At long last I have been able to satisfy my wish to visit the Andes. The opportunity came from an offer by Dr Liati, who wanted to form an expedition with Gigi Alippi. Despite the number of expeditions nowadays, there is still a considerable effort involved, with the search for an objective of sufficient merit, the choice of party, and the work on equipment and finance; but thanks to the co-operation of numerous friends all our problems were solved entirely satisfactorily.

First of all we consulted our friend Giuseppe Dionisi of Turin, who had already been to the Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash; he confirmed, as we had suspected, that there were no major new peaks left there. In order to achieve a result worthy of the world reputation of Lecco mountaineering, we therefore had to content ourselves with a new route on one of the unclimbed faces, and decided on the North-east face of Yerupaja, 6634 m, the highest peak in the Cordillera Huayhuash. However, before setting off we had to discard this after reading in a French mountaineering journal of the British-American ascent (see also *A.J.* 74 15); all that now remained was the East buttress.

Having chosen our objective, it was necessary to settle on the team, for which we turned to the Gruppo Ragni (the Spiders), having regard not only to the need for unquestioned climbing ability but also for everybody to be self-supporting to some extent (the Lecco Section of the C.A.I. was unable to give us any financial assistance owing to heavy existing commitments). The party was to prove well up to the demands of the task ahead of us. It was composed of Gigi Alippi, Natale Airoldi, Casimiro Ferrari, Giuseppe Lafranconi, Dr Sandro Liati, Annibale Zucchi, myself, and finally Mimmo Lanzetta, who was of the greatest help to us even though he had no claims to be a mountaineer.

Having got thus far, we started on the laborious preparation of the equipment and its dispatch overseas. At the same time, on the financial side the organising committee made an appeal to organisations, firms and private individuals, who responded with great generosity.

When the equipment was all ready, we received considerable assistance from the Peruvian Consul-General in Genoa, Signor Raul Garraud, and from Dr Cesare Morales in Lima, because under existing Peruvian law a special import permit was required; thanks to their speedy intervention this arrived just in time. Dr Cesare Morales, a leading figure in the Ministry of Physical Education in Peru, is a great expert on the Peruvian Andes, and also proved to be a great friend of the Italians, as we were to find during our stay in Peru. He provided us with porters, horses, and a long train of donkeys to carry our equipment.
Finally the day of departure arrived, and on the evening of 6 June 1969 our friends and relations said ‘good-bye’ to us at Milan Airport, our destination Lima via Paris and Rio de Janeiro. At Lima we were warmly welcomed by members of our Embassy, including Dr Lupardini, the Commercial Attaché, the local authorities, with Dr Morales, and several Italians. We had a heartwarming meeting with a large delegation of Lima climbers, and the organisers of the Italian Sporting Club were there also. We were their guests for some days while waiting for our stores to come from Callao and making arrangements for our departure for the interior. An outstanding figure among the Italians whom we had the pleasure of meeting on our arrival was Celso Salvetti, who had lived in Peru for years. His sincere and spontaneous friendship was of the greatest help to us, and he put himself at our entire disposal.

Unfortunately, unwelcome news awaited us. Dr Morales informed us that an Austrian party which had been unable to obtain permission for the Himalaya, had suddenly arrived and made for our chosen objective on Yerupaja (see p 212 below). It was a nasty moment, but it is in our nature to respond to discouragement, and we looked for something else important.

The new goal was the West face of Jirishanca, 6126 m, still in the Cordillera Huayhuash. We were pleased with the choice. Jirishanca is one of the finest mountains in the entire Peruvian Andes, and, with Yerupaja, the finest in the Cordillera Huayhuash. The history of Jirishanca is also bound up with the name of the lamented Toni Egger, my dear friend and a great climber, who in 1957, in one of the most outstanding achievements of valour, courage and endurance, conquered the summit after days of bitter sacrificial struggle on the East face, with S. Jungmeier.
The West side however, which was our choice, had never been attempted, and so the myth of inviolability had been born. Seen from any point it looks fascinating and outstandingly beautiful, an impressive, smooth shape gleaming with ice. In order to launch our attack on the wall we would first have to overcome an unexplored glacier which, in 1954, Dr Klier's expedition had considered inaccessible.

