



AAC Publications

Illimani, South Face, Partial New Route

Bolivia, Cordillera Real

Manu Chance and I left France with the explicit aim of climbing the south face of Illimani (6,438m).

We acclimatized with new routes in the Quimsa Cruz, and then, thanks to the Bolivian mountain guide Aldo Riveros, managed to reach the abandoned mine below the south face of Illimani by 4WD, thereby saving half a day's walk. On June 3 we moved up to the foot of the face, where we bivouacked.

Getting up at 1:30 a.m. to start the climb, we found that our stove would not function. Attempting a route on which we foresaw having to make two bivouacs now seemed "mission impossible." We decided to descend to the mine and see if we could scavenge any plastic bottles to fill with water. Once there we found four bottles that inspired some confidence among a pile of others that were either broken or reeked of petrol.

We hiked back up to our bivouac below the face on June 5, planning to start early the next morning. By now we had modified our objective to a line we felt we could complete in two days. We swapped our stove, fuel, and freeze-dried meals for eight liters of cold water, some energy bars, and powdered chocolate drinks. Comfort would be for another time.

After crossing the bergschrund, the first few pitches were straightforward mixed climbing up to M4. We quickly discovered that the rock did not accept our Friends and were pleased that we'd brought along four rock pitons. Toward the end of the day I led a fine pitch of WI5+, on which I was forced to leave my pack behind. Above, 100m of 50° snow in the couloir led to a possible bivouac site. We spent two hours hacking with our axes before being able to pitch the tent. It was 5,800m and dinner that night was dried fruit and a cold drink of chocolate. Throughout the day we had kept the water bottles on our bodies to prevent them from freezing.

The south face of Illimani showing the two partial new routes climbed in 2015. (1) Por la Vida (2015). (2) Hubert Ducroz (1988). (3) Original Laba-Thackray route (1974). (4) Directa Italiana (2015). Many other routes on this face are not shown.

Next morning we continued left up the snow couloir to the foot of a rock barrier. This had always been a question mark, as the base remained invisible. However, we found the entry to be a beautiful ice smear, which Manu quickly dispatched (WI5). We had now reached 6,000m, and the way ahead was not very difficult, with sections of ice no more than 70°. A final snow slope led to the southwest ridge, which proved long and exhausting. At 5 p.m. we reached the summit, drank our last water, admired the wonderful panorama, then headed down the normal route on the west side in strong wind. We reached the normal route's base camp at 11 p.m., and our Bolivian friends met us with Coca Cola and crackers. Heaven!

Many thanks to Aldo and his fellow guides for the hospitality and advice we received throughout the trip. We named the route Por la Vida (1,200m, WI5+).

Thomas Arfi, France

Editor's note: The two French alpinists climbed the first half of Hubert Ducroz, the line completed solo by Patrick Gabarrou in 1988. Where that route continues up right in a broad snow gully, the French followed a steeper left exit to the southwest ridge.

Images



Emmanuel Chance approaching the WI5 pitch on the second day.



Thomas Arfi above 6,000m, heading for the southwest ridge during the first ascent of Por la Vida.



Thomas Arfi completing the WI5+ pitch before the bivouac.



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