Cordillera Huayhuash Alpine Circuit mini-guide by Jeremy Frimer July 2025

Day 1. Garagocha Lake

Summary. The adventure begins at Rondoy, leading to a beautiful campsite on a grassy shoulder. I recommend combining this day with the 4-5h taxi ride from Huaraz.

Elevation Gain: 500m Elevation Loss: 0m Distance: 2.5km

Ascent: Walk up the Rondoy Valley for about 2km then pick your way through the cliffs below Garagocha Lake via grassy ramps. Top out on a shoulder above the lake and camp there (100m walk to get water).

Day 2. Garagocha Col

Summary: A rewarding adventure through a beautiful, lunar landscape, mostly on easy terrain, and with well-protected technical cruxes (protection added in 2025). Low 5th class rock climbing, a rappel, and a hidden cliff band on descent earn its reputation as the crux of the Alpine Circuit. I recommend referring to the gpx track repeatedly on this day to stay on route.

Elevation Gain: 500m Elevation Loss: 700m Distance: 5km

Ascent: A cliff band runs the entire length of the lake, blocking passage to the col. Before 2025, the route traveled above the cliff band via a sandy, exposed traverse with rockfall hazard. A 2025 new route—Quique's Ridge—avoids this unnecessary danger. Walk along the eastern shore of Garagocha Lake to its south end. Hike uphill toward the toe of a rocky ridge, picking up a series of cairns near its base. Ascend the gully to the right of the ridge for 20m then step onto the ridge via a 3rd class scramble. Ascend grass and occasional scramble (cairns) up the crest or right of the crest to arrive at a slanting slot cut into a rock headwall. Enter the slanting slot, pull up 4m up a chain at Valeria's step, sneak under or clamber over a chockstone, then pull up a second chain (6m) at Gabriel's step to exit the slanting slot.

Walk uphill (E) on scree and occasional easy slabs to reach the base of a steeper rock headwall at 4860m. Route finding here becomes critical. Turn left (N) and ascend a scree-covered ramp for 100m to reach the base of a distinct yellow volcanic dyke. The dyke is blocky, solid 5.0 rock climbing for 25m and has 4 bolts with fixed quickdraws for protection with a 2-bolt belay station on top (hardware added in 2025). An additional 15m of easy scree and short scramble (2 bolts with fixed quickdraws; added in 2025) leads to Garagocha Col (4910m; bolts for belay).

Descent: From the col, descend to the right (SE) for 30m down a scree-covered ledge to its end at a wall (chains and fixed quickdraw added in 2025) to reach a bolted rappel anchor. Rappel for 25m (or 15m with a 3rd class down-climb) to reach a ledge (a 5.0 solo down-climb is possible on a ramp just N of the rappel anchor). This ends the technical climbing. Walk left (N) for 30m down a scree-speckled ramp to reach the top of a large scree cone. Walk down the scree cone, past a bottleneck, to where the scree meets grassy slopes below. Turn left (NE) and aim for the base of a large cliff visible on your left. This avoids a major invisible cliff band that runs the length of the slope below. Once past the cliff band, descend easy grass slopes to Mitucocha. Camp at the south end of Mitucocha (fee of S/40; there is a large valley circuit camp called Janca near the north end of Mitucocha). Donkey-supported groups need to diverge from the Alpine Circuit route and camp at Janca.

Day 3. Chaclan Col

Summary: A pleasant hike up grassy slopes past a lake leads to a col with some of the most spectacular views on the Alpine Circuit.
Elevation Gain: 700m Elevation Loss: 400m Distance: 7km

Ascent: Walk up grass slopes E of Mitucocha to reach a grassy bench. Turn S and slog uphill toward a grassy break in a cliff band above. The grassy break has a trail up it, which leads to a ridge crest. Do not cross the ridge crest. Instead, turn right (S) and walk up the ridge crest to 4880m elevation before descending to the the left (E). (This avoids a wet, slabby cliff blocking the end of the valley). Descend to Alcaycocha Lake (4670m). From the S end of Alcaychocha, maintain your elevation on a good trail that side-hills

toward the S. Curl under two rocky ribs then abandon the trail, turning SW and grinding up firm talus to a Chaclan Col (4780m). Bathe in the stunning view of the enormous SE flank of Jirishanca.

