

Paccharaju and Nevado Copa

H. ADAMS CARTER and JOHN S. HUMPHREYS

AS I DRAGGED my feet up the last steep pitch of the thousand-foot slope, I wondered wearily how far ahead my crew had gone while I was chopping ice off the rocks at the brook crossing. Chopping steps for a horse! Steep and treacherous as it was, this was the trail over which Peruvian Indians sometimes brought their animals to graze in the alpine meadows of the Quebrada Paccharuri. In the thickets below it would be too narrow for our laden pack animals. That morning as we had climbed the steep paths that zig-zagged up the precipitous sides out of the Quebrada Honda, our porters, Augusto Jamanca and Justiniano Huamán, had had to do fancy engineering to make the path possible for my wife Ann's doleful saddle horse and the tough, runty packmare and her colt. After surmounting this first obstacle we had emerged into the flat of the flower-carpeted or thicket-choked, hemmed-in Quebrada Paccharuri. This was the Valley of the Cascades as its name in Quechua indicated, named from the waterfalls tumbling off austere Copa at the left, off the slightly lesser peaks at the valley head, and off graceful, snowy Paccharaju at the right. It was easy enough to wander up the alpine pastures but when we hit the steep thousand-foot slope that blocked the valley, we had wasted much time trying to find the trail again. This second slope had seemed endless. The step-chopping for the horse at 13,000 odd feet had consumed most of my lagging energy and when I finally topped the moraine I was relieved to see the others across a dry lake bed, flopped on the ground looking as exhausted as I felt.

But where was the pack train? We had the previous afternoon left the other two porters, Pedro Baltazar and Miguel Flores, at the roadhead in Vicos before making our three-hour climb to the entrance of the Quebrada Honda. The porters were to encourage the donkeyteer to make it to Base Camp with all deliberate speed. We were well below Base but still no donkeys. Fearing that they also might lose the trail, I had just sent our two porters down to look for them. Seated for a moment's breather on the moraine bank, I could still see Justiniano's black felt funeral-director's hat

and Augusto's squat broad shoulders, barrel chest and above all, his beaming smile as he looked back up to wave.

It was a cheerless supper, for we were short of food thanks to the donkeys and short of oxygen thanks to the altitude. Next morning, however, our spirits rose as we strolled first up alpine meadows and then over moraine toward that icy fairyland. After a final steep pitch beside the mountain torrent, we emerged on the shores of a sizeable iceberg-dotted milky green lake, hemmed in on three sides by ice-hung slopes and chilled by glaciers that ended in its waters. Several hundred feet above the lake, at the foot of an amphitheater of cliffs over which threads of water trickled, we found the only flat grassy bench. But we were not the first to find it; all the cattle that had ever grazed there had visited it before us. "Dung Haven", as Richard Goody christened it, was Base Camp.

The donkeys pulled wearily in just after noon. The wits of our wily, shifty-eyed donkeyteer were not affected sufficiently by the 14,500-foot altitude to keep him from finding several loop-holes in the written contract, all to his advantage. By nightfall the tents were comfortably pitched above the well-fertilized giant lupines. The southeast face of 20,303-foot Copa soared above us in the sunset across the waters of Pacchakocha.

Reconnaissance the day after led us up a steep grassy ridge above camp past two neighboring tarns, one turquoise and the other green, to glacially polished slabs. From a col above the slabs we stepped onto the glaciers of Paccharaju Sur (South Paccharaju). The main peak of Paccharaju ("Cascade Peak" in Quechua) lay higher up the ridge but cut off from us by a precipitous soaring ice tooth which soon received the unromantic name of the "Gendarme" from a rocky spire that emerged to form its summit. While the rest of us returned to Base, Jim Richardson, John Humphreys and Richard Goody scouted an unsavory route along the Gendarme's southeastern flank, dotted with huge blocks of avalanche debris. A more direct descent towards Base Camp disclosed a much safer line of ascent.

During a "rest" day Don Anderson and Jim Richardson fixed ropes on slabs to give us easy access to the glacier while others reconnoitered Paccharaju with field glasses from high across the valley. We shouldered loads early on June 28, bade good-bye to my wife, Ann, who was to be keeper of the Base Camp, climbed the grass slope above camp, crossed the brook and ascended the fixed ropes to the glacier. Past séracs and crevasses we advanced to 15,700 feet, where we pitched Camp I.

