

Nevado Huaguruncho

Southwest face



HUAGURUNCHO 2006

An expedition to explore and climb new routes in a remote corner of the Peruvian Andes.

Abstract

At the beginning of June 2006 Anthony Barton and Andrew Houseman undertook a trip to the Cordillera Oriental specifically the Quebrada Huaguruncho.

The Cordillera Oriental is a reasonably accessible and compact range of mountains south and east of the far more famous Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhaush. The focal point of the range is the highest summit that of Nevado Huaguruncho (5723mts), surrounding this peak are numerous lower peaks offering a wide range of possibilities on both snow and ice or excellent quality granite. The range offers climbs of all standards of difficulty on both glaciated and non glaciated terrain.

Access to the Cordillera Oriental is straightforward with daily buses from Lima to Cerro de Pasco and from Cerro de Pasco on to Huachon, the starting point for any expedition into this range of mountains. Mules or llamas can be hired to ferry loads into the mountains, one or two days being sufficient to reach most base camps.

The weather is very similar to that found in the Cordillera Blanca, we found the weather to be somewhat unsettled in June however this weather also stretched as far as the Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhaush. In the end the weather and the theft of vital items from our base camp led to an earlier than planned departure.

Given the problems faced by the expedition we achieved limited success with an ascent of the possibly unclimbed peak of Nevado Huarancayo Sur, I climbed the northern summit of this peak from Quebrada Huarancayo the previous year with Tim Riley. An abortive attempt at Nevado Huaguruncho Chico ended due to poor weather and unstable snow conditions. Shortly after this we were forced to leave the mountains as per the above mentioned reasons.

Report written by Anthony Barton with additional photographs provided by Andrew Houseman.

The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that all or part of it may be copied for the purpose of private research.

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Report written in October 2006.

Expedition Members

The expedition was comprised of the following members and was sponsored by both the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council.

Anthony Barton, electrician aged 38.

Andrew Houseman, student aged 24.

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Introduction

This season was my fifth spent in Peru and my second MEF sponsored expedition to this range of mountains. My previous trip to the Cordillera Oriental had been a reasonable success with ascents of three peaks however due to poor weather we were unable to attempt any of the peaks including Nevado Huaguruncho which are accessible from the Quebrada Huaguruncho.

Having been to this particular quebrada twice before I saw the potential for a further expedition to tackle the southwest face of Nevado Huaguruncho and perhaps make ascents of some of the other peaks accessible from a base camp in this quebrada.

Having already done a significant amount of research into the Cordillera Oriental I was aware that very few expeditions had explored the mountains that towered above the Quebrada Huaguruncho. One peak in particular remained unclimbed and Nevado Huaguruncho Chico had not even been attempted from this side, add to that the wonderful unclimbed southwest face of Nevado Huaguruncho and we had the makings of a great trip.

With support from both the MEF and BMC Andy and I arrived in Lima on the 9th of June 2006 with the intention of first going to Huaraz to collect some equipment and to help the acclimatisation process. This would allow us to go directly to Cerro de Pasco at 4300mts and on to Huachon the starting point for any expedition heading into the Cordillera Oriental.

Due to the poor weather in the Cordillera Blanca at the time we decided to leave prematurely however we had managed a day hike to Laguna Churup and picked up the equipment required.

With the acclimatisation gained whilst in Huaraz we could dispense with a night in Huanuco and head straight to Cerro de Pasco and the bus to Huachon. The day after arriving in Huachon we were in base camp.

The expedition was not to be as successful as the previous year, the weather proved extremely disruptive and only one peak was summited. On returning to base camp after an attempt on our second objective we found our camp in some disarray, our tent had been broken into and a number of items stolen. With the theft of several vital items and the continuing poor weather we decided to call it a day and managed to procure animals the following morning for our return to Huachon.

