

COLOMBIA

In southern Colombia, near the Nudo de Pasto, the Andes divide into three separate ranges - the Cordillera Occidental; the Cordillera Central, or Quindío; and the Cordillera Oriental, or Bogotá. The Cordillera Occidental is flanked on the west by an insignificant coastal range, the Cordillera de Choco. These ranges are all orientated, roughly speaking, from north to south. The Cordilleras Occidental and Central are separated by the valley of the Río Patía, flowing south, and that of the Río Cauca which (north of the Cordillera Central) joins the Río Magdalena, flowing north between the Cordilleras Central and Oriental, on its way to the Caribbean. The most important areas in Colombia for climbers are the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (probably an extension of the Cordillera Central) in the extreme north of the country; the Sierra Nevada de Cocuy (the most north-easterly range of the Cordillera Oriental) just south of the Venezuelan border; and the major snow-clad volcanoes of the Cordillera Central, headed by Nevado de Huila.

Elsewhere in the country, the Sierra de Perija, which forms the north-south boundary between Colombia and Venezuela, is of no particular interest to mountaineers. Likewise, the Cordillera Occidental, which occasionally reaches elevations of 4000 metres, does not offer much mountaineering interest, having no glaciers or snow peaks, although there are said to be some lower rocky peaks which are interesting. The Cordillera Central, apart from the major peaks, also has a very limited appeal. The most southerly region contains various peaks under 5000 metres, the most popular of which is Puracé, which until recently was thought to be the only active volcano in Colombia.

The Cordillera Oriental is mainly of sub-alpine character, with high grass tablelands (páramos) and desolate stony tracts. South of Bogotá the Cordillera is narrow and, in the Páramo de Sumapaz, reaches its highest elevation in El Nevado, probably first climbed by a Colombian miner prior to 1931. To the west of it is La Torquita. This area was visited in 1969 by F. Petitpierre. The Sierra de la Macarena, a sub-Andean range, rises some 150 kilometres south of Bogotá. It runs south for about 100 kilometres, rising to c.2500 metres, and while it is one of the most interesting areas of Colombia, is not significant for climbers.

Peak List

Páramo de Sumapaz

El Nevado 4249m: 3°57'N 74°07'W: 1-pre 1931.

La Torquita 4180m: 4°N 74°3'W: west of El Nevado:

Cordillera Occidental

Farellones de Citará (Choco) 4050m: highest point of range: approx. 5°30'N 76°W. There are five peaks in the cordillera over 4000 metres, all below the snowline.

Selected General References

Gansser, A. 'Die Berge Kolumbiens' BdW,3 (1948): 402-414.

Kraus, E. & Hammen, T. van der. Las expediciones de glaciología del Año Geofísico Internacional a las Sierras Nevadas de Santa Marta y del Cocuy. Bogotá: Instituto Geográfico 'Agustín Codazzi', 1959.

Kurz, M. (Ed). 'Kolumbien', BdW, 3 (1948): 344-51. Swiss climbers in Colombia.

Petitpierre, F. 'Impressions d'une modeste exp,dition dans les Andes de Colombia', LA 46 (1970): 116-124. P ramo de Sumapaz.

Philipson, W [& others] 'Expedition to the Sierra de la Macarena, Colombia'. GJ, 117 (1951): 188-199.

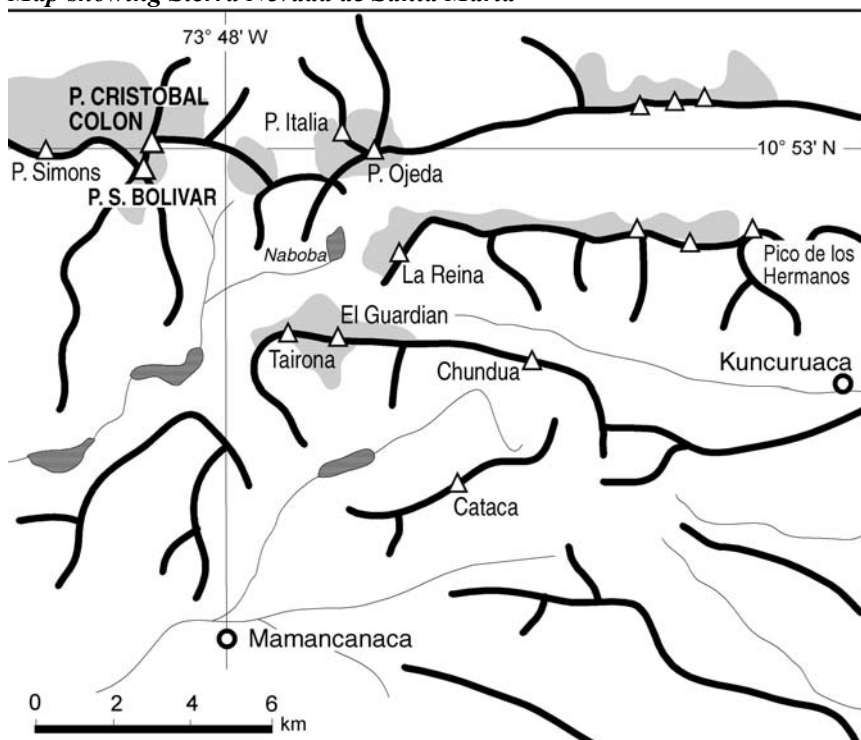
Ramírez, J. Bibliografía de la Biblioteca del Geología y Geofísica de Colombia. Bogotá: Instituto Geofísica de los Andes Colombianos, 1957. 2nd ed. (Serie C-Geología, Boletín 6) Best reference library in Colombia for climbing material.

