

Tullparaju

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TULLPARAJU, a 18,986-foot ice peak, stands on the continental divide in the Cordillera Blanca, seventeen miles northeast of the town of Huaraz. By the spring of 1962 both European and South American mountaineers agreed that its unclimbed summit was one of the finest prizes left in the Peruvian Andes. An attempt by the 1958 Italian expedition had failed well below the summit. This information, plus one blurred photograph of a forbidding ice mountain, was the hint of adventure that ultimately led three of us to Peru during the past summer.

We came from widely varied backgrounds. Leif Patterson, 28, who originated the expedition, was a Norwegian mathematician who had just obtained his doctorate from MIT. Charles Sawyer, 25, was a geophysics graduate student at MIT. Last to join the expedition was myself, 29, an electronics engineer from Florida. By all standards it was a small expedition for so difficult a mountain.

Leif and Charles, whose vacations began a week earlier than mine, left Miami for Lima in mid-June. There, with invaluable help from César Morales Arnao, one of Peru's foremost climbers, they guided our equipment through the difficult Peruvian customs and had it trucked 250 miles over the mountains to Huaraz, 10,000 feet up in the foothills. Scouting the approaches to Tullparaju occupied the remaining days until I could meet them. My own trip was fast, less than 48 hours from the muggy heat of Miami to the cool, thin air of Huaraz.

The day after I arrived Leif and Charles returned to town. They had seen Tullparaju and felt it could be climbed, though only with great difficulty. The site for Base Camp was also located. There was a surprise, too; on June 24 they had reached the 17,962-foot summit of Tururu, an easy but beautiful snow peak near Tullparaju. We spent the next two days organizing our equipment, buying food and arranging for porters and burros to carry it to Base Camp.

At last all was ready. We left Huaraz early on June 27, before the sun rose above the ragged peaks to the east. Our trail led first through a fertile

valley beside rocky debris from the disastrous 1941 flood. Soon it began to climb and as the morning wore on we passed numerous Indians using oxen to plow their high, steeply tilted fields. Indian women, in brilliant colored dresses, added improbable splashes of color to the otherwise dull, dry landscape. By noon we had left the settlements behind and were crossing the high grasslands lying at the base of the mountains. Eight miles from Huaraz we entered the mouth of the Quebrada Quilcayhuanca, one of the most beautiful canyons in the whole range. Polished granite walls rise thousands of feet on either side above a narrow green floor, which reaches back towards the heart of the mountains. Great white peaks cluster around the head of the valley, their glaciers dazzling under the tropical sun. Tullparaju rose among them, distant and aloof, with corniced ridges and avalanche-scarred slopes. It was all that Charles and Leif had said it was, a fantastic wedge towering high above the scattered afternoon clouds.

By mid-afternoon I began to feel the effects of high altitude and decided to finish the day the easy way by riding the extra horse in our pack train. Leif and Charles, with ten days acclimatization already behind them, hiked on ahead with disconcerting energy. All went well for an hour, then I missed the trail. The ground was treacherous with tufts of mountain grass effectively concealing the boundary between solid ground and bog. It was only a matter of time before my horse stepped on one of these tufts and we both went down. I fished myself and the horse out of the mud and retreated to solid ground to remount. The horse had had enough at this point. Between the deceptive ground and the complete stranger on his back, he was thoroughly spooked. He stood stiff-legged as I remounted and after a moment's motionless but uneasy calm set out to throw me by any means possible. Our lonely rodeo was a tie until the horse made one unfortunate mistake: he forgot where the bog was. His final leap carried us far out into its depths and in the ensuing commotion I wound up underneath him. This time it was more difficult to get back to solid ground. We finally straggled out, covered with mud and miscellaneous plant life, like monsters emerging from the primeval ooze!

Macario Angeles, our head porter and owner of the horse, had witnessed the whole escapade from afar and came running. He was obviously not quite sure whether to laugh at our ludicrous appearance or worry about the condition of his employer and horse (possibly in the other order). In any case a pair of blinders and some familiar Indian words soothed the horse and permitted us to be reunited peacefully. We dripped off up the valley. Fortunately it was dark when I caught up with Leif and Charles in camp and so avoided explanations and further injury to my

already damaged dignity. That night as we rolled our sleeping bags out under the stars, I felt ill-used by both altitude and horse.

The next day dawned clear. The whole world looked better. Soon after the first sun had burned the frost from the grass, we were on our way. The last miles were easy, though steep. By noon we reached Base Camp, a small grassy meadow on the moraine overlooking Lake Tullpa. The lake lay some 500 feet below us and filled the valley vacated by the retreating glacier. At the head of the lake magnificent snow-covered cliffs rose thousands of feet. Giant ice avalanches thundered down them with amazing regularity. Above all towered the improbable form of Tullparaju, its head hidden in the clouds.

The pack animals were put out to graze among the stunted bushes while we pitched colorful mountain tents and sorted supplies. We intended to stay in Base Camp only long enough to move everything up to Camp I at 16,000 feet on the glacier beside Tullparaju's west ridge. There the difficult climbing would begin. Succeeding days were filled with the monotonous and exhausting chore of backpacking equipment to Camp I. Our packs weighed 50 to 60 pounds, the porters' packs much more.

By July 1 the last loads had been carried to Camp I. There we paid our porters off and sent them back to Huaraz. The terrain ahead was too dangerous for them to assist us further. During the remainder of the expedition Camp I was our base of operations. In it we had a three-week supply of food and fuel. The summit was less than two miles away, two miles that were to become an almost endless distance in the days ahead.

Our first night in Camp I was memorable. As the hours wore on the wind increased and a full scale blizzard began. By morning visibility had been reduced to a few feet in mist and drifting snow. Further climbing was impossible. We welcomed the storm in one way, however; it gave us an honorable excuse to call a rest day and remain in our sacks, the first real halt we had had since leaving Huaraz.

The storm lost its strength in the early afternoon and later the clouds cleared, giving us our first close look at the upper slopes of Tullparaju. Above camp the mountain's basic shape was that of a three-sided pyramid. The faces were impossible, being without holds and frequently swept by avalanches. The ridge crests remained our only possible routes. The west ridge was closest to camp. It appeared climbable but had the disadvantage of being extremely long. The north ridge, which we had not seen before, was shorter, though reaching its base at the saddle below Nevado Chinchey would require scaling a difficult 1000-foot ice wall. The last, or southeast ridge, was out of the question. It could not be reached from Camp I. We

decided to spend the next few days exploring both north and west ridges before making a final decision where to concentrate our efforts.

The following day dawned clear but bitterly cold and windy. We left camp at 8 A.M., headed for the west ridge. The first thousand feet went quickly, requiring only step-kicking up easy 40° snow slopes. Thereafter the ridge became more difficult. Knife-edged snow crests, sometimes corniced, alternated with rotten rock towers. It also became evident that the ridge was much longer than the view from below indicated. By early afternoon, when time to turn back came, we had reached a point 1500 feet above camp, still only half way to the summit. Everything so far indicated that the ridge would go, but only after a long and difficult siege. We set 500 feet of fixed rope to secure what gains we had made and descended to Camp I, arriving in the late dusk. The following day was another rest day.

Our next target was the north ridge. After the difficulties of the west ridge this route looked more encouraging! We set off early the following morning to investigate. The first stretch up the glacier went easily. The headwall above was something else again. As we approached it, we began to realize for the first time the enormous size of the ice towers and ribs ahead. After crossing the bergschrund on a convenient snow bridge, we started up the wall itself. The first pitch was an easy 50° snow slope that presented no problems, though a great leaning ice tower 350 feet above encouraged us to cross as rapidly as possible! This brought us to the base of the first ice rib. The next pitch was long, and mostly over snow-covered ice at an average angle of 70°. Fortunately it ended in a good belay position astride the rib, though this was little consolation while leading it. The following pitch took us up a short wall and into the chute which continued all the way to the col. Here Leif took over the lead from me and continued upward. The next few pitches over alternating rotten snow and blue ice were without incident. The weird ice towers among which we were climbing gave the whole scene an unreal feeling of fantasy, though the 60° slope imparted a very real feeling of exposure. As we neared the top, the chute narrowed and steepened. Its surface became entirely blue ice, camouflaged by a thin crust of snow. The last pitch took Leif almost an hour, during which time Charles and I futilely hunted a way to escape his rain of ice chips. Leif finally disappeared over the brow and moments later a muffled shout announced success. Charles and I followed slowly; even with a rope from above it was a tricky pitch. Soon we were all standing on the Chinchey-Tullparaju col. The view was breathtaking. To the north and west stood a line of 20,000-foot ice peaks harshly etched against a blue sky by blinding tropical sunlight. East of us the mountains fell a

sheer 10,000 feet to the Amazon highlands. South of the col Tullparaju's north ridge rose majestically toward the summit, draped in twisted cornices. It no longer looked inviting, but still appeared possible. The summit was less than half a mile away. It was too late to continue further so we set 600 feet of fixed rope on the wall and returned to Camp I. It had been another long day.

After a rest day we returned to the Chinchey-Tullparaju col, this time equipped to stay a week. The headwall was brutal work with heavy packs. We reached the col about noon and immediately set to work digging a snow cave (the tents had been left behind to save weight), the first of many we were to dig before the trip was over. It was a tense afternoon during which we all spent much time speculating about the ridge we were to try in the morning. If all went well, success could be near.

The next day dawned clear. The thin air had a cold bite to it. Far below, a sea of clouds stretched out across the Amazon highlands to the eastern horizon. The beauty of the scene was lost on us, however, as we could think only of the ridge ahead. The first hundred yards to where the cornices began went easily. The first cornice was difficult. The next ones were worse, and to make a long story short, we never reached their end. Over the first one, under the next two, over a shaky fourth that quivered as we chopped steps; over still another, and up a steep ridge to the top of the sixth. All were the giant twenty to forty-foot awnings peculiar to the Andes. After three long hours we finally gave up, less than a quarter of the way to the summit. There was no longer any way to bypass the cornices. Even those we had already crossed were dangerous, and the hot sun made them more treacherous as each hour passed. Driving an aluminum picket for an anchor in one of the few solid places available, we rappelled over the worst part and climbed back down to Col Camp, a sober and thoughtful trio. The following day, after a late start, we returned to Camp I.

The only route left was the lengthy west ridge. Fortunately we still had two weeks' supplies at Camp I. We decided to send two men out each day, leaving the third in camp to rest, since it would take many days to prepare the route within striking distance of the summit. Leif and Charles took the first day, July 10. As I alternated between camp chores and watching them through field glasses, they prepared a few hundred feet more of the ridge and set another fixed rope. That night in camp they had chilling news: two big avalanches had swept away much of the route we had used descending the headwall the previous day.

Next came Leif's and my turn. The going had been so slow that both of us felt a new approach was needed. We decided to make a dash for

what we termed the Western Summit, a prominent ice tower 300 feet lower than the true summit, but separated from it by a jagged ice ridge several hundred yards long. To attain the Western Summit we would have to forego the time-consuming work of securing the route and climb instead as fast as possible. Even then there was grave doubt that we could reach it in one day.

The lower slopes went easily, as expected, and by the middle of the afternoon we were 500 feet above the previous high point, though the difficulty of climbing was increasing steadily. One nasty place in particular, a 70° ice slab that funnelled down to the edge of a cliff, made each of us feel like the proverbial cat on a hot tin roof. We jokingly named the spot the "Liz Taylor traverse".

That morning, when leaving camp, both of us had taken some light bivouac gear along, though we had no intention of getting caught in the bitter cold of a long Andean night at 18,000 feet. When the time to turn back came, however, neither of us wanted to. No discussion was necessary. We simply kept climbing. Darkness found us 600 feet below the Western Summit. After waiting half an hour the moonlight became bright enough to continue. The ridge here had eased off in difficulty and we had only to follow its knife-edged crest upward. Many of the surrounding peaks were already below us with just their moonlit crests showing above the shadowed valleys. The whole scene was eerie and beautiful beyond description. We continued climbing until we reached the highest firm snow in which a cave could be dug. Beyond this point ice ribs interspersed with powder snow reached to the Western Summit only 300 feet above us. While I belayed, Leif climbed carefully down a few feet into the shadows of the south side of the ridge and began digging. The first shovelfuls of snow started an avalanche that hissed out of sight into the shadowed depths below. It would be a poor cave out of which to step sleepily! We alternated at digging and finally finished the job about midnight. After sending light signals to assure Charles of our safety, we crawled inside, grateful to escape from the wind and cold.

