



AAC Publications

Nevado Cayangate IV, West Face

Peru, Cordillera Vilcanota

The Cayangate massif lies 10km northeast of Ausangate in the Vilcanota Range, southeast of Cusco. This chain of five high peaks is aligned and numbered I–V, north to south, comprising a 4.5km-long ridge. The history of these peaks is confusing, due to a few peaks being known by other names. After analyzing *The Andes of Southern Peru* by Piero Ghiglione (1950), I believe the first of the peaks to be climbed was the northernmost, by its northeast buttress—Piero called the peak Cayangate III or Verena. Subsequent expeditions called this peak Cayangate I; it has an altitude of about 6,000m.

In 1953 a German-Austrian team led by Heinrich Harrer made first ascents of many of the big peaks on the western side of the Vilcanota. They first climbed Ausangate, then Colque Cruz, and then Cayangate IV (ca 6,100m), the highest of the Cayangate group. They climbed the northwest icefall to a bivouac at the col between Cayangate III and IV, and then finished on the northeast face to the summit (*Alpine Journal* 1955). The Japanese expedition of 1962 made first ascents of Cayangates II, III, and a subpeak of Cayangate I they called Pico de Victor. (I believe this subpeak was climbed and called Horrorhorn by subsequent expeditions.) It seems the Japanese climbed the northwest sides of these peaks (*AAJ* 1962). The southernmost, and last, peak to be climbed was Cayangate V, in 1966. The German Alpine Club named it Chimbaya, which is also the name of a couple of remote peaks in the Vilcanota (*AAJ* 1967). Even more confusing, the Peruvian IGN map has this peak labeled as Colque Cruz, while the actual Colque Cruz chain is to the north [see report here].

Subsequent ascents of the Cayangate peaks have been few and far between. I will only note those going to the highest summit, Cayangate IV, which is also labeled Collpa Ananta on the Peruvian IGN map. In 1972 a French team made it to within 200 yards of the summit but had to turn back because of an arriving storm. Their report notes this was a new route; however, it appears they more or less followed the line of the 1953 first ascent (*AAJ* 1972). In 1985 four Polish climbers reached the summit by a new route, the technical rock buttress to the right of the northwest icefall. They bivouacked at the col between Cayangate III and IV, just like the Austrians and French before them. The most recent ascent, and the only one on the eastern side of the mountain, was completed in 2006 by three Americans: Chris Alstrin, Andrew Frost, and Mark Hesse. They climbed the technically difficult eastern ridge (about 1,000m of rocky terrain) and finished on the north face to make the third ascent to the summit (*AAJ* 2007).

I have long wondered about the imposing west face of Cayangate IV, and my compadre Luis Crispin and I decided to try it. We invited Caleb Johnson, who was working for the summer in Cusco. We left Cusco on April 18 and met Luis and his younger brother Adan in the village of Marampaki at about 1 p.m. The hike to base camp up the moraine south of Laguna Armacocha took us a few hours with horses. On the 19th we followed the moraine ridge on the west side of the west face icefall. It was easier than I anticipated, and we made good time to the end of the moraine, where it terminates below the shadow of the west ridge. We took in the face and made camp early and comfortably (ca 5,110m).

We left camp at about midnight, and early season gave us the advantage of snow-covered crevasses. We followed the most direct line up the west face, where there was plenty of funneled avalanche debris from the toppling seracs higher up. At the top of the funnel, midway up, the face steepened next to a serac barrier on our left. Here, I led a pitch of WI3 to bring us onto the clean snow slopes

above. Dawn was just breaking, so we stopped to rest a moment and take in the views. Luis led the rest of the wall while Caleb and I simul-seconded up 60–70° snow and ice. Being well acclimated (he lives at 4,300m), Luis made quick work of the trail breaking and brought us up a final 70° snow runnel directly to the summit. It was 11:20 a.m., the clouds had rolled in from the jungle, but there was no wind and it remained pleasant. I took a GPS reading of 6,120m on the summit. Our route was 900m, D+ WI3.

We decided to descend a different route due to the warm day and fear of triggering an avalanche on the slopes we'd just climbed. We downclimbed easier slopes on the upper mountain, to the climber's right of our route—meanwhile it started snowing and reduced visibility. After finding a serac band we debated where to rappel. At this point a river of snow started flowing down on us from above. Nervous, I found a passage through a serac and we rappelled from a V-thread into a rockfall-prone chute where the seracs meet the west ridge. After one more V-thread rappel down the chute we were out of the difficulties. We reached camp by dusk and had just enough energy to get some food down before darkness arrived. Luis, who is always indefatigable, went down to base camp with some equipment and to meet his brother. We all hiked out to Marampaki the next day.

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Images



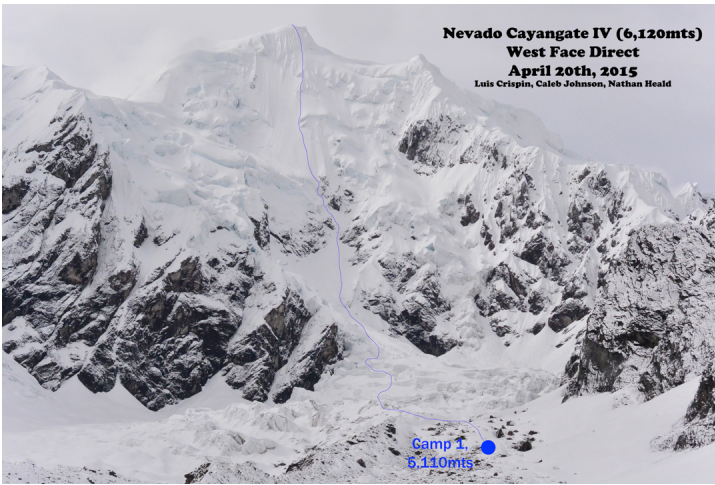
On the steep upper west face of Cayangate IV (6,120m GPS).



Caleb Johnson and Luis Crispin on the summit of Cayangate IV (6,120m GPS).



Rappelling below seracs on the final part of the descent.



The west face of Cayangate IV, showing the line of ascent (900m, D+ WI3).

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