----. Primer suplemento a la bibliografía.... Bogotá: Instituto Geofísica de los Andes Colombianos, 1973. (Serie C-Geología-Publicación Especial n.18).

Vilar, P. Geografía de Colombia. Bogotá, 1945.

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

Map showing Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta



The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is a triangular-shaped massif, covering an area of some 16,000 km², with steep slopes on the north and west, only fifty kilometres from the shores of the Caribbean. This northern slope is one of the most striking in the world and comparable in its gradient to the southern face of the Himalaya. It is separated from the much lower Sierra de Perija, to the east, by the broad, low valleys of the Río Cesar and Río Ranchería. The central part of the range consists of more than half-a-dozen east-west ranges. Much of the area is covered with luxuriant tropical forest up to a height of about 1200 metres, rendering the approach from the north virtually impossible. In the higher regions, however, bleak páramos lead up to a world of rock, scree and ice, containing a large number of small and beautiful glacial lakes. The usual point of departure for the peaks nowadays is the town of Valledupar to the south-east. The snowline is at about 5000 metres.

The range can be sub-divided into three distinct sections - a western group of very high peaks, principally Picos Bolívar, Colon, Sintana, and Santander; an eastern sector, made up of three parallel ridges running east-west, comprising several beautiful icy and rocky peaks, principally La Reina, Pico Ojeda and El Guardi n; and to the south-west a group of rocky towers at the head of the valley of the Río Cataca, of which the highest point is Cataca. The valleys between the peaks are noted for their beautiful glacial lakes and provide delightful hiking. There is considerable glaciation, notably on the ridge running east from La Reina, and formations of nieves penitentes are not uncommon. The rock towers in the vicinity of Cataca offer interesting and difficult climbing on good granite. The best months for climbing are December-March (particularly January) or, less good, the June-July period.

The first excursions into the range were made by scientists, notably F.A. Simons, an English naturalist working for the Colombian government. In 1881 he crossed the massif east of the highest peaks, probably by a pass at the head of the Mamancanaca valley, and climbed to a height of around 5100 metres on an outlying snow peak from a camp in the vicinity of the Cataca valley. As his visit was in August, visibility was probably not good, which would account for the inaccuracies of his otherwise excellent map (on which all pre-war maps were largely based), as regards the centre of the massif and height of the highest summit, which he estimated to be about 5300 metres. Other visitors included the German geologist Wilhelm Sievers, who reached the snowline in the 1880s and a Frenchman Joseph de Brettes in 1895, who claimed an ascent of El Guardián. However the peak he considered to be the highest is several kilometres south of the main massif. He appears to have camped below the moraines in the Mamancanaca valley, bivouaced on the upper moraine south-west of his peak and climbed the westerly ridge. It seems probable that he reached one of the many spurs and was prevented by clouds from seeing the higher summits to the north and east, as his map is very little improvement on that of Simons. De Brettes lived in the Palomino valley where he grew many European crops at an altitude of 925 metres. Lastly the naturalist A.F.R. Wollaston approached the mountains in 1923 from Dibulla in the north, but was unable to reach the highest peaks because of the difficulty of the route and bad weather.

Mountaineering proper started in 1936 when two Germans, W. Weber and H. Lotscher penetrated the Sierra on the southern side; however, their expedition ended in tragedy when Weber was lost in a crevasse on Pico Colçn. During the 1938-39 season Guido Pichler and Enrico Praolini climbed Pico Tairona in preparation for the ascent of Pico Bolívar, which they duly accomplished, accompanied by Erwin Kraus, later to become Colombia's leading climber. The following month saw the arrival of the American Geographical Society expedition led by T.D. Cabot. The members of this expedition produced the best trigonometrical survey of the range so far, and also achieved the first ascent of the other highest peak, Cristobal Colçn. In 1941 another American expedition made up of the Grand Teton guide Paul Petzoldt, Elizabeth Knowlton and Elizabeth Cowles succeeded in first ascents of Pico Ojeda, La Reina and El Guardi n. In 1943 the Swiss couple Dr. Frédéric and Mme Dorly Marmillod climbed Pico Simons, now called Sintana, while a month later another Swiss, Albert Gansser, climbed 'Gansser's Eighteen-thousander', an unnamed peak south of Pico Bolívar and now called Pico Santander. This concluded the first major phase of climbing in the range.

There was a fair amount of climbing activity in subsequent years but the next important development occurred in 1951, the work of three experienced climbers, the Colombian Erwin Kraus and two Swiss, G. Cuénet and R. Grière. Abandoning the traditional San Sebastian route, they started from Valledupar and followed the more direct route to the Donachui valley; this has become the standard approach. After climbing El Guardi n via the north face and north-east ridge they moved westward,

exploring the Chirigua saddle west of Pico Ojeda and making an ascent of the north face of Bolívar. The party then departed via the Sevilla valley, having traversed the area from south-east to north-west.

In 1954 and 1957 two British expeditions, led by A.B. Cunningham, carried out a programme of topographical work and scientific research, as well as making various ascents. Apart from repetitions of climbs of several peaks, they made first ascents of Pico Juanita, Santa Barbara and Pico de los Hermanos, the two latter on the immensely steep and icy ridge running east from La Reina.

In January 1957 the distinguished Italian mountaineer Piero Ghiglione visited the range, accompanied by Evelio Echevarría, Silvio Morra (cameraman) and two arrieros, Jesus and Jos, Zapata. They marched in from Valledupar and set up base camp (c.4400m) by an idyllic little lake to the south-west of El Guardi n. The weather was fine and Ghiglione made a solo ascent of the south face of Pico Coløn, as well as repeats of Pico Ojeda and El Guardi n. Echevarría made the first ascent of a 4600-metre peak (Observatorio). In 1958 Ghiglione paid his second visit to the Sierra, accompanied by the guides Giuseppe Pirovano and Gian Carlo Canali, making the first crossing of the range from north-east to south-west. During their six week stay they made twenty-one first ascents and thirty new routes in the eastern half of the range. In particular they climbed all the difficult Nevaditos peaks and the Taironas; the latter have steep ice faces, especially on the northern and western sides. Their route out of the Sierra passed through the Chundua ('Mountains of the Dead') to the huts of Mamancanaca, and thence to Valledupar. (See sketch-map in Ghiglione's articles in Rivista Mensile).

