



AAC Publications

Nevado Halancoma, West Face (Not to Summit)

Peru, Cordillera Urubamba

On June 28, Andres Marin and I drove from Cusco to Ollantaytambo. From here we continued up a paved highway (28B) that goes up a steep valley, with seemingly endless switchbacks, to a pass called Puerto Malaga and then down the other side to the large town of Quillabamba. Our goal was Nevado Halancoma (5,367m).

We started our approach to Halancoma at the largest left-turning switchback beyond the 117km marker, at about 3,900m. Our approach began up a steep, grassy valley with a stream coming down the middle, a waterfall on the left, and another stream cascading down incredibly steep grassy slopes to the right. Near the base of this stream on the right, we found a trail that ascended the hillside for almost 700m to gain a ridge crest (4,570m), where we got our first view of the west face of Halancoma. We had hoped that the descent of the far side of the ridge would be easy, but cliffs made it difficult to determine the best way down and we traversed for some time. (On our return trip it was more obvious: We followed a game trail that climbed a narrow gully to the ridge crest.) It took us five hours from the ridge to reach a lake camp below the west face at 4,650m.

The next morning we were up at 4:30 a.m. and began stumbling our way up the mass of boulders, steep scree, and rock slabs to reach the toe of the glacial ramp we planned to climb. The ramp was not any steeper than about 50°, so we chose to climb unroped. We roped up for the final 20m to the summit ridge, as this involved mixed rock and ice climbing. The rock was so broken and brittle that we debated climbing it at all. However, I convinced Andres to lead it, and 30 minutes later we were in the sunshine on the ridge crest of Halancoma, about four hours after leaving camp.

The main summit of Halancoma was a few hundred meters to the south and not much higher than where we were, but the thought of going there and possibly not finding good protection or even getting our rope cut deterred us. We found a large block to sling and began rappelling, retracing our ascent route, with a number of V-thread anchors along the ramp. We arrived back at camp around noon, packed up, and arrived back at the highway by about 4:30 p.m.

Our climb was 700m, 50° AI2 5.5 and similar to climbing the north face of Mt. Sneffels in Colorado via its Snake Couloir.

– Brad Johnson, USA, with additional information from Nathan Heald

Editor's note: Nevado Halancoma has two summits; its main summit is the south summit (5,367m) and the north summit is estimated to be slightly lower (5,300m). There has been some confusion between the peaks known as Halancoma and Huacratanca (5,000m), which is located just to the southeast. Additionally, Halancoma has also been called Helancoma or Alancoma. Local climber Nathan Heald believes that both the south and north summits of Halancoma were first reached by Piero Gighlione in 1953, when he also climbed Huacratanca. The route up the north face (F/PD) has become popular with local groups. The south summit has seen fewer ascents: The east face was climbed in 1981 by Tom Hendrickson and John Saunders; Peruvian climbers Cesar Cahuana and Alfredo Zuniga traversed from north to south peak along the ridge between the two peaks in 2015; **lastly**, Peruvian climber Coqui Galvez climbed a new route solo up the south face (PD, 55–65°) in 2016.]

Images



The 2016 route climbed by Colqui Galvez up the south face of Halancoma (5,367m).



The Johnson-Marin up the west face of Halancoma (5,367m), located in the Cordillera Urubamba, northwest of Cusco.



Nevado Veronica (5,822m), the highest in the Urubamba, on the left, and Halancoma Peak on the right, seen from the south.



The west side of Nevado Halancoma from Nevado Veronica, showing the 2016 ascent. The high peaks in the left background are (left to right) Chainopuerto (5,650m), Sahuasiray Norte (5,818m), and Sahuasiray Sur (5,770m).

Article Details

Author	Brad Johnson
Publication	AAJ
Volume	59
Issue	91
Page	0
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions