



## AAC Publications

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### **Illimani (6,439m), south face, Jach'a Kuntur Ajayu**

South America, Bolivia, Cordillera Real

Of all Illimani's aspects, the south face is perhaps the most beautiful and impressive. This huge wall offers lines of high technical difficulty, through vertical ice runnels and rock. Hidden from general view, it seems inaccessible, but it is not.

A four- to five hour drive from La Paz in 4WD, followed by a four-hour trek along an abandoned road, leads to Mesa Khala mine (4,695m), where you can make camp or stay overnight in the mine. A 3.5-hour trek up the glacier leads to a possible high camp beneath the south face at ca 5,000m. With my brothers Juvenal and Vidal, I followed this approach, but established high camp at 4,700m, one hour from the foot of the face. On this section we passed the wreckage of an Eastern Airlines Boeing 727, which crashed on New Year's Eve 1985. It was really impressive to see the snakeskin luggage, clothes, engine parts, turbines, and cables that have not yet disintegrated. We looked, with respect for the fallen, and with curiosity.

We had needed to wait a long time until we were granted the right to climb the south face of Achachila Illimani ("Grandfather Illimani"), because for my grandparents this mountain was considered a sacred ancestor and a source of power. Knowing it would be useless to use courage and strength without wisdom, we waited a long time until we felt the signs were positive from giant grandfather Illimani.

At 3 a.m. on December 1, 2013, Juvenal and I left high camp. Above the bergschrund, which we crossed by a two-meter ice wall, the slope was well-packed snow of 55-65°. At the top, this slope changed to 75-90°, the rock became variable—sometimes rotten, at other times fairly reliable—and we were forced to climb pitches of delicate snow and ice. These six long pitches were very intricate and time-consuming. There was rockfall, and on more than three occasions our hair stood on end from fright.

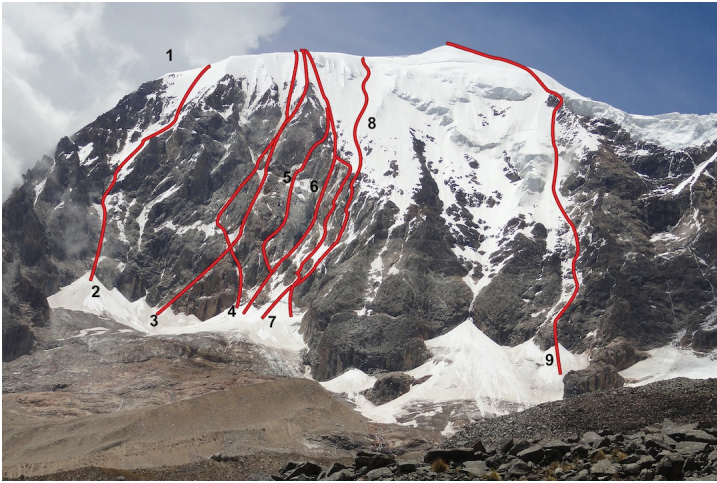
At 12:45 p.m. we finished the mixed section. There was a sense of relief that no more rocks would fall. However, the face's belligerence had not diminished—rather, it had just begun. We now sunk into wet, loose snow and it became very difficult to break trail. It was precarious, and a moment of negligence would prove fatal. Screws would not hold in this terrain, though deadmen buried one meter deep were secure. There was nowhere to stop and wait for a refreeze, so we had to continue. Finally I arrived on the summit ridge at 8:10 p.m. and saw the lights of La Paz. I waited for Juvenal with much excitement, and when he arrived I shouted with joy, *Salimossss!*

We shook hands and ate a little, but also talked about the fact that we were not done yet and should not do anything in a hurry. We finally reached the summit of Illimani at 1:25 a.m. and descended the normal route through the night, meeting Vidal and the 4WD in Pinaya, and arriving back in La Paz mid-morning on the 2nd.

We named the route Jach'a Kuntur Ajayu (Spirit of the Giant Condor), which is the way I saw the mountain from my grandparents' home near Lake Titicaca. We climbed the 1,200m route and descended to Pinaya in a continuous 27-hour push. Difficulties were TD VI WI4 X 5+ M5.

Sergio Condori, Bolivia, translated and adapted by Chris Clarke

## Images



A foreshortened view of the south face of Illimani (6,439m, the highest mountain in the Cordillera Real), immediately prior to the Condori-Condori ascent in 2013. (1) Southwest ridge (ca 1,450m, III 70°, Dowbenka-Ziegenhardt, 1983, and most probably descended in 1972 by Mesili and Sanchez during a north-to-south traverse of the three main summits). (2) Nada es Seguro (1,450m, V WI3+, Hendricks-Hendricks-McNeill, 2001). (3) Hubert Ducroz (1,200m, Patrick Gabarrou, solo, 1988). (4) A line claimed to have been climbed in 1972 by Alain Mesili with Nicolas Jaeger (1,200m, TD WI4 5.5). (5) Puerta del Sol (1,200m, ED1 WI5 R M5, Ichimura-Yokoyama, 2006). (6) Inti Face (600m, TD+ WI5, Satoh-Yamada, 2006). (7) Phajsi Face (1,200m, TD+ WI4+, Satoh-Yamada, 2006). (8) Jach'a Kuntur Ajaya (1,200m, TD VI 5+ WI4 X M5, Condori-Condori, 2013). (9) South Face Original (1,200m, D+ 60-75°, Jacquier-Mesili, 1978, now considerably more serious due to increased risk of serac fall. Repeated in 2012, see AAJ 2013).



A pitch of fragile ice in the steep middle section of Jach'a Kuntur Ajayu.



A steep rock pitch in the middle section of Jach'a Kuntur Ajayu.



A steep mixed groove in the middle section of Jach'a Kuntur Ajayu.



Valley mist rises to envelop the climbers as they negotiate the middle section of Jach'a Kuntur Ajaya.

## Article Details

Author	Sergio Condori, translated and adapted by Chris Clarke
Publication	AAJ
Volume	0
Issue	0
Page	0
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions