down the valley to Chaullay, making yet another mistake by leaving passport and return ticket with the Santa Maria police asking them to keep it safely for me! After boomeranging back on a second truck to pick them up and identify myself in Chaullay to rather impatient local officials, I found myself in the shade under a tree by the dusty roadside contemplating my stupidity, studying Ken's rudimentary maps, waiting for another camion to haul me to Coquipata. You should have learned this by now....always keep your passport close by you, said a clickety recording in my inner ear.

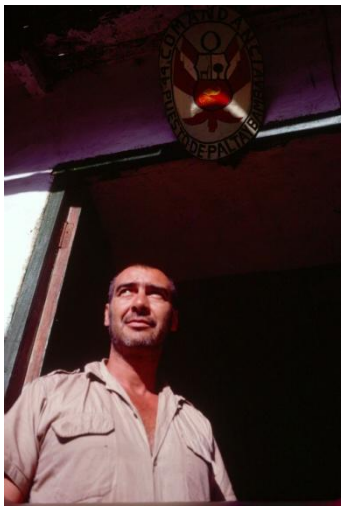
local jail

my friendly señora arranging transport

I obviously had far too much baggage to head off into the high country without either at least four wheels or four legs. These mountain communities were infested with the fear, if not the actuality, of bandits, and military presence was everywhere. I had a little reserve food, but needed to keep it for emergencies, and thus would rely on eating locally and risking the `squits'. Now, it was *domingo*, so no wonder there was not the usual number of trucks, and the few I saw were all going the other way. As far as I could tell, once I made the 7 km to Coquipata, I had another 13 km to Paltaybamba, then 20km to Huancacalle, where the big country started. Maybe I could get mules and some company, but I was not sure where the vehicle road ends. I thought at that time I was only a day behind my companions. How wrong I was. At this point my log deteriorates into a bunch of inebriated rants, out of which I deduce ..... not much. But my recall of those events are clear at this moment.

I woke up, dizzy as I assured myself, from altitude, in a *puesto de guardia* in Paltaybamba, some hours later, after drinking way too much with a superbly hospitable local police chief and his wife and friends (and their dog called Fisher which smelled heavily of shampoo, but which thankfully drank a significant proportion of my booze surreptitiously dropped floorwards). Actually, when the dog subsided, I clearly remember emptying a glass or two into the potted plant beside me, while my new good friend Chief Bauer tried valiantly to fight off incipient coma, and soon disappeared.

daily ablutions



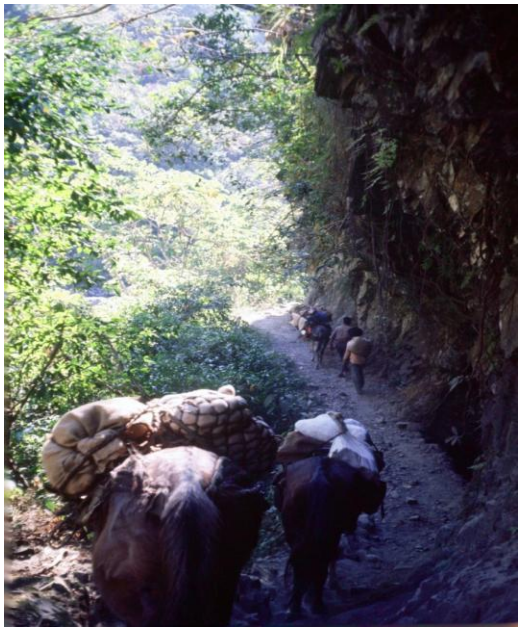
el jefe Señor Bauer, and ….

his wife

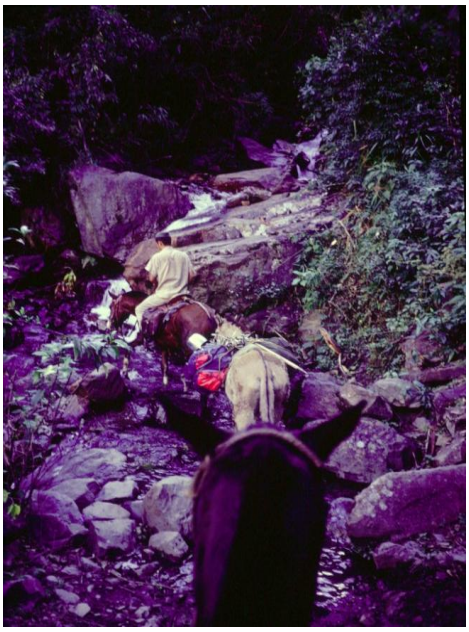
arriving at Bauer's puesto guardia

view from the hacienda balcony

I apparently found a mule, since my log's wobbly handwriting rhapsodizes about entering through a *hacienda* with a donkey. Yet I had also at least one horse, and my memory (and photos) suggest that I rode the horse and tried to strap my mountaineering sacks onto the donkey. I also record with notable pride getting up only once in the night after this drunken episode, on the eve of my thirtieth birthday, an otherwise irrelevant event which I may have, in a moment of weakness, communicated too freely.



the trail up the gorge

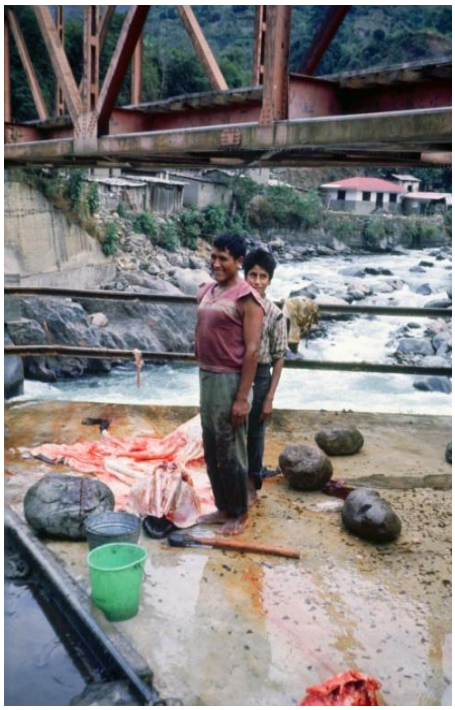


steeper and steeper

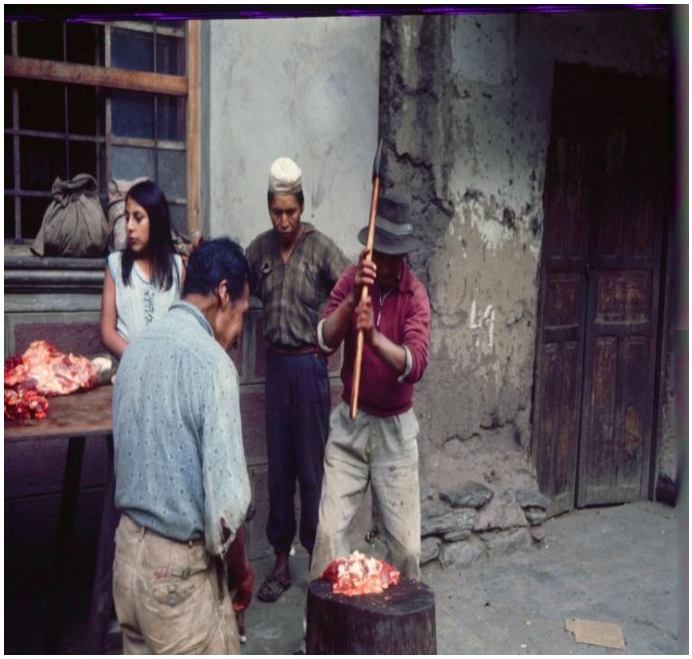
I took off at around 9.00 am on June 3rd with a police escort provided by the *jefe del puesto de guardia,* no doubt on the alerted recommendation of my Kiwi companions. The citizens of course had advance knowledge of the threat to Peruvian communities of me and my borrowed mule. This highly intelligent beast burdened unwillingly with my baggage continually diverted down side paths to former feeding posts, always cleverly losing its load on the way. Unlike me, she was familiar with the territory. My persistence prevailed eventually, my horse was strong and good natured, and understood quietly but efficiently how to manage the mule by turning when the mule turned. They both gained respect for me hauling her back up the trail with bags intact. As it got darker, my ear attuned to the sound of her trot, and I could track the clink and clank of my gear. It was an interesting symbiosis. We arrived at Pucyura late in the evening. Six bottles of champagne emerged from local cellars as tribute to my now widely broadcast achievement of thirty years. We drank ourselves to sleep.

The morning was a lot less promising. Bitter frustration resulted from having to turn in the mule, and a total lack of any others. I had a brutal hangover, and was angry at myself for losing another day in catching up with the team. I had no map, just notes and sketches, and had little idea really where I was. I had been promised a police escort by Bauer, since bandits and guerillas were apparently active in these valleys, and the police *puestos* were all chock full of arms. But neither policemen nor mules were available until the indispensable *mañana.* To improve my general state, I walked out into the village, and immediately saw a horse with a huge ulcerous saddle sore all the way down its spine, red raw and

steaming. Its owner had just taken a filthy paper and hide dressing off it, and then picked up dirt from the street, and sprinkled it all over to form a powder covering. Further down, a guitarist strummed quietly, using a plastic ballpoint held down with a rubber band as a fret. I bought some food, and contemplated how much precious time I was wasting. On the way back, I watched as a heifer was slaughtered on a rickety bridge, its entrails swept off into the river below, and the meat taken to the local market.

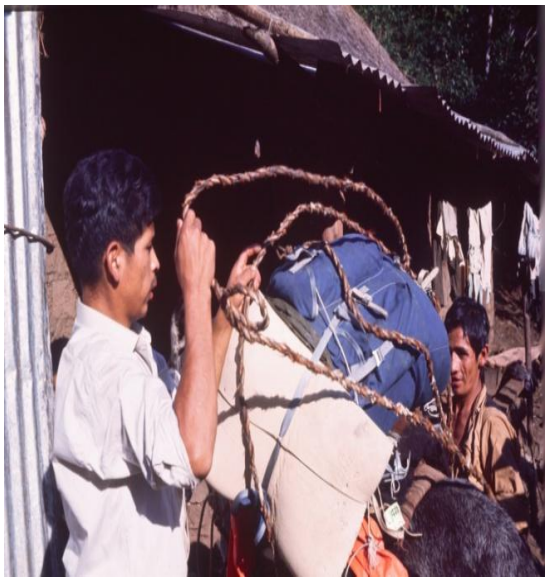


the professional butcher



local meat market

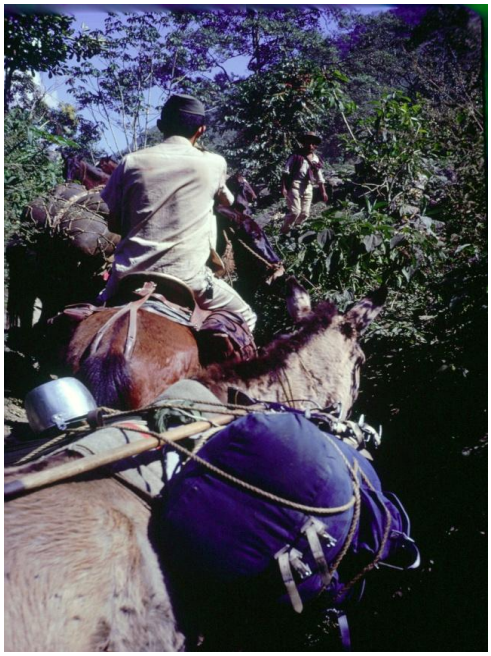
At last the next day dawned, my new mule arrived, and I was again introduced to the intricacies of mule-packing. Many layers of blanket and skins, and then a soft sort of rope ladder arrangement which goes on longitudinally, forming shelf-like steps on each side of the back to support the upside down V-frame. Fore and aft ropes stop the load from shifting that way, but also help to strap the girth well forward of the belly to stop it slipping backwards. After losing the load the first twenty times, I fooled myself into thinking I was a bit of an expert, and stuff hung in there pretty well. So off we went, on horseback, me and my two young police escorts, up the narrow valley path, trying to keep the mule away from the rocky sides which might snag and unsettle the load.



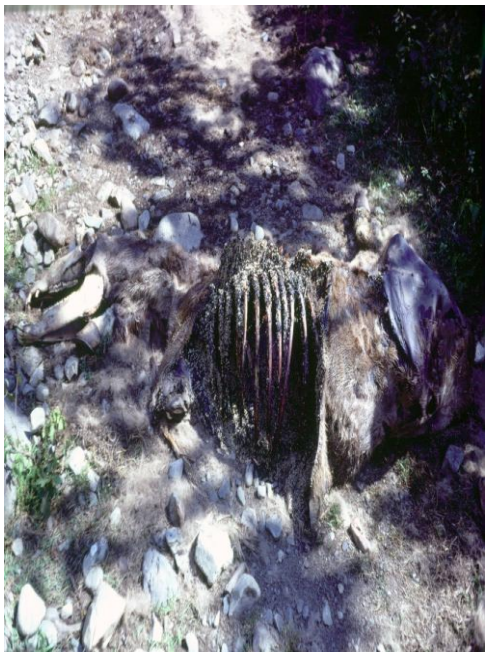
the binding sorgas……..

and eventual success

At every dwelling, we would ask `*los gringos passan alli*?' and the nods would keep us going, every now and then passing those before that had not made it.



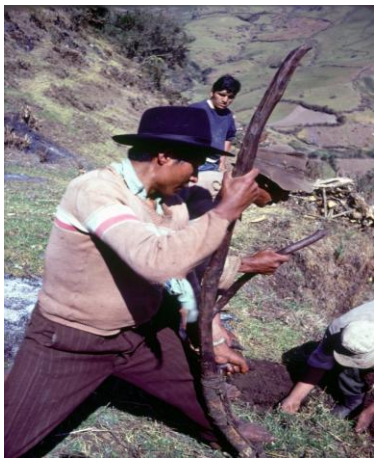
the leading cop



mini-monuments

Both the police had rifles, and from the way they held them, it didn't take long to realize they were increasingly uneasy about coming this far up the valley, since they were strangers in a new territory. We reached a pueblo, left the horses, and set off for the high ground with a lot of confidence, just us and the mule. The result was, once we started up the very steep incline out of the valley head, we got truly lost, and the enormity of the country became awesomely evident the higher we got.

We travelled up beside tilled ground even at this altitude, illustrating the harsh but rewarding livelihoods for those dwelling in these highlands. The tools were primitive, arguing for injury at every turn. The swing of an axe, or dig of a spade threatened even the youngest backs, and sharp hoe-blades thrust in repeated movements within inches of planting fingers. Children were exposed early to the heights, and to the nurturing blessings of a working mother.



digging……

in inhospitable, stony soil……..

while the youngest gets a snack

The high ice we had glimpsed several days ahead seemed to beckon us, but how to get there?

our elusive goal

there seemed no clear route, and the icy vista vanished as we got closer, and the question was which valley had the team chosen? After the trail became totally indeterminate, I began to worry. We could go for days up here without seeing anyone. A couple thousand feet down below us, we could make out a tiny dwelling, though it was not clear it was inhabited. But it at least implied shelter for the night, and my companions were much happier riding down than walking up. There was no track, but walls to corral cows and sheep. The numbers of times the mule fell, I had to re-lash the rucksacks again, and we knocked down walls (with minimal rebuilding Im afraid). This led to an increasingly mutinous attitude among the soldiers/police, and the clouds began to come down around us. Finally after several miserable and grouchy hours of grim descent, as the sun was setting, we arrived at the little building, which was nothing but a shepherd's hut. We had a stream, some water, shelter, but little else.

finding our way down

outside the hut

I thought the others might even scream, they were so disappointed. I was concerned they might simply go off and leave me, but I needn't have worried. They were far less able to find their way in this wild country than I. We all sort of began to depend on each other. Rifle butts made short work of the primitive lock on the door, and in we went. At least now we had cover.

A mug, a spoon and some potatoes in a sack on the floor meant dinner was on its way. While they labored to get a fire going, I made the most of the vanishing light to explore any possible exit for tomorrow. There was no track of any kind leading down, but it seemed unthinkable to go back up. I was sure there had to be some kind of route for shepherds and animals, but no, only upward. So I raced up it for a way, to see if it went onto the ridge, but darkness forced me back. I used my primus to cook up some hot drink for all of us. It took three hours before their feeble fire cooked the potatoes, and only because I kept adding fuel and fanning the flames while they sat in cocooned misery. The more I thought about where we had now ended up, I felt all the more sure we had come down onto the wrong side of the ridge. The rudimentary map drawings had nowhere near enough detail to determine which

way was the right one. But one thing was certain. Seven kiwis and twenty six mules had not passed this way. So we slept.

A fine dewy morning light woke us all up, and the remains of the fire was rekindled enough to brew up coffee. I knew there was no question of us starving. The police had plenty of ammo, and there were cattle in some of the enclosures further down. At one point we saw a tawny mountain lion in the rocks ahead, but several shots yielded nothing except the scream of ricochets. But they needed a lot of persuading to head up rather than down, but I succeeded, and as the path steepened, it became extremely difficult to get the mule up rocky outcrops, and through narrow stream ravines. Finally the load slipped off yet again in a particularly hairy spot, and we nearly lost the mule. One of the cops ran for cover the moment he saw the load starting to slide round underneath the mule's feet, and it started to kick. The other cop, a much taller and braver guy who I had grown to like, tried to hold the load and calm the mule, but they were both in danger of going over the edge. I had to jump up and grab the mules neck, and with the same move I'd learned in combat training, more by instinct and anger, one good leg sweep, floored the bloody mule. There we lay panting, the cop, the mule and I, in a heap, me and the cop on top of the mule, the mule on top of the *carga,* and the other cop watching warily. There was only one thing to do, get to our feet, apologize to the mule for the wretched treatment it was getting, and lash it all on again. But in a few yards, it was off again. So I did something I had been dreading. I took off the entire load, repacked it with most of the load in my own sack. This gave a manageable weight for the mule's load, and with the help of a sheepskin over the hard frame to provide more friction, only one minor adjustment was needed for the rest of the day. One of the cops motioned that maybe I would like to carry the mule as well as my now horribly overloaded pack.

We climbed and climbed, following the track upwards to ridge. At last, way over from the valley we had come down into yesterday, we saw the beginning of the snowy Pumasillo range. Another day or so should get us there. But that was not on the cop's agenda. They were only for going straight back to Pucyura as fast as possible. They made all sorts of excuses, including the fact they only had two days assignment with me, which made sense, but it wasn't my fault we were lost, and I knew they had orders to get me safely to the gringo's base camp. Furthermore, they had no idea in which direction Pucyura lay, since we were far removed from the point at which we had breasted the adjoining ridge two days before. Actually I was incomparably grateful for their company. To have been alone out here with just my mule would have been difficult for several reasons. Moreover they had to return the mule once I had finished with it. So I headed off towards the snow along the ridge. I knew I had their blankets, so after a bit of muttering, they followed. We probably went for about five miles until we saw a deep cut, and a small hut, this time with smoke coming from the roof. Whoops of joy ensued, *`casa, hombre'...* and a sense of huge relief. Barking dogs aroused the farmer, and the promise of food, warmth and company down to the next pueblito (Racachaca) gave us just the boost we needed. And one of the most unforgettable experiences of my life.

the two policemen outside our much appreciated B&B

Amazingly, this kind mountain farmer and his family had a small battery radio, attached to a wire aerial on a pole, way up here totally alone in the Andean heights. The nearest habitation was about a day away, down below in the valley. I thought we were probably at between 3 and 4,000 meters. A small antenna poked up from the roof connecting the radio to the pole, and the tall cop and I sat on a rock and drank a mug of tea while a stream of scratchy spanish came from the radio in his hand. For the record, this was Thursday, June 6th, according to my log. Suddenly the cop leapt to his feet with a loud `Ah'. He looked bitterly serious and concerned. I smiled reassuringly, but he stammered to communicate with this crazy gringo who didnt speak his language. `Kennedy, Kennedy *muerto... bang bang'* he shouted. Although he was almost in tears, I was sure he was reliving an account of JFK's death, but then I heard it myself, on Radio Lima, Robert F Kennedy assassinated. Overcome with this, and his obvious and very touching distress, I was simply stunned. It seemed utterly incomprehensible that I should hear of this in such a remote spot almost immediately after it happened. It reminded me of another grievously bitter memory five years earlier, when the future Governor of Ohio, Dick Celeste, then a young diplomat in India, woke me in the guest room of his residence in New Delhi, dropped a copy of the newspaper on my bed with tears in his eyes, and said he was sorry he had to go quickly to the American Embassy because the US President (John F Kennedy) had just been shot.

The farmer and his wife insisted on moving out of their warmest rugs and sheepskins, and letting me sleep on them, despite my protests. Throughout various wanderings across all the continents, I have been lucky enough to confirm these spontaneous acts of immense kindness to strangers as an almost

universal norm. I slept very well, partly from relief, and awoke to see our host the señora peeling spuds. I note in my log that all we've had to eat in the last three days is spuds, pork and tea, but gratefully. I had tongue-burn from something, but watched as the farmer expertly lashed the load onto the mule much higher than we had before, and using the under-projections of the frame to winch the load tight. His eleven year old son guided us through the tiered potato patches to a path leading through high crags to a point where we could see down to the original Pocyura path we had missed before, and the steep slope leading to the pueblo in the valley, which would lead hopefully to base camp. If only I had a glider. But I was immensely grateful to my young guide.

finally headed in the right path

So I pushed hard on down to the junction with the Pocyura track, sure that we would have a confrontation with the cops upon reaching it, so I stayed well ahead with the mule. We got to the pueblito where we established the gringos had been through, and what direction they had taken. However, the confrontation occurred as expected. No way the cops were going on any further. But the tall one generously conceded to helping with the mule for *una hora mas...* and when his companion enquired as to whether he would be back within the hour, repeated *depende, depende...*

However, after two hours out from the pueblo, in a large basin ending in a steep climb to a higher mountain valley beyond, where I was sure, because of assurances from locals in the pueblo, the base camp must be, even he refused to go further. I had learned to trust him, and made him promise to sit tight with the mule and all my gear while I scouted on up over the col and into the high moraine. I think I was feeling the three days lack of a good meal, something sweet, and the company of people I could talk with easily, and I toiled up that slope even with no load, with some difficulty, realizing he could have

whisked off with all my gear. But there was an obvious mule track, and I should surely see the others shortly. Moving fast now, reaching the crest, I looked into a rough rocky basin with a glacier stream, and further back, what looked like another higher hanging valley. Breathing like an asthmatic, I broke in to a sort of guide's trot, and went on up, and made the upper edge of the cwm. Suddenly, there ahead of me I caught the color of the red and yellow tents. God, what a feeling... and running and shouting, I arrived.

first sight of Base Camp

Nobody came out, silence. It was eerily empty. There was however food, a primitive chapel and a tent city. I grabbed a handful of biscuits, and some barley sugar and raced off back down to my faithful, and much appreciated companion. I found him cold, but immensely loyal, having waited two and a half hours. I decided to carry all of my stuff up myself, and let him take the mule with him, but by chance we saw a group of locals (quechuans) further down the valley who agreed for 30 soles to carry it all up to the camp. It was almost dark, so I unfolded my orange bivvy tarp , pitched it, and crawled happily into the sack. It had already taken me five precious days from Santa Maria, but I was now in another quandary, stay in base camp and wait for them all to return, or probe out into the surrounding country and try to find them so as not to waste another week. For some reason, respecting established property

ownership, I didn't climb into one of the many existing pitched tents, but set up my trusty little flysheet that had served me so well through many nights out, but never before at this height.

Upon rising the next morning, I found fresh snow on my bivvy, heavy cloud, and little promise of much progress.

my first bivvy

I headed up to the highest ground I could find still in sight of the tents, yodelled several times to accompanying silence, and returned to prepare for a lie-up day. My yodelling while driving friends and family crazy, and spraying those standing too closely in most unhygenic ways, has proved very useful in the mountains, and was to stand me in good stead here. It stirred my blood, and despite the whiteout, I packed everything I thought I might need for three days, left a note, and took off for high ground. My feet were still blistered from earlier mule-wrestling, and I found myself in tussocky turf hummocks in between vertical rocky walls. It took me five hours to get to the ridge, and I really thought I might break a leg in those boggy mounds. But I got to a new high tiny valley with what looked like a track. I searched in vain for vibram marks, and saw none. By now it had begun to rain. A large, fast stream flowed below me, with the unmistakeable cement-grey color of moraine water. I pressed on upwards, to find some yodelling spot that might promise a wide range for reception. The rain was stronger now and I climbed up into a large mossy basin with a moraine lake... a good place to camp. After five cups of good latin coffee, I settled down for sleep under my all-purpose bivvy, pitched up against a rock, and slept fitfully with occasional visits from possum-like animals looking for food.

a second bivouac alone

Sunday the 9th of June was again wet, cold and cloud covered, but the mist blew aside occasionally to reveal glacier ice at the head of my valley, and immediately above me a high pass. It stopped snowing as I cooked up some porridge on the stove, got out of the bivvy, and examined my visible options. Yodelling had proved the team wasn't in this valley, or at least within blasting range on the glacier, and I'm a fair to passing tracker, and there was no trace of human movement on the route up the river. So it seemed most profitable to head up to the pass, and beam a yodel down into the next valley. If that didnt work, I could head back to base, and work the other side valleys.

So leaving everything, I labored up through snow and the dreaded tussocks to the col. It looked like it would take me about 20 minutes, but the Andean principle was upheld... multiply by five.. and after more than an hour, I reached the ridge. Things were surprisingly quiet, and I could hear the river below in the foot of the next valley, several hundred feet below. I almost turned back as the mist swirled thicker than ever, and I had no gear at all with me, no spare clothing, or emergency stuff.

I gathered my breath and yodelled. Nothing. So I did it one more time, and got an answering shout! I couldn't believe it, thought I might be hallucinating, so this time shouted, and back came a mirrored answering shout. Unmistakeable! Great! After a swift intrapersonal debate on safety, which I won, I plunged down into the mist like a banshee, falling, sliding, rolling down gulleys, slipping and slithering, stopping every now and then for a reassuring shout, until I reached the valley bed. Still I could see little through the mist, but finally made out a figure... `John Lawrence' shouted Ken, and these Kiwis came running through the snow in SHORTS! God was I glad to see them! I must have been a rather crazy sight... and I'm sure they were wondering who this crazy Brit was arriving so late, and in such disarray.

I had the presence of mind to photo these magnificent guys, at least ten foot tall, at that actual moment… and have never been gladder to see anyone in my life!!

Paul Green Bob McKerrow Ken McNatty

2. Start Serious Climbing

They immediately put on a brew, right there, and we all had some cabin bread and jam, and they told me they were on their way back to base , having climbed the Unnamed Peak and Cupola, with a third still remaining. How I wish I had got there earlier. Still, the main part of the climb, Torayoc, and the redoubtable Pumasillo still remain. These amazing Kiwis insisted on climbing back up and over my pass to pick up my stuff, and head down the valley back to Base. These guys are *tough.* I couldnt keep up

even though I'm sure I was carrying less than them. It began to snow, then rain, and when we got to base, I handed over the mail I had brought, and settled into a dry bag and the first night together, only to get up with the dry heaves , perhaps from an overdose of spent adrenalin and altitude.

A third of my time gone, and nothing ascended yet. Heard the snow on the tent and realized that would hold us up further due to slow going and avalanche danger. Temperature was holding at just below freezing, pretty wet snow at around 15000', exactly like mild English winter conditions. The dawn got us all up at 0630, and I found to my dismay that everyone got up and ate meals at a common spot, rather than cook separately on elbows in the tent as I was used to, but this was obviously more economical. My lazy side had to be kicked off, and I demurred with rather bad grace.

andean congress

Heavy mist blanketed our little community, and we stayed in the bell tent swapping tall tales most of the day. At some point after nightfall, someone opened the tent flap, shouted, and we all jumped up and

out, and froze at the sight. In the Wagnerian moonlight, tier upon tier of rock and ice stood up into the vague cloud cover around Torayoc.

cloud miraculously clearing to display the Vilcambamba Range

This was the first time I had seen the ampitheatrics of our base, and was astounded as bit by bit the peaks were shyly revealed, Nevado Blanco, the incredibly beautiful turrets of Mellizos, and last of all Mitre. Tomorrow, if it's fine, we head up behind base to look at the ridge leading to Torayoc.

But we woke to damned swirling mist and snow again! Shortness of breath was endemic, and our medic Mac said that this is a hazard associated with the unusual climate contrast, climbing to high altitude so close to the equator. When will this stop, and we can start climbing? We split into our groups. I naturally gravitated to one of the youngest, and most thoughtful of the group, Bob McKerrow, whom I didn't know, but who had a sinewy and intellectual strength that I trusted. I knew he was a champion athlete, and had trained extensively for this expedition. I noted at the time that our initial climb was a `shakedown cruise… but he's strong, and I hope his head matches his shoulders'. I was to find out that it did indeed, and he was to become not only a well known, world class explorer in both antarctic and arctic regions, but respected head of the NZ Outward Bound School, and a leader in the Red Cross in several world regions.

I have sometimes thought that when a crumb falls off your lips, crashing soundlessly to the floor, that's how mountain climbers vanish from this world…with little fanfare, but a desire to pick them up and put them more appropriately where they belong..we may be insignificant in every psychological space except our own…but there are exceptions, and Bob is indeed one.

my good luck was to get to know Bob

The morning sun shines like a big red rubber balloon. We clean up our gear, and set off under the glacier snout. A rough icefall-strewn face from Nevado Blanco opposes us with a very hairy start. We head up under to establish a safe and well-supplied base for tomorrow.

My log says `start at 0430, summit at 1355, back at 2000, a long day'. But details followed. Bob and I clomped up the moraine in the dark, until it became essential to rope up and cinch our crampons as the summits of Mellizos and Torayoc were turning pink across the valley. We pulled out our slings and karabiners and pegs so carefully necklaced through airports under overcharge limits on baggage, rigged up, and began the routine rhythmic, repetitive roped-together slowdance that all high mountain climbers know.

warming up

getting higher

We didn't say much… not much needed saying. We followed the other team (Allan & Dick) towards the dreaded first section, a rock and ice traverse under those poised blocks at the foot of the icefall. These house-size chunks crash and grumble down the valley in symphonic avalanches that resonate regularly around the cirque. But enough of context… we had to attend to the business of ice climbing.

An extremely awkward series of crampon moves on sloping rock covered in powder snow led to the `belly' traverse'. This, a real fight with rucsac and N wall hammer on one's back, necessitated a couple of swimming strokes flat on the stomach until a bulge could be gained for the hands to swing on, and up across to safer ground. More hairy, unbelayed rock moves and snow terraces until the foot of a near-vertical 100' ice pitch which Allen led. This I found quite easy leading our rope but in Allen's steps., and we stopped for a munch at the top. Always those flutings above us, hanging there like damoclean chandeliers. Across from us, Mellizos' North Face stood as a standard challenge we were soon to face.

Mellizoz beckons in the background

Now on new ground, I took the lead, and found out what all the fuss was about. South facing snow, knee deep, and very steep. How the stuff stayed there I'll never know. It was peverse, dangerous conditions, sometimes a double crust to add to the uncertainty and threaten to break your rhythm on every step.

Anyway, it scared me a lot, and I thought that in any other range than the Andes with its major temperature differentials, we would have avalanched more than one of those wet snow slopes. I spent some twenty minutes negotiating a lip of overhanging snow over a crevasse. I thought it would be ice, a peg, a sling, a step up, and the whole thing would be over. But it was all rotten snow, and just had to be hacked away. This gained us a large névé under the spectacular ice gulleys of the summit ridge. Now the very last thing I wanted to do was to go straight up one of those fluted gulleys this time of day. Every rational diagnosis in my brain said `no!', but the others were sure it would go, and there was really no alternative, so I stood back, and watched the other rope start up that 700' feet straight up in the soft

snow. I was learning Andean ascent. Following them up that damn couloir meant moving up a little faster than the snow was coming down. At least there was some ice-peg protection on the sides which were scoured by the constant hissing stream . Speed was everything, and our rope took over the lead halfway up, plugging away until finally we reached the ridge with great relief. So far so good, and it was unforgettable to see the short remaining distance to the summit. It is a very inaccessible little peak, no easy way up, and certainly it was on my mind that we still had to get down, via one or other of those horrible flutings. The few hundred feet along the soft snow knife edge led to the final summit tower. Bob led, with several muttered curses about how hairy it all was.. and there was barely room for us both as I joined him on the final summit cornice.

high on the ridge

As always, the view was a stunning reminder of our context, though the weather was changing. We looked about 3000' straight down beneath our feet to the glacier at the bottom of the East face. This was a sub-peak of the Nevado Blanco group, and we were only a short distance (of execrable mushroom bulges) and a couple hundred feet below the top of Nevado Blanco . We moved back to a safe belay ledge cut out below the ridge and let the others come up past us to summit.

We didn't stay there long.. agreeing that an attempt up to Nevado Blanco was inadvisable given the snow conditions, and as we were in and out of cloud, and awareness of the dangerous descent was weighing heavily on all of us. The wind snapped at our anaraks as we front-pointed backwards down the summit ridge.

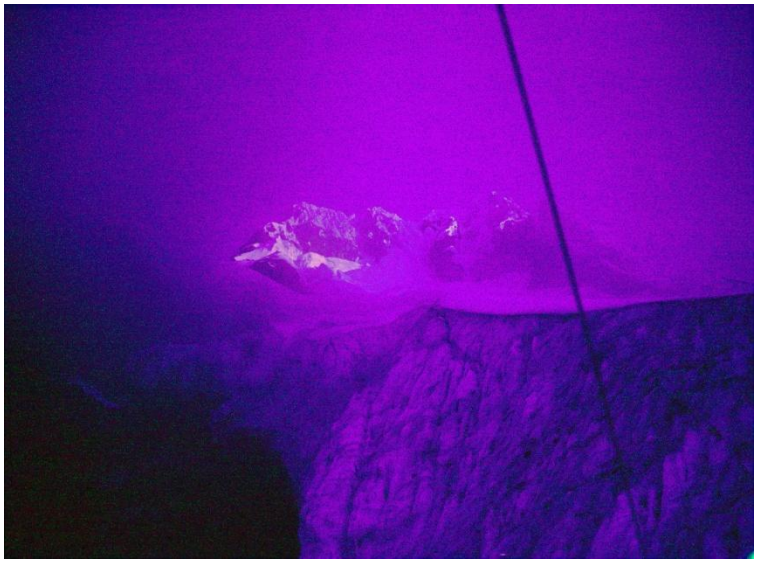
The gulley was better in reverse than we thought. I came down last, and we made it all in good fettle and good time. We rapped down the ice pitch from aluminium mooring pegs, one of which we took out for the last man down (Allen) who we protected (?) with some runners in the ice. By this time it was dark, so headlights were turned on. Climbing down the belly traverse was worse than we remembered , but we were finally back at tents and brewing up dinner feeling good that we had made it, if slowly. That night, avalanches could be heard off Mellizos, and we decided on a base day tomorrow. Besides Bob spoke worryingly of a pain in his chest as we moved between camps .

