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Tepui 2005 Expedition Report

A joint Anglo-Venezuelan expedition to attempt previously unclimbed tepui big walls in the Gran Sabana region of Venezuela.



Abstract

This expedition report describes attempts by a team comprising British, Venezuelan and a Russian climber to complete free ascents of unclimbed tepui walls between February and April 2005. The team had a notable success with a free ascent of Angel Falls main face, 1000m to create 'Rainbow Jambaia' The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research.

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Introduction

This report describes the successful attempt to climb a new big-wall route on the remote and relatively inaccessible tepuis in the Gran Sabana region of Venezuela.

The expedition is grateful for financial support from The Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council, UKSport.

Expedition Members

John Arran: 41, Web developer, extensive new routing experience in UK and USA. John is a strong rock climber with new routes up to E10 7a and regularly on sights E6/7 on many rock types. Two winter alpine seasons including climbing WI6 ice (e.g. Nuit Blanche) and Scottish winter VII. He has on sight soloed many multi pitch routes in Eldorado Canyon, Colorado (including Jules Verne 5.11) and climbed extensively throughout the world for the last 23 years. Climbed the ffa. 1800ft Long Hope Route (E7 6c) on Hoy in 1997. First and only expedition to the greater ranges was to the Ak Su Valley, Kyrgyzstan where new routes including The Philosopher's Stone, 25 pitches, E6 6a, lightweight alpine style were competed in 1999. SW Face of Venezuela's Cerro Autana (2002) with 25 pitches up to E7 6c (Fr 8a) climbed using traditional protection.

Anne Arran: 36, Climber, coach and photographer, 6 Alpine seasons including long rock routes up to ED and WI4. UK traditional climbing onsight includes The Cad E6 6a and new routes up to E4. Former British Champion, climbed Fr 8a and 4 seasons Scottish winter climbing leading up to grade IV. New 2-day route in the Grand Canyon in 2002 with British, American and Bulgarian team. Partner to John on The Philosopher's Stone in 1999 and SW Face of Autana, Venezuela 2002, 25 pitches.

Ivan Calderón: Venezuelan construction engineer and climber. One of Venezuela's most accomplished climbers, with eight years of Alpinism and Big Wall climbing experience throughout South and North America.

Ben Heason: Well known for hard trad head points, Ben's bold style has been an inspiration to many. A former member of the British team, has climbed E9 and had a successful expedition to Greenland.

Miles Gibson: Climbed many E8's, a former member of the British Bouldering Team, has climbed Fr8b s well as taken part in successful expeditions to Greenland and Kenya.

Alfredo Rangel: Venezuelan Alpinist now living in the Gran Sabana. Lives and breaths the mountains and one of the few active rock climbers in the region, this was his first multi-day big wall.

Alex Klenov:

- Summer 2000: [New route up to Spantik peak](#). Participant of International "Golden Peak-2000" expedition
- February 2000: new route in party with Alexander Klenov up to Petit Dru - "[Dream of summer](#)".
- May 1999: [New route on the North Face of Thalay Sagar \(6905 m\)](#)
- February 1999: new route on Grand Capucin in party - "[Russian winter](#)".
- 1998: Petit Dru, N.Face, in party; Grand Jorass, N. Face.new variant, 6A in party.
- 1997: [Aksu](#), first climb on N.Face 6B, not repeated.

Objectives

First ascents of tepui and new free routes around the Angel Falls area, objectives as stated on application form.

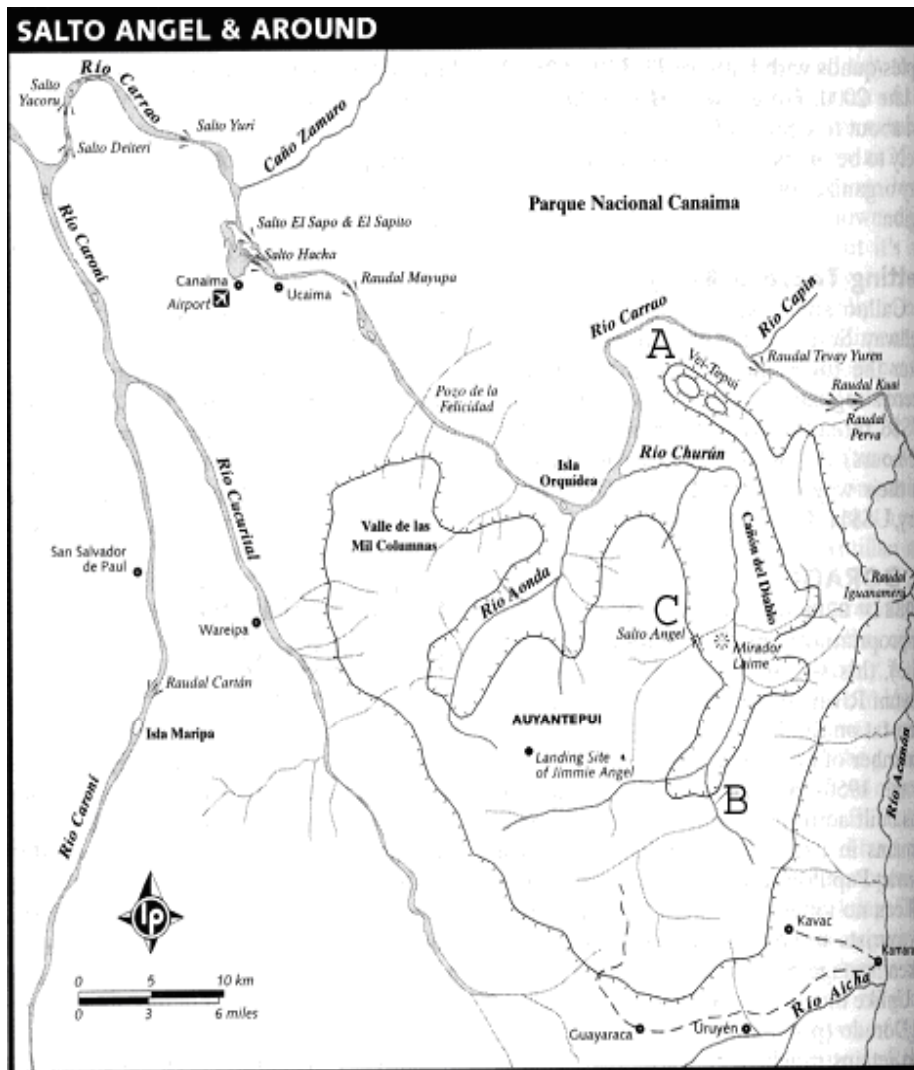


Figure 1

Logistics

Fund-raising

Support was requested from a number of sources. Financial assistance was obtained from The Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council.

Finances

The approximate expedition accounts for 4 British members share are as follows:

<u>Expenditure</u>	£	<u>Income</u>	£
Transport	3,641	M.E.F.	425
Food & subsistence	1,046	Alison Chadwick memorial fund (for Anne)	150
Equipment (SAT, general equipment for expedition, film and other camera accessories)	1,041	BMC	1,100
Total	5,728	Personal Investment Total	4,053 5,728

Insurance

Two British expedition members were covered by a BMC annual policy and the other two were covered by alternative insurance. The Venezuelan and Russian expedition members were responsible for their own insurance arrangements.

Travel

Travel between the UK and Venezuela was by American Airlines and Virgin via Miami because of baggage allowance for two expedition members and cost just under 600GBP. The other British went with Air Italia via Milan for ~ 450GBP with less baggage. Most internal travel within Venezuela was possible by overnight buses, costing of the order of £15 to £30 for a ten-hour journey. The bulk of the travel expense was the need to charter light aircraft to access the tepuis, and in the case of Angel Falls, the need to hire a boat crewed by local villagers to take the expedition members and their equipment from the landing site to near the base of the climb, a journey which took two and a half days due to extremely low water levels in the rivers.

Food and Accommodation

Accommodation in Caracas was with Venezuelan friends and team members. Most other accommodation was free camping, though on a couple of nights accommodation in Kamarata was included in the price of the boat.

Food of all types is readily available in Caracas though in general it is nearly as expensive as in the UK. Naturally in more remote areas the choice of foodstuffs available becomes much more limited. We did not take any food from the UK except Ben's mums Christmas cake.

Communications

Mobile phone coverage is patchy in the Gran Sabana. Networks are accessible near the towns of Canaima and Santa Elena, though away from these areas it becomes much less reliable.

We used two-way walkie-talkies on the wall, which were extremely useful, especially on Angel Falls as the team was split into two and verbal communication would otherwise have been virtually impossible. To conserve battery life for the duration of the climb we found it best to agree a regular time in the evening to make contact. We also hired a sat phone.

Specialist Equipment

Two portaledge were used on either climb and the Venezuelans sometimes slept in Hammocks.

A full aiding rack, including bolt kit, was taken. Some pegs were placed (and subsequently removed) on Angel Falls to reinforce belays or hauling stations occasionally with a bolt due to the friable nature of the rock when there was any kind of weakness.

Risks and Hazards

The risks associated with climbing tepuis are considerable.

The rock, while often sound and generally excellent for climbing, is at times loose and in some cases exceptionally so.

There are risks associated with the jungle environment. We judged the water to be safe to drink without treatment when it was coming from tepui streams and had not passed human habitation. But we treated all drinking water obtained from more significant rivers and no one became ill.

The hazards from wildlife were real but did not appear to be great. Dangerous snakes and spiders existed but were not problematic. We did have a close encounter with a crocodile in the river which could have been dangerous. More of a problem were ants and mosquitoes. 100% DEET was about the only thing, other than a physical clothing or mesh barrier, which would repel the mosquitoes, and covering up well (including tucking trousers into socks) was necessary on the approach as colonies of biting ants could get extremely painful very quickly if allowed access to unprotected skin. Mosquito coils highly recommended for Base camp.

Medical Arrangements

A comprehensive first aid kit was carried to both tepuis, though for reasons of weight-saving a considerably trimmed down version was carried on the routes.

It is noted that no rescue system is available anywhere in the Gran Sabana, that tepui objectives are often days away from habitation, and that even then it may take one or more days to reach a place where radio or SAT communication is possible to arrange a plane or helicopter evacuation.

Environment and Social Impact

Naturally everything taken into the tepui environment was brought out again, and every effort was taken to minimise the effects of our passage. It is worth noting that in places the jungle grows back extremely quickly if left.

Photography

The Gran Sabana is a fantastically beautiful region, and we came home with many fine photographs and video footage.

Itinerary

Angel Falls

Team members: John Arran, Anne Arran, Ivan Calderón, Ben Heason, Miles Gibson and Alex Klenov.

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0/3 – 11/3 Team members arrive in Caracas

11/3 – 13/3 Preparation and provisions

13/3 – 14/3 Overnight bus from Caracas to Ciudad de Bolivar

14/3	Cessna flight – 3 trips – to Kamarata
15/3 – 17/3	Boat journey from Kamarata to Isla Raton
17/3 – 18/3	Load carrying to base camp
18/3 – 23/3	climbing, hauling and fixing from the ground
23/3 – 5/4	Climbing and hauling, sleeping on the wall
4/4	Two team members reach summit before returning to ledge
5/4	All team members and equipment to summit
6/4	One-day descent to base camp
7/4	Load carrying to river
7/4 – 8/4	Boat journey from Isla Raton to Campo Carrao
9/4	Cessna flight – 2 trips – to Ciudad de Bolivar
9/4 – 10/4	Overnight bus from Ciudad de Bolivar to Caracas

11m dugout boat for 2 and a half days around Auyantepui to the tourist camps near the foot of Angel Falls (Camps were deserted as there was insufficient water in the river to run sightseeing tours. We had to push the boat many times up rocky shallows.)

There being almost no visitors due to the extraordinarily low river levels. It took 2 days to make it out to a small airstrip near Kamarata by boat. Our boat engine had broken so it as very lucky we were close to the airstrip. Our Indian helpers paddle down stream to the next village to get radio help and we fly out at mid day the following day. This was good because we were running out of food and meals were very boring. Overnight bus Ciudad de Bolívar – Caracas.

Due to the unexpectedly great expense of flight and boat travel within the Gran Sabana and the dense, extensive jungle to other tepui locations in the area, it was clear that accessing other objectives was no longer feasible after the wall although we had some time to investigate options before the wall.