Welcome to Peru

Arrival:

Upon arrival you will find yourself at Jorge Chaves international airport, which is located on the outskirts of Lima. Immigration and customs is usually a formality however you should make sure that they write the correct number of days in your passport. As a British citizen you are entitled to 90 days however sometimes they write 60 or even 30 over your entry stamp. If you exceed what is written in your passport you may encounter problems applying for an extension or be required to pay a fine when you pass through immigration on the way out of the country. It will cost you \$1 per extra day payable in either US dollars or Peruvian soles.

Finally make sure you use a registered taxi to take you into the centre of Lima, ask to see his ID card. You should pay around \$10 to Miraflores or Lima.

Money:

Cash dollars and euros can be changed on the street (beware of forged notes and poor exchange rates), in casa de cambios and in banks. Make sure all your \$ bills are in perfect condition, any torn or well used notes or notes with writing on will almost certainly be refused. There are a lot of forgeries on the streets so ask a local as to the best way to check your money. They counterfeit every note and coin and I was amazed to find myself in possession of a fake 50 centavo coin (9 pence) at one time during my stay.

As of writing your £ is worth around 5 soles 80 centavos.

Accommodation:

You can pay anything from 5 soles a night upwards for a room, in some small towns you would find it difficult to get a room worth any more than 5 soles however in major towns and cities there are a wide range of possibilities.

Generally if you are looking for a clean hotel with a hot shower you should expect to pay around 30 to 40 soles for a single, a little more and cable TV may be available! Expect prices to be higher in major cities and in the more exclusive districts of Lima such as Miraflores. If you want to pay a little more there are bargains to be had and I found an excellent hotel in Miraflores for 60 soles.

Food & Cooking:

As you would imagine restaurants serving most types of food can be found in Lima however in smaller towns expect the standard set menus or fried chicken. A meal can be had for as little as 2 soles however a 2 sole set menu could give you more than just a full stomach so be warned. Lunch or almuerzo served between 12 and 2pm is the main meal of the day and a set menu of three or four courses is the norm. Dinner or cena is a lighter affair normally consisting of a couple of courses. Choosing a set menu is by far the most economical form of dining out and nearly all restaurants offer a range of set menu choices.

As for mountain supplies there are some excellent supermarket chains in Lima and this would offer more of a choice than the markets in smaller towns and villages. Most villages have shops and it is always possible to find the basics but for a good choice I would recommend a visit to a major supermarket in Lima before heading out to the mountains. If you want to take fresh vegetables then these can be bought in the market in Huanuco or Cerro de Pasco. Limited supplies of fresh vegetables can be found in Huachon but it would be wise not to count on its availability.

I use a combination of stoves, generally an MSR XGK II with petrol or benzina and a gas burning hanging stove on the mountain. It is possible to buy gas in Lima at several outdoor shops, in Lima you should expect to pay around 20 soles for the standard sized canister.

I would also consider taking some freeze dried meals and I would recommend the Reiter meals which can be bulked out with a bit of potato powder. They really come in handy for high camps or bivvi's. Something else I took this time around was a selection of Shwartz packet sauces which proved to be excellent.

Getting about:

In Lima it is best to use registered taxis between districts and should cost around 8 to 12 soles depending on which district you are travelling to and from and at what time of day, expect to pay 3 to 5 soles for trips within the same district. Accessing this particular range of mountains is fairly straightforward with both day and night buses running to Cerro de Pasco and Huanuco. Travelling at night can be an extremely comfortable experience if you take the bus cama, this service comes complete with hostess, movies, food and the all important fully reclining seat. Less expensive day buses exist to the above mentioned destinations however when a bus cama costs around 40 soles it seem silly not to take the opportunity to travel in total comfort. Cerro de Pasco at 4300mts is too high to travel to directly and so initially a bus to Huanuco which is at an altitude of approximately 1800mts would make more sense, it is also worth bearing in mind that the direct buses to Cerro de Pasco are not of the same quality as the buses to Huanuco. A taxi costing just a few soles can take you from your hotel to where the buses leave for Cerro de Pasco, they start leaving around 5am and the journey takes about three hours which would give you plenty of time for some last minute shopping in the excellent markets of Cerro de Pasco, expect to pay around 8 soles for this bus.

