

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.”

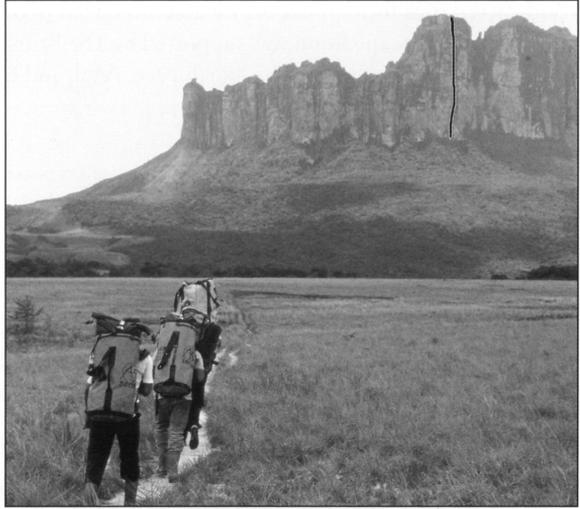
Accompanied by Venezuelan climber Alfredo Rangel, we were landed by our light aircraft on a patch of grassland near the Indian village of Yunek Ken in the Gran Sabana—a destination remote enough to escape the attention of even the Lonely Planet guide. Acopán's elegant, 300 million year-old bulging orange and gray walls gave the appearance of a fortress towering over the village. Our chosen line looked like an awesome proposition. It took two days, aided by the machete-wielding village chief, Leonardo, to break trail to the base.

Already a distant memory was the headache of planning an expedition deep into Venezuela in the aftermath of political unrest. Even the jungle approach, heavy loads, and irrepellable insects were no longer important. Bright red Gaijito de Piedera parrots welcomed us to the wall as we collected water at its base.

The fun began Tarzan-style, by us monkeying up 2"- thick vines for 35m. Four days of continuously surprising, bold face-climbing and steep cracks led to a 12m roof we hadn't seen from the ground. Alfredo had brought along a collection of lightweight Bolivian and Peruvian musical instruments which, along with his rap songs, had calmed many a stressful moment. Now a time of uncertainty: Could we overcome the monstrous roof? A reverse mantle and sloping hand-traverse, with legs dangling 400m above nothing, fortuitously led to more amenable ground.

After many close calls we made it to near the top, where the angle finally eased and I felt sure we'd cracked it. At one point John had to dyno for a bush on the lip of a roof, with no idea whether it would hold his weight.

Our 600m east-face route took six days and 21 pitches. We managed to free every pitch without falls. The route overhung by about 50m total with the hardest pitch cranking up to E6 6b (5.12bR), and the team avoided placing any pegs or bolts, even on belays. We spent a fun day scrambling around the summit's curious dike-like features and



Approaching Acopán Tepui's Pizza, Chocolate y Cerveza. *Anne Arran*



Anne Arran on Pizza, Chocolate y Cerveza, Acopán Tepui. *John Arran*

wind-carved rock formations, before descending left of the climbing line, making full use of our 100m ropes. This expedition was supported by The British Mountaineering Council, UK Sport, Mount Everest Foundation, The North Face, Petzl, and Beal.

ANNE ARRAN, U.K.

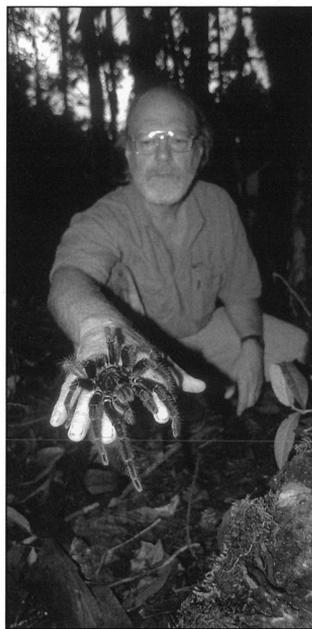
Acopán Tepui, Unate Arête (a.k.a. Racquel Welsh Arête). Louise Thomas, Dave Turnball, Steve Mayers, and I traveled from St. Elena after meeting up with Alfredo Rangel, a local climber who had climbed at Acopán with John and Anne Arran. After flying in we took one days' march through the savanna and jungle to reach the base of the wall. The line was a huge 500m arête which had previously been tried by Italian climbers (70m climbed and bolted). Over 65 days we worked on the line and bivvied on top for a day. We fixed ropes and enjoyed base camp and party life. We aimed to have a holiday, not an epic. One could take portaledge, but with a big team we kept life simple. We did not place any pegs or bolts. It was a very pleasant rock climb, all pitches E2 to E5, all pitches free except the first, which had a few rest points because of a bees' nest. Solid, excellent sandstone, perfect for free climbing, took nuts and cams well. We climbed about 500m in about 20 pitches, including easy scrambling at the top. It's big and bulging and leads to the land that time forgot, hence the route's a.k.a. This is a class venue without a doubt. Acopán is 80 miles in circumference, with only three routes. We also repeated a route on the south tower—Jardineros de Grandes Paredes, 350m, about E3, first climbed by Italians with Venezuelan Ivan Calderon—a fantastic climb. The weather is hot but with a constant cool strong breeze.

MIKE "TWID" TURNER, U.K.

Guyana

Roraima, The Scorpion Wall. My dream of climbing a tepui began more than 10 years ago. An article in National Geographic captured my imagination, with its photos of huge virgin rock walls soaring above a remote, mysterious jungle. Tepuis, I learned, are the remnants of a sandstone plateau that once covered an area of roughly 200,000 square miles in the heart of the Amazon. Over millions of years erosion wore down this plateau and left about 100 table-topped rock formations sticking out of the jungle. The cliffs ringing them range from 1,000' to 3,000' high and extend in some places for miles. Tepuis represent some of the biggest, yet least explored, rock walls on the planet.

In 2001 I received a grant from the National Geographic Expeditions Council to lead a botanist and a biologist up a tepui wall to search for new species. While many people had studied the tops of tepuis, no one had investigated the walls themselves. We originally planned to do the trip in Venezuela, but found it impossible to get a permit from the government. We decided instead to climb and study a tepui



Bruce Means with a giant tarantula he found in camp. Mark Synnott