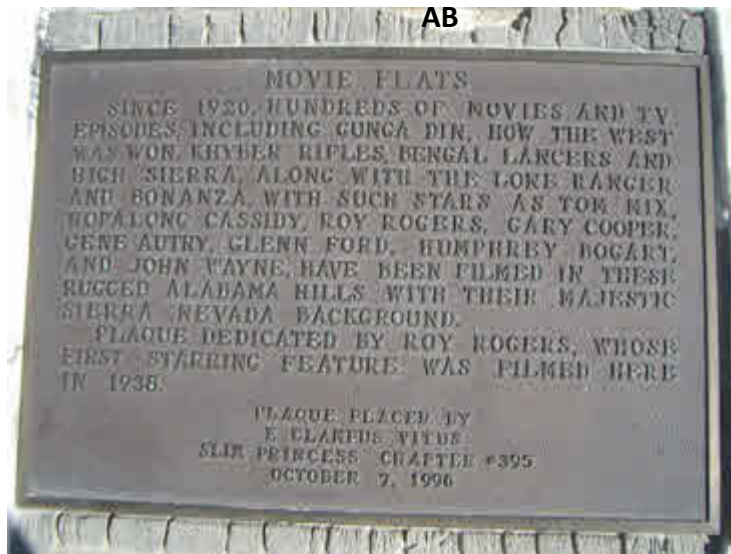


The dawn photos on the previous page are of Mt. Whitney from North Fork Trail, the team are beside South Lake and the camp site is at Whitney.

The other photos are of Bristle-cone Pines, an unnamed wild flower and a scene described as something from the wild west, backing up the claims of the plaque shown here. The final photograph is one of the local inhabitants - a rattlesnake.



Photographs throughout the report are by Tim (TJ), Adrian (AB) and Ken (KR)

## BOLIVIA, QUIMSA CRUZ - AUG

A report of the YRC trekking expedition to the small Quimsa Cruz range of 5000+m peaks a day's drive from Bolivia's principal city, La Paz. Following a week of acclimatisation tourism the party of seven completed their trek during a week in mid August 2010.

### Introduction

Over the last forty years or so the Club and its members have made several successful trips to the Bolivian Andes with ascents and treks in the Cordillera Apolobamba, Cordillera Real and the Yungas, Cordillera Cocapata and the full length of the Cordillera Occidental. The remaining significant mountain group, the Cordillera Quimsa Cruz appeared overdue a visit. Interest in such a trip was aroused among both rock climbers and mountain trekkers though the former were already committed to a trip elsewhere in the Americas this season.



The mountain ranges of Bolivia

### The Quimsa Cruz

The Quimsa Cruz range is part of the Cordillera Oriental which runs in a line to the north and east of the altiplano. The Cordilleras Apolobamba and Real form the northern part of the line, close to and north of La Paz with Cerro Illimani marking their southern limit. The Quimsa Cruz lie on the southeast of La Paz River as it cuts through towards the Yungas and Amazonia. The range extends from 40 to 80 miles southeast of La Paz, almost reaching the highway leading from the altiplano to Cochabamba.

Around 1900, miners from La Paz found tin deposits at the foot of the glaciers near Viloco in the northern part of the range. They ascended the icy ridges and high altitude glaciers under the leadership of one Don Oswaldo Quetena. He died tragically on a Korichuma ridge while searching for a mountain pass to the richer veins. A decade later Germans Herzog and Seeling published the first technical information on the range prompting a number of pioneering expeditions. Mining operations flourished, then towards the end of the century declined markedly. They are now being re-established by smaller scale cooperatives.

Mesili describes the mountain chain as beautiful with Bolivia's most isolated climbing on high quality graniodorite rock and excellent new route potential. Parts of the range can be reached in a single long day's drive from La Paz with a four-wheel drive (4WD) vehicle. Reliable mountaineering information is available in La Paz from those professional guides who were part of the 1987 German expedition.

Thellaeche calls the Quimsa Cruz a microcosm of the Andes with summits cloaked in perpetual snows and glaciers, enormous granite peaks, multi-coloured lakes, deep gorges, bamboo forest and an immense variety of birds and plants. This variety makes for unforgettable trekking between 4200m and 5000m.

