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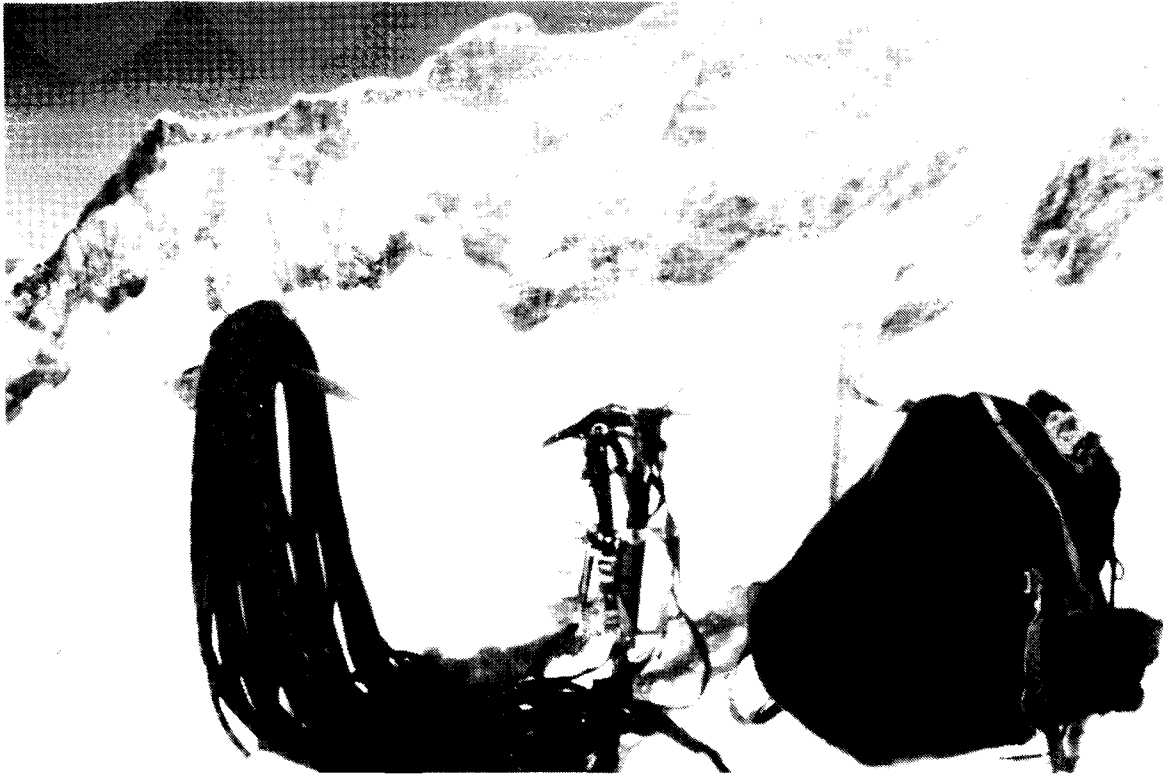


Photo by Geoff Harrison

Excerpts from my Journal of the Ascent of Chopiqalqui

SIX WEEKS IN A PAIR OF SKIVVIES

July 2, 1977

We packed up the basecamp gear and ferried it up to a large boulder in the trees above camp. We then headed out and camped below the crest of the moraine by an idyllic pool. John and Bill determined that there was only food for three climbers, so D.J. and Randy dropped out. Two caches were established on the moraine with the help of the hikers. Seeing the hikers off made this a melancholy day.

July 3

Carried 45 lbs. up to camp #1. This is a terrifically stark area, a granite garbage heap on a grand scale. I felt good all day; the mountain sickness has passed. Our camp is at 17,000 ft., high in the cirque of Huascarán and Chopiqalqui. The moraines grumble constantly, while the glaciers rumble and the mountains speak with rock, snow, and ice slides.

July 4

John and Bill had Cheyne-Stokes breathing all night. Snow fell most of the night and into the morning. We retrieved the high cache--it had all the warm clothes. Being here is worth the hassle; it's incredibly beautiful!

July 5

There are signs of a break in the weather: higher skies and patches of blue.

