

# Quechua Names in the Northern Peruvian Andes and Their Meanings

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*Translated by H. ADAMS CARTER*

IT IS not hard to express oneself in everyday Quechua. What is difficult is to give an etymological explanation of names because of the many changes which have occurred in the language of the Incas. Names often lack their original purity because of contractions, the introduction of new words and because names are sometimes incorrectly written down by those who are ignorant of Quechua and of phonetics.

So many climbing expeditions come into contact with Quechua that we feel it worth while to help them to appreciate its colorful usage. The mountain people have lovely ways of expressing themselves. For example, when you ask what time it is, they reply "Quima horata huacarishcanan tayta," which means literally, "Three o'clock has wept, sir," because for them the clock chime is weeping.

I have undertaken this explanatory study under the auspices of the Department of Physical Education of the Ministry of Education of Peru, investigating many sources, both past and present, and comparing names to their current interpretations and to their original meanings from the sixteenth century on. The results will serve as a guide for the future naming of topographical features in the Peruvian Andes. We hope that this paper will enable American and European climbers and explorers to appreciate the folklore of the Peruvian mountains. There are amusing bits

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1. Señor Morales is well qualified to write this study on Quechua place names. He was born and brought up in Huaraz, where he came into close contact with the local people from whom he learned to speak Quechua fluently. For some years he has been one of Peru's leading climbers and at present heads the Sección de Andinismo of the Peruvian government. This article will give a climber or explorer in Peru a clear idea of what lies behind names given to peaks in the Peruvian Andes. Inappropriate names, which have no connection with the region — names of people and of foreign cities are among those which offend the most — have been given by foreign expeditions. Such names will rarely be officially accepted and should be avoided.—*Editor*

of information which can add color to the mountaineer's account of his expedition.

Quechua as a deeply expressive literary language introduces through its words the true nature of an object by means of descriptions, states of mind and metaphorical flights. Many words have suffered in the change to pure Spanish or to its Americanized versions because they were frequently written down with inadequate phonetical accuracy. Since the Incas used their *quipus*<sup>2</sup> only for counting, they have not left us any samples of writing. However, there exist in many places circular hieroglyphs called *quilcas*, which possibly express meanings that have not yet been deciphered.

Characterized by its declensions as is Latin, four kinds of present-day Quechua predominate in Peru: Quechua of Cuzco, Pocrá of Ayacucho, Huanca of Huancayo and Chavino of Huaraz. These guttural sounds — influenced by Aymara in the south, more musical in the north — probably have such great differences because of changes originally brought about by the introduction of local expressions in each region which modified the language taught by the *mitimaes*, envoys sent out by the Inca<sup>3</sup> to missionize distant lands.

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The age of splendor of Quechua during the reign of the Inca Huayna Capac came to an end with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in 1532. The latter had difficulty in making themselves understood and made bad phonetic errors. For example they wrote "Atabaliba" for "Atahuallpa". The missionaries soon realized that they would have to learn *Runa-Simi*, called "Qquechua" by Father Domingo de Santo Tomás. The latter investigated the structure of the Incan language, and recording its vocabulary, published his famous *Lexicon* in Valladolid in 1560. This work allowed the Archbishops of Lima, Jerónimo de Loayza and Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo, to decree in their councils that the missionary friars should learn Quechua with all diligence.

Señor Morales gives an interesting account here of the history of Quechua through colonial and modern times. His original, full manuscript is on file at the American Alpine Club in New York, where it may be consulted. Unfortunately for reasons of space, we shall have to summarize salient facts here.

The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega noted how much Quechua had been corrupted during the first thirty years of the conquest. In 1573 Viceroy Toledo founded the

2. Thongs of various colors and with different knots used by the ancient Incas for accounting and arithmetical purposes.

3. Strictly speaking the word "Inca" refers only to the ruler or a member of the royal family.

Chair of Indian Languages at the University of San Marcos in the thirty-eighth year of that oldest of America's institutions of higher learning. Courses on Quechua were given for 200 years until they were abolished in 1784 by Viceroy Jáuregui after the rebellion of the Inca Tupac Amaru. Señor Morales describes the principal works on the language of the Incas, especially the early seventeenth century studies by P. González Holguín and Alonso de Huerta. He also mentions more modern works which deal primarily with Quechua etymology and with the naming of geographical features in Peru. He explains how Quechua is being spoken less, especially by hill people who move to Lima and of steps being taken by the government and by cultural groups to prevent its disappearance.

The nomenclature used by Professors H. Kinzl and P. Borchers in their recent studies of the Cordilleras Blanca, Negra and Huayhuash were primarily based on living tradition. They always questioned the local people about names in the regions visited in order to use them on their well known maps. They also took as a guide the names which appeared on maps of the Instituto Geográfico Militar.

The case of Huascarán will illustrate how names of mountains evolve. In his map of Peru (scale 1:500 000) Antonio Raimondi in 1850 called the mountain Huascán; M. F. Paz Soldán in his *Statistical Geographical Dictionary of Peru* in 1877 called it the same. The name was doubtless given by the local people because the mountain rises above the village of Huashco, which lies southwest of it at the source of the Mancos River; Huashco gets its name from the word for rope, presumably from ropelike snakes found there among the rocks. At the beginning of this century, during the explorations by the Englishman Enock and the American Annie Peck the named appeared as Huascarán, a form which has not since changed. When the mountain was mentioned, it was thought of in connection with the village and was called Huashco-Urán or "Beyond and down from the village of Huashco." There are those who say that Huascarán comes from Huasca-Urán, which might mean "Mountain which requires a rope to descend." This is not likely and it seems that the name Huascarán is merely a contraction of Huashco-Urán.

There are picturesque names such as Pisco, which originally was called Parap, a name not known to the French and Belgian climbers who made the first ascent in 1951. One morning when they were getting ready to climb, they discovered that three of the Indian porters were still intoxicated from having drunk the night before a large quantity of a strong Peruvian liquor called Pisco. In honor of the Peruvian drink and the tardy activity of the still staggering porters, the mountain received its baptism.

Some names were provisionally accepted until a true Quechua word may be discovered. In a group of mountains, only the principal peak may have a name, as for example Pucahirca. Names given by expeditions in

the Pucahirca group, such as Juan XXIII, Raimondi, Bérnago, etc., are only provisional. It has been decided officially in the case of glaciers to be more liberal and to allow the names of a famous person or of a deceased explorer who had been in the region.

Having made this introduction to the study of Incan place names still preserved today on the maps of Peru, let us list the meanings of Quechua words frequently used by travelers in the Cordilleras Blanca, Negra and Huayhuash. It is to be hoped that the etymology does not err in too many cases and that mistakes will be corrected by the experts. Here we have the start of a contemporary source of explanations of the folklore of Peru, which we hope later to extend to other Peruvian ranges.

*Names of the Principal Snow Peaks and Valleys of the Cordillera  
Blanca, Cordillera Negra and Cordillera Huayhuash*

**AKILPO:** From *Akallpu* (fine sand) because of the fine sand in the river of this valley. Out of its glacial lake flows a river with sandstone particles in suspension which form benches along its banks.

**ALPAMAYO:** From *Allpa* (earth) and *Mayu* (river) meaning *muddy river*. From its glacial lake, Jancarurish, springs the Río Allpamayu which is later called Los Cedros (The Cedars) before it enters the Río Santa; because it erodes the friable earth, it frequently runs muddy.

**ANCASH:** Meaning *azure*. This is the name of the valley north of Yungay where the village of Ancash was destroyed by the flood of January 6, 1725 when a glacial lake at the western foot of Huandoy discharged its waters. Previously the department or district had been called Huaylas, but in 1857 President Gamarra changed it in commemoration of the Battle of Pan de Azúcar which dissolved the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation.

**ARTESONRAJU:** From *artesa* (trough) and *raju* (snow peak or ice) meaning *trough filled with ice*. Above Lake Parón lies a glacial lake with very abrupt banks. It is exposed to avalanches, which nearly always cover the surface of the lake with floating ice.

**AUQUIMARCA:** From *auquis* (old man) and *marca* (region) meaning *region of the old man*. Probably some important old man lived in this region who was versed in the folklore and traditions of the western part of the Cordillera Huayhuash.



PLATE 49

*Photo by H. Adams Carter*

PACCHARAJU, meaning Cascade Peak.

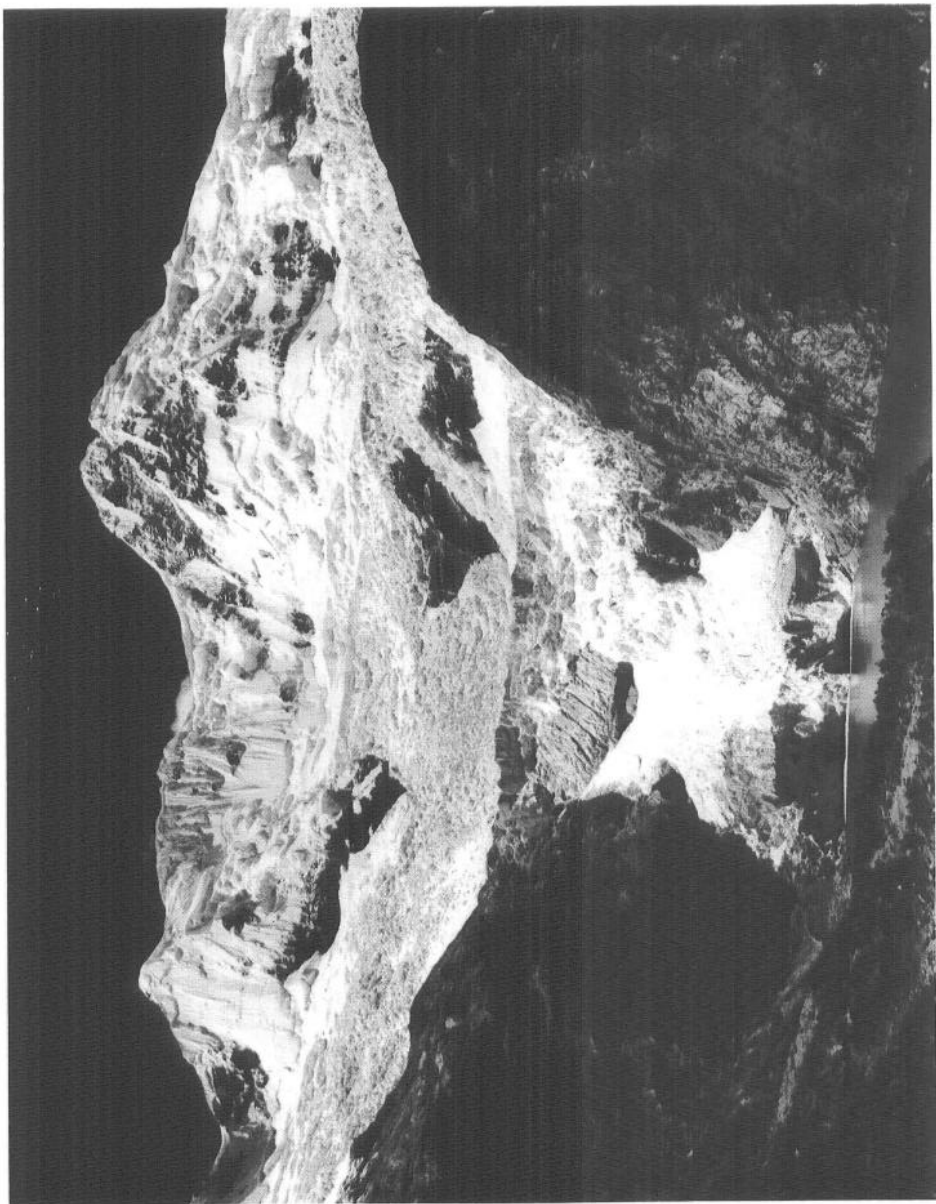


PLATE 50  
*Photo by H. Adams Carter*  
HUANTSAN, meaning Out-in-the-Open, above RAJUCOLTACOCHA, the Lake-Where-the-  
Ice-Wears-Away.

