The goal of our Pantayqoya/Último Punto Expedition was to arrive at the zone of the “Lago de Angel,” the “8-shaped” lake we had discovered in 1999, and, from that point, to explore the further reaches of the plateau known as the “Meseta de Pantiacolla,” to the northwest of the lake, in order to determine the furthest point beyond that might contain ancient Incan remains.

The expedition was funded and outfitted by Eastern Mountain Sports, and was awarded Explorers Club Flag #152.

Members of the expedition, and their nationalities, were as follows: film maker Garrett Strang, USA; cameraman Erin Harvey, USA; assistant and cook Alberto Huillca, Peru; explorer Goyo Toledo, Peru; explorer Paulino Mamani, FI’96, Peru; and explorer Gregory Deyermenjian, FN’88, USA.

Our group left from the city of Cusco by helicopter on the morning of the 10th of June. We flew northeast from Cusco, then followed the valley of the Río Paucartambo to the north-northwest, as the river further downriver becomes the Río Mapacho and then the Río Yavero. Leaving the river valley, we passed over the plateau known as the “Meseta de Toporake,” where we had found Incan barracks on the ground in 1989, and then continued on to the northwest, overflying the “Lago de Angel.” We were now above the Meseta de Pantiacolla.
Because of high winds and heavy mist, the helicopter was unable to land near the lake, and had to search for a suitable landing spot, finally finding a just barely flat-enough area, astride a steep incline, further to the northwest. We—the six expeditionaries—had to exit the helicopter in a hurry while the motors remained churning at full blast and the rotors continued to keep the chopper an inch or so off the soft, soggy ground. After we had jumped to the ground, the many sacks of gear and supplies were thrown out to us by the helicopter crew from the hovering craft, and we dragged it all away from the chopper while slipping and sliding in the mud and tall grass, buffeted by the wind from the turning blades and the chaotic roar of motors and mad shouts, until the pilot and co-pilot gave us a thumbs-up smile from the cockpit and quickly ascended to zoom off and leave us in a sudden and complete stillness, with not a sound to be heard in the middle of nowhere but our labored breathing.

We had more equipment than we could easily carry—even with Paulino and Goyo’s prodigious strength—but finally we managed to haul all the equipment to the southeast, to make camp to the west-northwest of where the Lago de Angel was reckoned to be. Our camp’s coordinates were 72 degrees-09 minutes-30 seconds longitude west, by 12 degrees-26 minutes-50 seconds latitude south. The next morning the 11th of June, we trekked southward, along various portions of Incan trail, to the Lake of Angel, which lay at 72 degrees-08 minutes-44 seconds longitude west, by 12 degrees-27 minutes-15 seconds latitude south. After photographing and filming and documenting anew the low Incan ceremonial platforms that overlook the waters of the lake, and seeking the caves around the lake in which we had found a triangular monolith five years before, we returned to camp that same afternoon. With the darkness of night came the intense cold of “las alturas,” the tundra-like highlands.

We were aware of our being, in a sense, immobile, our being in possession of a surfeit of quality equipment (including bulky film equipment) without pack animals to help us carry it all in the rarified air at between 10,500 and 12,000 feet altitude; and so, on the 12th of June our two strongest members, Paulino and Goyo, left, to quickly head southwest, toward the far-off settlement of Sacramento in the valley of the Río Yavero, to there seek campesino settlers with horses or mules, so that we could attain some pack animals to help us move about. Soon after Paulino’s and Goyo’s leaving, the cold Andean rains came in force. That same afternoon our satellite phone ceased functioning, making it impossible for us to call in our ongoing reports to the expedition’s website, and causing those who had been receiving our nightly calls to begin worrying about us, as we began to worry about them worrying about us. On the 13th of June the rains continued, and we waited all day in camp except for making a steep climb that afternoon, cutting through the cloud-forest that lined the upper reaches of a saddle between two peaks above our campsite. Finally on the morning of the 14th, the rains stopped, and we climbed up and over that same saddle, and cut our way through the thick mantle of moss and vegetative debris that covered the cloud forest on the other side, looking in vain for any signs of an Incan trail. That afternoon Paulino and Goyo arrived at camp, and, just before darkness, some campesinos and their acémilas, pack mules.

