



AAC Publications

Charquini and Milluni, Various Towers and Needles

Bolivia, Cordillera Real

On the west ridge of Charquini (5,392m), about 800m away from the summit and maybe 100m lower, stand a few towers and needles. Most of these have been climbed by their easy west flank, but several have impressive northeast faces, and are connected by a relatively easy but exposed ridge. Rodrigo Lobo and I first saw these towers while sport climbing around Zongo Pass. [Other local climbers have noticed these needles of good granite with protectable cracks, but remark that the drive, combined with a long approach on foot to a relatively high altitude, probably explains why they have not received much attention.]. In August and September, we stayed a month with a sheep farmer and his family at around 4,800m, just before the road drops towards the lowlands.

One morning we got up early and walked up to the First Tower, the one nearest Charquini. We started our climb at the steepest section of rock on the left side of the northeast face and followed a system of corners and cracks. These led to a picture-perfect crack through a roof that finished a few meters left of a huge rock sticking out from the summit area and forming a weird overhang. Rodrigo led this pitch. Some sections were overhanging, and disconnections meant you had to change from crack to face climbing. Protection is good—the hard section is a clean Camalot 2 crack, 10–15m long—and the grade 6c–7a. It is the most beautiful crack pitch I've ever climbed.

From the top of this tower, we followed the easy ridge west to the Second Tower, where an impressive crack ascended the northeast flank. Face climbing, then an offwidth, and finally a steep arête led to the top (40m, 6b+).

We continued west, climbing over several more towers. The further we progressed, the more the rock quality deteriorated, but we continued over all the towers—the First, Second, and Fifth have potential for more routes—and returned to our accommodation in the dark.

Later, I returned to the First Tower alone and climbed its east ridge. The hardest part was 5c, but most of the route was somewhat easier.

I also made possibly the first solo ascent of the south ridge of the most southerly (ca 5,300m) of the four Milluni summits. There were three pitches of 5, but the rest is easier. I took no rope or harness and downclimbed the rappels on the normal but complicated route on the east ridge. The south ridge is highly recommended and well protected. It was supposed to have been climbed first in the 1970s by Alain Mesili but appears to be rarely repeated.

Rodrigo and I also tried a short, eye-catching, overhanging needle on the ridge leading to the highest of the Milluni summits. We reached the needle via three pitches of fine crack climbing up to 6a+. However, our attempt to climb the final needle by a weird dihedral failed after several hours of attempts. We turned to an easier option and climbed it at 6b.

The classic traverse of the Milluni summits isn't done very often. The rappels are now equipped with bolts, though they are difficult to spot.

— Robert Rauch, Bolivian Tours

Images



Robert Rauch climbs into the sun on the initial crack of the Lobo-Rauch Route on the northeast face of the Second Tower, Charquini west ridge.



The northeast face of the First Tower on the west ridge of Charquini. The Lobo-Rauch Route climbs a crack system on the left side of the face leading directly to an exit just left of the prominent overhanging cowl. The Rauch solo route, the east ridge, followed the left-hand arête.



Robert Rauch above the roof on the crux 6c–7a pitch, northeast face of the First Tower, Charquini west ridge.



Robert Rauch moves into a layback crack on the lower northeast face of the First Tower, Charquini west ridge.



The Second Tower on Charquini west ridge. The Lobo-Rauch Route (about 40 meters) climbs the second crack from the left to reach the left edge at a platform a little above half-height. It then follows the sharp arête to finish.

Article Details

Author	Robert Rauch
Publication	AAJ
Volume	63
Issue	95
Page	
Copyright Date	2021
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions