

Tales from the Field

The Magic Inca Glass Ball in Lake Licancabur, Chile

Among the most fascinating features of the incredibly rich prehistoric culture of the Atacama desert are the pavements, platforms and firewood piles on the top of sacred mountains in northern Chile. These structures date from the Inca Empire and were built on volcanoes as high as or even above 6000 m elevation. One of the most peculiar sites is Vn Licancabur near San Pedro de Atacama with its small crater lake on top. Legend has it that this lake contains a mysterious glass ball. Using this ball as a mirror, Inka priests were able to communicate from peak to peak while smoking miracle drugs. A small expedition to discover this ball was undertaken. Among the group was the former

mayor of San Pedro, a legendary archaeologist and former Miss Chile. Scuba divers hiked through a desert that has not seen much water since late-glacial times, and discovered after a few dives – what a miracle – a glass ball in the lake sediments. When the ball was brought above the water, the beams of gleaming sunlight reflected in the glass and burnt the hands of the poor diver – who dropped the ball. It then disappeared in a burst of bubbles emanating from the deep. The only remaining evidence of this unusual discovery is a black and white photograph in the art gallery in the Hotel Tulo in San Pedro showing the diver's head, the ball and a bit of water. When our expedition arrived at the hotel and expressed our plans to core the sediments of high altitude lakes in the area we were immediately engaged in a controversial debate about what we might

find in our cores. The Chilean Army claims that the ball is part of a heliograph, a local artist claims that it is her gift to Mother Earth, and countless expeditions to retrieve the ball have ended without success. It is perhaps still there waiting for a joint action of PAGES-PEP1 limnologists.

MARTIN GROSJEAN
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Fig. 1: Volcan Licancabur (5930 m) seen from San Pedro de Atacama, Northern Chile (Photo: C. Kull).

Do you have an interesting and humorous story from your paleoenvironmental fieldwork? If you write it down in 500 words or less and send it to us, we will put it in PAGES news!

Inside PAGES

PAGES welcomes four new members to our Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) in 2002. **Pinxian Wang** is a paleoceanographer and micropaleontologist at Tongji University in Shanghai. **Rick Battarbee**, from University College London, is no stranger to PAGES. He joins the SSC after several years as leader of the PAGES PEP2 transect and Focus 5-LIMPACS (Human Impacts on Lake Ecosystems). Rick is a paleolimnologist. **Frank Sirocko** has worked in both marine and terrestrial paleoenvironmental archives including marine sedimentary records of the Asian monsoon and laminated sediments of dry maars. Finally, **Olga Solomina** began her SSC membership by hosting the 2002 business meeting alongside a major workshop which has served to improve Russian, and ex-soviet, pa-

leoenvironmental community links with PAGES. Olga has expertise in interpreting glacial features and tree rings as indicators of Holocene climate change.

Along with welcoming these new members, PAGES thanks those members who recently stepped off the committee: **Keith Briffa** (UK), **Patrick DeDeckker** (Australia), **Zheng-tang Guo** (China), **Laurent Labeyrie** (France) and **Dominique Raynaud** (France). Special thanks to **Bruno Messerli** (Switzerland), who served for many years as the Swiss Director of PAGES.

The International Project Office says goodbye to visiting scientist **Tom Edwards** from the University of Waterloo, Canada. Many thanks to Tom for serving as guest editor of this issue of PAGES News, convening and attending several workshops on PAGES behalf. This fall, the IPO welcomes a new guest scientist, **André Paul**, a paleoceanographer from the University of Bremen, Germany.

Call for Contributions:

The next issue of PAGES News will highlight the use of documentary data in paleoclimatological investigations. Science highlights that fit within this theme, as well as the usual workshop reports and program news, are welcome. If you are interested in contributing a science highlight to this issue please contact Heinz Wanner (wanner@giub.unibe.ch). Other types of contributions may be sent to Christoph Kull (kull@pages.unibe.ch).

All submissions should follow the instructions for authors on our web-site and be submitted by October 15, 2002.

www.pages.unibe.ch/products/newsletters.html

