

## Mt. Aconcagua, Argentina, February 2011 Elevation 22,810 ft

### My Journey



The fourth mountain on my journey was the one with the biggest challenge, and that was witnessing death on the mountain.

The first mountain climb was a test for me: Mt. Kilimanjaro – did I train enough and would I really have the mental stamina to reach the summit?

The second climb, Mt. Elbrus, stressed the importance of teamwork. My fellow climbers and I were roped together for safety as they traversed through steep climbs, snowy days and crevasses. Learning the skills and mindsets on that climb would only be a precursor to what was to follow.

The next climb, Mt. Kosciuszko, was only a one-day journey to the top of the highest peak in Australia, with an additional day spent diving with Great White sharks on the Great Barrier Reef.

Our take away from this trip was the impact we have on others and them on us as we share our goals, dreams and fears.

And now we pick up our journey at the highest peak in South America. This climb really put me to the test. All of the lessons learned in the past came into play.

- What is it like to be in a tent for three days in a blizzard?
- What is it like to share a tent with someone that days prior had said he did not feel confident that he would summit?
- What was it like to face death, not in theory, but in reality?

All of these were emotions I had to deal with and deal with successfully or my attempt to summit would not be a reality.

The story was at Camp 2. This is the camp before reaching Camp 3 then attempting the summit. Here is where a beautiful climb took a very bad turn.

A blizzard had struck the mountain delaying our ascent. Not unusual, but it did have its effects on the team. My tent mate was tentative about the climb right from the beginning, even sharing comments that he “was the weakest link”. This was only exacerbated as we two were pinned down in a small tent for three days with nothing to do but wait until the storm passed. That nothing to do time gave my tent partner a chance to think and more time to question himself. The conversation between me and him should have been about what could be, but instead it was what might not be. This experience left me stronger as I did what I could to give my partner more courage to continue, which I did as he attempted the summit yet did not reach it. Another contributing factor to an event that would never be forgotten

was the news that three members of another party got caught without shelter in the blizzard and died from exposure. This news was passed to me and my team informing us of what transpired and that we may pass the bodies as we continued our attempt at the summit.

It was a sleepless night filled with excitement and nerves preparing to reach the summit. At 4:30 AM we left Camp 3 and began our 8-hour climb, an increased elevation gain of 4,641'. Even with the extensive training I did to prepare for the climb, the difficulty we faced with weather and brutal terrain was unbelievable. One more strong man from our team could go no further and had to turn back. So disappointing for him being so close but again the terrain and extreme weather was beyond challenging. We climbed out of camp to join the Ruta Normal. A gradual traverse along the mountain's northwest flank took us past the abandoned Refugio Independencia and to the base of the Canaleta, a 1,000' long couloirs leading to the summit ridge. Upon reaching the top of the Canaleta, a straightforward traverse lead us to the summit. We' reached the summit with 4 men at an elevation of 22,841'. I'm ready to go home to celebrate!

### **What were the lessons here? Many**

**I learned that a supportive team is necessary, but unwavering self-confidence can never be underestimated. Also, when I conversed with my teammate I discovered that a certain layer of protection needs to be in place. Know what you can do, but also understand that others may not be as supportive as you would like. With this knowledge you will have fuller control of your emotions and perhaps be better equipped to assist others with theirs.**

### **Aconcagua Facts**

Aconcagua is widely accepted as the highest peak in the Western Hemisphere, but its precise elevation has been debated since the early 20th century. The Military Geographical Institute of Argentina documents its highest summit as 22,831 feet (6,959 meters) above sea level, a figure that has been in general use. In January 2001 a team of scientists led by Italian geologist Giorgio Poretti measured Aconcagua's height using advanced Global Positioning System (GPS) technology and reported an elevation of 22,840 feet (6,962 meters), plus or minus 16 feet (5 metres). Although this new figure has been widely reported, it is not officially recognized by Argentina's government or by the National Geographic Society in the United States. The southern summit has been measured at 22,736 feet (6,930 meters).