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JAVIER SANCHEZ

## Bolivia 2000

(Plates 35–38)

Santa Vera Cruz is the smallest chain of mountains in Bolivia, contained within a distance of 20km between Huañacota in the north and Ichoco in the south. There are several glaciers, which are located in the southernmost point in Bolivia.

In 1904, Henry Hoek wrote a chapter on the Santa Vera Cruz in his book *Bolivia's Mountains*, but he only traversed the range walking towards Quimsa Cruz, and climbed nothing significant. Thirty-five years later, the German Joseph Prem, one of the most important originators of alpinism in Bolivia, climbed **Santa Vera Cruz (5560m)** itself on his own. His 1939 expedition was repeated some years later by another German, Frederic Alfed.

Forty years on, the Chilean Andean expert Evelio Echevarría, who knows this land better than anyone, climbed the small hill called **Cala Cala (4600m)** which is located to the north of the small lake Huariananta. He went back twice to climb the 'Chupica' – which means 'red blood' in Aymara – without success, thus leaving four of five significant summits in this area unclimbed.

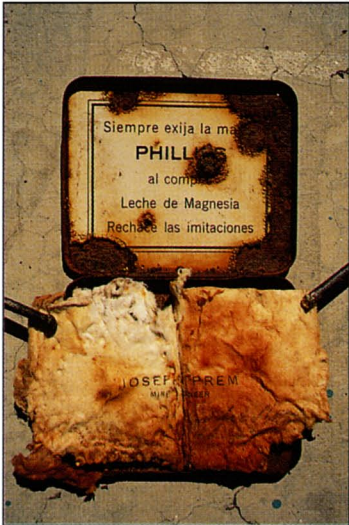
In May 1999, we three friends, Javier Navarro, Isidro Gonzalez and Javier Sanchez, decided to climb the region's second-highest summit, **Fortuna Peak (5493m)** in an attempt to generate new interest in climbing here. On 8 May we set out for the summit, taking 17 hours to climb a slope of between 50° and 70°. We called the route *Khespiqala*, which translates as 'precious stone' in Aymara. We were helped by unusually heavy snow conditions. Normally our route would be a mixed climb.

Two days later, we climbed Santa Vera Cruz itself by a new route on the crevassed western snow slopes that Prem avoided. The route was called *Jenecheru*, or 'the first is always burning'. On the summit we made two interesting discoveries: a small cairn containing a tin with Prem's card from 60 years before, and also a number of artefacts from the late period of the Tiwanaku culture. According to Oswaldo Rivera, the Bolivian archaeologist, these date back 800 years.

The items were offerings to Pachamama, or Mother Earth, and included some silver brooches, called Tupus, which were used to fasten clothes, a small wooden receptacle, two ceremonial wooden cups with geometric patterns, a hawthorn needle and a human collar bone, used as a spoon. All these things were covered in fabric. The purpose of these early climbers may have been different to ours, but we felt we shared a community of spirit with them, searching for peace and calmness. The Achachilas, or spirits of the mountains, gave us good luck in finding that treasure. It is amazing that these mountains, only four hours by bus from La Paz, had not seen more ascents.



35. The Cordillera de Santa Vera Cruz, Bolivia. The leftmost peak is Pico de la Fortuna (5493m), that second from right is Cerro Santa Vera Cruz, at 5560m the highest in the massif. (Javier Sánchez) (see Area Notes: Bolivia)



36. and 37. *Left and Above*

The tin and card of Joseph Prem, left in 1939 on the summit of Cerro Santa Vera Cruz, and the archaeological remains – offerings from the Tiwanaku culture – discovered near the same place. (Javier Sánchez) (see Area Notes: Bolivia)

