



Banff Mountain Film Festival

World Tour

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

7:00 p.m.

Royal Saskatchewan Museum

2445 Albert Street

Regina, SK

Tickets are \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door, \$10 at the door for ACC members by showing your membership card.

Tickets available at Fresh Air Experience, Royal Saskatchewan Museum Gift Shop and Eat Healthy Foods.

Thanks to our major sponsors:

**Fresh Air Experience
and the
Royal Saskatchewan**

*Approaching the summit of
Mount Aconcagua with the magnificent
south face in the background.*

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Special points of interest:

- Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour, April 27, Regina, SK
- Annual Thrasher's Weekend, May 18-20

Upcoming Events

May 18—20, 2005—Thrasher's Weekend for beginner rock climbers and those wanting to work out the winter kinks. Contact Kim Hitchings at 717-6408 or kim_hitchings@hotmail.com.

June 3-4, 2005 - The second annual Fiske Adventure Race will start Friday night, June 3, 2005, at 12:00 a.m. That's midnight!! This is in conjunction with the Fiske Sports Day to be held June 4, 2005. The disciplines will be hiking, biking, canoeing and teams can be 2 (\$40), 3 (\$100), or 4 people (\$120) per team. Please contact Byron Siemens for more information. E-mail siemens.cattle@sasktel.net or phone 306-377-4666.

June 2005 - Little Elbow Bike 'n Scramble - date to be decided, but objectives in the past have included Banded Peak and Mt Glasgow with many other possibilities in this very beautiful area just west of Calgary. Contact Dave McCormick davemc@shaw.ca or 384-3676 for more information.

July 15-18, 2005 - Walk the Wapta with the SK Section. This trip fills up quickly, so contact trip leader Jesse Invik invik@operamail.com or 652-0016 for more information and visit the SK Section website for equipment needs and other important stuff.

July 14-19, 2005 - Bow-Yoho Traverse. This trip is already full but a waiting list will be maintained in the event of cancellations so contact Dave McCormick for more information.

September 10, 2005 - Prairie Pitch Adventure Race will be held at Elkridge (just south of Waskesiu). This is a beautiful area so don't miss it! Keep checking the website for more updates. www.accsask.ca

Sask Summit 2005

The Saskatchewan Section of the Alpine Club of Canada is celebrating



by attempting the first ascent of Mount Saskatchewan in the Yukon Territory in May 2005.

On February 1 the Sask Summit 2005 crew hosted a fun and entertaining evening at the Odeon Event Centre in order to raise money for the expedition.

Many businesses and organizations supported this event with donations of silent auction and prize draw items. Special thanks must go to Outter Limits for arranging for several great items to be donated by outdoor gear and clothing companies.

The slide show was anything but dull with the team members running onto stage roped up, Ivan displaying his graceful coordination, Steve describing his first trip with Shelley & Andrew, and Ivan doing a climber's style striptease.

Thanks to everyone, especially all our families and friends who attended and made this evening such a success!

Now we're busy training hard, carrying big backpacks and hauling heavy sleds. We've seen many of you out along the trails! We're some of the few who hope the snow sticks around a while longer! Our departure date is set for May 7.

For more information on Sask Summit 2005, check out our website at www.sasksummit2005.ca

Expedition Members: Shelley McKinlay, Andrew McKinlay, Steve McCartney, Dave McCartney, Jesse Invik, Ivan Hitchings and Derek Birkham.

The Nordegg Newbie Climb 2005

By Cheryl Loadman

Departing from Saskatoon, we could not have asked for a better outlook for the beginning of our “Nordegg Newbie” weekend. The day was sunny bright, the roads clear and a great forecast for the whole trip.

Eight hours of non-stop chat and driving later we arrived in the dark, without incident, at the Shunda Creek Hostel. It is a rustic lodge set about 5 kms off the main highway. The vehicle was quickly unpacked and most of the group rested their road weary bones in the outdoor hot tub (NB: don't forget to take a swim suit) with a few beers. The place was clean, in good shape, and the staff friendly – for sure a “go backer”.

We met our entire group on Saturday morning, and with our leader Steve McCartney at the front, headed off to Center for Outdoor Education to pick up rental gear. The facility, about 5 minutes from the hostel, had an ample supply of equipment for every need. Some of it

was pretty rough looking, but worked just fine.

We hit the Pinto Lake parking lot around 9:30, unpacked (and of course being newbies, had to repacked our gear) then off we headed for 30 minute hike in. The first part of the trail is pretty easy - fairly worn and easy to follow, with small climbs uphill through poplars and pines. The climb travels through some small knolls until you hit the ridge above the river, where many of us at this point encounter our first experience with CRAMPONS. This can only be described as walking around with clumps of mud and sharp nails sticking out attached to your feet. We rope down into the river bottom to get to the base of the ice and the Cline River Gallery.

With everyone having acquired “crampon feet”, and safely at the bottom, the scene that met us was spectacular. The day was bright, the river running fast and the temperature wonderful. The ice was perfect. Dave and Steve McCartney set up climbs about the length of a rope long and which varied from some seriously easy to newbie hard. As the day progressed the ice got better and the tools and our feet were sticking like glue. We also got better. It all ended with a

fast trek out, back to the Hostel for some food and beer and relaxation in the hot tub. Some of us headed in to the hot spot in town – Nordegg Lodge – which lacked a sophisticated menu (no cottage cheese or fruit bowls for those hearty Nordegg regulars) but the food served the purpose.

The next day we headed off to 2 o'clock Falls. While the sky was overcast, the weather was good. The trek in was a gentle walk with some decent trail, that is until you started your ascent up to the falls. This took a



The Nordegg Newbies

little more effort with packs especially with some serious hidden ice. A number of us ended up on our butts sliding down the hill. It was worth it. The icefalls are spectacular though seemingly ominous looking; that is until your up one or two ropes, after which they turn into a lot of fun. While the day was cooler, the ice was still amazingly soft and made for some great climbing. This locale ended the trip for a number of us who had to head back to work the next day. A great trip, with a fun group of people.

Participants: Steve & Dave McCartney (leaders), Erin Thompson, Steph Thompson, Jaime Hogan, Alain Lusignan, Emily, Kristina Mark, Heather Matheson, Larry Rempel, Kevin Pilsworth, Mark Gilliland, Cheryl Loadman.



Against The Wall

Book Review by Tim Friesen

Simon Yates (1998) London: Vintage Random House. 176 pages, 8 colour plates.

Synopsis: A big-wall aid climbing epic as four British lads successfully establish a new route on the 4000-ft east face of the Central Tower of Paine in Patagonia in the eighties.

“ Once on the flake I had to move quickly and free-climb into the corner ten feet away. [...] Realising that I could not hang on long, I lunged to the left and in a series of rapid ape-like movements, stopped at the end beneath the corner. A race was now on. I needed to get a piece of equipment into the crack above and clip into it before my strength ran out. [...] My left arm buckled under the strain and my hand uncurled from behind the flake. I put my right hand back on the flake just as my left arm finally gave out. Shaking it vigorously to speed up recovery, I started to panic. ...”

I purchased this book last summer in my last refuge of consumerism: the bargain bin. Only recently did I have a chance to read it when it became a diversion to airport insanity. The author, Simon Yates, an accomplished climber in his own right, is (undeservedly) most famous for cutting the rope on Joe Simpson during a descent of Siula Grande. This is Yates' retelling of a 3 week expedition-style ascent of a remote big-wall in southern Chile during Christmas 1987 with three other British climbers. The climb was technically difficult and progress often slow but it was the Patagonian weather which posed the greatest threat and forced retreat several times during the climb. While some of the text revolves around the dangers of leading relatively blank sections, mental rather than physical exhaustion dominate much of the story. In the end, it is the author's internal struggle which determines the course of events.

