



ARGENTINA & ACONCAGUA

DEC. 7, 2013 - JAN. 14, 2014

Preface

Mirta Pellegrini and Fernando Terzano met while traveling in Europe in 1991. They returned to their home land of Argentina and were married. In 1997 they traveled to Park City, Utah for work at Deer Valley ski area, Mirta as a ski instructor and Fernando a snowcat driver. That started a long career of traveling back and forth between Argentina and Utah. In September of 2000 they had a baby girl and named her Olivia. As usual, for them, they pack up and left Argentina the first of December for Park City, Ut. taking Olivia with them. For the next ten years Olivia would live four and a half months in Utah and the rest of the year in Argentina. When she was old enough she went to school in Heber City, Ut. and developed many friendships. She became friends with our daughter, Addison.

In 2012 Deer Valley Ski Resort changed their visa policy and Mirta and Fernando no longer had jobs there. That ended Olivia's annual visits to Utah. She and Addison kept in touch using email and Skype and in 2013 it was decided that Olivia would fly up and stay with Addison for a month during the summer. While she was here the girls came up with the plan that Addison would travel to Argentina to spend a month at Olivia's house during their summer, our winter. Of course Olivia is completely bilingual and experienced in international travel. She flew up to Utah on her own. Addison on the other hand speaks no Spanish and has traveled by air very little. She would need some help getting there and back. And that is how I came to be traveling to Argentina in December of 2013.

PART 1

GETTING THERE

My friend, Mike Duggin, was a Delta pilot for many years. He is now retired but he still gets "buddy passes". When I looked at the cost of flying to Buenos Aires, Argentina, it was about \$1,700 each, round trip. Mike was willing to give us two of his buddy passes and it would cost us about \$700 each in required fees. I know that flying standby can be very frustrating but for \$2,000 maybe some frustration would be worth it.

Why Climb

That is why I was going to Argentina but a much more difficult question to answer is why was I going to climb Aconcagua? Aconcagua is 22,841 feet above sea level making it the highest mountain in the western hemisphere. It is one of the 7 mountains that make up the highest peaks on each of the seven continents. In fact it is the highest peak in the world outside of Asia. All this mean it is one of the most sot after summits in the world. None of those things are all that important to me. So why did I decided I wanted to climb it?

I can start with my having taken up mountain climbing again this last summer. Jen had said she would like to climb the Grand Teton for her 50th birthday. With that in mind she and I started going rock climbing each week to practice for our Teton climb. I started think about climbing more mountains. I went to the Tetons and climbed a few other times as well. I started upgrading some of my equipment.

Once it was clear that I was going to Argentina I started contemplating what I was going to do there for a month. One day it suddenly came to me that Aconcagua was in Argentina. I had known of Aconcagua for many years but I had never really had any big interest in climbing it but I was going to be right there. What better way to spend my time than to climb it?

As I learned more about it, it became apparent that climbing the usual north side with all the hordes of people wouldn't work for me but on the south side there are almost no people. It would be a rare and exciting adventure. I became obsessed with the goal of climbing it and for several months I couldn't think of anything else. The South Wall climb is a big deal. It is considered to be one of the really important big wall climbs in the world. It is over 9,000 feet, nearly straight up. As I studied routes and learned more about the wall I realized that it was very possible I wouldn't make it. But the adventure of trying was what it was about.

I know that high altitude climbing is all about suffering and hard work. Why was I feeling like I wanted to do it? It would be nice to "say" I did it but there are a lot of things that would be nice to "say" I did. That wasn't enough to get me there. I may have felt like it would be a good place to test my self and see if I still had what it takes to over come those hardships. That could be a little bit of why I wanted to do it but not enough to keep me going.

I think it has more to do with having a goal, something that is a challenge to plan and execute. Something I would have to plan, study, calculate, learn and figure out. I seem to thrive on that kind of goal. It becomes the thing I'm living for. It has to be something challenging for me, something most people wouldn't or couldn't do. Paragliding was like that. Learning to fly was easy but learning about weather, airflow, radios, launches and locations etc. consumed me for a long time. It takes a lot to become a good pilot. Building our house was defiantly one of those goals. I could think of nothing else for several years. Climbing Aconcagua is much smaller then either of these but it occupied my mind for a few months and there were certainly many challenging obstacles that had to be over come.