The next step was supper, such as we had. It consisted of half a can of spam and water melted in a sardine can over the Phoebus stove we had fortunately brought along. The first few canfuls had a unique taste! Next we spread the ropes and packs out to sleep on, donned our few extra clothes and began the long wait for daylight. I fared a little better than Leif, but was still bitterly cold. As the night wore on we blocked the door with snow hoping to conserve heat. Towards morning we both began to get some sleep.

The cold dawn finally came but still no sun. We were on the shadowed

side of the mountain. Leif had eaten most of the lemon drops during the night so my breakfast was one candy bar saved from the day before. We were both on the edge of exhaustion, worn out by the cold, almost sleepless night and lack of food. At the time neither of us realized this and, overestimating our strength, started upward again, drawn ever on towards the elusive Western Summit.

The first lead followed the ridge crest to the ice towers and went very easily. Leif came up, we traded belays, and I started on. The next pitch went around the first tower on its southern face in deep, loose, high-angle snow. It was a slow and tiring job, first clearing away the top foot, then wallowing up in the soft snow underneath. Finally I reached the top and swung my axe over the crest into solid, sun-baked snow. Safety at last. I set a belay around the axe and Leif started up. As he did, a very strange and terrifying thing happened to me. A sudden sickness, a combination of dizziness and weakness swept over me. It was a fight to maintain a safe belay. Finally Leif was up and I told him to get his axe in, that he had no more belay because I was sick. Then I numbly struggled to fix a loop of rope solidly over my axe with Leif's help. After what seemed forever but was really only a few moments, the strange malady relaxed its grip. I started down, well belayed by Leif; there was no longer any question of our climbing higher. After descending a full rope-length, I drove my axe in, put the loop around it and was secure. Years of climbing had taught me to do this instinctively. As I began to feel better, I realized that my fingers had been tingling during the descent, a sign of returning circulation. Exhaustion, which I then recognized as the cause of my trouble, had depressed it. It came to me with a sudden shock—lost circulation in the bitter cold of eighteen thousand feet—frostbite! I knew before I tried to move my toes that there would be no feeling. There was none.

My precipitous descent had turned our track on the 50° slope into an otter slide, down which Leif slid. After telling him of the newest problem, I beat it with all haste for the haven of the cave, now only a rope-length away. Once inside, I fought my way through the interminable maze of crampons, gaiters, windpants, boots and socks to my feet. They were white, but not the chalky white of frozen tissue. Carefully I pressed first one and then the other between my hands to restore warmth, taking care not to rub them lest my evaluation might be wrong. Almost miraculously the color came back, first in splotches, then all over, and with it feeling. It had been very close. When Leif crawled into the cave, he was confronted with the ludicrous sight of me sitting barefoot on the fixed rope gleefully wiggling all ten toes at once. It was good to be alive!

After an hour we started the endless climb down again. Alternating

leads did little to relieve the strain on the sun-softened slopes. Even so, we managed to fix one rope on the way down, thus preventing the day from being a total loss.

Both of us were completely worn out when we finally reached Camp I at dark. There was no question that the next day would be a rest day. We lost another day when Leif contracted a mysterious ailment, doubtless from overeating, and still a third, organizing and packing supplies for the summit attempt. Then came the task of backpacking everything up to the cave below the Western Summit. It had to be done in relays as the route was too long for heavy loads in one day. By noon of the 19th the job was finished.

With a full afternoon still ahead of us Leif and I decided to try once again for the Western Summit. This time it went surprisingly easily. The first few leads were uneventful except for exposure and poor snow, both old acquaintances by now. The mists of the dying storm created a world of fantasy with light and shadow on the snow shapes around us. Then, at the top of the third lead, we turned a corner and saw the final ridge. It was like nothing either of us had ever seen before. The long ridge was capped with great angular ice towers rising amid swirling mists above almost vertical fluted slopes. At the far end, standing high above everything before it, rose clear and serene above the mist a final square tower, the summit. We both just stood and looked, awed at what we had come to climb. When we continued upward, our thoughts were our own.

Another rope-length and we crossed the Western Summit to the beginning of the final ridge. It was the threshold of a different world, one where real effort was required to separate reality from fantasy. We remained there for almost an hour, each trying to fathom a way to the great white tower at the far end. Though the sun was bright, endless mists concealed all but the boldest features. Finally the falling sun told us it was time to leave.