Yates' writing style is easily read. The book has no literary aspirations but does provide a narrative ambiance, as though the story is shared among friends in a pub. With realistic dialogue and honest introspection, Yates is able to bring you, as the reader, to Patagonia and guide you up the rope with the climbers. Yates provides welcome tangents in the narrative by drawing on his wealth of experience to recall events of previous expeditions such as when his base camp in the Korokoram was flattened by serac fall, or a particularly daring solo ascent of Ben Nevis. Only a true enthusiast of autosports enjoys a race without a collision. Just so, it takes an honest enthusiast of climbing to appreciate an expedition account without a major disaster. Unfortunately this reality predetermines the book to a narrower audience than it deserves. In my opinion, this is an excellent form of mountaineering literature and a welcome response to sensationalism.

On a grander scale, an account of big-wall aid climbing is of little relevance to my own interests in mountaineering. However, there is a wide array of details which I found fascinating: coping with a hypothermic climbing partner, using slings fixed on ice-axes imbedded in the wall as aiders, narrowly avoiding an avalanche after starting too late in the morning. Scattered throughout are a litany of humorous moments tinged with a certain realism most of us can appreciate such as Yates getting mad at a mate who forgot his mitts at camp, and irate when another mate offers his only pair to help him.

While several motifs in the book such as being up "*against the wall*", hoping to surmount "*the central tower*" (of "*Paine*" nonetheless), explicit descriptions of crack climbing and nut placement, to say nothing of the double meaning in the above quote, allude to a curious psychological framework more lurid than I would want to explore, the perspective of this text lays elsewhere. These lads represent a transitional period in mountaineering history between earlier upper-class gentlemen alpinists inspired by colonialist ambitions to conquer nature and the commercial

enterprises of the nineties fuelled by thrill-seeking *nuevo riche*. Yates and his companions were decidedly antiestablishment and retreated to isolated corners of the world insulated by mountaineering counter-culture. In the present age, those able to overcome paralysis when confronted with the modern existential crisis have assumed hero-status¹. Where Jeff Lebowski and Walter Sobchak turned to bowling², Yates and company turned to climbing. Several descriptions and interpretations of risk throughout the text conceptualize near-death experience as an existential exercise which presents a little-explored motivation for climbing as both sport and philosophy. Yates' nihilistic attitudes in the book are reminiscent of Joe Simpson's sentiments during the prologue to the film "Touching the Void"³:

"We were fairly anarchic, fairly irresponsible. We didn't give a damn about anyone else or anything else. We just wanted to climb the world. And it was fun...brilliant fun."

Good escapist reading, an introspective account of climbing excitement and a great model of what expedition accounts should be.

References

- Schepisi, F. (1993) Six Degrees of Separation. Santa Monica: MGM Studios.
- ² Coen, J. (1998) The Big Lebowski. Hollywood: UMvd
- ³ Macdonald, K. (2003) Touching the Void. London: IFC Films.

The Perfect Climb

By Mike Wild

Perfect. Perfect weather. Perfect mountain. Perfect friends. Perfect route. Perfect conditions. Perfect joy. **Perfect.**

It is not often in a climbing career (especially one anchored in Regina) for everything to converge in one space and time. In the span of twenty years of climbing, I have only experienced two or three “perfect climbs.” Sure, there have been lots of adventures. Near epics, major epics, successes, and failures. They all hold special memories. This perfect climb is the story of a July 2004 climb on the NE ridge of Mount Assiniboine. It’s not the biggest or the hardest, but has been described as a classic.

Perfect climbs sometimes have arduous beginnings. The original plan was to go on July 2 with a transplanted Saskatchewanite, who is now living in Alabama. The previous week, as he juggled the logistics of a three week power visiting trip, he asked to move the climbing weekend to July 17-19. A few phone calls later and confirmation that the mountain was far from being in condition, I agreed to spend the long weekend with my family. A week before we were to leave, I received another call from a friend in Calgary who described the snow and ice that were plastered on the upper half of the mountain. Summer had not yet arrived in the Canadian Rockies (or the prairies for that matter).

The plan was to go anyway and “just enjoy the mountains” and maybe get to the hut to take a look around. The hut was booked (only two other people) and the helicopter was paid for. I was still at work at 5:20 p.m. on Thursday – half listening to my boss on a work-related problem. I was physically in the office, but my mind had already left on the trip.

I headed out with a couple other friends.

Bill’s truck was out of commission and his sport utility van (a minivan) had a timing belt that was past its recommended replacement date. So, we piled gear and bodies into Murray’s \$500 1982 Volvo that was still ticking with 240,000 kms on the original timing belt. After a couple of interesting car troubles we arrived in Calgary at 1:30 a.m. on Friday morning. We demolished a couple of “stress relieving” beers before heading off to sleep to get up at 6:45 a.m.; Canmore by 9:30; breakfast by 10:30; and off to meet the helicopter by 11:30. A 10-minute helicopter ride brought us to Assiniboine Lodge at precisely 11:51 a.m. (the benefits of climbing with the president of the Center for GPS Excellence). The helicopter unloaders damaged a few beers and fed the scraps to us wolves. **Perfect.**

It was a beautiful day at the Lodge with very little wind and strong sunshine. A leisurely 5.4 km walk on the Gmoser Highway led us to the Hind Hut. The weather was still beautiful and allowed me to smoke my pipe while viewing the planned route. It looked wet and white in some places and I wasn’t totally convinced that it was in condition. The weather was absolutely perfect and we wasted the remaining sunlight eating, drinking and reading. At higher elevations, a miracle was happening and the mountain was “getting into shape” right before our eyes. **Perfect.**

After a few Dylan Thomas poems, a hearty supper, and a bowl of tobacco, we packed gear and prepared for the 3:00 a.m. wake up call. Our climbing team was down to the three of us from Regina. The other two would be the “base camp managers” and sleep in. According to GPS Bill, we were out of the hut door at 3:47 a.m. The night was remarkably warm (we had slept with the hut door wide open to cool off) and we wandered over to the edge moraine. We alternated between scree and snow and made it up to the ridge to watch the sunrise. **Perfect.**

The benefits of climbing with three people are that one carries the rope, one carries the gear

and one carries the experience. Lucky for me, Bill and Murray knew that I would be too damn slow if I carried any extra weight (other than the permanent extra weight that I seem to be carrying all the time). The rock was very dry and we made good progress. We stopped below the red band to let Bill drop his camera and then traversed over to the obvious weakness in the cliff band. I went first to see if a rope was necessary. There was only one “move” required and we quickly passed the crux. As I moved over the difficult spot I saw a tricam still stuck in the crack. Murray picked up the “booty” on his way through. *Perfect.*

After the red band, the route goes back to the ridge, and we got an up-close view of the east face. It’s a heck of a lot steeper than NE ridge. The climbing for the most part was easy fifth class scrambling. I can see how if the mountain were not in condition that scraping up the verglass would be very difficult and time consuming. The grey band was not too difficult, but highly exposed. No screwing up allowed! We reached the snow ridge and trod to the top. The sun was still shining, the rope was still in the pack, and the wind had died down. It was a perfect summit. *Perfect.*

The obligatory summit photos and a naked one for the memory of Guy Edwards and we retraced our steps along the ridge. It was so calm and quiet that we were able to talk (yell) to the base camp crew that was 2.7 km away and about 3000 vertical feet. At the top of the grey band we pulled the rope out of the pack. We completed a couple of rappels, some down climbing and one final rappel through the red band. The rope was put away and we continued with the down climbing. After a leisurely paced day of climbing we arrived back at the hut at

3:28 p.m. The sun was still shining, the air was calm, and we spent the next hour drying feet and packing up for the descent to the Assiniboine Lodge. At 7:30 we arrived at the lodge and the manager bought us a round of beers, as we were part of the first “non-guided” group to climb the mountain that season and we had kept the lodge guests adequately entertained. Free beer. *Perfect.*

Since the first round tasted good we bought another and then another. After a quick supper, we packed up and started the 25 km walk back to the vehicles. We were too cheap for helicopters on the way out (and we would not have used them on the way in if we’d had an extra day from Regina). We walked till midnight and slept for four hours before resuming the hike on Sunday morning. The last 16.85 km went by quickly and we were back at the cars by 9:30 a.m. After a sleep deprived “misplaced car key” issue and a gas line vaporization problem (solved with beer can cooling fins on the gas line), we were back in Regina by midnight. A perfect weekend. *Absolutely Perfect.*

Pictures can be found on: <http://community.webshots.com/user/epictrips>



The “Perfect” climbing team and their “Perfect” mountain.

