



AAC Publications

Nevado Caracol, Concha de Caracol, Puca Punta, traverse

Peru, Cordillera Vilcanota

Puca Punta (5,740m) is an intimidating, steep pyramid of ice and rock. It stands like a sentinel over Jampa Pass, guarding entrance to the inner Cordillera Vilcanota. With other partners, I had already tried climbing it twice, via a chute on the left side of the southwest face. Both times we only made it to the west ridge leading to the summit. On the second climb we had a serious accident when an avalanche caused us to fall 120m into a crevasse. I had been thoroughly defeated by the mountain, but this time my approach would be different: Tom Ryan (U.S.), Luis Crispín (Peru), and I hoped to enchain Nevado Caracol (5,625m), Concha de Caracol (5,640m), and Puca Punta (5,740m) via the long ridge connecting the mountains. We hoped to finish with the unclimbed northwest ridge of Puca Punta.

On May 31 we reached a base camp at ca 4,900m below Jampa Pass on the Ausangate Circuit Trek, below the chain of peaks leading to Puca Punta. We left the tent at 1 a.m. on June 1 to start our climb up the west face of Nevado Caracol. I led the first crux, a 15m section of hard ice (80°). Then Luis took the lead, breaking trail through knee-deep snow up a 45° slope. Higher up we passed a bergschrund and joined the north ridge to the summit of Caracol, passing another short crux of snow and ice (80°). From the pointy summit we walked to the south, dropping 50m to a col, and then walked up easy terrain to the rounded summit of Concha de Caracol. It had taken us four-and-a-half hours to arrive here.

The steep summit of Puca Punta loomed over us just to the southeast. It was now 6 a.m., and Luis and I decided to go for it while Tom waited on the summit of Concha de Caracol. We first descended 100m to the col and then began the intimidating northwest ridge. We found much rotten ice and only a little hard snow. Several sections were vertical, and we barely spoke while delicately passing the cornices that hung over the west face. As we arrived at the top, I saw that the actual summit was just a large flake of ice, about the size of a car, balanced on top. It was too dangerous to stand on it, so I just touched the top with my hand. It took us four hours to climb the final ridge, and we went back the same way we'd come, with Luis down-leading and me cleaning. We reversed the rest of our route, by downclimbing and rappelling, then walked out to Pacchanta that night (200m, TD, AI2).

From my research, the south face of Nevado Caracol has been climbed twice: by an Austrian team in 1957 and Yugoslavs in 1979; Concha de Caracol had been climbed by the south face by a German team in 1972, and in 1966 a German team traversed from Tinki to Caracol to Concha de Caracol.

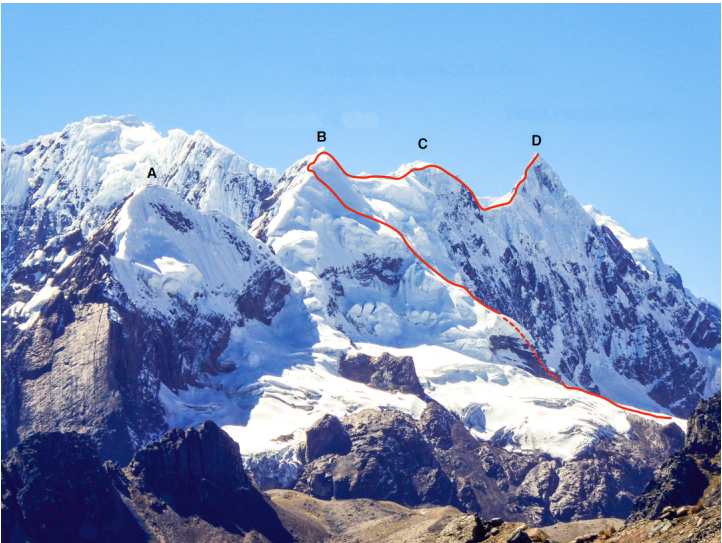
– Nathan Heald, Peru

Editor's note: Puca Punta has been called Choquetecarpo or visa-versa, however, they are separate peaks in separate ranges. Puca Punta is also known as "Pachanta" and is close to Nevado Ausangate in the Cordillera Vilcanota. It was first summited by Harvard University climbers in 1957 by its northeast ridge (approaching from the east by Laguna Ticllacocho). It was then climbed by a French party via the southeast ridge (AAJ 1971). And Yugoslavians climbed the south and southwest faces (AAJ 1981). Choquetecarpo is another mountain, located in the Cordillera Vilcabamba close to Pumasillo. A Swiss expedition (AAJ 1960) was the first to summit this peak. Then New Zealanders climbed its technical east ridge in 1962, a climb that was repeated most recently by Canadians Amelunxen and Easton (AAJ 2004). As with the all reports from the Vilcanota/Vilcabamba, note that the government-issued maps have many errors and some peaks have been known by numerous names throughout the years.

Images



Luis Crispin and Nathan Heald near the summit of Puca Punta.



The peaks of (A) Tinki (B), Nevado Caracol, (C) Concha de Caracol, and (D) Puca Punta as viewed from Jampa Pass. The line of the 2013 traverse is shown.



Luis Crispín winds up the corniced ridgeline toward the summit of Puca Punta



A more direct view of the start of the traverse via Nevado Caracol.



Choquetecarpo (pictured right) as seen from Pumasillo. The east ridge forms the right-hand skyline.

Article Details

Author	Nathan Heald
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	200
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions