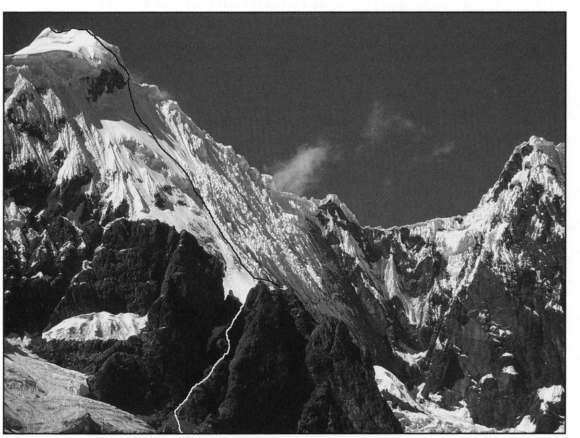
Peru

CORDILLERA BLANCA

Nevado Pucahirca Norte I, The Power of Perspective. In August 1979 Jack Miller organized the first commercial trek from the village of Huilca, on the western slopes of the northern Cordillera Blanca, up the Quebrada Alpamayo and over the main divide separating the remote eastern Cordillera Blanca from the more inhabited western drainages. I was fortunate to be among Jack's trekking guides on that circumnavigation of Alpamayo and the Pucahircas. During our forays to find the best route, we drove, coaxed, shoved, and dragged our unwilling burros over appalling passes. I'll never forget the drizzly day we came over the final pass of the main divide and dropped into the Sajuna Lake valley. The Pucahirca peaks (in Quechua, "puca" means "red" and "hirca" means "mountain") looming in the clouds were among the most impressive I'd seen—soaring walls split by huge faces and couloirs leading to jagged summit ridges.

Twenty-four years later images of those isolated red walls propelled Thaddeus Josephson (Bozeman, Montana), Crista Lee Mitchell (Halifax, Nova Scotia), and me to explore from Sajuna Lake for routes up those faces. In mid-June 2003 the three of us hired burros, arrieros, and Huaraz-cook Alejandro Sainz to make the three and one-half day journey from Huilca to Laguna Sajuna. However, my health was poor, so we descended to Pomabamba village. A horrible 22-hour bus journey returned us to Huaraz, where my goal was to regain my health and strength. In mid-July, with my health improved, Thaddeus and I returned to Laguna Sajuna for a second look at the Pucahircas. Our journey to the lake was made more efficient by hiring a private vehicle to drive us to Pomabamba and a 4-wheel-drive van to follow a rough track to the shores of Sajuna, where we had set up camp a month earlier.



Nevado Pucahirca Norte I, showing the only route on the face, The Power of Perspective. *Carlos Buhler*

We originally thought to make the complicated approach to the base of these faces by negotiating the dangerous icefall of the lower Pucahirca Glacier. However, we spotted a 200m gully of rotten rock leading to a high notch in the ridge that comes down from Pucahirca

Thaddeus Josephson negotiating steep ice on Nevado Pucahirca Norte I. *Carlos Buhler*

Norte II's west face and encloses the Pucahirca Glacier. From the notch we saw it was possible to descend easily to the glacier on the opposite side and access Pucahirca Norte's 1,000m west faces without setting foot in the icefall. (Due to the north-south crest of the Pucahirca Norte peaks, these "eastern" peaks of the Cordillera have flanks on Lake Sajuna that actually face west.)

The next day we climbed the gully, traversed the upper Pucahirca Glacier to the base of the west face of Pucahirca Norte I, and climbed four ice pitches to the top of a small, safe, glacial-ice buttress at the base of the face. We spent our first bivy here, which was our last night in a tent. One hundred meters above us, blocking our route, sat an alarming, overhanging serac about 60m high but passable on the right. This was the first of three scary ice cliffs we had to deal with.

Thaddeus writes: "The next morning we climbed through unconsolidated snow and poor ice threatened by the huge seracs looming above. This was a very unsettling activity for me, as this was my first "real" alpine route and first exposure to such uncontrollable objective dangers. When I reached the top of the next pitch I found Carlos sitting in a hole he had dug for himself; apparently this was the belay! Snow holes and serac falls? I began questioning the madness of these alpine endeavors."