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta continued to attract expeditions for both scientific work and for climbing. In 1967 the Japanese Scientific Expedition of the University of Shizuoka made many first ascents of 5000-metre peaks, mostly on the ridges to the north-west of Pico Sintana. In 1974 a 17-man Royal Air Force expedition, led by N.M. Ridley, was active in the western and northern sectors, making a number of face climbs and several first ascents (see R.A.F. report).

In the 1970's climbers encountered considerable hostility from local tribes, notably the Arhuaco Indians, who own the valleys that offer the best approaches to the range. Many parties were hindered or turned away, and in 1974 the Colombian government set up an Indian Bureau (Resguardo Indigena) at Valledupar. In 1978 the Colombian government officially reopened the area to expeditions. Various regional offices now issue the necessary permits to enter the mountain regions, for example INDERENA issues National Park permits and the Casa Indigena issues the necessary tribal authority to enter the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. One must also obtain a safe-conduct pass from the police. Information is available from the tourist offices, the Corporación Nacional de Turismo (CNT) in Bogotá and other towns.

Peak List

(I.G.M. maps 1:100,000, Sheets (Planchas) 19, 20, 26, 27.)

North-west and West of Pico Sintana

Pico Sintana throws off a W.S.W. ridge and several parallel ridges to the north, which are spurs of the N.W. ridge. The Japanese expedition climbed numerous peaks in the north-western sector, viz:

P.4890m, P.4920m, P.4980m: peaks from west to east on first ridge to north of W. ridge: 1-1967.

P.4880m, P.4920m, P.4980m, P.4940m, P.4970m, P.4895m, P.4875m, P.4880m: peaks from west to east on second ridge north of W. ridge: 1-1967.

Nevado Tesoro 5200m, 5180m, 5175m: on N.W. ridge of Sintana: 1-1967.

P.5000m, P.5030m: further north-west on same ridge as Tesoro: 1-1967.
Tridente 5415m, P.5070m, P.5040m, P.5020m, Shizuoka 5020m, Pico Esmeralda 4930m: 1-1967.
Further peaks climbed by Japanese expedition, probably in same area.
El Professor 5320m: glaciated peak on W. ridge of Sintana: 1-1965.
Nueva Vista 5180m: glaciated peak west of El Professor: 1-1965.
Pico Neiva c.4940m: glaciated peak west of Nueva Vista: 1-1965.
Pico Sintana (Simons) 5660m: 1-1943 via S.W. ridge?: S. ridge-1967: W. ridge, S. face-1974: Via W. glacier-1976: N. face (300m, 50ø-70ø), ice & fractured rock band.
Oriente de Simons 5490m: between Pico Sintana & Bolívar: 1-1967.

Bolívar-Colón Massif

Pico Bolívar 5775m: 1-1939 via N. flank?: Traverse from Pico Colón, descend S.S.E. ridge-1943: N. face (new route on N. flank)-1951: N.E. ridge-1967: Traverse from Pico Santander via connecting knife-edge, descend E. ridge-1972: E. face (see R.A.F. report)-1974.
P.5360m: 1 1/2 km N. of Bolívar: 1-1967.
Pico Santander (Gansser's 18000-er) 5540m: 1-1943 via W. face: S. face-1972: E. ridge-1972: S.E. face-1974: N.E. face-1974: E.N.E. ridge-1974.
Ancay Motul c.5200m: rock peak S. of Santander: 1-?: E. face, steep rock and snow-1979.
Pico Observatorio 4600m: south of main massif: 1-1957 from Laguna Naboba base camp.
Pico Colón 5773m: 1-1939 via S. face, E. ridge: S. face, right of glacier-1974: N. face, east of prominent N. buttress (see AAJ, 21 (1977): 209)-1977: E. ridge, mixed, difficult-1979.
Nieve de Naboba c.5300m: on ridge between Pico Colón & Chirigua saddle: 1-1965.
Pico Juanita 5100m: just west of Chirigua saddle: 1-1954.
Bienvenido 5140m: between Laguna Naboba & Chirigua saddle: 1-1974 via N. gully, S. ridge: Same, descend N.E. ridge-1974: Same & traverse to adjacent rock peak-1974.
Base Camp Peak 5080m: between Laguna Naboba & Chirigua saddle: 1-1974.
Pico Naboba: between Laguna Naboba & Chirigua saddle: 1-1974 via E. & W. ridges.

Ojeda Chain

Pico Chirigua (Panamericano, Ojeda S.I & S.II) c.5250m: 1-1966?: E.N.E. ridge-1974: N.E. ridge-1974. R.A.F. parties traversed all Ojeda S.I.-S.IV peaks, sustained scrambling with some hard pitches.
Ojeda S.III c.4990m: 1?-1974 via N.E. ridge.
Ojeda S.-IV c.4960m: 1-1974 via N.E. ridge.

