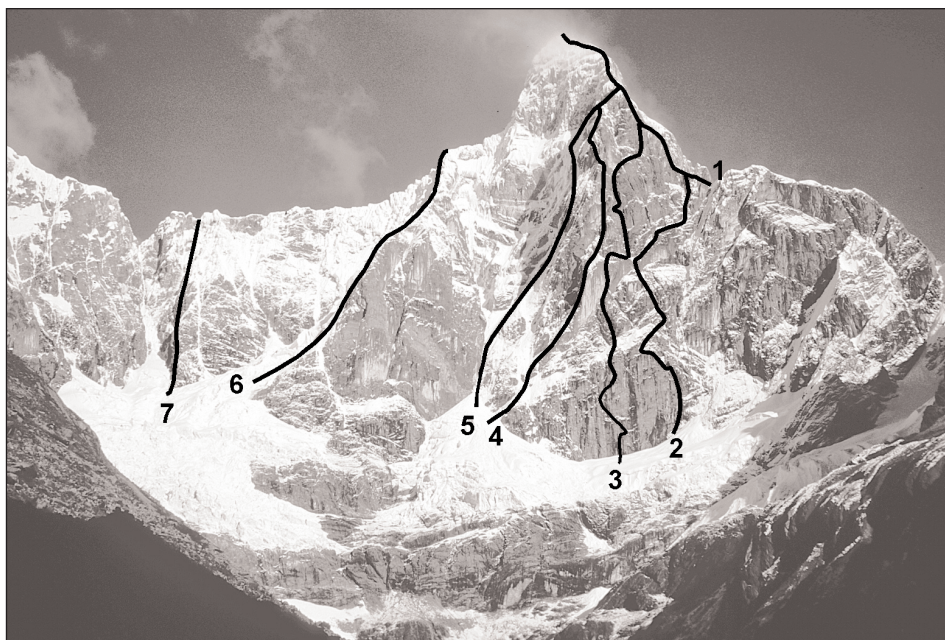


JIRISHANCA

A climbing history of the Hummingbird Peak's southeast face, Peru.

JEREMY FRIMER



The southeast aspect of Jirishanca (6,094m): (1) East Buttress (800m, ED1, Egger-Jungmair, 1957). (2) Suerte (700m, ED2, 6c+ A2 WI5+, DeLuca-Piccini-Stoppini, 2003) (no summit). (3) Tambo, Churros y Amigos (1,100m, ED3/4, 7a A2 95° M4, Clouet-Jourdain, 2003). (4) Japanese Route (1,100m, ED2, Nakatsuka-Okada-Sato-Shinohara-Yoshiga, 1973). (5) Fear and Loathing (1,050m, ED3/4, A2 WI6+, Bullock-Powell, 2003) (no summit). (6) Peruvian-Slovenian attempt (Monasterio-Kovac-Kozjek, 2000). (7) Austrian attempt (Angreiter-Coleselli-Erdenkauffer-Gerin-Gumpold-Murg-Oppurg-Schoisswohl-E Wurm-G Wurm-Wurzer, 1974). *Jeremy Frimer*

No range is more identified by a single event than Peru's Cordillera Huayhuash. In the shadow of *Touching the Void* lies a spectacular group of mountains, complete with a rich, 68-year history of committed alpinism. The crown jewel of the Amazon Basin, Yerupajá (6,617m) was the focus of Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler's first international expedition (1969); José Luis Fonrouge and Carlos Comesaña also opened a route on Yerupajá six months before their first ascent of Fitz Roy's Supercanaleta. Others who have visited the Huayhuash include Walter Bonatti, Joe Brown, Alan Rouse, and, more recently, Mick Fowler, Lionel Daudet, and Jeff Lowe.

Just north of Yerupajá is the sharp, delicate summit of Jirishanca, the "Hummingbird

Peak" (6,094m). The name could be a comparison between the summit and a hummingbird's bill. Alternatively, it could be referring to the hummingbird's speedy heart rate, much like that of climbers awed by Jirishanca's southeast face. I had plans to try the west face of Yerupajá on my inaugural expedition to the Huayhuash. But when I laid eyes on Jirishanca, I quivered in my plastic boots. Thoughts of Yerupajá fluttered into the wind as I assiduously attended to a personal fascination with the Hummingbird Peak. Since that awestruck moment, Jirishanca's specter has lived within me. My two attempts, one thwarted by illness (2000) and one by weather (2002), have left my reverence for this alpine masterpiece untouched.

