Unclimbed Peru Expedition Report

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Table of Contents

1 Expedition Journal 3

1.1 Acclimatisation in the Ishinca Valley 3

1.2 Main objective in the Paron Valley 5

2 Finances 9

3 Acknowledgements 10

1. Expedition Journal

Will very generously wrote the entire expedition journal, but I (Murray) now see that this was just so that he could absolutely roast me at every opportunity. I have resisted the urge to editorialize in any way - enjoy!

1.1 Acclimatisation in the Ishinca Valley

At 6am on the 1st of June I arrived in Huaraz, Peru, to find an eager Murray, who had been expectantly waiting for my arrival over a couple of days of relaxing acclimatisation. With my rude arrival quickly dispelling Murray's hopes for some further serene meditation, we quickly set about making a plan and gathering together food and supplies for our acclimatisation trip. It quickly became apparent that the most promising area for us to get some productive peaks under our belts would be the Ishinca Valley, and we had our eyes on Ishinca (5,530m), Ranrapalca (6,162m) and Tocllaraju (6,035m).

Thankfully, Murray's two days of finding himself in the thinner air of the Cordillera Blanca hadn't been wasted, and he quickly informed me that he had made an important new contact in Huaraz, Pocho, who could apparently be trusted to transport us to the base of the Ishinca Valley. Murray gave Pocho 'the reliable' the timings and settled on what he believed was a very generous price for the taxi.

The following morning, as we waited for the taxi to arrive, Zarela (the owner of our hostel), inquired as to our plans and who was organising our transport. Rather ominously she seemed somewhat bemused when Murray proudly announced that his trustworthy contact, Pocho, was the wise architect of our taxi. Further, she seemed rather concerned that we had opted not to furnish ourselves with a Burro (Donkey) to carry our gear to Base Camp, informing us that, 'everyone takes a donkey'. I was very inclined to believe her and didn't give any particular credence to Murray's claim that it would be 'good training' and provide 'good acclimatisation' – it seemed more likely to be the opposite. Having outmanoeuvred Murray's stubborn, penny-pinching defences, I managed to allow Zarela to arrange a Burro for us to my great delight. Later, a full hour after our taxi had failed to arrive, and a number of missed calls to Pocho's mobile later, Zarela was again required to save the day and arrange a new taxi for us – this time at a 40% discount to the price Murray

We climbed the NW ridge of Tocllaraju (D, 6032m) for acclimatisation. This is the ridge on the left hand skyline above.

had so deftly negotiated with Pocho 'the snake'. Our chariot arrived in a matter of minutes and we were quickly zooming at a rate of knots to the high mountains of the Ishinca valley – both praising Zarela's mastery and cursing Murray's dealsmanship; Donald Trump would have been ashamed.

Upon our arrival we were greeted by a young, energetic local who went by the rather concerning name of 'Fang' who was responsible for our Burro. Seeing the scrawny creature beside him we decided to take pity on it, and only gave Fang a small part of our gear, keeping the lion's share for ourselves – much to his surprise. Unsurprisingly, after a breathless 20 minutes, the athletic Fang suggested that he be allowed to go on ahead, and that he would meet up with our creaking unacclimatised frames at the Base Camp. This seemed sensible and he quickly ambled off into the distance.

A number of hours later, riddled with a splitting headache and me bemoaning Murray's two-day acclimatisation head start, we were reunited with Fang and the rest of our gear. We quickly put up the tent and I immediately retired into my sleeping bag, which in my state felt more like a cocoon of misery. The following morning things had improved marginally, but it was evident that I was certainly in no mood to move myself further than the two metres from the tent to our cooking stove. Murray however, was soon lost in the delights of the local topless, bare-foot bouldering, insisting every five minutes that this was a world class venue and affording these small rocks far more attention than the majestic spires all around. Later it turned out that his apparent great love of the local bouldering was not entirely inseparable from his desire to create a topless calendar for his girlfriend – and he repeatedly hounded me at every opportunity for more photos of his endeavours. The brotherhood of our climbing partnership apparently knew no bounds.

Finally, having recovered sufficiently to consider heading a bit higher, we set off very early the following morning to attempt Ishinca (5,530m). We made it roughly halfway until the constraints

of our expedited acclimatisation program began to make themselves known. Neither of us was felt particularly short changed however given the peak looked little more than a small stunted growth on an unattractive ridge; and the spectacular sunrise and lack of inevitable severe altitude sickness more than equalled the satisfaction of visiting the top.

We spent the following couple of days furthering our acclimatisation program and eventually settled on climbing Tocllaraju (6,035m) instead of our preferred target of the steep North Face of Ranrapalca (6,192m), which seemed comparatively buried under deep, sugary snow. However, stories of deep snow and an impassable snow wall of Tocllaraju didn't fill us with great enthusiasm either. Nevertheless, we decided to investigate things for ourselves and headed up to the high camp for the peak at c.5,000m.

