

The origin of the name is contested; it is either from the Mapuche *Aconca-Hue*, which refers to the Aconcagua River and means "comes from the other side",^[3] the Quechua *Ackon Cahuak*, meaning "Sentinel of Stone",^[5] the Quechua *Anco Cahuac*, meaning "White Sentinel",^[2] or the Aymara *Janq'u Q'awa*, meaning "White Ravine".^[6]

Geologic history

The mountain was created by the subduction of the Nazca Plate beneath the South American Plate. Aconcagua, used to be an active stratovolcano (from the Late Cretaceous or Early Paleocene through the Miocene), and consisted of several volcanic complexes, on the edge of a basin with a shallow sea. However, sometime in the Miocene, about 8 to 10 million years ago, the subduction angle started to decrease resulting in a stop of the melting and more horizontal stresses between the oceanic plate and the continent, causing the thrust faults that lifted Aconcagua up off its volcanic root. The rocks found on Aconcagua's flanks are all volcanic and consist of lavas, breccias and pyroclastics. The shallow marine basin had already formed earlier (Triassic), even before Aconcagua arose as a volcano. However, volcanism has been present in this region for as long as this basin was around and volcanic deposits interfinger with marine deposits throughout the sequence. The colorful greenish, blueish and grey deposits that can be seen in the Horcones Valley and south of Puente Del Inca, are carbonates, limestones, turbidites and evaporates that filled this basin. The red colored rocks are intrusions, cinder deposits and conglomerates of volcanic origin.^[7]

Climbing



Aerial view

In mountaineering terms, Aconcagua is technically an easy mountain if approached from the north, via the normal route. Aconcagua is arguably the highest *non-technical* mountain in the world, since the northern route does not absolutely require ropes, axes, and pins. Although the effects of altitude are severe (atmospheric pressure is 40% of sea-level at the summit), the use of supplemental oxygen is not common. Altitude sickness will affect most climbers to some extent, depending on the degree of acclimatization.^[8] Even if the normal climb is technically easy, multiple casualties occur every year on this mountain (in January 2009 alone five climbers died). This is due to the large numbers of climbers who make the attempt and because many climbers underestimate the objective risks of the elevation and of cold weather, which is the real challenge on this mountain. Given the weather conditions close to the summit, cold weather injuries are very common.



Argentina

Location	Mendoza, Argentina
Parent range	Andes
Climbing	
First ascent	1897 by Matthias Zurbriggen (first recorded ascent) ^[2]
Easiest route	Scramble (North)

The Polish Glacier Traverse route, also known as the "Falso de los Polacos" route, crosses through the Vacas valley, ascends to the base of the Polish Glacier, then traverses across to the normal route for the final ascent to the summit. The third most popular route is by the Polish Glacier itself.

No hard records are kept about Aconcagua ascents, but the Provincial Park reports a success rate of about 60% of climbers who attempt the mountain. About 75% of climbers are foreigners and 25% are Argentinean. Among foreigners, the United States leads in number of climbers, followed by Germany and the UK. About 54% of climbers ascend the Normal Route, 43% up the Polish Glacier Route, and the remaining 3% on other routes.^[9]



South summit and ridge

The routes to the peak from the south and south-west ridges are more demanding and the south face climb is considered quite difficult.

Camps

The camp sites on the normal route are listed below (altitudes are approximate).

- Puente del Inca, 2,740 metres (8,990 ft): A small village on the main road, with facilities including a lodge.
- Confluencia, 3,380 metres (11,090 ft): A camp site a few hours into the national park.
- Plaza de Mulas, 4,370 metres (14,340 ft): Base camp, claimed to be the second largest in the world (after Everest). There are several meal tents, showers and internet access. There is a lodge approx. 1 km from the main campsite across the glacier. At this camp, climbers are screened by a medical team to check if they are fit enough to continue the climb.
- Camp Canadá, 5,050 metres (16,570 ft): A large ledge overlooking Plaza de Mulas.
- Camp Alaska, 5,200 metres (17,060 ft): Called 'change of slope' in Spanish, a small site as the slope from Plaza de Mulas to Nido de Cóndores lessens. Not commonly used.
- Nido de Cóndores, 5,570 metres (18,270 ft): A large plateau with beautiful views. There is usually a park ranger camped here.
- Camp Berlín, 5,940 metres (19,490 ft): The classic high camp, offering reasonable wind protection.
- Camp Colera, 6,000 metres (19,690 ft): A larger, while slightly more exposed, camp situated directly at the north ridge near Camp Berlín, with growing popularity. In January 2011, a shelter was opened in Camp Colera for exclusive use in cases of emergency.^[10] The shelter is named *Elena* after Italian climber Elena Senin, who died in January 2009 shortly after reaching the summit, and whose family donated the shelter.^[11]
- Several sites possible for camping or bivouac, including Piedras Blancas (~6100 m) and Independencia (~6350 m), are located above Colera; however, they are seldom used and offer little protection.

Summit attempts are usually made from a high camp at either Berlín or Colera, or from the lower camp at Nido de Cóndores. All camps are used frequently, namely Plaza de Mulas and Nido de Cóndores.



Normal route to the summit

History

The first attempt to reach the summit of Aconcagua by a European was made in 1883 by a party led by the German geologist and explorer Paul Güssfeldt. Bribing porters with the story of treasure on the mountain, he approached the mountain via the Rio Volcan, making two attempts on the peak by the north-west ridge and reaching an altitude of 6,500 metres (21,300 ft). The route that he prospected is now the normal route up the mountain.

The first recorded^[2] ascent was in 1897 by a European expedition led by the British mountaineer Edward FitzGerald. FitzGerald failed to reach the summit himself over eight attempts between December 1896 and February 1897, but the (Swiss) guide of the expedition, Matthias Zurbriggen reached the summit on January 14. On the final attempt a month later, two other expedition members, Stuart Vines and Nicola Lanti, reached the summit on February 13.^[12]

The east side of Aconcagua was first scaled by a Polish expedition, with Konstanty Narkiewicz-Jodko, Stefan Daszyński, Wiktor Ostrowski and Stefan Osiecki summiting on March 9, 1934, over what is now known as the *Polish Glacier*. A route over the Southwest Ridge was pioneered over seven days in January 1953 by the Swiss-Argentine team of Frederico and Dorly Marmillod, Francisco Ibanez and Fernando Grajales. The famously difficult South Face was conquered by a French team led by René Ferlet. Pierre Lesueur, Adrien Dagory, Robert Paragot, Edmond Denis, Lucien Berardini and Guy Poulet reached the summit after a month of effort on 25 February 1954.^{[13][14]}

The youngest person to reach the summit of Aconcagua was Tyler Armstrong of California. He was nine years old when he reached the summit on December 24, 2013.^[15] The oldest person to climb it was Scott Lewis, who reached the summit on November 26, 2007, when he was 87 years old.^[16]

In the base camp Plaza de Mulas (at 4300 meters above sea level) there is the highest contemporary art gallery tent called "Nautilus" of the Argentine painter Miguel Doura.^[17]

In 2014 Kilian Jornet set a record for climbing and descending Aconcagua from Horcones in 12 hours and 49 minutes.^[18] The record was broken less than two months later by Ecuadorian-Swiss Karl Egloff, in a time of 11 hours 52 minutes, nearly an hour faster than Kilian Jornet.^[19]

In popular culture

The mountain has a cameo in a 1942 Disney cartoon called *Pedro*.^[20] The cartoon stars an anthropomorphic small airplane named Pedro who makes an air mail run over the Andes and has a near-disastrous encounter with Aconcagua (depicted in the film as an anthropomorphic menace).

Dangers

Aconcagua is the highest peak of South America and is also considered ‘easy’ at nearly seven thousand metres.^[21] And through that, Aconcagua is believed to have the highest death rate of any mountain in South America – around three a year – which has earned it the nickname, “Mountain of Death”. More than a hundred people have died on Aconcagua since records began.^[22]

Due to the improper disposal of human waste in the mountain environment there are significant health hazards^[21] that pose a threat to both animals and human beings.^[23] Only boiled or chemically treated water is accepted for drinking. Additionally, Ecofriendly toilets are available only to members of an organised expedition, meaning climbers have to ‘be contracted to a toilet service’ at the base camp and similar camps along the route. Currently, from two base camps (Plaza de Mulas and Plaza Angeritna), over 120 barrels of waste (approx. 22,500 kg) are flown out by helicopter each season.^[24] In addition, individual mountaineers must make a payment before using these toilets. Some large organisers will give a price up to US\$100, some smaller US\$5/day or US\$10 for the entire stay. Thus, many independent mountaineers defecate on the mountainside.^[21]



Pedro and Aconcagua

See also

- Aconcagua mummy
- Ojos del Salado
- Las Heras, Mendoza

Notes

- "Informe científico que estudia el Aconcagua, el Coloso de América mide 6960,8 metros" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20120908061725/http://www.uncu.edu.ar/novedades/index/informe-cientifico-que-estudia-el-aconcagua-el-coloso-de-america-mide-69608-metros>)

[Scientific Report on Aconcagua, the Colossus of America measures 6960,8m] (in Spanish). Universidad Nacional de Cuyo. 2012. Archived from the original (<http://www.uncu.edu.ar/novedades/index/informe-cientifico-que-estudia-el-aconcagua-el-coloso-de-america>

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- Centro de Investigación en Medicina de Altura (CIMA) de Aconcagua (<http://cima-aconcagua.com>) is an international consortium of high altitude researchers and mountaineers interested in improving the safety of mountaineers on Aconcagua and enhancing our understanding of the pathology of high altitude illness.
- Daily time lapse animations of the Aconcagua base camp Webcam (<http://zeitcam.com/webcam/aconcagua>)
- Highest peaks on peakware.com (<http://www.peakware.com/encyclopedia/highest.htm>)
- Interactive Satellite / Terrain Map, Photos, and Information on climbing Aconcagua (<http://www.purebound.com/aconcagua/>)
- Live webcam from Aconcagua base camp (<http://www.aconcaguanow.com/>) (December to March)
- Aconcagua: Everyman's Everest (<http://www.mensjournal.com/aconcagua>)

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