

BRITISH CORDILLERA CARABAYA EXPEDITION 2011



Tom Ripley leading low down on the South Face of Chichicapac. Photo: Hamish Dunn

Financial Support From:



Abstract

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Alpine style first ascent of the South face of Chichicapac - 5614m. Cordillera Carabaya - Southern Peru

Report compiled by: Tom Ripley

Introduction.

I first heard about the Cordillera Carabaya when Stephen Reid did a slideshow about his 2007 expedition at a BMC area meeting. I thought the area looked fantastic and well worth a visit. After a very wet first expedition to Karakoram, with Luke Hunt and Hamish Dunn, in 2010 I was quite surprised when Hamish rang me up in December to see if I was interested in going on a trip that summer.

I showed Hamish some of Stephen's photos of the Carabaya and he agreed that it looked a good place to go. Whilst still being remote it seemed to be everything our Pakistan trip wasn't: relatively close to the road; with stacks of good looking, unclimbed objectives; stable weather and best of all cheap and straightforward to get to. One objective looked particularly appealing, and caught both of our imaginations: the unclimbed South Face of Chichicapac.



The South face of Chichicapac, with the line of our climb marked in red.

Summary.

On 10 August we flew, with American Airlines, from Heathrow to Miami and then onto Lima. We arrived late at night and were driven to a pre-booked hotel in Miraflores (the only things we arranged prior to the trip). We spent the next day wandering around Lima doing various odd jobs like changing money and trying but failing to buy a map of the Cordillera Carabaya (thankfully this didn't cause too many problems).

That evening, after one too many cervezas, we boarded an overnight coach to Arequipa, arriving late the following afternoon. After a much needed kebab we got another bus onto Puno. We arrived in the early hours of the morning. It was freezing cold and we quickly checked into the first hotel we could find. Unfortunately this was also freezing but we were too tired to care. We spent the next four days on the shores of Lake Titicaca, acclimatizing by enjoying a touristy boat ride to some floating islands and buying base camp supplies. On 18 August we left for Macusani, the nearest town to the Cordillera Carabaya.



Our two trusty donkeys (left) and walking up to the base camp.

Arriving in Macusani we didn't really know what to expect. This small town is well off the tourist track, it doesn't even get a mention in the Lonely Planet. All our information was from the 2007 expedition's report, which mentioned staying in hotel opposite a brothel! With this in mind I was half expecting a frontier town from the wild west, but was quite surprised to find a small, pleasant town, with a few basic shops, a busy market, an internet cafe with a very slow internet connection, a number of hotels and not a gun fight or a red light in sight.

We quickly discovered that no one spoke English. We wandered forlornly around the town square asking everyone, "Habla inglés usted?" "No." was always the firm reply. Just as we were beginning to wish we'd put a bit more effort in on the linguistic front a tall white man walked round the corner. On closer inspection it turned out he was a priest. Daniel was a Spaniard, from Madrid, on a year's exchange and thankfully he spoke good English.

The lack of map proved to be a bit of a problem, at first, but eventually we managed to explain where we wanted to go. Daniel, very kindly, agreed to drive us to the end of the road the next morning. He also arranged for two donkeys and their owner, a friendly trainee teacher called Armando, to help carry all our gear and food to base camp. The rest of the day was spent shopping for food and other base camp supplies. This was followed

by chicken for dinner (apparently the only option when eating out in Macusani) and a chilly nights sleep, thankfully our hotel had thick blankets.

Early the next morning we found ourselves, Daniel and Armando bumping our way up a very dusty road in Daniel's very large four wheel drive. Beautiful mountains surrounded us. After about forty minutes we reached the dam at the road head. Armando nipped off to catch his two donkeys, while the rest of us shifted our four heavy duffles, made even heavier by the thin air, across the dam. Soon the donkeys were loaded up and we were walking up the valley. On first appearances the terrain looked very Scottish. If it wasn't for the snow capped mountains, the lack of bog and midges we could have been in Glencoe in May!

Two hours later we arrived, on the shores of Laguna Chamine, where we planned to stay. The site was flat, but exposed to wind. The only evidence of the previous expedition was a stone windbreak. The next day we relaxed in the morning, before heading up to have a look at Chichicapac's south face. It took a bit of finding. We walked up from base camp to the col south of the mountain and then down beyond this. After trying in vain to make the mountain fit our photograph we eventually found the face hidden behind a ridge.

Initially we feared the face was threatened by seracs, but on closer inspection it turned out to be quite three dimensional. The face sticks out in front of the seracs, so if they broke off they would be funnel down to the side of the face. We weren't completely sure of this theory, but decided we would give it a go and if, at the bottom of the face, massive seracs loomed above us, we would run away very quickly.

Our initial plan had been to acclimatize by climbing the unclimbed peak, Chequilla. We would then make an ascent of Chichicapac by its' easy West Ridge, giving us a good idea of the descent. Unfortunately bad weather on day two put paid to those plans. We awoke to discover snow falling, thick and fast. It continued to snow all day and didn't stop until early the next afternoon. By which point there was over a foot of it. Thankfully the sun came out and the white stuff began to disappear.



Hamish getting out of our little tent and approaching the route.

After the previous summer's washout we were both desperate to get some climbing done. After two days of good weather most of the snow was gone, so when sunshine dawned the next day we packed our bags and slogged up to the col. A couple of breathless hours later we were pitching our miniature tent, by a small tarn. The clouds had come in by this

point and it started to snow again. We had dinner and went to bed, optimistically set our alarms, but fully expecting it to still be snowing when we woke. At least it was good acclimatization and we wouldn't have to carry all our gear up next time.

To our amazement when the alarm went off at 2 am it was cold, crisp and starry. We quickly forced down a cup of tea and leaving our tent pitched, set off towards the face with just food, water, an extra jacket and climbing gear in our bags. A couple of hours later we found ourselves sat under a steep wall slightly disoriented and waiting for dawn. Daylight came and we managed to get our bearings straight and reach the bottom of the face



Tom seconding disintegrating snow on the first pitch and Hamish making bold moves off the belay on pitch two.

We took a direct line up the centre of the face rather than risk the obvious colour, which looked serac threatened. Hamish set off leading up the face. We swung leads encountering run out, insecure, but thankfully never desperate climbing. The steep headwall forced us leftwards up an easy ramp line. Hamish then led a short but extremely loose rock chimney which led us to the top part of the face. This was followed by a long, difficult and dangerous pitch, which I lead. Two easier, but very loose, mixed pitches lead us to the final snow slope. Ten hours after we started climbing we reached the summit just before sunset.

Keen to avoid an unplanned night out, we quickly descended the West ridge. An Alice in Wonderland moment climbing through a crevasse, followed by a short abseil, found us on a small glacier, which lead us back to the col. By this point it was pitch dark and cloudy. Thankfully Hamish had had the foresight to way mark our camp with his GPS. Twenty minutes later we collapsed into our tent. Exhausted, but happy.

The next day we packed up and descend back to base camp. After a couple of days rest, we walked down to Macusani to arrange for Donkeys to carry our gear back to the road. We then took a taxi back to the road head and walked back to camp. We spent our last couple of days relaxing and enjoying the mountains. We also climbed a two pitch route on the short crag above base camp. The first pitch was loose and bold. The second was a bit harder and better protected. The climbing above this was too hard (for us!) so we escaped

by traversing into a gully. The top part of the crag would go, but I would recommend taking RPs and knife blades as well as a stiff brush to brush away lichen.



Chuffed to be on the summit after our first new route and Tom descending the steep snow on the West Ridge.

We awoke early on 30 August to strike camp. Our donkeys were due at eight, by ten they still hadn't arrived. Hamish tried in vain to persuade a crazy old man, who lived nearby, to let us use his lamas. The man either didn't understand us or didn't want to help, but he was happy to take our surplus food. Fortunately, Hamish and I do a mean donkey impression. Five painful hours later we reached the road head, exhausted from carrying fifty kilo loads the five kilometres to the road. It wasn't over though, we stashed our duffles and started the long walk down to Macusani. After several miles a man with a motorbike stopped and offered us both a ride on the back of his bike. We gratefully accepted and arrived back in Macusani just after dark. We managed to find Daniel who kindly offered to drive up to collect our bags after mass. The rest of the trip was uneventful, but we spent two weeks traveling around Peru visiting the towns we'd rushed through in our eagerness to get base camp, arriving back in the UK on 13 September.



Left to right: Hamish climbing mixed terrain low down on the face; Hamish negotiating extremely loose rock on the chimney pitch; Tom leading a difficult pitch high on the route.



With Daniel the priest, tired but happy to be back in civilisation and the utter hero who gave us a ride back to Macusani!

Route Description.

South Face of Chichicapac (5614m) TD

Start by the obvious snow cone in the centre of the face.

Pitch 1: 45m. IV 5. Start up the gully and make a rising leftward behind a large block to a stance.

Pitch 2: 55m. VI 5. After bold and difficult moves from the belay, follow the line of least resistance until you run out of rope. Poor belay.

Pitch 3: 50m. V 4. Bold climbing up ice runnels.

Pitch 4: 50m. V 6. Follow ice runnels until a short mixed step. Make difficult rock moves to reach belay.

Pitch 5: 55m. IV 5. Climb snow above belay, before tackling mixed ground on the left. Climb more snow above to a rock belay beneath the head wall.

Pitch 6: 60m. II. Follow the ramp line leading leftwards under the head wall.

Pitch 7: 55m. III. Continue up the ramp line climbing snow and then Ice to reach a short rock chimney.

Pitch 8: 35m. Severe. Climb the very loose rock chimney and the neve ramp above. Rock belay on the left.

Pitch 9: 58m. VI 5. A serious pitch. Climb good snow, before moving right to climb poor snow. Move leftward crossing a gully before climbing loose mixed ground to reach the snow field above. Rock belay.

Pitch 10. 50m. Climb steep snow up and leftwards towards mixed ground.

Pitch 11. 58m. Climb loose mixed ground directly up from the belay. Belay on final block beneath snow ridge.

Pitch 12. 180m. Move together up snow to the summit ridge.

Descent: West Ridge until an abseil onto a small glacier to the South can be made. This leads back to the moraine and the tent.

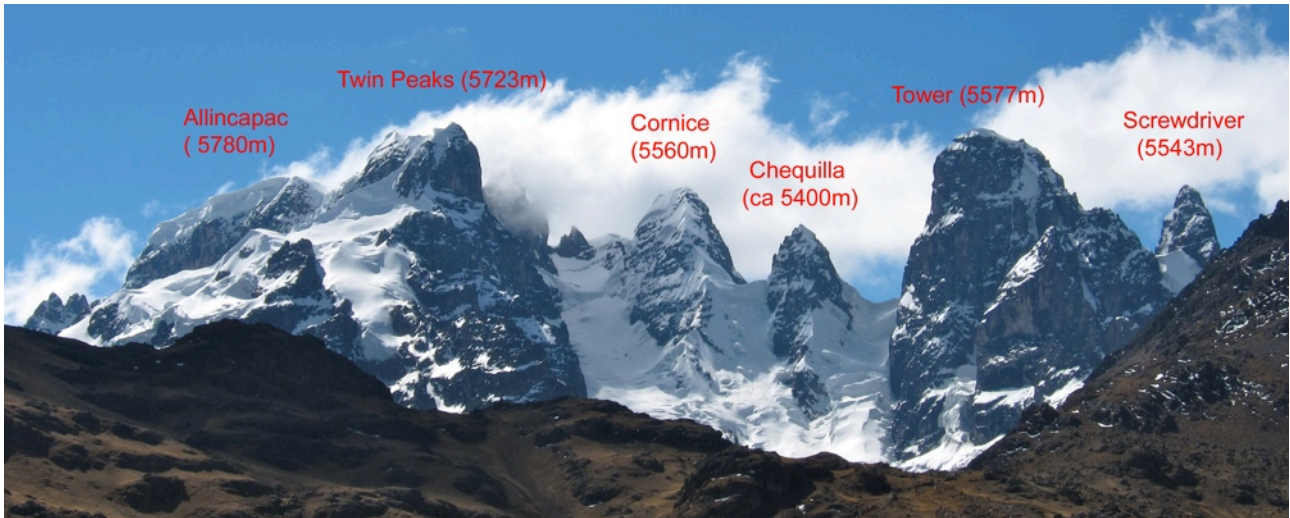
Tom Ripley and Hamish Dunn - 22 August 2011. 15 hour round trip.