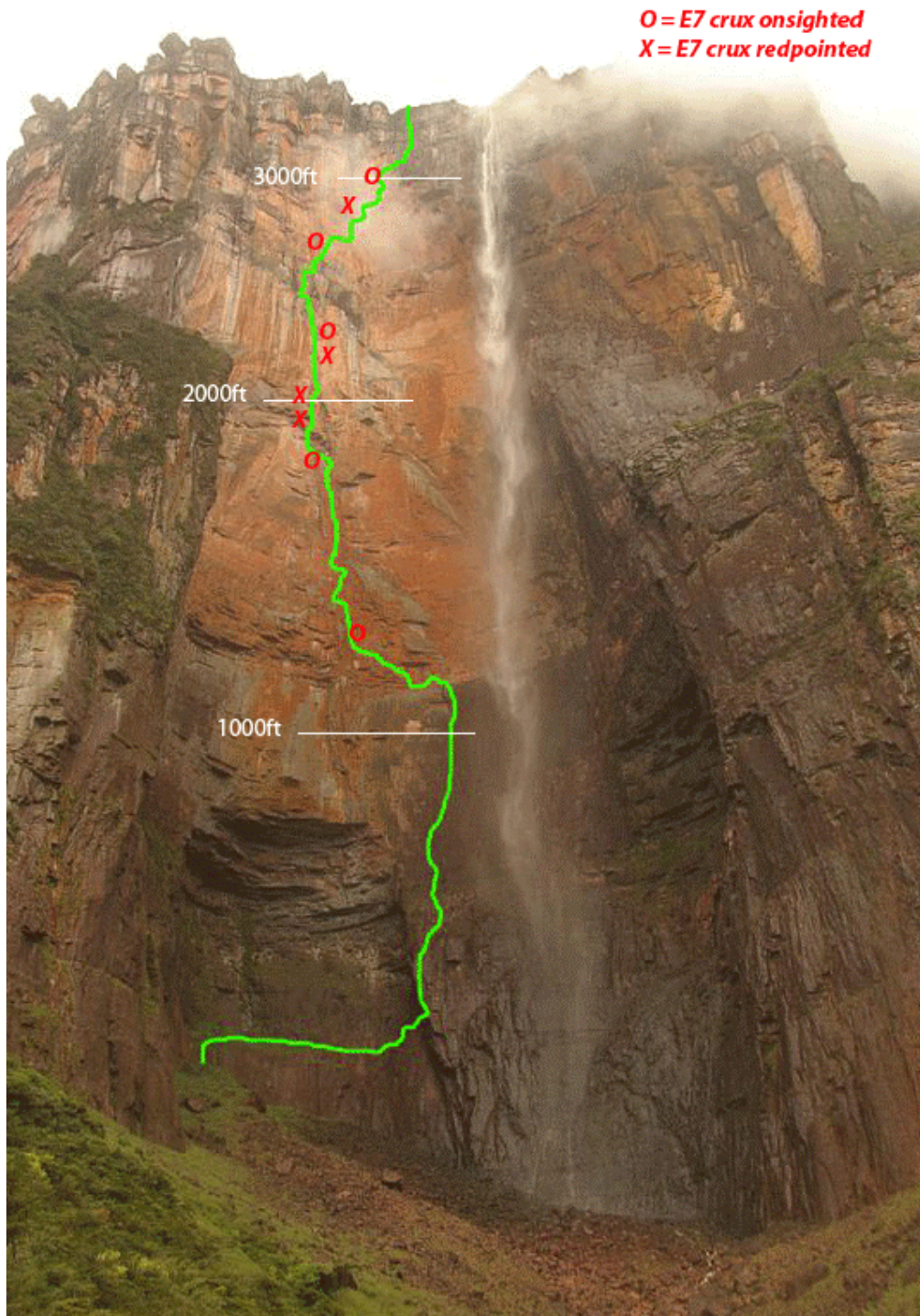
We had a magnificently successful trip. For more details of the ascent and wall story please see feature article for Climber magazine attached.

Conclusion

The Gran Sabana region of Venezuela is a fascinating part of the world and offers huge potential for further exploration and for new climbs on tepuis, many of which are still unclimbed. The main limiting factors are the difficulty of finding detailed information about the area, the expense, complexity and difficulty of accessing the foot of many tepuis, and the need to be climbing at a very high standard if the climbing is to be steep and relatively free from unpleasant thick vegetation.

Many thanks for the support of the BMC, UKSport, MEF and Alison Chadwick memorial fund.

Appendix 1 Angel Falls route photo



Appendix 2 Other images



Back from left to right: Ben Heason, Alex Klenov, Alfredo Rangel
Front from left to right: Miles Gibson, Ivan Calderon, Anne Arran, John Arran