A bus leaves Cerro de Pasco for Huachon every day around 12 noon from a small parking area a short distance from the centre of town. When you arrive in Cerro de Pasco's main terminal a taxi or cart will take you to this parking area and the bus to Huachon.

Buses depart Huachon for Cerro de Pasco around 4am and seats can be booked in an agency on the main street. At the time of writing the fare is 5 soles and generally there is no baggage limit which is in contrast to most major bus companies who have a 20kg baggage allowance however most of them don't seem to enforce this rule.

Safety:

Finally a note on safety, I believe Peru to be a relatively safe place and attacks on mountaineers are rare however your belongings are constantly at risk. Never leave your personal effects unguarded. Even on the premier bus services your hand luggage is at risk from thieves, I prefer putting everything into my checked baggage. I have never had any trouble on the cheaper services but I always make sure my baggage is secure and leave it

to the last minute before taking my seat. Try to avoid having too much kit strapped to the outside of your pack. Better still wrap it in a large sack which can be bought from the market for a few soles, it will also protect it from the weather and dust.

Once in camp there is the dilemma of leaving base camp unattended, there is always the possibility of theft. The region that is covered by this report has many small mining co-operatives and I have been told that they have been responsible for acts of theft.

Unfortunately our camp was robbed and a number of items stolen, we had been told that this particular quebrada was safe and there not being any mines in the area we thought it safe to leave the camp unattended. The local people were appalled at the theft and this was the first time my tent had been broken into after 4 seasons climbing in Peru.

Should you decide not to leave your camp unguarded there is always a possibility of hiring a local too look after your camp while you are in the mountains around 20 soles a day plus food would probably cover it.

Further information can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.

Part one (09 June to 14 June)

This part of the trip proved not what we had hoped it to be however it did allow us to go directly to our base camp in the Cordillera Oriental and to purchase some essential items not readily available in Lima.

We arrived in Huaraz on the 11th of June after taking the night bus from Lima, as mentioned before bus travel in Peru can be a fairly comfortable experience if you take advantage of the bus cama service available from most of the major bus companies.

The day of our arrival was spent purchasing various items for our expedition, gas canisters and kit bags being the main things on our shopping list. The kit bags were bought from Yuraq Janka which specialises in the making and selling of camping and climbing equipment.

The 12th of June saw us making our way to Laguna Churup a popular day hike from Huaraz. With the lake being at approximately 4400mts it is perfect for acclimatisation purposes.

After our day hike we considered our options and decided not to wait in Huaraz for an improvement in the weather. We later found out from a strong team that had ventured into the mountains just prior to our departure that conditions were poor with deep snow and considerable avalanche danger.

Part two (14 June to 02 July)

We arrived in Lima the evening of June the 14th after taking the day bus from Huaraz, an opportunity for Andy to see more of the Blanca and catch a glimpse of the Huayhaush.

We had discussed our options during the journey to Lima and decided we did not need to spend more than one night in Lima so the day after our arrival we purchased our tickets to Cerro de Pasco for that night and went shopping. A trip to Plaza Vea not far from our hotel provided us with nearly all our supplies.

I had found an alternative bus company namely Junin which I had been reliably informed had the most comfortable buses to Cerro de Pasco. We were not to be disappointed and passed a very comfortable night courtesy of empresa de transportes Junin arriving at 6:30am. With the bus to Huachon leaving at around 12:30 we had plenty of time to get some fresh vegetables and some fuel for the stove known as benzina blanca to the locals. Because the bus to Huachon arrives in Cerro de Pasco at 6:30 am we were able to put our bags on board and sleep on the bus until the markets opened. It is worth mentioning that this will also be the last opportunity to use the internet though there is a telephone in Huachon.

