

The middle section of the face gives mixed climbing, on brittle rock (UIAA V) and 65-75° névé. A wide belt of seracs looms above. Deep powder lies to the left, so I choose a stepped, direct line—safe, elegant, but with overhangs. There is no room for fear, and my concentration is total. The key section is 125°, and I climb it quickly, then catch my breath in a small depression. The final slopes are 55° and excellent snow, leading to the ridge a short distance from the summit. I at last enjoy the warming rays of the new day. In the distance banks of cloud rise from the tropical valleys of the Yunga region. Have I ever been this alive?

I name the 700m route La Venganza del Don Gringo (Don Gringo's revenge). To make money during the quiet rainy season, I sometimes wrestle. My opponents in the pre-arranged fights are Cholitas, women in traditional dress. My fighting name, Don Gringo, has become popular, not only at the wrestling ring but also with my employees and friends. La Venganza del Don Gringo is by far the most difficult of my three first ascents on Serkhe Khollu and may be the most difficult ice/mixed climb in Bolivia. I don't think I can climb harder ice, with or without a partner.

ROBERT RAUCH, [rauchrobert@hotmail.com](mailto:rauchrobert@hotmail.com), Bolivia

*Hampaturi Group, Serkhe Khollu (5,546m), southwest face, The Birthday of the Broken Leg.* Frozen gusts of thin air painfully escaping our weary lungs. Infinite stars splashing over dark velvet. "Happy birthday!" Robert Rauch screams into the Andean storm as I lean on my ice axe, panting. "Thank you," I want to tell him, but my words are violently ripped from my mouth and spiral high up into the air before they slowly drift down into silent insufficiency, somewhere between frozen cracks and ice shining with the reflection of southern stars.

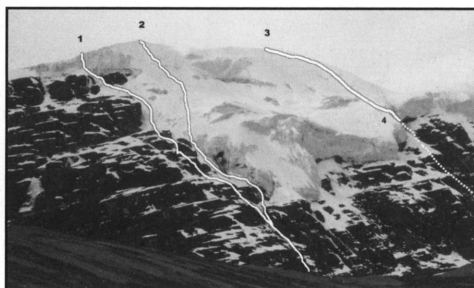
It was my birthday indeed, and no words could explain what it meant to me to watch once again the Bolivian Andes merge into the night. Exactly one year before, I had been climbing Ala Izquierda when one single second tore me apart from life. My imagination of the future was shattered along with my bones 300m below.

I spent the following two days and nights between my exposed bones and ghostly apparitions from the realm of hypothermia while I crawled over the ice. And yet I knew I was going to return to the magic world of ice.

I knew I had to return despite the doctors' verdicts. "You won't ever climb again," they would keep telling me. One year, 10 surgeries, and infinite sessions of painful physiotherapy later, there I was, emerging from the slightly overhanging last pitch of "The Birthday of the Broken Leg."

That day daylight had found us hiding my specially adapted "climbing crutches" in a cache before we ventured into the realm of verticality. The ice was hard as stone. The first ice shower that Robert sent down from above felt uncomfortable after such a long off-time. Then it was my turn.

On a small plateau in front of a majestic blue serac, Robert and I devoured some candy. Another 80m of steep, hard snow took us to an uncomfortable ice traverse that led to the face's last great obstacle, the final 95° ropelength, while daylight began to wane. As I followed Robert over the dreadfully hard overhanging ice, my admiration for him kept on soaring, not so much because of his ability to lead such



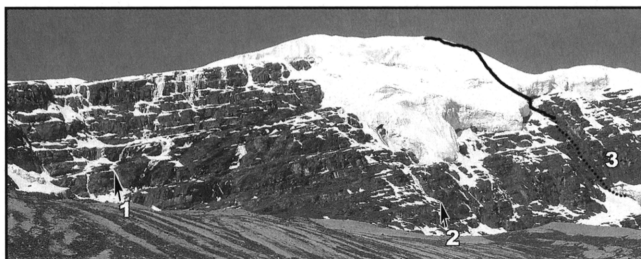
Southwest face of Serkhe Khollu. (1) Birthday of the Broken Leg. (2) Chamaka (Berger-Hill-Rauch, 2010, incorrectly drawn in AAJ 2011). (3) Summit. (4) La Venganza del Don Gringo. The 2001 Austrian route Durch das Nasenloch climbed an ice hose, long since disappeared, between 2 and 4 to reach the upper hanging glacier. *Isabel Suppé*

a hard pitch without hesitation, as for his unprejudiced capacity to trust a climber on crutches. Topping off on Serkhe Khollu marked the end of our new route, “The Birthday of the Broken Leg” (TD+/ED-), dedicated to Peter, who didn’t return from Ala Izquierda. But for me it also sealed a friendship.

However, another big challenge was yet to come: After walking down the normal route there remained an authentic crutch quest. I didn’t doubt that we would find our cache—simply because we had to find it. I needed my crutches for the descent because the horizontal dimension does not grant my foot as much freedom as verticality does.

ISABEL SUPPÉ, *Germany/Argentina*

*Editor’s note: Peter Wiesenekker died from the fall that broke Suppé’s leg in 2010. The Rauch-Suppé route and the 2010 Berger-Hill-Rauch route, Chamaka, lie close together on the left side of the face and coincide for their initial ropelength (see AAJ 2011).*



Complete southwest face of Serkhe Khollu. (1) Start of Tears of Pachamama. (2) Start of Birthday of the Broken Leg and Chamaka. (3) La Vengenza del Don Gringo. Normal route follows snowfield at extreme left, then gentle slopes behind ridge to summit. *Chris Clarke*



In 2011 Tears of Pachamama was only route on this far-left section of Serkhe Khollu’s southwest face. *Chris Clarke*

Complete southwest face of Serkhe Khollu. (1) Start of Tears of Pachamama. (2) Start of Birthday of the Broken Leg and Chamaka. (3) La Vengenza del Don Gringo. Normal route follows snowfield at extreme left, then gentle slopes behind ridge to summit. *Chris Clarke*

Based on Robert’s 20+ years of guiding in the Bolivian mountains, we believe that this type of ice is becoming more common in the country, where warmer temperatures are melting summit ice caps during the day and forming water ice during the night. So while Pachamama’s tears allow us to enjoy ephemeral routes today, we worry for the future.

CHRIS CLARKE, *Bolivia*

*Hampaturi Group, Serkhe Khollu (5,546m,) southwest face, Tears of Pachamama.* On September 15 Robert Rauch picked me up in La Paz at 4 a.m. The first crux was driving to the trailhead for Serkhe Khollu in Robert’s vehicle. The approach followed llama paths from 4,600m to 5,000m over gentle but steadily rising terrain, toward the left-hand

end of the broad southwest face. The last few hundred meters found us in a snow storm, ascending firm snow unroped to the base of a classic water-ice gully. We followed it to the crux vertical icefall, which had options from WI5+ to WI4. We opted for the latter. Several more enjoyable ice pitches of around WI4 led to the top. Thunder and heavy snow caused us to decline walking the last few hundred feet to the summit, but this option is easily available for other parties. Descent was via standard route (the only one that gets traffic, maybe a few parties per year), which climbs a snowfield at the left end of the southwest face to gentle slopes, with no obvious