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**Expedition Report**  
**British 2004 Artesonaraju Expedition**



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## ***Objectives and Summary***

The objective of the expedition was primarily to climb the unclimbed north west face of Artesonaraju (6025m). The south west face of this mountain is a classic D+ route on 55 degree snow. This mountain lies in the Cordillera Blanca, of Peru an area that has attracted mountaineers for many decades and has a well developed infra-structure for mountaineering and trekking. Our intention was to access the face by the popular Quebreda Santa Cruz and climb the face in 2 days, possibly climbing overnight to avoid poor snow conditions inclement on north faces in the Cordillera Blanca. Descent was to be via the equipped south west face. Additionally the South face of Pucajirca, or Pucahirca (5900m) and the South West face of Santa Cruz (6259m) were cited as possible alternatives.

Unfortunately during the summer of 2004 did not conform to the normal weather patterns; it is normal for the Blanca to receive large amounts of snow in January and February, this snow then consolidates giving optimal conditions during the dry settled weather of June, July and August. However in 2004 the snow fell through out the spring and summer rather than January and February. This left south faces covered in unconsolidated snow and north faces very bare. Additionally glacial approaches differed greatly from previous years with glaciers covered in powder or very open. Additionally the poor weather, rather than the normal unbroken sunshine further frustrated efforts to climb. In general climbing activity was greatly curtailed with only a handful of technical routes completed in the range.

This meant that our objectives were not fulfilled. An attempt on the North West face of Piramide de Garcilaso (5885m) was thwarted by a very open glacier and apparent poor conditions above. Next an attempt at the Jaeger route on the South face of the impressive Characaraju (6001m) failed due to very deep powder on the glacier and the fact that the adjacent couloir avalanched during the approach- hinting at sub optimal conditions! The next route attempted was the North Spur of Ranrapalca (6162m), this proved to be in lean but good condition and was climbed mainly at night to allow the safer top section to be reached by morning. Finally as the weather finally settled Artesonaraju was attempted, however continuing the run of bad luck Clare Fennell's old ankle injury reappeared and we were forced to retreat during the approach.

## ***Travel and Logistics***

The greatest advantage of the Blanca is the ease of access. We flew to Lima via Frankfurt and Caracas, although many people fly via the 'States. From Lima an overnight bus takes you to Huaraz. Huaraz is the main centre for climbing and trekking in the Blanca and the base for most expeditions and lies at the head of the valley from which all the main climbing valleys branch off. Cheap accommodation in Huaraz is plentiful. We stayed in the 'Alpes Huaraz' located just up from the street 'Alameda Grau' This hostel is highly recommended- ensuite double rooms were \$4 pppn, kitchen



facilities, and table football were provided. Eating and drinking in Huaraz is of a western standard – except far cheaper – just follow your nose.

The towns of Carhuaz, Yungay and Caraz lie down the valley, and are all easily served by numerous ‘collectivo’ buses. From these towns taxis were readily available to the road heads and the start of the approaches. No taxi was ever more than 40 soles (around £7). A point to notice is the approach information in the Sharman guide is rather outdated and where it recommends 4 by 4’s you can normally persuade an obliging taxi driver. Donkeys were appeared to be freely available at all major road heads at a standard rate of \$5 per donkey (burro) per day and \$10 per donkey driver (arrerio) per day. However on very popular routes, especially the Santa Cruz trek the steady flow of rich westerners has led to unreliable arrierios. Booking in advance through Mount Climb in Huaraz seems advisable.

Epigas cylinders and other rudimentary supplies are available (albeit expensively) in Huaraz, however anything more complex may be difficult to find - and probably even more expensive.

### ***Guidebooks, Maps and Information***

The two major guides to the area are Climbs of the Cordillera Blanca of Peru by DM Sharman, available in Huaraz and Amazon.com and Escalades en los Andes by J Tome and published by Desnivel. The former is in English and although rather old has most routes. The Tome guide is in Spanish but is comprehensive up to 2001. A very new guide has been published although it covers only the northern most half of the area. The best map is the trekking Alpenvereinskarte, again available in Huaraz. This map covers only the northern area, the southern map is currently unavailable. For the southern area only a poor tourist map exists titled Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash by Felipe Diaz exists.

Despite the popularity of the area it is still difficult to gain information on conditions of anything but the trekking routes. The owner of Mount Climb in Huaraz is super friendly and knowledgeable, the owner of Café Andino is also a climber and happy to supply information. The Casa de Guides is not too useful unless you are lucky to bump into one of the better guides.

### ***Expedition manoeuvres***

After spending 3 days acclimatising to Huaraz’s altitude of 3100m we acclimatised in the quebreda Caraz and ascending Maparaju (5326m) by the SW ridge, see sketch map. The route was a fairly mundane snow plod. The marauding cows at base-camp provided the only excitement between headaches. From the approach the South face of Pucaranra looks good at an amenable grade.

After this we attempted the north face of Piramide de Garlisco. This was accessed from quebreda Paron, note no donkeys are available from here, although other groups brought porters up from the valley. This face is of the same aspect and close to our objective on Artensonaraju so was likely to have similar conditions. Two nights were spent at the



moraine camp on the north side of the snout of the Paron glacier due to bad weather. From here we aimed to bivi at the bergshund and climb and descend the route in a day. Approaching the route by the right side of the glacier we were unable to get to the bergschrund due to large crevasses and cornice threats. An Australian team tried to approach from the left a few weeks later and had no more success! The route above looked in generally poor condition with larger ice mushrooms and unconsolidated snow. Hence this trip was put down to acclimatisation and we returned to Huaraz.

In an attempt to find acceptable conditions we next attempted a south face. The Jaeger Couloir on the south face of Taulliraju had been climbed by Nick Bullock and Adam Kovac earlier in the season, and hence this was attempted. However on the approach walk from Yurac Corral the adjacent couloir avalanched impressively and things weren't looking too optimistic. Two days were spent at Laguna 69 to allow the face to consolidate. However the approach Glacier was still covered in waist deep powder and the c700m of 50 degree approach couloir didn't look like an option for the sane! The customary retreat to Huaraz was taken.

Back in Huaraz the news was that the Simpson route on the North Spur of Ranrapalca (6162m) was in good condition and had been climbed by a party of Germans. The route whilst long (c1000m) has no major technical difficulties and can be climbed in a day. Approach was made by the well worn trail in the Ishinca Valley. During the day the lower part of the route is threatened by rock and serac fall. Hence an early start of 12 midnight was made from a bivi on the crest at the start of the route. With the exception of two pitches we moved together the whole route and suffered only moderate serac fall! The summit plateau was made in c10hrs, although the true summit was left to the brave. Descent was made down the North East slopes, with a number of abseils, this was the traditional route of ascent in past years but this season was steep unconsolidated rock and not recommended.

In the mean time we had meet up with Tony Barton who had seen our objective the N W face of Artesonaraju from a surrounding summit and reckoned it looked worse than the previously failed N face of Piramide! Hence we planned to go up the Santa Cruz valley to look at the face and if it appeared unrealistic the alternative plan was to repeat the new route of Samuels, Pescod and Barton on the N face of Paron. However in the event neither was to be as Clare's old ankle injury resurfaced and this precluded any further mountain activities. From the basecamp for Paron in quebreda Arteson the route on Paron looked good, if slightly thin, the route on Artesonaraju proved surprisingly difficult to get a view of and we never did see it! At this point the unsettled weather finally sorted its self out to really rub it in.

After the final return to Huaraz time had ran out and all that was left to do was a wee bit of partying.

### ***Closing Remarks***

Whilst the climbing in the Cordillera Blanca is relatively accessible this leads to the temptation to try and climb in a number of different areas. Whereas this is great for getting a feel for the area it may not be the most time effective way of getting routes

done as a large amount of time is still spent travelling to and from Huaraz. On a next trip I would probably try and take a couple of two week trips to base camps and attempt a number of peaks from these camps.

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