We managed to arrange animals for our trek into base camp on the day of our arrival in Huachon, I managed to find Carlos Trujillo who had packed our kit into the mountains the year before and he was keen to do it once again. The morning of the 17th dawned bright after rain had fallen for a good part of the previous evening and night. Carlos arrived

bright and early and we were soon on our way and after 5 ½ hrs we found ourselves at the ideal site for our base camp. Situated between two lagunas filled with trout and at the base of Nevado Huarancayo Sur's southeast ridge it was the perfect spot. The following day was spent relaxing, fishing and putting our camp in order.

It seemed like the weather was finally with us, it had been great the last two days and as we left camp to recce the unclimbed Nevado Huarancayo Sur it was again sunny and warm. We made our way up to the summit of point 4666mts, continuing along the ridge we found the perfect viewpoint. The mountain seemed to have a lot of potential, some fantastic looking ridges and an impressive looking icy gully on the mountains southwest face.

The following day we set off in the opposite direction towards the southwestern face of Huaguruncho, this trek provided us with a plan. We saw our route on Huarancayo Sur which was to be the southeast ridge, we saw our route on Huaguruncho Chico its southwest ridge and we picked out a line on Huaguruncho's southwest face. We thought climbing the peaks in this order would allow us to acclimatise and give us the best possible chance of success on Huaguruncho's southwest face. My original thought of a direct route to the summit was ruined by an enormous serac collapse, although not falling down the route it affected the approach and so we had to look elsewhere on the face for a safer possibility. There are three obvious ribs on the southwest face and we thought the left hand rib seemed to give the best opportunity for an ascent. It looked to be objectively safer than the other ribs and less technical to boot. The route to the summit would however be much longer than that afforded by its neighbours and although safer this approach was somewhat more technical.

After returning from our recce the weather started to deteriorate and the morning of June the 21st dawned cloudy and it started to rain around midday. The forced rest day was perhaps fortuitous as Andy was not feeling so good with a stomach problem. The following day was much the same and indeed it rained for the next two days. There was a pattern, usually clear first thing but with the weather gradually deteriorating, the rain starting by midday or a little earlier. It would generally clear during the night but we would sometimes awake to fresh snow just above camp.

June the 25th dawned a little brighter, we thought it was about time the weather improved and decided to go for it, leaving camp at 8.45am we headed for the southeast ridge of Nevado Hurancayo Sur. The start of the ridge proved straightforward and we gained height rapidly. Higher up the ridge narrowed considerably and a series of ledges on the eastern side of the ridge provided access to the final summit tower. It was at this point that we roped up and the pitch that followed constituted the crux of the climb consisting of a steep rocky gully filled with snow, two further pitches brought us to the first and lower of two summits. Leaving the packs we scrambled to the higher summit where we found no signs that the peak had previously been climbed, we reached the top at 2:30pm. In retrospect ice axes and crampons would have been useful for the final part of the climb as conditions were decidedly mixed. Descent was by the route of ascent initially with three abseils to gain easier ground and we arrived back in camp at 5:45pm. Having seen all aspects of the mountain this is without doubt the easiest line and could be made considerably more difficult by sticking to the crest however for us it was our acclimatisation and so the easiest route and the summit was the obvious choice.

Avalanche on the southwest face of Nevado Huaguruncho



Summit of Nevado Huarancayo Sur



Within an hour of returning to camp it was raining, we had noticed a deterioration in the weather as we descended, it seemed like the weather was once again on the change. Our pessimism wasn't warranted and the 27th was a fine day and we decided that the following day we would head for a high camp on Nevado Huaguruncho Chico.

We had decided to try the southwest ridge of Huaguruncho Chico and had spotted a route to high camp during our recce of Huaguruncho's southwest face. We left camp at around midday and after 4 ½ hrs of bushwhacking and some moderate scrambling we arrived at the edge of the glacier and a possible camp. We failed to find a suitable camp site on the moraine so we were forced to hack a platform out of the snow.