We bivouacked in a crevasse on the face and continued climbing up gullies, past the second set of ice cliffs on our left. Thaddeus writes: "The next day we encountered some fine ice pitches with solid belays, allowing us to move quickly in more secure conditions. Over the next two days we climbed through everything from wind twisted ice bulges to fragile mixed ground."

We chopped out two additional bivouacs on the face before gaining Puca's summit ridge. The crux was passing the large, ice-covered cliff at the top of the face. In an afternoon and the following day, we negotiated this obstacle on its right side. Two slow, technical leads on mixed rock and ice gave us access to the upper slopes. On the afternoon of day five, we were about 40 vertical meters under the summit when driving wind and snow prevented progress. We knew we were close, but could not go on.

Thaddeus describes our situation: "With a dwindling food and fuel supply our concerns mounted when we were pinned in a whiteout for 18 hours, just below the summit. As we melted snow the following morning, the increasing light revealed that the storm had passed, and we were able to continue. We reached the summit of Pucahirca Norte I (6,047m) at 8:25 a.m. on July 27, mentally and physically exhausted, but proud of our accomplishment."

At first we believed we could descend the opposite side of Pucahirca, and therefore we wasted four hours exploring this possibility. But 200m down we found the glacier crumbling into a complex icefall and decided to drag ourselves back up to the summit slopes for plan B, descending our route. For the remainder of that day and all of the next we rappelled, using many Abalakov threads and buried stuff sacks filled with snow as anchors. On July 28 we reached BC to find our cook Mauro waiting patiently with a fabulous meal. We spent the next two days fishing in Lake Sajuna with hooks and line we'd bought in Huaraz and worms the locals dug up. When our vehicle and driver didn't arrive, we made the arduous 40km hike to Pomabamba and soaked in the hot springs to relieve leg cramps. Thaddeus named the route The Power of Perspective (1,000m, TD+), in response to this game of alpine climbing.

CARLOS BUHLER, *AAC*

Nevado Alpamayo, tragedies. Alpamayo (5,947m), once selected as the world's most beautiful mountain, sees many ascents, but, in the last years, also many accidents. On July 21, 2003 an avalanche swept away a group 150m short of the summit ridge. Eight mountaineers (four Germans, two Israelis, an Argentine, and a Dutch) were killed, and others injured. The accident occurred on the Franco-Vasque Canal ["canal" is ice fluting] route on the southwest face. In June a Japanese climber died from high altitude illness, and in July 2002 three of eight members of a European team died in an avalanche.

MARCELO SCANU, *Argentina*

Nevado Quitaraju, south face, clarification. The Bullock-Powell Route (*AAJ* 2002, p. 295-6) begins to the right of the Slovenian Route, but after continuing near that line for several pitches, diverges left to attain the arête very close to the summit.

ANTONIO GÓMEZ BOHÓRQUEZ, *Spain*

La Esfinge, Welcome to the Slabs of Koricancha. On June 18, Slovaks Dusan Beranek, Rado Staruch, and I reached the top of La Esfinge (5,325m), having climbed a new route, Welcome to the Slabs of Koricancha (650m, 13 pitches, V 5.13b), via the largest slabs on the east face. We spent 10 days on this amazing granite tower in the Parón Valley and named the route in honor of the Incan sun temple in Cuzco. The route starts at 4,650m at the base of the east face, next to Ganxets Glacé (VI 5.9 A2, Ortuño-Salvadó, 1996). Ganxets Glacé leads to a ledge in the middle of the wall and continues to the right through an impressive chimney. Welcome To the Slabs connects with Ganxets Glacé at the ledge, via a direct line, and continues left and up through the slabs between two distinct black water streaks to the route Here Comes the Sun (VI 5.11 A3, Bigger-Regan, 2000).

We first climbed the route using aid at 7b+ (5.12c) A1, but with an all-free line in our