

A Railroad in the Clouds

The Andes is the longest continental mountain range in the world, extending from north to south through seven South American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

Commerce was demanding construction of a railroad to facilitate the transport of minerals and valuable types of wood from the Ucayali River, across High Andes to the Peru capital and on to Callao ocean port.

Engineers from participating countries were asked to give their ideas. These men proclaimed the job as an impossible one. Then American engineers were called in to give their opinions on whether the railroad could follow along the side of the River Rimac. Even these intrepid engineers claimed that it could not be done.

As a last resort, Ernest Malinowski, a Polish engineer, was contacted. Malinowski's reputation as an engineer was well known, but he was at that time in his 60th year, so the authorities feared to impose such a rigorous task on the man.



Malinowski assured the representatives of the various countries that the job could be done, and at age 60, he started work on the highest railroad in the world.



The railroad began to worm its way across the Andes from Peru with 62 tunnels and 30 bridges along its way. One tunnel ran 4,000 feet in length, 15,000 feet above sea level. Twice, revolutions in some of the countries through which the railroad was to pass held up construction. Once, Malinowski had to flee Peru and remain in exile for a time. Nothing, however, deterred him from completing the engineering feat that became one of the wonders of the world in 1880.

Is there a dream you carry that seems so big it's most likely – you figure – too hard to achieve? Is there a vision presented to you for your facility or your company that you or others believe it impossible to realize?

It can't be done?

That's the prevailing thought expressed to Malinowski. He rejected it, and he did the job.

– Beecher Hunter