Tuesday, the 15th of June, we were able to now pack all our equipment onto the pack animals as well as onto our own backs, and we left that campsite, headed northwest and west-northwest, following the remains of an antique Incan trail that appeared and disappeared on our tortuous route through these highlands, full of tall windswept grass and plants such as achúpaya, a cactus-like plant that is food for the spectacled bear, and with bushes and stunted trees in the various ravines and passes.
We continued our journey to the northwest. In the afternoon we found ourselves resting beside a moss-and grass-covered mound, while a *neblina*, a mist, rose from the valleys below and settled around us. We were at an altitude of 3,500 meters. Paulino inspected the mound beside us, and, removing some of the vegetative covering, showed it to be a large platform. We cut away at the high grass and pulled away the moss to reveal a ceremonial platform one meter high. Its shape was not symmetrical, with one side’s length being 14 meters, another being 11 meters, and with a width of 4 meters on one side and 3 meters on the other. The walls of the platform were of *pirqa*, piled field stones, tightly fit together in a dry wall, while the center was composed of tightly packed earth. It had a small ceremonial staircase of carved stone steps on one side. This platform was larger and taller, had more volume, and covered more ground than any other of the many ceremonial platforms we had ever identified in other areas such as Toporake or Lago de Angel. This was, as well, the only one we had found in these areas that boasted an attached staircase.
In front of us, up to the northwest, we saw the highest point of the region, a peak that we called “Último Punto.” We climbed the ridge up to that high point, at an altitude of 3,600 meters, where we found that the summit was totally covered by another platform, even more asymmetrical in shape, that had five corners, and was shaped like a squashed bullet, with its point toward the northeast. This platform was a little shorter than the other, with sides of 10 meters and 9 meters in length, of 6 meters width on the rear side, and with a wall of 8 meters in length and another of 5 meters meeting at the front to form the “point of the bullet.” It had a height of a little less than one meter. Its location, at 72 degrees-11 minutes-30 seconds longitude west, by 12 degrees-25 minutes-40 seconds south latitude, overlooked two separate river systems: to the southwest was the Río Yavero, and to the northeast lay the headwaters of the Río Timpía. Its location seemed most strategically placed.

We noted that these two platforms constituted the most distant Incan remains yet found directly to the north of Cusco.

Our return began the next morning, the 16th of June. We pushed on to the south and southwest, and we arrived at the settlement of Sacramento, above the sub-tropical Río Yavero, where we passed the night camped in front of the house of our mule driver, Mario. The 17th of June Paulino left us early in the morning in order to walk as fast as possible to the town of Quebrada, over the range of Lares-Lacco in the valley of the Río Yanatile, in order to use the public phone there to call Cusco and arrange for our vehicle to meet us the following day at the closest frontier point accessible by dirt road, called Abra Bellavista. The rest of us advanced more slowly to the southwest, crossing a bridge over the Río Yavero, until we reached the small settlement of Bellavista in the Lares-Lacco range.

The next morning, we found a stone chullpa, an above-ground tomb, on a nearby forested hillside. Its shape was circular, and its stone roof formed by a roughly corbeled vault topped by a long stone slab. It had a circumference of almost 8 meters, and was in exactly the same style as the “Chullpas de Ninamarca,” the complex of identical circular tombs to be found in the high area just south of the famous town of Paucartambo, a totally different area extremely far to our southeast. And Ninamarca, strangely enough, had been reliably attributed to the pre-Incan Lupaca culture based in the Lake Titicaca area over a hundred miles away. There were as well other more typically Incan structures in the surrounding forest.
The 18th of June we headed on, ever southward, along what seemed like an endless and extremely uncomfortable gauntlet of ascents and descents and ascents again, through the undulating center of the mountain range, until, just before dark, we were met by Paulino returning toward us from Quebrada, where he had succeeded in calling the proprietor of our vehicle in Cusco, and shortly thereafter we all reached Abra Bellavista together. Here was the furthest reach of a newly formed dirt road for vehicles that extended out in redundant zig-zag fashion from the town of Quebrada, skirting the high mini-range that would otherwise cut the town off from the area to the north, and here as well was our vehicle. We bid goodbye to our mule driver, Mario, and rode in style to Quebrada, where we spent the night.

The 19th of June we rode over the bumpy dirt trunk road that follows the course of the Río Yanatile to the all stone-edifices town of Amparaes, and then up into the highlands to the northeast to the site of Pumacocha, the lake renowned as that into which the retreating Incans threw their chuño, their stores of dehydrated potatoes, in order to lighten their load and speed their way toward their legendary ultimate refuge of “Paititi.” We passed the night in tents by the lake, then headed on the next morning as far as the road would take us to the east, then walked through the Quechua-speaking village of Hualla, and on to the site of Tambocancha, an extensive Incan complex overlooking the valley of the Río Mapacho-Paucartambo far below to the east. We cleared the dense vegetation from a portion of the site, to film and photograph it. Then we returned to Pumacocha, where Paulino extracted from its frigid waters some handfuls of preserved chuño, and from thence made the long voyage in vehicle to arrive late at night in the city of Cusco, ancient capital of the Incas.

The principal attainment, then, of The Pantayqoya/Último Punto Expedition, was our finding that there, at the very point where, geographically, lies the furthest edge of the plateau known as the Meseta de Pantiacolla, are situated as well two very distinct examples of the furthest reach directly to the north of Cusco of the Incas: the two ceremonial platforms that, up to this point in time, constitute their “Último Punto,” the ultimate reach in that direction of the Andean world.