

Jirishanca Norte

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THE TWIN PEAKS of Jirishanca and Jirishanca Norte, 20,099 and 19,735 feet respectively, are located in the northern Cordillera Huayhuash between Yerupajá and Rondoy. The only ascent of Jirishanca was made in 1957 by T. Egger and S. Jungmeier. The north peak remained unattempted until an effort by Leif Patterson, Christopher Smith and Geoffrey Wood to climb it in 1963 from the west side failed because of avalanche threat. César Morales Arnao of the Peruvian Ministry of Education kindly supplied photos taken of the northeast side which showed a long, glacier-hung ridge or spur extending down from a slender, conical snow summit. Though steep, the ridge looked reasonably safe. This was the project to which Gary Colliver, Glen Denny and I committed ourselves with Leif for the summer 1964.

We reached Chiquián on the evening of July 6 with all equipment organized and ready to be loaded on burros in the morning. The burros did not show up until a day later, but by mid-morning of July 8, only four days after leaving Miami, we were following our two burro drivers and fifteen animals down into the valley below Chiquián.

Excitement ran high. Occasional glimpses of giant peaks gleaming in the sun refreshed us as we began the long gradual ascent from the river valley through Llamac and Pocpa to the first pass over the northern extension of the Huayhuash. By noon of the third day we had crossed the pass and gone south through the grassy hills east of the cordillera to Mitukocha, a good sized lake lying in a valley below the Jirishancas. A quick, exploratory trip established the possibility of driving the animals to a meadow high on a moraine north of Ninakocha, the green lakelet above Mitukocha directly under the Jirishanca glaciers. Despite the steep slopes of the moraine we managed to reach our campsite early enough for Leif and Glen to make a preliminary reconnaissance of the glacier. Since their evening excursion showed the lower parts of the icefall to be very unstable, the following morning Leif, Gary, and I climbed a steep, rocky ridge to the right of the glacier until we could go onto the ice at a relatively level spot at approximately 16,400 feet. A short distance up the glacier we

came to an uncrevassed area near the foot of the ridge we proposed to climb. This would be the site of our next camp.

By now we had all seen enough of the mountain to make some tentative estimates of its difficulties. To get onto the ridge we had to choose between climbing 500 feet of rock at its foot or ascending through séracs along its base and then directly up the side. Certainly the rock climbing, if even reasonably easy, would be preferable to the system of hanging glaciers on the side. Once on the ridge we would shortly be confronted with an 80-foot overhanging ice cliff. Hopefully we could bypass this to the left or right. Two pleasant snowfields rose beyond, then a steep section, and a vertical 200-foot rock step. Visible above the step was a long stretch of difficult-looking rock and ice leading into snowfields below the huge hanging glacier constituting the foot of the summit cone. The only weakness in this last threatening ice barrier seemed to be a small cleft, probably a snow-filled crevasse, extending part way down the right edge. Certainly substantial ice climbing awaited us up there.

We resolved to try the rock approach first. In the morning Glen and Gary set off from the meadow camp heavily loaded with climbing gear while the porters, formerly the burro drivers, and I shouldered loads for the glacier camp. By early afternoon Glen and Gary had surmounted all the rock and were 60 feet up onto the first snowfield! That evening exhilaration gripped us all. The rock, a form of limestone, had turned out to be easy. In the few really steep parts widespread fracturing made handholds plentiful and water-etching made the feet stick almost anywhere.

Next morning Leif and I set out to climb the snowfield. Halfway through the second lead I came out onto a cornice over a deep gully we had not even suspected. The hot sun was loosening boulders imbedded in the left side of the ice cliff, which ricocheted down the gully, dislodging showers of smaller rocks en route, then bounded off into oblivion down the far side of the ridge. We continued along the ridge and up the snowfield at its end to the foot of the ice cliff. Short of scaling the overhanging, icicle-hung face of the cliff, the only way to continue was along its foot into the network of hanging ice on the right side of the ridge. This we left for another day.

July 13 was entirely devoted to packing. By afternoon the meadow camp had been dismantled, some items hidden on a nearby cliff, and nearly everything else moved onto the glacier. We paid the porters and watched them start on their way to Chiquián with our last letters home. Then we set off for the glacier camp with the few remaining loads. That evening for the first time we were alone. On three sides of us rose huge

séracs backed by ramparts of rock and ice extending three thousand feet into the sky; to the east a narrow string of footprints wound its way through crevasses to the grassy ridge and thence to the valley below.

Next morning Glen and I stayed in camp while Leif and Gary set off to climb the ice cliff direct. Glen's depth perception seemed to be suffering from the altitude and he occasionally had a curious lack of balance. For my own part I felt a day's rest and salt-water gargling might rid me of a throat infection acquired from burro dust on the trip in. Leif and Gary found the ice too soft from the sun to hold the ice pitons necessary for a direct ascent of the face. Trying the traverse instead, they managed to turn the corner of the cliff and make one lead up a steep ice slope. Here mushy ice again forced a retreat. Next day Leif, Gary and I carried loads to the top of the rock. Since the heavy breathing re-inflamed my throat, the day after I stayed in camp with Glen, who, in exasperation, was trying oxygen as a remedy for his troubles. Leif and Gary renewed their attack on the ice cliff. This time by traversing far past the corner they reached a steep snow slope which they climbed to the snowfield above. Marking an excellent site for our next camp, they set fixed ropes to the lip of the ice cliff and then rappelled from pickets to the slope below.