16,000' kicks in

Idleness however didn't feel right, so we worked on moving another camp (II) as a base up under Mellizos, well out from the face away from avalanche danger. Several hours of hard lugging loads, and Bob managed one load, but again complained of a chest pain, so we left him at the high camp when we went back down for a second haul. The flithy, slippery moraine ice on the way up seemed much more difficult this time, and we stopped often, feeling the altitude (estimated around 16,000').Just before we left the moraine and got onto the snow, as we sat panting quietly, four boulders the size of armchairs rolled and sidled down into the glacier gut right beside us. Allen, a panel-beater by trade, and as formidable a kiwi climber as any who ever wore boots, turned a sore neck slowly, giving the action the benefit of a cynical eye, swore softly, and hoisted his pack back up again.

When we got up to Bob, with whom I was sharing the one of the Camp II tents, I was concerned that his chest was still significantly bothering him. I could hear no răles, and there seemed no fever or infection that we could detect. Finally I persuaded him to prod his chest himself in various places, and located the center of the problem at the sternum, thus likely bone or muscular. We were all relieved when he grinned and recalled as how he had cracked his sternum playing football. As an all-round champion athlete, the rugby bug had not passed him by. We were days from even the nearest Qechuan village, and weeks from any medical care. Moreover, as I remember, we had no kind of radio or other contact outside, or even inside our base camp. This was the faith we had in each other, and the risks we quite voluntarily enjoyed taking.

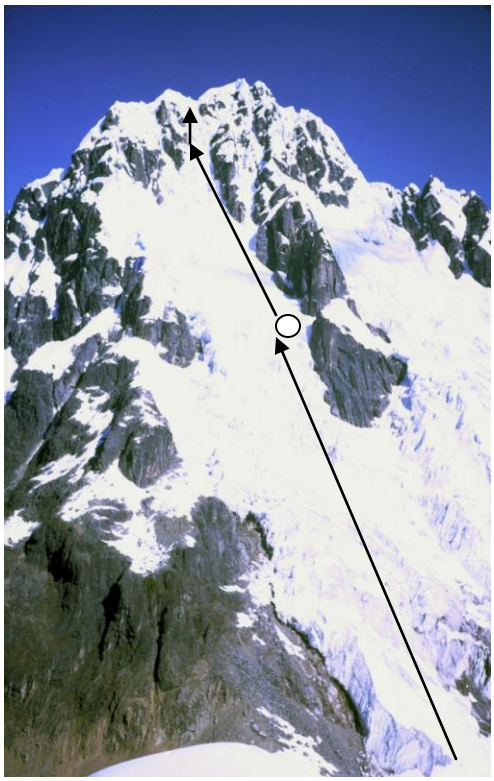
3. New Ascent of Mellizos by its North Face



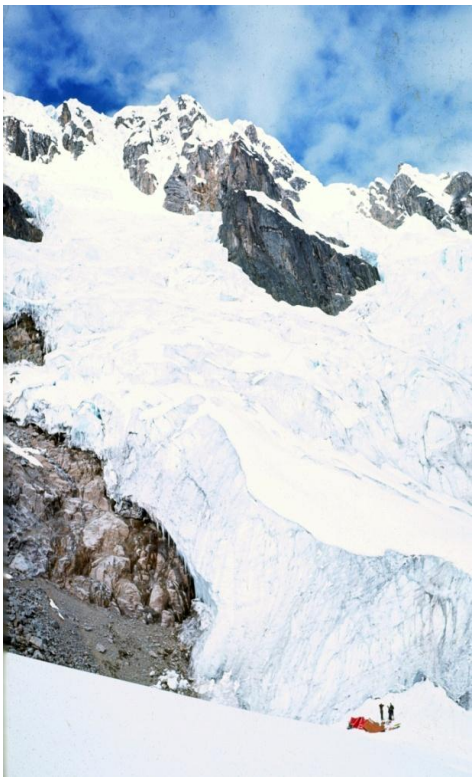
last light under Mellizos

Wake-up was leisurely the next morning, and breakfast somewhat protracted. We had our eyes set on the North Face of Mellizos towering directly above us, and through blowing mist, we started up to diagnose what had looked from below like a safe ledge for Camp III. We cramponed steeply through huge crevasses on much better snow. Our rhythm was established, and we were climbing well together, although the whirling, sporadic mist made route finding difficult. When we got to where we thought the ledge was we had seen from Camp II, it was just the lip of another enormous crevasse, offering some protection form avalanche, but not much room for tents. We pressed on, and found a sizeable ledge, and marked it so we could find it again with loads the next day. Camp II looked great down at the foot of the face, and we yodelled to the others. It took us only 1 1/2 hours to get back down. Tomorrow we would carry loads up to Camp III and go for the summit the next day given decent weather.

We looked up in the twilight to see what looked like the best route, around 3500' to the top from this north side. The mountain had already been climbed from the east by Americans on 29 July 1956. Since the Vilcabamba to our knowledge had never been surveyed, the heights of all the peaks were an approximation, but we thought ourselves to be in the six thousand meter area. The North Ridge looked like all these Andean ridges, tottery and time-consuming, with little protection, like a fruit cake with creamy toppings. More practical, and quicker if somewhat unstable on the north-facing side of this beautiful mountain, was to pick the cleanest-looking couloir going straight up onto the North ridge close to the summit. The devil or the deep blue sea. The shorter the couloir, the more climbing remained on that candyfloss ridge. And at the top of the couloirs are those magnificent cornices, curled like ornamental awnings, menacingly out over the face. We could watch, in the afternoon sun, the gulleys erode visibly, plunging selective chunks of rock and ice down the face. The only answer was to move in the coldest parts of the day. After a hard frost, the face would take front pointing and fast progress seemed possible.



the direct route we took; Circle marks Camp III



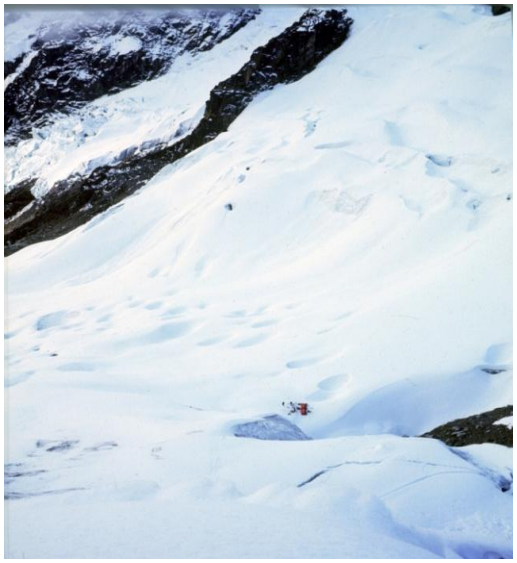
Camp II at the foot of the face

Bob seemed OK with his chest, was climbing strongly, and besides very sore lips, I felt fine. We had a good chance to get our wind carrying loads up to Camp III at over 17,000'. We estimated the summit to be another 2000'+, so we would be carrying tents, personal gear and 4 days food, plus a couple ropes and all the climbing gear. We would be roped all the way of course, and one ice pitch (where I had left a sling and peg) would probably require sack hauling. We gratefully accepted the backup assistance from Dick and Allen who we knew were anxious to do their own climb on Nevado Blanco, but who generously agreed to haul loads with us up to Camp III. These kiwis are something special. So glad I was able to join them. Plus the kiwis had come up with a new kind of ice screw since import regulations made european gear harder to come by. It was an ordinary standard 8 inch coach bolt with a chainlink welded onto its head, and the pitch of the thread lathed out more deeply to give extra bite in the ice. Though they were sometimes hard to start, I found them better than any other ice screw I had used, from quite wide array of British and European climbing equipment.

My next log entry says `We are camped safely, ensconced under a huge ice cliff on the N face of Mellizos.. primus going well, snow melting in the pot, and Bob getting into his pit… we've had an eventful few hours'…

All four of us started out rather late morning (1015 hrs) with the usual gruesomely heavy loads, with the hot sun and now wet snow making going very difficult. Bob and I were well ahead, though both carrying tents, and got up to the difficult ice pitch, where we stopped and had some `ki', ginger biscuits, chocolate and cheese, wondering why the others didn't appear. Finally we decided to push on with the

ice pitch, leaving the pegs in for the others. It was very difficult with packs on. Yesterday's peg had melted out, and the ice was flaky. Fixed ropes and pegs were of little use in these sun-drenched mountains, and traditional ice screws went floppy in an hour. Coach bolts were the only answer. I was halfway up when Dick's head showed up below us, and he emerged on his own, saying Allan was `crook' and he'd have to go back. I came back down from another ice screw to where I could see down to Allan collapsed in the snow. We made our way down to him, and he was in bad shape, half-sobbing for breath, and clearly there was no alternative but to get him down quickly. We had oxygen at base camp, but I didn’t think he needed it, he was likely to recover quickly after descending with appropriate rest, food, and drink, although he complained of shortness of breath and leg cramps. The sun and the heavy packs and wet snow were too much for any of us, and Allan had had a bout of dysentery already. Although we offered to accompany both of them back down, he insisted that only Dick need come with him. So we kicked out a ledge, opened packs and reconstituted loads. We worked out a plan whereby Bob and I would go on up with as much as we could carry to Camp III, and we'd leave the rest of the gear attached to the icewall peg, and Dick would either bring it up to Camp III tomorrow, or if we could manage without it, we'd go ahead and climb the next day. We worked out yodelling signals, and the face was steep enough so almost all of it could be seen from a short distance back from Camp II.



looking down from the face on Camp II

I took us five hours to complete the load carry up to Camp III, and it was the hardest day yet. We both moved very slowly. The strap broke on Bob's crash hat and it flipped down into a deep slot. We let it go, to our cost. We felt we had enough food, shelter and equipment for at least a recce of the upper part of the face, if not to go all the way without any extra stuff or help. Camp III was in a safe spot, a wide ice ledge, separated from the face by a schrund, and with plenty of toom for the tent. However, ee encircled our tents with a rope strung between our ices axes as protection against a sleepy nocturnal stumble that could convert a mere necessity into a fatal slip down thousands of feet to Camp II. We went to sleep with the sun and set our alarm for 0400 hours, determined to get onto that ice tomorrow long before the sun hit it.

Sunset at Camp III Mellizos

We almost didn't hear the alarm, muffled under duvets and sleeping bags. Bob had heated up the milk the night before and we hauled out the thermos , poured it on the weetbix, and we heated up some hot lemon. We should have left by 0500, but it was very cold and we thawed our boots over the primus for half an hour. A nippy wind was blowing down the face, though the visibility was perfectly clear, and we finally got roped up and off by 0600.

We skirted through steep crevasses that guarded our camp, and hesitated a while deciding which of the couloirs to aim for. We picked the one that let straight up out of sight into the ice towers and cornices of the North Ridge. We moved together for about 500', until the slope steepened to where we would lead through for the rest of the way. As we approached the bottom of the gulley, we found we had to cross the schrund between ice and the rock walls of the gulley, but there seemed no satisfactory start beyond that. As we got higher, the rock walls obstructed us, and the couloir went blind. A short pitch up the wall yielded sight of a much larger chute going up the left side of a massive rock rib, and branching at the top into three options, the middle one of which gained the ridge close to where we had seen the summit from the other side.

