

**The  
Porchester  
Andean  
Expedition  
1985**

**Expedition Report**

nd 23512

# The Porchester Andean Expedition 1985

On May 4th 1985 The Porchester Andean Expedition, comprising of Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, left England on a two-man Alpine style mountaineering expedition to the Cordillera Huayhuash in the Peruvian Andes.

The main objective of the trip was to make an Alpine style ascent of the unclimbed West face of Siula Grande (6356m or 21,000ft). It was one of the biggest unclimbed faces left in the Andes. They also hoped to make other first ascents in that range.

## THE ANDES

The Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash are the highest of the 20 glaciated cordilleras, or mountain chains, in the Peruvian Andes. Mt. Huascarán (6768m, 22205ft) in the Blanca, and Mt. Yerupaja (6634m, 21600ft) in the Huayhuash, are also the world's highest mountains in the tropical zone.

The Cordillera Blanca is located in the Ancash region of north-central Peru, 200-350 km directly north of the capital Lima. The Huayhuash lies just 50 km to the south-east. Despite their proximity the two are definitely separate ranges.

## The Cordillera Huayhuash.

The crest of this range is only 30 km in length from north to south and all but one of the peaks lie directly on this knife-edge divide. Within this compact area there are found seven peaks over 6000 metres and as many more over 5500m. If not more beautiful than the Blanca, the Huayhuash is more spectacular and overwhelming, with all the peaks having towering vertical ice-covered faces on all sides. A more awe-inspiring place would be hard to imagine.

This range is harder to reach than the Blanca and is consequently less frequented and more seriously isolated. The nearest road-heads are over 40 km away from base camp sites.

Siula Grande's West face lies within a ring of stunning and dramatic peaks. Seria Norte, Rasac, Yerupaja, Siula Grande, Siula Chico, and Sarapo form a crescent round the glacier approach to the west face.

ALPINE STYLE ASCENTS.-The team intended to make all its ascents in the range in Alpine style.This means that the two-man team moves up the mountain in a continuous push,bivouacing when necessary,but without resorting to using fixed ropes and stocked camps.Not only is this a more asthetic challenge but is also much faster and consequently safer.Less time is spent on the face and the climbers do not have to repeatedly cross dangerous ground as they would if they were fixing ropes and camps. However it also requires greater committment and ability since any accident occuring high on the mountain can rapidly become fatal. Two men are very extended if trying to rescue one of their team from high on a face without the help of fixed lines of retreat. More often than not it can prove to be impossible to help an injured climber when alone,and as a result both may die in the attempt or one may have to abandon the other.Yet it is the fair and ethical approach to tackling the challenge mountains offer.

#### THE CLIMBING.

Base camp was established beneath the Laguna Sarapoquocha, (4500m,15000ft) after a two day walk-in from Cajatambo where the road from Lima ended.

Two days later on 17th May an acclimatisation climb on Rosario was under-taken.This minor mountain (5450m,18000ft) was asceded to just 150m below the summit.The last part to the top was left out owing to having decided not to take ice climbing gear and due to resurgence of stormy weather.Fine views of the range allowed us good reconnaicane of approaches to Seria Norte and Siula Grande.

On the 20th May the team set out to climb the unclimbed south ridge of Cerro Yantauri(Rurigallay),5455m,18000ft,by climbing the southern end of the west face (1st climbed with fixed ropes by Italians,1977) to gain the south ridge.This gave worrying climbing on very loose rock,shale,mud and rubble until the snowy south ridge was reached.A bivouac was made on the ridge at about 5000m,16500ft,in a severe snow storm.The following morning in fine weather a high point was reached at the end of the south ridge just 150m below the summit.The climbers were unable to progress further due to very deep powder snow and extremely dangerous state of the cornices and the summit itself.A safe descent to base was made that day.

On the 23rd May the team attempted the unclimbed south ridge of Seria Norte,(5860m,19000ft),approaching it from the east and climbing the east face to a col between Seria Norte and Seria

Central (5500m, 18000ft). A bivouac was made on this face at about 5250m, 17200ft. The next day the col was reached on easy angled slopes made exhausting to climb due to deep powder. From there it was clear that the remaining 400m of the south ridge was in an impossibly dangerous condition to climb. From the col Joe Simpson climbed the short distance to the summit of Seria Central. To our knowledge this mountain had not been climbed from the east side.

On the 30th May the team made their 1st attempt on the West face of Siula Grande, approaching in tiring snow conditions and making a snow-hole bivouac beneath the face. Heavy snow-fall during the night and following morning meant the face was continuously being swept by avalanches. Some equipment was stashed near the snow-hole and a retreat to the base camp was made uneventfully.

