
Climbs



Rowan Huntley *Les Drus ~ Study from Grands Montets*
Watercolour and pencil, 16cm x 23cm

MICHAEL COCKER

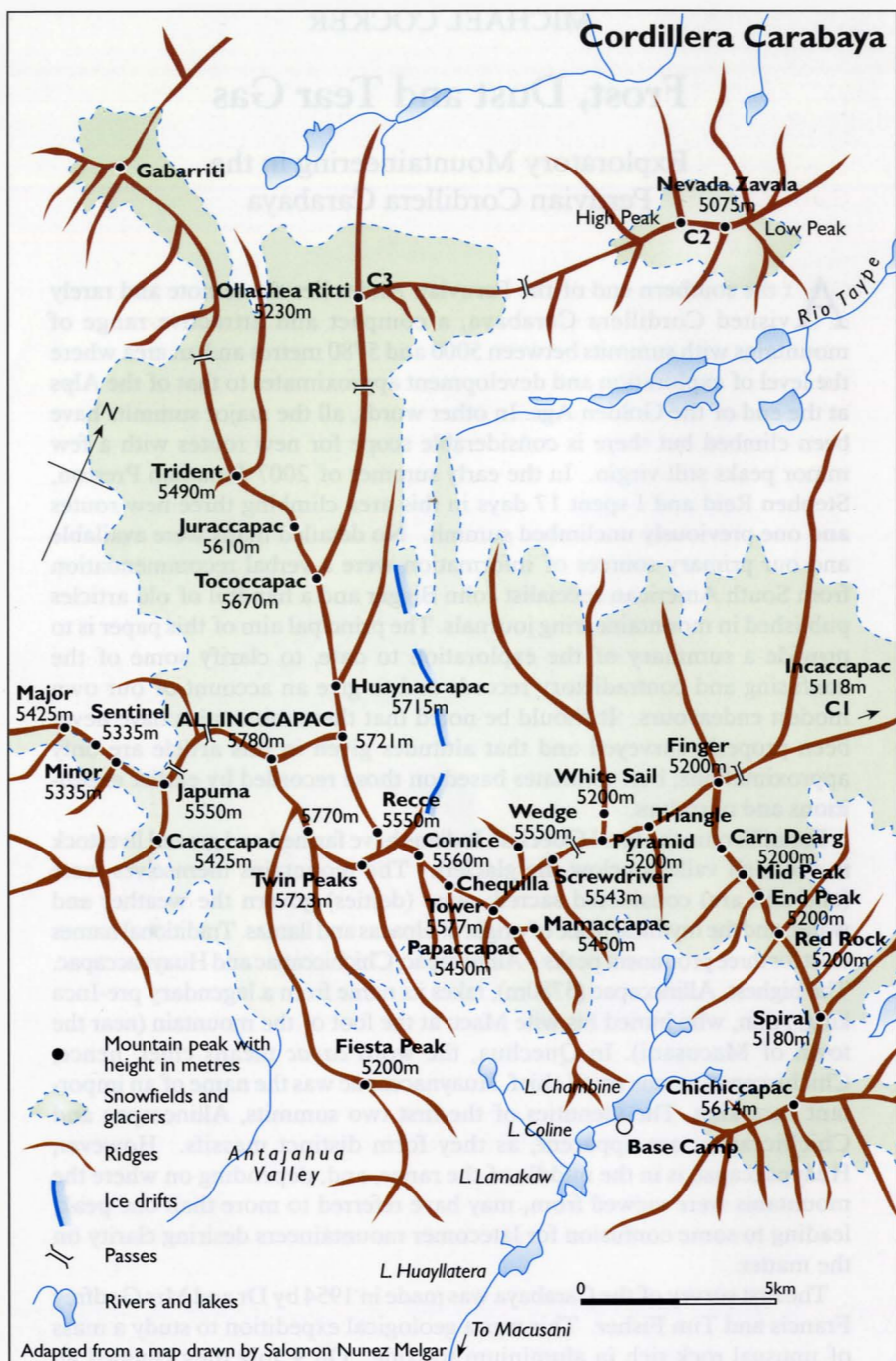
Frost, Dust and Tear Gas

Exploratory Mountaineering in the Peruvian Cordillera Carabaya

At the southern end of the Peruvian Andes lies the remote and rarely visited Cordillera Carabaya, a compact and attractive range of mountains with summits between 5000 and 5780 metres and an area where the level of exploration and development approximates to that of the Alps at the end of the Golden Age. In other words, all the major summits have been climbed but there is considerable scope for new routes with a few minor peaks still virgin. In the early summer of 2007 Jonathan Preston, Stephen Reid and I spent 17 days in this area climbing three new routes and one previously unclimbed summit. No detailed maps were available and our primary sources of information were a verbal recommendation from South American specialist John Biggar and a handful of old articles published in mountaineering journals. The principal aim of this paper is to provide a summary of the exploration to date, to clarify some of the confusing and contradictory records and to give an account of our own modest endeavours. It should be noted that these mountains have never been properly surveyed and that altitudes given in this article are only approximations; best estimates based on those recorded by earlier expeditions and ourselves.

For millennia the local Quechua Indians have farmed and grazed livestock in the high valleys below the glaciers. The mountains themselves were (and still are) considered sacred; *Apus* (deities) govern the weather and water, and the mythical place of origin of alpacas and llamas. Traditional names exist for three prominent peaks – Allinccapac, Chichiccapac and Huaynaccapac. The highest, Allinccapac (5780m), takes its name from a legendary pre-Inca king, Allin, who buried his wife Macu at the foot of the mountain (near the town of Macusani). In Quechua, the word *capac* means chief, hence, Chichiccapac means small chief. Huaynaccapac was the name of an important Inca king. The identities of the first two summits, Allinccapac and Chichiccapac, are apparent, as they form distinct massifs. However, Huaynaccapac is in the middle of the range, and, depending on where the mountains were viewed from, may have referred to more than one peak, leading to some confusion for latecomer mountaineers desiring clarity on the matter.

The first survey of the Carabaya was made in 1954 by Dr and Mrs Godfrey Francis and Tim Fisher. This was a geological expedition to study a mass of unusual rock rich in aluminium trioxide. On 9 July they climbed an