The range is also called the Tres Cruces – Quimsa or Kimsa being the Aymaran for three. Sometimes the term Southern Cordillera Real is used locally. Around fifty of the Quimsa Cruz peaks have heights of 5000m to 6000m. The reported heights of early ascents are exaggerated by around 150m to 200m. Monochrome photocopies of 1:50k maps are available in La Paz though it is said that the sheets may be reprinted and/or updated. The mapping is mainly from aerial photography in the 1950s with little attempt to represent accurately the steeper ground, especially crags. Glaciers in the area have retreated considerable distances with the smaller ones no longer extant resulting in unstable rock in these areas. There is poor agreement between sources on place names.

Currently the range attracts little attention with a few visits from serious mountaineers each year. There remain parts of the range with no ascents and ample opportunities for new routes even in the more frequented areas. However, the altitude, isolation and absence of available support in case of any accident or serious illness are factors which need to be considered by visiting teams.

## Participants

In a busy (northern) summer for the Club this expedition attracted seven participants. Their ages ranged from 20 to 74 and their previous mountaineering experiences ranged from single visits to the Lake District to a number of mountaineering visits to the greater ranges.

Members:	Rob Ibberson	Guests:	Sarah Broadhead
	Michael Smith		Gabrielle Ibberson
	Richard Smith		Helen Smith
			Fiona Smith



The trekking team at camp 4 with on the back row (l to r) Javier Thellaeche (guide), Richard, Michael, Helen and Fiona Smith, Sarah Broadhead, Gustavo (cook), Gabrielle and Rob Ibberson, Raymundo (head porter). The Penis Pass is in the left background. (photo by JT)

## Logistics

International flights to Bolivia's La Paz are available via Miami, Madrid and Santiago or Amsterdam and Lima. Mid 2010 these cost about £900. Accommodation in La Paz is plentiful but should be pre-arranged at the height of the season (July/August). We found the Hostal Naira to be (£17 per person with breakfast) quiet, clean, efficient and helpful. They store bags in a locked area while you are on trek.

The availability of good logistical support for mountaineering around La Paz has improved markedly over the last thirty years. There are a handful of companies providing experienced and qualified guiding, portering, catering and transport. Besides the dependable agencies there are innumerable small tourist services offering support for trekkers and mountaineers but employing porters (not guides). Care should be taken to avoid these.

Andean Summits were selected for this trek because of their knowledge of the Quimsa Cruz and longstanding reputation. Arrangements were made with them several months in advance and an itinerary negotiated via email. Their reliability and flexibility were invaluable. Menus were varied and interesting and the food well prepared. The guide's knowledge of flora, fauna and local cultures adding to the trekking experience and well worth the £415 for five days full trekking support and two days transport. We provided only our sleeping bags, sleeping mats and personal gear.

For the seven trekkers a substantial support team was required: ten porters and head porter, a cook with his assistant and a mountain guide. Transport consisted of two 4WD strengthened and adapted to withstand the rigours of the rough dusty roads in addition to a pickup truck for the porters, tents, provisions and other equipment.

Even well-made plans often fail to run like clockwork in Bolivia. On this trip two political protests and two celebratory parades caused minor disruptions to our programme. Participants need to be adaptable and, at times, patient.

All food and fuel for trekking should be taken from La Paz. The largest nearby community, Viloco, is a shadow of its 1920s heyday and can not be relied upon for supplies. All water was thoroughly treated first by filtering then boiling at camp or using standard personal water treatment systems en route during the day. The distribution of petrol to the towns along the highway on the altiplano was undependable. Local transport is available from La Paz to Viloco (from where it is possible to trek) and apparently beyond. Transport to Cochetanga may also be available. Local transport would be cheaper but somewhat slower and more crowded than a hired vehicle.

## Acclimatisation

La Paz lies between 3000m and 4100m so, assuming one is arriving from UK altitudes, a number of acclimatisation days need to be spent around this height adjusting to the altitude before starting trekking. On this trip seven days were spent at altitude before setting off for the Quimsa Cruz. The first in La Paz, four on a brief visit to Cuzco and Machu Picchu in Peru and, finally, two days exploring the city of La Paz. Despite the hectic trip to Peru, by the end of that week the initial symptoms of nausea, dizziness, lassitude, lack of appetite and headaches had abated and all were feeling ready for a trek. However, once actually heading up a rising route at 4500+m breathlessness quickly returned and the pace was slow on the first day. By the last day the pace had improved noticeably.

## Route

The five-day route was circular, starting and finishing at Cuchu Mocoaya (586370), a terrace of mining cottages set back from and hidden from the road several kilometres north of Viloco in the northern part of the range. An eight-hour drive from central La Paz arrived there via Ruta 1 towards Uyuni turning off at Conani passing Puchuni, Tablachaca and Caxata on a surfaced road before a rough track past mining villages including Viloco and Campamento Miraflores. This track was left just before a ford on a tight bend (one of many) for a smaller track soon barred by a padlocked wire. The miners have the key. A few hundred metres beyond, past the houses, are flat areas by the stream. This was our basecamp.

## Day One - Cuchu Mocoaya to Mina Nevada

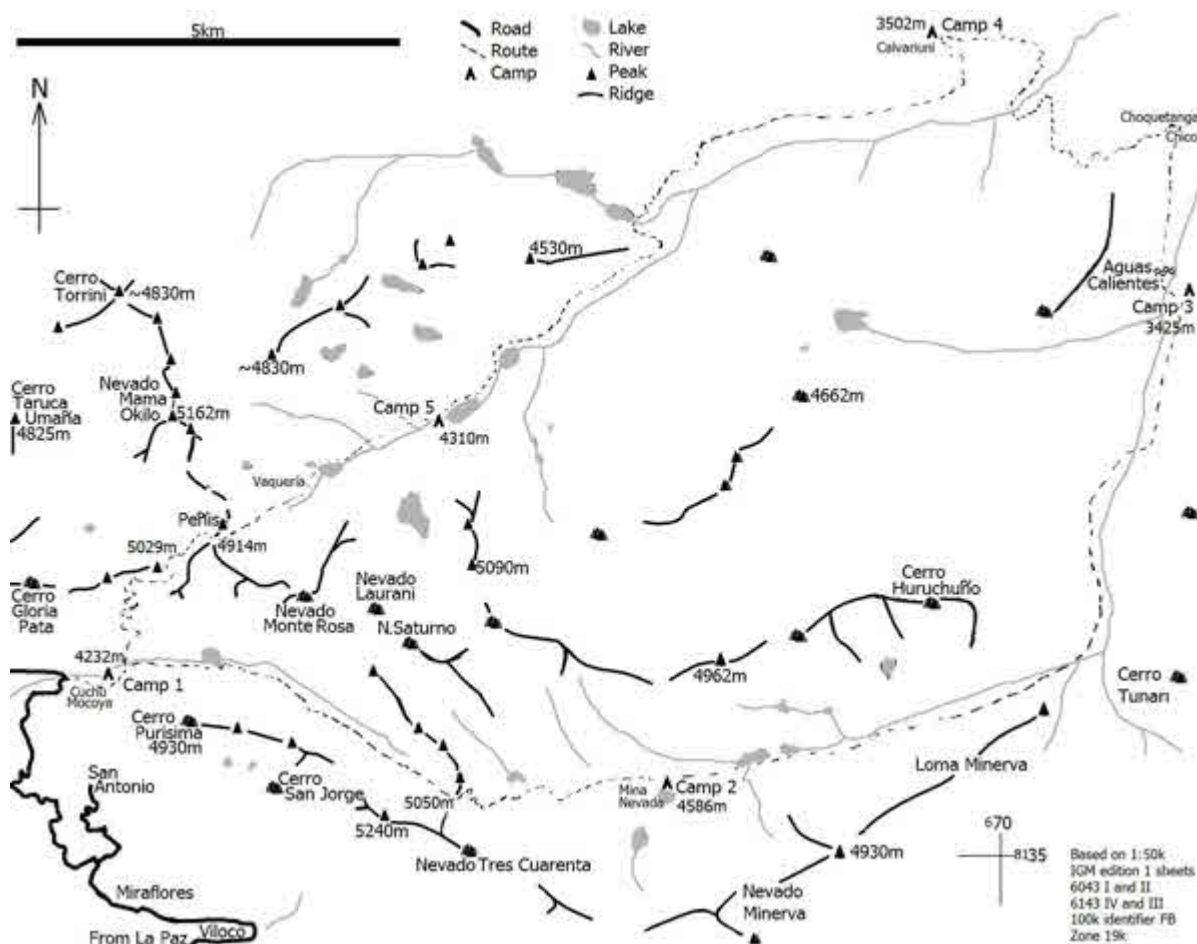
Initially on a rough vehicle track to the mining area the route became less distinct through hanging valleys leading eventually to a broad col around 5058m. The miners we saw climbed steep screes then crags to gain the veins they worked. Power for their tools came from a spluttering compressor at the foot of the scree and Cuchu Mocoaya had a two-man rocking crusher made of granite resting on a flat stone.

Above Laguna Blanca in the first hanging valley llamas grazed and the route moved to the right (south) of the valley passing through a narrow cleft between a boulder and a cliff. Beyond this the path was usually on the south flank of the valley until the screes were gained towards the col.

The season had been exceptionally dry so streambeds were parched resulting in a lack of drinking water. This was the only section of the trek where drinking water was a problem.

At the col a rough 4WD mining track from Viloco is joined. This track gives an easy-angled descent to a second tarn and the hamlet of Mina Nevada perched high on the hillside at the track's end. This track on the south side of the valley does not follow the line shown on the IGM map and there are other new tracks on the northern side of the upper Rio Calachaca valley. The mining hamlet has a few houses and an old administration building with people living in some of its rooms. By the tarn is a rudimentary football pitch on which we were allowed to camp. The family in the house adjoining the larger building provided a quinoa-based drink flavoured with cloves and later a sweet coffee.

Sketch map of the trekking route



This was a tough first day with about 800m of ascent and a distance of 10km on the map. Eight hours.

## Day Two - Mina Nevada to Aguas Calientes

An easier second day ensued as the valley was descended so relinquishing the height gained the previous day over about 12km, 1350m of descent and 8 hours. Initially the path followed the line of the mining track, contouring round the hillside. A balcony walk followed the south side of the valley through four hanging valleys passing Laguna Pakkota and a prominent waterfall to cross the river close to the junction of three valleys and Cerro Tunari. Here the route and Rio Calacha Jahuirra valley descends to the north.

We disturbed feeding condors, saw flocks of ibis and on reaching the timberline, noisy flocks of parakeets. To the east of the lower valley were many craggy peaks of sound-looking rock all believed to be unvisited. A worrying activity was the burning of vegetation at the foot of crags and by some pastures. This did not appear to be aimed at improving pastures and was started by children. Large areas were engulfed in flames as sparks lit new areas and smoke filled the valley.

Crossing the river we passed through an increasingly vegetated area of large boulders to arrive at a small village on the opposite side of the valley to a hot water spring. The flow from the spring passed through a bathing pool to a washing area. We had the place to ourselves but believe that it is a popular gathering place for locals on a weekend. To reach the springs from the village involves a loop upstream and crossing four interesting log bridges across streams.

It was at this camp that a decision had to be made. From here an alternative route could be taken east for one long or two shorter days to reach the Choquetanga road. However, to continue we had to accept that there was no other sensible ways out except to continue over the high Penis Pass or reverse our route in. We decided to continue. The decision was celebrated round a campfire with songs from both gringos and porters.



Gabrielle makes running repairs to clothing by the campfire at Aguas Calientes

## Day Three - Aguas Calientes to Calvariuni/Alisuni

A rising traverse from the pool headed to an obvious shoulder on the western side of the valley, about 3km downstream. A village, Choquetanga Chico, rested on the far side of the ridge and we passed some time talking to a local lady with her children and inspecting her garden. She reported spectacled bears raiding her crop of sweetcorn. This small community far from any road has a schoolhouse but no teacher as the last one was taken ill. Unusually for such a remote location a neighbouring garden sported topiary.

A long traverse along a pre-Columbian trail was then made back west across a heavily ridged, north-facing forested slope high above the Rio Chaca Jahuirra. A few cattle grazed the slopes and it was in a clearing here that a dead skunk was found. Soon after midday a gradual descent was made to the river (3300m) and a bridge above some hydroelectric workings. There is a large HEP installation about 20km further east and there was once a plan to flood the valley we had descended the previous afternoon.