Between the 5th-7th May the climbers succeeded in climbing the face during a spell of settled weather. From a snow-hole at the foot of the face they climbed a steep ice field to cascades and mixed ground before gaining access to a very steep ice gully which was the key to getting through the central buttress. A snow hole bivi was made at ca. 5500m, 18000ft. The following day they gained a large ramp line running diagonally left to right up through the buttress and finishing on the summit slopes. These slopes turned out to be very difficult powder snow flutings. It took five hours to climb 150m before another snow-hole was dug into the side of one of the flutings for the second bivi at ca. 6200m, 20100ft. The summit was reached next day at 2:00pm on the 7th June. Half an hour was spent on the summit before starting the descent of the north ridge in rapidly deteriorating weather. The ridge proved to be especially complex and difficult not helped by nil visibility and snowfall. At one point the cornice ridge collapsed 16m, 50ft back from the crest taking Simon Yates with it. His fall was held after 9m, 30ft and he regained the ridge shaken but uninjured. A further snow-hole was dug at ca. 6000m, 19800ft. That night it snowed and temperatures were approx. -20/25.

The descent continued the following day in fine weather. The ridge was decidedly dangerous with knife-edge powder and very unstable and unavoidable cornices. At 11:30am Simpson fell when the edge of a small ice cliff collapsed. He fell about 16m, 50ft down the east face and sustained a severe fracture of the right knee joint and right ankle. The impact of the fall had driven his tibia up through his knee joint and caused a less serious fracture to his heel. At this point the climbers were still above 19000ft. Despite an apparently hopeless situation Yates succeeded in a phenomenal one-man rescue effort in very dangerous conditions.

For the remainder of that day he lowered Simpson on a doubled 9mm rope knotted together some 800m,2600ft down the west side of the north ridge.He lowered without any belays other than a snow-seat dug out of unstable powder snow.Hoping to lower Simpson down the face to the glacier they had approached the face from he continued lowering in continual spindrift avalanches and storm conditions.After nightfall and on the penultimate lower,Simpson was lowered over the edge of an unseen 33m,100ft over-hanging ice cliff.Yates was unable to haul him back and Simpson failed to reascend the rope with prussik loops due to frost-bitten fingers.Communication between the two was nil due to avalanches.Yates carried on lowering Simpson hoping he would reach bottom before the knot jammed in his lowering device(stich-plate).

Unfortunately it jammed while Simpson was still 50ft above the crevasse at the base of the cliff.After one hour Yates was being pulled from his seat.He was suffering from frost-bitten fingers and constantly exposed to the avalanches.Temperatures were probably as low as -20/25.At the last possible moment he managed to cut the rope and prevent himself from being pulled to his death.

He dug a snow-hole and spent the night above the cliff.The following morning he descended and saw that Simpson had fallen into the huge crevasse at the foot of the cliff.No sight or sound could be detected from Simpson so Yates descended alone to base presuming him to have died.

Fortunately after a 33m,100ft fall Simpson had stopped on a snow-bridge inside the crevasse.Aware,the next morning that Yates would undoubtedly have thought he was dead he decided to descend a further 80ft to a ledge in the crevasse.From there he was able to crawl northwards and then climb 33m,100ft up a steep avalanche fill-in slope and quit the crevasse.

He climbed/fell to the glacier and crawled for  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days reaching base-camp in poor condition in the early hours of the 11th June,having had no food for four days and water only on the last day.

Base camp was evacuated that day due to fear of infection setting in on Simpsons injuries.He had to ride a hired mule for two days before reaching Cajatambo.Next day a pick-up truck was hired and it took the team to Lima.

Simpson spent from 13-6 to 22-6 in the Anglo Americana Clinic undergoing a major operation on the knee injury which required pinning back into place.

From the 22nd until the 28th after leaving Hospital a very beery time was spent before flying back to England.

Since returning Simpson has had two further operations on the knee injury and now contrary to 1st opinions he should be able to climb again in about 18 months.

The route on the West face was graded as Extreme Difficile +, the maximum Alpine grade. It was a very fine quality route with hard work on steep ice and unstable powder.\*the face is reckoned to be 1250m,4200ft high.

MAIN SPONSORS.

PORCHESTER INSURANCE,91 Wimpole St.London.	£755
MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION.	£350
BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL/SPORTS COUNCIL.	<u>£350</u>
	£1455.

EQUIPMENT SPONSORS.

Berghaus.  
Javlin International.  
Damart thermal wear.  
Optimus.  
EpiGas.  
Europa sports.  
Don Morrisons.  
Greenpeace.

FINANCES.

Airfares.	£950
New Equipment	<u>£500</u>
	£1450
Plus £400 contributed by each climber.	
Insurance.	£190
Food,equipment,fuel,transport to base-camp	£70
Transport by mule & pick-up to Lima	£90
Hotel fees.	£45.