



## AAC Publications

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### **Acopan Tepui, In Gold Blood**

Venezuela

Pat Goodman, José Miranda, and I first attempted this line in February 2012 with a Jonny Copp Foundation Grant, completing four pitches, but Pat and José both got injured. We felt some serious voodoo from the wall, and so decided to come back in a year and see if the tepui gods would forgive us.

February 2013 wasn't a whole ton better—the Pemon people rose up against illegal mining going on in the jungle and kidnapped 40 miners as well as the soldiers who attempted to free them. We cheered them on from our swanky (skanky) hotel room in Ciudad Bolivar, but the uprising shut down all flights to the region for some time. Eventually a pilot agreed to drop us, along with photographer James Q Martin, in Yunek. The chieftain, Leonardo, gave big hugs and laughter as we exited the Cessna on their bush-covered landing strip. They had seen only one tourist party since our visit a year prior—a group of two trekkers. This is rough on the community, as visitors equal dollars and bartering. We had delivered a solar-power system to them in 2012 and brought a new system this time to stop them from relying on the gas generator that powers their small village.

We returned to our route, attempting to find the most beautiful and sensible free climbing, and all summited after a five-day push. After summiting, we attempted to free the two crux pitches. The first of these was pitch two, Pat's lead. He'd worked tirelessly to find a free path through this steep, blank section of immaculate Precambrian sandstone. With three distinct crux sections of V6/7 and runouts of 5.12+ between each, it was totally doable for "The Good-One"—a master of hair-raising headpoints and finicky gear. However, it also had a distinct problem: a pulsing, amber nest of healthy-looking wasps at the crux. None of us was willing to attempt cutting it loose. Pat fired through this section anyway, breathing quiet words of respect: good wasp, pretty wasp, omniscient wasp. He fell higher after breaking a key hold. The voodoo continued. Pat's shoulder was tweaked, and the wasps prevailed. Pitch two awaits a full free ascent (proposed 5.13a).

The second crux, pitch four, was my lead, with 5.12+ wandering through some exciting sections of sparse but solid protection, including a bomber Lost Arrow I had placed a year prior. However, when I reached the pin placement this year, I thought, "What the... Hey, where's the pin!?" Apparently it had come out in Pat's hands the day before. Voodoo, certainly. I kept at it, now 20' out from a flared No. 00 C3 on techy 5.11+ face climbing. I begged the Tepui Voodoo Council for safe passage, and finally entered the well-protected crux: three boulder problems with a series of wild deadpoints. Eventually, all the steep jungle hiking and 400' of free-hanging jumaring caught up with me. I fell just beneath the anchors, above the crux, on our last day, last hour, and last route of my four-year mission to put up first free ascents in the four cardinal directions from my home—north, west, east, and, now, south. I was bummed, but ready to go home to my wife and kids. Someone else can send it. It didn't go free, but I certainly felt free—free to move on, free to enjoy the journey, and free to go home.

Our route In Gold Blood (V 5.12c R A0) climbs 11 pitches (11+, 13a, 12b, 12c, 11a, 11a, 11+, 10b, 10 X, 11+, easy 5th). It is truly an amazing line, with numerous, distinct sections. A big thanks to the AAC and the Jonny Copp Foundation.

## Images

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