



AAC Publications

Huallomen, Southwest Face, Via del Querubín

Bolivia, Cordillera Real, Condoriri Group

On the first day of May, Pacifico Machaca (Bolivia) and I climbed a partial new route on the impressive southwest face of Huallomen (a.k.a. Wyoming, 5,463m). The previous afternoon we had hiked to Chiarkhota base camp, and because of recent snowfall we stayed in the refuge that has recently been built there by locals. We left around 3 a.m. and started our approach through about 20cm of new snow. We hiked around Laguna Huallata and reached the base of the southwest face at dawn.

The southwest face of Huallomen. (1) Route climbed by an Argentinian-Chilean team in 2017. This line was dubbed Canaleta del Angel by Alain Mesili in a 2004 guidebook. (2) Mesili Route (1976). (3) Via del Querubín. Photo by Alexander von Ungern

In the initial section of the main gully we struggled through short sections of knee- to hip-deep snow, which slowed us considerably. Crossing the first rock band was harder than expected—we overcame this by a short, flared, slightly overhanging crack. The following two pitches were much easier: 55–60° fresh snow, where the belay anchors were deadmen backed up with a piton. We finally reached the main steep section of the gully, where the Canaleta del Angel (see editor's note below) slants up left and the real climbing begins.

Unfortunately, the snow from the rainy season had not transformed into solid ice and I was unable to find safe placements for ice screws. I therefore decided to continue to the right of the existing route, hoping for easier terrain. Given the wintry conditions and the bad quality schist (the strata on this face is downward sloping, making the cracks poor for nuts or pitons), I had a hard time finding good protection, and the climbing was not as easy as hoped, with cruxes of dry tooling on mostly bare rock.

After nine pitches we reached the ca 5,400m shoulder south of the summit and descended from there along the normal route on the opposite side. It was already dark and my dear partner was in a hypoglycemic state. (I felt only partially responsible for this—Pacifico had carried an entire cheese to the top, forgetting he had it.) We named our new finish Via del Querubín (“Cherub Route,” TD+), referring to the existing route Canaleta del Angel and the fact that, despite poor pro, everything went well.

– Alexander von Ungern, *Andean Ascents*, Bolivia

Editor's Note (Updated in May 2022): On September 15, 1976, Alain Mesili claimed a new route on the southwest face of Huallomen. In his 1984 guidebook, *La Cordillera Real de los Andes-Bolivia*, Mesili describes and marks this route as the line of (2) on the accompanying photo-diagram, and grades it D (400m, 60° with short steeper sections). The relatively uniform snow/ice couloir that diagonals left to the summit is very visible under good snow cover, and at the time of Mesili's ascent a broad snowfield led up to its base.

Since then, glacial recession has made the route harder, and Yossi Brain, who marks the same line in his 1999 guidebook, estimated the difficulties at ED1 UIAA V+ 85°. This grade assessment comes from the 1996 ascent by Jason Currie and Mark Ryle (U.K.). The first pitch, which the pair guessed had been a benign snow slope before the glacier receded, gave technical mixed climbing with almost no protection. The slanting ramp/couloir above was steeper than expected, covered in unconsolidated snow, and again

lacking in protection. The finish—a loose blocky wall—was like climbing a Jenga tower. In that year conditions throughout the range were relatively dry, and the descent of the backside of the mountain involved scree-covered ledges and no snow. Currie and Ryle found the route several orders of magnitude harder than the west face of Huayna Potosí, which they had completed earlier the same trip.

Later, in his 2004 guide, Mesili moves his line to the position of (1), a harder gully system that he called Canaleta del Angel. This line is known to have been attempted in recent years, and in late July or early August of 2017, Alex Albornoz, James Baragwanath, and Mati Korten (Argentina and Chile) climbed it in a 25-hour day, rating it ED1/2. Currie and Ryle, looking at the line of Canaleta del Angel in 1996, thought it would be at least as difficult as their route. — Lindsay Griffin

Images



Pacifico Machaca on the first steep pitch of the Via del Querubín on the southwest face of Huallomen. The ice and snow on this section and above were poorly formed and unconsolidated.



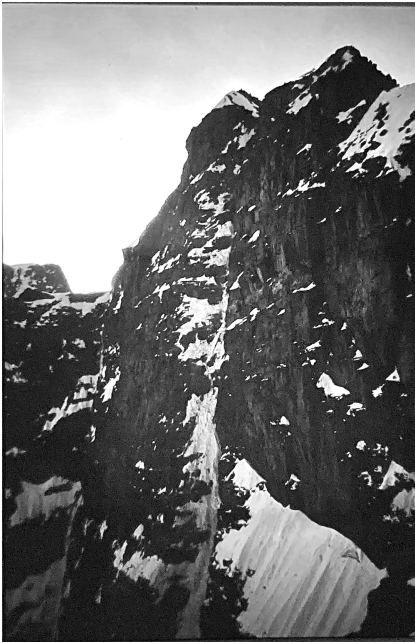
The southwest face of Huallomen. (1) Route climbed by an Argentinian-Chilean team in 2017. This line was dubbed Canaleta del Angel by Alain Mesili in a 2004 guidebook. (2) Mesili Route (1976). (3) Via del Querubín. The peak's normal route is on the far side.



Pacifico Machaca climbing one of the harder pitches on the Via del Querubín variant on the southwest face of Huallomen. (1) Part of the route Canaleta del Angel. (2) An ice pillar—thought too fragile to attempt on the day—leading into the unclimbed gully that rises directly to the col between the main summit and south shoulder.



The start of the 1976 Mesili Route on the southwest face of Huallomen, as seen in 1996.



Looking across the southwest face of Huallomen in 1996 to the line that would become Canaleta del Angel.

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