

Aconcagua

2010



Enjoying the views from Camp One © digilbert





“SSSSHHHHHH. God, I know we shouldn’t have put the tent next to 2 gurlies!” Douglas to Simon having pitched tent next to Di & Constance.

Introduction

I was working for UK based company, Adventure Peaks, as one of their Expedition Leader’s for their January 8th departure, Aconcagua Expedition 2010. Along with Sean James, we were to be a 21 strong team with the intention of dividing into 2 separate smaller teams. Over 2 summit days, 16 members of our team summited.

Accompanying us would be 2 local guides, Cesar and Juan.

Due to logistics we actually remained as one large team in the end and it sometimes felt that the last person was leaving one camp just as the first person was arriving at the next camp.

Actual Itinerary

Day 1: UK – Madrid – Santiago – Mendoza
 Day 2: UK – Madrid – Santiago – Mendoza
 Day 3: Final preparations in Mendoza
 Day 4: Drive to Puente del Inca (2578m)
 Day 5: Punta de Vacas – Pampa de Lenas (2823m)
 Day 6: Pampa de Lenas – Casa de Piedra (3228m)
 Day 7: Casa de Piedra – Plaza Argentina (4150m)
 Day 8: Acclimatisation and preparations
 Day 9: Load carry to Camp One (4990m)
 Day 10: Rest day at Plaza Argentina
 Day 11: Move to Camp One
 Day 12: Load carry to Camp Two (5863m)
 Day 13: Rest day at Camp One
 Day 14: Move to Camp Two
 Day 15: Summit day (first group)
 Day 16: Summit day (second group)
 Day 17: Return to Plaza Argentina
 Day 18: Plaza Argentina – Pampa de Lenas
 Day 19: Pampa de Lenas – Punta de Vacas – Mendoza
 Day 20: Mendoza
 Day 21: Mendoza
 Day 22: Mendoza
 Day 23 & 24: Mendoza – Santiago – Madrid – UK



Flights:

International flights can be found easily on the web and prices will vary. We were off the mountain a few days early due to early summit opportunities and it proved expensive or impossible to change flights for earlier departure's.

Mendoza:

As a general rule, Mendoza is a fantastic place to spend time although the majority of the team felt that 2 days at the end of the expedition were enough. There is an abundance of things to do, ranging from wine tasting tours, mountain biking, rafting, tours, fishing and shopping.

Accommodation is easy to find and prices range from budget to expensive depending on how big your wallet is. Wifi and internet are either free or cheap and there are all the facilities and amenities you would expect from a small city.

You cannot come to Mendoza without mentioning either the quality of steak nor wine. Malbec being the wine of choice and Fillet being the steak of choice. An excellent meal, including drinks would cost around 70 jobbies (3.8 jobbies to 1USD).

There is a large supermarket in the centre of town where you can purchase last minute items and there are about 6 outdoor shops where you can either hire or purchase outdoor equipment.

Mendoza, like any Spanish city, will be busy in the morning before closing down for the afternoon siesta. Things generally start to kick off again in the early evening with restaurants opening their doors around 9 – 10 pm. Nothing is really open on a Sunday.

The Plaza Independencia is a great place to relax and watch either the entertainment or peruse the open stalls.

US Dollars is the preferred currency for exchange as opposed to Sterling.

General Logistics:

You have a few options about your approach to climbing Aconcagua.

There are plenty of independent agencies in Mendoza which will make climbing Aconcagua either as hard or as easy as you wish or you have the option of doing it completely under your own steam (which many people do). The third option you have is to join a commercial expedition company such as Adventure Peaks.

You will most definitely have to organise your own permits in Mendoza which can be quite time consuming.



The approach route:

We approached Aconcagua by one of the Vacas Valley routes, therefore avoiding the heavily used 'Normal Route'. It took us 3 days to arrive in Plaza Argentina.

You can easily purchase maps for the routes in Mendoza.

There are definite rivers to cross on the day to Plaza Argentina which you can either simply wade across or you can hire a Mule which will save you getting your feet wet.

Getting lost shouldn't really be an issue since the track is fairly obvious. Be aware of the random paths heading off either up or down heinous scree and rubble fields.

There are water and toilet facilities on the approach trek to Plaza Argentina.

Mules & Porters :

We used Mules (a crossbreed between a horse and a donkey) to carry all the expedition equipment and food from the road head to Plaza Argentina. Each mule can carry around 60kg. It is also possible to hire porters above Plaza Argentina to carry your own personal equipment for a price.

Plaza Argentina:

Plaza Argentina (or Base Camp) is a bustling little epicentre which can provide shelter, showers, toilets, a medical centre, park guards, internet and phone and burgers, coke and beer.

The park guards try their best to control rubbish and crap everywhere on the mountain. This is heavily controlled at base camp but there is definite evidence of abuse at both camp one and two.

All rubbish and toilet waste must be carried off the mountain before presenting your permit to be signed off at various checkpoints. Failure to do so will result in a 500USD fine. You will be given a shit bag (no plastic container) to use above Camp One from the Park guards.

When you first arrive in camp, you will have to visit the on-site doctors for a quick service. This is a unique feature on any mountain that I have been too and I don't know if I agree with it or not.



Camp two © digilbert

The Mountain:

There are plenty of guide books with information on the various route's. I used Harry Kikstra's little pocket book guide called "*Aconcagua Summit of South America*" which provided enough information in the field.

We adopted a cache and move approach to aid acclimatisation which worked very well.

With the exception of summit day, the length of mountain day is relatively short – i.e. normally about 4 – 6 hours.

Weather:

Aconcagua has a reputation for being a wild and windy place. Fortunately (or unfortunately depending on how you look at it) we never experienced any of this much promised misery. Temperatures were at either end of the temperature gauge, with very little wind. Precipitation was common, especially on the second part of the expedition.

Equipment:

I used the Adventure Peaks equipment list as a guideline. I made a few 'Di Modifications' as always but never deviated too much.

Generally equipment is straight forward – just pack for a stiff walking day above the snow line and expect extremes.

Insurance:

Rescue insurance is vital for this mountain.

Thanks:

Thanks to Dave Pritt at Adventure Peaks who, once again, came up trumps with another excellent expedition for Di to get her teeth into. Thanks to John & Ailsa Armstrong for loads of in-country and mountain information over dinner and thanks to Sean James for sharing the load and to the guys of the trip for proving the giggles and laughter as always.



Independencia hut © digilbert