We were dismayed to find a cloudy sky when our alarm woke us up at 4am the following morning, given the unreliability of the weather we decided to wait and see what was going to happen. The weather continued to deteriorate, the temperature rising and with snow beginning to fall we discussed our options. We decided to give it a while however later that morning the slope above our camp avalanched partially burying the tent. On close inspection it seemed the rising temperature had weakened the bond between the top two layers of snow. Given the circumstances it seemed prudent to retreat and so we packed up our camp and headed down. The moraine was now covered in even more snow so we made two abseils to reach easy ground in the approach gully. We arrived back in camp at 4:30pm.

We were appalled to find that our tent had been broken into and several items of value had been stolen including our base camp stove and lot of our food. They had broken the zip on my tent making it impossible to close its door it didn't take too long to decide enough was enough and that a return to Huachon was the order of the day. It was decided that I should head down to the nearest village some 45minutes away and try and hire animals to take us down to Huachon the following day. I followed a trail of sweetie wrappers as I walked to the village, it seems the thieves had taken the same route, upon reaching the settlement I found it to be deserted. I returned to camp and we decided that I should hike out to Huachon the following day and arrange animals for the 30th.

We were due a bit of luck and the following day before I had chance to set out we were surprised to see some people coming over the hill, they had come from Huachon that day and one of them volunteered to return the following day with a donkey to take us out of the mountains.

The 30th of June dawned bright it had rained all of the previous day! The weather seemed to be taunting us. The man we spoke to the day before arrived at 10am along with his family we were all packed up and ready to go so were soon on our way. After a hike of some 5 ½ hrs we arrived in Huachon and after booking into the hotel we made our way to the police station.

Reporting a crime in Peru is far from simple and getting hold of a police report is a long and complicated process after several hours in the police station we had managed to put in a denuncia and completed the bulk of the paperwork however before we could get our hands on the police report we had to purchase another document from the local bank. Unfortunately for us there is no bank in Huachon so we arranged to take a policeman with us to Cerro de Pasco to buy the document and get all the relevant stamps and signatures on our police reports.

Southwest ridge of Nevado Huaguruncho Chico



High camp on Nevado Huaguruncho Chico



We had bought tickets for the bus after leaving the police station and the police had asked for a wake up call and so I went to the police station at 3:30am the following morning to collect our policeman. After waking what seemed like the whole station our man appeared and we got on the bus, after arriving in Cerro de Pasco he left us saying that everything was in hand and that we had to wait for his return. True to his word he returned 1 ½ hrs later along with our police reports, as is the way in Peru we paid him a little something for his trouble, it seemed to be 50 soles well spent.

We made our way to the main bus station and bought tickets to Lima, we arrived that evening and made our way to the hotel. The end of an eventful trip, not a major success but at least we made one ascent and returned from the mountains unscathed.

Conclusion

Unfortunately our expedition was not very successful however despite the poor weather and the thefts from our base camp we did manage to make the first ascent of Nevado Huarancayo Sur, approximate height 5150mts. We also made it as far as high camp at 4800mts on Nevado Huaguruncho Chico before finally being forced to call it a day.

The Cordillera Oriental has never been a popular destination however I believe it to be an excellent place to visit. The majority of peaks are of moderate height which limits possible problems with acclimatization. Access is straightforward and because of the compact nature of the range a base camp is usually no more than two days from Huachon.

There is so much potential, there are many summits still awaiting first ascents many of which are glacier free and would provide excellent quality routes on granite up to 600mts in length. There are still many possible first ascents waiting to be climbed on the glaciated summits of the range.

It is fair to say that the region deserves more attention and if you are looking to do new routes in beautiful surroundings then the Cordillera Oriental would provide the perfect destination. Whether it is a hard mixed climb, ice, rock or just some interesting scrambles to virgin summits then it can be found in the Cordillera Oriental.