The traverse into this big couloir proved extremely hairy, over very shaky ice, with fifteen hundred feet of face yawning below. By now I had learned, Bob's muttered curses were, like David Witham's low whistling with me on some of Australia' s and New Zealand's hardest rock and ice climbs, a sign of profound, if profane respect for our overall situation on the mountain. I was encouraged by my faith in the rock pegs I had brought with me clinking round my neck through all the airports, because I knew they would hold as either runners or belay/rappel anchors. The last crawl under a bulge into a small

schrund-cup and up to where we hoped to find the start of the couloir revealed a frantic vertical wall of rotten ice for about 50'. It was on Bob's lead, and he did it muttering all the way, thoughtfully leaving in two ice screws for me. I followed and saw why he had had so much trouble, but getting over that step made all the difference.

Looking down ……. and up the couloir with Bob in the lead

Once we gained the couloir proper, the good hard snow and occasional ice and rock rib meant much faster (and better protected) ascent. We moved up in long takeover leads, 120' at a time, with runners as we felt like it, but knowing speed was safety, we mostly just climbed. At the top, the angle eased as we rounded a rock corner, and the couloir branched again. Taking the most direct line up, another 3 pitches and gingerly through the cornice, we were on the ridge, not much more than half a ropes length to the prize. We had climbed the North Face clear to the summit. It was hard to believe our luck.. we looked straight down the face to Camp II amost 4000' below. We thought we could also make out the other team's brightly colored tents on Torayoc, since there was noone else remotely close in the entire Vilcabamba Range, we probably were correct. My yodel raised a faint COEEE from Camp II, much better than a bloody radio!

Bob breaking the summit ridge in his wool cap…..arrow points to Camp II

What was really staggering was to look down the other approaches. The ridges were horrifying (as we were to learn later). The face dropping down the other side towards Mitre was just an abyss. I had seen pretty awesome scenics on the South face of Annapurna IV, and gazing down the Caroline face of Mt Cook, but there is something quite unique about the architecture of those improbably sculpted Andean spines. Nothing seems reasonable! Here Bob points with a grin down the NE ridge.

The ridge beside our couloir……in more detail

Across to our left was the second peak of Mellizos, about the same height, a rounded bulge surrounded by broken cornices. We debated, not for very long, whether to make the traverse to the second summit, since it was only 1015 hrs, so we had made good time. But a recce of the S facing ridge yielded thigh deep snow, and with the memory of our last climb fresh in our minds, we wiped the idea. Bob took his feet out of his boots and put them into my armpits to relieve frostnip in his toes.

We could see plainly in all directions, all the way to Salcantay on which Fritz Kasparek (of Eigerwand fame) had died falling through a cornice near the summit. I have noted I my log that Cesar Morales Arno, Head of the Peruvian Department of Andeanism, who had welcomed the others on the expedition when they arrived at a reception in LIma, shook Bob's hand and told him to `beware of the cornices'.

The classic Andes *brown* dominated the landscape far below that I had seen so much of from the plane, just the icy pinnacles, ridges showing like teeth across the smiling panorama, quite unlike the monstrous white arc of the Himalayas. When I wrote about this in my tent later, I mused on the vista, and the entropic forces against our venturing into such extreme country. Death, I thought, would be unlikely to come instanteously. My almost 200' fall in an ice gulley in Antarctica had introduced me to the drama of what is now called a `near death experience'. Bouncing precipitously into the air after a slip descending a steep cut on Mt Anakiwa[1], I was saved only by the belay of my climbing partner, the redoubtable senior geologist Graham Hancox. We had practised so many times, and he was an experienced alpine climber, subsequently joining Ed Hillary's expedition to Mt Herschel. But as I flew through the air with a high-def awareness of my predicament, slamming momentarily against the ice, only to ricochet back into spinning aerial helplessness, I knew I had somehow to stop, otherwise I would be the death of both of us. I resolved to grab something next time I hit…Bang… bounce…back out into space…then suddenly an elastic bungy-jumping finale as Graham's belay held. I had completely forgotten about the rope, but as it squeezed around my waist and I came back onto the slope grabbing ice like a scared cockroach, Hank's shout from above brought me back to something like ordinary life. (Thanks again Hank!).

My feelings are that death seldom comes unexpected in the mountains. Some seek it, like Guy Waterman, whom I met once in the Gunks, and whose young son I helped rescue off Alaska's Mt McKInley in 1969[2], but who wished to die in the arms of Mt Lafayette, and did[3]. I venture to think rather it comes in the big mountains after a long fall, several impacts, ending up rolling into a crevasse like Joe Simpson[4], but unlike him, unmarked, unfound, perhaps to wake again briefly, for some lonely, agonizing, shivering moments, and then finally, to fade out. Not to be thought about? Why not?.

It seemed we climbed Mellizos on a particularly cold day, which was very fortunate. I noted later that others said the creek at Base Camp was dry, because the frost clamped down higher up during that

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[1] Lawrence J E S `Antarctic Rock' *NZ Alpine Journal* 1967. pp 21-34

[2] `Johnny' Waterman climbed Denali with Brad Snyder and got into trouble above 17'000' on the West Buttress, had to be brought down by sled off the icewall, an episode which engaged myself and others. He subsequently recovered and became one of the youngest ever to summit Denali.

[3] *Outside Magazine* June 2000.

[4] *Touching the Void.* Joe Simpson. 1988

week. Leaving the summit was easy. We roped up and started our descent around 1200. My usual concerns about the funneling function of our route seemed assuaged by our quick progress down the first parts of the couloir, including the rock steps without having to leave any pegs behind. However, as more branches joined the main artery, we were subjected to a constant stream of tiny avalanches with growing chunk-size. Most distressing was that Bob would increasingly lean into the wall with gloved hands over his head to compensate for his lost crash-hat, whereas I stood up and out so I could have a chance to dodge the incomings. They loomed at disastrous speed, and it was clear that the increasing whirring sound spelled nothing but trouble. When Bob was almost buried in a mini-cascade as he clung to the ice, we decided that we had to get out of the gulley. As luck would have it, there was a safe ledge under an overhang in the rock rib running down our flank, and we sought immediate refuge. We had biscuits and cheese, and drank from the water drip from the roof, celebrating our salvation.

our salvation …. Bob's facial acknowledgement of a merciful rock overhang on the west side of the gulley

The hiss was changing now to a thunk and crash, as big stuff began to clean out our gully. The vertical sastrugi are so steep in the flutings that the sun acts like a sort of razor. When the ice blocks flew by, we would stop munching, and look at each other, and Bob would begin to mutter. We could see our red tiny tents clearly between our feet as we sat, in a kind of mockery. I thought it reminded me of being on a ship unable to make port, moored in the roads outside when you have a date and you can see the lights onshore and you wonder what she's doing.

We sat on the ledge for hours, listening to the mountain shivering, watching the detritus rolling out down the face below. At some point a humming bird flew close on the face beside us, beak into tiny flowers, in a brilliant display of miniscule aerobatics, then gone in a flash as if it was never there. If only

we had had those wings. We began timing the space between the chunks of ice. As the sun recedes from the face, you can almost hear the ice re-gelling, as the sound volume gets turned down. I was prepared to spend the night on the ledge if necessary… we had good gear and were in good shape. But after counting two or three 3-minute silences, and no big stuff for an hour, we decided to chance it. We descended as fast as we dared, on belay, ensuring our belay stances were always out of the direct fall line. I don't think either of us have ever moved so fast over ice, and I count it among the more purely lucky episodes in my climbing experience, but despite both of our mutual remonitions as to caution, we simply shot down, only bumped by the odd shot from above. Bob got hit by one sizeable chunk, but no lasting damage. Once over the two big slots at the bottom, we could breathe again, and in less than an hour were grateful to be back at Camp III. Two figures below at Camp II, presumably Dick and Allen were watching our descent. Only when we were finally at the tent did I yodel, and they waved, and retired from their vigil. I'm sure they could see and hear the crap coming down too.

Few feelings can equal those upon safe return from danger. Bob's warm handshake at the tent was immensely welcome. We had been lucky, but we had also been skilful, and had come out alright from a significant effort. We both ate too much. Our over -stressed bodies needed more liquid than we could take, and the result was very heavy stomachs, leading to a more or less sleepless night, and some great midnight photos.

I woke at dawn feeling very crook indeed, and record staggering out of the tent and having a very large and very painful crap which was thoughtfully committed to the crevasse depths behind our little camp. I felt so weak I took one of our gastro pills, and felt almost instantly better. We could intermittently see others ascending the lower part of the face but were not sure who it was. They seemed to take a long time getting up, to us over the ice step, and shouts failed to raise any response. Perhaps they were just collecting the gear we had left there. We relaxed, and Bob read me hilarious excerpts from his log about the mob that had seen them all off from Wellington on board the Rangitani, something about throwing the minister's daughters into the swimming pool, and entering a Fancy Dress competition as Snow's wife and the Seven Wharfies. Apparently they behaved so badly that they were occasionally mistaken for the crew, getting ordered to their quarters by the captain. Another big Kiwi advantage was that at some point on their outward journey, a Kiwi cent worked as a dime in slot machines, gaining a certain mercantile advantage in various schemes. Many other tales emerged to our great mutual amusement, but we were interrupted by shouts from below and Allen's cheery face appearing at the foot of our little nevé, closely followed by Dick. They were relieved to see out tent was still up since they had traveled very light, relying on all our kit to sustain their ascent up the face the next day.

We made it down to Camp II in one hour and a quarter, using the fixed rope they had left on the ice step, including cleaning up and carrying down all the remaining gear. We learned later that our sojourn on the ledge had given them some pause since they had heard our yodel from the summit at 10.30, then nothing… until they saw us scuttle at high speed down the bottom of the couloir. They were relieved, but surprised at the soundlessness of the yodeller who waited until actually at the tent before signalling success!

I recorded a great sense of achievement and pleasure following that climb. Bob had been a terrific mate, climbing expertly in quite extreme conditions on what was a major new route. While very exposed and steep all the way, we had found the technical steps well within our grasp, and since the conditions were fairly good again, our support team , Allen and Dick, decided to have a go at it.

We basked in the kaleidoscopic show above as mist acted like a slowed film shutter across the face. Turrets and ridges appeared and disappeared randomly as the marvelous light shifted from place to place. Sometimes we could see the tiny figures like flies on a wall. We watched them until they were out of sight in the gut of the couloir. We knew they would make it, and they did. We suddenly heard a `cooee', and they were there in our sights, but too far away to communicate verbally. I was disturbed by the icecliffs that marked the bottom of the route especially at that time in the afternoon, knowing what they must have already gone through. Yet they wasted no time, even abseiling the last bit free (out from the face) . We watched the whole thing, and what a pity Mac wasn't there with his telefoto lens. Allen described the final rappel as the hairiest part. He said Dick went over like a piece of rubbish, then skated out of the way at the bottom, while Allen contemplated the descent, then dropped like a reluctant stone. He said afterwards that he could see nothing but icicles threatening his impalement. So we all shot back down, to base and a blizzard of tales and comparisons of hardest parts of the climb. Amazing double shift on a hard assignment. These guys were showing me more and more how strong and tough they were, and what a team we all were, and I felt very grateful to be able to join them. I've been part of many extended trips into various mountain ranges, and never felt more trusting of judgment and skill of fellow climbers as a group than of these Kiwis. In these situations, one's life depends not only on one's own skill (and a huge handful of luck) but of course on those of others too, and also on the psychological health of the entire climbing `cluster' that makes up any particular `expedition'. The collective judgment is crucial, stemming from a cool, effective `leader' like Ken, and running like a balancing cybernetic behind all decisions.