The next morning we climbed through the jumbled icefall above camp, where it was generally easy to find the route and where only an occasional pitch was really steep. Yet we had our doubts about this as a pack route, especially for unescorted porters. At about 17,800 feet we found the

whole southwest face of the mountain cut by a huge bergschrund with an overhanging upper lip. Way to the left, where it seemed to run out, Jim Richardson climbed a 60° slope to find himself face to face with a huge unbridged crevasse beyond. We were on the route but we should need to establish Camp II there below the schrund at 17,750 feet.

After a rest day we divided forces. Harry McDade, my two sons Peter (aged 14), Larry (aged 13) and I reconnoitered a much better route to Camp II south of our previous route. We looked across to see the progress of the others towards Peak 5460, north of Camp I. Then after Goody and Humphreys turned back, apparently suffering from the altitude, only Don Anderson, Jim Richardson and Chuck Staples continued. But let Anderson describe the climb.

"At first we progressed fairly rapidly across the long ascending traverse towards the ridge, which we hoped to hit at a col a good quarter mile east of the peak. Then Jim plowed through thigh-deep snow beneath threatening ice cliffs overhead. The last pitch to the crest was hideously steep and soft, and each of us reached the narrow ridge top exhausted. We traversed the ridge above exciting exposure for less than 100 yards to a minor summit before we dropped to a second col, which was cut by an uncrossable crevasse. Richard and John turned back here. We dropped down the steep southern face until we could cross the crevasse where it was choked with snow. The final summit ridge was terribly steep. For about 30 feet it was a precipitous, three-foot wide bicycle path with drops of 1000 and 2000 feet on the respective sides. We reached the summit at 2:30 P.M. On the return we avoided the most dangerous section by traversing below the crest on the north. We regained the second col on step-like frost formations that made child's play of a 60° slope. Our return lasted into and past the sunset."

Bad weather prevented our moving camp the next day, though the porters arrived early from below to help with the lift. They stayed on, and early the day after we broke camp. We all carried a load apiece to the flat below the bergschrund but the porters made a second round trip before they descended dead-tired to Base Camp. Don Anderson and Jim Richardson put the afternoon to good use, climbing the overhanging lip of the bergschrund at its lowest point where there was only 20 feet of overhang. Without ice screws they could never have tension-climbed this section and fixed the ropes for our final assault.

On July 4 we prusiked up the fixed ropes to find ourselves on a small terrace between Paccharaju and the higher of the twin peaks which the porters had called Churihuaquui ("Brothers" in Quechua) both because they looked alike and in honor of the brothers in our party, Peter and

Larry. Following the lead rope of Jim Richardson, Don Anderson and Larry, in due time Richard Goody, Peter and I, with John Humphreys, Harry McDade and Chuck Staples behind us, reached the second enormous schrund that cut the entire southwest face. This problem was neatly solved by a huge block, the size of a house, which had fallen from above and wedged itself into the schrund. One edge of the block made a fine staircase towards heaven above, a fine "Jacob's Ladder". Obscured in the clouds we continued up the face, skirted below an ice cliff which we climbed on a convenient terrace that cut back up its face. We crossed the final schrund where it pinched out right on the very crest of the summit ridge, a somewhat delicate step in the unconsolidated floury snow above a drop of seven thousand feet straight into the Quebrada Honda. A few minutes later we stepped onto the mist-shrouded summit. The clouds parted now and again for fleeting glimpses in all directions.

We old men descended straight away. The "For-Ever-and-Ever-Boys", Jim Richardson and Don Anderson, however, along with Larry, proved the aptness of their nickname. They continued on into the col between Paccharaju and the higher of the two summits of Churihuaquui (18,584 feet). We watched them as they traversed out into the incredibly steep south face, climbed past the bergschrund and finally reached the top. The first ascent of two 18,000ers in one day was not a bad feat for a 13-year-old!