outlying peak, which they named Japuma (5550m). In 1959 Francis led a second expedition to the area to attempt the three highest peaks—Allinccapac, Huaynaccapac and Chichiccapac. On 30 June, Francis, Simon Clark, Beverley Holt and Julio Cardenas climbed Chichiccapac (5614m) by its west glacier. Having assumed this was the first ascent, they were disconcerted to find footprints and rope marks in the snow near the summit. Cardenas, their chief porter, made enquiries and discovered that the Italian mountaineer Piero Ghiglione and a local porter, Fortunato Mautino, had made the first ascent, via the same route, eight days earlier. At the time Ghiglione was 76 years old. He and Mautino also made the second ascent of Japuma and an attempt on Allinccapac before moving to other areas where they made another 13 first ascents. Francis's party also tried Allinccapac but, hindered by soft snow, were unable to find a suitable line. In 1960, Francis, who wrote the instructional manual *Mountain Climbing* (1958), was killed by stone fall on Pillar Rock.

The first ascent of Allinccapac I, an imposing flat-topped massif encircled by steep cliffs overhung with huge ice séracs and cornices, was made on 25 July 1960 by Robert Kendell and Michael Binnie via a short steep couloir on the west side. The three other members of this Oxford University party – John Cole, Keith Meldrum and Nigel Rogers – made the second ascent two days later by the same route. From a high camp west of Allinccapac, they also climbed the lower of Huaynaccapac's two summits (5715m), which they named Huaynaccapac I, by two separate routes on the same day – the north-west ridge (Cole and Rogers) and south-west face (Binnie, Kendell and Meldrum). The following day Binnie and Kendell forced a track through soft snow up the south-west face, to a col between Juraccapac (5610m) and Tococcapac (5670m) before continuing up the south-east ridge of Juraccapac to make the first ascent. The next day the rest of the party used their tracks to regain the col and made the first ascent of Tococcapac via its north-west ridge. Kendell and Binnie made the first ascent of Allinccapac II (5770m), climbing 300m of steep snow on the north-west face. Recce Peak (5550m) was ascended by Cole, Rogers and Meldrum in order to inspect the four impressive rock and ice towers that they named: Screwdriver, Wedge, Tower and Cornice. They also made a complete north to south traverse of Japuma and included Cacaccapac (5425m), a rock peak to its south. Towards the end of the expedition Cole and Kendell made the first ascent of the second, slightly higher and south-westerly summit of Huaynaccapac (5721m). Finally, during the evacuation from their high camp, 'Pico Carol' (5670m) 'a prominent gendarme on the east ridge of Allinccapac' was climbed. The party had their base camp in the Antahoua valley, directly under the formidable south-west face of Allinccapac, and spent six weeks in the mountains.

In July 1965 a Keele University expedition made the third ascent of Chichiccapac, following the same line as previous parties, before making the first ascents of Tower (5577m) (which they confusingly and erroneously

refer to as Huaynaccapac), Screwdriver (5543m) and nine other peaks. It took the best part of a week to find a way up Tower, which Brian Chase, Rodney Gallagher, Geoffrey Bonney and Andrew Tomlinson eventually climbed via 'a huge ice-gully' on the north-east side. During their exploration of Tower they named two subsidiary peaks, east of the main summit, Papaccapac and Mamaccapac, both c5450m. A spell of bad weather and the theft of some equipment detained them for a few days in base camp before a high camp was established in the glaciated cirque below Screwdriver and Pyramid. From here Chase, Tomlinson, Bonney and Gallagher made the first ascent of Pyramid (5200m) by two independent routes. Chase and Tomlinson followed this with the first ascent of White Sail (5200m), another snow peak, possibly Vela Blanca (on the same ridge and slightly north of White Sail) and, on 16 August, Screwdriver via its north ridge – a pure rock climb with two VS pitches. Bonney and Peter Floyd made the first ascent of Red Rock (5200m) and a peak 'just east of Pyramid' (probably Triangle). Chase and Tomlinson devised 'a superb ridge traverse on snow and rock' over the summits of End Peak, Mid Peak, Carn Dearg and Finger Peak, all around 5200m. At the end of August bad weather set in 'and only minor rock peaks nearby were ascended'. The party established base camp at Laguna Lamakaw on 15 July and departed on 9 September.

The first expedition to approach the mountains from the north was a team from the New Zealand Alpine Club which, in 1967, set up a base camp near the head of the Rio Taype. On 14 June, Alex Parton, Dave Massam, Bryan Dudley and Alwyn Chinn made the first ascent of C2 (5075m), an impressive snow peak overlooking their camp, finding it harder than expected, the crux section being a 100m rock buttress which was iced in parts. On 18 June a high camp was established on the glacier north-east of Trident. From the lower reaches of this they 'climbed steep fluted ice and rock to a ridge' leading to the top of C3 (5230m), the first ascent. On 21 June second ascents of Juraccapac and Tococcapac were made via a long snow couloir, presumably on the north-east face, by Parton, Dudley, Massam, Chinn and Roderick McKenzie. The following day the same party made the first ascent of Trident (5490m) their main objective. Steep snow and ice led to a col between the middle and north peaks where 'an interesting rock ridge' led to the summit. After a couple of days back in base camp, second ascents were made of Screwdriver (repeating the line taken previously), Tower and Huaynaccapac II (both allegedly by new routes) and, on 4 July came the first traverse of Allinccapac I and II (third and second ascents respectively of the individual peaks). Massam and Parton made the first ascent of Cornice (5560m), finding it 'longer and more difficult than was anticipated', but left no details of the line taken. Eight other peaks were climbed from base camp, the most spectacular being a subsidiary summit of C2 involving a height gain of more than 600m.

