

## PERU 8thousand

“Human conquests are mountain chains with abysses and valleys. Aspiring to excellence as a collective achievement is like reaching for the highest summit...”

Brahma Kumaris

“Every mountain climber has read about expeditions to the Himalayas, emotional and passionate stories of courage and determination. I don’t think there’s a single mountaineer who has not dreamt of climbing the Himalayas. Though many Peruvians had been climbing for more than fifteen years, and not only in Peru, actually going there seemed far too remote and difficult.” With these words, Renzo Uccelli gave us a glimpse of his aspirations, but with an underlying pragmatism strengthened by his years climbing the Andes.

Annie Peck from the United States and her two Swiss guides were the first to climb the lowest of Peru’s Huascaran snow peaks in 1908. From that point on, many expeditions –first foreign, then Peruvian– have traveled throughout the Andean mountain ranges in search of tough, difficult challenges. Maybe this would be an excellent opportunity for a group of Peruvians to make up for the fact that a foreigner was the first to conquer Peru’s highest snow peak. To visit the Himalayas and be the first Peruvian expedition to reach the summit of one of its lofty mountains would partly compensate for the loss of that andean pride.

However, there is a wide gap between an idea and its execution. What sort of an expedition did they want to be? Who would go and who would commit themselves to this tremendous undertaking? What type of equipment and technical material would they need?

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Professors Guillermo Quiroga P. and Jorge Pancorvo C., prepared this document as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation. August, 2000.

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How would technology and communications contribute? How would they finance the project? They even had to ask a most simple, but crucial, question: which of the high mountains would they choose to climb?

Today, in retrospect, the answers seem more obvious to Renzo and his team of mountain climbers. But, for future projects, it was important for them to assess the experience they had acquired from the trip to the Himalayas and, above all, weigh what they had learnt from the Peru 8thousand expedition, in order to properly benefit from this knowledge.

## Background

This adventure sport began in Europe more than 200 years ago, where it was first known as Alpinism. As time went by, the name was adapted to each specific mountain range. In Peru it is referred to as Andinism and in the Himalayas, as Himalayism. This sport has various specialties: rock or ice climbing, mountain climbing and, as an initiation, what is known as trekking or hiking.

This is more than a hobby; it's not like playing tennis or golf. For a true climber, it's a passion. Renzo Uccelli, an Andean mountain climber and photographer, declared: "It's about contact with nature, about falling in love with the mountain; it is a continuous test to show how far one can go. Yes, the fear and the risks are there, but isn't that, perhaps, what life is all about? About facing ever-bigger challenges? The city, on the contrary, brainwashes you. The enormous amount of information, of visual elements and stimuli, produce great confusion in modern society. And then, there is advertising, seeking to impose a certain lifestyle and pace which only increases stress. On the contrary, nature is the best way to find the true answers at the core of the human condition."

For mountain climbing, a person ideally should be agile and lightly built, with well-developed shoulders and triceps, and good balance. This does not mean that people with other characteristics are disqualified, but, undoubtedly, the lengthier and more demanding the climb, the more well-trained, prepared, healthy and, above all, strong-willed a person has to be.

Mountain climbing is not a highly promoted sport in Peru. There are many reasons for this: a population with limited economic resources, a country that does not have a deep-rooted tradition in mountain climbing, a sport that has not developed organically and has had no support of any kind, public or private. In the 80s and early 90s, the terrorist group known as Shining Path had taken over a large part of Peru's mountain ranges, making it difficult for anyone to practice the sport. Most of Peru is Andean, but despite this enormous potential, 97% of the climbers are foreigners while there are only 200 Peruvians who are active mountain climbers. A few clubs, such as the Andino Peruano (Peruvian Andean) or the Andean Association at Universidad de Lima should be mentioned, in addition to a few institutions such as the High Mountain Guides Association in Huaraz.

Jorge Luis de Los Heros said: "Many mountain climbers in Peru start out while they're in college, when they have time, but no money. The irony is that once you have the resources to become fully involved in mountain climbing as a professional activity, you have no free time. Very few are truly able to keep on climbing once they've graduated." In plain language, one could say that Peru is a country with mountains, but no mountain climbers.

## **The Andes Mountain Range**

The Andes Mountain Range extends all the way from Venezuela to Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost tip of the South American continent. The highest mountain peak is the snow-covered Aconcagua, at 6,959 meters (22,832 feet) above sea level, in Argentina.

The Peruvian Andes consist of a group of mountain ranges, of which the Cordillera Blanca and the Huayhuash are the most important for climbers. Precisely the Cordillera Blanca is where the highest tropical, snow-covered range in the world and the highest peak in Peru, the Huascaran, at 6,768 meters (22,205 feet) above sea level, are located. The Alpamayo snow peak, with a height of 5,947 meters (19,512 feet), also deserves to be mentioned –a perfect ice pyramid considered to be the most beautiful mountain in the world, a title awarded in Germany at the international scenic beauty contest.

Peru has 19 sub-mountain ranges, more than a thousand mountains with altitudes higher than 5,000 meters (16,400 feet) above sea level and 36 mountains more than 6,000 meters (19,680 feet) high. Another significant aspect is that these mountains are easily accessible; that is, the foothills of the mountains are easy to reach, as opposed to the Himalayas, where this can take up to a week, in the best of cases. This makes Peru one of the most attractive countries for mountain climbing in South America.

## **The Himalayan Mountain Range and the Eight Thousand Family**

The Himalayas are often perceived to be a single mountain, but, to be precise, it is a large mountain range which goes from the southeast to the northeast of the Asian continent's wide territory, separating India, to the south, and China, to the north, and cutting across the territories of Bhutan, Nepal and Afghanistan, Tibet and Pakistan. This is where 10 of the planet's 14 peaks higher than 8,000 meters (26,250 feet) are located.

The Himalayas cover an immense ecological and topographical diversity, which culminate in the roof of the world, the majestic snow-covered summit, Mount Everest. Weather conditions are extreme: winds of more than 62 miles / hour, temperatures that fall below 35 degrees Celsius and heavy rains, the equivalent of 3,500 mm columns.

The Eight Thousand family consists of "14 sister mountains": the highest mountains in the world, from Mount Everest<sup>1</sup>, 8,848 meters (29,030 feet) high, to Shisha Pangma, 8,012 meters (26,287 feet) above sea level. Only six mountain climbers have managed to climb them all; the first was Reinhold Messner, between 1978 and 1986, and the sixth was a Spaniard, Juanito Olarzabal.

In 1950, as part of the French expedition to Annapurna (8,091 meters (26,546 feet), Maurice Herzog reached the summit of the first 8,000-meter peak. Since then, activity in the Himalayan Eight Thousands has been intense, varied and controversial. Currently, both lone climbers seeking new routes in winter and agencies, which charge approximately \$50,000 dollars to take a team of six all the way to the top of Mount Everest, converge in this part of the world. The agency rate includes the climbing permit, but does not include all the other costs such as equipment, communications, etc. This is the so-called commercial mountain

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<sup>1</sup> E. Hillary and T. Norgay reached the top of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953.