



Chachacomani, Northeast to Southwest Traverse Via Complete Northeast Ridge

Bolivia, Cordillera Real

On August 20, Fiona Tummon (Dutch/Irish, resident in Switzerland) and I, with a driver, left La Paz at 5 a.m. Before reaching the little village of Peñas, we took the road to Laguna Khara Khota and then over the Paso Mullu, which crosses the Cordillera Real at an altitude a little over 5,000m. A long descent took us to the village of Amaguaya at 3,600m. We then drove up the valley to the northwest, reaching an altitude of 3,800m before stopping at 15°56'47.63"S, 68°17'7.28"W, five and a half hours after leaving La Paz.

We hiked up a valley to the southwest for four and a half hours to reach the lake of Leche Khota (4,500m on IGM 5946-III). Our packs were heavy, but we persevered for another hour and camped on a fine, white sandy beach, close to a stream just below 4,750m (15°59'16.84"S, 68°20'53.82"W). Our goal was the unclimbed lower rocky section of the northeast ridge of Chachacomani (6,074m), and we decided not to get up too early the following morning, so that we could enjoy the first rays of sunshine when we touched rock.

Reaching the glacier leading to the col at the start of the ridge proved a real ordeal. We were forced to cross a huge, very unstable boulder field left behind by the rapidly retreating tropical glacier. However, the granite on the ridge was of excellent quality, with sublime views of the neighboring glacier-covered summits and the cloud-covered Amazon basin sublime. The climbing probably felt a little more difficult than it was because we carried food, bivouac gear, and high-altitude clothing. We overcame a series of granite needles, overhanging on their far sides, in the middle part of this rocky section. We used counterweight and other "cowboy" rope techniques to rappel quickly, without leaving gear, but at one point managed to get a core shot close to the middle of our rope.

We took care to summit all the gendarmes, needles, and other spires on the ridge and finally reached the snow at around 5,600m, with the afternoon already well advanced. Contrary to expectations, we didn't move any faster now. I had first been introduced to the fun of snow penitents (névé penitentes) a decade ago but had always crossed them while they were still well frozen. I now discovered they become even more tiring when melting and soaking wet, especially in the steeper sections, where we had to repeat the same step several times to bulldoze our way forward.

Around 100m below the summit, we stopped to make some tea and enjoy a spectacular sunset, before reaching the top under a full moon. We then continued to the lower western summit, before heading down toward the north. [Above the rock gendarmes, the snow section of the northeast ridge had been traveled previously, both in ascent and descent, reaching it from either the north or south flank.]

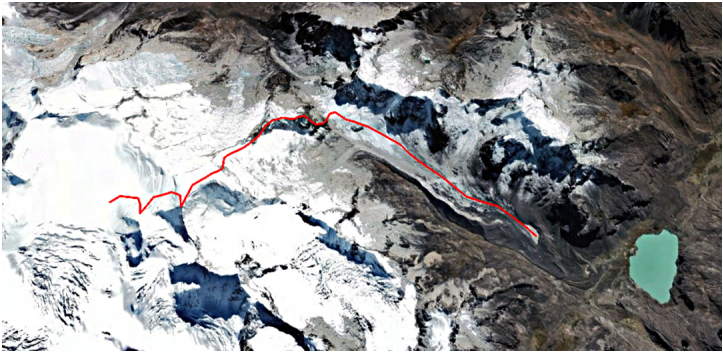
As there hadn't been much traffic on the normal route, because of fewer tourists traveling during COVID-19, we couldn't find a trail. We decided to head straight down. This resulted in two interesting operations rappelling from snow bollards into bergschrunds and then climbing out the other side. Once we finally reached the huge, flat glacier on the western side of the mountain, we continued until we reached some rocky outcrops, where at 10:30 p.m. and still above 5,300m, we bivouacked for a second night, too tired to eat a proper meal. Next day we quickly found our way off the glacier and at 2 p.m. arrived in the little village of Alto Cruz Pampa on the western side of the cordillera.

The idea for this climb had been born earlier in the summer on Jankho Laya, where the south side of Chachacomani formed a backdrop throughout a climb. On July 24, Thomas Wilken and I made a northwest-to-southeast traverse of this rarely climbed peak of 5,545m. We started from the col between Jali Huaycunca (5,392m) and Jankho Laya, and followed the exposed west-southwest ridge of the northwest summit (50°), then traversed southeast from there to the main top.

Continuing in the same direction, the descent involved 45° sections before we left the glacier for the eastern, rocky flank, following major features east to avoid cliffs at the base of the mountain (AD+). This traverse was first made (and in both directions) by the 1973 Austrian expedition that made the second ascent of the mountain. Given how little the peak is visited, it may not have been repeated since. Even by Bolivian standards, the area between Jankho Laya and Chachacomani is wild, with not a single road or mine (abandoned or otherwise) in sight.

– **Alexander von Ungern, Andean Ascents, Bolivia**

Images



The northeast-to-southwest traverse of Chachacomani from the high camp above the blue Leche Khota. After descending northwest from the west summit to the flat glacier basin, Fiona Tummon and Alexander von Ungern descended the normal route south down the glacier, then (off picture) west down a valley toward the altiplano.



Fiona Tummon approximately 100m below the summit of Chachacomani, having climbed the northeast ridge integral. (The last section along a sharp snow arête is visible behind.) A few minutes after this photo was taken, the climbers stopped to make tea and admire the sunset before heading to the summit under a full moon.



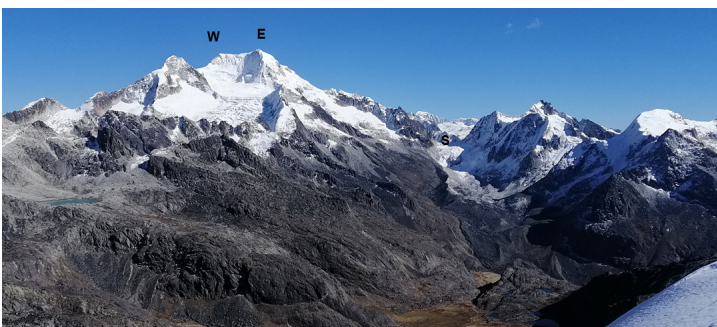
Fiona Tummon downclimbing an offwidth crack on one of the granite spires on the northeast ridge of Chachacomani.



Low on the northeast ridge, Fiona Tummon climbs solid granite with a large pack. Below is the col from where the ridge begins, and behind are two of the three Marias (referred to on the IGM map as Nevado Pulpituna).



Looking up the northeast ridge of Chachacomani from a col between the first two rock peaks. This view is severely foreshortened.



Chachacomani West (W) and the higher East (E) summit, seen from Jankho Laya to the southeast. The northeast ridge starts from the col (S) between Chachacomani and, to the right, the Tres Marias. The Tummon–von Ungern traverse followed the skyline from (S) to the West summit, and then descended the far side. The idea came from seeing this view during Alexander von Ungern's earlier traverse of Jankho Laya, and this photo formed the "topo" during the ascent.



Thomas Wilken about to reach the northwest summit of Jankho Laya. Below is the west-southwest ridge dropping to the col before Jali Huaycunca, which is the summit (steep scree on one side, snow on the other) in the top right corner of the picture.

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