



AAC Publications

Illampu, Chachacomani, and Chearoco Groups, Various First Ascents

Bolivia, Cordillera Real

From May 25 to June 25, my husband, Antoine Trichot, and I climbed seven routes in the Cordillera Real, most of them new, and a few to summits that may have been unclimbed. For me, first ascents had long been a dream.

Only 48 hours after arriving in La Paz, we headed for the Chachacomani region, where we discovered several lines we had not seen on Google Earth during our planning. Our first objective was a long rocky crest, the northwest ridge of Peak 5,600m (16°1'35.38"S, 68°21'39.94"W). On June 1, from a camp at 4,750m, we approached over scree and up a short snow gully to reach the crest from the south, then for the next six hours followed it on mostly quality granite of moderate difficulty to a finish over steep snow and mixed terrain. From the summit we descended north into a different valley, lost time trying to find the best way through moraine, and only made it back to the tent after dark. We named the peak Cerro Llama Blanco y Negro and graded our route D- F4+.

Our next objective was the magnificent south ridge of Jakoceri (5,910m), which at the time we believed to be unclimbed. Leaving from a high camp at 5,250m on June 3, we followed the ridge from its very beginning. [Previous ascents, reported in AAJ 2017, gained the ridge higher up from the west.] The snow was deep and unconsolidated; the crux was a very exposed slab, which sported a rappel sling. [The slab lies on the original route; the sling was likely left by Ecuadorians who descended the ridge after an ascent of the southwest face; see AAJ 2017.] The upper snow slope leading to the south top proved unclimbable, so we took to rock on the flanks and used our dry-tooling skills to make progress. We reached the south top at 4 p.m., 10 hours after leaving the tent, and followed the elegant, sharp ridge northwest to the north summit. From there we continued in the same direction, descending to the 5,800m Jakoceri-Chachacomani col. From the south top to this point had required constant concentration and effort, but now we were able to head more easily southwest down the glacier to our tent. We graded our first integral ascent of Jakoceri's south ridge TD- 4+ M5.

We then moved to Cocoyu in the northern Real, and after two days of hiking up boulder fields and glacier, established a base camp at 5,350m on the east side of the Illampu massif. Our original plan had been to try a new route on the east face of Illampu, but we were drawn to what appeared to be a relatively straightforward yet elegant 700m line up the southeast face and pillar of Pico del Norte (6,050m), a summit on which we had no information. Ice too thin to protect, run-out dry tooling, strenuous climbing, nerve-wracking gusts of wind, and a long and complex descent in the dark—it was a climb we'll well remember. [The French climbed the first half of the 1972 Mesili Route (Arias-Bathelemy-Grange-Khern-Mesili, 1972, TD) and the upper half of the classic Bettembourg Pillar (Bettembourg-Chaud-Mesili, 1982, D+); they graded this combination TD+ WI4 R M5+ and took 12 hours to reach the summit on June 11.]

After a day in camp sitting out a windstorm, we headed for the beautiful east-southeast ridge of Pico Esperanza (5,760m). It soon became difficult: mixed climbing to one side of the crest, fine dry granite on the other. While examining the route with binoculars, we had spotted a 25m wall on the crest that obviously looked difficult. When we arrived beneath it, our fears proved well grounded: It was a vertical compact wall with a single thin crack. With just a few small cams, nuts, and pitons, it was impossible for us, and after exploring both left and right we had no option but to rappel off the ridge to the glacier on the north side. We regained the crest somewhat higher and followed straightforward terrain to the summit. The climb had taken eight hours from the foot of the ridge, had a vertical gain

of around 250m, and was D 4+ M4. After enjoying a marvelous sunset, we made our way down, only to be hit by another windstorm. It was quite a struggle to get back across the complex glacier to our tent. Next day we had an equally exhausting time descending boulders, scree, and steep grass, then finally making a river crossing, all without a single break in eight hours for fear of missing our prearranged transport.

After two days' rest on the shores of Lake Titicaca, we embarked on our third and last trip into the mountains. We planned for seven days in the Chearoco area, upgrading our logistics so that we had mules for the first day of the approach, and then help carrying our loads up to the glacier on the second day. On June 18, from a camp at 5,200m at the base of the glacier that runs up the west side of Chearoco (6,104m), we went to the broad west face and at 5,500m started up a west-facing rock pillar leading to a 5,870m shoulder on the normal route. We climbed this 370m pillar at 4+ and were then faced with a dilemma: Should we take it easy and head up the standard route to the summit or should we risk downclimbing to the left to reach a glacier terrace at 5,720m below the southwest face of Chearoco, the latter, due to its orientation, we hoped might be in good condition? We opted for the descent to the southwest face.