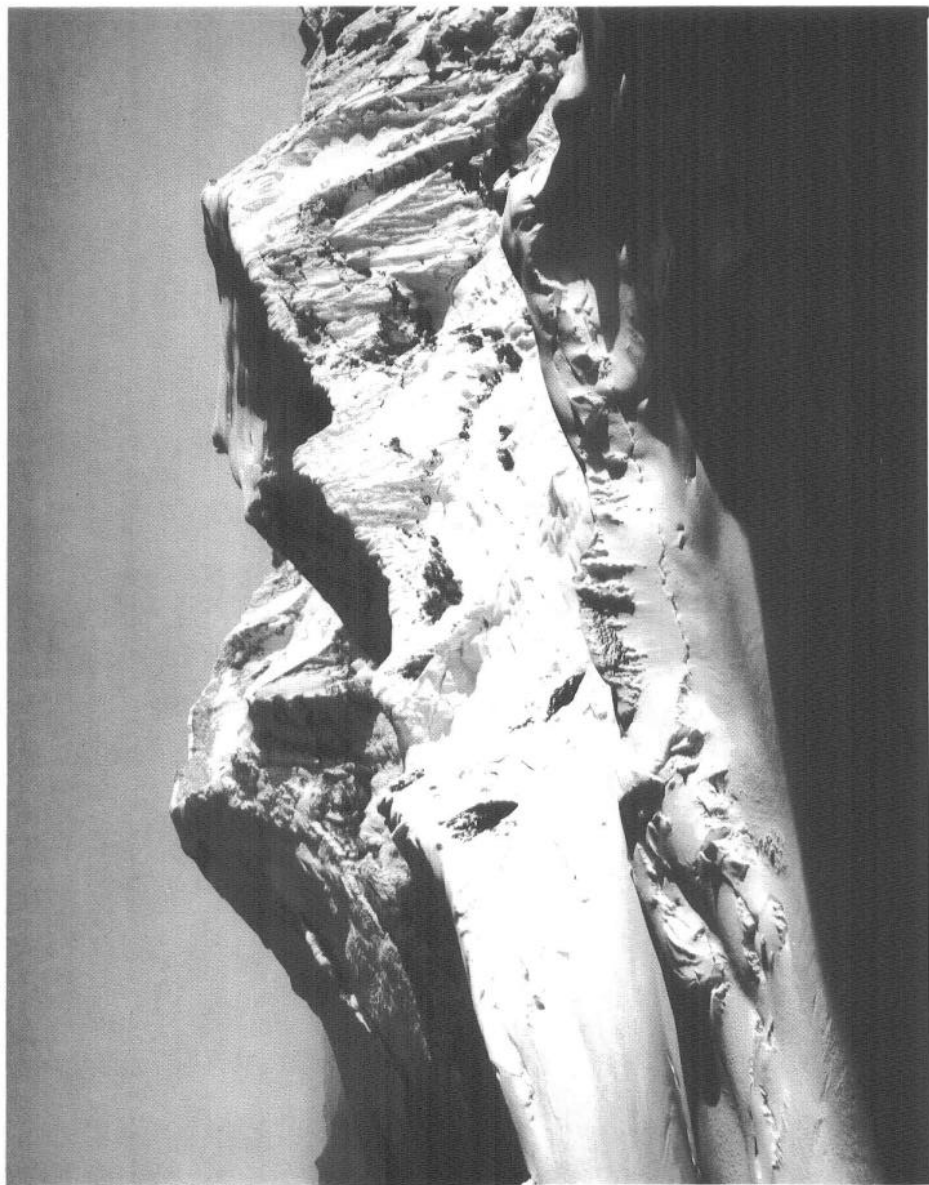


PLATE 51

*Photo by Leigh N. Orinburger*

HUASCARÁN and HUALCÁN (Necklace) from high camp on COPA (Pleasing).