John and Bill put on their crampons and scouted the route of the first part of the glacier. It looks good. Alarm is set for 5:30 a.m. Tomorrow, the mountain!

July 6

Today started clear, but clouds later poured over the jungle passes. Tracks left by the Swiss three weeks ago led us through the ice fall and seracs and onto the glacier. It was

hollow and potentially dangerous, but we trudged in sunshine. It was so hot, I wore only a T-shirt and was still sweating. As we rounded the col and traversed beneath the ridge on the Yanga Nuca side, a rock fall crossed our path 100 ft. in front of Bill. Exciting stuff! With our route down onto the glacier of the north col in doubt, a white-out engulfed us. After we cleared a platform and set up camp #2, the sky cleared. Sunset behind the three peaks of Huandoy was splendid. Last light dramatically illuminated the summit of Chopiqalqui.

July 7

Slept well with 2 mg. of Valium and two aspirin. White-out all day. Daydreams of good beer, a real bed, a sit-down crapper, real food. Temperatures just below freezing at night and during the day. John looks out of the tent, "God, you're a f---er!" Maybe D.J.'s rain god is getting even with Bill, John, and I. Bill has just had his first nose bleed. Mine is running clear and copious.

The wind comes, rattles our tent, and is gone. Snow hisses against the nylon outer shell and passes on; only the clouds linger.

Barrett doggerel:

"'Twas July 7th on Chopiqalqui,
The climbers lay in their pits,
Imagining climbing [redacted]
[redacted] with [redacted]."

Time flows like an old river. The stench of old sweat, old dirt, and old bodies is overpowering. Climbing seems to be an endless grunt. I hope to reach the top of Chopiqalqui but, after that, to more or less hang up my crampons. I would like a higher esthetic-to-grunt ratio. It's hard to pick your nose with sunburned nostrils. I think I might like running marathons--at least they're over in 3 1/2 hours.

July 8

Out by 11:00. We dropped about 300 ft. with Bill doing a fine lead across a detached bit of ice cliff over 200 ft. of air to get us onto the glacier of the north col. The weather was strange; clouds flowed over the pass into Yanga Nuca, then swirled around the valley, but avoided us. We slogged up all day to the bergschrund guarding our ridge where we pitched camp. Camp #3 is at least 18,500 ft.

July 10

The alarm went off at 4:00 a.m. yesterday; we were off by 7:00. It took an hour to put on my frozen boots. John led out across the 'schrund. I followed like lightning, spurred on partly by cold, partly by fear, front pointing and daggering my way up. Thanks, Pierre. Bill led above. My toes had gone through the painful thaw stage, but Bill's hadn't. We lost an hour while he thawed his feet. He led to the right, eschewing the thigh-deep snow of the more direct route. As we approached a crevasse, we felt more than heard a deep "whump", the warning sound of settling crust before an avalanche. Below us lay 3,000 ft. of Chopiqalqui's east face! An eternity of five minutes passed as Bill, then I, then John traced step by cautious step past the danger. From there, it was a slog in thigh-deep snow: step, breathe, breathe, breathe, breathe, breathe, breathe, breathe, step, repeat. In five hours, we had only gained 1,000 ft. Exhausted and having 1,500 ft. to reach the summit, with John and I suffering from acute mountain sickness, we turned back.

Defeat.

I'm not too excited about another epic. I've been there and seen the beauty, heard the glaciers and moun-

Some text removed in the interest of good taste. "Pits" is UK climbing slang for sleeping bag.

tains talking. I have no great desire to reach the top. I've tested my fears, taken some amazing pictures, tried my body and its endurance. Perhaps another mountain. We'll see. While coming down today, we saw several new crevasses had opened and others widened. This could be a real obstacle.

I don't know how hot John is on trying again; he asked about early out and sight-seeing...I wouldn't mind backpacking some.

July 12

I awoke last night with an amazing determination to climb this damned mountain! I haven't a clue why, but there it is.

July 13

We continue to rest in basecamp and fatten for the kill. Now that I've decided I want to climb the blasted mountain, I feel more at home with John and Bill. Around the camp fire last night Bill told of his meeting with Sir Edmund Hillary in New Zealand and of the kindness of Lady Hillary.