After lunch the northern bank had to be followed across boggy ground for a few hundred metres to pick up a newly restored trail up through steep bamboo forest. The dark tunnel of vegetation stopped as the ridge was gained and a more open trail contoured to the hamlet Calvariuni perched on a shoulder. This once hacienda is marked by a prominent tall tree with dark foliage and had the drying skin of a spectacled bear outside one of the two locked huts. Minor engineering works soon restored to operation the narrow aqueduct which served the site.

Perhaps 10km with 600m of ascent. Seven hours.



Fiona crossing the outflow of the lake above the cliffs. The crags and valley beyond have had only a few visitors. (Photo RWS)

## Day Four – Calvariuni to Vaqueria

The route continued back east and south for a short distance up the slope above the campsite to reach the ridge on the left. Crossing this and traversing west round a ridge brought into view the long traverse ahead high above the Rio Chaca Jahuirra again. The valley below is heavily wooded and 5km

further upstream a cirque of steep bald cliffs blocks the valley. The carefully engineered traverse we follow across ridges and cliffs arrives just above this cirque at the outflow of the lower Laguna Rater Kkota which form one of the two impressive waterfalls flowing over the cliffs. The route predates the Incas.

As we traverse we see smoke from a fire set at the foot of a gully by the laguna. This rapidly spreads up the gully and much of the slope for 600m above with dense smoke engulfing the peak above.

After lunch by the outflow we head up the slope to the south again rounding the ridge to the left to see the now smaller traversing path onwards into the Vaqueria area of granite rock to the east of Nevado Mama Okllo. This narrow valley is approached via a few scattered buildings in the valley bottom, llama herds and two hanging valleys. We camp just beyond the second lake with its gulls and geese. There are trout in the lakes but the ones caught are not large enough for our supper.

About 10km with about 600m of net ascent making it a tough day. Nine hours.



Basecamp with ascent route heading off to the right and descent route above the shadow on the left. (Photo RWS)

### Day Five – Vaqueria to Cuchu Mocoya

Starting on the north side of the stream feeding the lake the route heads south of west past Laguna Mama Okllo and boulders harbouring large kangaroo-come-rabbit-like viscachas. Height is then made quickly as the route steepens and reaches the prominent pinnacle of the Penis Pass. All around but especially to the left before the pass are steep crags of sound rock with some established routes up the obvious cracks.

Beyond the pass the route first descends west a little with another large crag on the left. A route can be seen to a second slightly higher pass on the left (south) side of the valley above Cerro Gloria Pata. This 5000m pass was taken after lunch. Beyond the second pass a traverse is first made right (west) into the next corrie before many zigzags are followed to the valley floor at Cuchu Mocoya.

Only 8 km but 650m of ascent and 800m of descent. About 7-8 hours.

Overall this was a challenging five-day round which could be tackled in 6 or 7 days but with sustained interest and mostly on good paths. Two hours might be taken off each day's time if all the team were well acclimatised and experienced in mountain trekking.

### Weather

The weather followed the traditional pattern for an altiplano winter. Dry with generally clear skies.

Mornings generally had a frosty start with a thin layer of ice on lake edges and some streams. The arrival of the direct sunlight onto the camp was welcome. Temperatures quickly rose though it remained chilly in the shade. Protection from the high level of ultraviolet radiation was essential and lips needed protection from the cold dry air. The dryness, radiation, low pressure and exercise also contributed to rapid dehydration and we all needed to watch our water supply. By the afternoon walking required only one or two thin layers of clothing. Under trees on the lower parts of the trek the humidity and temperatures were higher but not uncomfortably so.

Sunset triggered a rapid fall in temperatures and duvet jackets and thicker trousers were soon required. Sleeping bags rated -10°C to -15°C were considered too warm by some and inadequate by others though the minimum overnight temperatures were thought to be -5°C to -10°C. Skies remained clear and calm at night giving good views of the stars limited only by an early rising moon.

At the end of the trek the effects of a cold front were observed. An increase in the winds from the usual midday fresh breezes were accompanied by billowing clouds encroaching over cols from the Yungas.

### Fauna

The range of climates from the cold arid high mountains to the warmer damp upper Amazonian forests between them support a diverse flora and fauna. This can be seen in the following lists though they are not exhaustive as several species were not identified.

Birds seen on the Altiplano and in the Quimsa Cruz

- American Kestrel
- Andean Condor
- Andean Flicker
- Andean Goose
- Andean Guan
- Andean Gull
- Andean Lapwing
- Andean Swallow
- Andean Tyrant
- Ash-Breasted Sierra Finch
- Bare-Faced/Whispering Ibis
- Black Siskin
- Black Vulture
- Black-Crowned Night Heron
- Black-Faced/Andean Ibis
- Black-Winged Ground Pigeon

Blue/Puna Ibis  
 Cattle Egret  
 Common Moorhen  
 Golden-Winged Cacique  
 Grassland Sparrow  
 Grebe (Lake Titicaca)  
 Humming Birds (black and blue/green)  
 James Flamingo (Lake Titicaca)  
 Marbled Wood Quail  
 Mountain Caracara  
 Mountain Parakeet  
 Neotropic Cormorant  
 Peregrine Falcon  
 Pipit  
 Puna Plover  
 Puna/Variable Hawk  
 Rock Pigeon  
 Rufous-Collared Sparrow  
 Snipe (small)  
 Social(?) Flycatcher  
 South American Tern  
 Stripe-Capped Sparrow  
 Tinamou  
 White-Headed Gull  
 Yellow-Rumped Cacique

#### Additional birds seen in the Amazon Basin

Amazon Kingfisher  
 Black-Tailed Trogon  
 Blue-Crowned(?) Trogon  
 Blue-Fronted Parrot  
 Cocoi Heron  
 Collared Trogon  
 Curassow  
 Diademed Sandpiper/Plover  
 Flycatcher (all black)  
 Great Egret  
 Green and Blue Macaw  
 Green Kingfisher  
 Large-Billed Tern  
 Red and Blue Macaw  
 Red and Green Macaw  
 Round-Tailed Manakin  
 Snowy Egret  
 Speckled Chachalaca  
 Dark-Winged Trumpeter  
 Tawny-Throated(?) Dotterel  
 Torrent Duck  
 Trogon (brown)  
 White-Capped Dipper  
 White-winged Swallow  
 Yellow-Billed Tern

#### Animals (neither domesticated nor captive)

Araneomorph (funnel-web spider)  
 Armadillo  
 Butterflies including Blue Morpho, Northern Segregate, Papilionidae, Pieridae and Nymphalidae

Capybara  
 Cockroach  
 Dragonfly  
 Dung Beetle  
 Glow Worms (Phengodidae)  
 Horse Fly  
 House Fly  
 Lizards  
 Neuroptera (lacewing?)  
 Skunk (dead)  
 Tarantula  
 Viscacha

Insects were not an inconvenience on the trek. Lower down by the River Beni near Rurrenbarque there were biting insects but no mosquitoes were noticed though the areas round the villages where we spent the evenings are likely to have been treated with insecticide.

#### Problems encountered

There were no insurmountable problems. Those listed here are included to illustrate the operating environment for those organising and participating in trekking in Bolivia.

- Somewhere in the transfer of one couple's kit from the airport to the hotel room a small rucksack was stolen. This required the urgent replacement of medical items including prescription medicines and reporting the loss to the National Tourism Police for insurance purposes.
- Early symptoms of acute mountain sickness were observed by the guide in one of the porters who had been suffering from a cold but had not mentioned this fact to anyone. Diamox, coca leaves and a shot of alcohol (on patient request) followed by a rest and removal of his load resulted in the porter being fit for duty the following day.
- The burning of vegetation in the dry season results in fire and smoke over a wide area, spreading at alarming speeds. If mountaineers notice smoke anywhere away from houses they should check wind directions and plan an escape route in case it becomes necessary to take evasive action.
- Road signs are to be seen in parts of La Paz and on some newer main roads. The vast majority of junctions have no indication of routes and in some villages and towns it is difficult to distinguish between the main road and residential side streets. Discussion with local people can help to establish the condition of roads and such information is likely to be accurate for routes along which public transport arrives at their location. Having a guide familiar with the roads and able to check on their condition avoided potential problems.
- Parades and fiestas with marching bands are popular in Bolivia. A parade of college bands blocked the main street in La Paz pushing more traffic onto the side streets and closing all streets for one block leading down to the main street. Our accommodation was on such a block and this

complicated loading the transport for departure for the trek. Later, at Patacamaya local fiesta parade was making its slow way with the complicated dance steps of the merengue along the highway. All traffic dispersed onto inadequate unsurfaced side streets to bypass the blockage.

- Political unrest in the Potosi area arising from dissatisfaction with the level of national support for local development resulted in a number of days when roads were blocked and about 100 tourists stranded behind the barriers. The leader of one such group of tourists was the Andean Summits partner with the final instructions on arrival times and hotel requirements for our group. Our advance party were therefore not met at the airport so took a taxi to the anticipated hotel only to find that it was full and they had no reservation. Eventually, a room was found in the hotel next door.
- Our party had bus tickets booked for the 12 hour journey from La Paz to Cuzco, Peru, due to leave at 8am. The day before departure we were first warned the journey was likely to be cancelled as the Desaguadero border crossing was closed on account of "smugglers protesting at the government tightening of customs regulations". Later we were told that the bus would leave late in the afternoon so that, by agreement, the bus would pass the border in the middle of the night when the protesters would have gone home. While this did require us to spend a cold night on an unheated bus it did allow us to visit Cuzco.
- It is common knowledge that Bolivian water closets can not cope with toilet tissue being flushed down them. What one long-distance bus passenger did not know, but the bus conductor obviously expected her to know, was that such bus toilets can only cope with urine.

## Personal recollections

Trekking trips are about much more than the route and the adequacy of logistics. They are personal journeys and opportunities to get to know new people. The following accounts reflect these aspects of this trip.

### Downhill all the way

After the trek the Smiths took the opportunity to see part of Bolivia which contrasts with the altiplano and high Andes. A nine-hour drive in a 4WD took us over the La Cumbre pass between Mururata and Khala Huyo, down the alleged "most dangerous road in the world" (which now carries much less traffic on account of the new road on the opposite side of the valley) and to Yolosa. There we flew the three 400m to 600m zipwires back and forth across the valley. Back in the vehicle it was down to Caranavi for a lunch of bush meat (snake, boar and deer) then on a lesser road to the gold mining town of Guanay and an overnight in a simple hostel. Another 9 hours in a dugout canoe along the Beni river took us down to the San Miguel del Bala lodge run by the Tacana people whose lands rise from there to the Cordillera

Apolobamba above. We spent three days there visiting their community, school, sugar extraction machine and fields then following their trails. A more luxurious boat took us further downstream on this tributary of the Amazon to Rurrenbarque to catch a flight back to La Paz. This was a complete change from the previous two weeks and well worthwhile.

### Catering by Gabrielle

This was my first experience of such a trek. Many things impressed me about the organisation but I think the cooks, Gary and Gustavo, deserve a special mention. Their first concern was to prevent any bowel problems. This had been a problem in the past. They achieved the good hygiene by making sure there were hand-washing facilities before entering the canteen tent and also supplying a spirit based sterilising hand gel.

Obviously they had to give us enough kilocalories to do the trekking as our energy consumption would have been well above our normal daily level. They went well beyond this though by making the meals interesting. No two meals were the same, not even breakfasts, and we were given a number of Bolivian specialities such as quinoa, apple bananas, empanadas, cooked chicken marinated in a chilli/vinegar and appi - a drink made from a red sweetcorn. Lunches were especially good; for five of the seven the cooks carried precooked food in a large saucepan in an insulated box so we had a rice based dish twice, a pasta based dish twice and a quinoa based dish once. All helped stoke up our calorie intake. Each time there were different additions to the basic carbohydrate in the way of meat, fish or vegetables to make the food very appetising.

There was always tea with cake or biscuits when we arrived at camp, even when we were very late, followed by supper an hour or two later. The latter always started with a delicious soup (the soups again were outstanding) followed by a main course and then a dessert, mostly fruit based. All these were cooked on a small gas cooker which they had to carry, of course.

### Contrasting Treks by Rob

Since joining YRC I have experienced several treks: all different. This one stands out from the others for several reasons. First, starting at 4,200 metres and reaching our highest point (over 5,000 m.) on the first day and with almost all of the trek above the 4,000 m. level. Second, the almost total "isolation" in that few local people were encountered. Third, that the scenery was without exception from start to finish, exceptionally grand and inspiring; different from other mountain regions because of altitude, latitude and remoteness. This last points to the further possibilities for some future YRC pioneers re-visiting the region with new climbing routes and summits as objectives. The organisation is proven and competent, so could be relied upon assuming continuing availability of support from Andean Summits which seems likely. Though mentioned already, the weather would seem to be more reliable than many other regions the Club has visited; an important detail when one has to travel so far.