Descent: Two cliff bands, hidden until one is standing right on top of them, complicate the descent to Chaclan Lake; however each is solved via easy scree gullies. Camp is by the creek that flows out of Chaclan Lake (4487m) and provides jaw-dropping views of a world class peak, Jirishanca, the hummingbird beak of ice. Donkey-supported groups need to continue downhill and traverse a sidehill to camp at Carhuacocha (fee of S/30).

Day 4. Siula Pass

Summary: An easy hike with some great views but shared with Valley Circuit hikers, making it feel crowded at times.
Elevation Gain: 700m Elevation Loss: 900m Distance: 13km

Descent #1: Hike down (S) from camp at Chaclan Lake (4487m) on the W side of the creek to the Carhuacocha Valley (4150m) and cross it (higher is drier).

Ascent: Walk through the mini-valley to the E of the moraine wall that circles Gangrajanca Lake. Pass Gangrajanca on its E side, a new lake caused by a rockslide on its W side, and Siula Lake on its E side. Make a rising traverse, following a well-worn trail, up a steep grass slope. Eventually gain a shoulder/viewpoint and walk into a hanging valley. Meander up a switchbacking trail at the end of the valley to reach Siula Pass (4834m).

An adventurous, quiet, and scenic alternative is to traverse the peaks (including Cerro Yanacocha) directly south of Carhuacocha and directly east of the Siula Lakes chain to reach Siula Pass.

Descent #2: Walk down from the pass, aiming for a second pass on your right (S). Cross through this second pass (4710m), then follow a faint trail down a long, gentle valley to Carnicero Lake (4441m) and beyond to the Valley Circuit campsite called “Huayhuash”. Camp there and pay a trekking fee (S/30).

Day 5. Trapecio Pass

Summary: A gradual ascent into the alpine, circling the majestic Trapecio, is followed by a dramatic unveiling of the major southern faces of the range at a high point. A glacier W of Trapecio Pass disappeared in the 2010s, opening this pass to Valley Circuit hikers and donkeys. After leaving the crowds at the high point, the day ends with an interesting lunar slab descent and a hike along a moraine crest.

Elevation Gain: 800m Elevation Loss: 800m Distance: 12km

Ascent: Cross a rock wall encircling Huayhuash camp and follow a trail up the right (W) side of the valley rising to the S for 3km. Curl over a shoulder to enter a valley to the W, with Trapecio looming above. A cliff band looms at the end of the valley. Follow either a quiet grassy route on the left (recommended) or a busy moraine crest trail up the centre of the valley to ascend through the cliff band. The trails converge above the cliff band in a lake-strewn hanging plateau. Pass Trapecio Lakes then follow a trail on scree up to the continental divide at Trapecio Pass (4910m). Do not descend the other side (to Elefante Camp). Instead, turn right (S) and follow a faint trail uphill on red rock, to a notch (5110m) with incredible views of Carnicero, Sarapo, and Siula Grande.

Descent: Leave the Valley Circuit crowd and scramble down to a col due W of the viewpoint, then walk down easy scree to the NW (there was a glacier here until about 2022), following a trail on a scree-covered shoulder beside the glacier. This leads to a lunar slab descent. Descend to the W then the NW down easy scree and high-friction slabs (cairns). Reach a cairned bench around 4740m. Traverse left (S) to exit the slabs into a grassy gully. Descend to cow pastures atop the moraine S of Jurau Lake. Follow a trail on the moraine until directly above the outflow of the lake then down to a sandy camp either between Jurau Lake (4343m) and a tiny lake to its W or continue on, crossing the moraine to the NW on a good trail and camp by a creek in grassy pastures in the Sarapococha Valley.

Day 6. Touching the Void

Summary: The stunning stage is that of the legendary Touching the Void. This day is both figuratively and literally the high point, taking in a summit at 5152m. And it ends at a campsite that might even feel sacred to atheists.

