

*La Esfinge, The Riddle of the Cordillera Blanca, New Route.* On May 1, Todd Offenbacher, Bill Posner and I arrived in Lima, Peru, with the goal of climbing a new route on La Esfinge. Bill Posner traveled with us with the intent of helping us complete some filming and video projects for Resort Sports Network. We immediately continued to Huaraz at 10,000 feet. Our intent was to organize supplies in Huaraz, plus make brief acclimatization outings into the surrounding hills, as base camp for the wall is at 15,000 feet. This plan was rapidly foiled, as all three of us in succession became very ill with the Peruvian version of Montezuma's. We spent the five days in town struggling around, shopping, and running to the toilet. We befriended the owner of the local Thai restaurant, Naresuan Butthuam, who would accompany us to base camp to cook the best Thai food ever and to do some rock climbing during our preparation for the route.

Thus prepared, the four of us and seven porters drove to the Paron Lake and hiked the four hours to base camp, one hour from the base of the wall. Over the next five days, we ferried loads, filmed, drank and ate, and fixed the first five pitches, 155 meters (three ropes) direct to the ground. Thereafter, Todd and I were on our own, as Naresuan and Bill were needed elsewhere.

Our intention in arriving in the Blanca in May was to beat the crowds we anticipated on La Esfinge for the coming season. We paid for bagging what we felt was one of the last good lines on the east face in bad weather currency. We originally wanted to climb another new route on the 950-meter southeast face, but after scoping, this wall, which houses only one line, seemed devoid of connecting systems that would comprise a natural and aesthetic line.

We committed to the wall, hoping for significant amounts of free climbing. However, we were hammered every day like clockwork by a paisley of rain, snow, and hail. After two days of fixing, we led three more pitches, established our portaledge, spent a soaked and miserable night, dried the next morning, and fixed three more. On the fifth and final day, we juggled our lines, pulled them with us, and climbed three more steep mixed aid and free pitches, including the A3 crux. Upon reaching lower-angle ground, we chucked our haul bag and any extra weight we could. We then freed and French freed to the top into the night in a snowstorm, and summited to a break in the weather. With nothing but a gentle breeze, we stood and gazed at the Paron Valley giants, lit by a full moon, as they emerged from a silver fog bank filling the valley. We descended the north ridge and returned to our base camp after 22 hours. Two days later, we returned to the wall, juggled our lines, re-led two pitches and retrieved our portaledge and haul bag. We beat a hasty retreat to the tune of the wettest storm yet.

We named our route after Antonio Bohorquez's 1998 AAJ article *The Riddle of the Cordillera Blanca* (VI 5.10 A3). The porters met us the following day and we were soon dancing with the locals at El Tambo.

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*La Esfinge, Cruz del Sur, New Route.* Silvo Karo (Slovenia), Mauro "Bubu" Bole (Italy), and I traveled to Peru on my birthday, June 23. Upon our arrival at Base Camp (4650m) below La Esfinge (a.k.a. the Sphinx) on June 27, we had some problems with the altitude. The third day after our arrival at BC, Bubu had to go back to the valley. After his return, the whole thing ran smoothly, and our climbing could really start.

Silvo managed to climb the first pitch on June 29, with me belaying because of Bubu's sickness. I rated the first 35 meters 6b+. It was good for warming up. The crack had to be cleaned a little bit—there was some soil and vegetation—but in general the rock in this part of the face was very good.