



AAC Publications

Illimani (6,439m), south face, first or second ascent

Cordillera Real, Bolivia, South America

For 20 years Argentinian mountain guide Gustavo Lisi has visited Bolivia during the dry season. We know each other, but as I live far from La Paz center, it was sheer coincidence I met him in a shop. Within minutes we'd agreed to make an attempt on Illimani's rarely visited south face.

After a bumpy bus ride we arrived at the small village of Tanin Pata, close to Mina Urania, below the intimidating south face of Illimani. Two days later we were carrying heavy packs up to a camp below the route when we spotted something quite strange. Closer inspection revealed a wheel from a Boeing 727. We then discovered turbines, parts of wings and seats, clothes, a shoe, and large amounts of Crocodile skin. Now we remembered: On New Year's Day 1985, an Eastern Airlines flight with 200 passengers on board disappeared without trace, shortly before landing at El Alto. We had found it, at ca 4,900m, after almost 30 years.

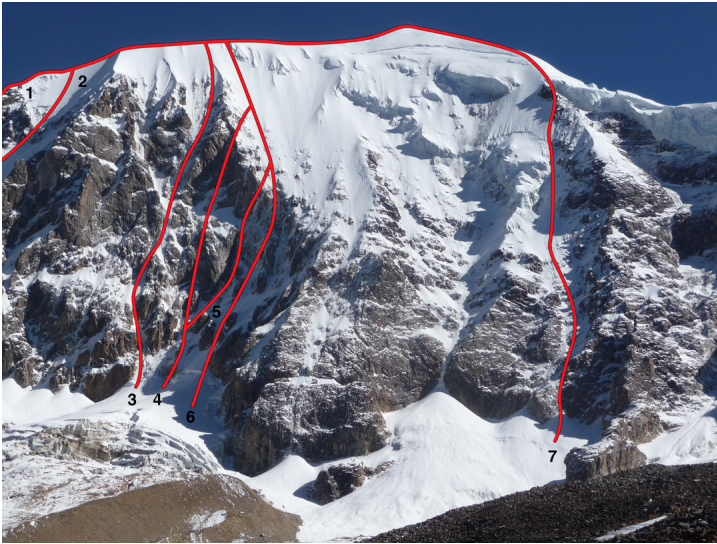
Next morning we set off at 3 a.m. Climbing unroped up a 55° ice slope, we reached a steep goulotte. It gave a 60m pitch with a section of 90° and led to an amphitheater, up which we climbed for 500m. Large amounts of snow made it necessary to belay all the way. Night closed over us as I led the second crux 90° pitch. The ice was lousy and I was unable to place a single screw. As the sun's rays eventually warmed our shivering bodies, the face lay back. We unroped and climbed toward the top on a perfect clear day. It was windy on the final ridge, and we reached the main summit at 4 p.m.

We started down the normal route, heading toward a preplaced cache of gear and food. But it had been stolen. No drink for us and no extra sleeping bag for me. We bivouacked one hour above the Nido de Condores, and next day made it down to Puente Roco base camp; in the latter part of the descent we were able to suck dribbles of water from the rock with plastic tubes. I'd climbed my third route on the south side of Illimani since 2009 (ca 1,200m, WI4 R 65-75°).

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Editor's note. When Lisi and Rauch returned to La Paz, guidebook author Alain Mesili was the first to congratulate them on a new route. However, apart from the start, their line is identical to that drawn by Mesili in his books, a route climbed by himself and Christian Jacquier in 1978 and not known to have been repeated. The Jacquier-Mesili line climbs the rock just to the right of the Lisi-Rauch entry goulotte. Subsequently, and in his new guide mentioned above, Mesili has insisted that Lisi and Rauch simply made a repeat of his 1978 route. Conditions on the mountain have undoubtedly changed in the last 35 years, and this line has become more dangerous: Mesili described his route as D- in the first guide, and D+ in the second, with the first 100m mixed, and an average slope angle of 60-75°.

Images



South face of Illimani (6,439m). (1) Southwest ridge (1,450m, III 70°, Dowbenka-Ziegenhardt, 1983, but most probably descended in 1972 by Mesili and Sanchez during the third north-to-south traverse of the three main summits). (2) Nada es Seguro (1,450m, V WI3+, Hendricks-Hendricks-McNeill, 2001). (3) A line claimed to have been climbed in 1972 by Alain Mesili with Nicolas Jaeger (1,200m, TD, WI4 5.5). (4) Puerta del Sol (1,200m, ED1, WI5 R M5, Ichimura-Yokoyama, 2006). (5) Inti Face (600m, TD+, WI5, Satoh-Yamada, 2006). (6) Phajsi Face (1,200m, TD+, WI4+, Satoh-Yamada, 2006). (7) South Face Original (1,200m, D+, 60-75°, Jacquier-Mesili, 1978)



Gustavo Lisi below the exit seracs on the south face of Illimani.

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