

## SOUTH AMERICA

### Through Thick and Thin Ice

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In addition to the difficulties of ice-covered mountain terrains, there are many complications that glacial and high-altitude archaeologists often face while performing their duties as both, scientists, and climbers. Based on my professional experience spanning over four decades, the biggest obstacles to mountain archaeology in the near future are excessive bureaucracy, lack of recognition of merit, political correctness and professional jealousy, affecting science in general, and our field in particular.

A widely spread problem, especially at southern latitudes, is that permits for field research and access to collections are often granted or arbitrarily restricted by bureaucrats with no academic background. It may be the case that someone without any experience in science (a painter or poet, for example) becomes a Secretary of Culture or Heritage Director, thanks to family connections or ideological affinities with local politicians. Nepotism and lack of professional experience, in the hands of powerful bureaucrats, can become a recipe for disaster, particularly in areas where serious archaeological research is threatened by non-scientific interests, such as those of mining companies.

Another serious problem is caused by an overemphasis on political correctness, and adherence by scholars and the general public to politically motivated agendas that have little to do with the search for evidence-based knowledge. In recent years research projects have been delayed or stopped unnecessarily across many corners of our world.

Gatekeeping also remains an issue within academia. When attempting to publish the results of our work, glacial archaeology articles may suffer from difficulties in the process of finding appropriately-qualified reviewers. Calls for anonymity (and other excessively bureaucratic aspects in the peer review process) tend to exacerbate the issues of an already dehumanizing “publish or perish” system, in which pettiness and jealousy are oftentimes allowed to persist over merit.

The history of an emerging line of research should not remain ignored by the younger generations of scholars coming into the field of glacial archaeology. An honest recognition of the contributions of the pioneers is essential, particularly at times when the foundations of a scientific discipline are being established. In the case of glacial archaeology, it is not only “the founding-fathers” from the northern hemisphere that should be taken into consideration. It is important to recognize the



Figure 1. The author climbing above 6000 meters (20,000 feet) during archaeological field-work in the Andes of Argentina.

contribution of founding female scientists, particularly those from Latin America. My own archaeological research in the high Andes (as the only woman specialist in the world at the time), covers more than one hundred ascents on mountains above 5000 meters, in addition to co-directing (with Johan Reinhard in 1999) the expedition to the summit of volcano Lulllaillaco, the highest archaeological site on earth, where we discovered three perfectly preserved frozen Inca mummies and numerous offerings (Ceruti 2014). In the mid nineties, I had to overcome challenges presented by extreme weather and remote locations without access to proper technical equipment, without the assistance of helicopters or the chance of emergency calls. I also had to confront the skepticism of armchair archaeologists about any project involving a woman working on high mountains. However, my twenty-five years of intense teaching and international lecturing, the dozens of papers and books published, the numerous awards received and the worldwide media coverage of my work and its results, have all contributed to initial awareness on the importance of the archaeological heritage in high mountains.

I am thankful that we have come to a point in which honest reflections on our scientific praxis are being welcomed. In previous years, in view of some of the problems mentioned above, I have tried to advocate for the formation of an Association of Glacial Archaeologists (although a motion introduced towards this end at the Frozen Past meeting was met with cold indifference). Nowadays, I would recommend being outspoken, in defense of our individual and collective legacies. We, glacial archaeologists, are mountain and high-latitude people (sometimes by birth and always by choice). Our inspiration should be found amidst the wisdom of the Scottish highland-

ers, the “free men” of the Alps, and other mountain cultures and communities across the world and through human history, which have kept the fire burning. We can and we should, follow in their footsteps.

## References

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