A fixed rope was quickly placed to secure the dangerous parts of the route to camp. Thirty minutes more and we were back at the cave. As we came into camp, the workers at Lake Tullpa set off several thunderous blasts. Congratulations? Possibly, though we didn't know, for the Western Summit was the highest point on the mountain visible to them.

Later in the evening, Charles' little radio gave us a real shock when we heard the news that a military junta had taken over Peru. It also noted that the generals still guaranteed the people's civil rights. We hoped this included foreigners! Yet somehow it all seemed very far away. Up there our world ended with the ice.

The following day dawned clear. Charles and Leif set off early to see

what progress, if any, they could make across the towers. I had been having trouble with my feet ever since the bivouac and so stayed in camp to see what could be done. When night came and the clouds closed in there was no sign of Leif and Charles. Finally, after several hours, I spotted their lights high on the Western Summit. Another half hour and they were back in the cave with encouraging news—they had been able to traverse three rope-lengths across the fluted ribs below the towers. The following day Leif and I were able to push on another rope-length and a half. This was the way it went for several days. The climbing was all extremely difficult. The average angle was never less than 70° and in many places approached the vertical. Each day we set fixed ropes to secure our gains. Every morning we would return as early as possible to what we jokingly called the "roadhead". Finally we reached and crossed what all of us considered the critical pitch, a deep chute directly below the summit tower. The crossing was not without incident, however; Charles was hit by falling ice. The damage was slight, though the bloody spots on the slope formed the basis for many slightly morbid jokes!

On the 23rd a blizzard forced us to remain in the cave all day. It was not a welcome rest. Our food supplies had already been stretched and there remained only one day's rations. As we lay in our sacks it was a sobering thought to realize that the following day represented our last chance to reach the summit. We turned in that night listening to the wind still howling around the cave entrance.

The same scene greeted us early the following morning. Whirling snow and gray mist still swept past the door hiding everything more than fifty feet away. We set out again at eight o'clock, this time groping our way along the fixed ropes. By 10:30 we had reached the "roadhead". The weather was still poor, though visibility had improved to better than 100 feet. Occasional glimpses back showed us we were already above the highest intermediate towers, and probably even the Western Summit. The next two pitches were mine and went easily. Ice gave way to snow and sometimes it was even possible to kick steps. An hour later I stopped a few feet below what we thought to be the summit. Here I called Leif to come up and take the lead. Since we all thought of Tullparaju as his mountain, it seemed only appropriate that he should be the first to stand upon the summit.

Leif covered the last few feet quickly. Instead of a whoop of triumph, however, there was only silence. When Charles and I joined him, we saw the reason why. Ahead of us the ridge dropped down a bit and then rose up to the real summit. It was only a shadow in the fog, but even so there was no mistaking the fact that it was a giant cornice. The ends, about



TULLPARAJU. West Ridge rises from foreground; Chinchey-Tullparaju col is behind on left.

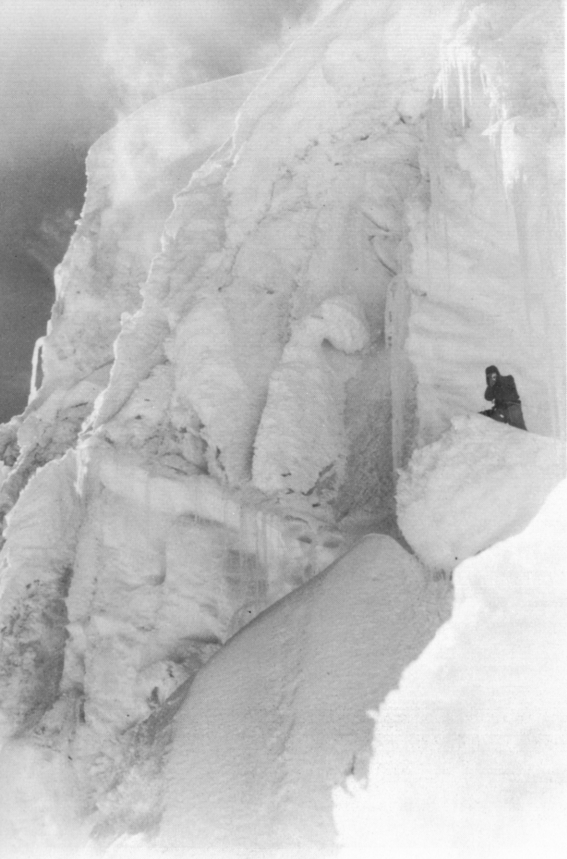


PLATE 30 *Photo by Leif Patterson*

Between western and true sum-
mits of TULLPARAJU.



