



AAC Publications

Siulá Grande, East Face

Peru, Cordillera Huayhuash

Marc Toralles leading the second pitch (7b/5.12b) of the east face of Siulá Grande during the 2019 attempt. Photo by Roger Cararach.

The adventure to climb the east face of Siulá Grande began in the summer of 2019 when Roger Cararach, Marc Toralles, and I first tried this complex limestone big wall. In that attempt, we learned a lot about the mountain, finding an efficient approach to the foot of our route and overcoming much of the difficulties on the steep lower wall. However, a rockfall, which seemed innocuous at the moment—although it had already warned us!—resulted in a broken arm for Roger and a hasty retreat.

Despite the close call, we returned home happy, with a dream for the following year, knowing that our experience would ease future logistics. However, the pandemic and personal injuries took us away from the mountains for a good while. Finally, in 2022, we saw the opportunity to give it another go, but this time it would be only two of us: Roger was soon to be a father, with a new adventure awaiting him at home.

After many hours of traveling, I met Marc in Carhuacocha, Peru, in early summer. We continued traveling for seven more hours before reaching Queropalca, the gateway to the Cordillera Huayhuash.

The next day, in a bit of a rush, we hiked to our base camp next to Laguna Jahuacocha. From that point, there is still 1,400m of vertical gain to a glacial shelf at the foot of Siulá Grande's east wall. We planned to porter some loads there and accelerate our acclimatization before starting our climb. Marc had approached base camp by horse to rest a painful foot injury that had kept him away from alpinism for a year and a half—he had not even had time to go rock climbing at Montserrat! His excitement was enough, though: I knew we would be able to adapt to his limitations.

At base camp, we joined five Italian climbers who also were aiming for the first ascent of Siulá Grande's east face. From the first moment, we got on well, as our parties had different aims: They wanted to open a route up the middle of the limestone wall, using bolts as needed, whereas we would focus on natural weaknesses that diagonal up the center-right side.

The approach to the east face from base camp is complex, exposed, and not obvious: One must begin along the grass slopes below Jurau on the far side of the lake and traverse underneath a gully topped by a big, threatening serac. From there, 500m of scrambling and easy climbing (5.7) reaches a small hanging glacier, where it is possible to cross to the other side and set up a fixed rope to quicken the descent to base camp. We had described this approach to the Italians earlier, and, to our luck, we could now take advantage of their already-fixed rope.

On our first load-carrying trip, the crevasses on the upper glacier were covered with sufficient snow to cross, though the summit of Jurau and its snow mushrooms still threatened us. Upon reaching the wall, the rockfall was constant. It sounded like a motorcycle race. Mostly, the rocks were small, but we saw bigger rocks strewn across the ground. The Italians had warned us, of course, and the uncertainty about climbing this wall grew as our souls shrank. We had to go down.

After two rest days, taking advantage of cooking lessons from the Italians' camp chef, Carlos, and

bouldering next to the tent, we felt ready to make a second acclimatization portage and take another look.

The east face of Siulá Grande (6,344m) and the route Ànima de Corall, the first ascent of the face. Much of the complex approach is hidden below the foreground ridge. Photo by James Dowley.

July 11: The weather is a bit dubious, and we climb up from base camp not knowing for sure about our aim for the day. Seven hours later, we are at the base of the wall. The sun has left the face, but there is still some rockfall. With a bit of courage, we run to the start of the first pitch, which is protected by an overhang. We decide: *Now*. It is the moment to start the climb.

On the first part of the wall, where the rock climbing is difficult, we plan to haul a pack and climb in rock shoes. The first pitch is a long, athletic crack (6c) that leads up to the main weakness through an overhang. The second pitch surpasses this overhang along a dihedral, which has compact, difficult-to-protect rock—it must be 7b.

After redpointing these two pitches, we abseil down to a bivouac at a shelf made by the Italians at the foot of the wall. Once inside the tent, we check the weather. The forecast calls for cloudy skies but without precipitation. We believe that if it stays cloudy there will be less rockfall (which had seemed less serious while the wall was in the afternoon shade). It is our best chance, and tomorrow we will continue up.

July 12: We ascend the ropes and Marc starts climbing. The first pitch is a technical dihedral (7a). By now, the rain of rockfall has begun, and I hide under the haulbags while I belay. Since our line follows diagonal weaknesses, we are somewhat protected, but the stones that do crash next to us are big. The tone of the next pitch is similar. We are shitting ourselves and doubt if we should be here.

During the third pitch of the day, the sky clouds up and the rock race suddenly stops. We are saved! Now it is time to climb a frightening pitch that Roger had opened three years ago: a 40m slab, almost unprotected. Body vibrating, I try to keep my nerves down while navigating between long runouts. I flash it, and, after two more snow pitches, we reach a good bivouac immediately underneath a section of aid climbing.

July 13: The day is cloudy. There is almost no rockfall, and this is the key. We have to cross the groove where the rock hit Roger last time. Marc will aid the pitch, which requires hooks and pitons, since he is the most efficient. Approaching the decisive point where we abandoned our last attempt, he climbs slowly but eventually overcomes the difficulties. From this point onward, everything will be new!

The next pitch is an imposing offwidth that I am determined to suffer through. It is getting dark when I finish the wide crack. In front of us is a steep 30m wall, where, just above, there should be a good ledge to spend the night. We overcome it using a thin crack that gives way to big, athletic moves between huecos (7a). We spend the night inside a cave. We are where we want to be.

July 14: To go lighter, we leave all the gear that we do not need in the cave, planning to descend the same way we've come. From here, we can stop hauling and climb alpine-style over increasingly snowy terrain. After two good pitches, we reach the upper slabs. These broken, rotten terraces prove difficult to protect. The only solution we can find is to avoid the rock and seek out the snow aretes that appear to overcome each shelf. At the last of these, while placing a snow stake, I suddenly lose grip of my ice axe and it falls. *I have lost it!* I am able to calm myself only by avoiding thoughts of the implications. This is the most critical moment of the adventure. It is getting dark, we cannot see any place to bivouac, we are tired, and we do not know how to surpass this wall. Neither of us suggests going down, but if either of us had, the other would have agreed.

Marc climbs another snow pitch that leads him to the base of a crack system. We consider a sitting

bivouac on a small ledge, but do not feel like staying up all night. After a pitch of very loose and exposed mixed (M6) in the dark, we reach a huge snow cornice. It is quite scary to be on top of it, but there is no alternative. We set the tent there with care.

July 15: It takes us a good while to get ready. Finally, we start climbing toward an are te-like snow feature, which we are slow to surmount. Above is the big serac band, which we manage to overcome with pumped, swollen arms. The summit seems very close.

I cross one crevasse in the ridge and then another. Down-climbing a cornice to what seems like solid footing, I suddenly take a short fall into a crevasse, and my heart shrinks—shit! It feels like my arm is facing backward: I have dislocated my shoulder. I know the maneuver to put it back in place and, so, inside the crevasse, I bring it toward my knee and, with a clunk, my arm jolts back into place. Then I keep climbing like nothing happened. After all, the final section is just above.

At a rest, Marc gives me a pill to ease the pain. He continues leading up the final snow mushrooms to the summit. I start crying. I cry from happiness: I had wondered about reaching the summit before, but now it is real. We have fought for it, and here it is! I cry from sadness: I think of everyone who cannot be with me right now. I look up at Marc raising his ice axe. He is crying too. It is very intense.

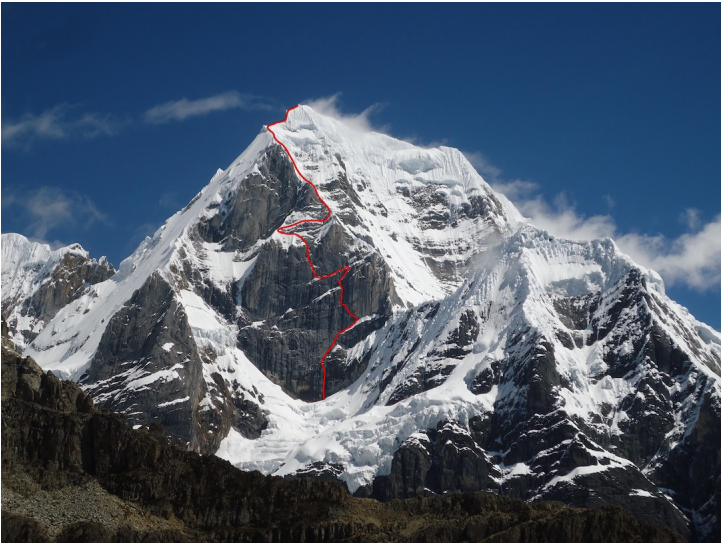
On the summit, we hug and cry together. As alpinists, we have grown to see each other's virtues and never give importance to the shortcomings, and Marc has always trusted me. Thanks to him, I have been able to live these experiences on the most beautiful summits in the world. This is priceless.

The descent is complex, fighting against the persistent pain in my shoulder. It is difficult to find safe anchors on the upper slabs and, in many moments, our success depends entirely on luck. On one rappel, an anchor piece comes loose, leaving us hanging from a single piton of dubious quality. The descent to our cornice bivy takes us into the night. We wait there until shade arrives in the middle of the next day, so as not to be exposed to falling stones when we continue.

At 11 p.m. on the sixth day, July 16, we arrive back at base camp. This culminates the most intense experience we have ever lived, where the effort and the desire to live in the present have allowed us to savor for a few moments a magical fullness. We will try to find this again in another adventure.

SUMMARY: First ascent of the east face of Siulá Grande, July 11–16, 2022, by Bru Busom and Marc Toralles, via Anima de Corall (1,100m, 7b A3 AI5 M6). The route is named after a song by Catalan musician Guillem Ramisa, which the climbers say reminds them to “take advantage of the time we are given because we don't know when it will end.” This story was translated from the original Catalan by Berta López Mir.

Images



The east face of Siulá Grande (6,344m) and the route Ànima de Corall, the first ascent of the face. Much of the complex approach is hidden below the foreground ridge. The rocky east pillar in lower left was first climbed in 2016, finishing up the southeast ridge, and by a new route in 2022. On the right is Jurau B.



Marc Toralles leading the second pitch (7b/5.12b) of the east face route during the 2019 attempt.



View of the east face of Siulá Grande from the glacial basin below the face.



Preparing the bivouac below the main rock wall on the east face of Siulá Grande.



Marc Toralles leading a crucial aid pitch (A3) on the steep limestone wall of Siulá Grande.



A long traverse on the east face of Siulá Grande. At right is part of Jurau B.



Marc Torrales after exiting the east face rock wall onto the upper slopes. Behind and right is Jurau B.



Bru Busom climbing toward the summit just after dislocating his shoulder in a crevasse fall.



Marc Toralles (left) and Bru Busom on the summit of Siulá Grande after climbing the east face.

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