Since the completion towards the end of 1925 of the Bolivian State Rail-way, between Villazon and Atocha, a distance of 123 miles, the last remaining link in the International Rail Route between the South American Republics of Argentina and Bolivia, has been completed. This route can be said to afford access to some of the finest mountain scenery in South America, and brings one within easy reach of the mighty Andes, and the romantic land of the Incas. The distance from Buenos Aires to La Paz, is about 1,633 miles, the journey between the two Federal Capitals occupying almost five days, and being accomplished in five distinct stages, which enable the traveller to fully appreciate the scenic beauties of the route.

* In this connection, it should be mentioned that four different railway companies are at present concerned with the international traffic, namely:

The Central Argentine Railway, the Argentine Central Northern Railway (State-owned), the Bolivian State Railways (Villazon-Atocha Section) and the Antofagasta and Bolivia Railway. The first-mentioned has a gauge of 5 ft. 6 in., while the others are metre-gauge. These railways form the quickest and most direct route between Buenos Aires and La Paz, although it would be possible to work through traffic by two other alternative routes, maintaining the same metre-gauge throughout the whole journey between Buenos Aires and La Paz.

* Through services were inaugurated around 1926/27 between Tucuman and La Paz,

The alternative routes are as follows:

1. By Cordoba Central Railway from Buenos Aires to Tucuman, thence by the Argentine Central Northern Railway, &c.
2. By the Province of Buenos Aires Railway (Compañía General) from Buenos Aires to Rosario, thence by the Santa Fe and Argentine Central Northern Railways, &c.

The above routes (see map) would entail a considerable increase in the mileage, and up to the time of writing no through working of International passenger traffic from Buenos Aires has yet been undertaken by the Cordoba Central, Santa Fe or Province of Buenos Aires railways. It is, however, interesting to note in connection with the International Exhibition held in La Paz towards the end of 1925, on the occasion of the Centenary of the Independence of Bolivia, that a train of 27 freight wagons, &c, containing the Argentine Exhibits of national products, &c, was run from Buenos Aires to La Paz by the second route mentioned above.

Leaving the palatial Retiro terminus of the Central Argentine Railway in Buenos Aires on a Saturday at 5 p.m., the International train, after leaving the Argentine capital, passes through flat and undulating country, which is characteristic of almost the whole journey between Buenos Aires and Tucuman by the Central Argentine Railway, and 4½ hours later, reaches Rosario, the second city of importance in the Argentine Republic. From Rosario, the train passes on to Ceres, where the country, although still undulating, may be said to assume a wilder aspect. Before reaching Tucuman, one observes the extensive sugar plantations, which he in close proximity to the railway.

Tucuman is reached at 6 p.m. on a Sunday, and it is here that passengers experience their first change, namely, from the broad-gauge trains of the Central Argentine Railway, to the metre-gauge trains of the Argentine Central Northern Railway, which runs up to the Bolivian frontier. The station at Tucuman, which is terminal, is covered in by a roof divided in two spans. There are two platforms, one of which is of the "island " type. The Central Northern trains use the outer face of the island platform, while the inner face and the remaining platform accommodate the trains of the Central Argentine Railway, whose line terminates at Tucuman. It should be mentioned, that in addition to using the Central Argentine station for the interchange of International traffic, the Central Northern Railway have their own station in Tucuman; from which extensive services are operated in various directions.

Tucuman, the fourth city of the Argentine Republic, is of considerable importance, being in the centre of the sugar industry. The town has a population of about 100,000 inhabitants, which has rapidly increased during recent years. The climate is semi-tropical, being hot in summer, but the winters are quite temperate and the nights cold.
The Central Northern train for the Bolivian Frontier leaves Tucuman at 8 p.m. on a Sunday evening, and is usually made up as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Vans (including postal vehicles)</td>
<td>La Quiaca.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sleeping Cars (detached at Guemes)</td>
<td>Salta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Sleeping Car</td>
<td>Jujuy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Sleeping Car</td>
<td>La Quiaca.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Composite Saloon Car</td>
<td>Jujuy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Restaurant Car</td>
<td>To Quiaca.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kitchen Car</td>
<td>La Quiaca.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>11 vehicles.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As will be seen from the above, the vehicles for the Bolivian frontier are seven in number, the remaining vehicles being for intermediate destinations.