The crag above basecamp. The rock is steep, very smooth and compact granite. We climbed a two pitches of VS following the line in red. The climbing above was too hard (for us!) so we escaped by traversing into the gully.

Possible future objectives.

Whilst there are relatively few unclimbed peaks left in the Cordillera Carabaya there are still lots of unclimbed technical routes to do.



The following look particularly worthwhile:

Chequilla (ca 5400m) - One of the few unclimbed summits remaining in the Carabaya. The South ridge looks short, but quite technical.

Tower (5577m) - This mountain was first climbed over a week in the 1965 and as far as we can tell has had one ascent since. There is a good line up the south face, following colours on the right hand side.

Allincapac Traverse (5780m) - This has been climbed before from left to right (in 1967) but hasn't been traversed from right to left. It looks long and high so make sure you're well acclimatized.

There also are good, unclimbed lines on **Twin Peaks** and **Screwdriver**.



Hamish belaying on the crag above base camp and our base camp taken from the crag.

Notes

Travel and General: We flew from Heathrow to Lima, via Miami, with American Airlines. American Airlines offer a generous luggage allowance of two twenty kilo bags per person, plus a carry on piece. This was good and meant that we had no problems getting all our climbing gear and some nice hill food into the country. We also found the cabin crew to be very friendly and helpful. Our flights were the cheapest we could find and cost £898 each.

The currency in Peru is sols. US dollars are also readily excepted (though probably not in Macusani). At time of writing £1 is equal to 4.3 sols. We managed to change a small amount of pounds in Lima, but I wouldn't bother taking any if I was going again. Most large towns in Peru have ATMs - Macusani doesn't so take all the cash you expect to need (and a bit more) with you. We put about £600 onto a Travelex card, which once topped doesn't charge commission on withdrawals.

Very few Peruvians speak good English and neither of Hamish or I speak Spanish. We managed to get by with the Lonely Planet phrase book and Hamish's (who speaks fluent French) linguistic ability. Had we not met Daniel the priest in Macusani it would have been much harder to arrange our journey to base camp, but I suspect we would have managed eventually.

On our first night in Lima we stayed in Miraflores in a nice, but expensive hotel. This was the only thing we pre-booked on the trip. On our return we stayed in a Hostal Espana in Central Lima, which was much better value for money. It was also opposite the Monasterio de San Francisco, whose catacombs are well worth a visit.

Being time rich and money poor, we travelled around Peru by coach. Cruz del Sur are the most expensive company and have a good reputation. To start with we used the cheapest buses possible, but after several very uncomfortable journeys we decided to go a bit up-market. We found that traveling first class with Flores was very comfortable and roughly two thirds of the price of Cruz del Sur.

Getting to the Cordillera Carabaya and base camp supplies: In Puno we stayed at the excellent and good value El Manzano. Unsure of what would be available in Macusani we bought instant noodles, Oreo cookies, packet soup and tomato puree in Puno. We could have probably purchased all of this in Macusani. The essentials we bought in Puno that weren't available in Macusani was benzino blanca (white gas) which can be found in the Ferreteria (ironmongers).

We got a colectivo from Puno to Juliaca (5 sols) which took about an hour. From there we got a coach on to Macusani. This journey only takes about two and a half hours and costs 10 sols. In Macusani we stayed in the Hostel Carabaya, which was the only hotel that appeared to be open. We bought meat, eggs, cheese, fruit, vegetables, biscuits, beers, wine (not recommended and make sure it isn't port!) and other oddments from the market and shops in the town. We also bought a shovel, cutlery and crockery, a frying pan and a large sauce pan. All of which were very useful at base camp.

Our base camp was situated in the Toca Valley. Had we known this it would have made trying to explain where we wanted to go much easier. It takes about forty minutes to drive to the end of the road from Macusani and 60 sols seems to be the going rate. A four wheel drive vehicle isn't necessary in dry weather. Below are instructions of how to get to the road head.

1. Drive North out of Macusani on the Carretera Interoceanica. After roughly 5 km you will go through a toll booth.
2. 1 km after this there is a right turn onto a dirt track. Go up here for a short way and take the first right turn up a another (very steep at first) track.
3. Follow this track for roughly 10 km until the road ends by a damn. While driving up the track there should be big snowy mountains in front of you and a series of lakes on your left.

Gear: A few notes of the stuff we took that was good/useful

Tents: Mountain Hardwear kindly lent us a Trango 4. A big sturdy tent that was brilliant at base camp. Rab kindly lent us a Summit Superlite Bivi Tent. A single skin tent about the size of a child's play tent. It weighs 1.5kg and is much warmer than sleeping outside.

Sleeping bags: We both used high quality down bags with 600g of fill. I'd probably want a warmer bag if I was planning an open bivi.

Stoves: We took two MSR XGKs which were great for cooking gourmet meals at base camp. Don't forget the wind shield as the our base camp was very exposed to wind.

Clothing: On the climb we both wore similar clothes to what we'd wear on an Alpine North Face in summer. We both also carried a thin belay jacket.

Boots: I wore La Sportiva Spantiks, which although bulky were very warm and comfortable. Hamish wore Scarpa Phantom Lites and although he had slightly cold feet on the route would take them again.

Rack: We took three ropes and a load of hardware to base camp. On the route we took: a set of nuts, cams 0.5-3.5, 4 screws, 2 pegs and lots of slings and krabs. If you are planning to do any routes on the crag above base camp, RPs, knifeblades, a stiff brush and the ability to climb E5 at 4500m would be helpful.

Budget

Costs (for 2 people)	
Flights	£1796
Medicine and Equipment	£680
Insurance	£240
In country	£1534
Total	£4250
Grants	£3250
Personal Contributions (each)	£500

Support, Sponsorship and Thanks.

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Alpine Club Climbing Fund **£500**
British Mountaineering Council **£1500**
Mount Everest Foundation **£1250**

We're really grateful to the following companies who supplied us with equipment.

Mountain Equipment - supplied us high quality clothing that kept us warm and dry.

Teko - supplied us with a number of pair of their excellent socks

Walsh - supplied us each with a pair of shoes, which we wore while traveling and trekking.

Needle Sports - Kindly gave us four boxes of Clif Bars, to eat on the climb

Rab and **Mountain Hardwear** kindly lent us tents.

Lyon Equipment, First Ascent, Mammut and **Aiguille Alpine** allowed us to buy gear from them at trade price.