Pico Ojeda (Ojeda I): 5490m: 1-1941 via S. face, mixed: S.S.W. ridge, snow-1943: Traverse W.- E.-1943: W. ridge, ice-1957: S.E. spur-1958: S. face-1974 (see R.A.F. report): N.W. face-1977 (see AAJ, 21 (1977): 209): N.E. face, best in range-1978 (see AAJ, 21 (1978): 559): N.W. face, new route-1979 (see AAJ, 22 (1980): 571): N.E. ridge, long and rocky, solo traverse-1984.
Ojeda II (Punta Italia) 5390m: 1-1958 via W. face & ridge, descend S.E. ridge.
Los Nevaditos: line of difficult peaks east of Pico Ojeda:
--Pico Codazzi 5336m: 1-1958 from S., fairly difficult: W. ridge (rock), descend S.E. ridge, serious peak.
--Ojeda N.I 5240m: 1-1974 via W. ridge (rock).
--Ojeda N.II 5368m: 1-1958 from S., difficult: N.E. ridge (snow), descend S.W. ridge (rock).
--P.5273m: immediately W. of Pico Oriental: 1-1984.
--Pico Oriental (Tulio Ospina) 5373m: 1-1958 from south: S. ridge, S. face (rock)-1974: S. face, descend S. ridge, severe-1974: N. face, poor snow, good rock belays-1984.

--P.5255m: 1-1958 from south.

--P.5334m: easternmost peak of Ojeda ridge: 1-1958 from south.

Unnamed peak S.W. of La Reina: 1-1958 via N. face, steep ice.

Pico La Reina Chain

Pico La Reina 5735m: 1-1941 via N. slope: N. slope, descend W. ridge-1943: N.E. face, N. ridge-1958: E. face, E. ridge-1964: N.W. glacier-1974: S. face-1977 (see AAJ, 21 (1977): 209): S.W. face, S.W. spur-1979 (see AAJ, 22 (1980): 571).

Picos Orientales, or Taironas: peaks on the ridge east of La Reina, characterized by steep corniced ice ridges and faces, especially to north and west:

--Pico de los Hermanos 5296m: 1-1957 from south.

--Pico Santa Barbara: 1-1957 probably from south.

--P.5275m: 1-1958 from south.

--P.5273m: 1-1958 from south.

The Pap 5212m: 1-1958 from south: N.W. face-1974: S. ridge, W. face-1974.

8 'Taironas' peaks: 1-1958, traversed in one long day.

N.B. A British party, led by Frank Cunningham, ascended three peaks on the Picos Taironas ridge in January 1961. From east to west (of La Reina) they were called Ñ4, 5, & 6Ò. Heights and exact location unidentified.

El Guardián Chain

Pico Tairona 5050m: 1-1939: Traverse from El Guardián-1943: S. face-1972: E. ridge, descend ridge/N. face/S. ridge-1974: N.W. face-1974: N. face, lefthand 75ø rock buttress-1979.

Pico El Guardián (De Brettes Peak) 5285m: 1-1898 (claimed by De Brettes): 1st undisputed ascent-1941 via fine S. ice slope: W. ridge (rock/snow), descend S.W. rock rib to Pico Tairona-1943: N. face, N.E. ridge-1951: S.E. face & ridge-1957: S. face-1972: Via S.W. glacier-1974: N. ridge, serious-1974: N. face and N.W. face-1979 (see AAJ, 22 (1980): 571).

Other Massifs

Torres de Cataca 4725m (highest point): rock towers located south of El Guardián:

Loma Cebolleta: 10 peaks c.3900-4420m located on the N.E. slopes of the range: All climbed solo in 1974.

Unexplored group east of the Ojeda-La Reina ridges c.5000m?:

Pico Pittsburgh c.4880m: 1-1952.

Mission peak c.4360m: highest point on the Donan Chucua ridge: 1-1962.

Selected References

Agnolotti, G. 'Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta '74'. RM, 94 (1975): 337-339.

Cabot, T. 'Mountains of the Caribbean'. Appalachia, 18 (1930): 17-23. See also: AAJ, 1 (1930): 232-234.

-----, 'The Cabot expedition to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta of Colombia'. GR, 29 (1939): 587-621. See also Appalachia, 22 (1939): 309-14, 398.

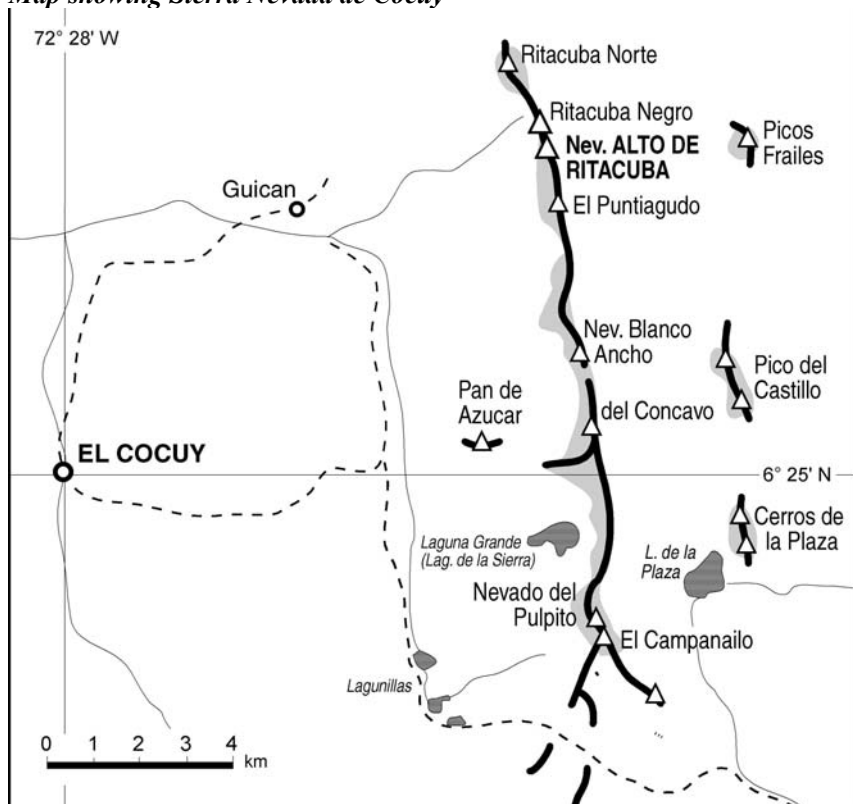
Cowles, E. 'More about the Santa Marta'. AAJ, 4 (1942): 362-368.

