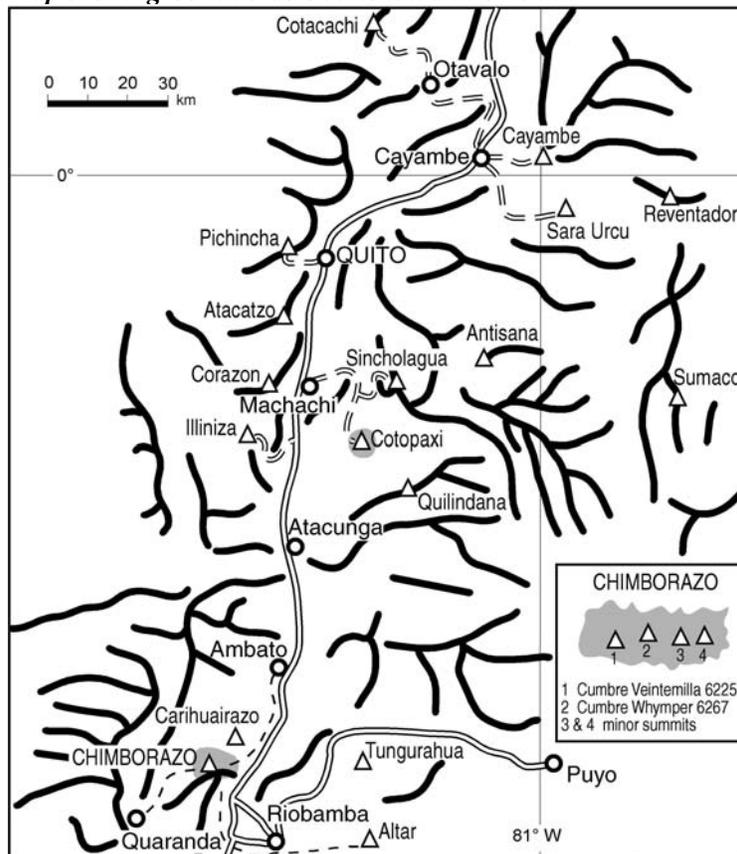


ECUADOR

The Andes of Ecuador are renowned for the spectacular collection of volcanoes in the northern half of the country. The mountains of southern Ecuador rise only to 3000-4000 metres and are of little or no interest to mountaineers.

Map showing Cordilleras Occidental and Oriental



The giant volcanoes of northern Ecuador rise above a high plateau lying at an altitude of 2000-3000 metres. The principal peaks run north-south through 350 kilometres and, roughly speaking, are grouped into two parallel chains, usually referred to as the Cordilleras Occidental and Oriental, west and east of the capital city Quito. Cross ranges between these chains divide the plateau into a series of basins (hoyas); other peaks rise between the basins and, in places, stand completely in them. The principal peaks of the Cordillera Occidental are Chimborazo, Illiniza, Carihuirazo and Cotacachi. Those of the more ancient Cordillera Oriental are Cotopaxi, Cayambe, Antisana, Altar, Tungurahua, and Quilindaña, while the very active volcano Sangay lies still further to the east.

The snowline is between 4600-4800 metres, being higher in the drier Cordillera Occidental. The most favourable months for climbing are June-August and December-January but climbs have been made in most months of the year. The colossus of the range is Chimborazo (long believed to be the highest mountain in the world) which is crowned with a thick ice-cap and sixteen glaciers. Peaks such as Cotopaxi and Tungurahua are almost perfectly symmetrical cones, while others are eroded caldera, with craters torn through their flanks. Of these, Altar provides the most savage rock scenery and technically interesting climbing in Ecuador.