Our expedition left Lima for Chiquian after a few days' delay, partly due to unforeseen bureaucratic complications. Chiquian is a large village at a height of 3553 m, situated on a large natural plain, the majority of the population being engaged in agricultural activities carried out with extremely primitive equipment. The land is bone-dry, and the peasants have to use crow-bars to turn the soil. At Chiquian we met our four porters, good lads, strong and resourceful, who had the job of helping us to carry the large packs up to the starting point. We loaded up the forty burros (small donkeys), which were to carry our stores to the Base Camp, and climbed towards it, arriving and installing ourselves at a height of 4000 m after three days' march, covering over 140 km.

The Base Camp was sited near two small lakes, in which Lanzetta monopolised the trout. It was an idyllic spot, a magnificent setting and adequately protected. Before our eyes the West face of the Cordillera Huayhuash rose up, with its shattered crest gleaming in the sun, of immense size and fantastic proportions. We filled our lungs with the sharp, stinging rarefied air of the 4000 m high Andes. Our eyes were enraptured by the beauty of the peaks around us: on the left Rondoy, with its imposing massif; then Jirishanca, which presents two peaks (the small and the great) as if to emphasise its majestic boldness with an appearance of proud strength; El Toro, where the ice-covered rocks are of a pale pink colour, giving them a resemblance to the Dolomites; and finally Yerupaja, powerfully dominating all. Each of them has its own individual character.

It was 17 June. It was already twelve days since we had left Italy, and so far we had only managed to set up our Base Camp. Accordingly, we wasted no time, and the next morning I went towards our mountain with Alippi and the four porters. We walked for four hours until we found a suitable place for our intermediate camp which was to function as a depot and support. We erected a tent for the food and equipment, and returned tired to Base. In the days that followed we took it in turn to carry to the intermediate camp.

On 21 June we set off for the Advanced Camp. We were excited and thoughtful because we knew that to reach this camp we would have to cross the Colle El
The approach from Base Camp was up a separate glacier to the col on the right. The point reached by Lafranconi and Zucchi on 28 June was slightly above B2 (second bivouac—see p 349 for abbreviations and signs used). The North face of Yerupaja Chico is on the right; Rondoy is on the left.

Toro, 5300 m, hitherto considered impassable. Dr Morales had told us that in 1957 an aeroplane with twenty-seven passengers on board had crashed into the mountain-side between Jirishanca and El Toro; the rescue party had had to give up after four days because they could not find any way to the scene of the accident.

It is a very extensive area of ice, intersected by an impressive series of crevasses running in all directions, something quite unprecedented for me, even in the Karakoram and Alaska. We seemed to be moving in a fabulous frozen kingdom of snow, full of deadly snares and pitfalls, when in the middle of a very long crevasse we saw a slender bridge of snow nonchalantly put there by Providence. As if for fun we looked to right and left to see if there was a better passage, but there was none, we had to be content with this one.

Slowly, cautiously and delicately I advanced; the bridge held. We all crossed, glad to have overcome the first hard obstacle. We would all cross it several times during our work to prepare the Advanced Camp, which we placed at a little over 5100 m, after crossing the col.
The wall of Jirishanca presented itself as a climb of extreme difficulty, with a gradient of 70°–75°, an impressive sight, completely vertical in places, topped with enormous seracs. We had chosen the most compelling problem of the Cordillera Huayhuash, and now we had to climb this unconquered West wall by the route which was aesthetically most beautiful and technically most interesting. The chosen route ran under enormous overhanging seracs, and was to involve much step-cutting with pegs for belays.

The high altitude reached too hurriedly gave us all bad headaches. For some days we carried replenishments from the intermediate and Base Camps to the Advanced Camp; apart from the considerable loads there was also the difficulty of operating at over 5000 m, which is not always fully appreciated.

On 28 June, in weather which continued to favour us in every way, four of us set off towards the peak, Zucchi and Lafranconi to go ahead and prepare the way beyond where Ferrari and Alippi had got to the day before, Arnoldi and I to film and take photographs and carry some equipment. However, when we arrived at a rope’s length from the place reached by Alippi and Ferrari, we two were forced to go back as a hail of ice was raining down on us caused by the two ahead cutting steps. Furthermore I had finished the film, and the help we could offer was very slight.
At the Advanced Camp Alippi asked me my opinion about the ascent, and I again confirmed that it really was extremely difficult. At 6.30pm, by which time it was already dark, Lafranconi and Zucchi returned to camp. They had not reached the ridge, but had got to within about 50 m of it.

