



The Andes: The Complete History of Mountaineering in High South America

By Evelio A. Echevarria

Joseph Reidhead & Co, 2017, 840 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-940777-71-9.

Price: \$64.95 (paperback), \$19.99 (Kindle).

SOUTH AMERICA'S FIRST CASE RECORDED in English of competitive mountaineering was between two New Englanders. The year was 1911. Annie Peck of Providence, Rhode Island, and Hiram Bingham of New Haven, Connecticut, raced to climb

the only peak rising above 23,000 feet in the entire Western Hemisphere—or so they thought.

More than a mountaineering rivalry, it was a battle of the sexes. At 65, Peck was more than twice as old as Bingham, a young professor at Yale University who later became a U.S. senator for Connecticut. Bingham believed exploration and mountaineering to be a man's domain. How could Peck, even if she had climbed the Matterhorn in 1895 (becoming the second woman to ever do so), have the audacity to consider stepping first atop Peru's soaring massif of Coropuna?

"There was no chance of joining forces," the historian Evelio Echevarria writes in his new book, *The Andes*. "Bingham would have never accepted shared leadership with another, even less a woman. Nor would this very particular woman accept on her limited means to travel in Bingham's style with his train of surveyors, geographers and even a secretary."

The rivalry of Peck and Bingham is one of many surprises of Andean history found in this exhaustive chronicle of mountaineering in South America by Echevarria, who has also written for *Appalachia*.^{*} At 840 pages, *The Andes* is almost as daunting as the range itself. The appendices stretch nearly 200 pages. The book includes 60 maps. The softcover weighs 6 pounds.

The book was clearly a labor of love for Echevarria, a professor emeritus of Spanish and Hispanic literature at Colorado State University. Born in 1926

^{*}Echevarria wrote about prehistoric mountain ascents in North America for the Summer 2001 issue of *Appalachia* and about early mountaineering in Ecuador for the Winter 1984 issue.

in Santiago, Chile, Echevarria was ticking off first ascents in the Andes at a young age and chronicling his summits for *Revista Andina*, then Chile's official journal of mountaineering. After being drafted into the Chilean army and serving with a mountain regiment as a member of the ski troops, he moved to Colorado to pursue a doctorate. But the Andes kept luring him back. Echevarria estimates he made 60 trips to South America over the decades to do research for this book.

"I knew that no other person anywhere had at hand the enormous amount of historical information I had," Echevarria said in an interview with *Appalachia*. "I also believed that *andinismo*, that is, mountaineering as practiced by the South Americans, deserved a wider international recognition."

The Andes is a hefty addition to mountain literature. For all its pages, however, many times I was left wanting more specifics, be it about the dueling personalities of Peck and Bingham, the two Polish dogs that became the first canines to climb Mount Aconcagua in 1934, or the 300 Norwegian skiers who delivered mail over Andean passes in the late 1800s. In trying to cover so much ground, Echevarria had to skim across much of the world's longest mountain range.

Still, I have to thank Echevarria for putting me on the trail of Peck and Bingham. As the New Englanders raced to South America in 1911, by coincidence they wound up on the same ocean steamer out of Panama City. In a letter to his wife, Bingham described Peck as a "hard-faced, sharp-tongued old maid." The old maid arrived first to Coropuna, raising a triumphant banner atop the summit with the inscription, "Votes for Women."

Two months later, after Bingham had made a side trip to inspect some Inca ruins, he opted for a different route up what he judged to be Coropuna's true summit. The American Alpine Club gave him credit for the first ascent. It was a bittersweet victory.

Coropuna was in fact only about 21,000 feet tall—nearly 2,000 feet shorter than Aconcagua, the true pinnacle of the Andes far to the south. Moreover, neither Bingham nor Peck actually stood on the true summit of Coropuna. The first ascent honor went to an Italian more than four decades later. By then, however, Bingham's fame had already been secured for "discovering" the magnificent Incan city of Machu Picchu in the weeks before climbing Coropuna. He had Peck to thank for motivating him to go to Peru in the first place.

—Stephen Kurczy