



Upigma Tepui, showing approach and Hospital Breakout. El Nido del Tirik Tirik climbs obvious pillar directly above advanced base. *Shane Houbart*

*Upigma Tepui (2,200m), south face, The Hospital Breakout.* The Gran Sabana holds some of the world's most majestic big walls, rising dramatically above rainforest. In February 2012 Cory Nauman, Alfredo Zubillaga, and I flew to the region to establish a new route on Upigma Tepui in the Canaima National Park.

Chartering a Cessna aircraft we landed at the native village of Yunek. Hiring porters we set off on the approach, negotiating grassland plateau, jungle, and river systems.

Simply reaching the base of a tepui is an adventure in itself. Using machetes we cut through dense jungle. After two days of trail blazing Cory got bitten by an unknown venomous snake. His foot turned black and swelled to twice its normal size. We abandoned most of our equipment to speed up the rescue. Two days later we found ourselves back at Yunek, which had a radio. Miraculously a Cessna was passing through a neighboring valley, heard our distress call, and flew us to Santa Eleana, located on the border of Brazil. Cory received five-star treatment from the hospital staff but after three days wanted to leave for further treatment in the U.S. The hospital refused to release him, so Alfredo and I staged a hospital breakout and got Cory to Miami.

One member down, Alfredo and I went to salvage our equipment. We were now short of time but still decided to try a new line. After ferrying loads for many days, we arrived at the base of our proposed route, which was 400m high and the largest overhang I had ever laid eyes on. We eased into the complexities of routefinding on the first three pitches. After the third pitch the overhanging nature of the rock became more immediately apparent, and the climbing tested my limits as we solved the overhanging puzzle. Crack systems linked to horizontal breaks, providing well-protected climbing, though with occasional unprotected sections for up to eight m.

Alfredo handled the pressure like a heavyweight climbing champ. I'd never seen someone grin so effortlessly while cruxing out on a runout 5.12+ pitch. Most of the climbing was free, with the exception of pitch 11, a tenuous A2+ with two tension traverses, and pitch 12, C2+ with mandatory 5.11-.

It was a relief to pass the last overhang and hit thick jungle on top the tepui. That night, perched on our ledge, we celebrated The Hospital Breakout (520m of climbing, 14 pitches, V, 5.12+, A2+) with a bottle of rum. And Cory is alive and climbing, after receiving further medical attention in Miami. The Hospital Breakout turned out to be more than just a new route—an epic odyssey and adventure.

SHANE HOUBART, *Australia*

*Editor's note: Upigma was first climbed in 2007 by ubiquitous tepui explorers John Arran and Ivan Calderon, who with a BBC film team and presenter Steve Backshall established Aranas en las Nubes (300m, 5.12). The following year more tepui regulars, Kurt Albert, Bernd Arnold, and Helmut Gargitter, with Ivan Calderon, climbed El Nido del Tirik Tirik (350m, 14 pitches, 7b). El Nido was repeated in January 2009 by Venezuelans Luis Jeremias, Oliver Sevcik, and Alfredo Zubillaga. Houbart and Zubillaga established their advanced base directly below the pillar taken by El Nido del Tirik Tirik, then cut a trail through dense jungle to reach and then climb the middle of the broad wall to the left.*