

AUSTRALASIA

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Carstensz Pyramid. In the very last years, aside from a few Indonesian climbers, only a few rash mountaineers have attempted Carstensz Pyramid because of political and safety problems. In 1987, the first Swiss to make the climb, Markus Itten and Diego Wellig, came close to being shot by military patrols. After I had made fruitless attempts to get permission, I heard that Brian O'Connor and friends were being allowed to visit the mountain. I made contact and in early March joined Americans O'Connor, John Stegall, Colin Fuller, Jack Cecil, Jack Beaton, Martyn Williams, Canadian Pat Morrow and Indonesian Adiseno in Biak. Five days were needed before we had the final signatures for permission. We wanted to follow the original approach taken by Heinrich Harrer in 1962, a week's march from a dirt airstrip in Ilaga to the east, but the area has been off-limits to foreigners since after Reinhold Messner was there in 1971. To further justify restrictions on this area, we were told that three Indonesian students were ambushed and killed by members of the *Free Papua Movement* on their way to Carstensz Pyramid a couple of years ago. We could get permission only for the other approach through the Freeport Mining townsite of Tembagapura. Our climbing began after the mining company's vehicles took us into swampland. Scantily-clad local porters helped us for two days to transport our gear to the foot of the mountain. Then the Dani porters withdrew; despite the closeness to the Equator, the temperature at 3800 meters was near freezing and the constant rain turned to snow. The original Harrer route should have involved lovely alpine scrambling up 500 vertical meters of gullies to the summit ridge. The gullies turned into stream beds and waterfalls in the wet weather. We spent two days reaching the summit ridge but were turned back by storm and a foot of new snow. A second attempt failed on vertical rock covered by four inches of ice. Finally, on March 16, I started out with Pat Morrow, who had previously climbed Carstensz Pyramid in 1986, and Antarctic veteran Martyn Williams. We climbed mostly unroped, struggled up waterfalls and finally traversed the long summit ridge. At one 40-meter rappel on the way up, we left a rope hanging for the return. The climbing was on fantastic limestone, but most hand-and footholds had to be chopped clear of ice. It was a particular delight to get past these difficulties to the summit, given both as 5030 or 4884 meters (16,503 or 16,023 feet). This climb made me the third person, after Morrow and Messner, to have climbed to the highest point of all seven continents if Carstensz Pyramid is taken as the highest in Australasia and not the much lower Kosciusko in Australia. I had to leave after the climb to get back to Switzerland. Two days later, Adiseno had to turn back due to illness, but the rest all climbed to the summit on mostly dry rock.

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