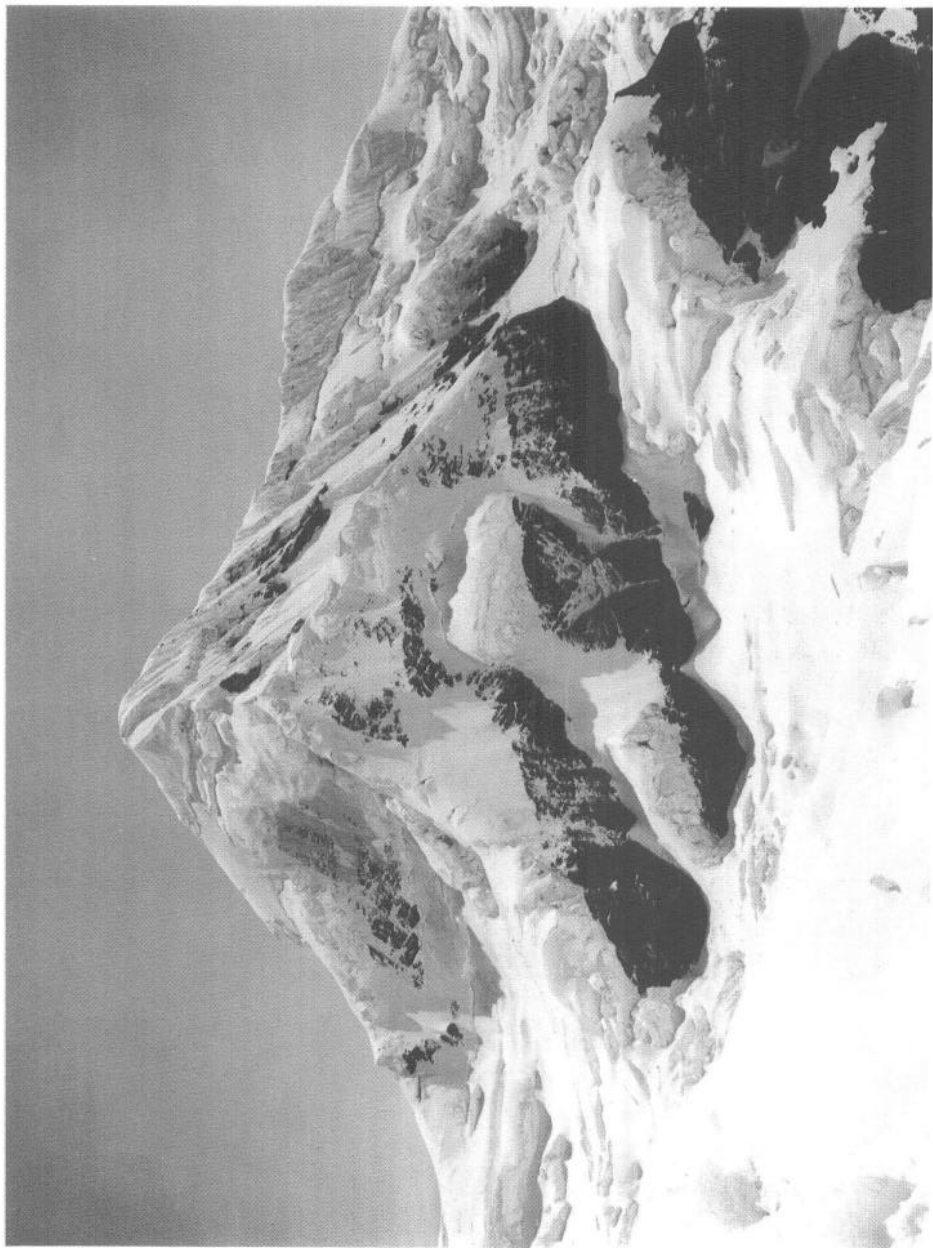


PLATE 52

*Photo by Leigh N. Ortenburger*

TOCLLARAJU, meaning Ice Trap



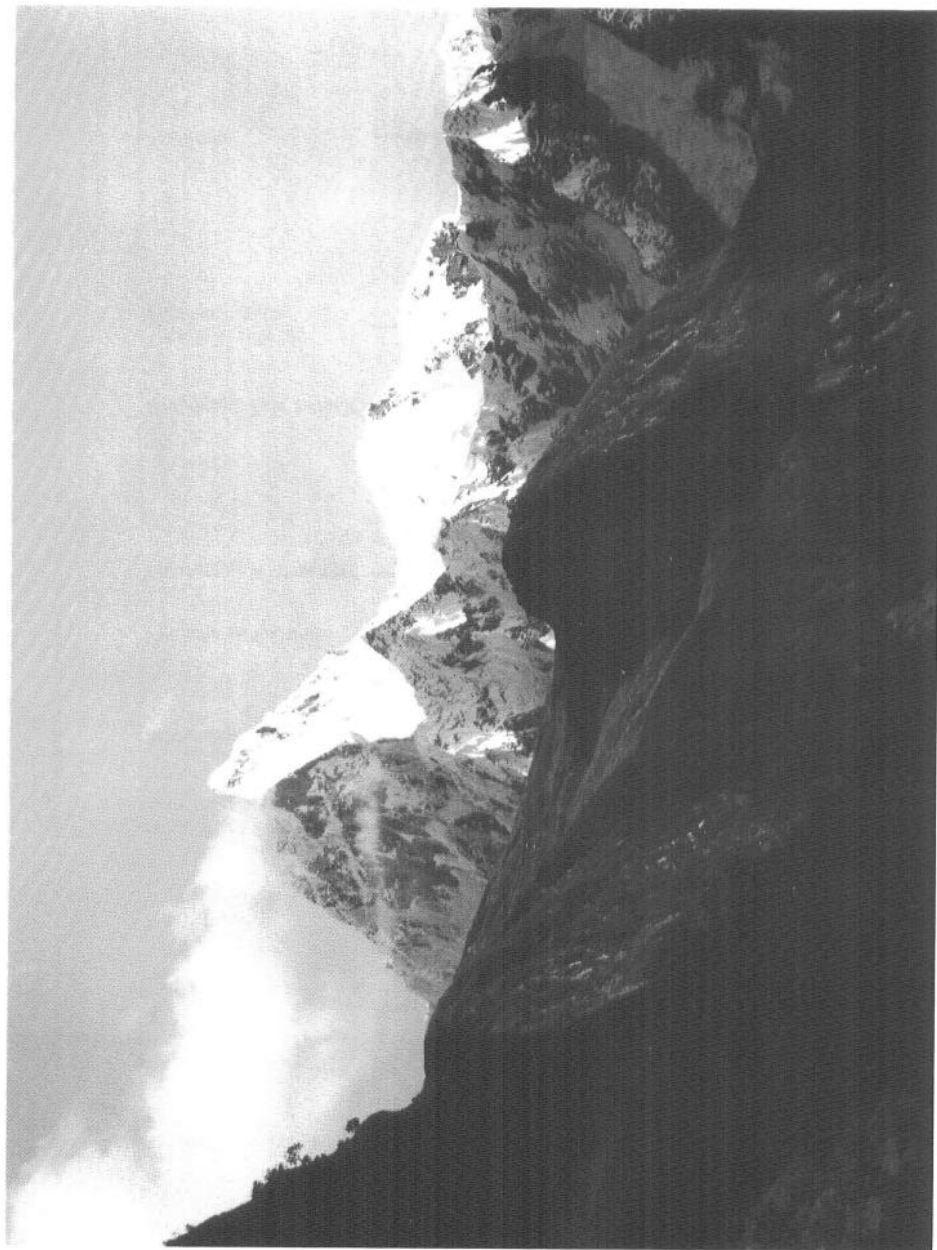
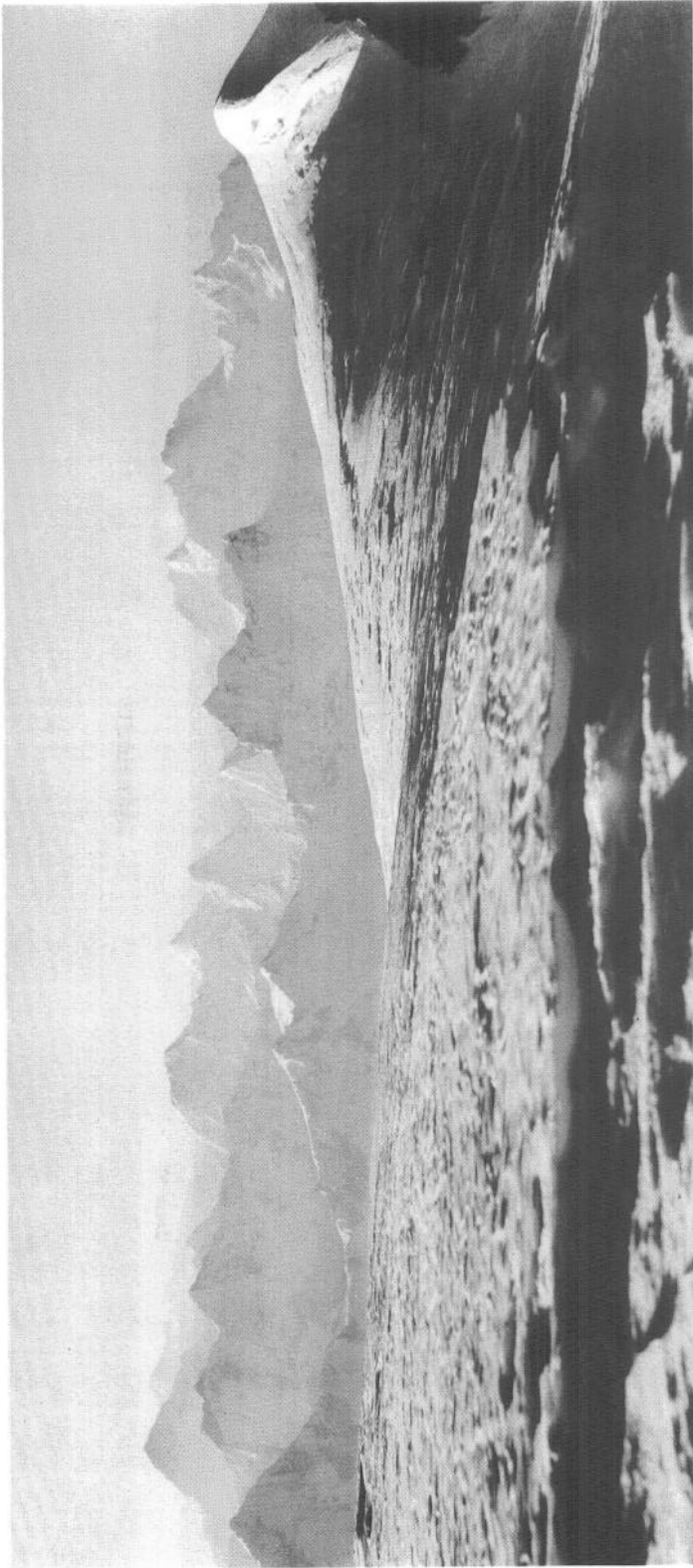