It seems certain now that the first recorded ascent in Ecuador was made in 1582 when Toribio de Ortiguera and several other Spaniards climbed Quito's 'backyard' peak Pichincha after an eruption: there is also a record of an unsuccessful attempt made in November 1660. However, the main history starts in 1736, with the arrival of Charles De La Condamine's expedition to determine the length of a degree of the meridian near the Equator. The visit was remarkable among other things for being the first by non-Spaniards since the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, by which the then Pope divided the whole of South America between Spain and Portugal. The expedition, led by French geographer and mathematician De La Condamine, included his fellow-countryman Pierre Bouguer and the Spaniards Juan Jorge and A. de Ulloa.

Despite many interruptions and interferences the party succeeded in laying out a base line five miles long on the plains of Yarqui north-east of Quito. Then followed two gruelling years of triangulation work, until there was scarcely any portion of the Ecuadorian Andes they had not traversed, measured, drawn and mapped. Many high signal stations were used, including the summit of Pichincha, where members of the party spent twenty-three days in 1737, roasting by day and freezing by night, and living on rice and fowls brought up by relays of Indians, their work hampered by the drifting fog-banks. During the course of their work De La Condamine and Bouguer surveyed the flanks of Cotopaxi during an eruption, reached a height of 4745 metres on Chimborazo, and climbed Corazon, which in those days was covered with permanent snow. They were encamped twenty-eight days on the mountain (probably on the eastern side) but there are no precise indications of their route to the summit. That De La Condamine was the adventurous driving force of the expedition was further demonstrated by his homeward journey alone from Quito down the Amazon to Cayenne.

The next visitors were the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt and Aim, Goujaud (called Bonpland) who, in 1802-3, reached the snowline on Cotopaxi and a height of about 5500 metres on Chimborazo. In December 1831 the French geologist J. Boussingault, together with Colonel Hall, an American, and a negro porter, repeated the attempt on Chimborazo, claiming to have reached a height of 6000 metres. In 1858-9 the German naturalist Moritz Wagner attempted Illiniza, Altar, Cotopaxi and Chimborazo, but with less success. Cotopaxi was the first major peak to be climbed, the achievement of Wilhelm Reiss and the Ecuadorian A. M. Escobar in 1872. This ascent, like the many that followed, was only to the crater rim. The highest point on the rim, a predominantly icy pinnacle, was not scaled until much later. In 1873 Dr. Stübel, accompanied by four Ecuadorians, made the ascent by the south-west ridge, while Theodor Wolf and Alejandro Sandoval made the next ascent in 1877 by the north-west ridge. Reiss and Stübel also attempted Altar, Antisana, Chimborazo and Quilindaña.

The year 1880 saw the most important expedition in the entire history of Ecuadorian climbing that of Edward Whymper and his guides Jean-Antoine Carrel and Louis Carrel. On 4 January 1880 Whymper made the first ascent of Chimborazo, then climbed Corazon and Cotopaxi. Then he launched into a series of first ascents - Sincholagua, Antisana, Cayambe, Sara Urco and Cotocachi. Later he reached the fore-summit of Carihuairazo, already attempted by Reiss, and again climbed Chimborazo, with the Ecuadorians Beltran and Campana, following the Murallas Rojas (Red Walls) route which was to become the standard one. A few days after his return from Cotocachi, the Carrels reported that they had climbed Illiniza but when Whymper returned with them to repeat the climb they found the way blocked by a dangerous cornice. To commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the first ascent of Chimborazo, a new hut has been opened on the original Whymper route, on the southern slopes of the mountain near the Thielmann Glacier.

In 1903 and subsequent years the German glaciologist Hans Meyer (of Kilimanjaro fame) carried out a series of observations on the glaciers and made attempts on Chimborazo, Quilindaña and Antisana. Later he made the sixth ascent of Cotopaxi with Rudolf Reschreiter, who collaborated with him in producing a book with the most beautiful illustrations of Ecuador's mountains, and now very rare.