On July 5 Humphreys, Goody and Staples set out to climb Ichic Churihuaquui ("Little Brother"). After traversing an avalanche fan, they climbed very steep snow to the top. Meanwhile Jim Richardson, Larry, Peter and I headed in the opposite direction for the "Gendarme." In the gorgeous weather, the trip was worth it for the view alone of the southeast face of Paccharaju. Huge ice flutes dropped away to nothing and seemed to threaten the winding road and corrals 7000 feet below in the Quebrada Honda. We climbed along the ridge a way but quit while still over 100 feet from the summit when we noticed that the ribbon-thin ice ridge not only hung far over the cliff to one side but also was still translucent 20 feet below the crest. Peter climbed his second 18,000er that day, however, when he and Richardson followed the first group to the summit of Ichic Churihuaquui having first removed the hardware from the Paccharaju bergschrund.

After carrying mountainous loads to Base Camp, the porters were justifiably exhausted, but still retained their undimmed enthusiasm for the accomplishments of the party in which they took such personal pride. At dusk, under the inspiration of a bottle of Pisco, the local liquor, their spirits revived. They felt that such world-shattering events as our ascents

must receive proper recognition. By dark the brush on the slopes around Base Camp were dotted with celebrating bonfires. By seven o'clock it was a holocaust. We did not provide burnt human sacrifice that night but we did not miss it by much.

Our time was drawing to an end. One group was to head for Copa, as described below, while the rest of us wrestled with the problems of transport to the valley. Harry McDade, Larry and I made one final first ascent, that of Paccharaju Sur. We reached the glacier as we had on the first reconnaissance and continued upward to the southern ridge of the peak where the last few rope-lengths provided the only real climbing. Swiss-cheese ice posed serious problems. As we ascended the final steep knife-edge, I was fearful that the honey-combed snow would hurl me out onto the southeastern precipice, but it was Harry who, while belaying, aired his feet over the void when his belay platform crumbled under his feet and left him wedged by his shoulders above the abyss. Moments later we took turns standing on the sharp summit.

H.A.C.

Nevado Copa, Southeast Face and South Ridge

Following two days of rest and reorganization at Base Camp, a party of four, Anderson, Richardson, Goody and I, set off on July 8 to attempt the south wall of Copa. Two porters, Justiniano and Miguel, accompanied the group carrying enormous loads. Originally we contemplated two different routes, Anderson and Richardson girding themselves for tension climbing and bivouacs on the cliffs of the direct south face, while Goody and I planned a somewhat gentler route up the southeastern slope to the south ridge, intersecting it about 1000 feet below the broad upper plateau of the mountain.

From the floor of the Paccharuri valley, we crossed on loose moraine the end of the main glacier draining this side of Copa, and climbed for several hours up the prominent lateral moraine of this glacier to a pleasant campsite at about 16,500 feet. From here, directly below a band of cliffs separating a small central hanging glacier from the lower ice, the two projected routes diverged. Unfortunately, bad food from some undetermined source laid the south face party so low that evening, that on the morning of the 9th they remained in camp with the porters while Goody and I investigated the route to the ridge. There was only one reasonable line to follow, which involved an ascending traverse through the central hanging glacier from left to right and then the climb of a small ridge and gulley system linking this with a higher hanging glacier directly below the south ridge. A very steep traverse leftward across this upper glacier

on extremely hard snow led around an exposed corner to a fine camp-site on a broad snow terrace a few hundred feet below the ridge itself, at a height of about 18,500 feet. A fixed rope was placed on the descent to the moraine camp.

A decision to combine efforts of the whole party on the ridge route was reached the following morning, based on the still questionable state of several digestive tracts and the promise of some excitement on the steep and corniced ridge itself. Accordingly the rest of the day was spent by everyone packing a three-day camp to the higher level. In the process several hundred more feet of fixed rope were installed for the porters on the steeper sections. The strength and general competence of Justiniano was very impressive at these spots, and it was only through his leadership and constant encouragement that Miguel made it at all.

A pre-dawn start was attempted on the 11th, but it was 7:30 before we were under way. Justiniano declared himself eager to climb and tied on at the end, but Miguel stayed behind with "*dolor de cabeza*". The sky was completely cloudless, but as we neared the crest of the ridge, it became clear that part of the reason for this photogenic state of affairs was a steady, brisk, upper-level wind, averaging perhaps 30 mph on the ridge, with gusts to 40 or 50. Although the temperature was not particularly low (maybe 20°), the constant lashing by this wind was very annoying by the time we had kicked several hundred feet of steps up the crest. Since Justiniano was not properly equipped for this kind of thing and Goody lacked wind pants, they turned back at about ten A.M. Several hours of steep climbing followed, Jim Richardson doing most of the leading, with one of the three on belay nearly all the time. The one really prominent gendarme was traversed on the eastern side. Just below this, a sizable cornice plunged down the nearly vertical western slope towards Vicos as we three stood in the cornice crack to escape the wind. Fortunately ice-axe tie-ins were secure.