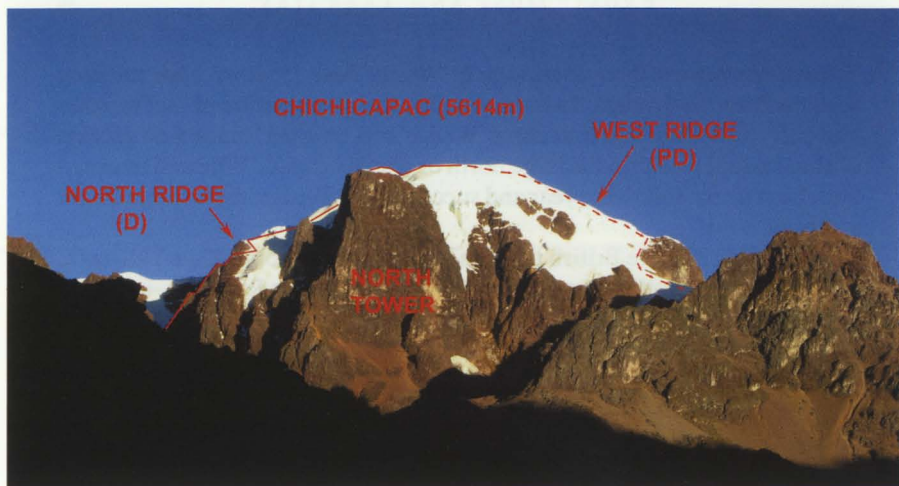
Also in the area at the same time, based on the south side of the range, was a British team led by Roger Whewell. They too had come to attempt

Trident but turned their attentions to Wedge Peak (5550m) after meeting with the New Zealanders. In the event, due to a combination of bad weather and soft snow, they failed to climb Wedge and, instead, made first ascents of three minor peaks on the ridge north of Chichiccapac. Whewell returned with his wife the following year and succeeded on Wedge, the last significant virgin summit.

In August 1971 five British mountaineering instructors – Kate Dilworth, Barbara Spark, Mollie Porter, Carol McNeill and Janet Richards – climbed Japuma from the north and made the first ascents of three peaks on the ridge running west from this: Sentinel (5335m), ascending the south and descending the west side, Minor (5335m) via the south face and west ridge, and Major (5425m) via the east ridge and south face. Spark, Porter and Richards also made the first ascent of Spiral Peak (5180m), one mile north of Chichiccapac, via the south-west ridge, while McNeil and Dilworth made repeat ascents of Triangle and Pyramid.

In October 1973, Steve McAndrews (American), Ian Haverson (Australian), and Michael Andrews (New Zealand) made the fifth ascent of Chichiccapac by the normal route up the west face. On 2 August 1980, from a base in the Antajahua valley, a Chilean team – G Cassana, D Delgado, G Naccicio, and A Neira – made the first recorded ascent of Twin Peaks (5723m) via the south-east ridge. This was the last expedition to visit the Cordillera Carabaya for 25 years as political instability and an aggressive campaign by the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) guerrillas made Peru a virtual no-go area. By the time climbers did return, in the 1990s, the Carabaya, no longer having the lure of significant virgin summits or peaks over 6000m, slipped into obscurity.

First to rediscover these mountains was John Biggar who led a commercial expedition to the area in 2005. On 14 June, from a base camp at Laguna Chungara, south-east of the Chichiccapac massif, they climbed Chichiccapac via a new route, the east glacier and north-east ridge, a technically straightforward ascent which they graded alpine Facile. The following day Biggar and two others climbed the minor peak of Chichiccapac South-east (c5285m), which they believed to be a first ascent; an easy glacier on the south side was followed by rock climbing on the north-west ridge up to VS. The party then moved their base camp to Laguna Chambine, west of Chichiccapac, from where, on 19 June, Biggar and three others climbed an unnamed rock tower (c5267m) by two separate routes, the north ridge and west face. No location for this peak is given. They thought the summit may have been reached before but were fairly certain the climbs were new as there was clear evidence that the lines had only recently emerged from the glacier. Ascents were also made of peaks they believed to be White Sail and Red Peak; the latter via a straightforward scramble up the south ridge, possibly a first ascent. Various members of the team climbed Quenamari (c5294m), which lies south of the main range, Iteriluma (c5270m), just south of Chichiccapac and an unnamed peak (c5057m) near Laguna Chambine. It is not clear if any of these were first ascents.



38. North-west face of Chichicapac, showing the line up the north ridge (Alpine D).
(Stephen Reid)



39. Base Camp at Laguna Chabine. (Michael Cocker)

Jonathan, Stephen and I arrived in Lima, on 14 June 2007 and the following day took an internal flight to Juliaca and a bus to Puno, on the edge of Lake Titicaca, where we spent four days acclimatizing and acquiring essential supplies. A luggage allowance of 20kg each on the international flight had pared our equipment down to a bare minimum and all the food, fuel and base camp kit had to be purchased locally. A minibus and driver were hired to take us the 300 or so kilometres of dirt roads to the unprepossessing town of Macusani at the foot of the mountains. Here, having little or no choice in the matter, we found a room in a basic hotel, next door to the local brothel.

