

## **Huayna Potosi West Face, Cordillera Real, Bolivia.**



The following text was written by Michael Wahlin & Olof Dallner after climbing the American Route on Huayna Potosi West Face in July 2001.

### **Location:**

West face of Huayna Potosi (6088m), Cordillera Real, Bolivia.

### **General description:**

1000 altitude meters of ice and snow. About grade D-, 65 degrees angle average.  
First climbed in July 1970 by Harthorne, Harvard, Lanney, & Thompson (US).

### **Transports:**

The roads are usually in bad condition. To access the west face you will need a transport with 4-wheel drive (4x4), price 40USD one way (2001). After climbing the west face route you descend the normal route to the hut "Refugio Huayna Potosi". Usually it's possible to find cheap transports there going back to La Paz. If you for some reason don't climb the west face you will have to trek around the mountain to reach the hut where the transports wait. Or try to hitch hike once you reach the main road where the transports pass on their way to La Paz.

**Access:**

Car transport:

Time: 2 - 2.5 hours with 4x4 transport from La Paz.

Road condition: Bad roads. A 4x4 transport is necessary.

Walk:

Time: 2.5 - 3 hours.

Distance: 3.5 km on rock, followed by 1.5 km on glacier.

Terrain: Flat.

Starting point: "Acueducto subterraneo" near Carmen Pampa.

Start altitude: 4900m.

End: Bivouac site at "Campo de Nieve".

Bivouac altitude: 5000-5100m.

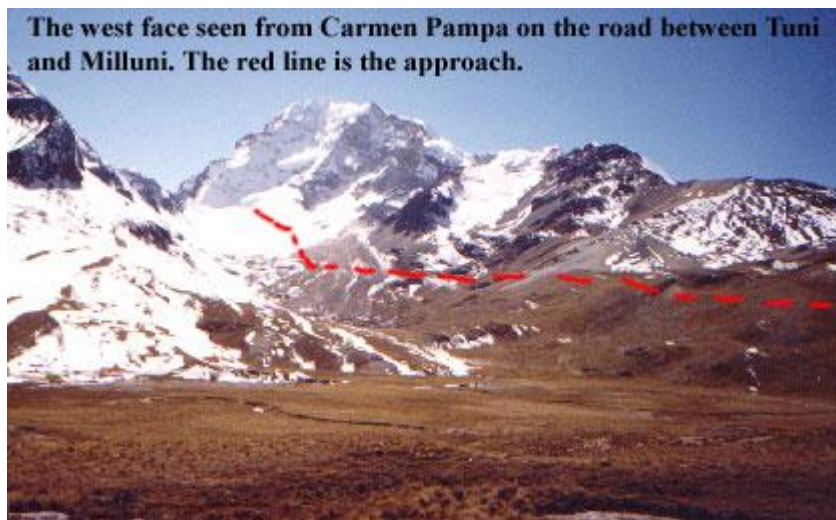
**Comments:**

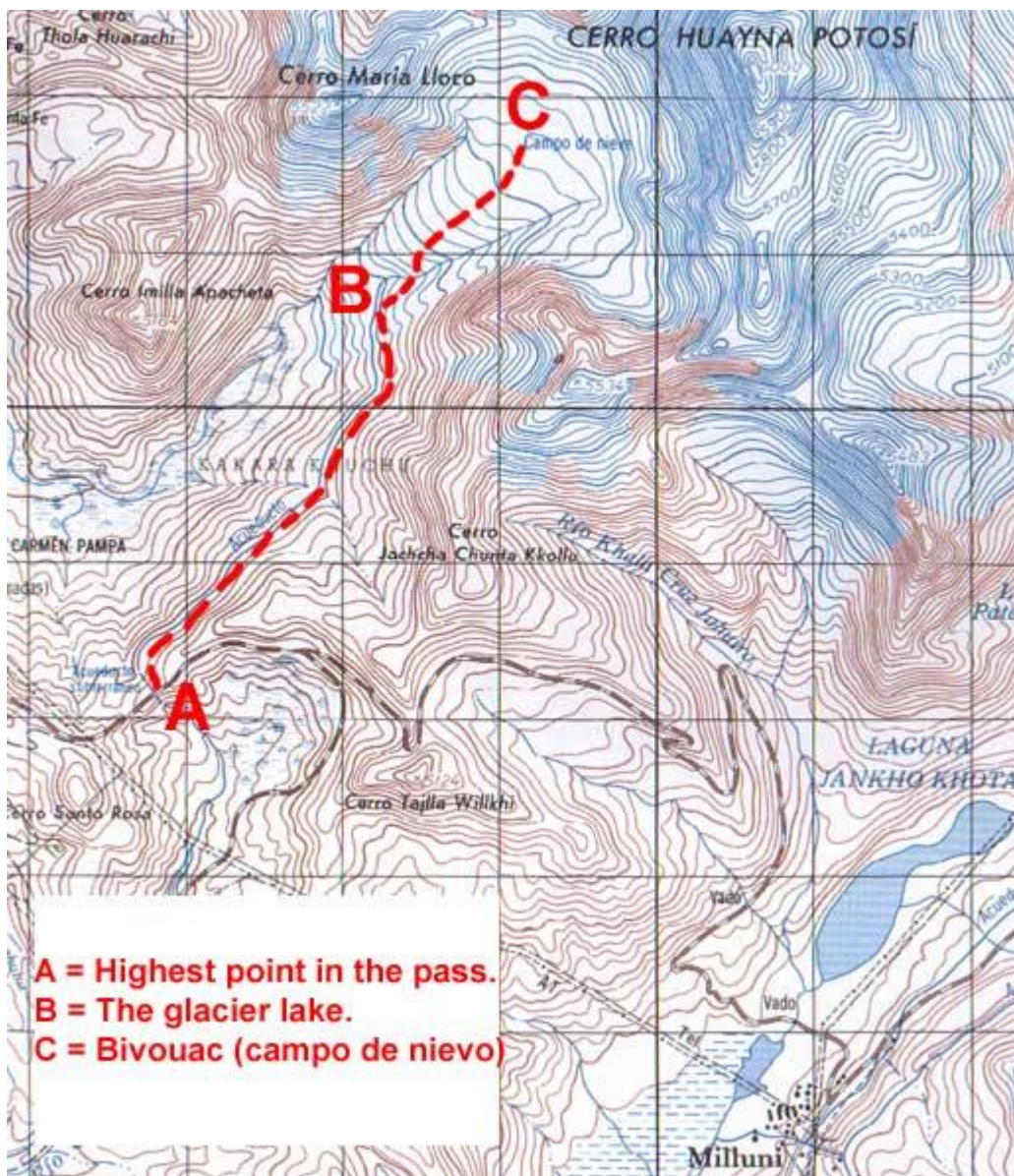
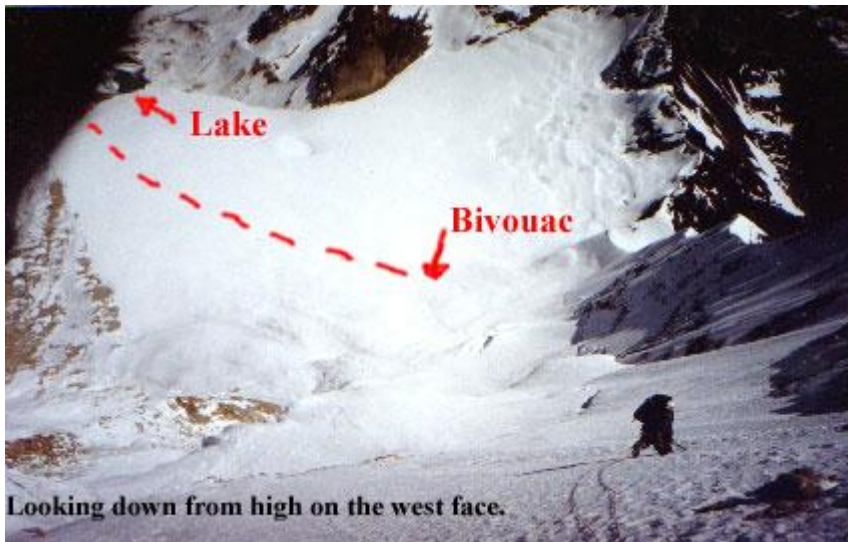
The Jeep transport from La Paz takes about 2 - 2.5 hours if you drive via Milluni and then take the mountain road up left. Its a bad road, sometimes not possible to pass because of much snow. In that case, go via Tuni instead, which is longer. Totally that takes about 3 hours from La Paz.