Cunningham, A. 'Exploration in the northernmost Andes'. GJ, 123 (1957): 344-355. See also: AAJ, 10 (1957): 161-163.

- Cunningham, F. 'The Andes of Colombia'. *Geographical Magazine*, 35 (1963): 575-588. Taironas ridge & miscellaneous climbs.
- Echevarrja, E. 'The Santa Marta range, Colombia'. *AJ*, 63 (1958): 209-215.
- 'La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta en Colombia', *Pyrenaica*, 151 (1988): 53-59.
- Ghiglione, P. 'La Sierra Nevada di Santa Marta'. *RM*, 78 (1959): 141-150.
- 'Seconda spedizione alla Sierra Nevada di Santa Marta'. *RM*, 79 (1960): 13-22.
- 'Die Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Kolumbien'. *LA*, 35 (1959): 23-33.
- Grière, R. 'La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta'. *Alpinisme*, n.99 (Spring, 1952): 17-24. Traverse of range from south-east to north-west.
- Marmillod, F. 'Die Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta'. *BdW*, 3 (1948): 416-427.
- Peyton, J. 'Western peaks of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta'. *Appalachia*, 35 (1965): 704-714.
- Royal Air Force expedition to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia, 1974: report. *The Expedition*, [1975]. By the leader N.Ridley and others. 68p, illus, map.
- Snowswell, D. 'The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta'. *AJ*, 78 (1973): 78-82.
- Wollaston, A. 'The Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, Colombia'. *GJ*, 66 (1925): 97-111.
- Wood, W. 'The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia'. *AJ*, 52 (1940): 243-249. See also: *AAJ*, 4 (1940): 21-28.
- 'Mapping the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta: the work of the Cabot Colombian Expedition'. *GR*, 31 (1941): 639-43.

Sierra Nevada de Cocuy

Map showing Sierra Nevada de Cocuy



The small but beautiful Sierra Nevada de Cocuy forms part of the Cordillera Oriental and is situated about 450 kilometres north-east of Bogotá, just south of the border with Venezuela. Its tropical

situation produces a mist-enshrouded climate, not unlike that of the Ruwenzori or Carstenz peaks of New Guinea, and this almost constant lack of visibility has resulted in a still imperfect knowledge of the range, with confusion over heights and nomenclature. The area is ideal for trekking and probably has the best rock-climbing (on gneiss) in Colombia, with perpendicular rock peaks overlooking the Llanos.

The range consists of two parallel chains which run approximately north-south through twenty kilometres. The western chain contains the highest peaks - Nevado Ritacuba Norte, Ritacuba Negro, Alto Ritacuba, Banco Ancho, Nevado del Cóncono, and Nevado del Pulpito. The smaller eastern chain (where the weather is even worse) is headed by Pico del Castillo, one of the finest peaks in all the range. Generally speaking, the eastern flanks of the peaks are characterized by steep rock walls surmounted by hanging glaciers, while the western sides are covered by relatively gentle snow-slopes. The range is the most heavily glaciated in Colombia, with the snow-line at an altitude of about 4700 metres. The nominally dry season runs from December through March but the best spells of weather will be encountered in January or February. Approach to the range is easy - the town of Cocuy can be reached by road in one long day from Bogotá, whence it is a half-day journey to the foot of the western chain. Also on the western side of the range is the town of Güicán, 1 - 1 1/2 hours' jeep drive from the mountains. There are farms and tourist cabins above Güicán.

In 1928 the Swiss diplomat Walter Róthlisberger, with Hans Weber, made the first ascent in the range, climbing Pan de Azucar, the prominent peak visible from the La Cueva valley. They were followed in 1931 by two American geologists, R.E. King and F.B. Notestein, who carried out a partial survey of the range and some geological research; their attempt on Alto Ritacuba was defeated by a violent storm. Róthlisberger returned in 1934, with a larger party, making some climbs while the British scientist A.P. Coleman and another member of the party made glaciological studies in the cirque around the Cóncono lake. In 1938 the leading Colombian climber Erwin Kraus and A. Lampse made the first ascent of Nevada del Pulpito, a mountain often mistaken for Pan de Azucar.

The main conquest of the Sierra Nevada de Cocuy took place during the years of the Second World War, mostly through the efforts of the Swiss geologists, G. Cu,net and Albert Gansser. In January 1939, from base camp by the Cóncono lake, they explored the southern half of the main chain, climbing the minor peak Pico Pulpito before tackling Pico de los Portales, the unnamed 5223-metre peak of the King-Notestein survey, which they climbed via the steep western ridge, followed by a descent to the north. A few days later they made the first ascent of Nevado del Cóncono. Three years later they turned their attention to the northern peaks, making first ascents of Alto Ritacuba and Ritacuba Norte, both partly on ski. During this expedition they obtained good views of the eastern peaks, and in December 1942 they searched for a pass which would lead to them. However it was not until the following season that they were able to cross the main range and set up camp near Laguna de La Plaza. Then they climbed Pico Blanco and traversed south to Pico Castillo, along the corniced ridge connecting the two peaks, only to find that another team of climbers had made the first ascent a few days earlier. A year later, in January 1945, Cu,net and Gansser returned to the northern half of the western chain and succeeded (in all probability) in making first ascents of the Banco Ancho summits (San Paulin and San Paulin Sur). They also attempted Puntigudo but were forced to retreat only a few metres from the top on account of the instability of the cornices and lack of time.