Wind & Wine

By Andrew McKinlay

Biking to work for the "last" time, I had to laugh out loud with the sheer joy of anticipation of another adventure. Here we go again! I was looking forward to climbing Aconcagua, to being back in the high mountains. And to the simple pleasures of travel, of being in new places, and meeting new people. South America was one of the few continents Shelley and I hadn't climbed on and Aconcagua, as the highest peak, seemed like an obvious choice. At almost 7000m Aconcagua is the highest peak outside of the Himalaya. And it didn't hurt that Chile and Argentina both produce excellent wine!

We made it to Santiago safely, with all our baggage intact, after 35 hours of hanging out in airports and airplanes. (Although Air Canada flies direct from Toronto to Santiago, we were using Aeroplan points and ended up with less than ideal connections.) We couldn't find a Starbucks in the Toronto airport but did find some decent coffee in the Sao Paulo airport.

Our hotel in Santiago (Presidente) was small but nice. It was close to the subway and the park that runs across the city. We walked up Cerro Santa Lucia, a rocky hill near downtown, and got some great views of the city. Despite being a big smoggy city, it didn't seem so bad when we could walk through the park along the river all the way from our hotel to downtown.

We checked out the supermercado (supermarket) to see out what food was available and were pleasantly surprised by the selection. Almost everything we needed seemed to be easily available. We decided to leave the grocery shopping till Mendoza so we didn't have to haul it around as much. (Although, as it turned out, the selection wasn't quite so good there.)

Ordering food was a challenge. There seemed to be less English spoken here than most

of the other places we've traveled and climbed. Our Spanish was limited to what we could mispronounce from our phrase book. Luckily, everyone was good natured about it and most restaurants had at least one copy of the menu in English. On the subway we resorted to holding out a handful of change and letting them pick the right amount! Choosing from the extensive wine lists was even more of a challenge so we relied on recommendations from the waiters, all of which were very good (not to mention inexpensive). We especially enjoyed the Malbec's, a local variety of grapes.

We had booked transportation from Santiago to Mendoza through our trekking agent and sure enough our car and driver showed up at the hotel on time. It was a tight squeeze to fit all our gear in the small car! The drive from Santiago to Mendoza is about six hours, across the spine of the Andes. We looked forward to getting out of the city and into the mountains. On the plains around Santiago and Mendoza it's hot and dry, almost desert. Up in the mountains it's cooler and we passed several big ski resorts. They were all closed since January is summer here. To reach the highest pass we had to negotiate 30 curvos (switchbacks) in the road. The weather was clear and we got our first glimpses of Aconcagua. It looked impressive.

Our driver, Luis, also kept the trip exciting by using whatever part of the road he felt like, as long as there were no cars coming the other way



Pack mules heading home.

(well, most of the time). But this didn't stop him from tsk, tsking and shaking his fist at the ones that drove on "his" side of the road. The signs with "PRECAUCION" or pictures of sharp curves, rock fall, or steep hills just seemed to spur him on. On a positive note, Luis did manage to get us through customs in record time, well ahead of the huge lineup of cars and buses.

Mendoza is a beautiful city. Although an earthquake in 1861 destroyed the old colonial city, it was rebuilt in the style of a European city. There is a central Plaza Independencia and four smaller plazas equidistant from it. (Our hotel, Cordillera NH, was beside one of these smaller plazas.) A pedestrian mall leads from the main plaza with shops and sidewalk cafes. There were lots of trees everywhere. Our first night, the main plaza was full of all sorts of craft booths and street entertainment - drummers, dancers, mimes and jugglers.

Our first task in Mendoza was to get our climbing permit. We linked up with a couple of other climbers from our hotel and together we walked across town to the tourism office. It was a long walk, but pleasant in the morning sunshine. The office is in the beautiful tree filled San Martin Park on the south side of the city. We had some minor difficulties finding the right building but, once we did, it was no problem to get the permits. (\$300 USD per person for high season.)

Our next stop was to meet with our trekking agent (Aymara) to make final arrangements and pick up white gas (for base camp) and butane cartridges (for up high). And last but not least - grocery shopping. We managed to fit the contents of a full grocery cart into our backpacks for the walk back to the hotel.

The next day, we drove back to Puente del Inca on the highway to Santiago. The end of January seemed to be past the peak of the climbing season and there was lots of room in the hostel - we had a room with 5 beds to ourselves. After we finished packing, Leo, the

English speaking guy at reception told us that once we gave our loads to the mules we wouldn't see them again until base camp. We'd assumed we'd have access to our loads each night and had packed accordingly. We went back to the room and repacked. The bad part was that it meant heavier loads for the walk in. As it turned out, Leo was wrong - the mules and loads camped with us each night! On the positive side, it meant we weren't tied to the mules and were able to spend an extra acclimatization day on the walk in.



Beautiful clear views enroute to basecamp.

To avoid some of the crowds and for a more interesting route, we headed for the Plaza Argentina base camp on the east side of the mountain. (The standard route is via the Plaza de Mulas base camp on the West side.) Normally people take three days to hike the roughly 50 km up the Rio Vacas to Plaza Argentina. It was a pleasant walk, but very hot, well over 30 C, and there was little if any shade in the rocky valley. Sunscreen seemed ineffective and we had to stay covered up to avoid getting burnt to a crisp! Most of the elevation gain, over 1000m, is on the last day so we chose to spend an extra day at 3100 m to acclimatize before moving to base camp at 4100m.

Base camp was a pleasant surprise. Despite the heavy traffic of climbers, it was amazingly clean and well organized. Several park rangers were posted at the camp and they kept a strict eye on the residents. There were a number of

outhouses with the barrels flown out by helicopter. Drinking water came from a small glacial stream at the edge of camp and no one was allowed to wash (dishes or yourself) in the stream itself. There was even a park doctor who checked out everyone when they arrived to make sure there were no serious altitude problems.

In keeping with Sask. Section tradition, we made sure we ate well at base camp. Since mules carried our supplies, we didn't have to live on freeze dried. We brought fresh eggs, potatoes, vegetables, and canned food. Although our canned food got dented and beat up on the mule ride, happily 24 of our 30 eggs made it intact. We brought our Outback oven and used it to make pancakes, pizza, cornbread and other treats. We could even enjoy bacon and eggs and hash browns for breakfast!

Unlike the two of us, most of the other groups on the mountain were guided commercial groups. These groups seemed well organized and led. Unfortunately, they all seemed to be on tight schedules. The problem is that acclimatization can't be rushed and a lot of these people seemed to be suffering from mild altitude problems, making their trips a lot less enjoyable. Anyone who needed extra time had to turn back. If you sign up with a commercial trip, make sure you pick one that will allow you time to acclimatize, and time to wait out bad weather. We took 20 days for our climb (the maximum on a standard permit). Most of the commercial groups seemed to be on 12 or 14 day schedules.

Another difference was that most of these other groups didn't return to base camp once they'd moved up to Camp 1. We followed a more "Himalayan" style - returning to base camp after successively higher climbs. It might seem like a lot more work, but it was quick and easy to drop down, unloaded, and we ate and slept much better at our base camp.

On one of our trips down to base camp we caught up to a lone climber struggling down beneath a huge load. He explained that his



The dreaded penitentes enroute to camp 1.

partner had traversed the mountain, descending the far side to Plaza de Mulas, leaving him to carry all their gear down by himself! We split his load between the three of us, earning his gratitude and expensive (\$5 US!) cans of coke from his outfitter at base camp.

Another time, we helped out an ascending climber who had taken an ailing team-mate down to base camp and immediately headed back up to catch his team. We provided him with hot drinks and filled up his water bottles. In return he gave us a freeze dried Chocolate Decadent Cheese Cake which was surprisingly tasty. (Shelley even made an exception to her "no freeze dried" rule!)