From either Tuni or Milluni, the transport goes to the highest point in the pass, close to the aqueduct. Then walk on the aqueduct or next to it, until you reach a position right below the glacier. Then walk up towards the glacier. There is a small lake before the glacier at about 4800m, not marked on the maps. From the road to the glacier it takes about 1- 1.5 hours of walking, almost completely flat. Then walk on the right side of the lake (rocky terrain) and walk up on the glacier. It's also very flat. We didn't see any crevasses, but we used a rope and walked far apart.

Be careful when choosing your bivouac site, because at night ice avalanches can fall down from the right side of the face.

The walk on the glacier takes about 1.5 hours. So totally from the road to the bivouac it's about 2.5 to 3 hours.





A sample of the Milluni map.

**Maps:**

IGM:s map:

IGM Milluni, Hoja 5945 II, Serie H731

Scale 1:50 000

Price: about 40 Bolivianos (black/white photocopy).

Can be bought at:

- IGM office Calle Rodriguez.
- ELMA Tours on Calle Linares.

Walter Guzman's map:

Huayna Potosi

Scale 1:50 000

Price: about 40 Bolivianos (Original in color).

Can be bought at:

Book shop "Los Amigos del libro" (near McDonalds on Prado)

**Climbing:**

About 1000 altitude meters of ice and snow. About grade D-, 65 degrees angle average. Flatter in the beginning and steeper in the finish. The route is more physically demanding than difficult. Expect anything between 4-18 hours depending on conditions. Proper acclimatization is essential. Unplanned bivouacs on the face are not unusual. The whole face is at an angle, there are no flat sections or ledges at all. So the slow climber would have to hack out a ledge to bivouac.

Several serious accidents have occurred on the face. Rescue is non-existent.

**Route description:**

Sections:

You can divide the face into 3 sections:

The lower parts straight up to the left side of hanging glacier.

The traverse of the hanging glacier.

From the right upper corner of the hanging glacier, and almost straight to the top.

The lower parts of the face (up to the hanging glacier) usually consist of good névé snow. Shouldn't be any problem. It's normally climbed in darkness early in the morning.

The evening before the climb we walked from the bivouac site to the start of the climb just to check out the approach. That made it much easier to find the way in the darkness the next morning.

Watch out for the bergschrund crevasse. Once on the face you just aim straight up to the left of the hanging glacier.

The traverse of the hanging glacier was rather easy. We climbed as high up as possible on the hanging glacier and then traversed right climbing just below the rock face above. It's steeper but safer. The reason to go high was to minimize the risk of rock fall from the rock face above, and I think the snow conditions were better there as well. Some guides recommended us to do that and it worked fine.

At the end of the traverse we found the only water ice on the face. About 1 full pitch (50m) of easy angled water ice, which we belayed with 2 long ice screws. The ice was very hard and brittle but was possible to belay with Black Diamond ice screws.

After the hanging glacier it's time to turn straight up. Look for a gully going straight up from the right side of the hanging glacier. Follow it straight up to the summit. (we didn't climb the gully. We saw it, but it looked easier to continue more to the right and follow a broader snow field straight up. That was actually much harder with really poor snow conditions, and finally we had to traverse back left to reach the correct gully. A rather scary traverse over small ridges of bad snow..). So take your time at the end of the hanging glacier and look for the gully going straight up through the rock.