The party that preceded Cu,net and Gansser on Pico Castillo was made up of Erwin Kraus, Frédéric and Dorly Marmillod. In the 1943-44 season they approached the La Plaza valley from the south, crossing the Boqueron gap, and camped near the lake. In the course of their expedition they not only made the first ascent of Pico Castillo but also first ascents of Cerros de La Plaza, the fine Campanilla

Grande and Pulpito del Diablo, a curious rock-block which rises from the glaciers of Nevado del Pulpito.

In 1957 one of the two most important virgin peaks, Puntiaquito, was climbed by B. Curry and R. Perry, members of the first Cambridge University expedition to the Sierra. In addition to repeating ascents of Alto Ritacuba and Banco Ancho, members of the expedition made first ascents of other peaks, all of which are difficult to identify - four were south of Alto Ritacuba and two were probably in the Picos Nordeste group of the eastern chain. The second Cambridge expedition in 1959, led by D.R. Stoddart, carried out an ambitious programme, including glaciological studies on the San Paulin glacier and ethnological studies on the Tunebo Indians, to the east of the Sierra. They also had as part of their programme the first ascent of the other important virgin peak, Pico Los Portones (El Picacho), a very bold icy spire. This difficult ascent was accomplished without incident by J. Rucklidge and C.R. Smythe.

There remains considerable scope for fine new climbs in the range. These include the great eastern faces of Alto Ritacuba and Ritacuba Negro, the eastern ridges and faces of Pico de los Portones and Banco Ancho, the north face of Pan de Azúcar, and the formidable east face of Nevado del Pulpito. Elsewhere, the Picos de Rechiniga are unexplored and unclimbed, as is the lesser Pico del Amarillo. Campanilla and Pico de la Vieja also appear to be unclimbed.

Peak List

(Maps: I.G.M. 1:100,000, Sheets (Planchas) 137 & 153).

Western Chain

Nievecitas del Cielo: a small group located north of Paso de la Sierra:

--Picos Moscarrios 4800m: 1-1957.

--Alto del Cielo 4900m: Unclimbed?

--Pico Nievecitas 4800m: 1-1957.

P.c.5045, P.c.5075m: immediately N. of Ritacuba Norte: 1(?) -1980.

Ritacuba Norte (Nev. de Güican, Pico del Norte) 5257m: 1-1942 via steep, rocky W. flank.

Ritacuba Negro 5384m: one of the finest peaks in the range: 1-1942 via W. ridge: N. face, subject to falling ice-1974: N.E. ridge (III)-1980: E. buttress, 500m (V+)-1980: N.W. face, ice-1981.

Alto de Ritacuba (Ritacuba Blanco) 5464m: 1-1942 on skis from west: S. face, steep, crevassed-1978: N. face, 700m (V)-1988.

P.5037m (Cambridge Peak 17460 ft?): sharp ice peak located immediately south of Alto Ritacuba: 1-1957: N. face, steep-1980.

P.4930m (Cambridge Peak 17320 ft?): located S. of Alto Ritacuba: 1-1957.

P.4929 (Cambridge Peak 17112 ft?): located S. of Alto Ritacuba: 1-1957.

Puntiaquito 5019m: S.W. of Alto Ritacuba: 1-1957.

Pulpito Negro 4929m: prominent rock tower capped with ice, S.W. of Puntiaquito: 1-1957.

Pico de los Portones (Nevado del Picacho, San Paulin Norte) 5222m: one of the finest peaks, heavily corniced summits: Incomplete ascent via steep S. flank-1944: 1-1959 via W. flank: E. face, rock topped with steep ice (V & VI)-1983.

--S.W. peak 5217m: 1-1978 & traverse to main top, exposed but not difficult.

Nev. Banco Ancho (San Paulin & San Paulin Sur; erroneously Chiflón, Corrales) 5271m: 1-1944 via W. flank on skis.

Pico del Chiflón 5050m: rock & ice peak located on W. ridge of Nev. Banco Ancho: 1-1976: another route-1977.

Nevado Gorro Blanco 5047m: rounded summit: Incomplete ascent-1976: 1-1977.

Nevado del Cñcavo 5268m: 1-1939 by S. ridge, traversing from Pico de los Portales, and traverse W. ridge to Pan de Azúcar: N. face, 800m (III-IV) on right-1980: Traverse from Concavito-1980.

Pan de Azúcar (Concavito) 5175m: west of Nev. del Cñcavo: 1-1928: Traverse from Cñcavo-1939: N.E. buttress, 500m (III-IV)-1980.

Pico de los Portales (Pico Daniel Trumpy) 5249m: 1-1939 via steep upper W. flank, and traverse N. ridge to Cñcavo.

Picos Paloblanco 4900m: 3-peaked mountain N.E. of Laguna Grande/de la Sierra): 1-all three in 1977.

P.c.5000m: on ridge between Pico de los Portales & Pan de Azúcar, east of Laguna Grande/de la Sierra): 1-1970.

Pico Púlpito (Pico 'Toti', Nev. Paloblanco) 5074m: near southern end of range: 1-1939.

Nevado del Pñlpito (Campanario) 5210m: prominent peak, broad dome with ice pinnacle: 1-1938.

--Púlpito del Diablo 4711m?: rock block in middle of glacier, c.60-100m high with vertical walls: 1-1944 via a staircase of snow-covered ledges on N. face.

Campanario (Campanilla Grande) 4986m: Campanario peaks are two beautiful rock peaks with rugged faces: 1-1944 from N., from col leading to Nev. Púlpito, W. face, icy. The party did not have time to traverse the interesting ridge to the lower peak.

--Campanilla 4800m: Unclimbed?

Pico del Vieja de la Torre 4689m: Unclimbed?

Picos de Rechiniga 4834m, 4728m: 4 peaks on a long unexplored rocky ridge.

Pico del Amarillal 4700m: Unexplored?

Eastern Chain

Picos Frailes (Picos Nordeste) c.5000m: northern extension of eastern chain:

--Pico Sin Nombre (Peñon Carmen): highest point of group: 1-1946: S. face (450m)-1988.

--3 lesser summits of approximately same height, running eastwards, rocky & ice-encrusted on S. side: Unclimbed?

Pico Blanco 5096m: northern peak of Castillo massif, ice pyramid above good rock, large glacier on W. flank: 1-1944 via S. ridge from west & traverse to Pico del Castillo: W. buttress (800m, III-IV)-1980.

Pico del Castillo (Punta Helvetia) 5123m: ice pyramid above good rock: 1-1943 via S.W. ridge: Traverse from Pico Blanco-1944: W. ridge-1978: N.W. buttress (770m, IV-V)-1980: W. ridge variant-1981.

Cerros de la Plaza 4957m: large massif: 1-1943, traversing rocky summit pinnacles.

--P.4700m: rocky dome, fine viewpoint: unclimbed?

Selected References

[Cambridge University.] Cambridge Colombian Expedition, 1959: general report. Cambridge: Foster & Jagg, 1959.

Coleman, A. 'Pleistocene glaciation in the Andes of Colombia'. GJ, 86 (1935): 330-334. Röthlisberger's 1934 expedition.

Echevarría, E. 'The Andes of Cocuy'. AJ, 63 (1958): 33-43.

----. 'Cocuy, Colombia: las nieves de la luciernaga', Pyrenaica, no.166 (1992): 3-9. Welláillus., map.

Gansser, A. 'Der Nevado de Cocuy, Columbianisches Bergerlebnis'. LA, 15 (1939): 283-286.

Moore, J. Tears of the sun-god. London: Faber, 1965. Pp.167-90.

Notestein, F. & King, R. 'The Sierra Nevada de Cocuy'. GR, 22 (1932): 423-430.

Petitpierre, F. 'Dans les neiges du Cocuy'. LA, 47 (1971): 171-178.

Röthlisberger, W. 'Cocuy. Erste Besteigung'. LA, 5 (1929): 161-168.

Cordillera Central

This disjointed range, which in its peaks and countryside is not unlike the mountains of East Africa, contains several isolated groups of volcanoes, and is being popularized by the creation of national park areas. It provides pleasant climbing in an exotic atmosphere but is scarcely more than a training ground for more serious expeditions elsewhere. The hardest climb of all is probably the icy north face of Nevado de Tolima, the mountain best known by the Colombians themselves.

The most northerly group of peaks, west of the capital city Bogotá, lie in the Parque Nacional Los Nevados. The three principal peaks, all snow-capped, are Nevado El Ruiz, a mountain with several summits and craters; Nevado Santa Isabel, a heavily glaciated mountain with three peaks; and Nevado de Tolima, heavily glaciated and partly very steep. Much further south is the massive, heavily glaciated, four-peaked Nevado de Huila, the highest point of which has a number of fumaroles. Further south again, in Purac, National Park, is a group of lower peaks dominated by the semi-active volcano Purac,. This is a fast-growing tourist area. Between Purac, and the border with Ecuador are more isolated peaks, the best known being Cumbal and Chiles, the latter being on or even inside the Ecuadorian frontier.

The first recorded ascent in the Cordillera Central was that of Cumbal, climbed in 1848 by Jean-Baptiste Boussingault. Purac, was climbed in 1868 by R. Blake White and again in 1869 during a violent eruption. The authorities in Popayan having begged him to ascertain the danger to life, White set off within a few hours and by evening of the next day was established in camp at 4000 metres, one kilometre from the crater. After dark the flames of the gas jet could be seen shooting 300 metres upwards topped by a rainbow-coloured column of steam, all accompanied by fearsome displays of lightning. During the night they were constantly attacked by flash floods as the cooled steam fell as snow and melted again. For the next day or two there was not enough wind to disperse the noxious fumes but eventually White was able to ascend the north-west ridge to the crater rim and examine the remarkable flame spout, coloured brightly by many chemical elements. Next day his clothes were found to have been burned by the acid gases.

During their travels in 1868-69 Wilhelm Reiss and Alfons Stübel climbed Cumbal twice, made the first ascent of Chiles and attempted Ruiz. This peak was eventually climbed in 1936 and again in 1939 by Cu,net and Gansser, partly on ski. On 14 November 1985 the mountain erupted, destroying the town of Armero, and killing over 22,000 people. The first recorded eruption of Nevado del Ruiz was in 1590 and the previously last major one in 1845. Nevado de Tolima, the youngest and most symmetrical of the big volcanoes, was claimed in 1923 by Kaspar Golay but his ascent is disputed, the credit going to a Colombian party in 1926. There are various routes on Tolima, the easiest being the south-east face, and the hardest the north face, accomplished by a group of Colombians in 1973. Santa Isabel was the next to be climbed, in 1943, by the German-Colombian team of Erwin Kraus, E. Drees and H. Hüblitz.

Nevado de Huila was the goal of two rival parties during the Second World War. In 1943 the Swiss climbers Cu,net and Gansser reached the north peak, only to find it was not the highest point, which is Pico Mayor. This was climbed by their rivals, Kraus, Drees and Hüblitz, in 1944, at the second attempt. The second ascent was not until 1970. The remaining two peaks of the massif, which were at

the time the highest unclimbed points in the Andes north of the Equator, were climbed in 1975 and 1978.

Peak List

Ruiz Group

(Maps: I.G.M. 1:100,000 Sheets (Planchas) 206, 225, 244).

Nevado del Ruiz 5237m: 1-1936: Devasting eruption in 1985. There is/was a ski-lift on N. face and refugio on western side. W. face route safe and easy, more challenging routes available.

Volc n Bravo c.4800m: northern end of Ruiz massif:

Nevado El Cisne 5000m: on southern spur of Ruiz: 1-1957. Simple climb via usually bare N. ridge.

Nevado Santa Isabel c.5100m: has 3 tops of which N. is the sharpest & central is the highest: 1-1943. Can be climbed from north or west, or from Laguna de Otun (i.e. S.W.).

El Quindio 4798m: group of 5 rock peaks at south end of ridge from Santa Isabel, some glaciation: 1-not now known: From W. & traverse 3 main tops, descend knife-edge below highest point-1977.

Nevado de Tolima 5100m: the youngest and most symmetrical of this group: Disputed-1923: 1-1926. Can be climbed via N.W. ridge (large crevasses), N. face (hard), W. face, S.E. face (easiest?).

Volc n Olleta 4855m: near Ruiz: 1-1868.

Nevado del Huila

(Maps: I.G.M. 1:25,000, Sheets (Planchas) 321-IV-B & 321-IV-D. Poor quality owing to cloud cover during aerial survey).

Nevado del Huila: extended crest composed of steep ice masses above broad expanses of active glaciers with route-finding problems:

--North Peak 5220m: 1-1939 on skis from west via N.W. flank: W. face?-1944: Ice cliffs near top almost identical to those encountered by 1944 party, only access via steep, narrow ramp-1977: W. face, new route (1000m, III)-1980.

--Pico La Cresta c.5200m: 1-1978.

--Pico Mayor (Central) 5365m: broad W. summit may be 5-10m lower than sharper top 200m to E.: 1-1944 probably from West: 1st ascent of E.top-1975: Ordinary route from 'Polish Camp' to N.W., working southwards to finish up W. face.

--Pico Polonia c.5150m: southern peak of massif: 1-1975.

Purac, group and other southern volcanoes

(Maps: Simple map of Parque Nacional Purac, available from tourist office in Popayan).

Purac, 4700m: 2°20'N 76°26'W: 1-1868. Steep, loose ash. car 4670m: Paletar 4482m:

Sotar 4580m: 1-1869.

Los Cononucos 4512m, 4544m: Pan de Azú

Volcán Cutanga 4300m: Doña Juana 4250m: Las Animas 4242m: Petacas 4300m:

Galera (Volcán Pasto) 4266m: 1-1869. Well known tourist spot W. of Pasto.

Nevado Cumbal 4764m: 0°57'N 77°53'W: on or just north of border with Ecuador: 1(?) -1848: No longer has permanent snow.

Selected References

- Baur, R. 'Nevada del Ruiz, 5320m, als Sonntag Skitour'. LA, 33 (1957): 219-220.
Echevarría, E. 'The central cordillera of Colombia'. AJ, 82 (1977): 49-55.
Eugster, H. 'Tolima'. Jahresbericht des Akademischer Alpenclub (Berne), 16 (1921): 25-26.
Golay, K. 'Der Tolima, 5620m, in Kolumbien'. LA, 5 (1929): 337-345.
Heath, C. 'The Colombian Andes. Nevado de Huila-Pico La Cresta'. AJ, 88 (1983): 161-164. Huila, central peak.
Huber, H. 'Die Ersteigung des Tolima'. Andina, 8 (1930): 122-129.
Ritterbush, P.[& others] Report of the 1970 expedition to the Nevada del Huila, Central Andean Cordillera, Colombia, July 1970. Cali & Washington D.C.,1970.

Topographical Maps

The central mapping agency in Colombia is the Instituto Geográfico 'Agustin Codazzi' under the administration of the Ministerio de Hacienda. The basic series of topographical maps are: 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 (Series E772) with 25m contours. There are also 1:100,000 and 1:200,000 series, dating from 1948 and 1977 respectively. Permission from the Ministerio de Defensa Nacional in Bogotá is required for maps scale 1:200,000 and larger. There are other series at 1:250,000 and 1:500,000 dating from the late 'seventies. Not all the sheets in these series may have been published.

Mountaineering and Other Organizations

- Asociación Colombiana de naturalistas y Exploradores, Apartado Aereo 53.670, Diagonal 29, #.37-41, Bogotá .
Asociación Tolimense de Montañistas y Escaladores, Ibagu, .
Centro Nacional de Montaña, Transversal 10, #. 106-35, Bogotá.
Corporación Nacional de Turismo [CNT], Calle 28, No.13A-15, Bogotá. (Also offices in other towns).
División Parques Nacionales y Vida Silvestre, Calle 26, #.13B-47, Bogotá. (Part of INDERENA)
Federación Colombiana de Andinismo, Apartado 101.668, Bogotá.
Instituto Geográfico Agustin Codazzi, Carrera 30 y Calle 45, Bogotá.
Instituto Nacional de los Recursos Naturales Renovables y del Ambiente [INDERENA], Diagonal 34, #.5-84, Bogotá. (Offices also in main towns in national park areas. Maps and information on parks available).
Raider Comandos de Colombia Escaladores, Apartado Aereo 8922, Bogotá.

Mountaineering Journals

- Asociación Colombiana Naturalistas, Campo Abierto.
No.1-October,1977: Nos.2 & 3 - 1978: ?
Federación Colombiana de Montañismo, Altius.
Año 1, No.4, Dec.1985: ?