Finally, after several trips up and down we were ready to go for the summit. We climbed to our Camp 1.5 (Ameghino Col, 5300m), spent the night and then packed up our tent and moved up to Camp 2 (5900m) at the base of the Polish Glacier. We had originally considered doing the Polish Glacier route but it was out of condition. That left either the Polish Direct or the Polish Traverse. We had brought our technical gear in case we wanted to do the Direct, but we ended up leaving it at base camp after talking to a number of parties that carried all their technical gear up to Camp 2 and back down without using it because they ended up doing the Polish Traverse instead. It's easy to be ambitious at home in the planning stages but at altitude that ambition tends to fade! The Direct isn't that steep

but it's a sustained 1000m with a couple of tricky rock steps. And it was mostly bare ice. We decided we'd be happy enough getting to the top. The big advantage to the traverse is that it doesn't require any gear, not even a rope.

For the most part, we had great weather on our trip. It was clear and sunny every day. Clouds sometimes built up in the distance but never amounted to anything. The only issue was the wind. On the walk in, and at base camp, it got quite windy, especially in the afternoons. But Camp 2 was the worst. You could hear the wind coming like a freight train and then all of a sudden it would slam into you. We waited 2 days for the winds to die down before finally deciding to go for the summit despite the wind (there were a few lulls the morning we went). We set out at 4:30am in the dark. It was cold, maybe -25 C and we had on all the clothes we'd brought - long underwear, salopettes, insulated pants, down jacket, and Goretex pants and jacket. At first I thought we'd overdressed, but when we reached the traverse into the Canaletta I was glad of every layer. As it was I was a little concerned about losing the feeling in my toes. Luckily, the sun reached us and we got some shelter from the wind and warmed up. Just below the top I waited for Shelley to catch up. Reaching me, without looking up, she said "What now!?". "The summit," I replied! We spent a short time on the top, taking pictures and admiring the view and then headed down. Surprisingly, it was less windy on the summit than on the way up.

It took us about eight hours to reach

the summit and another three to get down. We were lucky to have the mountain to ourselves - we didn't see anyone else until we had descended to the bottom of the Canaletta. (Although the beaten path made it hard to imagine we were too alone!) Many climbers dismiss Aconcagua as a big unattractive heap of rubble. But from the Plaza Argentina side, it's actually quite an impressive mountain with the Polish Glacier and steep cliffs. Once you get up higher the views of the surrounding snow-capped peaks are fantastic. It's also easy to underestimate the mountain. By the normal routes it's a straightforward hike for the most part, an easy scramble by Rockies standards. But it's also a very high mountain. Almost 7000m is not something to take too lightly; the altitude and the weather can easily beat you. We were happy to be successful.

The next day we descended all the way to base camp. It was a long day, with heavy loads, but it was nice to be back down. We took a rest day to clean up and repack our loads for the mules. And, of course, to try to eat as much of our leftover food as possible!

Hiking out from base camp turned out to be almost as challenging as the climb! We had planned to do the 3 day hike out in 2 days and arranged for the mules to stop where we would spend the night. We left base camp before the mules, but were assured that everything was in place. In contrast to the walk in, this time we carried only our lunch and some water. But when we got to where we were going to camp (already tired,



Saskatchewan and Canadian Flags on the Summit!

hungry and wind blown!) our mules were nowhere to be seen. We asked the park ranger to radio base camp to see what had happened. He was told that our mules were "too tired" to make it. So there we were, with no sleeping bags, no tent, and no food. Rather than spend the night out, we decided to keep going for another three or four hours to the road. As we hiked, and the afternoon turned to evening, it got darker and darker - no sign of the moon. The last hour was pitch black. In case you're thinking this is a nice foot friendly hiking trail - think again! The trail follows the river on terrain consisting of rock of all shapes and sizes from sand to boulders. The trail itself is often barely discernable. It's amazing we didn't lose the trail, sprain an ankle, or fall over a cliff into the river! After 12 hours of hiking, a few blisters and one blackened toenail, we made it back to the hostel just five minutes before the restaurant closed for the night!

Our mules (and bags) showed up the next day and we headed back to Mendoza. We spent another 10 days enjoying Argentina and Chile, especially the great food, and wonderful wine!

**Articles,
information, photos,
quotes, items of interest
for the newsletter are
welcome at any time!
Please send to Shelley
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or mail to the section
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