



AAC Publications

Cerro Cabaray, North-Northwest Ridge and East Face

Bolivia, Cordillera Occidental

Cerro Cabaray (5,869m, 19°8'45"S, 68°41'53"W) is a remote extinct volcano in the department of Oruro. Rising very close to the Chilean border, it is the highest of a chain of volcanoes in western Bolivia and northeastern Chile; it belongs to the so-called ultras—peaks with at least 1,500m of prominence.

Very few ascents have been reported. The first recorded climb is attributed to Tobiro Condori before the 1980s: He reportedly started from Chile to the west. He mentioned a 5m Inca structure at the summit, inspiring the archaeologist and climber Johan Reinhard to explore Cabaray, as recorded in [Enigma de los Santuarios Indígenas de Alta Montaña](#), by Antonio Beorchia. Reinhard climbed Cabaray alone in March 1981, by the west ridge. The mountain was snow-covered, and he found no large structures on top. He doubted very much that any existed, although he acknowledged that sometimes Incas made only simple alignments of stones, and these may not have been visible in the snow (see AAJ 1983). Beorchia, in his paper, thinks it most likely Condori greatly exaggerated his claim.

In 2010 a team from the Chilean Club Andino Universitario arrived in the area with Cabaray as one of their targets but only appear to have climbed Volcán Isluga (5,550m) in Chile.

In September I planned to ascend Cabaray from the north. I also wanted to solve the mystery of possible Inca structures on the summit. Andres Choque (associated with the Bolivian agency Climbing South America) was my local guide and climbing partner.

We drove south-southwest from the small village of La Rivera to a plateau at 4,800m just below Cabaray's north face. This face, which had neither snow nor ice, is bordered by the northeast and north-northwest ridges, with a 50m rock barrier just below the summit. On September 6, we set off up the north-northwest ridge, planning to deal with the rock barrier when we got there.

The lower section was an easy scramble and we noticed footsteps in the scree. These ended at around 5,400m, where we found several small mines. There were also vague vehicle tracks zigzagging up the lower part of the face, probably left by miners transporting sulfur (large crystals are known to be mined on this mountain).

The terrain became steeper, reaching around 45° as we approached the top. We opted to leave the ridge and traverse left across the face, sliding with every step. The rainwater and melted snow must have permeated through the scree and then frozen, leaving scree resting on solid ice. We put on crampons, but it was not necessary to use the rope.

We reached the rock barrier, which was loose and white, with protruding sulfur. We crossed the northeast ridge to the east face hoping to find a way to proceed. Fortunately, there was a wide gully, partly filled with icy penitents, and by this we reached the summit ridge. The slopes on the far side were snow-covered and we walked easily to the top. The entire climb had taken five hours.

The view was magnificent. Approximately 120km to the north lay snow-covered mountains of the Sajama National Park. To the west, Chilean volcanoes were lit by the setting sun. The most colorful view was east to the large blue lake of Salar de Coipasa. The long east ridge of Cabaray led toward

other peaks, their colors ranging from yellow to brown to violet due to the presence of mineral oxides. Several rocks on the summit resembled a cairn, and beneath them lay a folded piece of paper. Had it been left by Reinhard 41 years ago? No writing was visible. We enlarged the cairn, and I replaced the paper below it.

Cabaray has three summits. We visited the north and central (the highest, with the cairn). Nowhere did we see anything that appeared to be a man-made structure. There is another, lower, east summit, some distance away. We were too tired to traverse there, but we did not observe any large structure at that summit. I took many pictures and sent them to Reinhard, but he was not able to identify any Inca structures in them. He recalls that he did leave a piece of paper below rocks on the summit.

— Roman Siegl, Czech Republic

Images



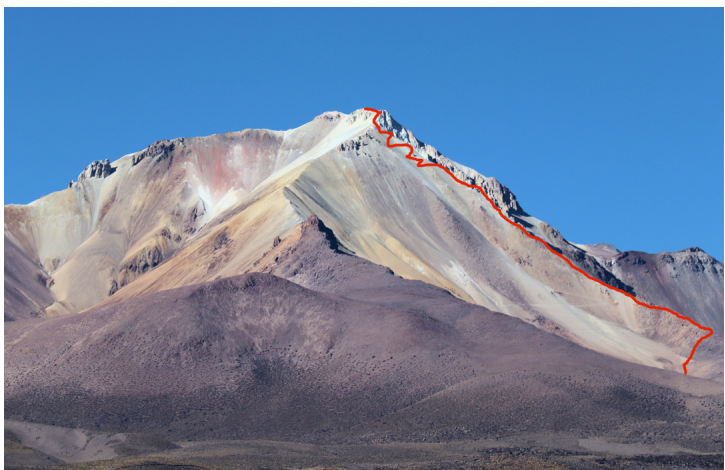
Cerro Cabaray from the southeast in 1981, just after the rainy season, with considerably more snow on the mountains than in September 2022.



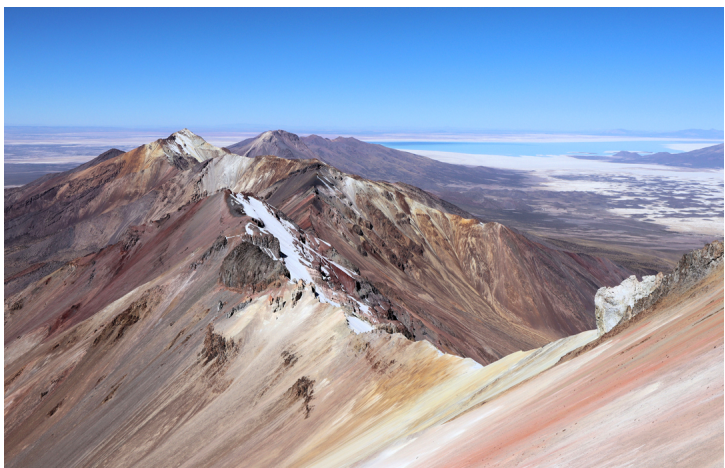
Johan Reinhard on the summit of Cerro Cabaray in March 1981. The view behind is looking east.



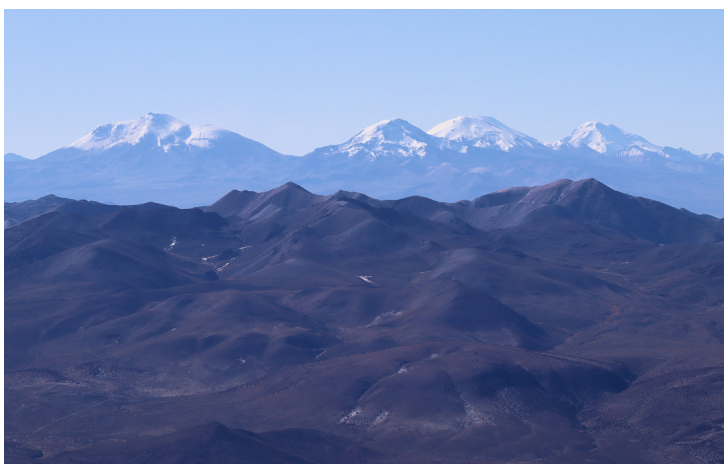
Roman Siegl on the summit of Cerro Cabaray in September 2022. This is taken from the same location (but with far less snow) and looking in the same direction (east) as the 1981 photo.



Cerro Cabaray and the 2022 route of ascent via the north-northwest ridge, finishing up the east face.



Looking east from Cerro Cabaray, along ridges colored by mineral oxides, to the distant blue lake of Salar de Coipasa.



Looking north from the summit of Cerro Cabaray at the distant 6,000m peaks of Sajama National Park. From left to right: Guallatiri, Acotango, Parinacota, and Pomerape. Sajama itself is not visible.

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