Leaving Tucuman by the Central Northern Railway, the line rises sharply for nine miles, and reaches Tafi Viejo, which owes its importance to the fact that the workshops of the Central Northern Railway are located there. From Tafi Viejo the scenery changes, and thickly wooded valleys and low ranges of mountains take the place of the flat country.

The next point of importance reached is Rosario de la Frontera, the railway having now reached the altitude of 3,180 ft. above sea level. Rosario de la Frontera is a growing tourist resort, and is frequented by invalids and those wishing to escape from the cold winters of Buenos Aires. A fine hotel is situated about six miles from the station. Owing to the presence of mineral water springs in the neighbouring mountains, thermal baths have been installed in the vicinity.

The next station worthy of mention is Guemes, 179 miles from Tucuman, and the junction for Salta, from which it is 30 miles distant. Salta is the capital of the Province of Salta, and has a population of 20,000 inhabitants. As was mentioned previously, the two sleeping cars for Salta are detached at Guemes.

From Guemes the line still rises steadily, and Perico is reached. Just north of this station a branch line strikes off to Embarcación, this forming an alternative route to Bolivia, via Embarcación and Yacuiba, a town close to the frontier.

The International train arrives at Jujuy at 7 a.m. on a Monday morning, and waits there an hour for re-marshalling purposes. Jujuy is one of the important towns in the north of the Argentine Republic, and is the capital of the province of the same name. Owing to its proximity to the Bolivian frontier, Jujuy is an important military post, having extensive barracks on the north side of the town, which is picturesquely situated in a valley surrounded by high mountains.

After leaving Jujuy, the railway follows the course of the "Rio Grande de Jujuy" through Reyes and Yala to Leon, which is situated 14 miles from Jujuy.

From this point the gradient is too steep for the ordinary adhesion locomotives, as a result of which the "ABT" system of rack has been adopted.

The International trains for the north are split at Leon, the first portion of the train being taken up the gradient, which is nine miles in length, to Volcan, being followed half an hour later by the remainder of the train.

Continued →
The International Rail Route between Argentina and Bolivia.
The International Rail Route between Argentina and Bolivia.

The locomotives employed on the rack section of the line are of the 0-8-2 rack-adhesion type, with side tanks, and built by the Esslinger Locomotive Works, Germany, in 1905. It is interesting to note that the gradient between Leon and Volcan in some parts is 6 per cent., the time taken to accomplish the nine miles of rack being 1 hr. 45 min. At Volcan the train, as originally composed, is made up again, and proceeds on its journey drawn by a 4-6-2 type Baldwin locomotive, burning oil fuel.

Still following the "Rio Grande de Jujuy," the railway winds its way through a series of deep rock cuttings. At this point the scenery is very desolate and monotonous. The vegetation is scarce with the exception of cactii and low stunted bushes, which will be observed on the mountain-sides. A number of stations are passed, including Tilcara and Humahuaca, the latter town standing at a height of 9,931 ft. above sea level, and with a population of over 1,000 inhabitants. Humahuaca, which is situated 99 miles from the Bolivian frontier, is the last town of any importance in the Argentine. At Iturbe the railway leaves the river course and makes a rapid ascent to Tres Cruces, the highest point reached by any railway in the Argentine Republic, being 12,100 ft. above sea level.

La Quiaca is reached at 7.40 p.m. on a Monday evening. The town itself is small and scattered, and stands on a sandy plateau devoid of all vegetation, at a height of 10,960 ft. above sea level. We have now reached the frontier of Argentina and Bolivia, and also the terminating point of the Argentine Central Northern Railway. From La Quiaca one can observe the small Bolivian town of Villazon, about one mile over the frontier.

