REPORT TO THE EXPLORERS CLUB
FLAG # 95

POLISH-AMERICAN-PERUVIAN
SCIENTIFIC & EXPLORATORY EXPEDITION
COLCA CONDOR 2008

The team of the Colca Condor 2008 Expedition at the entrance to the Colca Canyon

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THE POLISH-AMERICAN-PERUVIAN SCIENTIFIC & EXPLORATORY EXPEDITION
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III. Introduction

It has been over 27 years since the first exploration of the Colca Canyon in Peru by the Polish Expedition “Canoandes’79”. This canyon was recognized as "the world's deepest canyon" and its conquest has been compared to the conquest of Mt. Everest. Its discovery was recognized as one of the "greatest geographic discoveries of the 20th century" and has generated much recognition and astonishment. The expedition ran 100 of the 120 kilometers of the canyon, leaving behind the first 20 kilometers untouched. This segment, named "Cruz del Condor", has been unexplored and remained one of the last wild frontiers in the world.

By 2001 the canyon became the second most popular tourist attraction in Peru, only behind the famous Machu Picchu. However, we believe that in the next 3 to 5 years the Colca Canyon will attract the most tourists.

The Colca Condor 2008 expedition sought out to conquer this last remaining segment, believing that its exploration may help answer questions on the many mysteries concerning the geology, hydrology, archaeology and history of this region. The Colca Condor 2008 Expedition sought out as its objective to answer the following questions:

- How did the geological formation of the Colca river canyon and valley take place?
- What scientific and historical data are hidden there?

This report summarizes the results of the Colca Condor 2008 Expedition and provides insight into these two important questions.

The scientific endeavors mentioned above, which were done inside the virgin territory of the Colca Canyon – the world's deepest – bring to the world a plethora of fresh information from all of the pictures, film, descriptions, data measurements, geological analysis and journal entries. What has been hidden and unknown to humanity for centuries was now unveiled.

Our exploration also helps unearth the mysteries from past generations of earlier civilizations by discovering the existence of tombs and a small fortress.

The following results may also be very useful and important to the future establishment of the Colca Canyon National Park, a project that has been undertaken by academia from Poland and Peru since 2003. [ ]
IV. Expedition Log

Expedition timing: August 18 – September 2, 2008.
Expedition territory: Southern Peru, Arequipa Province.

August 18th
We departed New York City on Monday, just after our inaugural Press Conference held in the Explorers Club headquarters in Manhattan. After arriving in Lima we took a direct flight to Arequipa (2,350masl) where we stayed two nights for acclimatization and additional supply preparations. We also held an unplanned Press Conference which was attended by the local and national media. For the next 3 nights we stayed in the village of Cabanaconde (3,450 masl) – our expedition base.

August 24th - On Sunday, we arrived at the small village of Madrigal from where we descended to the canyon bottom.

August 24th to 30th - Exploration of the first part of the Colca Canyon known as “Cruz del Condor”.

August 29th and 30th - We climbed out of the canyon. After one night in Cabanaconde we drove back to the airport in Arequipa, from where we took a flight to Lima.

September 1st - We held the Press Conference organized by the Peruvian Ministry of Tourism, where we presented the first results of our expedition. We specifically focused on the potential environmental damage of the accumulation of wastes in the canyon.

September 2nd - After arriving in New York, we held a Press conference in the Pilsudski Institute in Manhattan to close out the expedition.

September 26th - With our final expedition results, our main sponsor organized a Press Conference in the Warsaw Stock Exchange.
V. Exploration in Kayak

By Eugene Buchanan FR’98 - Team Member of the Expedition

From an expedition standpoint, the 12-mile-long (20km) “Cruz del Condor” section of Colca Canyon proved a formidable adversary. In all, we’d be dropping nearly 2,800 (850m) vertical feet in 12 miles, from our put-in at 10,000 (3,050m) to take-out in Sangalle at 7,200 feet (2,200m), for an average drop of 233 feet per mile, nearly 30 times that of the Grand Canyon’s eight feet per mile.

Having run rivers in more than 25 countries, including several first descents and a W.L. Gore & Assoc’s -sponsored expedition to the former Soviet Union, it was as difficult a canyon to navigate as nearly any other I have been on.

Complicating matters was the water level. Based on historical flows, at first our team thought it would be more of a backpacking/canyoneering descent. As such, we lined up Peruvian mountaineer Carlos Zarate as a ropes expert, myself to paddle a Pyranha Ammo kayak, and two alpacka rafts for gear transport.