Finally for me, was the appreciating the explanation of an Inca “mystery” by visiting the pre-Incan archaeological site of Tiwanaku. This civilisation was building magnificent pieces of civil engineering – aqueducts and temples; metal element mining, smelting and alloying; foundries; wonderful ceramics and a clear knowledge and use of the astronomy from 1,500 BC until they were absorbed by the Incas in the early 13th Century A.D. This is presumably how the relatively short-lived Inca civilisation acquired the engineering skills they needed for their renowned buildings.

**Conclusions**

The Quimsa Cruz offers varied and interesting trekking and there are opportunities for rock climbing. A minimum of two weeks is required even for a short trek on account of the acclimatisation period needed on first arrival on the altiplano. The unfamiliar cultural and geographical setting of Bolivia enhances the experience. Support for mountaineering around La Paz has improved markedly.

A number of more specific conclusions drawn from this trip follow.

- The continuous support of an experienced mountain guide familiar with the route pays dividends. Their ability to extract up-to-date information on the state of routes from local residents avoided potentially time-wasting diversions.
- Visiting Cuzco and Machu Picchu from La Paz in 4 days is possible but tiring. Breaking the journey at Puno or Copacabana would help. While trains still run the full length from Cuzco to Machu Picchu the slow zigzagging near Cuzco is generally now avoided by tourists who are transported by minibus on a good road to Ollantaytambo to connect with the trains.



The Smiths and the Ibbersons rest on the approach to the Penis Pass,



The distinctive column at the Penis Pass (photo MS)



Richard crag climbing, 4b at over 4200m (photo MS)

**Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to Ted Saunders of the UCL expedition for recounting first hand experiences of different parts of the Quimsa Cruz.

The success of this trip was due in no small part to the preparation and encouragement of Andean Summits, especially Javier Thellaeche.

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## CHINA REPORT

*Our covers go off to China; do some good work and come back and it is perhaps almost becoming routine, almost like the moon landings did. As such your editor has to press them to keep the rest of us informed and to put on record the work they are doing. They have just returned from another successful trip and I hope in the next edition to have a report updating us on their caving activities. Ged Champion has however been persuaded to give us a different slant on their trips to China and penned this before they went off on this years trip.*

## CRASHING OUT IN CHINA

Fairly late on in the organisation of the 2009 China Caves Expedition to Huanjiang in Guangxi, Southern China we were to discover that the World Bank were going to be indirectly funding some of our activities. Although this sounded very impressive we weren't absolutely sure what this would entail. Since 2003 we had talking to Guilin Karst Institute about organising an expedition to the Mulun National Nature Reserve, where some of the most extensive and stunning cone karst in Southern China can be found. No caving expedition had previously explored this area although our French colleagues including Jean Bottazzi had explored the Libo area to the north just across the Guizhou border. They had reported seeing a spectacular skyline of cone karst towers stretching to the horizon but none of them had crossed the Da Gou River which guarded the northern approach and inner sanctum of Mulun.

As luck would have it, Zhang Hai our trusty contact at Guilin Karst Institute had applied for permission to enter the reserve from Huanjiang and so the planning of the expedition started to gather momentum.

We set off for China a little depleted because some of the usual suspects were away on other assignments but we managed to recruit new blood from a reasonably reliable local source, the New Inn at Clapham.

We collected our equipment from the store in Guilin ensuring we had plenty of rope; our scouts in Mulun had informed us of many bottomless shafts just waiting to be descended. Huanjiang is just 4 hours from Guilin and easy to reach by road. Huanjiang literally means 'town on the bend of the river'. The town is a typical bustling Chinese county town with an impressive square where local people congregate. Huanjiang County has a population of approx 330,000 which comprises Han people but also Maolan, Molao, Zhuang, Miao and Yao minorities.

Mulun Karst Forest Natural Reserve is situated in the north of Huanjiang county and 72km away from Huanjiang county town, and comprises 90 square kilometres in total area divided into a protected, buffer and experimental zone. It was approved as a natural reserve by the National Council