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Huascaran: A Climb to the Top of the Earth's Equator

Standing at 22,205 feet in elevation, Huascaran in the Cordillera Blanca of Peru's Andes, is the highest point in the equatorial zone of the world and fourth highest in the Western Hemisphere.

The climb on this famous peak was the 1984 Huascaran-Pisco Oeste Expedition organized by the American Alpine Institute. Six men including two professional guides participated in the trip last July.

After several days of acclimatizing in historic Cuzco at 11,500 feet, the climbers rendezvoused in Huaras in the heart of the Blanca to make the final preparations. A five-day climb on the Picso Oeste (18,871 feet) was the last step in the acclimatization process before tackling Huascaran without bottled oxygen.
Returning briefly to civilization to resupply, the group embarked from Musho at 10,000 feet and ascended to 16,000 feet in two days passing along ridges of immense lateral moraines. The glacier was negotiated to 17,500 feet where camp was made about a half mile below the toe of an ice avalanche that killed three Canadians the week before. Adjusting the route and climbing in the predawn hours enabled the group to move through the danger zone and arrive in La Garganta, the col between north and south Huascaran.

High winds stymied the group for two days at 19,600 feet. Then at 3:00 a.m. of the sixth day of the climb, the decision was made to go for the summit. With headlamps the team ascended steep to sometimes vertical snow and ice slopes. Every movement was painfully slow and exhausting but the summit was gained by 3:00 p.m. and the group returned to the safety of the col by 9:00 p.m. on rappels with headlamps again.

The remaining climb down took another two days, but one's health and vigor seemed to improve by the minute during descent. Thus ended a dream of a lifetime — to climb one of the Earth's greatest mountains.