Upon arriving, however, the water level was higher than anyone expected, turning the expedition into more of a river-based one, which slowed the team’s progress. It also did the same to another expedition team down in the canyon at the same time, a group from Poland student AKT Watra Club. The best technique for navigating the canyon was a mix of rappelling, boat-lining, paddling, swimming, wading and hiking, with the expedition averaging less than a mile per day. Of particular concern were the many waterfalls and other sieve-lined cascades in the canyon, which required careful rope work to navigate.

Two of the most difficult sections included the navigation of waterfalls on days three and four, the first requiring a climb, rappel and scramble along a cliff on the right, followed by a rope-lowering into a pool, river crossing and another roped-up climb on river left; and the second a climb and 60-foot rappel on river left.

The best technique for navigating the canyon had me scouting ahead to the next horizon line in my kayak and then relaying instructions back to the team as to which side to progress down on. I could also offer help in shuttling gear in the two pack rafts by towing them back and forth through pools and Class I-II waters. When it came time to cross the river, I could also ferry ropes back and forth to facilitate matters.
While the canyon offered everything from Class I pools to unnavigable Class VI waterfalls, it also had plenty of Class II-IV sections that were capable of being paddled by an experienced kayaker, as well as Class V for experts only. But the remoteness of the region made you err on the side of caution.

With safety the team’s primary concern, the gradient and water levels we encountered made the team realize it was progressing too slowly to complete the journey in the allotted timeframe allowed. After helping the AKT Watra team shuttle their gear through a walled-in abyss via our kayak and pack rafts on day 5, we joined the other expedition in hiking out of the canyon on day six, after navigating about half of the canyon’s 12 miles. In all, we descended more than 1,200 vertical feet (370m) of the Class V-VI canyon, estimating the second half to drops another 1,600 vertical feet (485m).
VI. Archaeological Impressions  

By Jerzy Majcherzyk FR’92 – Expedition Leader

For the reason that our team did not have an archeologist present, our activities were limited to carefully observing and recording our surroundings during the expedition for any signs of structures or formations that were not made naturally.

Our first observation was that of coming across many “colcas” – small caves or openings located along the vertical walls of the canyon. These caves resided high above the river level and several hundred feet from the canyon edges. These locations made the colcas very difficult and in most cases impossible to access without proper gear. Local legend has it that these colcas were once used as tombs. Our supporting team, who followed our progress from the top of the canyon, would spend their time exploring the canyon perimeter and edges overlooking the river. They were able to find a tomb with several mummies in the various conditions. Some were greatly decomposed and in pieces, however several remained in their original seated position.

Thanks to the local porters of our expedition, we have been able to find and explore a small fortress located high above the Colca Canyon entrance. The location of this fortress is of much interest, as she is invisible from the valley, yet from her walls one may observe the entire length of the “Cruz del Condor” segment. This begs the question – why was this fortress built in this location? It may be speculated that the Colca Canyon was once somehow populated, or that it was an important ceremonial and religious location. It is difficult to imagine how any activities could have been conducted in this treacherous and almost uninhabitable region. To my best knowledge and speculation, this fortress is from pre-Incan and possibly built during the Wari or Tihuanaco periods. Only a team of archeologists can answer these questions correctly. [ ]
VII. Hydrological Analysis

By Jerzy Majcherczyk FR’92 – Expedition Leader

Exploration of the canyon bottom during the Colca Condor 2008 Expedition was a great occasion to obtain hydrological data/information. I was able to take measurements in three locations. At the entrance to the canyon, at the middle of the “Cruz del Condor”, and at the end of the “Cruz del Condor”. The results are very interesting.

![Map of Colca Canyon](image)

**Point A:** At the entrance to the Colca Canyon, (+- 2km down from village of Madrigal). Colca River flows only with 5 to 7 cubic meters per second (cm/s).

**Point B:** In the middle of the “Cruz del Condor”, where we put-off our exploration (+- 7km from the beginning), Colca river flows with 17 to 20 (cm/s).

**Point C:** At the end of the “Cruz del Condor”, known as Sangalle, the Colca river flows with only 13 to 15 (cm/s).

During our exploration we did not come across any joining river or stream which would be able to increase the Colca river volume so dramatically (+- 10 cm/s). It is also very interesting to note that +- 5 cm/s of the water disappear in the second section of the “Cruz del Condor”. One possible explanation can be that the Colca River is part of subterranean water system in this region. This theory can be supported by existing subterranean rivers in the nearby Volcanoes valley, where one of them, Mamacocha River flows many kilometers underground and appears in the form of a small lake. This theory can be also supported by the existence of various hot springs of different sizes and formations. In order to properly understand this, further studies are necessary.