The end of the narrow ridge at about 19,500 feet was reached by 1:30 P.M. and the remaining climb was simply a long one and a half hour walk, for the most part on beautifully hard snow. From the doubly-corniced summit (20,303 feet) the entire Cordillera Blanca was spread out to view, from Alpamayo to Huantsán. The wind had abated somewhat, but the weather was still unusually clear and brilliant. The summit itself was a narrow little ridge hanging out over the fantastic ice towers of the east ridge leading down toward Paccharaju. Darkness overtook us at 6:30 P.M. about 500 feet above camp, and this final steep descent was considerably slowed by the possession of only two headlamps for three people.



PLATE 36

PEAK 5460 and PACCHA-
KOCHA from Base Camp.

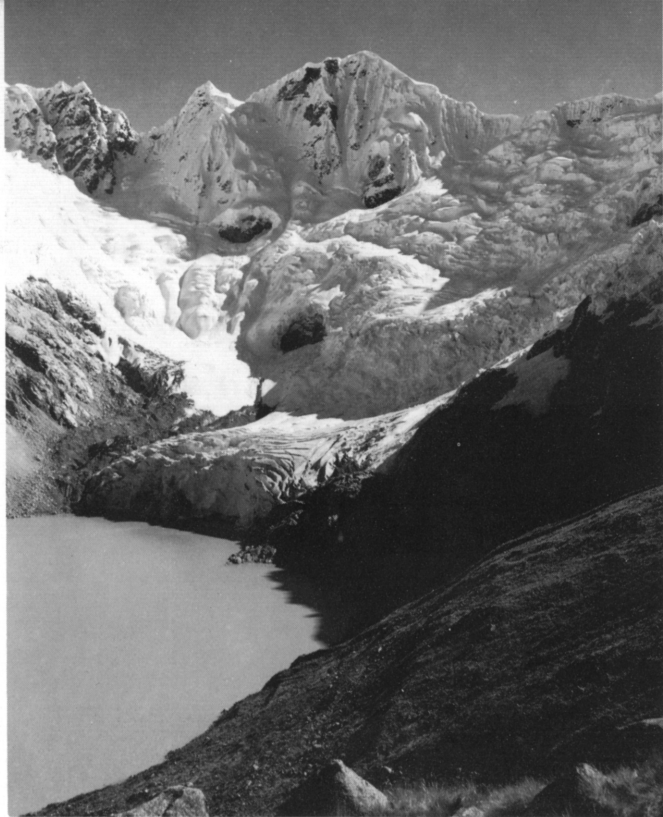


PLATE 37

BASE CAMP below PAC-
CHARAJU.





PLATE 38

Camp I below ICHIC CHURIHUAUQUI (left) and CHURIHUAUQUI.



PLATE 39

Larry Carter (age 13) leads towards PACCHARAJU SUR. Gendarme on left and PACCHARAJU in background.



PLATE 40

Pack route between Camps I and II.



PLATE 41

Final slopes of ICHIC CHURIHUAUQUI.