PLATE 53

*Photo by Leigh N. Ortenburger*

TAULLIRAJU



Huandoy, East summit

Nevado Santa Cruz

Front: Nevado Carás  
Back: Champará

Nevado Carás Este

Front: Pisco  
Back: Quitaraju

Front: Pisco Este  
Back: Alpamayo

Artesonraju

Pirámide de Garclaso

Chacaraju, West summit

Chacaraju, East summit

Three summits of  
Pucahitca group

Tauilliraju

View northeast from the summit of Huascarán.

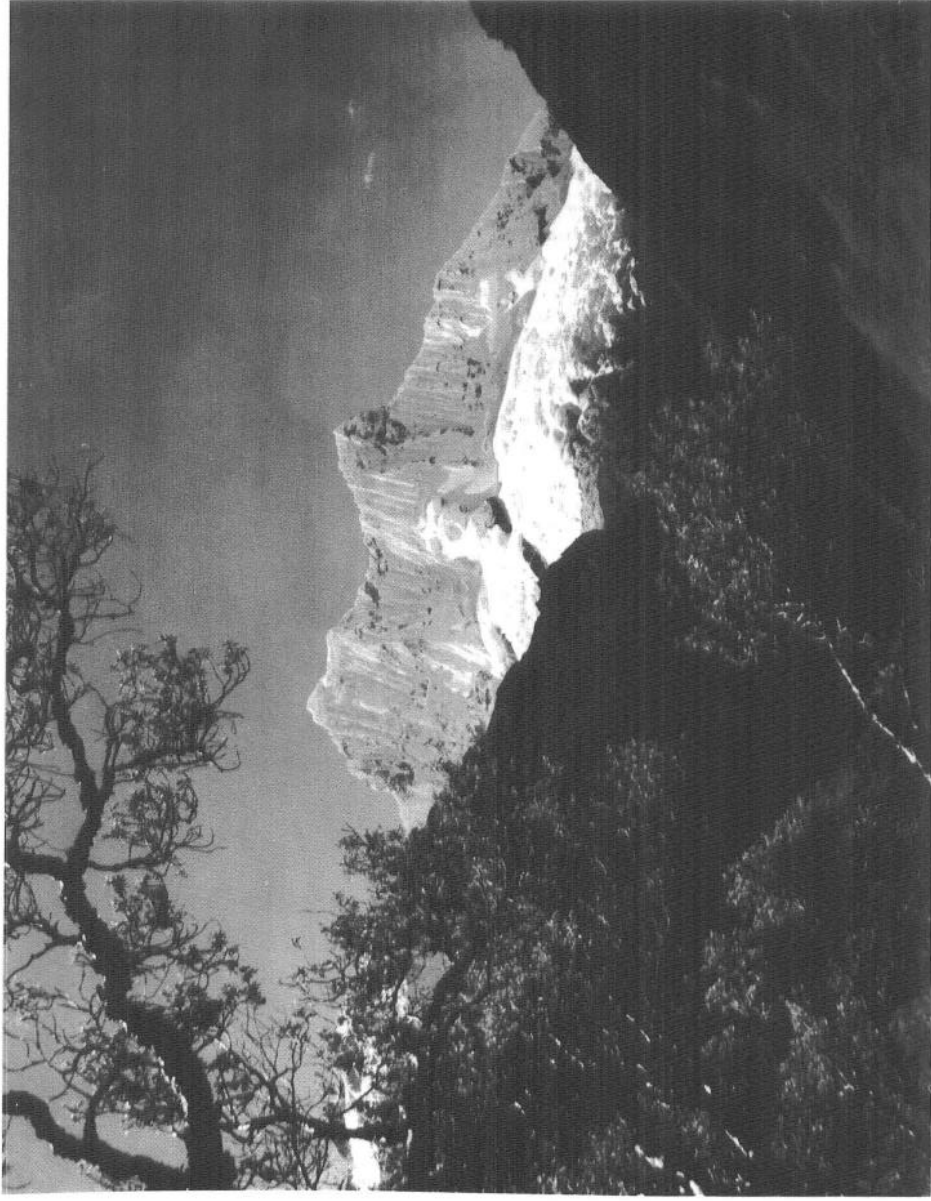


PLATE 55

*Photo by H. Adams Carter*

CHACRARAJU.