With no established infrastructure to facilitate onward transportation into the mountains we wandered the streets enquiring in broken and inadequate Spanish if it was possible to hire a vehicle. No one was forthcoming until we were introduced to Alex, a local wheeler-dealer and likeable rogue who had spent time working on construction sites in the USA. Significantly, he had a car, a beaten up old Peugeot with bald tyres. After agreeing a price, he drove with alarming speed and confidence up a rough track leading to a dam at the road head so we could recce the start of the trek to base camp. On the way back we stopped at a farm where two rather toothless middle-aged ladies, wearing the traditional Derby hat and hooped skirt, agreed to act as porters and lend us pack animals. The following morning a friend of Alex's arrived at the hotel with a minibus that looked even more of a wreck than the Peugeot. However we were assured that it was good for the journey and, as if to prove the point, both the driver and Alex brought along various members of their families for the ride. Remarkably, despite living virtually in the shadow of the mountains, they had never been to the lakes at the head of the valley. All went well and a couple of hours later we were met at the dam by the ladies from the farm with two horses and three donkeys. After an hour or so preparing the loads a small caravan, that now included not only the ladies and their pack animals but also the driver, Alex, various family members and a couple of children, set off on the two and a half hour trek to base camp, which we established at the edge of the picturesque Laguna Chambine.

The winter solstice was almost upon us and the locals had told us about the *Allinccapac Raymi* or festival that was due to take place at the head of the adjacent Antajahua valley on 23 June. Thinking the walk would be a good acclimatisation exercise and that we would probably be the first outsiders to participate, we set off that morning to join in the festivities. However, by the time we got to the top of the 5000m pass giving access to the next valley, it became clear we would not be able to get there and back in a day, so instead we decided to traverse the ridge leading north-west towards Allinccapac. A couple of hours' easy scrambling bought us to the foot of a rock tower that projected 50m or so from the ridge. Drum beats, pan-pipes and voices drifted eerily up from the valley below as we soloed



40. Stephen Reid on the crux pitch during the first ascent of the north ridge of Chichiccapac. (*Michael Cocker*)

up the tower, finding the final short, loose and technically severe wall, just below the summit, disconcerting in big boots without a rope. There was no cairn on top and as it had no name and didn't appear to have been climbed before we called it Fiesta Peak (5200m).

Base camp was a delightful spot. The sun hit our tents at seven in the morning and for a few hours the air was still and warm. Then around midday the wind picked up, producing clouds of dust that would deposit their contents over the camp, invariably just as we were about to have lunch, the main meal of the day. We were a little concerned about the wisdom of leaving the tents unattended while we were away climbing, but, in the event, the only visitor we had during our stay was Marco, a 30-something family man from Macusani who came three times a week on his bicycle to fish the lake for trout, which he later sold in the market. Just after 3.30pm the sun disappeared behind the surrounding peaks and within minutes the temperature plummeted, driving us into our tents for extra clothing or clambering up the hillside to stay in the sunlight a little longer. Being mid-winter, and just a few degrees south of the equator, days were short and the darkness lasted a full 12 hours with the temperature dropping to around -8°C in the early hours of the morning.

