

headwall offered stupendous “dream climbing.” On the lower half of the wall the team used fixed ropes to facilitate the hauling of supplies. (They removed everything on their descent.) Higher, the climbers stuck it out in “Purgatory” and refrained from seeking relief down on terra firma. The climbing proved extremely athletic, the difficulties continuous between 5.11 and 5.12. They equipped all belays two bolts. They used mostly Friends and nuts to protect the pitches. Glowacz: “Despite the roofs and overhangs, the route always follows a natural line.”

After going through “Purgatory,” the team again took to the boats and paddled to the Uonkén airstrip, where they were picked up by a single-engine Cessna. With their first ascent, Glowacz, Heuber, Albert, and Calderón were the first mortals to scale the north pillar of Acopán Tepui. Purgatory is the third route on this extended massif. In 2002 Helmut Gargitter, Walter Obergolser, Toni Obojes, Pauli Trenkwalder, Ivan Calderón, and Renato Botte pioneered the 10-pitch *Jardineros de Grandes Paredes* (5.11) on the south face. In 2003 the British couple John and Anne Arran, with Alfredo Rangél, stomached the 21-pitch *Pizza, Chocolate y Cerveza* (5.12+) on the southeast face.

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Mike Libeck heading to work on steep sandstone, jugging pitch 7 on Acopán Tepui. Kyle Dempster

*Acopán Tepui, north pillar, Dempster-Libecki variation.* Mike Libeck and I left home in Salt Lake City on December 28 clad in shorts and flip-flops, with a foot of fresh snow on the ground. Three days later, after reciting the Rosary in Spanish, our pilot gunned the chartered Cessna, we rumbled into the sky, and my stomach dropped. Meandering rivers and streams snaked through the heavily forested jungle, thousand-foot waterfalls seemingly dropped

from nowhere, miles of rolling grasslands with silica content glistened in the intense equatorial sunshine and gave rise to stunningly broad red and black sandstone plateaus. I pictured *Brachiosauri* eating leaves from the high canopy, raptors racing across the open grassland in pursuit of their next meal, a *T-rex* stalking his next victim, and *Archaeopteryxes* flying alongside our Cessna. The Gran Sabana was a dinosaur's world.

Our plane circled around the village of Yune-ken, and I watched its residents emerge from their homes. [Editor's note: This is the village spelled “Yunék” in the above report, although the teams used different approaches. This village has also been spelled “Yunek Ken.”] Consisting of 10 or so grass-roofed, mud-walled homes, no electricity, and a population of around 40, Yune-ken contributed to the prehistoric atmosphere. As intently as the villagers eyed us with our 300 pounds of stuff, my eyes fixated on their beautiful land, pristine culture,

and innocent existence. Leonardo, Yune-ken's chief, accepted our gifts—soccer balls, clothing, school supplies, and especially the Juicy Fruit—with smiles, oohs, and ahhs.

Less than two hours later Libeck, our hired porters, and I were hiking the four miles to our first camp at the jungle's edge. We shook hands, exchanged smiles, and relayed that in “dos semanas” (two weeks) we would need their help again. The porters, some wearing rubber boots and some barefoot, headed back to Yune-ken.

The next day we hiked for two miles on a relatively well-defined trail through the jungle, paralleling the Acopán massif. Later in the day we fixed the initial jungle pitches to reach the base of the wall. The five pitches of jungle madness consisted of slippery footholds, slimy tree branches, numerous spiders, thick vegetation, and our scraped limbs. Eventually we arrived at the base of the wall.

A bolt: 15' off the ground and 8" from a bomber cam placement! The gear, ropes, and portaledge that Libeck had left four years prior were gone. Rumors we had heard in Yune-ken of European climbers in the area were true. We both wondered: Did they summit? Is this a sport climb? Where are we? What the hell? Not to mention that we didn't have the mandatory portaledge and extra ropes. We rappelled back down the jungle lines and walked the two miles back to camp.

In one day we shuttled all of our stuff up to the base of the wall, established camp, and climbed the first pitch. Mike gave me the honor of getting us started. A beautiful 5.10+ finger/hand crack out a medium-sized roof finished with 100' of easier ground. I fell in love with the Venezuelan sandstone. It was getting dark so I fixed and rappelled to the ground. That evening, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a small black scorpion swinging his battle axe and sprinting toward my exposed thigh. “Kill it!” Mike shouted. One step ahead, I retaliated with the bottom of my flip-flop.

The next two days of fixing involved more close encounters with various arachnids and a better example of the shitty rock quality remaining above. We were disappointed to see random bolts to the left of the natural line we were following. It seemed that for each of our pitches, the sport climbers would veer left up impressively steep face climbing, drill a two bolt sub-anchor, and then cut back right to the natural line, where Libeck had drilled anchors four years prior. After four pitches we entered terrain new to us, but it was not virgin. Bolts were spaced in the most random places, with fresh rock dust and chalk guiding the path. Our psyche was blown. The extreme steepness of the wall made it mandatory for us to leave fixed ropes on many pitches, but since we only brought five we would have to figure something else out.

Back in Yune-ken we had seen a villager carrying a butchered chunk of rope. We walked down, and after some disturbing Spanglish that only an American would be proud of, we eventually borrowed several sections of rope and Libeck's portaledge.

Fueled by curiosity about the mysterious world atop the cliff, we climbed the remaining nine pitches in five days. 5.11 free climbing, coupled with A2 moves on frighteningly horrific rock, was the norm. When we could avoid the bolted madness, we did, but subsequently found ourselves following the Europeans' line, with the exception of the last two pitches. The jungle experience and a new climbing partner were the highlights on my Venezuelan foray. Blue and gray tarantulas hid in cracks, beautiful green and yellow parakeets awoke us in the mornings, mysterious screaming came from the jungle canopy a thousand feet below. Spectacular plants with exposed root systems grew straight out the rock, and beautiful, several-thousand-foot waterfalls streamed down the panorama in most directions.

The summit was not what we had expected. The top was a blackened, boulder-strewn world with intricate flowers hiding in cracks and crevices, and we felt like we'd put our heads in an oven. We hung out for an hour, took in the magnificent sights, and rappelled back toward our families in Utah. On our descent we removed all of our gear from the wall, as well as a fixed rope abandoned by the European team, and as many of their littered candy wrappers as we could realistically get.

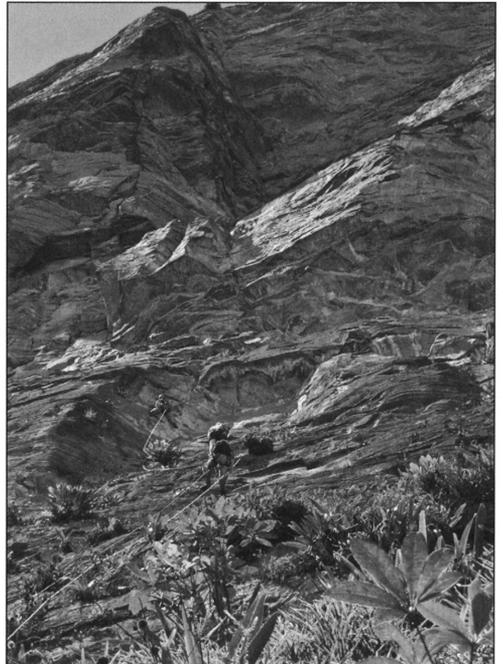
Going on a trip with Mike Libecki is a privileged experience, and the opportunity to climb with him in Venezuela was a learning experience that I will never forget. His positive philosophy and dominating love for life are inspiring and encouraging. As a University of Utah student my ability to participate in this Venezuelan adventure would not have been possible without gracious funding from the American Alpine Club's Mountaineering Fellowship Grant. Thanks to everyone at the Club, especially the old dogs, for all your generous contributions directed at enhancing the sport and safety of climbing.

KYLE DEMPSTER, AAC

## Guyana

*Roraima, Cutting the Line.* Our expedition to the Pakaraima Mountains in the southwestern corner of Guyana had two objectives: to establish a new route on the east face of Mt. Roraima; and to set up solar power in the village of Wayalayeng, a small Amerindian community where we would begin our trek to the mountain. Our team included climbers Greg Child, Jared Ogden, and me, as well as filmmakers Scott Simper, Rob Raker, and Angus Yates. Biologist Bruce Means also accompanied us. This was my second expedition to Mt. Roraima with Jared; in 2003 we established a new route on the Prow (an overhanging north-facing buttress) called The Scorpion Wall. We arrived in Wayalayeng by bush plane and helicopter on November 7. Before heading off on the 40+-mile trek to the mountain, we helped install two solar panels on the roof of Wayalayeng's one-room school house. The panels were soon generating electricity, and it was exciting to watch the Amerindians' reaction when we turned on a light for the first time ever in their village. More importantly, the power would be used to operate a high-powered VHF radio with which they could communicate with the outside world.

The trek from Wayalayeng to the base of the Mt. Roraima took us five days.



Greg Child leading the first non-vegetated pitch (5.11) on Cutting the Line, while Jared Ogden belays and filmmaker Rob Raker jugs. *Mark Synnott*