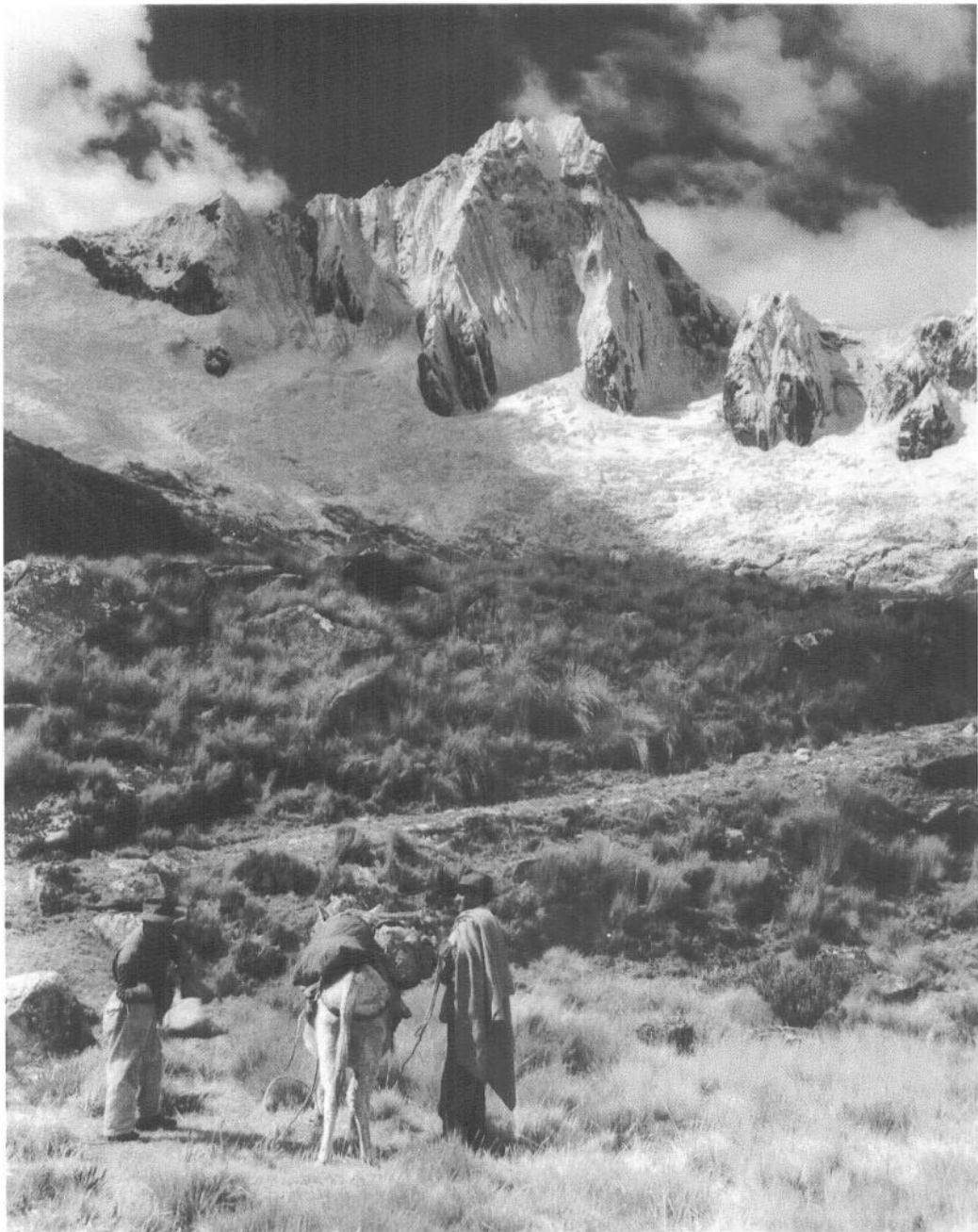


PLATE 56

*Photo by H. Adams Carter*

TAULLIRAJU, the Painted Ice Peak.

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**CAJAVILCA:** From *kaja* (cold) and *vilca* (supreme) meaning *supreme cold*. Possibly when the inhabitants of upper Chavín had to cross to the Callejón de Huaylas by the pass near Ulta they described this place as being too cold. It may be from *wilca* (grandson).

**CALLÁN:** From *callana* (earthenware cook pot). When travelers crossed the Punta de Callán from the Callejón de Huaylas to the coast on the Incan road they stopped to cook and roast corn or popcorn. It might also come from *cayan* (to call) since it is normal to call the stragglers from the top of a pass to come and rest before continuing.

**CARHUAC:** Meaning *toasted* or *blackish*. The flat glacier, situated to the right of the Cerro San Cristóbal, has a dark color in the Andean summer because with the heat the snow melts off and leaves the moraine of dark andesite rock exposed.

**CARHUACATAC:** From *carhuas* (yellowish) and *catac* (back-pack load). Possibly this describes the loads of ice, covered with yellow straw for insulation which are packed down to the village. Carhuacatac was the former name of one of the Copa peaks. It could also originate from *carbua* (toasted or smoked), referring to something like smoked meat carried on the back.

**CASHAN:** Meaning *split open*. Its glaciers, as they approach the bedrock and moraines, have numerous crevasses. It could also be derived from *casba* (thorn), because the *Curicasba* plant abounds on its slopes.

**CAULLARAJU:** From *keulla*, a highland bird and *raju* (snow peak); this bird is common near the mountain.

**CAYESH:** Possibly from *caye* (to call) because this narrow valley is famous for its echos which answer when one calls. Or it may mean *cayash* (burned).

**COCHAPATA:** Meaning *a plain with lakes*. Various places have this name.

**COJUP:** Meaning *frost*. There is also a flower which grows in the *puna* of this name. Its name seems to indicate frost because early in the morning frost crystals abound in the pastures and brooks after a frigid night.

**COLLOTA:** Meaning *rounded scree*. Many places bear this name.

**CONOCOCHA:** From *cuñoc* (hot) and *cocha* (lake). On the west bank of this lake is a hot spring where one can always bathe, despite the inclement weather of the *puna*. It is unlikely that the name comes from *conoc* (section of road).

**COPA:** From *kopac* (obliging or pleasing). Rising above a fertile area and above the hot springs at Chancos, this is a very pleasing region.

**CHACCHAPUNTA:** From *chaccha* (to chew coca) and *punta* (summit of a pass), meaning *pass on which to chew coca*. Frequently when crossing a high pass, the Indians rest, chewing coca, the much used leaf which is slightly narcotic when mixed with lime. This is a pass in the Cordillera Negra.

**CHACRARAJU:** From *chacra* (cultivated field) and *raju* (snow peak or ice), meaning *snowpeak which seems cultivated*. The faces of this mountain are fluted by avalanches<sup>4</sup> and seem to be full of plowed furrows of ice. It could also come from *chaki* (foot), meaning *ice at the foot* of the face.

**CHAMPARÁ:** From *tzamparac* (hairy skin), describing the *bichu*, or strong, sharp grass tufts, as separate, stiff hairs. It could however come from *champa* (a field of *oconal* grass) and *urán* (below) referring to the many patches of this grass which grow below the mountain.

**CHEKIACRAJU:** From *chequia* (to peep) and *raju* (snow peak or ice) meaning *the peeping of a small bird in the snow*. It could, however, come from *chaki* (foot) in which case it would refer to broken ice found at the foot of a mountain face.

**CHINCHEY:** From *chinchay* (sharp). This name describes the many patches of *bichu* that exist below this peak. The points of this tufted, sharp grass unpleasantly prickle and puncture the skin of one who has to walk through it.

**CHOPICALQUI:** From *chopi* (half) and *callqui* (situated within) meaning *situated half within*. This mountain lies behind Huascarán and is seen very prominently from the Llanganuco Pass and the Quebrada Ulta and thus seems to lie half within the valleys.

**CHURUP:** Meaning *uncultivated* or *unproductive*. The land beneath this wild mountain contrasts notably with the fertile soil of the Callejón de Huaylas and the Cordillera Negra.

4. In Kinzl and Schneider's *Cordillera Blanca* on page 25, Dr. Kinzl attributes this fluting more to currents of air which travel up the western faces. — Editor.

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**HUALCÁN:** From *haullaca* (necklace). Possibly at the foot of this mountain, the Indians saw ice blocks which fell from the slopes of Rajupakinan, which seemed like the beads of a necklace. It might, however, come from *huallque* (suspended bag). Thus would the venturer into this remote region have to carry his provisions.

**HUAMASHRAJU:** From *huamash* (frightening) and *raju* (snow peak), meaning *snow peak which frightens*. In the Shallap and Quillcayhuanca valleys, the Indians have many flocks and herds which stray into this forbidding region. The shepherds are afraid when they search for them.

**HUANCARHUAS:** From *huanca* (tall, upright stone) and *carhuas* (yellowish). This might have marked the edge of some property in the region or some ancient road. This used to be the name of the Nevado Santa Cruz which now bears the name of an *hacienda* at its foot. It would seem logical to give the name Huancarhuas at least to Santa Cruz Chico.

**HUANDOY:** Meaning *filled to overflowing*. This name most likely comes from the ice-choked glacial lake at the head of the Quebrada Ancash, which has in past centuries overflowed and caused floods.

**HUANTSÁN:** Meaning *out in the open*. This mountain dominates all the high land of the south of the Cordillera Blanca and rises above everything else. It might also come from *nantsán* (to be afraid).

**HUASCARÁN:** This name probably comes from *huashco* and *urán* (beyond and below). It is usually referred to as the Nevado *de* Huascarán as if it were the snow peak of the *hacienda* or village. The name has already been discussed in the introduction.

**HUAYLAS:** From *huaylla* (green field). This describes the happy, fertile fields of the Callejón de Huaylas, full of pastures, meadows and ridges boxed in between the Cordillera Blanca and the Cordillera Negra. Until 1857, when it was changed to Ancash, this was called the Corregimiento (political division) of Huaylas. It is still called the Callejón (long, walled-in lane) de Huaylas.

**HUICHAJANCA:** From *huicha* (to whistle) and *janca* (height). It describes a snowy place where the wind whistles. This was once the name of the Nevado Hualcán.

**ISHINCA:** Meaning *bare*, perhaps because of the asperity of life in these high regions. The name might however be derived from *ishkinka* (to take care of him who falls) since there is always the danger of slipping



and falling while walking on moraines and glaciers. Another possible source is *shinca* (dizzy or nauseated), a normal state for a recent arrival who is suffering from *soroche* or mountain sickness.

**JAHUACOCHA:** From *jabua* (plant root) and *cocha* (lake), meaning root-filled lake. This lake at the western foot of the big peaks of the Cordillera Huayhuash has on its banks cattails and reeds which fall into the water and seem like roots to the local people.

**JIRISHANCA:** From *jirish* (hummingbird) and *samca* (glimmering dream), meaning *to catch a glimpse of a peak as sharp as a hummingbird's beak*. This peak has the form of an enormous sharp beak.

**JURAU:** This is a thin-leafed grass with a purple flower. This grass grows profusely on the lower slopes of this mountain of the Huayhuash.

**KAKANANPUNTA:** Meaning *stone wall on the pass summit*. It is normal to erect a wall at the top of a pass to prevent herds from straying.

**LLACA:** From *lleca* (ash-colored wheat liquid). The name comes from the light-colored muddy water. The glacial lake discharges milky water which resembles the liquid in which corn or wheat is washed. It could also come from *racá* (hut or ruined shepherd's dwelling).

**LLANGANUCO:** From *llanka* (frozen *puna* or high country) and *nuco* (terror). Possibly the sounds of avalanches and the loneliness of the place made the Indians afraid to establish themselves within this *quebrada*, which once was cut off by the lower lake as the Parón Lake still does in its valley.

**MATARRAJU:** From *matash* (big twins) and *raju* (snow peak), meaning *two big twin peaks*. At the beginning of the century this name was applied to Chacaraju and possibly also to Huascarán both of which have twin peaks. The big peaks west of the colossus are at present called Matarao, the logical contraction.

**MILLUACOCHA:** From *millua* (wool) and *cocha* (lake), meaning *wool in the lake*. Doubtless the Indians saw the surface of the lake covered with ice and thought of its resemblance to wool.

**OCSHAPALCA:** From *ocsba* (straw of *bichu* grass) and *pallca* (high ridge connecting two summits). In its moraines grows much *bichu*, which the natives cut for various uses.

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**PACCHARAJU:** From *paccha* (cascade) and *raju* (snow peak or ice) meaning the ice cascade. Probably the name stems from hanging glaciers or from ice avalanches. Many Andean names include the word *paccha* which can also refer to a gully with mud or sticks.

