A Calling

Jerry Gore
Plates 18–20

Nevado Cayesh (5721m)—a pinnacle in the Peruvian Andes. The name itself is a derivative of the Quechua Indian word 'Caye' meaning 'to call', and indeed it did just that. I think as soon as I saw the mountain, whilst leafing through Ricker's 'Almanac of Figures', I knew that I had the enthusiasm, the sheer audacity, to organize a trip out there. In many ways Cayesh was only loosely involved with the expedition, even at the start, and certainly by the end. Yet there is definitely something awe-inspiring about its whole aspect. It fills one full of images of people such as Streather, or perhaps Herzog—a real blood-and-guts mountain upon which great deeds of heroism are enacted to the full.

Actually, although I didn't know it at the time, the only two proper ascents that it has received would both easily qualify for the title 'Epic'. The first ascent in 1960 involved a truly horrendous climb along the peak's overhung, corniced and heavily mushroomed S ridge by three intrepid New Zealanders. The second complete ascent took place in 1984 with a superbly technical and serious route up the E face by Mark Richey and three disciples.

Anyway, like it or not, as early as October 1983 I knew I was committed to organizing a climbing expedition to the Cordillera Blanca. My next decision was to make a film of the whole trip and put it up for the BBC's 'Mick Burke Award'. My old climbing partner, Rick Thorns, already experienced in high-altitude camera work, was duly recruited. From then on the film very quickly became the real aim upon which we focused all our attention. Cayesh slowly withdrew to the back benches, like some retired and thorny old politician, only to rise at odd intervals and thrust a hoary finger at me, a reminder of just what I was getting involved with.

The pier-head jump has been taken and we are in Lima in early June, struggling with a culture that rears up and embraces you in a colourful and confusing array of poverty and wealth. There is neither order nor sense, simply spontaneity.

Lima itself is an unfinished city. The shells of colonial houses contrast with both the barriada slums of the Andean peasants and the cosmopolitan wealth of the business centre. The metropolis makes its own special contribution to Peru's 80 per cent inflation rate!

Problems are very much a part of all enjoyable trips abroad, and they always seem to be totally earth-shattering and awful. Our first one came with the knowledge that the dockers of nearby Callao had recently gone on strike. As a result all our freighted gear was deeply immersed in the complexities of Peruvian officialdom.

The boys left for Huaraz and I spent a week running round Lima in ever-decreasing circles until finally, someone, somewhere, threw a six and the game began again. But for the help of Cesar Morales Arnao, at the Ministry of Sport,



Photo: Roger Payne

18 The W face of Nevado Cayesh. The line eventually climbed took the ice-couloir L of the face and the skyline (L).

and Captain George Hogg, the British Defence Attaché, life could have become exceedingly embarrassing. I took the bus to Huaraz and smiled at everyone.

Huaraz, 3000m high, 8° south of the equator, and mountain fun-town of the Cordillera Blanca. The place itself was virtually destroyed by an earthquake in 1970, killing over 50,000 people. Since this unfortunate encounter with one of nature's more unpleasant aspects, Huaraz has made a brilliant recovery, establishing itself as *the* mountaineering centre of the Peruvian Cordilleras.

Like the ever-increasing number of local earthquakes, the town vibrates from its own internal energy. The faces of its weathered inhabitants reflect, in every crease and crinkle, the nature of their vivacious and proud ancestors, the Incas, once ubiquitous in this part of Peru.

You cannot rush in such a town, merely stroll at a brisk pace, for you will never change or hurry these people. 'Manana, manana' is mostly what you get, and often it is best to acknowledge defeat from the start and lie back in the sun like everyone else. Huaraz for me was a 'cafe con leche' at Lola's restaurant, watching the day walk before me in a haze of colour and dust.

The 32km to Base Camp involved a pick-up, five mules, and a whole day of filming. The track followed the path of an Inca road, passing numerous ruins dating back to the 15th century. An estimated 2000 people lived in the valley until western diseases and a relocation programme, both introduced by the Spaniards, depopulated the Sierra in the 16th century. The valley leading to Quebrada (Quechua for valley) Cayesh is flat pasture land used only for sheep, cattle and horses. There are no llamas in this area, although herds of up to 15,000 animals grazed here when the Spaniards invaded in 1532. The story is typical of Peru.

Once Base Camp was established and the whole team was together once more, acclimatization and reconnaissance climbs were undertaken. These revealed two facts. Firstly, the NW ridge of Nevado Cayesh, which was originally considered, was badly out of condition. It was agreed that it could take up to two weeks to rid itself of early season snowfall. Secondly, a major and unclimbed route existed on the west face of Milpocraju (5420m) at the head of the valley. This elegant line, traversing the main part of the face, was quickly spotted by our two professionals, Messrs Payne and Peter.

After much discussion, the route on Milpocraju was decided upon. It was the right decision. The climb, completed and filmed in its entirety over a three day period, allowed the climbers and film team to become fully acclimatized. It also involved mixed rock and ice conditions similar to those anticipated on Cayesh; and it allowed much of the filming to be completed whilst giving success on a technically demanding route.

Back down at Base once more, and before complacency even looked like setting in, the weather broke. So whilst any further climbing was out for the time being our ever enthusiastic tape man, Steve 'Sounds' Derwin, decided to capture a few private thoughts on the team's private aspirations, *vis-à-vis* 'climbing', and 'why the hell do we do it!'

Tempers ran high, surprisingly, as somehow people managed to drudge up the motivation from amongst the squalor and slush that pervaded Base Camp to debate, almost seriously, such wide-ranging issues as the psychological imba-



Photo: Jerry Gore

19 Al Hinkes below the high point reached on the NW face of Nevado Cayesh in 1985.

lance created by the use of blue and pink forms in schools, or why we should categorize according to numbers, not alphabetically! Our dogged leader, not nicknamed 'Binder of the Andes' for nothing, was seriously confused and stuck to Tom Sharpe instead, feeling himself unworthy of such 'higher level' discussion.

Eventually the weather improved, and people began to think about climbing again. The NW ridge on Cayesh looked fairly normal once again, and plans were afoot to go up it. We climbed to the col beneath the ridge, and found that it was a face instead. More important, though, it was a face full of telegraph-pole-sized icicles, actually collapsing or about to do so, together with generous amounts of spindrift and the occasional boulder. The route looked appalling and retreat advisable, so we ran back down to Base Camp counting our blessings.

Spirits were high once again as the weather cleared, and we left the tents for the first time in three days and set off for attempt number two. After reaching the col once more, Al and I made a 24 hour continuous push, only to reach an impasse after eight pitches, below an overhanging and loose rock wall. It was well into the night, with no bivouac in sight. The route might have gone, but as the famous Swiss guide once said, 'I'm not going'. Not until next season at any rate, and I'll definitely be taking a bolt-kit with me! It was time to sample the delights of the Imantata disco once more. We left the Cayesh valley on 2 July and headed back to Huaraz. The incentive of Nevado Cayesh remained, but it was time for newer pastures.

The majority of the team had now to return to the UK because of work commitments. The film, the main aim, had been completed, and the small residue of climbers who remained in Huaraz were now primed and ready for a further five weeks of pure, unadulterated mountaineering.

Ever since I had seen the very dominant west face of Nevado Churup (5495m) whilst descending the depressingly long trail that led down from our Base Camp to Huaraz, I had been captivated by this very beautifully sculptured peak. Shaped as a vague crescent, Churup stands proud from the jungle of glaciers and mountains that lie behind, forming the southern aspects of the Blanca.

The W face can be seen clearly from Huaraz, and for three days it dominated my every thought and action. I had no doubt that I would attempt it, with or without a partner. So it was that I set out in the early morning of 6 July and was at its foot by 2pm on the glacial sands that border the mountain's outwash lake. Here I set up my small bivouac and admired the spectacular scenery that surrounded me. The north and south were bounded by huge rock walls that eventually led inwards to form the northern and southern ridges of Churup itself. Below me, and to the west, lay a typically Andean lagoon, characterized by its deep blue colour, and finally, 900m above me, towering over everything, was Churup's W face.

By 3pm it had started to snow, and I was more than alone, inside my private world of fantasy and fiction in a timeless existence. After a small meal of freeze-drys I drifted off to sleep.

I awoke at midnight from a horrible dream and shook myself violently.