It was on 29 June that we were assaulted by particularly infernal weather. It was something unearthly, horrible, malevolent, which reduced us to impotent creatures at the mercy of the whims of mother nature. To think that they had told us you never get bad weather in the Andes at this time of the year! I cheered up my companions, but in my heart I was afraid that the devil wanted to lay his hands on us. For four days we were forcibly confined to the tent.

On 3 July the weather improved, and Ferrari and Liati went to the face to clear their half-destroyed tracks, but towards evening they were caught by a sudden change in the weather and were forced to bivouac on the face. At the Advanced Camp, we were without news of them. I tried not to dramatise matters, but I was unable to hide my fears. The bad weather made us miserable, and anxiety about our two companions prevented us from keeping calm. It was a long, uncomfortable, sleepless night.

Early the next morning we caught sight of the tent in which Ferrari and Liati were sheltering on the edge of the ridge, and gave a sigh of relief. Once again the gear had proved perfectly efficient and ideally suitable, even in a violent storm, permitting us to survive unscathed.

The weather moderated, and then Lafranconi and Zucchi set off in the footsteps of the two leaders and met Ferrari and Liati in an ice-cave which they had reached in the meantime. On the next day, 5 July, Alippi, Airoldi and I set off. Overladen with food and stores, we all met together in the evening of the same day for the bivouac. We were to spend the night in a large, uncanny, Dante-like cave, remarkable for stalactites of ice and naturally artistic architectural features, but, unfortunately, we were seven, and every so often somebody volunteered to sleep outside. At dawn on 6 July Ferrari and Lafranconi set off in good spirits, climbed back up the 100 m already covered the previous day, and tensed themselves for the effort to conquer the last few dozen metres which separated them from the summit. They had to cope with the upper part of the snow and ice mushroom which covers the summit of Jirishanca, where they were confronted by an inconsistent and treacherous spongy ice, blown on the surface. The ice-axe sank into everything, and the snow gave no purchase for the feet, making it impossible to brace for the next move. The fragile calotte of ice on the summit seemed determined to preserve inviolate the 6126 m high peak.
Suddenly we could no longer see Ferrari and Lafranconi, who had gone to the other side to look for a passage, and for a few minutes we were frantically worried. Finally, Ferrari, supported with strenuous determination by Lafranconi, and refusing to give up, made a further attempt, strewing his passage with little wooden stakes like the pointed handles of ice-axes, and succeeded so far as to hoist his body on to the summit. The ice there is fragile, it never solidifies because of the sun, wind and snow which are whipping it continuously. It was our point of contact with the earth. We all ploughed a furrow to the top, even though there was not room for us all at once. Back in the cave we gave vent to our joy.

Once more after a mountain conquest I experienced a feeling of strength and security. I felt my palpitating heart beat faster as if about to explode, while a strange feeling of well-being filled me with elation. These are the times when I feel truly happy and carefree, aware that I shall never be able to express the flowing of these sensations, because it is an interior joy, a thing of the spirit. I also feel that I shall never be able to express my gratitude to my companions, and this time, again, outward demonstration was limited to the simple ritual at the summit, which for me signifies the everlasting ritual: a firm handshake and a vigorous embrace, which says everything.

On the next day, 7 July, at daybreak, we began the long tiring descent. Lafranconi and I brought up the rear, and had the job of recovering the ropes and removing the pitons, except those needed for the descent. It was quite tiring work, but all went magnificently. At 2 pm we all met at the Advanced Camp, where Lanzetti and five porters were waiting for us. We toasted our victory with the one bottle of 'Cardinale' wine which Zucchi had brought up so far. We decided to go straight on down to Base Camp, where we arrived when night was already far advanced. Now we could say that another fine adventure had had a happy ending.

To close this brief account, it is my duty to recall and thank all those who gave their support in order to realise this latest Lecco enterprise.

Nevado Jirishanca, 6126 m, 6 July 1969. First ascent of West face, by the whole party (except Lanzetta) in three successive ropes.