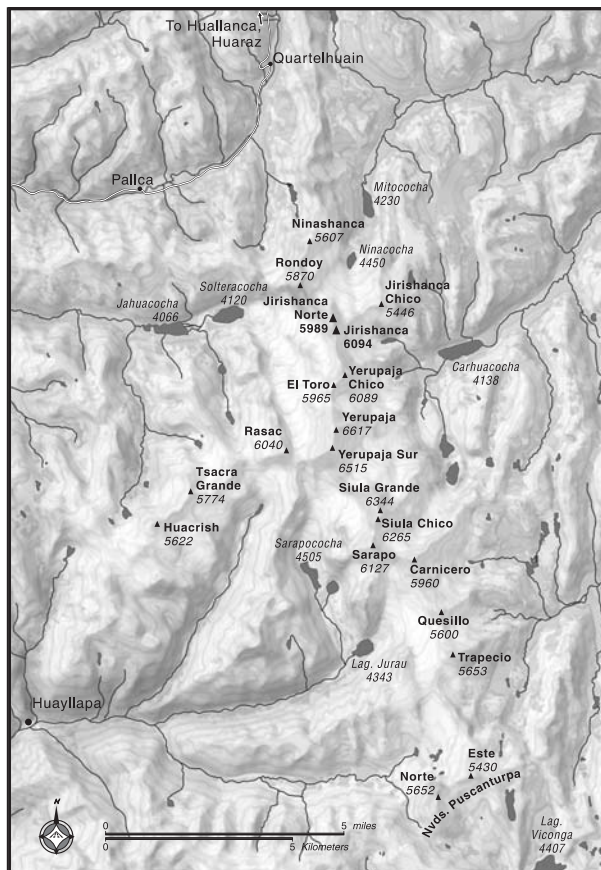
The mountain first gained notoriety when a Peruvian Army transport plane crashed into its southeast face in 1954. Surprisingly, this is the only known incident resulting in fatalities on the mountain. Austrian Alpine Club expeditions in 1936 and 1954, along with an American expedition in 1950, resulted in the first ascents of many Huayhuash peaks—but not Jirishanca. The Austrians returned in 1957 after recruiting some "heavy artillery," including the Dolomite guide Toni Egger, who 18 months later would meet his end on Cerro Torre.

The Austrians decided not to attempt Jirishanca's west face, which, "high and formed of fluted ice flanks and steep walls, would have been impossible." In light of the equipment of the day, perhaps this assessment was justified. The 60-degree ice sheets of the 900-meter west face have since allowed six quality routes of predominantly TD difficulty, the first established in 1969 by an eight-man Italian team led by Riccardo Cassin. After cutting steps and fixing ropes, they reached the summit ridgeline. "They had to surmount an ice mushroom on unstable, precarious ice, spongy and fluffy on the surface. The axe cracked everything, their feet gave way and it was hard to make the next move. The delicate icy skull-cap was the final defense of the virginity of the face of this 20,099-foot colossus." Their West Rib Route follows an aesthetic, bending ice arête and is now a classic. (This and other quotes come from *Mountain World 1958-59* and *AAJ 1970*, for routes on the west and southwest faces, see *AAJ 2003*, page 308.)

The 1957 team of Austrians also ruled out the snowy north ridge, in spite of it offering the easiest route to a Jirishanca summit (the lower north peak). To traverse from the north summit to the true summit would involve a treacherous "advance along [the connecting] knife edge, not unlike a cockscomb of ice." The first ascent of the north ridge came seven years later (1964), by Americans Gary Colliver and Glen Denny. Incidentally, this is the only route to date that reaches the north summit of Jirishanca; the route has yet to be linked to the true summit.

The Egger team also dismissed the "gruesome" southeast face and set out on the east buttress, approaching it from the north. Towering rock and ice cliffs adorned by icicle fringes earn this route an ED1 rating by modern standards. Climbing in expedition style, the Austrians fixed ropes on the lower rock pillar to reach the snowy, icicle-fringed section at mid-height, where they tunneled behind an ice cliff. After placing a high camp, they launched onto the upper rock pillar. "The difficulties of this brittle rock nose above the abyss demanded a supreme effort from my certainly hardened men." A summit attempt was stifled by deep snow on the final ridge, where "one could have gained height only in swimming fashion." They retreated.

After making the first ascent of Yerupajá Chico, Jirishanca's southern neighbor, the Austrians returned to Jirishanca. With the end of the dry season fast approaching, they decided to attempt the summit with an "extreme personal effort," skimping on food and sans tent. "This is the hardest tactic one can imagine on such a difficult and high mountain—and in times of peace, nobody could be ordered to pursue such an action. But Egger and Jungmair went voluntarily." Aided by fixed ropes still in place, they reached their previous high point early on their second day and began



The Jirishanca region of the Cordillera Huayhuash. *Martin Gamache/Alpine Mapping Guild*

a bold traverse of the summit ridge. On July 12, 1957, Toni Egger and Siegfried Jungmaier stood on the summit of Peru's last unclimbed 6,000-meter peak. Their ascent was "probably one of the boldest climbing feats ever performed in the Cordillera."

