

# Imperial students rock

Experienced climber and mechanical engineering student **Virgil Scott** holidays the hard way on the Imperial College Quimsa Cruz Climbing Expedition 2007

We had set up camp in a small, flat bottomed valley, near the banks of the **Riío Kuchu Macoya**.

The valley is surrounded by an imposing series of mountains with sheer cliff faces. There were a couple of

tasted strangely similar to dirt) to stay energized, we hiked around the valley scoping out potential routes on the rock faces. We found an abundance of striking crack-lines and beautiful slabs; far too many to choose from,

then forced to play excruciatingly complicated German card games by Markus, the German in our group.

The next day we were still finding it hard to do anything remotely strenuous without going into wheezing,

## Climbing became a matter of propelling yourself upwards faster than you were sliding down

French mountaineers in the area when we arrived and they warned us that we should only drink from the northern branch of the river. Apparently the southern branch had heavy metal contamination from the mines further up the valley – something that neither our filter nor our iodine would help with.

Eating our chocolate bars (we had 12kg of various brands and they all

they all looked so promising. Unfortunately we weren't ready to climb yet; we had to let ourselves acclimatize for at least a day before undertaking anything very big, otherwise we would risk suffering acute mountain sickness, which can result in death in its severest form as a result of respiratory distress or brain swelling. So playing it safe, we rested in our tents, reading books at first,

breathless fits. But, desperate to start climbing, we went to an attractive cliff that we had seen the previous day and attempted what appeared to be the easiest route. Unfortunately it turned out not to be so easy: we wrestled with the rock, shoveling dirt out from the cracks in order to reveal the holds, constantly sliding down due to the loose undergrowth in the cracks. Climbing became a simple matter of



Photo: Markus Roggen

propelling yourself upwards faster than you were sliding down.

When we returned to base camp we blew the dirt from our noses and squeezed it from our eyes. It was then that we noticed something had been eating our chocolate and cereals. We

presumed it was the giant bunny-monkeys - not their real name clearly, but we couldn't remember the Spanish term and as they looked like giant bunnies and could climb boulders like a monkey, that's what they were called. We attempted to confiscate their food by hanging it from bushes and boulders but eventually gave up: they evidently enjoyed the chocolate more than we did and had a taste for honey puff cereal.

The next 22 days were spent trying to do everything that we wanted to in the area; the final tally, eleven routes climbed (two of them thought to be entirely new) and one 7ft snowman created.

Photo: Virgil Scott



### TRAVEL INFO

In July 2007, Hal Watts, Bernard Lam, Markus Roggen, Ben Withers and Virgil Scott went to the Quimsa Cruz mountain range in Bolivia. The expedition was made possible with sponsorship from Sir Richard Sykes, Imperial College, Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council, First Ascent, PHD Designs, Rab and Terra Nova. For more pictures and info visit [www.quimsacruz2007.co.uk](http://www.quimsacruz2007.co.uk)

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