Whether or not to try a particular route on a particular day in the particular conditions of the moment (icefall, personal stamina, equipment, weather) comes down to judgment. Back home, as a professional climbing instructor for paying `clients', I subscribed to a general rule which held us all to `the standard of the day' which meant that any climb could be bypassed if the instructor didn’t feel exactly right. But when a group comes back all alive and healthy from a major new ascent, aside from the luck factor, survival reflects not only individual, but team support. All worthwhile adventures have `excedrin moments', where disaster is narrowly averted, and we certainly had some of ours, but I felt the organization was quite excellent, and that we were a capable, effective mountain expedition.

We woke to a satisfying view of the Mellizos face from across from base, what a beautiful, impressive face it is, and all the more since we had learned to know it intimately. We had shared, touched it and now basked in the memory of its embrace.

At about 6.0 am two Andean shepherds arrived up with spuds slung across their backs. One was wearing a Tibetan-style hat, and we produced the milk tins they were seeking. One would have sufficed, but Dick apparently owed them one additional tin, so we fessed up. We had a big breakfast, and I had four coffee brews without feeling bloated, lay on my Lilo and dispassionately ate porridge and eggs in the sun, and read a little while catching up on my log. All of a sudden, Mac rolled up from the other party, looking for some baccy. He'd walked around from the North Col in shorts (as usual) and we were glad to see him and get an update. He said they had successfully climbed, and filmed, Torayoc, and he outlined the route for us, with major difficulties confined as he said, to the last 500'. We had now climbed all the peaks that the Everest Foundation required for their grant (Cupola, the High Unnamed, and Torayoc as subsequently recorded)[5], and were thus in new territory.

4. Heading to Pumasillo

It was the next day that found Bob and I high on the shoulder of Torayoc, and eager to share the experience this fine climb I cleaned my teeth tonight in readiness. We had time to reflect. We must be careful, I'm only here by invitation, for a short time, and thus in a way, on probation myself. I must be judged useful or not, by the team, and thus reciprocally by my own assessment of, and interaction with others .

Paul Green, so my log records, has had two falls so far, one slip on a climb before I arrived - slipped off the glacier onto the moraine - and one on Torayoc for 50' over an ice bluff, where he was shaken but unhurt. He's an interesting character, among the strongest and most respected in our group, and has a quiet dignity and bearing that reached me through the Peruvians he had impressed even before I met him. Tall, lean, mature, he struck me as a standout, and the stories I heard were numerous. He did two years of a B. Comm. but finally gave it up. His father owned a trucking business, so Paul drives for a

[5] see Evelio Echevarria `A Survey of Andean Ascents 1961-70' American Alpine Journal Supplement 1973.

living, but tramps for a pastime, with phenomenal feats attributed to him, such as the Coxcomb Ridge on Mt Aspiring, with little gear, and a 50 mile run in one day to get a doctor for a crook friend.

As I record, one of the most memorable in our group is Dick Cowan, whose rough diamond individuality we all respect. He seems an old-soldier type, tough, stubborn, and bears the scars. He seems by all accounts to have continually evolved as a climber since the expedition started, winning through by his integrity and competence. I am continually glad that Bob is my rope-mate. He is easy to get along with, and tolerates my tales and idiosyncracies with great patience. Most importantly, he is smart, tough and reliable. That trumps everything else to an ex-royal marine.

So tomorrow, it is Torayoc or bust. Our holy grail is of course Pumasillo by the North Ridge, and all of this preparation is directed that way. Wandering outside the tent to gaze at the clear stellar panorama of an Andean night, I saw again, and drank inspiration from my favorite constellation. As an obstreperous northerner, the Southern Cross is my darling star, and every time I see it I draw deeply its elixir.

Confidence returns for tomorrow. Looking back to the little tent stuck into the snow slope (the others who crafted this camp must have done a fair bit of digging) the candle inside flicking yellow against the dark flank of this mountain, I feel a moment of deep appreciation for warmth, comfort, good food, trusted company against the icy hostility of our environment. I am lucky with a now trusted young companion climber whose coolly introspective mind complements his raw strength. My log records that we get along well, and `he is strong, fast and determined..a satisfying `second', and a safe leader'.

The capacity to relax in face of great stress (as one can learn for example in hard rock climbing, or any other dangerous endeavor) is useful, and well worth incorporating into one's skill-set . I have that tonight. We get up at 4.00 am tomorrow to start our Torayoc climb. At 3.00 am I rolled over and looked at my watch. Pulled back the tent flap and saw clear moonlit sky, and debated whether to wake Bob. As it turned out I split the difference and waited until 3.30 before cranking myself out of the bag for a routine venture into the cold, and get some fresh snow for the billy and a hot brew. It was very cold, we later learned -10 at base, and the snow pile at the tent door needed a North Wall hammer to loosen it.

Porridge and two brews of cocoa and we were out. Watching the dawn come up over Nevado Blanco was really something, as we followed cut steps up over the hump above our camp. A steep snowplod for the next 500' and I was pulled up short on the rope. I looked back, and Bob's left Simonds crampon had broken. We fixed it together, and continued on. Things got steadily more interesting, and I was reminded of Mac's predictions. We had a sort of super-confidence going after Mellizos, and felt perhaps invincible. So much for that.

Once we reached the crest of the ridge ahead, we realized the considerable challenge before us. We found ourselves on a knife-edged arète leading into a high cwm in the glacier coming up from the North Col. Out of that was a short and crevassy drop to a snow nevé, where we must take a final ridge that led awkwardly up for several hundred feet of sharp ice to rock buttresses surmounted by the pale summit beyond.

low on Torayoc

on the ridge

The main advantage of course was the clear tracks of our pioneers, so we headed along the route until the ice became harder and crampon marks were difficult to discern. Eventually we made our own way, making two minor variations in the original route. I foolishly led up onto the ice arète too soon, leaving us some delicate corniced ridge to traverse until it suddenly seemed to cease in mid air. Below, on both sides, a long drop, but we persevered, and with occasional glances at our base camp down the awesome steep gulleys on the East face, we came to a ledge under the ice cliff which lay above the flutings the others had climbed. At the end of this, we found the first rock peg, complete with karabiner (!) from which they had abseiled down the flutings. Using this as a runner, I traversed out across beautiful sharp granite for about 40'and vertically up a Grade V groove to a ledge where we moved left, belayed on two rickety ice pegs, taking off my crampons since I was sure the summit was just above us, climbed another rather rotten vertical scoop (about Grade IV) to the ridge again, found a sling, two karabiners and a peg marking the others' descent! Wow!

After a considerate shout from Bob as to whether I needed my crampons, to which I responded asininely `NO'…he joined me on belay. One more easy ropes-length scramble over the exposed ridge informed us that the summit was actually 300'away over delicate, fragile ice cornices. Bob had broken crampons, and I had taken mine off.

Bob on the summit

Mac down low on the glacier, unbeknownst to us, was photographing, wondering why it took us so long over those last few feet, belaying so closely! So, we crouched, quite scared honestly, on the summit, for about two minutes then carefully retraced our steps. On the return, I collected all the previous crew's ironmongery, reversing the top rock pitch on a natural runner, and the lower section on a ring peg I had found near the high camp. We avoided what my log records as ` the stupid cornice', and were back at the tent at 12.45 for a total climbing time of six and three quarter hours. It took us less than an hour to pack up our camp, and we were back at base in less than an hour. Phew! At this point I record that our leader Ken says he thinks that our ascents in this region at this altitude (10 peaks, several new, and/or by new routes) are entirely unprecedented. And he pushes our vision and goal, once again, as the unclimbed N Ridge of Pumasiilo. And despite ourselves, we find that Bob and I are asked to be the summit team, backed up by Ken McNatty and Paul Green. How could the mountain deny such a distinguished assault?

The next day (June 22nd) was logged as a well deserved rest day. A rat in a pack at base camp was arrested for due cause (big holes in our woollen gloves), given due process, tried, and found guilty.

facing the accused with the evidence

Paul Green and I were assigned as advance rope to move up the lower glacier and map a hauling route through the approach icefalls, a significant barrier to the base of Pumasillo's north ridge. I liked Paul, knew he was fit and fun to climb with, and we set off with a collective grin.

I have the 23rd recorded as `the hardest day yet'. I didn't feel too good in the morning, flatulent at both ends, after a steaming brew of hot weetbix and tea. We left at dawn before six o'clock, up the moraine for two hours in between the Mitre and N Pumasillo glaciers, then put on overboots and crampons, roped up and headed high on beautiful snow. At first we welcomed the sun, but after a couple hours it became hostile, merciless, as though we were in a great white desert. Every movement, for either of us, became a huge effort, as route finding became more and more difficult, the angle became steeper, crevasses deeper, and snow bridges smaller and more precipitous. Many times we turned around, tried another way, our spirits seemed to dive lower, and the snow bridges got hairier. We zigged close to the eastern side at one point to avoid menacing ice cliffs.

The glacier in its middle steep portion is margined at both sides by dark brown vertical earthy fans incessant salvoes of detritus.

our route up between avalanche tracks

We had to pick our way up through enormous crevasses surrounded by spectacularly tottering ice cliffs. Most unnerving, since loads would have to be lugged up through all of this. In the end, we marked the route with what Paul termed `the Eiffel Tower' poised over a final steep ice pitch that gained a small nevé where we could establish a high camp at the foot of the N ridge.

higher ground at the start of the N ridge

Paul leaves marks at our camp II site on Pumasillo

It had taken us four hours to get up this far with light loads, and we had not left any fixed ropes since swift movement was the only safe way. We marked the spot, and began the long and treacherous route back to our camp.

On the way down I slipped into a crevasse, cramponing my leg slightly through `overtrou', a sure sign of fatigue. I noted on return that I had not felt so exhausted since the start of the expedition, hoping it was not a sign I had shot my bolt. I professed doubts about packing up such a dangerous approach, yet the others were already loading up to get ready for tomorrow, having watched our route up and down. We had what I note was a `fine supper' of macaroni, spaghetti, the ubiquitous spuds, peaches, cream, coffee and fruit cake. Thank god for those twenty six mules that carried all this up to base before I arrived.

Tomorrow, the plan is all eight of us leave with loads to the base of the avalanche gulch leading up towards the dreaded Eiffel Tower, where we can all view the route carefully and make an appraisal. Four will stay, and the decision will then be made as to whether and how to continue towards Ken's goal of all eight finally on top of the mountain. My concerns are not around the capabilities of the team, but around the incredible sun, and its brutal carving into the ice above us.

5. The Long-Anticipated North Ridge of Pumasillo

Monday the 24th found four intrepid humans camped sat our new Camp I safely on a ledge under the difficult section of the northern glacier of Pumasillo. All eight of us had left in early morning with heavy loads, and I had gone up in front, feeling so much better. Amazing how one recovers, from lethargic, sleepy and weak one day, to quasi-invincible the next. Part of it is the normal athlete's familiarity with going through the psychological `wall' of pain/exhaustion to the other side, and part of it is luck in not coming down with something much more serious. We all felt this at various times, but the amazing part of this Kiwi team (as I had found in the Antarctic experience) was their reliable and robust recovery.

The route up the gulch did not look so bad today, even the Eiffel Tower looked smaller from below. Four of us were to stay in our new Camp I, and the other four took off back down to act as support, leaving us to hack out platforms and pitch tents .

I logged that we now have up here sufficient food/equipment for four people. Tomorrow it is planned that Bob and I will sleep high on the nevé above in a camp (Pumasillo Camp II) the four of us will establish at the high point we reached earlier. The next day we will reconnoiter the actual ridge above. We feel confident, and glad that we have a crack, but the snow conditions are pretty awful, and a huge avalanche of the face a little east of us had us ripping nervously at our tent doors to have a look.