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- Pete Graham
- Luke Hunt
- Ramsay Dunn

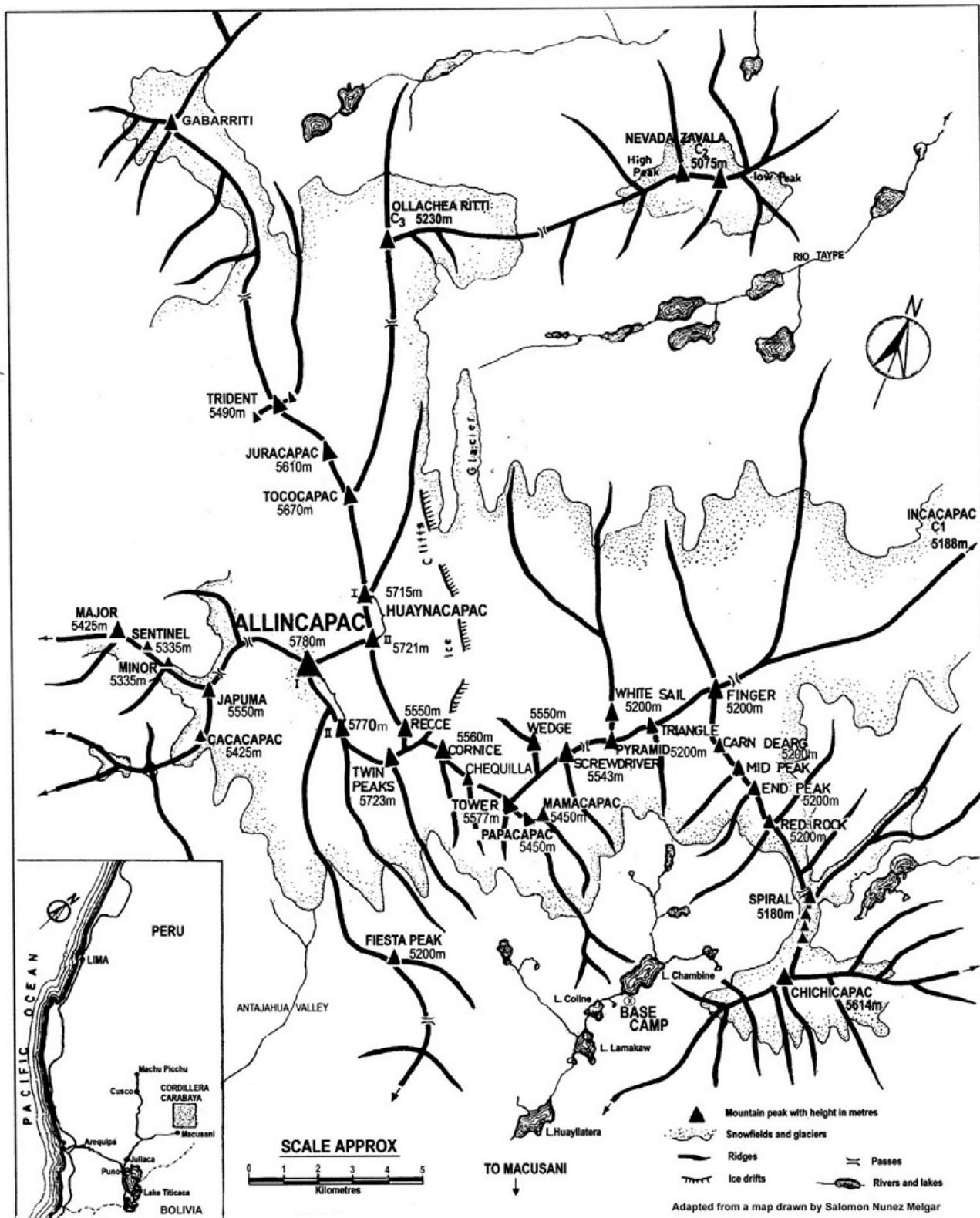


Tom enjoying a post route beer and olive binge and fresh trout that we bought from a local fisherman.

If you are planning an expedition to the Cordillera Carabaya and would like more information feel free to drop us a line:

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Hamish Dunn: hamdunn@aol.com



Acknowledgements: The map above was originally drawn by Salomon Nunez Melgar in 1967 and was adapted by Mike Cocker in 2007.