Appendices

Map of Peru



Map of the Cordillera Oriental



Itinerary

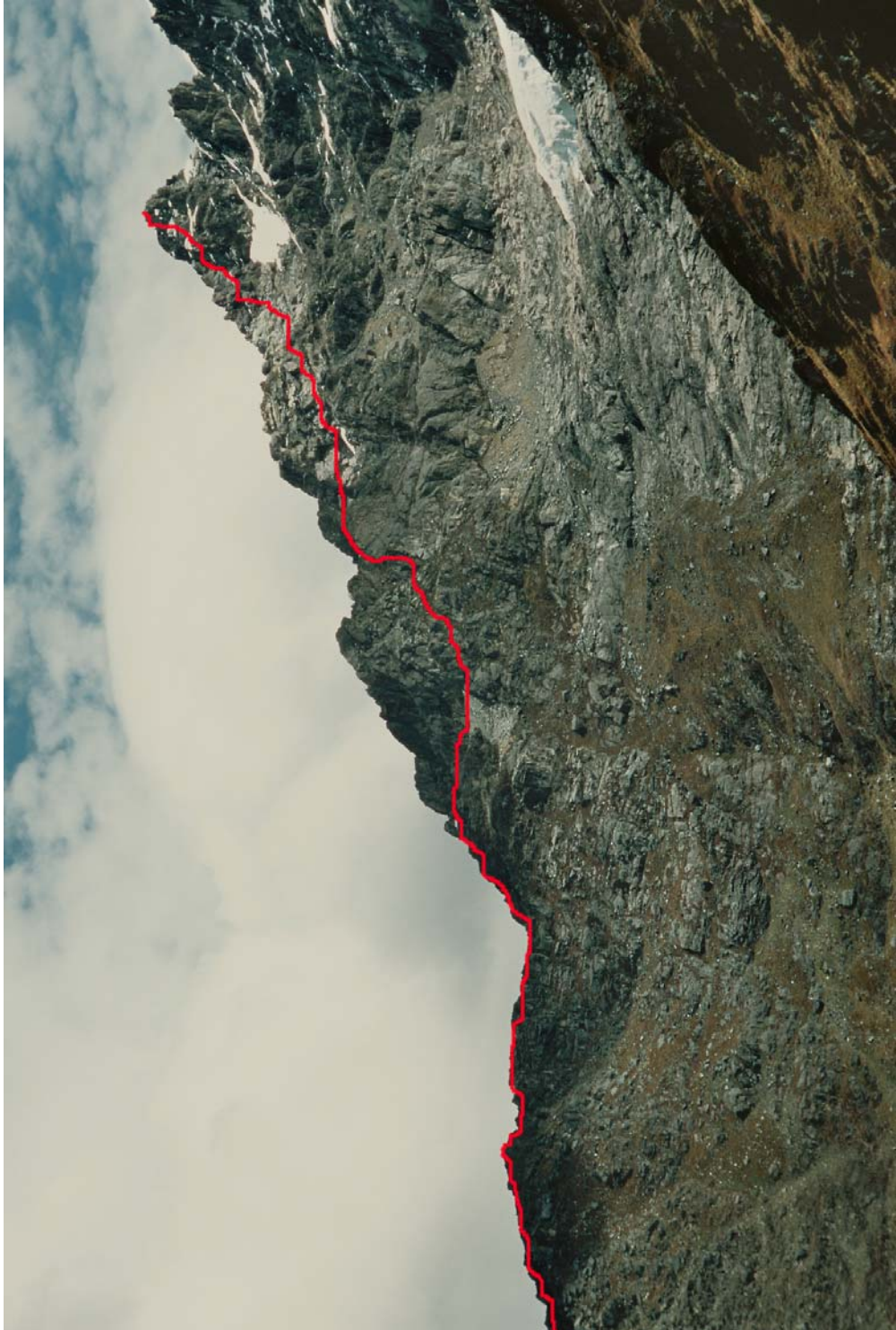
Trip to Huaraz:

- June 09 day 01: Arrive Lima.
- June 10 day 02: Bus to Huaraz.
- June 11 day 03: Day in Huaraz.
- June 12 day 04: Trek to Laguna Churup.
- June 13 day 05: Bus to Lima.
- June 14 day 06: Day in Lima.

