



AAC Publications

Ocshapalca, South Face, Polish Route

Peru, Cordillera Blanca

In August, Damian Bielecki and I climbed a partial new route on the south face of Ocshapalca (5,888m). We had initially targeted an unclimbed wall in the Honda Valley. Although our hopes were enormous, the local community prevented us from entering the valley (until recently, there was a gold mine in the area). Thus, on August 6, we took a taxi to our “plan B” in the Llaca Valley with the intention of repeating the American Direct on Ocshapalca. However, the first thing that caught our eye was an outstanding rock pillar to the left; the pillar is to the left of the summit and the central face that diagonals from right to left. [Editor’s note: This pillar is just left of the Swiss-Canadian route (Balmat-Banderet-Ouellet, 1982); later records incorrectly described this line as the “French” route. It is likely the 2021 Polish line shares some terrain with the upper portion of the 1982 route.]

We left our camp at 3:30 a.m. on August 7, reaching the base of the pillar by 7 a.m. The route began with ice runnels and great quality mixed climbing offering rock protection. After four pitches of aesthetic climbing, we dug a snow tunnel to gain the true crest of the ridge. From here, the climbing looked unimposing; however, two pitches with sections of steep ice (to 85°) gave us full satisfaction. Eventually, we reached exposed, smooth rock slabs about halfway up the pillar, where protection did not seem possible to allow climbing the pillar directly.

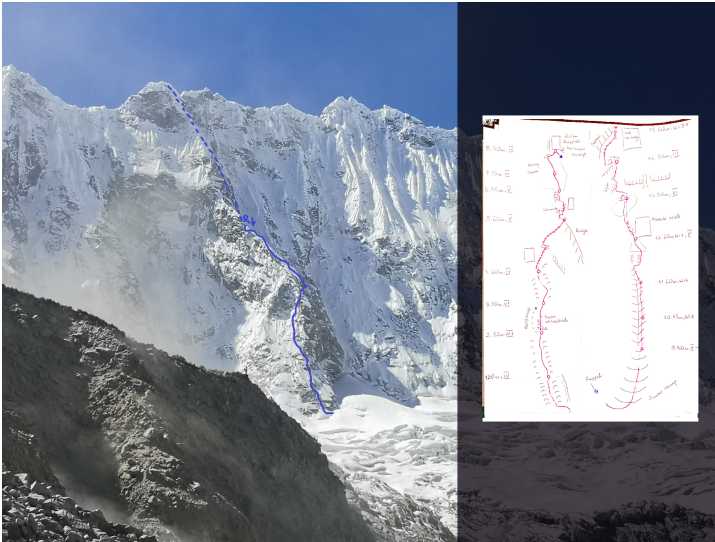
We decided to rappel 20m to our right to reach a snow and ice couloir inset from the pillar; it looked possible to take this couloir to the summit ridge. [This is likely the same couloir followed to the ridge by the Swiss-Canadian team in 1982.] It was 3 p.m., and only three hours of daylight remained. We simul-climbed for about 100m, then led three pitches on mostly good ice but with some difficult sections. Eventually, we reached another rock barrier, which looked difficult but offered good protection (M6).

From here, terrifying seracs and rock hang-fire appear almost at your fingertips. Two more full pitches brought us to the ridge by 9 p.m. On the second of these, we ascended a beautiful chimney with a serac forming one wall and rock the other. We ended our route (850m, ED1 WI4+ AI4 M6) along the west ridge, atop the large serac crowning the pillar.

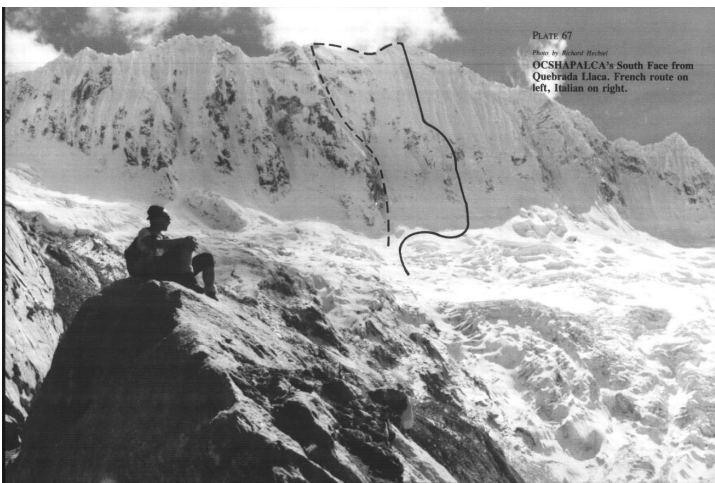
Although we planned to descend the ridge west towards Janyaraju, it looked complex and dangerous. We instead made 12 rappels down our general route, seven from V-threads (which shows that the wall still has good ice conditions despite the effects of climate change in this range). We reached our tent again at 7:30 a.m. on August 8.

— Tomek Olszewski, Poland

Images



The south face of Ocshapalca showing the 2021 route (850m, ED1 WI4+ AI4 M6) climbed by Damian Bielecki and Tomek Olszewski from Poland. It is unclear how much terrain the 2021 Polish route shares with the upper portion of the 1982 Swiss-Canadian route.



The south face of Ocshapalca showing the Balmat-Banderet-Ouellet (Swiss-Canadian, 1982) route, on the left, and Cambon-Francou-Grassi (Italian, 1983) route on the right. The American route climbed by Richey-Blatherwick (1981) is just left of the Italian route.

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