We headed off to the summit early the following morning under a clear, star-filled sky. Given how early it was in the season, it was likely we were the highest people for hundreds, if not thousands of miles – a fact perhaps lost on Murray as he came to grips with his first encounter of the delights of extreme altitude. Although perhaps not enjoying himself as much as expected, Murray kept putting one foot in front of the other and we quickly made good progress. We arrived beneath the so-called 'impassable snow wall' just after sunrise and we bemused to discover that this allegedly insurmountable obstacle at nearly 6,000m only provided difficulties of Scottish II/III. We quickly dispensed with this and then carefully picked our way up the final section of precarious sugary ridge to reach the summit. We spent a leisurely period taking photos and soaking up the celestial vista from 20,000ft.

We descended back to the 'passable' snow wall and began preparing the anchor for the 60m abseil over the difficulties. We were just about to make our descent when the pair that had been following us up the mountains frantically came over to us asking if they could share our abseil. It seemed their 50m single rope doth butter no parsnips. Despite us now being in a slight rush to make our pre-planned Burro and taxi after our leisurely stay on the summit, this surely would not provide much of a delay. To our great frustration, this pair took 45 minutes to descend the ropes were had prepared for them in what can only be described as some of the poorest mountain-craft either of us had ever witnessed. To our great amusement, the slower and more grizzled of the two, donning mountain-wear fresh from the 70s, proudly informed us that he had climbed Everest, Lhotse and Manalsu, just moments after he emerged from his head-first dive into the bergschrund. Now running close to schedule we quickly set off on our descent, with Murray making a particularly valiant speed descent of the final section to base camp to ensure our Burro didn't abandon us. A number of hours and a spectacular trek later we were settled into our taxi back to the delights of Zarela's hospitality, and a much needed shower.

1.2 Main objective in the Paron Valley

After a few days of rest, recuperation and Zarela's famed pad-Thai curry, we headed out again to the mountains. This time we planned to head to the Paron Valley for an 8-day trip. Having dispensed with Pocho as our local organiser, Zarela was more than happy to arrange our transport and porter – as ever, she didn't disappoint. We sped off into the mountains on Murray's birthday and were soon back to the back-breaking grind of load carrying our kit to Base Camp. Once again, we failed to pack as effectively as we might have liked and the porter we had organised ended up not taking the heaviest bag – that honour was reserved for the birthday boy. I found it helped with the guilt of him carrying the heaviest bag on his supposedly special day, by disappearing off into the distance whilst telling myself our bags probably weighed the same and that he was just being slow and weak – not

unheard of from Murray.

As we wound our way around the shoreline of the stunning Laguna Paron the path quickly disappeared and we were soon clawing our way forward on a steep, prickly slope, trying desperately to keep up with our light-footed porter. It became very apparent why an agile 50+ year-old local was at a substantial advantage to the common Peruvian Burro. I found this section particularly good for my feelings of guilt as I had become far more concerned with the fact my boots looked like they would imminently fall from our porter's rucksack into the lake below than Murray's whimpering. We eventually made our way to a deserted Base Camp and set about putting up the tent. At this stage, Murray didn't enormously appreciate me reminding him that when we had first met our porter, he had said that he would definitely outpace him. Murray's justified feelings of antipathy towards me however quickly vanished when I produced the slice of cake I had bought to mark his birthday – even if it was drier than the Sahara.

Big bags on the beautiful approach past the Laguna Paron. Note Will still wearing his helmet for the approach despite being ridiculed by none other than Marko Prezelj in Scotland earlier this year for this practice.

This joy however, was short-lived, and replaced by shame I imagine, when he realised not long after that he had forgotten to bring our cutlery. Undeterred, Murray put his ingenuity to the test and quickly fashioned us a new spoon: The Mark 1 Wooden Spoon. The interesting thing about this spoon was that it was virtually indistinguishable from your everyday stick. Unsurprisingly, that was because it was just an everyday stick. Having wolfed down our dinner, complete with authentic fragments of bark, we settled into a restful sleep.

Will digging a trench on the glacier below Caraz II through some typically bottomless Peruvian snow.

This sleep, however, must have lasted all of two hours before we were rudely awoken by a herd of 20 cows, keen to ingratiate themselves with the new arrivals… and their food cache. There followed a momentous conflict between the embattled climbers and the stubborn cows. As the fatigue set in, the last complaints we had concerning the morality of throwing stones at cows faded. However, rather than follow the local guides' example from the Ishinca valley – the trebuchet tactic of launching huge boulders the size of small children at the cows – we opted to go easy on the locals and sling a higher intensity of small and comparatively harmless pebbles. We also made the moral decision not to target the calves, although Murray's poor accuracy quickly made this principled decision a complete irrelevance on one particularly stinging occasion. This barrage however had the desired effect, and coupled with noise and chasing we repeatedly drove the cows back across the river… Only for them to immediately return to our great frustration.

Rather wound up by the new state of affairs, we decided to gain altitude as soon as possible. The

Looking upwards at the East face of Caraz II from the broken glacier below. On the right hand side you can see the extremely unstable seracs which overhang a possible approach gully. A similar array of seracs threaten approaches to the left hand side, so we attempted to force a direct line through the middle.

following day we moved our Base Camp several hundred metres higher and beyond the range of even the most inquisitive cow. Finally, our thoughts turned to our climbing objectives. We made the unanimous decision to first attempt a technical line on the South arête of Artesonraju (6,025m) – famed for being the inspiration for the Paramount Pictures peak.

The Mark 2 wooden spoon

We spent another day to reach our staging camp for our planned ascent, and both of us now felt fully acclimatised to the altitude, which was particularly encouraging. We set off in the early hours of the morning to the base of the peak. However, we quickly got very bogged down on a long awkward, steep, loose & slabby traverse over to the bergschrund. This ate up a couple of precious hours, but our margins were still good and we continued. Having crossed the foot of the glacier and approaching the base of the climb, our luck had really turned for the worse. It quickly became apparent that everything, regardless of how steep, had been buried in nightmarish and unprotectable sugary snow. What was quoted by previous ascensionists as a fantastic and well protected ice and mixed line, was sadly nothing of the sort. We soon realised that the only way was back – obviously a great disappointment.

However, we remained optimistic about our main objective, a new route on the East Face of Caraz II (6,025m). Our morale was further buoyed by Murray's latest cutlery development: The Mark 2 Wooden Spoon. This model looked far more like a spoon than its stick-like forebear. It was however constrained by the fact it was, by its design, fundamentally unwashable. As such, washing up involved adding a fresh layer of duct tape into the mix and burying the latest remnants of dinner – truly delightful.

We therefore changed our focus to Caraz II and moved up to a spectacular high camp beneath the peak. After a recce the previous day, we set off typically early to try and forge our way to the infamously impassable glacier that lies at the foot of the East Face. Early on we realised there was a potentially viable line on the right hand side, however it snaked right underneath a number of precarious glacial spires and seracs, that to head that way would be especially foolhardy. We spied a line to the left of this that appeared to avoid unstable seracs on both extremes of the glacier, taking a cunning line straight down the middle. We worked our way up it, and managed to make it almost within a stone's throw of the base of the peak before we faced the final section of ramparts – an impassable wall of overhanging ice cliffs and cavernous crevasses. We spent more time trying to work our way through this, but sadly it proved impossible and we were forced to retrace our steps back off the glacier. The glacier there sadly appears to have been ravaged by climate change and, receding rapidly, it has now broken up to such an extent that for us it was not acceptable or possible to find a way through. Murray's only consolation was putting up a new trad route up below the glacier on our descent. An unsurprisingly low quality HS at over 5,000m, which Murray likes to think was probably the highest altitude trad route on UKC.

Sadly, this marked the functional end of our expedition. Whilst not nearly as successful as we hoped, we managed to give ourselves as good a chance as we thought possible to completing our main objective, without going over the boundary of what we considered to be acceptable risk. In so doing we got to experience and explore some of the most beautiful scenery either of us had ever encountered, and on our second trip, we were fortunate enough to see no other people for a full 8 days, which was especially memorable.

William Kernick, August 2017

2. Finances

The following tables summarise the total expenditure and income of the expedition.

Expenditure	**Amount (GBP)**
Flights	1013.40
Medical & rescue insurance	563.56
Satellite phone rental	215.00
Lima - Huaraz return transfers	108.64
Taxis to and from the mountains (9 hours total)	135.00
Huascaran national park permit	31.10
Burro and porter fees	57.43
Accomodation in Huaraz (7 nights total)	238.70
Equipment	635.00
3.5 weeks food	360.00
	3357.83

Income	**Amount (GBP)**
BMC grant	550.00
AAC grant	400.00
Frisby fund grant	100.00
Personal contribution	2307.83
	3357.83

3. Acknowledgements

We are hugely grateful to everyone who supported our expedition.

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We are very thankful for the equipment sponsorship from Rab. We each received a pair of the fantastic Nebula Endurance mitts, which kept our hands toasty at extreme altitude.

Finally, big thanks are due to Zarela (of La Casa de Zarela in Huaraz) for being the best host imaginable and for going above and beyond the call of duty in helping out two helpless gringos with barely a word of Spanish between them.