For example, I had been wondering if I should take a two way radio of some kind so I could contact the rangers or others for weather information, emergency assistance or any number of things. We have a few different walkie-talkies around the house. The

night before we were to leave I went online to see if I could find something about the frequency they used for radios there. I went to the official Aconcagua National Park website and just happened to see a tab that said “2013-14 South Wall Regulation”. I had been to this website before but I hadn’t seen this tab. It turns out that it had only been added a week before. It was a rather important bit of information.

There were a lot of requirements listed that I should have noticed but two requirements jumped out at me and kind of stopped me from going farther.

Climbing parties must carry VHF radios with 142.800 frequency at all times.

EXPEDITIONS MUST PUT UP A DEPOSIT THROUGH AN OFFICIAL BANK ACCOUNT OR PAYMENT OBLIGATION DOCUMENT FOR U.S. \$ 30,000.00 (thirty thousand American Dollars).

I had less than 24 hours until I was supposed to be getting on the airplane and now I had to solve these two problems. It was a sleepless night lying in bed trying to figure out how I was going to get a VHF radio and \$30,000 before noon the next day but by morning I had come up with a plan.

The one that might seem the most difficult, a \$30,000 deposit, was actually not so difficult. I had already bought a special travelers insurance policy for both Addison and I. It cost me \$115 for a one million dollar policy that would cover both of us for rescue, recovery and medical and it specifically included mountain climbing on mountains under 7,000 meters. I reasoned that would cover the \$30,000 obligation.

That left me with getting a working VHF radio in the couple hours I had left before going to the airport. I went on the local internet classifieds and looked up VHF radios. There were 3 or 4 radios for sale. One was right in SLC. I called the guy and amazingly he answered. He was one of those ham radio geeks and he knew all about radios. I told him what I needed and he said he would program the radio to 142.800 for me and have it ready to go when I got there. We packed all our stuff for the trip into the car and Addison, Jen and I headed to SLC. We found the guy’s house and the radio looked almost new. He even had the box and instruction for it. He had charged up the battery as well as programming it. I gave him \$135 and we headed for the Airport.

Standby

I have found that flying standby is not that easy. If you get right on the plane it’s no problem but if you don’t make it on the flight, or several flights, it quickly gets depressing. For one thing airports are not really that much fun to hang out in and then there is the stress of not knowing. We were pretty sure we were going to get on the plane out of Salt Lake City to Atlanta but getting out of Atlanta was a different story.

In Atlanta they had TV screens that show the names of the people on the standby list and the number of seats available. It even shows the position of each standby passenger on that list. We started in position 8 and 9 with 11 seats not taken. Then we moved to 5 and 6 with 6 seats available. If one of the unclaimed seats filled we were stuck in Atlanta. There were 10 or 11 people trying to get on standby and some were

making a fuss with the ticket people. Addison and I just stood in the back with our fingers crossed. Then one of the ticket ladies said “McCarthy party”. We ran down the gangway onto the plane. They closed the door behind us and pushed the plane back. We were on our way to Chile. We had a nine hour flight ahead of us but we would be in Santiago the next morning.

12/8/13

Chile? Why?

It was a very long and uncomfortable flight. I am never able to sleep on airplanes and this flight was no different. There is almost no leg room and the seats barely tip back and I was stuck between two guys in the middle row. Addison was 6 rows ahead of me. I was really glad to be landing in the morning.

Fernando had given me plenty of instructions on how to get from Santiago to their house. There were a few different buses that would take us from Santiago to Osorno overnight. From there it was just a short hop over the mountains to Villa la Angostura, where Fernando and Mirta live. I had decided to fly into Santiago, Chile because I figured it would be more interesting than traveling across the vast pampas of central Argentina and it is actually a little closer to Villa la Angostura. Besides we were going to fly out of Buenos Aires and that would mean we would cross the pampas on our way home. By starting in Santiago we would get to travel down the central valley of Chile. I wanted to see it. If we took a night bus we wouldn't get to see much. It would take an extra day to travel during the day but it would be worth it.