Ken's plan is that:

a) tomorrow [25th] the four of us (he, Paul, Bob and I) climb from here (Camp I) up to the high camp (II), then he and Paul go back down to Camp I, where they meet the others who will bring more supplies up from Base to Camp I

b) [26th] Bob and I `recce' the N ridge while Ken and Paul haul to CII, and all four of us sleep at CII, with support below at Camp I

c) [27th assuming success in finding a route on the N ridge, the support team moves up to C II and everyone has a go.

So, my log (25th) starts out `*fUUck!* what a day'…

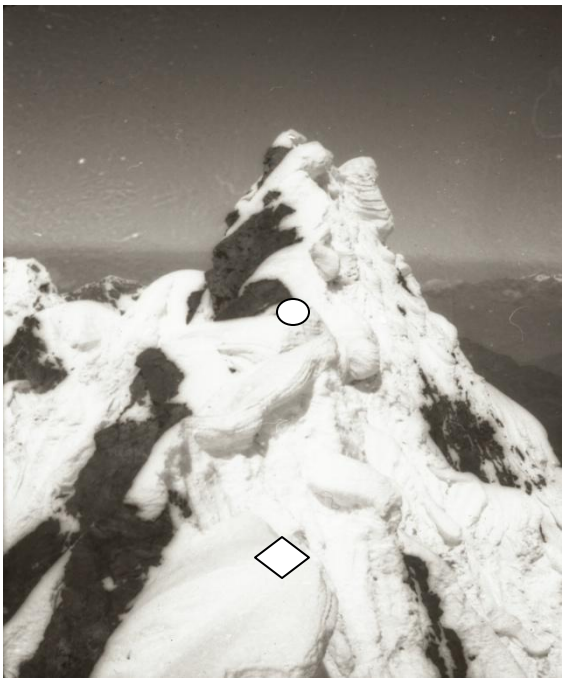
We camped finally at something we thought at around 19,000' on the North Ridge, in blowing snow, as we somehow got the tents pitched, and crawled inside. `This is a wild place' my log admits, and I recorded that we were extremely cold after getting gear sorted out in very rough conditions, cold and wind whistling continuously in our anorak hoods. The others had left their loads at the bottom of the `gulch' and Bob and I had double hauling up under the Eiffel Tower. Execrably soft snow over everything, making climbing, hauling, pitching and digging very difficult. *UGH!*

Above us looms the corner peak, and somewhere above and beyond, the ridge. We are, as always, exposed in every way, weather, altitude, and verticality. The tent bangs and flaps. Not much chance of sleeping, and we are both very restless and stressed. Took 2 disprin with supper, and I took an extra pirophen to assuage a keen headache.

The morning dawned somewhat better. We started out at 0715 on the morning of the 26th into clear visibility but a very sharp wind. We were late because of time taken to thaw out boots, and we left into soft snow with cold feet. I wore windproof overgear, and we were prepared to spend a night out bivouacing, with requisite duvets, down slippers, mitts etc. The snow was awfully soft from the fall the day before. The first challenge was a steep overhanging crevasse which we turned on the left by climbing on rock, quite exposed on the east side. This was followed by 500' of steep ice to the first summit, the Corner Peak, actually two peaks, a left and a right, quite dramatic.

Ahead was a much higher, larger ice peak, split three or four times from the north side by crevasses and ice faces. Really a startling sight. We knew Pumasillo proper lay behind this aggressive hurdle, so we dropped the 500 or so feet of soft south facing snow to the col between the Corner Peak and Pumasiilo Chico (ahead). We started then up the hard icefield across two intimidating slots until we reached an ice shoulder at about 19,600' (estimated). We could now see the corniced summit several hundred feet above, but the ridge was broken by pillars and zawms, like a row of tottery buildings. We slid out onto the east face for a few apocalyptically exposed ropes lengths, and finished by climbing one of the ice flutings 200' to gain the ridge again, and thence to the first summit (Chico)[6].

As we stepped one by one, with the pretense of careful but utterly insecure belays, onto the summit hump, we could see immediately ahead an extraordinary horizontal causeway of crazy ice and rock, like marshmallows on a fork. Bob said it looked as if a machine gun barrel had burst. Something between a mediaeval castle wall seen end-on and a factory chimney in a snowstorm[7].



The diamond marks the site of next photo. The circle is highest point reached.

[6] From here on, my ridge photos were only black and white
[7] This picture of the summit made the cover of Summit Magazine, and the lead article in the 1969 issue

We pressed on over the Chico summit, driven by imagined scent of the prize. We were almost the same altitude as Pumasillo's main peak, and it seemed so close. We descended down through corkscrew cornices, extremely exposed in the increasingly soft snow, up, and across gendarmes of about as much dependability for belays as a wedding cake. We were on severely corniced ice, about as wide as a person's back, within a few hundred feet of the summit now. On the west side, blue shining couloirs dropped straight down beneath our feet 6000' to the moraine. On the east it was equally exposed, but less steep, 60 degree ice steepening into flutings which shot again about 5000' down to the eastern basin. We were riding the tiger.

I made my way along this crazy crumbling cookiewalk until I could see directly down between my boots into an impossible gap. I probably stood for several minutes without saying anything. Bob was muttering anyway, and his toes were freezing. The ridge dropped so steeply for perhaps 70' below me that I couldn't see it all, vertical, very soft snow, perhaps another split, then up to the final gendarmes leading to the summit of Pumasillo. Even if there was any way of protecting descent into the `gap' (our aluminum snow anchors were hopeless in this soft snow) the subsequently delicate traverse across those fragile snow-covered needles would have committed us to one way only, and there was no support team on the other side of the summit. Had there been another group on the traditional (west) route, it might have been worth trying. So I dug an axe in, turned around and invited Bob to have a look.

Reaching me on the crest, his summary was characteristically brief and profane, but entirely in accord with mine. We had a serious task ahead of us just to get back to our and so began our fairly tense and

disappointed retreat. We got back eventually to the Corner Peak camp (II)[8], and started our explanations. I felt entirely sure of our decision, and we knew that Simon Clark's expedition had looked down our ridge from the summit all those years earlier with assurance that the ridge would `never' be climbed. To my knowledge it never has, though we got mighty close.

6. The return

I woke to atrociously sore eyes and blurred vision at Camp II , and realized that when my goggles dropped off yesterday on the ridge, though Bob picked them up from the snow, stupidly I hadn't worn them since. It was extremely cold, and because of our stories of the route's impenetrability, the others had decided to move quickly down to stop the rest of the team dragging up supporting loads. I was under pressure to hurry, but could barely see, and was in considerable pain from what I knew was an onset of blisters on the eyeball, a.k.a. snow-blindness. We were all demoralized and affected by the failure on the ridge, and were feeling both altitude and cold. I became a sad burden on my mates, taking the safe position, unceremoniously middle-roped down from Camp II.

wobbling down under the seracs

We somehow got down the gut safely under the Eiffel Tower, and met the others who were fortunately resting before carrying, and we debriefed them on the climb. Everyone seemed good-natured, and no one was overtly anxious to go up and have another go. My eyes were awful. I bandaged the worst one (left) and Allen kindly put some gantrisin into both. Ken generously wanted me to rest for a while, but I knew they were anxious to get moving on other climbs, and I needed to get off the snow which was agonizingly reflecting the sun onto my cornea. Bob and Paul arrived down from Camp II, and Paul, the good guy that he was, seemed determined to go straight back up to spend the night at the high camp, close it out, and bring all the stuff down past the Eiffel Tower again in the morning. That would make his eighth time through that gauntlet, a truly recognizable and much appreciated feat. Meanwhile, Bob and

[8] There is a picture of our tents at this camp in the NZ Alpine Journal 1969 p xix

Ken locked me in safely as middleman on their rope, and steered me in considerable pain and virtually blind, down to the moraine.

This was my first experience of snowblindness, an excruciating sunburn of the eye surface, with no relief. If your eyes are closed they burn under the eyelids as if over an open flame, and if open, they stream with salty tears, blazed by the snowlight. `Down a little bit, now left, steep for a few feet, now a BIG step over the slot' …the instructions came in a steady monotone. Thank god for good, patient mates… after missing out on Pumasillo, they could have just left me to sort myself out and gone off to catch up on other peaks, but they got me down to the base, where I took some Restoril, and drifted thankfully off to sporadic dreamland.

dealing with it

The 28th passed slowly, and painfully. Rest. Damn eyes, streaming. I couldn't see much, and didn't want to. My nose was blocked, making mouth breathing and a dry throat inevitable. I had no idea how long this might take to heal, or whether infection of some sort might complicate matters. I decided just to leave everything alone, rest, and support my body as it did its job of recovery, as I had so many times before.

with much appreciated help

still, it hurt like hell

The next day seemed an improvement, after getting further back down in altitude, though it was obviously folly for me to attempt to climb anything else in this condition, and I didn't want to hold up the others in any way. My time was coming to a close anyway, and so I decided to head out alone the

next day for the valley below, to spend some time perhaps at Macchu Pichu above the river, which I had always wanted to see but had passed below on the way in.

It was truly a sad moment to say goodbye to all. My log notes `a quiet and touching farewell', but they were ready to go on, and had done so much for me, bringing me into their company, and giving me the chance at the most highly challenging routes, and a fine companion in Bob. I wished I could have gone on to more climbs with him, but it was not to be. We had gotten on famously, and have stayed in touch since. He has become a well known explorer/climber, with subsequent experience in both the Arctic and Antarctic. His highly reputable work since on disaster relief is internationally recognized and a fitting testimony to his strength and courage.

I was in dubious shape for the 6 hour trek down the slippery moraine to the valley, carrying all my gear and some food. My pack seemed very uncomfortable, and my eyes still stung at each blink.

FINALLY, HEADED BACK HOMEWARDS DOWN THE VALLEY

I was more exhausted by the steady climbing regime than I thought, but pressed on alone towards fresh food, beer and transportation that didn't rely solely on my feet and hands. Finally, I came to the first dwellings, and barking dogs drew the attention of the pueblo to the approaching, rather shattered gringo wobbling under his heavy rucsac. Surprisingly my two soldiers were still there, and accompanied me down further to the hacienda where we could purchase a beer and a good meal. The Commandante was also up in this high village, on some strange mission which I never understood, and he was also very welcoming. They supposedly arranged a mule for me to the next, larger pueblo, Paltaybamba, in the morning, and I went to supper wondering if it would materialize. The same newspapers were on the hacienda wall, the same unobtrusive dog picking up something you drop very quietly. The same excellent, and <u>*so*</u> welcome, two helpings of food, and aromatic tea, and corn in the center of the plastic table cloth. The same lackadaisical air around the courtyard, as two men tried to explain to me in quechuan dialect that they were the very mule drivers that had brought the *veintiséis mulas* on the

original expedition entry to this valley. They must get tired of dusty football and cards, but they are so warmly welcoming to strangers like me, and I wish I could repay them in some more meaningful way. Santos, the more sympathetic of the two soldiers, with whom I had shared the Kennedy moment on the little radio several weeks before, was a real gentleman this evening. Sensing my exhaustion and general dishevellment, he got me out an old, flea-bitten mattress, saw me climb into my sleeping bag, and told me to call him during the night if I needed anything. What I really needed was a hot bath and clean clothes, but that was not to be. I slept fitfully, woken often by boisterous drunken sounds from the courtyard.