Depressingly, after 30 minutes we were struggling in deep snow. However, once we climbed onto the steeper southwest face, conditions were close to perfect. The 300m face (45–60° M4) led to an exposed snow arête and finally the summit. We headed down the normal route and the lower southwest face variant (AD+, possibly first climbed in 1993), under stunning sunset light, taking as direct a line as possible to our tent. Overall, our ascent route combination was D+ and took seven hours from the start of the rock pillar to the main summit. [Their upper southwest face line is likely to have been climbed before: The "southwest face of Chearoco" was reportedly climbed in 1969, but there are no details, and in 1982 Argentinians climbed the "50–55° southwest face" to Chearoco's south summit, but again their description is vague.]

Ambitiously, we wanted to complete two more ascents before leaving. On June 20 we aimed for a sharp, east-facing granite ridge rising to a pointed pyramid summit opposite the west face of Chearoco. It gave high-quality rock climbing to the summit (350m, D/D+ 5, five hours), which we measured at 5,750m and named Pirámide Aymara (15°58'3.88"S, 68°25'31.76"W). Steep downclimbing of the southwest ridge led to a col from where it was possible either to return to base camp or continue south along the ridge. We chose the latter and crossed several tops, for which we propose the name Picos de la Vuelta, before finally descending snow slopes to the east more or less directly to camp.

The following day, we climbed the central pillar on the south face of a peak we dubbed Pirámide Santos (15°58'49.98"S, 68°25'37.16"W). It was situated lower down the valley, and we had noticed it during the approach to base camp. The difficulties proved higher than anticipated, both on rock (we used rock shoes for the first time on the trip) and mixed. It took eight hours to reach the summit, which we measured at 5,570m. The 470m pillar was graded TD 5 M5. The descent, via a couloir to the east, was surprisingly easier than expected—a good thing, as it was once again dark before we reached camp. [Whether these peaks west of Chearoco were previously unclimbed is difficult to say. In 1978 a team of Italians climbed five summits in this group, but it has not been possible to ascertain the exact location of any of them, reported at the time to be between 5,350m and 5,520m].

More effort was required of us next day, as for six hours we carried our gear across the glacier and up scree to meet our muleteer. This brought an end to our most intense alpine experience. When can we come again?

– Elsie Trichot, Rêves Alpains, France

Images



The northwest ridge of Cerro Llama Blanco y Negro, climbed in 2017 for the likely first ascent. The route ascended the short snow couloir to the notch (N) and continued more or less on the crest to the summit (S), hidden just behind the foreground rock. Descent was via another valley on the far side.



The west side of Chearoco seen from Pirámide Aymara. (1) West pillar of Point 5,870m, the descent from it to the glacier terrace, and the southwest face. (2) Route used in descent from the summit. See also photo in AAJ 2015.



The southeast face of Pico del Norte. The red line is the route combination climbed in 2017: the first half of the 1972 Mesili Route and the second part of the Bettembourg Pillar. The blue lines show the start of the Bettembourg Pillar and continuation of the Mesili Route.



Pico Esperanza from the south, partially hidden behind Gorra de Hielo (summit on far left). The 2017 route up the east ridge is shown.

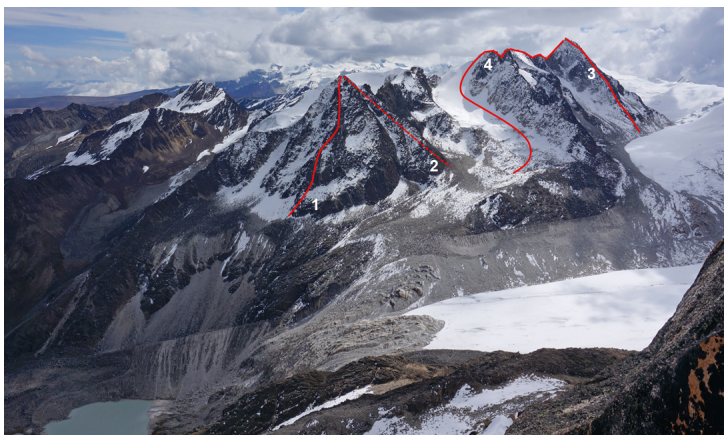


Seen from Chearoco, the east ridge of Pirámide Aymara and the continuation traverse over the

summits to the south.



(1) The central pillar on the south face of Pirámide Santos. (2) Couloir used in descent. A photograph of this pillar, in profile and taken from lower down the main valley, appears in AAJ 2015, where it is identified as "unnamed peak ca 5,500m."



The largely rocky peaks to the west of Chearoco, some of which may have been climbed in 1978 by an Italian expedition. (1) Central pillar on the south face of Pirámide Santos and (2) the descent. (3) East ridge of Pirámide Aymara. (4) Continuation traverse over the Picos de la Vuelta.



Antoine Trichot on the northwest ridge of Cerro Llama Blanca y Negro, with the French pair's next route seen behind: the integral ascent of the south ridge of Jakoceri (pointing toward the camera) and subsequent traverse of the summit ridge.



Elsie Trichot on the west pillar of Chearoco.



Antoine Trichot on the summit ridge of Chearoco. Behind is the rocky ridge traverse over the Picos de la Vuelta, climbed in 2017, while in the far distance is Lake Titicaca.



Elsie Trichot on the east ridge of Pirámide Aymara.

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