PLATE 31 *Photo by Leif Patterson*

Climbing above western summit
of TULLPARAJU.



PLATE 32

Photo by David Bernays

Traversing a fluted section above the western summit.



PLATE 33 *Photo by David Bernays*

**Leif Patterson on the summit of
TULLPARAJU.**



PLATE 34 *Photo by David Bernays*

**CHINCHEY - TULLPARAJU
COL CAMP.**

fifty feet apart, were the high points. Between them the great roll of snow curled over the vertical southern face. The entire structure rested atop a broad tower rising fifty feet above our ridge. As we approached it we could see that it would not yield easily. Charles and I, as a unanimous majority, pointed out that this was Leif's mountain and neither of us could imagine taking the ultimate pleasure of leading away from him. Leif accepted the verdict with a very skeptical expression, and while Charles belayed, he started to work his way out onto the southern face. I sat back with the movie camera to film the proceedings. It was ticklish going; everything seemed to be frost feathers and powder snow with few decent holds. Leif disappeared around a corner and then began a long wait. The rope would move out around the corner for a few feet and then back up. We could see chunks of snow and ice fall free into the mists below. Finally the rope began to move out steadily again and soon Leif's shadowy form reappeared above the overhang. He tried to tell us something, but in the wind and storm his words were lost. Finally, as I watched through the finder of the movie camera, he gingerly climbed the last few steps and stood atop the crest at our end of the cornice. Slowly, like a person who is not too sure of what he is standing on, he raised both his hands over his head in a gesture of triumph. The goal all of us had dreamed of for weeks and months was suddenly attained.

As Charles and I followed Leif we realized why it had taken him so long. Tullparaju's last pitch was probably the most difficult and dangerous of the many difficult and dangerous ones we had seen already. Everything was loose and the slightest movement crumbled away further what few holds there were. When we reached the top it was hard to tell which end of the cornice was higher. That was settled very simply. Leif worked his way cautiously across to the other high point. Then began the long wait for a sufficient break in the clouds to establish beyond any doubt that we were really on the summit. When it came, the views around us were unbelievable. There is no other way to describe it. Aside from the little patch of snow we were standing on, itself a cornice, there was only air. Far below to the north we saw the ridge we had attempted first. It was clearly impossible. As we hurriedly took the traditional summit shots, the mists closed in again with a leaden solidity that told us there would be no more views. Once again we were back in the small dim world that faded into nothingness less than a hundred feet away.

It was late in the afternoon when we started down. Only the fixed ropes made it possible to reach camp before the black stormy night ended all possibility of movement on the mountain.

As we crawled into our sacks, the days ahead did not look good. Outside the storm continued with renewed fury, inside our supplies were gone. I had my own private worry also. My feet, tender ever since the initial attempt for the Western Summit, had been numb on and off most of the day. Only time would tell what damage they had suffered. Even so in all of us there was a deep satisfaction. We had done what we had come to do and that knowledge would provide strength enough to carry us through the long days back to Huaraz.

The rest of the trip was difficult, as expected, though blessedly uneventful! The following night we bivouacked halfway down the ridge under clearing skies. Late the next day we reached Camp I. Two more long days and we were in Huaraz. There under the palm trees the cold and ice and snow suddenly seemed far away. Yet as we looked back towards the ragged eastern horizon each of us realized what a grand, if not always pleasant, adventure Tullparaju had been, one that none of us would ever forget.

Summary of Statistics

AREA: Cordillera Blanca, Peru

ASCENTS: Tururu, 17,962 feet, June 24, 1962 (Patterson, Sawyer)—first ascent.

Tullparaju, 18,968 feet, July 24, 1962 (whole party)—first ascent.

Cerro México, Cordillera Huayhuash, 16,404 feet, August (Patterson)—second ascent.

PERSONNEL: Leif Norman Patterson, leader; David Bernays, Charles Sawyer.

