

Venezuela

Matawi Tepui (a.k.a. Kukenan Tepui), attempt and exploration. In the first week of February, climbers Federico Pizani, Luis Cisneros, Chris Gardner, and I, Maikey Lopera, and trekkers Dan Kopperud and Lindsey, as support crew, left from Caracas for southern Venezuela to attempt to climb and explore the west face of Matawi Tepui, located northeast of the Roraima Tepui. Our interest in climbing this tepui was that the west side was unexplored. I thought it would be a great opportunity to explore and climb this untouched face. Matawi Tepui (in local Pemon language, it means “The Place to Die”) has been a mystery because of legends that surround its name.

After two days of traveling by bus, we were dropped off at the bridge on the Yuruani River. Our first leg of the approach was through savanna with the occasional jungle patch. We spent the first night at an abandoned Indian house, from which we “borrowed” a canoe to transport us across the Yuruani. We continued to a small tribe of Indians who screamed at us, trying to keep us from continuing our route. Two more days of walking put us at the edge of the jungle.

After four days of battling thick jungle, fighting off swarms of mosquitoes, and avoiding poisonous snakes, we reached the base of the wall. The next day, Luis and I carried loads to the base of our intended route, while Federico and Chris led the first three pitches. Chris had the honor of leading the first jungle pitches in wet weather. On the second day we committed to the wall, hauling gear and adding two more pitches, led mostly free by Federico. At the end of the fifth pitch the nice crack-and-corner system vanished into a sea of small and delicate features on the red sandstone. There we found a ledge where we set up camp. To our surprise the rock was bulletproof, making our drill bits and Petzl bolts worthless. Our only option was to drill 1/4" holes for rivets that we could use as anchors. Thankfully, we found a shallow crack in which we could back up anchors with Lost Arrows. Luis and I added two more pitches before we decided to bail due to the impossibility of safe anchors. Our last belay station consisted only of two 1/4" and one 5/8" rivets. The rock was so hard that in some instances drilling a 1/4" hole took 45 to 60 minutes. In addition, when we tried to set a rivet into a hole, it would deform rather than penetrate the depth of the hole, making the situation that much more dangerous. Becoming part of the legend was not part of our plan.

We rappelled from the top of the seventh pitch and, in four raps, were on the ground. Some of the rap anchors consisted only of two rivets. Of the seven pitches, the first two were “jungle” climbing and were done in intense rain. Pitches three, four, and five consisted of crack climbing up to 5.12. We encountered much loose rock on these pitches. Pitch six was easy climbing from the ledge (5.6). The seventh pitch consisted of aid climbing on fragile features and rotten rock. From the base of the wall, two days of jungle traveling got us to Paraitepui, the nearest town.

MAIKEY LOPERA, VENEZUELA (translated by TRICIA KING)

Acopán Tepui. Pizza, Chocolate y Cerveza. In March, back in Venezuela again, we were preparing for another intense tepui (flat-topped mountain) experience. John Arran, nicknamed “La Máquina” by the Venezuelans, was particularly keen following last year’s success on Cerro Autana. But this time there would be no José Pereyra to share the tepui experience—which he summed up last year as “a different kind of gnarly.”