



AAC Publications

Nevado Palcaraju, South Face

Peru, Cordillera Blanca

The south face of Nevado Palcaraju (6,274m) and the line of the first ascent of the face. Photo by: Matt Stacy

On May 5, Dane Christensen, Nate Heald, and I set off on a quest to put a route on the unclimbed south face of Nevado Palcaraju (6,274m, -9.367555, -77.370719). It had been a heavy La Niña rainy season, and based on photos that I sent Nate the previous year, we anticipated there would be favorable conditions to climb a direct line from the bottom of the face.

Dane had only arrived in Peru a few days before we began hiking up the Ishinca Valley, and with his acclimatization in mind, we decided on a four-day schedule. On day one, we walked up to Refugio Ishinca at 4,350 meters, and the next day ascended to 5,000 meters, making a comfy advanced base camp only a few meters from the start of the glacier. Taking advantage of an overnight freeze, we broke camp early and started up the glacier to our third and final camp.

We found snow only as deep as our ankles and a relatively safe path beneath the forbidding walls of Palcaraju Oeste to reach a flat bench just below the large basin under Palcaraju's south face. We arrived at Camp 1 (5,600m) at 11 a.m., and neither Dane nor I felt well. The combination of Dane having had food poisoning a week before he arrived in Peru and his inadequate acclimatization started to take effect, and his condition worsened during the day. After a brief discussion, Dane decided that it would be in his best interest to go back to our moraine camp to rest while Nate and I made an attempt at the route. It was disappointing to see him go, but we were pleased he'd made it as far as he did, given his circumstances. Nate and I rested for a few hours then began ascending from our camp to the upper basin around 2 a.m.

To gain the upper basin, we climbed two short snow ramps. The first was about 25 meters of loose 65° snow. The second wall was about 50 meters of similar 65°–70° snow. We soloed both sections. Once we reached the bottom of the basin, it was fairly easy walking on ankle- to calf-deep snow with some breakable windboard.

By about 4 a.m., we started simul-climbing the 500-meter south face, with Nate leading. In the first half of the wall, we encountered a mix of 65° snow and ice. Halfway up, we found a perfect 70°–75° runnel of AI3 ice leading all the way to the summit ridge. We pitched out the final 210 meters of the route, reaching the ridge around 12 p.m. From there it was only a ten-minute walk to the summit—Nate went to the top while I stayed back half a rope length to fly a drone for photos.

We descended the face with about seven rappels, making it back to Camp 1 around 6 p.m. After resting until midnight, we packed up and hiked down to meet Dane at the moraine camp by dawn.

A huge thanks goes to our local support, who make the logistics of climbing here stress-free: Ever, our trusted arriero and porter from the town of Collón, who helped save our legs the first two days; Geremias, our reliable local transport, who is punctual even when we request to be picked up at 5 a.m.; and our caseros at the local market who are attentive and stocked with all the goods we need to fuel our bodies for these big adventures. And lastly to my good friend Jim, who provides us dirtbag climbers a home base in Huaraz to relax and share stories between our time in the mountains.

—Matt Stacy, USA

Images



Drone photo of Palcaraju Oeste and Nevado Palcaraju. The approach to Palcaraju passed under the shaded face in the foreground.



The south face of Nevado Palcaraju (6,274m) and the line of the first ascent of the face.



Dane Christensen and Matt Stacy walking the final meters to Camp 1 on Palcaraju, relieved to get out from under the headwall separating Palcaraju Oeste and the main summit.



Matt Stacy simul-climbing the south face of Palcaraju with the formidable Nevado Huatsán in the background.



Nate Heald leading the final pitch of the south face of Palcaraju to the summit ridge.



Matt Stacy on the summit ridge of Nevado Palcaraju.

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