The journey into Bolivia is now continued on the Bolivian State Railways (Villazon-Atocha section), but, owing to the fact that the Bolivian State Railway train does not leave La Quiaca until noon on a Tuesday, the international passengers are obliged to stay in La Quiaca over the night. The following morning, after the usual customs formalities have been gone through, passengers join the Bolivian State Railway train, which is drawn up in front of the Customs-house at La Quiaca. This is due to the fact that the Bolivian State Railway Company have at present made no arrangements with the Argentine Central Northern Railway for the use of the latter company’s station, although the metals of the two companies are joined and are used for through freight vehicles.

Leaving La Quiaca, the line descends sharply, and about half a mile away crosses over the frontier viaduct into Bolivia and enters Villazon, a small Bolivian frontier town. The train waits at Villazon for an hour to enable a further examination of baggage, &c, by the Bolivian customs authorities.

From Villazon to General Medinaceli the line rises sharply, and later descends in a series of bends into a valley, along which flows the River Suipacha. This river is followed as far as Tupiza. During the course of the journey the railway crosses the river several times by means of substantial bridges, which have been constructed of stone, and passes through deep gorges. The embankments and bridges along this part of the line have been reinforced to counteract the heavy floods caused by the rivers, which in summer time often wash away the embankments and cause many landslides.

A few miles from Tupiza the railway passes through a gorge, the sides of which are almost perpendicular, and eventually enters a short tunnel cut through the solid rock.

The train reaches Tupiza at 5.15 p.m. on a Tuesday, and passengers are obliged to put up for the night as the train does not leave until the following morning at 7.0 a.m. Tupiza, 62 miles from La Quiaca, is situated in a deep valley, and has a population of about 5,000 inhabitants. The valley near the town is quite fertile owing to the extensive irrigation work that is being carried on in the vicinity of the river.

Leaving Tupiza for the north at 7.0 a.m. on a Wednesday, the line continues to rise steadily and, still following the river, winds its tortuous way through narrow valleys. Approaching Escorianí, the railway passes through more open country. Escorianí is the highest point on the Villazon-Atocha section of the Bolivian State Railways, and is situated 13,310 ft. above sea level. On the right of the line, some distance away, one is able to view the majestic snow-clad peak of "Santa Barbara." From Escorianí, the elevation of the railway drops for about 1,200ft, and the line crosses the river by a trestle viaduct, and enters Atocha, the terminus of the railway.

Atocha is a typical Indian town, situated in a sandy valley. There are several small hotels, and extensive mining is carried on in the vicinity of the town. It may be mentioned that Atocha is also the terminus of the Uyuni-Atocha branch of the Antofagasta (Chili) & Bolivia Railway. The station of the latter company is situated about 300 yards from the station of the Bolivian State Railway, but, although the metals are connected, no through trains have yet been inaugurated between La Quiaca and La Paz.

Continued →
The International Rail Route between Argentina and Bolivia.

From Atocha, the journey is continued over the Bolivia Railway Company's system, the working being in the hands of the Antofagasta and Bolivia Railway. Leaving Atocha at 2.30 p.m. on a Wednesday, the line follows the river, and ascends a steep gradient to Chocaya, where a fine view is obtained of the country surrounding Atocha. From this point the railway passes through deep cuttings in sandy earth. Between Chocaya and Uyuni, the railway passes over sandy desert, characteristic of the high Bolivian tableland.