Trip to the Cordillera Oriental:

- June 15 day 07: Bus to Cerro de Pasco.
- June 16 day 08: Bus to Huachon.
- June 17 day 09: Trek to base camp.
- June 18 day 10: Day in camp.
- June 19 day 11: Recce of Nevado Huarancayo.
- June 20 day 12: Recce of Nevado Huaguruncho.
- June 21 day 13: Day in camp.
- June 22 day 14: Day in camp.
- June 23 day 15: Day in camp.
- June 24 day 16: Day in camp.
- June 25 day 17: Ascent of Nevado Huarancayo Sur.
- June 26 day 18: Day in camp.
- June 27 day 19: Trek to high camp on Nevado Huaguruncho Chico.
- June 28 day 20: Return to base camp.
- June 29 day 21: Day in camp.
- June 30 day 22: Trek to Huachon.
- July 01 day 23: Bus to Lima.
- July 02 day 24: Day in Lima.

Nevado Hurancayo Sur route



Budget

Transportation: £70

Arriero's: £25

Food: £180

Accommodation: £188

Misc items: £42

Flights: £1514

TOTAL EXPENDITURE - £2019

Not included in this budget is the cost of insurance however a typical policy from the BMC to cover our original trip would cost around £490. Both Tim and I took out annual policies.

Useful addresses and information

Below you will find a list of services that we found both excellent and of good value, Lima has a bewildering choice of restaurants, bars, club's and movie theatres and there are a good many sites to see, it is a shame that most visitors aim to spend as little time as possible in Peru's capital city. It seems superfluous to go into detail regarding restaurants etc as you will have no difficulty in finding a restaurant meeting both your budget and choice of menu. In regards to the other towns we passed through, there was little in the way to be recommended as most places we ate were on a par with each other. Internet facilities can be found in most towns however there are no internet facilities in Huachon.

Maps:

Instituto Geografico Nacional – Avenida A. Aramburu 1190-1198, Lima 34.

Open Monday to Friday 8am to 5:30pm.

It is worth mentioning that most of the IGN maps are fairly inaccurate, they are produced from very old aerial surveys and they have never been updated. Expect to find roads, mines, dams and many other structures which will not be shown on your map. Place names can be a problem, lakes, mountains and towns can all be incorrectly named. This is a major problem and not just in the Cordillera Oriental, during my research and after visiting the area I unearthed a bewildering number of inaccuracies, even the people that live in the area offer differing opinions as to the names of certain places.

Gear repairs and manufacture:

Yuraq Janka – Pasaje Agutin Loli 465, Soledad, Huaraz.

Transportation:

For Huanuco, Bahia – Avenida 28 de Julio 1520, Lima.

For Cerro de Pasco, Junin – Av Luna Pizarro 153, Int 6, La Victoria, Lima.

Hotels:

Lima, Hotel Maria Luisa – Pasaje Tello 241, Miraflores, Lima.

Huanuco, Hotel Tours – Jr Abtao 796, Huanuco.

Food:

If shopping in Lima there are several supermarket chains, I found Plaza Vea to be excellent and most districts have a branch.

Websites:

www.climbingperu.com

Acknowledgements

No expedition relies solely on the efforts of its members and with this in mind the Huaguruncho 2006 Expedition would like to thank the following organizations.

First of all we would like to thank the Mount Everest Foundation for supporting our expedition and along with them the British Mountaineering Council who also generously provided us with much needed financial assistance.

During my research the British Alpine Club library were very helpful with gathering together information from various journals and I would also like to thank the French Alpine Club library for their help in obtaining a copy of an expedition report written by the leader of the 1968 French expedition to the region.