**PALCARAJU:** From *pallca* (high ridge connecting two summits) and *raju* (snow peak). From *Cojup* lake and from the *quebradas Isbinca* and *Honda* it is seen as two big summits separated by the western col.

**PARAP:** Meaning *place of the winds*. This was the original name of what is now called Pisco, which is exposed to winds from the Llanganuco and the Parón valleys.

**PARIA:** Meaning *loneliness* or *grief*. This name is applied to solitary, desolate places, which abound.

**PONGOS:** Meaning *poor pass*. The moraines and glaciers are difficult to cross and exposed to rockfall.

**PUCAHIRCA:** From *puca* (red) and *hirca* (mountain), meaning *red mountain*. The red metamorphic rock of this mountain gives it a reddish hue. The glaciers appear red from detritus.

**PUCARANRA:** From *puca* (red) and *ranra* (heap of stones) meaning *heap of red stones*. The smooth granite on the glacier is of orange color.

**PUSCANTURPA:** From *puchka* (to spin wool) and *turpa* (a plant with yellow thorns). About the mountain, plants are grown which provide wood for spindles. Perhaps the name describes the steep summit of the mountain as a spindle covered with wool.

**PUTACA:** The name might come from *pucuta* (thick mist), describing a mountain covered by clouds. This is the ancient name for the Aguja Nevada (Snowy Needle) at the entrance to Parón. *Putaca* is also the name for a grass. Chopicalqui was also formerly referred to by this name, as well as other peaks.

**QUEÑUARACRA:** From *queñua* (the common tree of the high valleys) and *racra* (opening). This describes the valley or opening in the mountains where many queñua trees (*polylepis*) may be found.

**QUESHQUE:** This is the name of the Peruvian plant (*pouretia gigantea* or *puya Raimondii*) which grows in the valley of this name in the Cordillera Blanca. Here it was studied by Antonio Raimondi who discovered plants 35 feet high with 8,000 flowers and 6,000,000 seeds.

**QUILLCAYHUANCA:** From *killcay* (hieroglyph) and *huanca* (large rock pillar). In this valley above Huaraz rock pillars with hieroglyphs were found.

**QUITARAJU:** From *quita* (reservoir) and *raju* (snow peak). It could owe the name to a lake at its foot, possibly Jancarurish, which comes from *janca* (altitude) and *ruvish* (within). *Quita* or *tita* (broad and big) may account for the name because it is a big, broad peak.

**QUITARACSA:** From *quita* or *tita* (broad and big) and *raxa* (concavity). This describes well the depth of this long, huge *quebrada*. Others say that it is the name of a grass.

**RAJUCOLTA:** From *raju* (ice) and *colta* (gradual wearing away). Clearly it describes the lake where ice is continually falling into the water from the glaciers of Huantsán.

**RAJUTUNA:** From *raju* (snow peak) and *tuna* (*puna* or high country). It is the name of a snow peak near the Conococha *puna*.

**RAJUTAKANAN:** From *raju* (snow peak or ice) and *takanan* (it strikes). It describes the falling of avalanches onto the glaciers of this mountain.

**RANRAHIRCA:** From *ranra* (heap of stones) and *hirca* (mountain). This village was built on an alluvial fan, doubtless produced by a pre-historic flood. It was destroyed in the tragic avalanche that fell from Huascarán on January 10, 1962.

**RANRAPALCA:** From *ranra* (stone heap) and *palca* (ridge connecting two summits). The rocky side is seen from the Ishinca valley. Formerly it was also called Pumpuyac from a plant which grows on this mountain.

**RARIA:** From *rarian* (summit or height). It gets its name clearly from its appearance.

**RASAC:** Meaning the *green scum* which forms on dammed-up rivers. It also means *weasel*, an animal found in many of the grass patches below this mountain.

**RIMARIMA:** Named for the flower which abounds on this mountain. This scarlet flower of the *puna* grows on the crags and is used by the Indians to strike against the mouths of their babies in the hope that they will speak at an earlier age.

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**RUREC:** Meaning *the valley way in, far away*. From its rocky, narrow entrance the Indians saw a great, deep, long valley which stretched far away to its head. It is a kind of unknown abyss, not lacking in mystery.

**SACSA:** This is named for an ancient long-haired tribe which lived around Yanama. It may stem from *secse*, a cottony flowering plant. It is the former name of Yanapaccha.

**SARAPO:** From *tsarap* (to grasp) indicating the need to hold fast to the paths in this region.

**TAULLIRAJU:** From *taulli* (painted) and *raju* (snow peak or ice). Taulli is also the name of a flower of the high country.

**TOCLLARAJU:** Meaning *ice trap*. The Indians may well have considered the crevasses at its base as a kind of trap.

**TUCO:** The name of a *nocturnal bird*, a kind of *owl*, probably often seen in this region.

**TULLPARAJU:** From *tullpa* (fireplace) and *raju* (snow peak or ice). Its closely enclosed lake has the shape of a native oven in which floating ice seems to be baking.

**TSACRA:** Meaning *valley without exit*. The name is a logical one where there are hanging valleys that end in a rock or ice wall.

**URUASHRAJU:** From *urnash* (solitary) and *raju* (snow peak). This well describes this peak that stands as a great mass above the Punta Yanashallash at the southern end of the Huantsan group.

**ULTA:** From *nulta* (to submerge). It may owe its name to frequent floods that descend the Buin River, which start when Lake Yanaraju (black ice) discharges.

**VALLUNARAJU:** From *valluna* (cut) and *raju* (ice). It gets its name from the ice cut with axes in the glaciers for use in the valley. Huaraz is supplied with ice from here. The name Jangyaraju is also used for this mountain. From *janya* (noise) and *raju* (ice or snow peak) from the noise the ice makes when crashing.

**YAHUARAJU:** From *yabuar* (blood) and *raju* (snow peak). It gets its name from the dark red rock of this peak as seen from the Quebrada Rajucolta.

**YANAMAREY:** Meaning *black pestle*. Possibly the name comes from the black trachytic rocks of this region above Querococha which serve as round pestles for grinding cereals to flour.

**YERUPAJÁ:** Probably from *yuri* (to be born) and *huacan* (weeping). It seems that the mountain is giving birth as avalanches sweep its precipitous slopes while the winds howl and weep. It may however come from *keru* (wood) and *huaje* (to put to pasture). In this inhospitable region the animals graze even on wood.

