

ARGENTINA ANDES EXPEDITION

High-Altitude Archaeology: In Search of Incan Mountaintop Shrines

In July 2007, Constanza Ceruti climbed an unexplored 19,000-foot peak in the Andes of Argentina, carrying Wings WorldQuest Flag #15 to its summit in search of traces of the Incan civilization. The Incas were the first high-altitude climbers in history, leaving behind the highest concentration of manmade mountaintop ceremonial structures in the world.

DISCOVERING ENDANGERED INCAN SITES

Throughout the Andes over five centuries ago, the Incas built sanctuaries atop peaks at elevations of 16,500 to 22,100 feet. Since little is known about these mountain shrines, Constanza's mission is to find as many as she can and recover any evidence of ancient ceremonies before they disappear. The ice that long hid these sites is melting due to global warming, exposing them to the elements. Although the sites are remote, they are increasingly subject to looting and careless destruction by tourists and mining interests.



Constanza Ceruti stands atop a previously unexplored Andean summit, holding Wings WorldQuest Flag #15

By finding these inaccessible mountaintop shrines and undertaking high-altitude archeological work, Constanza and her colleagues hope to record and preserve a unique part of Argentina's cultural heritage.

MOUNTAINTOP MUMMIES AND CULTURAL MYSTERIES

In previous high-altitude archaeological expeditions, Constanza and Johan Reinhard (National Geographic Society) have won worldwide attention for their discoveries of frozen mummies atop these mountains. These

exquisitely preserved mummies have been found with symbolic items and other Incan offerings. These rare finds have provided archaeologists with rich clues from which they hope to understand Incan ritual practices from centuries ago.

EXPEDITION SPONSORS

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WHO

Constanza Ceruti

WHAT

Explore Andean peaks above 17,000 feet

WHERE

Andes Mountains, Argentina

WHY

To discover and document Andean archaeological sites and to learn more about Incan society



Previously unexplored peaks in the Andes that Constanza climbed during 2007

ABOUT CONSTANZA CERUTI

As the only female Andean high-altitude archaeologist in the world, Constanza has climbed over 100 mountains above 16,000 feet; twice summited Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the western hemisphere; and sat atop Mt. Pissis, the highest volcano in the world. Her interests in mountains and anthropology have taken her to the Himalayas, India, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Greenland, Australia, Polynesia, United States, Italy, France, and Mexico.

She is currently a Scientific Investigator of the National Council for the Scientific Research (CONICET) in Argentina and a Professor of Inca Archaeology at Catholic University of Salta. In 2005, she was designated an Emerging Explorer of the National Geographic Society, and in 2007 received the Courage Award from Wings WorldQuest. Constanza has authored six books, written for more than forty academic publications, and has lectured throughout the Americas.



Constanza's study area, the northern Argentine Andes, has the largest concentration of high-altitude archeological sites in the world