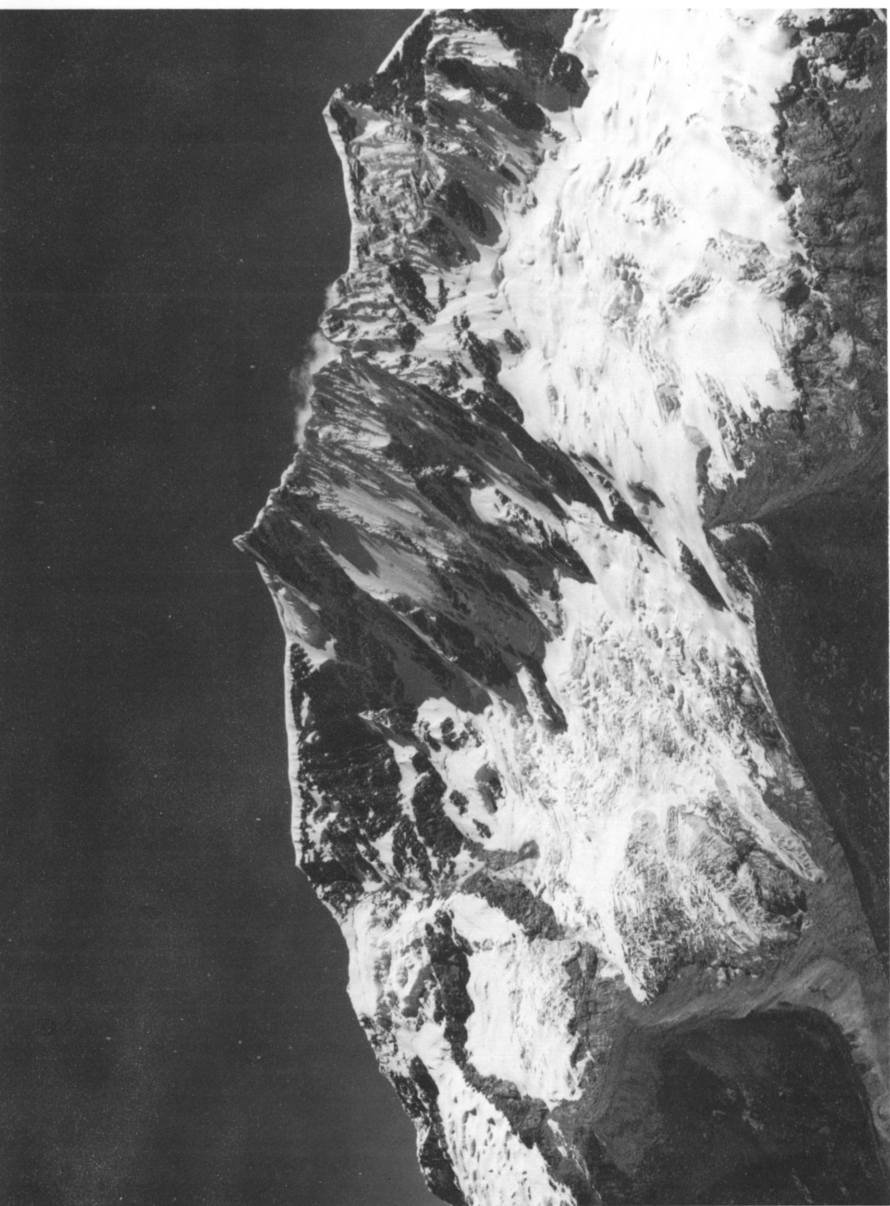


PLATE 44

NEVADO COPA. Route lay up glaciers and ridge on left.



PLATE 42

Don Anderson at top of tension pitch on bergschrund.



PLATE 43

Larry Carter prusiking on bergschrund.

The following day, with porters and climbers carrying comparable loads, both Copa camps were evacuated to the valley floor, and on the 13th we trudged down to Vicos in the continuing fine weather that we had come to accept as the norm. The completion of this route on Copa was very satisfying to all concerned, for it was quite clearly the most reasonable route up the southern flank of this large peak, but yet not without its challenging moments.

J.S.H.

Summary of Statistics

AREA: Cordillera Blanca, Peru.

ASCENTS: Peak 5460, 17,914 feet, July 1, 1962 (Anderson, Richardson, Staples) — First ascent.

Paccharaju, 18,835 feet, July 4, 1962 (whole party) — First ascent.

Churihuauqui, 5650 m. or 18,584 feet, July 4, 1962 (Anderson, L. Carter, Richardson) — First ascent.

Ichic Churihuauqui, c. 5600 m. or 18,373 feet, July 5, 1962 (P. Carter, Goody, Humphreys, Richardson, Staples) — First ascent.

Paccharaju Sur, 5220 m. or 17,126 feet, July 8 (A. Carter, L. Carter, McDade) — First ascent.

Nevado Copa, 20,303 feet, July 11, 1962 (Anderson, Humphreys, Richardson) — by Southeast Face and South Ridge, new route.

PERSONNEL: H. Adams Carter, leader; Don Anderson, Lawrence Carter (age 13), Peter Carter (age 14), Richard Goody, John S. Humphreys, Harry McDade, M.D., James Richardson, Charles Staples.