Our original objective was the unclimbed south face of Chichiccapac but a preliminary inspection quickly ruled this out. Although we could see a feasible route up a series of connecting snow gullies the whole face was overhung by massive séracs and cornices. So we turned our attention to the north side of the mountain where we found a fine rock ridge, with three distinct towers, leading directly to the upper snowfields. A chilly bivouac in the corrie below and an early start enabled us to reach 'Preston Col' at the foot of the ridge just after dawn on 29 June. To avoid having to re-arrange the ropes at each stance we had agreed that the leader would climb three pitches before changing the order. Jonathan took the first shift and set off up a chockstone-filled chimney on the east side of the ridge. From an icy belay two thirds of the way up this, a short wall and traverse took us out onto the front of the ridge, where a series of open grooves and corners led to a platform at the foot of the middle tower. We swapped leaders and Stephen donned rock shoes to tackle what was clearly going to be a difficult pitch. Technically it was probably only MVS, but the holds were small, the rock friable and it was only moderately well protected. We were also all acutely aware of the altitude and the sacks felt heavy. It was an impressive lead and when I came to second it, in big boots, I found myself calling for a tight rope on more than one occasion. A couple of pitches of easier climbing took us to the foot of the third tower, which we were able to avoid by a rightward traverse onto the snow. We had noticed a band of ice-cliffs above the ridge the previous evening and had been a little uneasy about the difficulties these might contain, but in the event a straightforward passage was found through them and only a few hundred metres of steep snow and the occasional crevasse separated us from the summit, which we reached at 1.30pm. Far below we could see Macusani, a small stain in the khaki altiplano. To the east, a sea of cloud lay over the Amazonian rainforest while to the north rose the Allinccapac massif and, in the far distance, Ausangate, the highest mountain in southern Peru. After a bite to eat we set off down the west face, the start of which would be difficult to locate in poor visibility. This contained one short steep ice section, but otherwise led easily down to a snow col where we veered away from the normal route and abseiled down the corrie headwall to descend scree and boulder fields back to our bivvi site. It was 5.30pm and almost dark, but rather than endure a second night out we stumbled on down for another hour and a half to reach base camp utterly exhausted. It had been an excellent day's climbing – a new route (which we thought about alpine Difficile), the first complete traverse and seventh overall ascent of Chichiccapac.

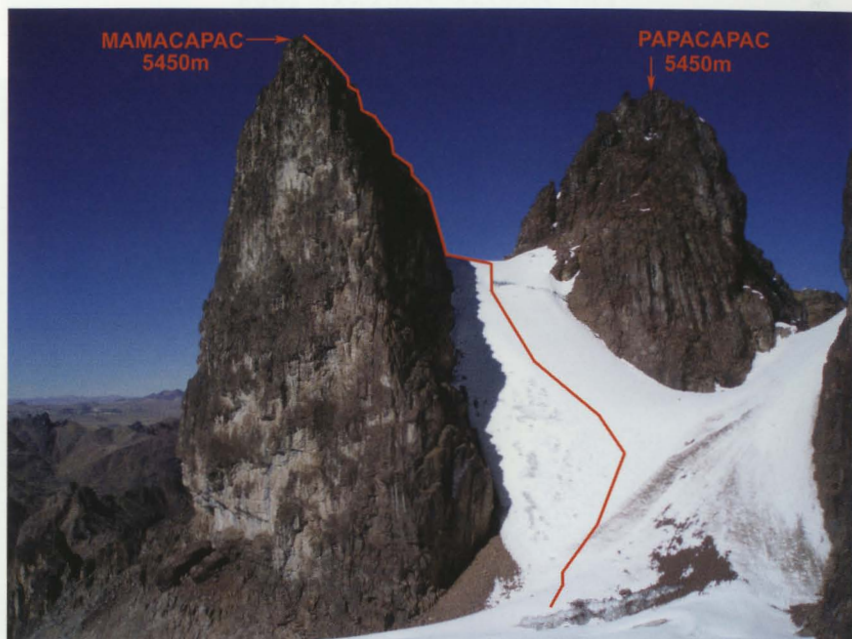
Four days later, and after another cold bivouac and predawn start, we scrambled over exhausting, ankle-twisting moraine to access the unnamed glacier below the south face of Screwdriver, our main objective for the day. The snow on the glacier was soft, we moved slowly, and it was already 9.30am before we were near the foot of the face; rather too late, we felt, to embark on a major mixed route of unknown difficulty with no bivouac gear (we had left

this below the moraine). Furthermore, we could see no practical line up the face. After a brief discussion we opted for the unclimbed, more amenable and impressive looking Mamaccapac. A steep snow slope led to a col between the twin peaks where we belayed and I set off up the shaded south-west face, the rock rather cold on the fingers. The angle eased after a few moves but the rock became horrendously loose and the climbing akin to tiptoeing up a pile of precariously perched roof tiles. Three nerve-jangling pitches took us to the summit where we built a cairn and wondered how we were going to descend. In the event, delicate down climbing and one abseil landed us safely back at the col where we began the long and wearying return to base camp.

With time left for only one more sortie, we decided to explore the mountains at the head of the valley we had crossed on the way to Fiesta Peak; the elegant looking south ridge of Cornice had in particular caught our attention. On the walk in, and just as we were approaching the bivouac site, I slipped on a loose boulder and landed heavily on my left wrist. I didn't think much of it at the time but next morning, as we walked up the moraine to the foot of the glacier, it was painful every time I put weight on it and I thought it unwise to embark on a long snow and ice climb that was going to require the use of two ice tools for most of the day. Reluctantly, I dropped out, leaving Stephen and Jonathan to complete the route. They reported it as superb, with 13 pitches of climbing at about Scottish grade III/IV that took most of the day and descent down the same line. They didn't get back to the bivouac site till 10pm and, as I had taken our only MSR stove back to base camp, endured a second cold night with only a few mouthfuls of water and some boiled sweets as sustenance. We had all anticipated a return to base camp the same day, so their absence caused me some concern during the night and I was mightily relieved to catch sight of them strolling back up the valley early the following morning. This was only the second ascent of the mountain and the first ascent of the south ridge, which they graded alpine Difficile. The adjacent peak to the north of Cornice, Chequillia, remains unclimbed.

During our time in the mountains the weather remained remarkably stable with only one day of low cloud and drizzle, but on the last evening thunder rumbled in the distance and lightning forked across the eastern sky. We had arranged for our porters and transport to return on 8 July, but being aware that Peruvians have a rather elastic sense of time we were unsure if anyone would materialise. However, our doubts were misplaced and they arrived at base camp early that morning and before we were ready. In the hour or so it took to tidy up the camp and load the pack animals the sky changed from milky high cloud to thick fog and heavy snow that lasted for the rest of the day.

Back in Macusani there was talk of political unrest and a national strike that would bring the whole country to a halt. As we approached Juliaca, the following afternoon, the roads were already strewn with boulders and makeshift barricades. Early next morning troops and tanks surrounded



41. Mamacapac, showing the line up the south-west ridge (Alpine PD+).
(Michael Cocker)



42. Chichiccapac reflected near the bivvi site below Mamacapac.
(Stephen Reid)



43. Jonathan Preston on the first ascent of the south ridge of Cornice (Alpine D).
(Stephen Reid)



44. The Allinccapac massif showing the line up the south ridge of Cornice (Alpine D). Chequilla, the smaller peak immediately right of Cornice, is still unclimbed.
(Michael Cocker)



45. Jonathan Preston near the summit of Cornice (Alpine D).
(Stephen Reid)



46. Running to dodge the missiles at the outskirts of Arequipa.
(*Michael Cocker*)

the airport, vainly attempting to hold back large crowds of protestors who broke through the cordon and smashed lights on the runway, inflicting enough damage to render it inoperable for several days. Avoiding the demonstrators, we returned to the hotel and were effectively besieged for the next 48 hours whilst sling-shot wielding protestors battled it out with troops and tear gas on the streets outside. At the first opportunity we boarded a bus to Arequipa where we understood the airport was still operational. However, unbeknown to us the protests were still at full pitch in the shanty towns surrounding the city, and the bus driver dropped us 25 kilometres short of our destination, refusing to go any further.

With no alternative, we started walking, carrying the gear as best we could. A short distance down the road we came across a number of abandoned vehicles. On the cliffs above, protestors were hurling rocks and boulders down on anything that moved below. Taking our chances, with debris landing all around us, we moved through this section as fast as we could, only to walk around the next corner to find a pitched battle taking place between protestors and heavily outnumbered riot police. The police ordered us to leave the area, but with nowhere to go and the road ahead completely blocked, our only option was to follow the railway line in full view of the rioters. The uncertainty of the outcome during the next few hours, as we made our way past protestors fuelled with anti-government, anti-capitalist and anti-western sentiments, eclipsed anything we had experienced in the mountains. Nonetheless we survived to tell the tale and that evening wine and dined in style amidst the colonial splendour of Arequipa.

Summary: A historical overview of the exploration to date and account of three first ascents in the Cordillera Carabaya, southern Peru, in June and July 2007 by Michael Cocker, Jonathan Preston and Stephen Reid.

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