As all the major peaks of the Huayhuash had been climbed, expeditions began focusing on the remaining unclimbed faces. A wave of expeditions advanced on the southeast face of Jirishanca during the early 1970s. First to arrive was a Japanese team from the Moji Alpine Club in 1972. They retreated from a highpoint 300 meters up the face but did discover the long-sought wreckage of the airplane that had crashed 18 years earlier. The following year, a Japanese team of 15 led by Masayuki Shinohara approached the southeast face ready for a prolonged siege. Over the course of 49 days they succeeded in making the first ascent of the southeast face,

having forced a route up the left edge of the right-side rock wall and joining the East Buttress below the upper rock pillar and continuing to the summit. They had faced sustained steep rock and ice, including an eight-meter rock overhang as well as overhanging ice cliffs, which they aid climbed on ice screws.

Jirishanca's southeast face quickly attracted a third expedition, this time a group of Austrians in 1974. This team of eleven climbers led by Jürgen Gumpold tackled the far left side of the face, requiring six days to reach Jirishanca's south ridge near the Jirishanca-Yerupajá Chico Col. The rock buttress leading to the south ridge involved rock to 5.10a on the lower parts and ice-cliff dodging higher up. The weather then deteriorated and they retreated. In descent, they watched an avalanche emanating from Yerupajá Chico overwhelm the route they had traveled that day.

This early period of exploration ended with the 1974 expedition and the southeast face faded from the limelight for 26 years. A second wave of interest, which persists to this day, began in 2000 when Pavle Kozjek, Marjan Kovac (both from Slovenia), and Aritza Monasterio (Peru) teamed up for the first alpine-style attempt on the face. In seven hours they tackled the

unclimbed south-southeast spur—an ascending, narrow edge, stacked with ice mushrooms—to reach the south ridge, where the difficulties intensified. Having floundered in deep snow to that point, the team opted for descent and reached base camp 23 hours after departing.

This Peruvian-Slovenian team was also the first group of brave souls to talk seriously about an attempt on the Direttissima: straight up the fall line to the tip of Jirishanca's pointed summit. After climbing the bombarded funnel, it would ascend through mixed ground, passing a semi-circular overhanging rock cliff at mid-height to reach the snow bowl below the final challenge: a steep, mixed headwall 200 meters in height, capped by overhanging icicle-fringed ice cliffs. Fitting of such a supreme mountain, the most direct route would also have the distinction of being the most difficult. Needless to say, they have not been the last to dream of this still unclimbed jewel. Alun Powell, while on Fear and Loathing in 2003, watched the formidable line sustain regular bombardments. Upon returning to civilization, Powell made a standing offer of a bouquet of roses for the first to climb the Direttissima.

High Mountain Sports published an article on the Huayhuash in 2001, including an image of the southeast face of Jirishanca. This sparked a flood of interest, beginning with three visits in 2002. Alun Powell and Nick Bullock (U.K.) were the first. In May they began climbing the center of the face, only to be caught by an avalanche that promptly deposited them back at the base, partially injured. Yanik Bérubé (Canada) and I arrived in July just as a storm rolled in. We sat in base camp for 12 days, “doing time” as the storm outside gradually abated and an intestinal storm in Yanik stole center stage. As we packed it in, I wondered if I would ever again be willing to psych myself up enough to try the Direttissima. Finally, Slovenians Rok Zalokar and Urban Azman attempted a line beginning in the center of the face that would traverse a sloping snow ledge rightward before striking upward along the line that the French would climb in 2003. Zalokar was soaked while aiding through a dripping overhang, and his clothes and boots froze overnight. Instead of risking cold injury, the strong, young team retreated.

The word was out on Jirishanca; six teams visited the Huayhuash in 2003 with the southeast face as their primary objective. Tragedy and triumph marked the beginning of the season as Austrians Alexander Fidi and Julian Neumayer perished on the southwest face of the neighboring Jirishanca Chico while acclimatizing. Soon thereafter, Alun Powell and Nick Bullock, ready for a rematch with the Hummingbird, made the first alpine-style ascent of the southeast face by their bold new line, Fear and Loathing. The season was far from over; Aymeric Clouet and Didier Jourdain of France showed up and finessed their way up the center of the right-side rock face, resulting in their challenging new route, Tambo, Churros, y Amigos. (See adjoining articles.)

The 2003 climbing season included a strange twist. Italians Stefano DeLuca, Paolo Stoppini, and Piccini Alessandro, with a power drill in hand, forged a line up the right side of the right-side rock face, connecting with the base of the East Buttress after 18 pitches of climbing to 5.11+ and A2. Their new route, Suerte (“Luck”), follows a wandering line of over 40 bolts (see Climbs & Expeditions). For a bolted line to connect with a route first climbed by none other than Toni Egger is either a blunt statement on bolting ethics or a profound coincidence.

Jirishanca's southeast face is by no means climbed out. The far left side of the face is still wide open. Just left of center, another possible line could primarily climb ice to reach the south ridge just before it kicks back. And then there's that bouquet of roses....

Jeremy Frimer is the author of the upcoming guidebook, Cordillera Huayhuash: Select Treks and Climbs (2005, Elaho Publishing, Squamish, Canada). See www.elaho.ca for more information.