On July 18 everyone carried a load to the top of the rock. On our return to camp Glen declared himself fully recovered while I, with my throat no better began to dose myself with penicillin. Plans called for Glen and me to bivouac on the top of the rock in order to reach the top of the ice cliff in plenty of time the next day to haul all the equipment. Prevented from bivouacking by bad weather, we started in the morning under a heavy overcast and reached the top of the ice cliff with barely time to start a cave before dark. Meanwhile Leif and Gary had moved up to the bivouac in a small crevasse just above the rock.

At dawn Glen found he was snowblind. Deceived by the overcast, he had not worn glasses. Meanwhile Gary was lying in the crevasse below, exhausted from carrying too heavy a pack. I spent the rest of the day enlarging the cave to a spacious chamber. Next morning Gary joined us. Glen's eyes were greatly improved. With his help all the loads were up by early evening. Leif soon followed in a hail storm and immediately on arrival extended a corner of the kitchen into an entire new sleeping room, making this by far the most comfortable camp of the trip. The walls shortly became blue water ice, giving the whole chamber an eerie glow by starlight, while in sunshine the entrance framed Jirishanca Chico with an arch of jewels.

Next day Leif, Glen, and I climbed the snowfields above almost to

the rock step. Because the rock again turned out to be easier than anticipated, by the evening of the following day Gary, Glen and Leif had fixed ropes past the rock step and into the area of mixed rock and ice above. We now badly needed a new camp. By evening two small caves about 30 feet apart had been cut into the steep slope below the step. On July 25 Leif and Glen continued the route through the area of mixed climbing all the way to the foot of the hanging glacier while Gary and I moved camp to the twin caves. Sunday the 26th we rested. Only about 300 feet separated our ropes from the easy slopes of the summit cone, but 300 feet of overhanging ice could easily stop us. A way around to the right had to be found.

On the morning of the 27th we all started up again, Leif and Gary to attempt the glacier while Glen and I carried loads to the snow slope beneath. As we slowly worked our way up the fixed ropes under heavy packs, we could see Leif and Gary working their way along the foot of the glacier toward the nose of ice glinting in the sun. They reached the nose, then progressed slowly upward, and finally disappeared. Long after we had returned to the twin caves, they emerged from the dusk to announce they had entered the foot of the chute and continued upward to the top of the glacier.

With an early start next morning Glen and I hoped to take our personal gear above the glacier and set up Camp V. On reaching the traverse out to the nose, I was disappointed to find the ice pitons loose in their sockets and decided to bivouac on the slope below. We cut a horizontal slit about twelve feet long into the slope and slept head to head with the upper shelf of ice a few inches above our noses. Perfect weather and the airiness of our perch made it a memorable night. By the next evening, thanks to a hard day's work on everyone's part all our equipment was on top of the glacier, but no shelter had been found. The wind rose, sending particles of snow streaming across the slopes and down into the depths. Gary's feet grew so cold he had to put them into his sleeping bag. Instead of water-saturated corn snow, so excellent for construction of caves below, here we found hard windpacked snow which bent the light aluminum shovels. Eventually we carved out a small cave using the army entrenching tool. We were 500 feet below the summit.

July 30 dawned warmer with scattered clouds. Above us the uniform slopes of the summit stretched up at about 45° to a last rise periodically shrouded in mist. Glen and Gary were the first to try the summit; all morning they swung leads across the expanse of white until about noon they stood together on top, two dots seen through drifting cloud. Next day Leif and I carried his Norwegian flag to the summit, thereby making

success official. The day was clear and breathless, affording outstanding views of Jirishanca and Yerupajá as well as the sharp ridges and corniced summits of Rondoy to the north. We tried to traverse the corniced summit ridge further to a saddle 300 feet lower, from which we might ascend Jirishanca's main summit. Immediately we encountered nearly vertical flutings of rotten, sugarlike snow and made very slow progress. The next day an intensely cold wind swept the mountain and streamclouds below indicated a major displacement of air masses. Reluctantly we retreated.

We left Lima the morning of August 14. When the pilot of our plane discovered that we had been climbing in the Huayhuash, he made a complete circuit of the higher peaks, at one point passing over the shoulder of Norte on which our high camp had stood. Already our tracks had vanished from those glistening slopes; only the cave entrance showed black in a field of white to attest for a few more weeks man's intrusion into the realm of cornice and cloud.

Summary of Statistics.

AREA: Cordillera Huayhuash, Peru.

FIRST ASCENT: Jirishanca Norte, 19,735 feet, July 30, 1964 (Denny, Colliver); July 31, 1964 (Patterson, Wilson).

PERSONNEL: Leif-Norman Patterson, *leader*; Glen Denny, Gary Colliver, Leslie D. Wilson.