The first Ecuadorian to become a life-long mountaineer was Nicolás G. Martínez (died 1934); he also wrote several works on the natural history of the mountains of Ecuador. His first successful climb was the second ascent of Antisana, made in November 1904, when he reached the summit alone. The following year he made the fifth ascent of Tungurahua at his third attempt and, a couple of months later, the seventh ascent of Cotopaxi by Wolf's route. Five years later he made the fourth ascent of Chimborazo and in April 1912 another ascent of Cotopaxi by a new route on the eastern side. A few days later, having been repulsed on Illiniza Sur, Martínez and his companions succeeded in making the first ascent of Illiniza Norte via the south-east ridge, from the col between the two peaks. The principal difficulty was a traverse past the main gendarme across to the north ridge. While they were on the ridge an earthquake started stonefalls all over the place. This was the only 5000-metre virgin peak to be conquered exclusively by Ecuadorians and was the crowning glory of Martínez's climbing career. But his favourite peak was Tungurahua which he climbed for the last time in 1933, a year before his death; with this 'pleasure trip' he said goodbye to his beloved mountain. The eastern, and most difficult, summit of Chimborazo now commemorates the name of the 'Father' of Ecuadorian mountaineering.

One of the principal mountaineering problems remaining in Ecuador was the ascent of the majestic fire-breathing Sangay. The first modern approach to the mountain was made by G. Dyott who, in 1925, climbed beyond the snowline only to be defeated less than 150 metres below the crater rim. However, an American party made up of Robert Moore and his son Terris, with P. Austin, succeeded in making the climb in 1929 during a period of volcanic dormancy. At that time the cone was perfect, unlike the truncated top drawn by Whymper fifty years before. In 1966 the peak was attempted by Chris Bonington and Sebastian Snow from the east. In 1976 a party of British servicemen was overwhelmed by an eruption when near the summit, resulting in the deaths of two of them and the hospitalization of the others.

The only other major Ecuadorian peak remaining inviolate, the difficult Altar, held out against attack much longer. The horseshoe-shaped crater rim of Altar is open to the west and the first peaks to be attempted were the highest point, Obispo, near the southern end of the rim, and El Canónigo near the northern end. The mountain had been approached several times during the second half of the nineteenth century, and in 1870 Reiss and Stübel had reached a forepeak, El Pilar, on the northern end of the amphitheatre. In 1939 Piero Ghiglione claimed an ascent but he was misled by his local guides and thick mist into climbing Cubillin which lies about ten kilometres to the south. In 1961 a Japanese expedition from Waseda University reached forepeaks of both Obispo and El Canónigo, and in 1962 local climbers made repeated attempts to reach Obispo. However the following year the Italian climber Mariano Tremonti and two Italian guides climbed Obispo by the south-south-west face, with the benefit of a full moon and an exceptionally fine day at the crucial point of the climb. In 1964 the second Waseda University party tried the north face of El Canónigo but it was again Tremonti and his guides who, in 1965, made the first ascent from the north-north-east, despite bad weather and difficulties comparable with those encountered on Obispo. The remaining peaks and pinnacles were conquered by various parties between 1965 and 1979. Except for a few routes, all the climbs have been done on the outer-facing flanks of the mountain.

As one of the most famous mountains in the world, Chimborazo is still a great crowd-puller and while not as fundamentally difficult or dangerous as, for instance, Denali, Huascarán or Aconcagua, it still offers a considerable challenge. There are now five recognized peaks - the Whymper or Ecuador summit; Ventemilla; Norte; Central or Polytechnic; and the most difficult of all, the Eastern or Nicol Martínez. The two usual routes to the highest point are the Old Route via the north-west flanks (i.e. route of Whymper's second ascent) and the New (Whymper) Route via the south-west flanks (i.e. route of Whymper's first ascent). Other difficult routes which have been done include the east summit from the Moreno glacier; the highest point from the north; and the central summit via the Humboldt glacier. The New Route is now the most popular since the opening in 1980 of the Edward Whymper refugio, one of a chain of climbing huts maintained in Ecuador.

There is plenty of literature on the mountains of Ecuador, including several guidebooks, large-scale maps for the most popular peaks, and Whymper's perennially fascinating book, *Travels Amongst the Great Andes of the Equator*.