Photo: Jerry Gore

20 *The W face of Nevado Churup. The line soloed by Jerry Gore starts up the central couloir lying directly below the summit.*

Reality hit me, and I forced myself to concentrate and begin the final preparations. Gas stove, brew kit, matches, all lay before me, and I went through the well-rehearsed ritual automatically, not thinking, but detached and above it all. Half an hour later I was ready. The full moon illuminated all, as I crunched up the glacier on hard compact nevé. I decided on a direttissima and so took a line following the central couloir which branched out on to the face directly below the summit. After an initial 60m of near vertical ice veneers (well, they're all near vertical, aren't they?), the remainder of the climb went smoothly enough, and I was on top for sunrise. The whole range lit up before me as the sun slowly rose, and for a few moments I felt as if I was among friends.

The descent was tricky, and I had only one rope. I rigged the first abseil, after down-climbing most of the S ridge, and dropped the rope. As I moved down, ever cautious, I desperately searched for an intermediate belay. No luck. I saw a small stance below and realized that the first rappel was 50 metres. No thought, nothing. I jumared the rope, fixed it, and started to abseil once more, but this time feeling every inch of kernmantle as it slithered away from me. I descended the rest of the face very slowly!

Back at Lola's for tea, I met Philippe, a Frenchman who was writing an updated guidebook for the Cordillera Blanca, and had several peaks that he wanted to climb. We teamed up and headed for the Llanganuco Valley, further north.

After taking a close look at Chacraraju Este and Oeste, both 6000m peaks, and deciding that they were totally out of condition, we decided on a new route up the S face of Pisco Oeste (5752m). We walked down the Llanganuco a little, in search of the all-female Polish Expedition on Huascaran Norte, and a bed for the night. Instead we found Maximo, an arriero and old friend of Philippe's. He was looking after Base while his clients, a French couple, were halfway up Pisco Oeste, laying siege to its *voie normale*, the long W ridge.

We left at midnight, carrying no more than our boots, a snack each, and ice gear. By sunrise we were just below the mountain's southern glacier and at 3pm we had gained the summit, after a superb climb involving good névé and a couple of pitches of mixed ice and rock. We finished up a Y-shaped couloir of vertical sugar, out of which, on the first attempt, I fell.

We descended the delicate line of Pisco's W ridge and were off the moraine before darkness. Half an hour of frantic searching revealed our hidden training shoes, and then we were into the gloom, at the end of which was home and a hot meal. We eventually got in around 8 o'clock that night, 20 hours after we had left and after 3700m of ascent and descent.

The next day Philippe left for Huaraz and family commitments, and a day later the French couple arrived, having completed Pisco within the usual time of four days. Francoise and Jean were now very keen to attempt Chopicalqui (6345m) and we decided to team up, leaving a day later for the SW ridge. This proved very enjoyable, and on reaching the summit we were greeted by some truly glorious views of the Huandoy group, and the twin peaks of Chacraraju and Pisco. We descended to Base in a day, and the next day found me back in Huaraz looking for Philippe.

The summer was coming to an end, and after a week up the Rurec Valley,

with success on Kashan (5723m) and a failure on Nevado Shaqsha (5697m) we decided on the W face Direct on Santa Cruz (6259m). So after a two day slog, and 2400m of vertical height gain, we eventually reached the peak's western moraine. The face was enormous, devastating, but Philippe was out of the game. After another midnight start, he collapsed around 4am on the upper reaches of the glacier that becomes the W face, and retreat was the only option.

I flew out from Lima on 18 August, the 20 hour flight providing more than enough time to reflect on the 2½ months I had spent in the hills. I realized that I had only just scratched the surface of the Blanca. Yet I hadn't even set eyes on the Southern Cordilleras, like the Huayhuash or Vilcanota: so great are the possibilities that exist for the ambitious Peruvian alpinist. As for myself, I am already in the process of organizing a return trip. Cayesh is calling again.

Postscript

The following year (1986) I returned, together with my partner Terry Moore, and we succeeded in climbing Nevado Cayesh by the previously unclimbed NW face. The route took six days, Base Camp to Base Camp, and difficulties involved vertical ice and mixed ground, Alpine VSup/A2 rock, and some pretty devious route-finding. The climb was a First British Ascent, and the third of the mountain overall, after repeated European and American attempts. At 1.15pm on 13 July 1986 we stood on the summit—it had taken me three years. The call had been answered.