Bill has chronic nose bleeds. John stays in the tent to rest his sunburn, except to foray out and stone the cows. I'd feel safe if John were to try stoning me--they simply don't have throwing sports in England. The cows are attracted to our camp by the salt in our urine. John exercises his pyromania on our garbage pit; we have an excess of kerosene and cow chips.

A can of sardines between us for lunch. Fantastic! Real food.

July 16

Yesterday we ferried eight days' food up to moraine camp. John was dizzy and lagged behind. He's worse this morning. We couldn't afford to eat our high altitude food while waiting for him to get better, so we went

all the way back to basecamp.

Time is running out. We can afford only one day here. John will rest tomorrow, then hopefully we will make our last ascent.

July 17

Today is miserable: overcast and raining. We wouldn't have been happy on the mountain.

July 19

Sun on the tent and a powder avalanche 100 yds. away.

The glacier has been moving, melting, and shifting. The 10 ft. ice wall which took us onto the glacier is now a 4 ft. step. Bill led through the seracs. New crevasses have opened, old ones have widened, but our route is still intact.

We pushed down onto the north col glacier this time for camp #2. Traversing the detached ice flake was no less hairy. One slip and the whole rope surely would have gone.

July 20

Bill's idea of fixing a rope over the bergschrund didn't pan out. After 20 minutes of cursing the 9 mil rope and prussik stirrups which kept falling off his boots, Bill took a belay from John. We have four days to try for the summit from here. We should be able to push it even with deep powder snow.

July 21

Alarm at 4:00 a.m. Starry sky and the lights of Huaraz below. Clouds already in the valleys.

By probing with his axe, Bill was able to find our old trail. Slow, but a whole lot faster and easier than slogging through powder up to our asses. We made good time up to the base of the triangle. A 60 ft. diameter disk of snow with the Swiss' tracks up the middle had detached and rotated to

vertical. No bridge across the crevasse. John, at the end of his tether, was ready to give up. Bill and I overruled him. Bill scouted the left hand ridge. He did an impressive lead behind the guardian serac and found the last possible route. We will try it after a rest day.

Voices which Bill though he had heard in the morning materialized in the form of four [REDACTED] (English dialect for Frenchmen). Their appearance on our mountain left no doubt of John's ability to psych-up for another try. They are camped just up the hill from us. Bill and John are burned because the [REDACTED] will reach the summit before we do, having had the benefit of our solidified tracks and our route finding.

July 22

Rest day. At 5:00 a.m. I started up the hill to see how the French had done. They were still on the mountain. After 15 minutes of watching their progress and wondering at their slow descent, John noticed that they were climbing. They had bivouacked on a cornice at 20,700 ft.!

July 23

Up at 4:00 a.m., out by 6:45, despite Bill's mysteriously acquired case of the Inca two-step. The temperature dipped to 10°F., the coldest of the trip. For this elevation, the temperature is amazing.

We did it!

The snow above the serac was steep and very loose. Bill did a gutsy lead. We followed the edge of the triangle to the higher transverse crevasse, then crossed to a median snow bridge. Above this, we diagonaled back to the edge through snow which lent itself more to powder swimming than to climbing. We buried an arm to the shoulder, an ice axe and forearm, and both legs to the crotch in the 45° stuff

just to keep from avalanching down. Spin drift filled Bill's tracks by the time I reached them, and mine for John.

Going up the edge was much easier. The [REDACTED], descending, passed us there. The lip of the crevasse at the top of the triangle was not as high as anticipated. Nothing, though, is easy at 20,800 ft.

The final bit of summit ridge, which had turned parties back in the past, proved easy--a walkup. Mountains change from year to year, from week to week. Just as the triangle didn't appear on early ascent reports, and the snow bridge used by the Swiss to cross onto the triangle had disappeared in the two weeks since we had last been there, so the summit ridge had metamorphosed into a tame ridge.

As first Bill, then I, then John crested the summit, the clouds settled in. The view was tremendous for 50 ft. We took "I was there" pictures, ate lunch, basked in the 22° temperature, and then headed down, thinking of the climbers' saying, "The summit isn't a great place to be, but it's a great place to have been."

Geoff Harrison

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