

at the base of the wall. The new route is primarily glacial, with sections of 75 to 80 degrees and some of 90 degrees, as well as mixed climbing. Bullock and Powell reached the summit on July 23 after two days of climbing.

JUANJO TOME, Peru

*Tuctubamba, Middle Earth.* Clay Wadman and I tried the prominent couloir on the right, climbing ca 300 meters and reaching the rock band before rappelling the line of ascent. We found conditions that varied from one-inch ice over rock to perfect névé to bottomless snow. The crux involved thin, 75-degree ice protected by knifeblades. On our descent we used primarily knifeblades and small stoppers, but placements were difficult to find, as the rock is compact.

Topher and Patience Donahue did the probable first ascent of a line that is hidden to the left behind Tuctubamba, and Clay and I repeated it two days later. Middle Earth (IV 5.8 WI5, ca 400 meters) lies in a cleft and deposits the climber on the saddle between Tuctubamba and Taulliraju. Another 70 or 80 meters of moderate snow climbing takes one to the summit. Pitches two and four were the cruxes. The first crux involved rock climbing to access a tenuously adhered, five-meter vertical pillar, while the second involved vertical ice for 15 meters, protected at the steepest part by rock gear in the wall. Conditions were generally excellent, as was protection. Middle Earth is a recommended route to a great summit and lends itself to being climbed from Punta Union in a day.

CHRISTIAN BECKWITH, AAC

*La Esfinge, Via Gringos.* On June 17 Joe Vallone and I, both of Colorado, began to climb the south face of La Esfinge (The Sphinx). Funded by an American Alpine Club Youth Fellowship Award, our team of two set out to make the first all-American ascent of this Peruvian gem. The Sphinx is perched three hours north of Huaraz in the Cordillera Blanca, humbly located beneath the proud faces of the Huandoy group.

The route entailed 14 days of ferrying loads, fixing pitches, and varied climbing on immaculate golden granite in an unbelievable setting. Our route, Via Gringos, is to the right of a route put up by a Spanish soloist several years ago. It began with a technical face pitch, which punched through several roof systems on hidden crimpers and required delicate face climbing. We rated the pitch 5.12a; the difficulties are protected with bolts.

We pushed upward for seven more pitches, navigating a maze of thin seams and difficult corners. The major difficulties were not in the climbing of the natural lines, which were there, but rather in the relentless cleaning of malevolently vegetated cracks. Future teams will surely find the gear placement and climbing more entertaining without the bushwhacking through the high-altitude jungle we encountered.

As we continued we rested each night looking at the single, tattered photo of the face we carried. "Somewhere up there is a big ledge"—we reaffirmed this glimmer of hope daily, after dumping dirt from our trousers and before passing out wincing in pain. To reach the big ledge, we continued forging our way up several difficult pitches involving A3+ hooking and sizable fall potential. Along the way bat-hooks were used to link natural placements and bypass plants that were too dense to be removed and too prickly to touch.

On the sixth day Joe led across what we dubbed Jose's Roof Traverse. Mostly protected by

large camming units, the roof required awkward moves, and much of the climbing was done while dangling from a crack. The pitch required a nearly horizontal traverse that finished under a small roof.

After an incredible hanging bivy several hundred feet from friends on a neighboring route, I led into the exit pitch of Jose's Roof Traverse. Varied climbing eventually brought me to an A2 knifeblade seam and an even more spectacular hanging bivy. Our pace of one grueling pitch per day began to wear our nerves thin, but after a long A3+ pitch the following day we finally rested in the comfort of the big ledge. However, the grim reality was that we were only halfway up.

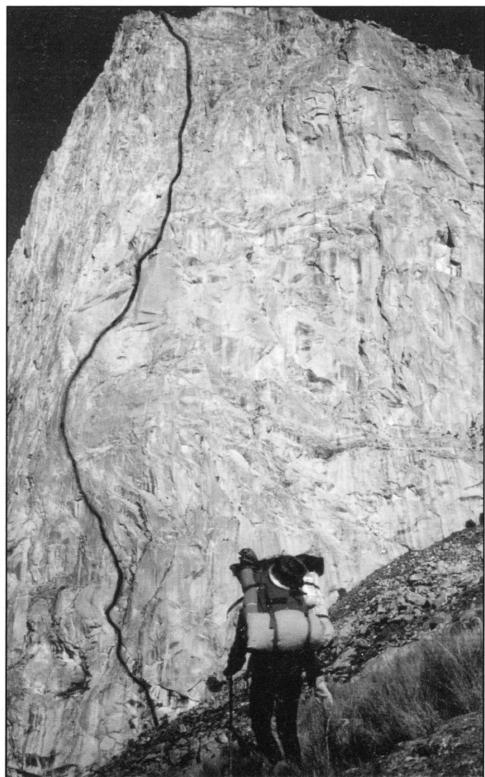
On the ninth day I ventured into what we called the Railroad Cracks, a pair of parallel cracks. From the ground we had been sure that the cracks would be finger and hand sized perfect for free climbing. Despite our optimism, however, the cracks turned out to be closed seams that would hold no gear of any kind. Once again I was reduced to hooking far above the bolt I had placed. The slow pace, coupled with untimely losses of both drills, forced us to escape from our initial line and look for a quicker path to the summit. We joined a route (*Todos Narcos*, I think) a hundred yards or so to the right and quickly gained elevation the next day. Before retiring the next day we hauled to a high ledge, where the angle of the wall eases, and managed to climb two new pitches below the gleaming headwall at the top of the face.

The following day we finished the route and enjoyed a quiet, warm sunset over the Cordillera Negra. Over tuna fish and tomato sauce, we soaked in the soft rays of the sun as it drifted out of sight, all the while exchanging casual conversation about one of the toughest climbs we had done together. *Via Gringos* (*The Way of the Gringos*) is VI 5.12a A3+ route that was completed in 17 pitches, over two weeks, gaining the summit at around 18,000 feet.

ZACK MARTIN

*La Esfinge, Mecho Taq Inti?* Our team was two women, Tanja Rojs and Aleksandra Voglar, and I, Andrej Grmovsek, all from Slovenia. After acclimatization on Vallunaraju (5686m) we put up base camp under La Esfinge on July 11. Because of many articles in recent climbing magazines, we were expecting big crowds on and under the wall, but we were all alone. In the month of our stay under La Esfinge, only a few parties came and climbed the classic 1985 route.

Our plan was to put a new route on the wall, but the wall was almost full of routes. Nevertheless, we found a nice unclimbed line



*La Esfinge, Mecho Taq Inti? Andrej Grmovsek*