



FOUNDED BY
JAN AND HERB CONN

NEWS OF THE P.A.T.C. MOUNTAINEERING SECTION

1718 N St N W Washington, D. C. 20036

24
VOL. 34 NO. 7

JUL 1969

PAGE 1

NEVADO DEL HUILA, 1969

Art Wilder

It all started sometime last fall when an acquaintance, Phil Ritterbush, mentioned that he had seen a mountain in Colombia that he would like to climb sometime. Having heard nothing further for several months I called Phil from Touhey's on Inauguration Day, Jan. 13. Phil said yes, he was getting up an expedition to Nevado del Huila (18865 feet) and was leaving in about three weeks with Bob Mason, who is also with the Smithsonian. I made a rare on the spot decision and said that I would like to go along if possible. Thus began a flurry of activity which included trying to learn Spanish, getting shots, passport, tickets, tourist caros (visas), buying equipment, and so on. Meanwhile Phil's friend Carlos Lehmann (Director of the "State" Museum of Natural History in Cali and without whose help our trip probably would not have been possible) wrote that bandits (guerillas) would not be a problem in the area, and that he had several climbing candidates. This was to be a sort of joint Colombian-American expedition to the "Huila", which had been climbed once back in about 1944.

On arrival in Cali on Saturday, Feb. 8, we met our Colombian climbing partners (ranchers with an urge to do some exploring) and picked up Paul Fehling of the Peace Corps who had previous climbing experience. After some trying hours spent getting our baggage through customs we set off on Tuesday in three vehicles for Huila. It was 175 kilometers to the mountain, partly on the Pan American Highway but mostly on dirt roads that twisted through deep Andean valleys (the Army is building a new road which will make it a much shorter trip). That night we hired eight porters and found that a trail had been cleared to the tree line for us as planned. Next morning we started out from about 9000 feet through cloud forest going through tunnels occasionally in the thick vegetation. That night we camped under rather poor conditions -- rain, clouds of midges, and on a thickly vegetated mud slope. On Thursday we progressed to a little beyond the end of our cut trail to about 12000 feet and were feeling the altitude. The next day Paul turned back suffering from chest pains and breathing difficulty. Phil and I stayed in camp while the others found a route and moved up to 13000 feet and took some equipment to the glacier terminus. All but two of the porters now left, to return on Thursday. We moved to the snow line on Sunday.

Mountain sickness for me was now serious as I could muster barely enough strength to walk up hill a few steps at a time. On Monday Phil and our Colombian contingent, Guiermo and Francisco, strapped on crampons and with a stove, tent, food and movie cameras, started up the ice. The following was written by Phil:

An end to the three months of good weather usual for December through February and respiratory complaints limited us to one attempt, in which we ascended the west slope of the North Peak. We reached a height from which descent into the amphitheater below the Central, the highest peak, was barred by steep slopes. From a camp at about 17000 feet we followed a spur to its crest just below the summit platform where the attempt was abandoned when one of our party was overcome by exhaustion.

The snow mantle of the Central Peak, third from the north in the group and its highest, is pierced by about five fumaroles which smoke constantly and one emits a loud whistling noise. The mountain is composed of steep ice masses above broad expanses of active glaciers which present route-finding problems. Its general aspect is an extended crest in contrast to the typical conical form usually associated with volcanoes. Believing it likely that other parties will be interested in climbing the Nevado del Huila we are preparing a report to be available also from the Museo Departamental de Historia Natural, Dr. Carlos Lehmann, Director, Apartado Nal. 938, Cali, Colombia.

Following our descent on Thursday we spent several very enjoyable days socializing and sight-seeing before reluctantly (myself at least) returning to Washington.

BELAY LEDGE
(formerly Notices)

Entertainment:

The Section needs positive suggestions for next season. Please communicate with Don Stemper (365-2716) preferably with information on the source of materials.

Route descriptions:

For the record, will all members please mail a description of any new route to the Chairman or to the Secretary for use in a guidebook (to be published sometime in the future). Follow the style of the Shawangunks guidebook.

Belay Ledge, cont. p. 2