



AAC Publications

Helicopter Rescue in the Bolivian Andes

Bolivia

In 2007 and '08, the Vladostano Alpine Rescue Service, which operates mountain rescue services in Italy's Val d'Aosta, organized training courses for Bolivia's professional mountain guides. Since then, these IFMGA guides, operating under the title of Socorro Andino Boliviano (SAB), have made multiple mountain rescues, sometimes saving lives. However, it was obvious that faster and more effective missions could be made with the use of helicopters, as in Europe.

From October 19–28, 16 members of SAB were trained for helicopter rescue under the supervision of Edy Grange, a rescue instructor from the Aosta Valley; Sandra Cauchy Leal, a doctor from IFREMMONT (the Institute of Training and Research on Mountain Medicine in France); and Charly Perritaz, part of the Swiss mountain rescue service. During the program, the members were trained in getting into and out of a hovering helicopter and being transported on a 30m long line without a stretcher. The helicopter operated up to 4,300m, but in May 2019 a second program is expected to take the training further. The intention will be to practice long-line techniques up to 5,900m—between the two summits of Huayna Potosí. Landing should be possible up to 5,500m.

The helicopter belongs to a private company called Heli America, based in Santa Cruz; the company mostly works with the oil and gas industry but also hires out helicopters at times. The flight time for these training projects was financed by Airbus, but SAB is seeking sponsorship for additional activity.

This is among the first mountain rescue groups in Latin America trained for such rescues. Although the instructors evaluated the team as being operational from a technical standpoint, there is currently no helicopter in La Paz reliably available for a rescue. However, it seems hopeful that one will be available in La Paz during the 2019 high season for mountaineering, from the start of June until the end of August. Climbers planning to visit during that time can get an update on the situation by contacting SAB at socorroandinoboliviano@gmail.com or via its Facebook page.

– Alexander von Ungern, SAB Secretary, Bolivia

Images



Members of Socorro Andino Boliviano working on helicopter rescue.

Article Details

Author	Alexander von Ungern
Publication	AAJ
Volume	61
Issue	93
Page	0
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions