

# Huascaran, east face *direttissima*

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(Translation: E. N. Bowman)

In the summer of 1972 a party from the Vienna Academic Section of the Austrian Alpine Verein, achieved an important success in the Cordillera Blanca of Peru—the first ascent of the E face *direttissima* of Huascaran (6768 m).

The participants were as follows: Eduard Koblmüller (leader), Dietmar Entlesberger, Erich Lackner, Sepp Hasitschka, Christoph Pollet, and Foland Schulz, all of the OAV, and Michael Gizycki of the DAV.

Franz Jonas, Federal President of Austria, was honorary patron of the expedition.

Our plans for the summer of 1972 originally envisaged an expedition in the Karakorum-Himalaya region of Pakistan, either Gasherbrum II or the Ogre, but owing to the inherent political situation following on the recent Indian-Pakistan war we were unable to obtain an entry permit for Kashmir.

We did not receive the final refusal until four weeks before we planned to start, so we changed the goal of our expedition to Huascaran in the Peruvian Andes. We flew to Lima on 30 June and with the assistance of the Austrian Embassy we managed to get our baggage, weighing about 800 kg, through the Peruvian customs within a few days. On 5 July we drove to Carhuas in the Santa valley in a hired bus and then went up to Shilla in the Quebrada Ulta, the starting-point of the expedition.

After one and a half days' march-in through the Quebrada Ulta and the Quebrada Matara, we set up Base Camp at 4300 m on 8 July. We employed twenty donkeys to transport our baggage up to this point. From the opposing slopes above Base Camp we were able to inspect the full extent of the huge E face of Huascaran, 5 km in width and 1200 m high.

After a close inspection of the central portion of the face we decided to attempt a direct ascent a little to the N (to the right) of the summit fall line. Our chosen route had two outstanding features: 900 m of steep ice from the start of the climb up to 6300 m with an average angle of 50–55° throughout, followed by 300 m of rock face terminating at 6650 m at the exit to the summit plateau. While falling stones and ice avalanches frequently came down on either side of our route, the direct ascent over the somewhat convex ice-wall appeared to be relatively safe.

In the course of our expedition we had had no knowledge of the outstanding achievement of the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, USA) expedition which

in 1971 succeeded in climbing the s end (left side) of the face. In fact we did not learn of this until our return to Europe. The routes are about 2 km apart.

As the principal difficulties were in the rock wall at the top of the climb, we felt that an 'Alpine-style' ascent, i.e. a solitary assault comprising a number of bivouacs, was too risky. We utilised in all 1400 m of rope about 80 ice and rock pitons and some aluminium rods.

We began our preparations for the climb on 9 July. Wide grass-grown moraine slopes led upwards to the terminal moraine of the Matara glacier at 4900 m. After crossing the lower scree-covered portion of the glacier we set up Camp 1 at 5100 m at the tip of a prominent three-cornered moraine. Some days later we reached the start of the wall at about 5450 m via the crevassed upper Matara glacier, and erected Camp 2 at 5700 m in a large crevasse. We called this camp the Ice Palace and used it as a base for further attacks on the face. Up as far as the Ice Palace the ice-wall was at a relatively low angle, about  $40^\circ$ , so that we only utilised fixed ropes for the last 100 m. From 16 to 22 July we took turns in working on the ice-face above Camp 2. The higher we climbed the steeper and harder became the ice. Just below the transition from ice to rock the angle was  $60^\circ$  and the surface was flat and smooth. On 22 July we descended to Base Camp for a two-day rest.

Erich, Sepp, Roland, Christoph and I left the Ice Palace for a bid on the summit. Helped by the fixed ropes we reached the transition from ice to rock by 10am. Our suspicion that the rock face would prove extremely difficult was soon confirmed. The face proved to be technically more difficult and considerably more rotten than, for example, the n face of the Matterhorn, in addition to which it was of course at a great height. We made only very slow progress, having to cope with dangerous climbing of the IV and V grade and heavily iced-up rocks; combined with the cold and some wide projecting ice-balconies which we were forced to circumvent. The route on the rock face led diagonally upwards towards the right for the first three run-outs until it attained the right-hand edge of a 70-m wide ice-field. Several vertical pitches finally led us to the névé wall which terminates the rock face after a ziz-zag course between the ice-balconies.

The way through the rock wall led for about three run-outs diagonally upwards towards the right to the edge of a 70-m wide ice-field, then ascending several steep pitches finally zigzagged between the ice-balconies until it came to the névé wall which topped the face. Erich and I alternately led through and after each run-out ropes were fixed in place. In the course of this ascent Roland's camera was struck by a falling stone and became a write-off. During the evening part of one of the ice-balconies broke away and thundered down over the fixed ropes, fortunately below our stance. Fearing that the ropes might have been damaged by this avalanche, we decided that it would not be advisable to descend by the same route. When night fell we were still about 100 m below the summit. There was no possibility of bivouacking on the face, so we continued our climb with head lamps. Each run-out took about two hours and there were long and tiresome waits in between. At last, fourteen hours after starting up the

face, we climbed out on to the summit platform of Huascarán, 6650 m. We were almost completely exhausted.

A bitterly cold wind was blowing so we rapidly set up a two-man bivouac tent and the five of us crowded into it. At daybreak on 26 July we began the descent of the normal route down the w face, which was entirely new territory as far as we were concerned. It is therefore not surprising that we strayed into the great ice-fall above the Garganta and were consequently obliged to re-ascend. At last, after considerable expenditure of energy and will power, we reached the Garganta (6010 m), the saddle between the s and n summits of Huascarán. Just below the Garganta Roland tore a ligament in his ankle while leaping over a crevasse. With great difficulty and supporting him on either side we managed to get down to the lower part of the glacier round about midnight, where we made a second bivouac.

On 27 July, Erich and I went down as quickly as possible to the village of Cajabamba in the Santa valley, where we found some very amenable Indians who were willing to climb up to the glacier and assist Roland to the village. Next day we took a truck as far as Carhuas and two days later we again rode up to Base Camp in the Matara valley.

The period of fine weather which had been with us for so long was coming to an end. We climbed up the face again to 6200 m, brought down all the equipment and closed down the camps. On 8 and 9 August we made a reconnaissance into the Cancahua valley to have a look at the e face of Chopicalqui (6400 m) which was our next objective. However, by this time we were all tired out, Roland was injured and I had a cold. In view of all this we had to give up any idea of trying it.