The first of July dawned dimly, and I realized it was a good job I had come out early. I felt very crook, as the adrenalin had all drained out, and the *mañana* factor began to kick in again. The promised mule did not appear, and I was faced with the prospect of another day loafing at this pueblo (Pocyura) though there was an upside. I truly needed to slow down, and the opportunity was therefore an advantage, but I was restless. Green parakeets screeched around like jets, and I decided to take a wander up to the Inca ruins they had pointed to high above on the hillside. My local guide was very unfit, and I had to support him on the way up and down, since his shoes were not suited at all to the very steep turf and rocky ground. The ruins were amazing, and I marveled at the huge, carefully fitted stones and oddly high steps. Why did such small people build such enormous steps? The site was clearly a tactical one, with a clear, supreme view both up and down the long valley. The intricate organization of dwelling, water course, and flat vs steep ground again demonstrated how successfully these indigenous folks incorporated sustainability principles into their adaptation to such harsh surroundings.

My guide was somewhat less well adapted. His shoes were simply treacherous, and the slope, being an approach to an Incan site, had to be tricky. He made it up OK, with some help from me. Finally, however, on the way down after sliding a few feet painfully over the rocky scarp on his bum, he snatched a branch from a tree, and with the correct word in english - *`grandfather'* - he began half mockingly to lean on the stick as he picked and slipped his way down. After a few more lurches, he said disgustedly *`grand MOTHER'..* and grinned.

Upon return to the pueblo, the promised mule had miraculously appeared, but no *sorgas* to hold my gear onto its back. It looked really as though I would lose the day, until out of the mulga came a most unlikely if utterly most welcome pair, Genevieve, a real estate broker from Paris, mapping Inca ruins, with her escort, appropriately named Rodolfo, a student assistant from the University of Cuzco. I gathered there had been a husband in the picture somewhere, but not in evidence, and she proved a highly entertaining, competent and friendly multilingual travelling companion. She sorted out the *sorgas* problem immediately, and after a convivial lunch, we set off down the valley with bags bound immovably onto the mule's saddle frame with many lengths of tough thin sisal rope produced from inside their own baggage. Another, of many lessons: always carry some of this in mule country. The mule started obediently trotting down the track with not only my bag, but theirs as well, for me at least a previously unattainable feat. This was just a show, to get me thoroughly fooled. I found out also while unpacking later, my hemp waistline, a long held trophy from marine commando climbing days[9], had been surreptitiously transformed into one of the crucial underlying lacings to the wooden frame mount. Fair payment I thought.

[9] this early form of protection predated modern climbing harnesses, and consisted of several feet of thin hemp, wound around the waist about four times, and tied off twice (once halfway) to guard against breaking.

We were accompanied for the first half mile by a laughing cavalier who kept us waiting an extra three quarters of an hour while he constructed some `papers' for me and some for other authorities in our destination Paltaybamba. One page, laboriously tapped out on an ancient typewriter, introduced me as `JHON LARWONCE Alpinista de Pumasillo'. As he struggled to find extra stuff for us to deliver for him, he finally handed us a wrapped parcel, the contents of which none of us ever discovered, but he seemed to know that delivery would be no problem. I eventually caught up with Genevieve and Rodolfo wandering through the next pueblito (Tarqui), had a meal there, and got to the next village (Oyara) in the dark, where we slept in the school house. My first aid kit came in handy for a frenchwoman's bum. Sore from mule riding, she confided that two long blisters in the unmentionables were giving trouble, so it was `doctor' Lawrence humbly to the rescue. All sorts of contortions followed in Rodolfo's corner as the ailment was treated, and my expert contribution stopped short at merely supplying the raw materials.

Walking in the dark that evening, I had cogitated on how I was perhaps unusually aware of the dangers of stepping on a *`fer de lance',* though experiences in south Asia, particularly Iran and Afghanistan, had primed me to the menace of large semi-feral dogs always in peripatetic evidence around any human habitation, with courage enhanced by the night. The most effective strategy, I learned was to have a supply of cricket ball-sized stones handy. During daytime, just the movement of bending down as if to pick them up was enough to back them off. After sundown however, it was necessary to fire off rocky missiles, and the thud and scrape and occasional yelp would suffice.

We only lost our load once, through inefficient lashing, a considerable improvement over my inward journey. It was the same mule, blond colored, with a steady, knowingly docile smile, but after the promising start, I simply could not get her to do what I wanted. We got on much better in the dark, when she was content to follow me. Parenthetically, I noted how much more comfortable I felt with a woman companion (not the mule), especially such an educated, alert Frenchwoman even if she did have blisters on her bum. She was terrific company, as was Rodolfo, and I felt very lucky to have found them.

The Peruvian night high in the Amazon watershed was full of crickets, fireflies, frogs and a huge moon. Most of the journey so far we had been talking nonstop about the Incas and their incredible capacities for survival, their great `lost' city, somewhere deep in the Vilcabamba. Genevieve and her escort were on a serious quest. She struck me as one cool lady, changing for sleep even in these stark conditions, and I caught the flash of a nightgown in a wanton flicker of candlelight before turning away in my smelly bag to sleep, perchance to dream. Coquipata was only six hours further, and I hoped we would pass through Paltaybamba at midday, with less chance of total inebriation at Bauer's bar.

We awoke to the sound of children's voices, since we were camped in their school. They gazed curiously in the doorway at two drowsy gringos, and a young Bolivian student who was already up and shoeing one of the horses. We *desayunoed* from *leche y pan* both provided from US Alliance for Progress stamped sacks in the schoolhouse corridor. It occurred to me ironical that I had already paid for that breakfast with my taxes.

We moved off into the steamy flyblown morning past the waving schoolchildren and their barefoot mothers, grateful for their hospitality as always. Several hours later we rounded the corner into the Paltaybamba *puesto,* a characteristic place indeed. An old Spanish courtyard, long sweeping rooves, and yellow high walls, and the open armory with locked, chained weapons stacked in rows. And again, Señor Bauer! Great vivid handshakes almost dislocating my shoulder, with more jokes about my thin legs, and a warm greeting from the señora, though Fisher was lost and a new pup had his place named *Chocolata,* a little female bundle of ferociousfur. With a combination of my outrageous flattery and

madame's wiles and of course her fluent spanish, we oiled our way into an enormous lunch and a covey of mules all the way to Coquipata. While the others had more sense, I ravenously attacked the food, drinking the fresh orange juice as if from a fountain. I should have remembered that Paltaybamba was a symbol for me of excess of one kind or another, and I suffered horribly for the next six miles, throwing up continuously, and walking crouched in a permanent `S' shape.
On arrival in Coquipata, Genevieve whipped up a local supply of alkaseltzer powder from a local store, but I felt no better. A very delicate looking señorita in charge of the store started my recovery by inquiring gently why I looked so beat up, and learning why, insisted on giving me *mansanilla* and two gruesome looking grey pills. I shied away from the latter initially, partly because of built-in doubts about local apothecaries, and also because I wasn't sure if a cup of tea and two pills would fit inside me tidily. Finally Madame, who after all had been making all the decisions for two days, persuaded me . She later encouraged me, out of civil duty, to take a freezing cold shower at Santa Maria. After the pills, I felt instantly much improved. I wish I had kept one of them for analysis, since if I had rolled over and died in paroxysms, it might have been useful. We slept that night in the army barracks as official guests of the Commandant to the sound of sentries shouting their five minute warnings to each other.

After the shower, my first in almost two months, I rejoiced in partial cleanliness, thanks to Genevieve, though climbing back into more or less the same clothes did little to relieve odorous tensions. Fortunately, bodily naturalness is a cultural norm in these valleys, and the absence of tourists on the local transport (trucks and trains) meant I fitted in quite well. We rushed to the tracks in Santa Maria to catch the train, second class, and crowded enough to remind me of Indian third class from Calcutta to Madras several years earlier. The women wore tall white hats, and the men were in old sewn up jackets, dressed up respectably for travel, making me rethink my assessment of my own rather disreputable state. There was a mini-struggle at every station to get on and off, a bit like today's rush-hour subway. The town of Santa Theresa came and went, and I got some excellent wrapped chocolate bought through the train window from a platform vendor, which I shared with our little team. Finally we got to Machu Pichu, and got off the train with a great fight to haul our bags through the oncoming tide of humanity. Madame insisted on arranging for our bags to be left at the *museo* at the bottom, and on paying the 20 soles for the *collectivo* bus up to the ruins. That's of course when our money really started to flow, 50 soles each to see the ruins, roughly a hundred a meal each, plus tidy little extras like beer. Well, I hadn't spent a penny for a while, and this was after all a world wonder. We met several interesting people, including a large Sierra Club group on a trip from Salcantay where they had encountered Japanese climbers.

We slept that night in the ruins, an unforgettable experience, accompanied by much wine and lots of conversation, and I remember watching the dawn come up over the startling silhouette of Inca walls, jagged peaks, and deep jungled chasms and the river below. Beyond was the hint of ice, many miles distant, framed in between the high passes. At some point, we made it up the second peak, Hauyana Pichu, enjoying the vista back to the extraordinary layout of the fortified structure below. The long water courses, huge steps and immaculately fitted boulders are astounding. Short of Petra, this place remains the most memorable site of human construction I have ever seen.

At this point, my log comes to a stop in midsentence. The reason is etched in my memory, and probably permanently in my entrails as well. On the way back to Cuzco on the train, I did what I had done both ways, but this time - perhaps reflecting my low resistance and some congenital laziness - with far less care. I took food from the platform vendor through the train window, including some very unsanitary but delicious pork. How I made it to the hotel I do not know, but remained semi-conscious for at least three days locked in my room, horribly sick and fevered, unable to move except to throw up in the

vague direction of receptacles. Afterwards, when I asked why they had left me so long, they said I had left a `*do not disturb'* sign on the door. When I finally surfaced to loud and insistent knocking, and folks came in to horror at the mess, I was immediately visited by first nurses then doctors, who took me somewhere, and I slowly recovered until I was well enough to be put on the plane back to the US.
It was a bitter end to a great climbing experience. I have never been so grotesquely sick in my life and it took me almost year to recover fully after the diagnosis of typhoid fever upon return to Morganton. Most surprisingly, I remember that these doctors in the mountains of western North Carolina were already quite familiar with this, telling me they had seen several cases in local populations. Since that time however, my stomach has been as tough as a seagull's, and I have never (yet) suffered any serious upsets, despite much travel in underdeveloped communities throughout Asia and Africa. So maybe there is some advantageous immunity there, but still I don't recommend it.

In the end, the expedition climbed some 20 peaks by 28 routes, with 11 first ascents, and found new Inca sites including a previously undiscovered road. My gratitude remains firm for having survived, and I'm ever thankful to my trusty and tolerant Kiwi mates, and most especially to Bob, for putting up with me for many weeks of unforgettable mountain memory. The climbs, and other Inca explorations were often recounted in newspaper articles, books and climbing journals, a partial list of which is appended below.

THANKS BOB!!!

1. Pumasillo's North Ridge. John E S Lawrence. *Summit Magazine*. September 1969. pp 2-9
2. NZ Climbers faced many problems. R. McKerrow. *Otago Daily Times*. October 12, 1968
3. Altitude was our greatest enemy. R McKerrow. *Otago Daily Times* (date?) 1968
4. The Puma's Claw. K McNatty, Bob McKerrow, and Mac Riding. *NZ Alpine Journal* 1969 pp 49-63.
5. *The World At Their Feet.* Philip Temple. Whitcombe and Tombs. Christchurch., NZ. 1969 p 189.
6. Ascents in Pumasillo Group, Cordillera Vilcabamba. *American Alpine Journal* pp 436-8
7. A Survey of Andean Ascents 1961-1970. Echevarría E. Supplement to *American Alpine Journal*. 1973 pp 384-7.
8. Pumasillo Area: NZ Expedition 1968. UK Alpine Journal. 1969 pp 256-261.. which has an incorrectly titled picture of the N Ridge of Pumasillo (photo # 122 on p 258, which is in fact the N Ridge of Nevado Blanco, taken by Ken McNatty… see NZ Alpine Journal 1969 p 61).