Elevation Gain: 800m Elevation Loss: 600m Distance: 10km

Ascent: From camp at Jurau Lake (4343m), ascend the moraine to the NW then descend the other side to enter the pleasant Sarapococha Valley. Joe Simpson and Simon Yates’ base camp is about 2km up the valley, on the left side. A distinct angular/jointed boulder 8m in height marks the spot. As you approach a terminal moraine get some water (there isn’t any more until camp), and then gain a trail rising on the left valley wall, which eventually climbs onto a shoulder overlooking Sarapococha. Small cliffs loom above. Once beyond the cliffs, switchback, hiking up steep grass. Slog upwards on grass, picking up a faint trail, to Velilina Pass

(5060m). Hike north along a stunning alpine ridge-crest, a sidewalk into the sky, for 2km in total. The 360-degree views are among the best on the Alpine Circuit, including the famous Siula Grande and infamous Simpson crawl route down to the right. Skirt around rocky outcroppings on the right and left to crest Cerro Gran Vista 5152m (high point of the entire circuit).

Descent: Walk straight north toward Rasac (“The Toad”) over a 5097m summit and eventually reach a pass made up of white sand (which is 400m S of Seria Pass). Descend scree then a trail to a magnificent camp at the outflow of Caramarca Lake (4575m)

Day 7. Rasac Pass

Summary: This is the second most technical day on the Circuit. The majority of the terrain is straightforward. However, 1km of glacier travel, a convoluted descent, and a rappel or down-climb might keep some parties on their toes. The views of Rasac and its West Summit on the ascent are a highlight.

Elevation Gain: 500m Elevation Loss: 1000m Distance: 9km

Ascent: Start at camp beside Caramarca Lake. Hike up the crest of a moraine immediately W of the lake to gain a boulder-strewn plateau. Boulder hop past a small lake to the left edge or centre of the Seria Glacier. Dawn micro-spikes/crampons and hike up the glacier (15 degrees), passing a few minor crevasses. Unavoidably, the route crosses an avalanche path coming off Rasac Oeste. The glacier culminates in a 35-degree 50m headwall just below the pass. Crampon up the headwall, turn left (W), move horizontally on scree under a rocky cliff then use a chain to ascend 8m of steep, exposed, hard-packed moraine dirt to reach the minor West Col 100m west of Rasac Pass.

Descent: The first 1km of descent is not intuitive. Pay close attention to the instructions. Boulder hop downwards for 50m from the West Col then traverse horizontally left (toward the NW), just below cliffs on Huacrish Norte, for 700m. Look for a place where you can walk straight down hill and then switchback along a hanging bench (cairns). Traverse the bench toward the E, staying high, then either make a 25m rappel from a bolted rappel station (added in 2025), or descend a 20m 4th class down-climb starting just past the station (or some combination of the two) to reach the top of a grassy moraine. The rest is walking. Walk along micro-valleys past the place where Barrosococha (lake) used to exist and then join the cows near Rasacocha. Camping near Rasacocha is not recommended due to the extensive effects of cattle on the water and ground. Follow trails for about 1km N of Rasacocha, then cross the creek to the E side and follow an exposed, traversing trail that curls to the E into the area between Jauacocha (4050m) and Solteracocha (4120m). Camp near the outflow of Solteracocha (S/30 fee).

Day 8. Sambuya Pass

Elevation Gain: 700m Elevation Loss: 700m Distance: 9km

Summary: With all of the technical terrain behind you, this final day of the Alpine Circuit offers a mellow and scenic conclusion, ascending over a pass and an easy descent to the road. I recommend combining this day with the drive from Rondoy to Huaraz.

Ascent: Cross to the north side of the valley the follow a major trail E past Solteracocha. The trail then turns uphill, switchbacking into the alpine, with excellent views of Jirishanca and Yerupaja behind. Reach Sambuya Pass (4750m) and Rondoy Pass (4735m) and bid farewell to the mountains of the Huayhuash.

Descent: The trail makes a high, descending traverse of the S slope of the Rondoy Valley, all the way to the homestead of Rondoy, where your ride is (hopefully) waiting for you. Alternatively, follow the ridge crest north of Rondoy Pass over loose 4th class terrain, past an ancient forest, and descend grass slopes to Rondoy.