



## Fango Fiesta: The First Ascent of Hualcán's East Face

Peru, Cordillera Blanca

**At the end of June, members of the Slovenian Youth Alpine Team (SMAR)— Denis Arns ek, Matevz Gradisnik, Davo Mihev, Anja Petek, and I—traveled to Peru to sample the climbing.** Aritza

Monasterio, a longtime local, originally from Spain, would join Anja and me to attempt the unclimbed east face of Hualcán (6,122m). I had first thought about attempting a new route up Hualcán during my second visit to Peru, in 2016, but it was not until members of SMAR climbed two new routes on the north side (AAJ 2022) that I got a bit of a kick in the ass. Except for the mine in the Quebrada Huichganga below the east face, there is very little information about that side of the mountain, and the planning was involved. Fortunately, Aritza knew the area well, having climbed new routes on the north face in both 2017 and 2021.

On July 6, Anja, Aritza, and I took a taxi to the highest point possible in the Quebrada Huichganga. From there, we continued up long pastures dotted only by cattle. Just before the end of the valley, we turned right toward the mountain. Bushes and tall grass made progress difficult. Even the steep slope to the lake did not relent. After eight hours, we set up camp. From there, we mind-climbed a way up the wild, serac-filled east face. Except for shell casings left by game hunters, there were no signs of other people, just an endless sky, full of stars.

We woke to a beautiful, clear morning. We were not in a hurry, as we would not climb today. After three hours, we found an ideal spot for our tent at the starting point of our intended route up a ridge-like feature on the left side of the face. The sounds of crunching seracs did not leave us indifferent, nor did they stop us from planning our climb as we gobbled down extra food.

On July 8, the alarm went off at 2 a.m. Sleeping at the tent entrance, I had the honor of preparing breakfast and fluids for the journey. While getting dressed, Aritza did yoga, which made Anja and me laugh. Once on the face, I had a big lump in my throat because I felt it would be difficult to find a way through all the seracs, but Aritza soon found a traverse up and right through the lower ones. The sun burned mercilessly, making the snow quite soft as we progressed to more vertical terrain.

Anja led the steeper section through the rock band, finding a nice passageway, weaving left, then right. This opened the door to a serac at mid-height on the face. Just below the serac, a large rock broke off. Luckily, only Aritza's helmet got hit. This was followed by another physically crushing stretch under the serac, where we found a hole big enough for a bivouac. Aritza and Anja slept in the tent as the night was extremely cold. I was lucky because I always sleep better outside.

Anja was first up on the morning of July 9, impatiently waiting for us to move. The weather had deteriorated considerably. There were no rays of sun, only fog and a few snowflakes. Anja started climbing through the hole in the serac and then along a long, rightward traverse across raw, unconsolidated snow, fighting the breathtaking height.

I took the lead in the upper third of the wall, which involved the typical high-altitude pastime of five steps forward, followed by deep breathing, and repeat. About 100m below the summit ridge, we spotted a potential passage to the top of the wall. Not wanting to bivouac again on the face and its unstable snow, we simul-climbed two pitches. I collapsed on top, fulfilled and overwhelmed with happiness.

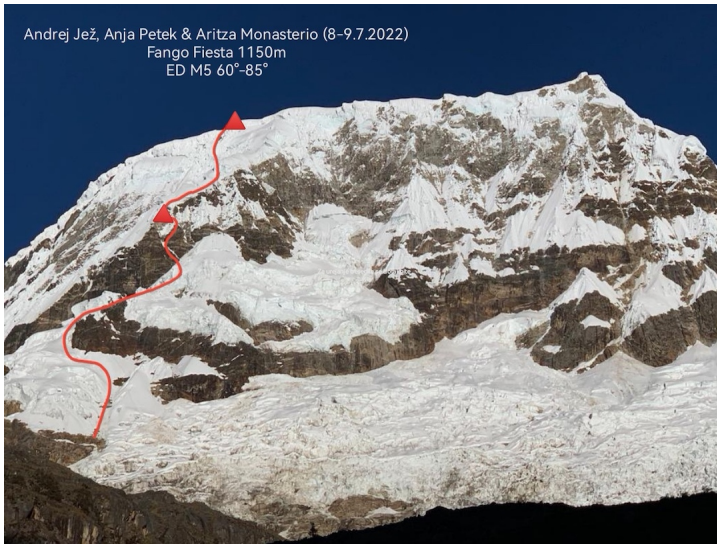
In the dark, we found a spot to set up the tent. We could not eat much due to exhaustion but slept well—at least until the middle of the night, when I got kicked in the head: Aritza was obviously dreaming of something nice. While they slept, I started melting snow to prepare for our long descent, which I knew would be difficult.

In the morning, we were greeted by beautiful sunshine. After walking to the summit, we started down the south ridge, the path of the first ascent, which contains endless seracs and crevasses. At the lower glacial plateau, we made a short stop and saw seracs crashing right where we had walked. Although exhausted, with our minds already on a delicious meal, we managed to make good decisions. We still had a long way through the valley, which would be capped by an adrenaline-filled ride back to Huaraz.

We called our route Fango Fiesta (1,150m, ED M5 60°–85°).

— **Andrej Jež, Slovenia**

## Images



Fango Fiesta (1,150m, ED M5 60–85°) on the east face of Hualcán (6,122m) with the two bivy sites shown.



Anja Petek leading through the central part of Fango Fiesta (1,150m, ED M5 60–85°) on the east face of Hualcán (6,122m).



Aritza Monasterio following an ice runnel on Fango Fiesta (1,150m, ED M5 60–85°) on the east face of Hualcán (6,122m).



The hole-in-the-serac bivouac halfway up Fango Fiesta (1,150m, ED M5 60–85°) on the east face of Hualcán (6,122m).



The team's second bivy, on the summit of Hualcán (6,122m), after climbing Fango Fiesta (1,150m, ED M5 60–85°) on the east face.



Aritza Monasterio, Anja Petek, and Andrej Jež on the summit of Hualcán (6,122m) after climbing Fango Fiesta (1,150m, ED M5 60–85°).

## Article Details

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