Uyuni is reached at 6.40 p.m. on a Wednesday, and here passengers change for La Paz and Antofagasta. The train for La Paz leaves at 8 p.m. the same evening. Owing to better facilities in hotel accommodation in Uyuni, passengers proceeding to Potosi are advised to put up for the night in Uyuni, instead of continuing the journey to Rio Mulato, which is actually the junction with the line to Potosi, but all trains for that point start from Uyuni. Uyuni is a town of 5,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom are Indians. The junction of the Atocha branch is situated about 1 mile south of the station. At Uyuni transfer is made to the 2-ft. 6-in. gauge section of the Antofagasta & Bolivia Railway, which runs to Antofagasta on the Pacific coast. In order to effect this change passengers have merely to walk across the platform and enter the other train, which is waiting for them. There is a special apparatus for lifting through wagons bodily on to other bogies, an operation which takes about seven minutes. The station consists of one main and one island platform. The main platform serves the 2-ft. 6-in. gauge trains of the Antofagasta - Uyuni section, while the island platform serves the metre-gauge trains of the Uyuni-La Paz section. The Antofagasta & Bolivia Railway Company owns extensive repair shops for the locomotives and rolling-stock of the 2-ft. 6-in. gauge. These are situated at the north end of the station. Leaving Uyuni a very fine view is obtained on the right-hand side of the line, where a great range of snow-clad mountains rises abruptly from the tableland. The railway now runs along the high Bolivian plains at the height of about 12,000 ft. above sea level, between vast ranges of mountains. On the left side of the railway the mountains will be observed very much further away. After passing Chita, 30 miles from Uyuni, the mountains close in on the railway, although they are still from 8 to 10 miles away. Beyond Chita a river is followed, and the lower ranges of mountains close in on each side of the line. The railway follows the right bank of the river as far as Quehua. Rio Mulato is reached at 12.24 a.m. The town is small, and consists chiefly of Indian mud-brick houses.

Before continuing the description of the journey to La Paz, a brief account may be given of the journey between Rio Mulato and Potosi, a distance of 108 miles, during the course of which the railway passes through rugged mountainous country, and reaches an altitude of 15,809 ft. above sea level, being the second highest point reached by any railway in the world.

The Potosi branch leaves the main line to La Paz about a mile beyond Rio Mulato station, and curves sharply to the right in the direction of the mountains. The line leaves the tableland about 11 miles from Rio Mulato, and commences the five hours' climb to the summit of the "Cordilleras de Los Frailes" through desolate ranges of mountains, many of whose peaks are snow-clad. The progress of the train, is very slow in many parts, owing to the steepness of the grades encountered. The Potosi train is hauled from Uyuni to Potosi by a special type of locomotive of the 0-6-2-0-6-2 Kitson-Meyer built by Beyer Peacock & Company of Manchester in 1913.

At 3.15 p.m. the train arrives at Condor, which is probably the highest passenger station in the world, being 15,809 ft. above sea level. This height is only exceeded by the mining railway from Ollague to Collahuasi in Chile, where an altitude is attained of 15,814 ft. above sea level. From Condor to Agua Castilla the line falls rapidly, and there is little of interest to relieve the monotony of this mountainous desert, devoid of vegetation and very sparsely populated. At Agua Castilla is situated the famous "Porco" silver mine, which may be seen in the distance on the right side of the railway.

The line between Agua Castilla and Potosi runs more or less at a continuous elevation of 13,000 ft. above sea-level, and passes through deep gorges and rock cuttings. In parts, where the line passes through protected valleys, the vegetation is more apparent, being in the form of cactii and stunted bushes. Eighteen miles from Potosi, a magnificent panoramic view of vast mountain ranges presents itself. Potosi station is visible quite twenty minutes before the train is due to arrive there, as the railway descends slowly from a high elevation to the town.
Potosí is reached at 7.34 p.m. on Thursday evening. Cars meet the train, and convey passengers to the various hotels, which are some distance from the station. It may, perhaps, be of interest to note that Potosí was founded in the year 1546 by Don Juan de Villaroel Santandia. The famous silver mines of Potosí are situated in the Cerro, a mountain with a conical shaped peak, which stands behind the town, and rises to a height of 15,900 ft. The silver mines, although not so old ECs the "Porco" mine at Agua Castilla, have nevertheless been worked more or less continuously since the town of Potosí was founded. Potosí has a population of about 25,000 inhabitants, of whom more than half that number are Indians. Situated as it is, over 13,000 ft. above sea-level, the climate is never very warm at any time of the year.

Leaving Potosí at 10 a.m., the same line is traversed to Rio Mulato, which is reached at 8 p.m. the same evening. The sleeping car from Potosí to La Paz remains at Rio Mulato until 0-24, when it is attached to the international train from Uyuni to La Paz. From Rio Mulato, the line passes through an arid desert, and nothing of interest is to be seen until Lake Poopó is reached. Lake Poopó is a large fresh water lake about 60 miles long and 20 miles broad. The curious feature regarding this lake is that although many rivers flow into it, it has but one small outlet at its northern extremity, connecting with the famous Lake Titicaca.

The International Train arrives at Oruro at 7 a.m. on a Monday morning, and waits 15 min. in order to detach several sleeping cars. The platform is usually crowded with people, and the many coloured dresses of the Indian women, add to the picturesqueness of the scene. Oruro is situated at a height of 12,300 ft. above sea-level, and is the most important tin mining centre in Bolivia. The population is about 28,000 inhabitants, and about the same proportion of Indians as in Potosí.

Thirty-eight miles from Oruro is Eucalyptus, near which are situated the mines of Monte Blanca at the height of over 16,000 ft. above sea-level. Continuing the journey, most of the stations between Oruro and La Paz are connected with mining, and little need be said about them. At Viacha, a small town 12,657 ft. above sea-level, and about 23 miles from La Paz, a connection is effected with the Arica and La Paz Railway, and the Guaqui and La Paz Railway. The former connects La Paz with Arica on the Pacific Coast, while the latter connects La Paz with Guaqui, a small town situated on Lake Titicaca. The Arica and La-Paz trains are worked into La Paz by the locomotives of the Antofagasta and Bolivia Railway, while the Guaqui and La Paz Railway has its own electrified line from Alto to La Paz (Central). The line between Viacha and Kenko drops gradually, and just beyond Kenko Station, the descent to La Paz commences. About half a mile from Kenko the tableland falls abruptly away, disclosing a deep valley, and a magnificent view of the snow-clad peak of Illimani, 21,000 ft. high. The railway, after descending rapidly through several tunnels and deep cuttings, follows the western slopes of the valley for several miles. The embankments have in many cases been reinforced owing to their liability to be washed away by the torrential rains.

The International Train arrives at La Paz (Chijini) at 2.25 p.m. on a Thursday. From a traveller's first impression of the station one can hardly realise that the capital of Bolivia has been reached. Chijini station, which lies on the western slope of the valley, overlooking La Paz, has only a single platform, and a small wooden station building. There are, however, extensive sidings and warehouses in the vicinity. In addition to the Antofagasta and Bolivia Railway, the La Paz and Yungas Railway (State-owned) runs into Chijini station, from Unduavi on the north side.

The city of La Paz with a population of about 100,000 inhabitants, is probably the highest capital in the world. Although standing at a height of 12,000 ft. above sea-level, the city lies in a valley, 1,000 ft. deep, and is surrounded by high mountains. The giant snow-clad peak of Illimani stands like a sentinel over the city. From Chijini station one is able to obtain an excellent birds-eye view of La Paz and its surroundings. Among the principal edifices in the city are the Congress Hall, and a fine Cathedral, which is in course of construction. There is a good tram service in La Paz, the routes mainly radiating from the Chijini station.

In conclusion, the writers would certainly recommend any readers, who have an opportunity of visiting the Argentine Republic, to endeavour to make the journey between Buenos Aires and La Paz, which gives one an excellent opportunity of viewing the Andes, and inspecting the working of railways in an extremely wild and mountainous district, and under difficult conditions.