Peak List

*(I.G.M. maps are available for some peaks, others are still being prepared. Because of the number of sheets involved with the large-scale series, and availability, refer to details in Michael Kelsey's *Climber's and Hiker's Guide* (3rd ed.).*

Cordillera Occidental

Chiles 4768m: 0°49'N. 77°55'W.: 1-1869. Ascend W.flank to snowy ridge on north side, easy.

Yana Urcu del Piñan 4535m: survey point on top: 1-?. Ascend via trough of erstwhile S.W. glacier, easy.

Cotocachi 4939m: highest point is rocky southerly peak: 1-1880. Ascend via W. glacier and rock couloir (pitches of IV).

Pichincha:

--Rucu Pichincha 4790m: 1-1582. Approach via Cruz Loma, or Cerro Ventanillas, and follow ridge. Optional rock-climbing on summit pyramid.

--Guagua Pichincha 4794m: Ascend from Lloa village or via Padre Encantado, then south-westwards; or traverse from Rucu Pichincha. Descent into crater difficult and/or dangerous.

--Padre Encantado: just N.W. of Rucu Pichincha, large active crater: 1-?

Cerro Atacazo 4457m: small, eroded volcano: Ascend via northern spurs, easy.

Corazon 4791m: eroded volcano: 1-1738. Approach N.W. foot of peak (choice of route) and ascend to top, easy.

Illiniza Norte 5100m: moderately easy rock peak: 1-1912. Ascend S. ridge from refugio on N.E. side of Illiniza Sur. Almost constant stonefall danger. Worse when snowy. Few harder passages (III), awkward traverse past main gendarme to N. ridge.

Illiniza Sur 5263m: fairly steep and crevassed, great variety without extreme difficulties, quite serious: 1-1880 via N. face: S. face, S. ridge (600)-1973: N.E. face-1974: S.W. face-1982 (see AAJ, 26 (1984): 197-8). Ordinary route N.face from Nuevos Horizontes hut. More difficult is E.(NE). face/ridge (Celso Zuquillo route).

Quilotoa 4010m: Ascend via W. side, mostly by road. Path into crater.

Carihuairazo 5028m: on a spur of Chimborazo, heavily crevassed, fairly easy but technical with numerous crevasses: routes start from Refugio Cumbre Piedra Negra S. of peak:

--Cumbre Maxima: 1-1951. Via big S.W. rock ridge or W. glacier.

- Cumbre Central: *Via central western spur.*
- Pico de Mocha: *hardest summit: Via S.W. glacier or S. ridge (IV+), or ridge to the right (IV+,V-).*
- Chimborazo: several summits: original Whymper route harder than Pogyos route: best climbed June-September, or December: numerous routes, consult guidebooks:*
- Whymper (Ecuador) 6310m: *1-1880 from S.W. (New, or Whymper, Route from Refugio Whymper): 2-1880 from N.W. (Old Route from Pogyos & Refugio Fabi n Zurita).*
- Veintimilla 6267m: *1-1963?*
- North c.6200m:
- Central (Politécnica) c.6000m:
- Eastern (Nicol s Martjnez) c.5570m: *the most difficult and attractive summit.:*

Cordillera Oriental

Cayambe 5789m: dangerous crevasses and avalanches, technically not too difficult, seldom climbed other than by ordinary W. side route:

--Cumbre Maxima: *1-1880: Variant to E. on last part-1975. Ordinary route from S.W. from refugio: N.W. route, Espinoza glacier (passes close to Punta Jarrin): N. face, N. buttress, extremely steep at top-1988.*

--Cumbre Norte: *1-1964.*

--Cumbre Oriental: *1-1964: North route from Laguna de San Marcos: S.W. route.*

--Punta Jarrin: *1?-1967 from ordinary N.W. route.*

Sara Urco 4676m: somewhat mysterious peak, difficult of access, normally snow-capped, easy, glaciers on N, N.E. & S. sides: 1-1880. Ascend via S.W. glacier.

