



AAC Publications

Nevado Tucarhuay, South Face Direct

Peru, Cordillera Vilcabamba

In 2013, Edwin Espinoza and I climbed the lower east summit (5,700m) of Nevado Tucarhuay (5,943m GPS). The main, western summit remained a challenge to me. Lionel Terray called this peak Pico Soray, and the locals call it Humantay, but on the Peruvian IGN map it is labeled Tucarhuay. [See AAJ 2014 for further clarification and photos of previously climbed routes.] The climbing history on this peak is short, with Terray and party making the first ascent in 1956 up the north side, and with its last known ascent by a Japanese expedition in 1968 via its south ridge (AAJ 1957 and 1969). The beautiful, triangular west face was first attempted by a Japanese team in 1980; it still awaits its first route (AAJ 1981). At the foot of the peak's south face is a glacial lagoon that tourists visit; a local rancher named Antonio Huari told me he once had to recover the bodies of two climbers who had perished attempting this face.

After acclimatizing on the normal routes up Pumahuanca (5,350m) and Cerro Soray (5,428m), Duncan McDaniel and I decided to try the south face of Tucarhuay. We spent the night of April 28 in Soray Pampa, having left a gear cache in the meadow west of the lagoon. On the 29th we hiked up to our cache and then gained 600m up to a camp on some ledges below the south ridge (ca 4,800m). At 11 p.m. on the same day we set out for the summit with a stove but no bivy gear. We easily gained the glacier below the icefall formed by the south ridge, but had to navigate immense seracs. Above the seracs, we traversed west underneath the south face, looking for runnels that would lead directly to the summit. We alternated leads up 30m pitches of 80–90° ice. At one point the angle lessened to 70° for a couple of pitches of mixed climbing.

It began snowing in the afternoon, and the rapid accumulation became dangerous. I could see what lay ahead: mixed climbing with loose snow covering it all, topped by hanging cornices that stretched up to the summit. We decided to look for a hole under one of the cornices to bivy and found a perfect, rocky roof to protect us. We laid out our ropes and gear on the icy floor and prepared tea while watching the last golden rays fade from the ancient Inca heartland. The long night was clear, with lights shining from towns in the valleys below. I would awake at times and look at them, almost forgetting about the shivering cold at 5,800m. As morning came on May 1 we began to stir into action. The sun would not touch us here.

At 6:45 a.m. we left the ledge, mixed climbing up runnels covered by fresh, loose snow. Two pitches later, we reached a large, hanging cornice. Dangerous simul-climbing followed over loose snow, brittle ice, and airy cornices—it felt like I was standing on clouds. The lip onto the final summit block was overhanging rime, in which I had to cut a gap to pull myself over. I could see the final summit 30m higher. As I got to the top, the cloud level was rising all around. The summit was about the size of a volleyball, so I straddled the ridge just below it. I was out of protection. Duncan fell as he pulled over the lip onto the summit block, but I held it. It took three hours to climb the final 150m. It was 9:45 a.m. and the GPS read 5,943m.

I made a V-thread below the summit and we made 11 rappels. On the last rappel we core-shot a rope, and on the final downclimb a bus-size block of ice fell from a serac. Duncan went ahead, and I finally made it to the tent about 7 p.m.

Summary: South Face Direct (1,000m, TD+ AI4) on Nevado Tucarhuay (5,943m), Cordillera Vilcabamba,

by Nathan Heald (Peru) and Duncan McDaniel (USA), April 30–May 1, 2015.

Nathan Heald, Peru

Images



Duncan McDaniel leading steep ice on the south face of Nevado Tucarhuay.



Duncan McDaniel on the upper south face of Nevado Tucarhuay.



Descending the south face of Nevado Tucarhuay.



The south face of Nevado Tucarhuay, seen from the air.



Duncan McDaniel at a hanging belay, just after sunrise, on the south face of Nevado Tucarhuay.



Ice tools planted in the summit of Nevado Tucarhuay.



Duncan McDaniel and Nathan Heald straddle the summit of Nevado Tucarhuay.



The South Face Direct (1,000m, TD+ AI4) on Nevado Tucarhuay.

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