The snow conditions usually become worse the higher you climb. We had really bad snow up there. Belaying was almost impossible. First man just stamped a platform in the snow, pushed down the ice axes deep in the sugar snow, and belayed the second, who better not fall while he was swimming upwards through the snow...

Just under the summit there is usually a huge cornice. We found a passage through it traversing slightly right of the summit. Then on the summit ridge a short easy 30m traverse back to reach the summit.



*American Route, Huayna Potosi West Face.*

### **Gear list**

This is a list of the climbing gear we carried on west face. See the comments below.

Two 50cm technical ice axes.

Crampons for classic alpine climbing.

Plastic double boots.

Helmet.

Two 50m dry ropes 8.5mm

Two ice screws Black Diamond 21cm.

3 snow stakes.

3 slings 60cm.

One 120cm sling.

Daisy chain or one more 120cm sling for belay station.

Comments on the gear:

Crampons: I would recommend crampons with classic front points, for example Charlet Moser black ice. Not technical crampons with mono-points or dual-points. They will just shear through the bad snow.

Plastic double boots. Maybe modern thinner boots with an insulating over boot can work. But it's very cold for the feet at high altitude (low blood circulation) so I recommend plastic boots with super gaiters. I used Scarpa Vega plastic boots with Berghaus Supergaiters.

Helmet: Don't go without it, Stuff do fall down on the west face. Lots of high altitude climbers leave it home just to save some grams. The helmet can be the difference between a good story and a bad story...

### **Logistics and other gear for the climb:**

We made totally 2 bivouacs.

We arrived at the first bivouac site on the glacier below the face around afternoon. So lunch and dinner for that day. Then climbing all day. Then descent to high camp "Campo Argentino" on the normal route. There we made the second bivouac and dinner. Then the next day breakfast and descent to the hut and lunch.

So we carried food for 2 days and some extra. Fuel: We had about 1 L of white gas (gasolina blanca).

Sleeping bags, sleeping pads (Ridgerest), MSR stove, fleece jacket, 2 one-litre insulated Nalgene bottles. 50L backpack,

Energy gel, sports drinks, candy. Sunglasses, extra gloves, map, head light, altimeter.

The altimeter was very useful to know where we were on the face. It's difficult to see in the upper sections how far it is to the summit.

Some climbers bring a porter or a friend to the bivouac site, and then climb without packs.

The porter goes around the mountain with the bivouac gear and joins on the normal route.

That's cheating...

The climbers should carry their own gear on the mountain. It's ethically right, and if something happens you will need the gear.

Trash: Don't leave any trash in the mountains. Carry it with you and throw it away when you get back.

### **Gear to bring to Bolivia:**

These things are usually hard or impossible to find in Bolivia:

Freeze dried food can be bought in La Paz but its super expensive. Bring your own freeze dried dinner food and buy the other food in La Paz.

Batteries for head light if you use other than pen cell batteries (AA and AAA can be bought in La Paz). 4.5 Volt batteries are hard to find.

Duct tape is also hard to find.

**Recommended guide offices (2001):**

ELMA Tours

In the corner of Sagarnaga Street & Linares Street

email: [illimani\\_yupanqui@hotmail.com](mailto:illimani_yupanqui@hotmail.com)

High Camp Bolivia

Sagarnaga Street #189

Email: [gonzaloja@hotmail.com](mailto:gonzaloja@hotmail.com)

**More information:**

”Bolivia a climbing guide” by Yossi Brain.

”Los Andes de Bolivia” by Alain Mesili.

Lonely Planets guidebook for Bolivia.

The Swedish Apolobamba Expedition 2001:

<http://www.apolobamba2001.com>

**Contact Information:**

Michael Wahlin

Email: [mwahlin@yahoo.com](mailto:mwahlin@yahoo.com)

Phone: +46-73 772 08 45



*Above the hanging glacier.*



*The summit cornice.*