Puntas 4452m: consists of 48 rock pinnacles c.100-150m high on crater edge:

Antisana 5705m: four peaks forming part of old crater rim: huge glaciers and vast amount of snow, one of the hardest Ecuadorian peaks:

--Central: *1-1880: N.W. face-1952.*

--East: *1-1975. Climbed from high camp on col between main and south summits via sharp ice ridge.*

--North-East c.5600m: *1-1972: N. glacier, W. ridge (ice towers)-1974.*

--South (Antisanilla) c.5570m: *avalanche danger, hardest summit: 1-1963 via N. ridge to main summit: N.W. face-1982.*

Sincholagua 4901m: easy, summit pinnacle loose and rotten: 1-1880 via N.W. ridge (ordinary route).

Cotopaxi 5897m: route-finding more difficult than on Chimborazo, snow and ice section more heavily crevassed and steeper, best climbed December-April: 1-1872 from S.W: 1st complete ascent to highest pinnacle-1929(1971?): From N.E. and possible 1st descent into crater-1972: Yanasacha rock wall (high on ordinary route) direct-1989. Hut & ordinary route on N.W. side. Has also been climbed from E. & N.E.

Morurco 4830m: variable snow cover, said to be easy but with possibilities.

Quilindaña 4878m: difficult and technical: 1-1953: N. face direct, W.ridge, extreme route-1973: N. face, E. ridge-1980.

Llanganati Range: remote range N.E. of Baños, small snowfields to S. & W.:

--Cerro Hermoso 4571m: *1-1941.*

Tungurahua 5005m: active & snow-capped, technically easy but physically demanding: 1-1873. Usually climbed from N. via refugio: S.W. flank, S. ridge-1989.

Altar: peaks stand on rim of eroded crater & are climbed almost exclusively from outside:

--Obispo 5319m: *1/2-1963 via S. face: S. face, descend E. ridge-1981: W.ridge to Italian couloir-1983: N. face-1984: S.W. ridge variant-1986: N. face variant-1990.*

--Monja Grande 5317m: *1/2-1968: S.W. flank-1984: S. face, extremely steep ice gully-1986.*

--Monja Chica 5120m: *1-1971 via very corniced W. ridge: E. side from col leading to Tabern culo.*

- Tabern culo* 5296m, 5180m, 5130m: 1-1972 via N.W. face (65ø): S. face direct-1981.
- Tabern culo II*: 1-1972 via N.E. slopes?
- Tabern culo III* 5130m: 1-1972 via S.E. face.
- Canénigo* c.5260m: 1-1965: S. face-1984.
- Fraile Grande* c.5200m: 1-1972 via N.E. ridge: E. ridge, descend W. ridge & N. glacier-1981.
- Fraile Central* c.5150m: 1-1978.
- Fraile Occidental (Beato)* c.5150m: 1-1979.
- Fraile Oriental* c.5185m: ice pyramid on N.E. corner of crater rim: 1-1975.
- Cerros de Cubillin* 4717m: 3 tops, just S. of Altar: 1-1939. Ascend via W. flank to crest between southern and central tops, then follow crest north-westwards to highest point.
- Paila Cajas* 4550m: 2 tops, just N.W. of Cubillin: Ascend via S.W. spur and traverse summit crest south-eastwards.
- Quilimas* 4670m: just south of Cubillin peaks: Ascend from north, up snowy rock ridge.
- Sangay* 5323m: extremely active, usually approached from W.: 1-1929.
- Ayapungo*: massif comprising two main summits, the southernmost snow peak in Ecuador:
- Pico Sorochi* 4730m: 1-1973. Ascend via N.W. face.
- Tintall n* 4455m: rock needle on W. spur of Sorochi.
- Achipungo* 4630m: north of Pico Sorochi: 1-1973. Ascend via S.W. face.
- Rock peaks east of Achipungo:
- Yanaurcu* 4289m:
- Sasqui;n* c.4500m:
- Cerro Azul* c.4500m:

Transverse or Inter-Andine Peaks

- Imbabura* 4630m: Ascend via E. spur and sharp ridge; or from south. Easy climb, bad rock.
- Mojanda*: several approach routes:
- Fuya Fuya* 4263m: easy rock pinnacle:
- Yana Urcu* 4000m:
- Paschoa* 4200m: eroded volcano, crater open to west: Ascend via S.W. spur or from east. Easy except for W. face, which consists of steep, eroded crater walls.
- Rumiñahui* 4712m: 1-? (no records prior to 1950): Traverse S. to N. - 1972: Ascend from *Limpiopungo* valley, up *P ramo* Ridge which descends from central summit, then north-eastwards. More challenging and technically difficult climbs possible. Poor, weathered rock. Occasional snowfall.

Isolated Eastern Peaks

- Reventador* 3485m: Very active volcano first visited in 1931 by the Ecuadorian L. Paz y Niño. Now accessible from road on eastern side; wet, cloudy, fairly easy. New cone inside old crater can be climbed.
- Sumaco* 3900m: remote jungle peak, position not determined until 1921: 1-1925?: Now more accessible, very wet. Ascend from north through tropical forest.

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Topographical Maps

Topographic mapping in Ecuador comes under the Instituto Geográfico Militar, Quito (Postal address: Apartado 2435, Quito). The current series are at 1:25,000; 1:50,000; and 1:100,000. More than half the country has been mapped in detail, mostly the western side. The 1:100,000 series has 80-metre contours and the 1:50,000 series has 40-metre contours in the mountains.

Mountaineering and Other Organizations

Asociación de Excursionismo y Andinismo de Pichincha, Casilla 8288, Oficina de Correo, Americana y Mazosca, Quito. (Includes about nine different clubs).

Asociación de Andinismo de Chimborazo, Chile 33-21 y Francia, Riobamba.
(Use same address for mountain guide Enrique Veloz Coronado).

Casa de Gobierno, Oficina Emigration, 2d Piso, Ambato. (For information about Chimborazo & Sangay).

CETURIS [Tourist Office], Apartado 2454, Reina Victoria 514 & Vigente Ramón Roca, Quito. (Provides information in English or Spanish. Correspondence not answered).

Club Andinismo del Banco Central del Ecuador, Casilla Postal 105-B, Quito.

Cumbres Andinas, Quito. (Meets Fridays on Ambato near Mazo).

Grupo Ascensionismo Colegio San Gabriel (Secciones 'Juvenil' & 'Montñeros'), Apartado 266, Quito.

Instituto Geográfico Militar, Avenida T. Paz, Mino Casilla 2435, Quito. (Off Av. Colombia, behind Casa de Cultura).

Libri Mundi Bookshop, Juan León Mera 851 y Veintimilla, Quito. (Also sells I.G.M. maps).

Nuevos Horizontes-Club Agrupación Excursionista, Venezuela 659 on Pasaje Amador, Quito. (Near Plaza Independencia).

N.B. Most of the major colleges and universities in Ecuador have a mountain club.

Mountaineering Journals

Club de Andinismo del Banco Central del Ecuador, Andinismo.

No details.

Club de Andinismo Colegio San Gabriel, Montaña.

In Spanish with some English. Editor: Padr, Jos, Ribas. No.3-May-Jun.1962: No.6-Apr.1964: No.7-Apr.1965: No.8-Mar.1966: No.11-Jan.1975: No.12-Jan.1980: No.13-Jul.1981: No.14-Apr.1983: ?

Club 'Nuevos Horizontes', Nuevos Horizontes.

No details.

Almacén Cotopaxi [shop], Avenida 6 de Diciembre 1557 & Baqueadano, Quito,

Campo Abierto. Small climbing magazine in Spanish; good source of local information. No.1-1982: No.5-Mar.1983: ?

Map showing Cordilleras Occidental and Oriental, Peru