The landscape around Santiago was a lot like around Salt Lake City, big mountains off to the east, the close hills arid and dry. The city itself was fairly green with irrigation and human planted vegetation. We didn't see too much of the city, just the airport and the bus terminal. I exchanged \$110 at the airport and then we took a shuttle bus straight to the main bus terminal.



I was immediately thrown into the hustle and bustle of the city, Spanish speaking and a new currency. I've been trying to learn Spanish since my first trip to South America back in 1981 but I'm not very fluent. I took 6 hours of Spanish classes before we left home just to refresh my brain but I hadn't used my Spanish much since we went to Costa Rica in 2005. Now here I was try to ask about buses, buying tickets with pesos. I was disappointed when during my very first transaction, buying two bus tickets, the sales girl try to rip me off by keeping my change. I caught it just after leaving the window and at least she was a little embarrassed about it. It is one of the things I least enjoy about traveling in South America, always having to worry about someone taking advantage of your lack of understanding and knowledge.

It takes a lot of equipment to climb big mountains so we had a lot of baggage, four bags between the two of us plus our day packs. Two hundred pounds of stuff can

add significantly to the challenge of travel. Some how I have spent a lot of my traveling days that way. We checked our bags on the bus and climbed aboard.

I love riding along watching the world go by outside the window, quick little glimpses into the lives of the people whizzing by and watching the landscape change. As I watched the city melting away and the farmland coming into view. As we drove south the view became greener and greener. It looked to me like they were growing a lot of different crops. There were a lot of orchards, I couldn't tell what kind. There were vineyards and a crop that look like sugar beats and hay and lots of corn and plenty of other stuff.

From my journal:

“The country side is beautiful and gets more so the farther we go south, so green and lush. Not tropical green, more of an agricultural green. Lots of orchards, fields and forests. So many different kinds of trees.”

We got to the town of Chillan around 7:00 PM. We were about half way to Osorno. We would catch a morning bus from here to Osorno. I asked about tickets for the next bus and then found a taxi to take us and all our luggage to a hotel. I told the taxi drive a “barato” cheap hotel but what we got wasn't cheap. I really had not slept since the night of the 6th and now it was the 8th. I was just too tired to try to find something cheaper so we paid \$107 for the night. It was nice and we slept great. The room came with breakfast but Addison being gluten free couldn't eat much of it. It was a great place but we would be out of money real fast at that rate.

We dropped our bags in the room and went out for a walk around town. We went back to the bus terminal to actually buy the bus tickets for the next day. Then we went on to the grocery store, in Spanish, supermarkato. Along the way we passed a little sidewalk restaurant that was grilling meat on an outside grill. It smelled really good so we stopped and bought some. I think it was pork on a stick like a shiskabob. They were really good. Addison's allergy to gluten makes it more difficult to find foods that she can eat. She thought this meat on a stick was the greatest.

We got on the bus at 9:00 am and headed south and then west to the town of Valdivia and then on to Osorno. The last bus from Orsorno to Argentina and Villa La Angostura left at 4:30. We got in about 5:00PM. We would have to wait until morning to get the next bus over the mountains.

Osorno had a very busy town center, lots of shops and venders. Addison wanted to go into more of the hole-in-the-wall places. It doesn't get dark until after 9 pm so we had time to wander. We found a hotel for 26,000 CP(US \$50). Still pretty expensive but it was nice and came with breakfast.

We called Fernando from a phone center. The desk person tells you which booth to use and you go in and make your call. There is a readout on the wall that tells you how much it is costing as you to talk. When you are done you go out and pay the desk person for the call. It works quite well.

We caught the bus in the morning and headed over the Andes to Argentina. The ride was amazing; snow capped volcanoes, blue lakes, dense, green forest, clear, cascading rivers and waterfalls. What a place to live. When we climbed off the bus in Villa la Angostura Mirta and Olivia were waiting for us. We loaded all our luggage into the back of their little, white pickup truck and drove the 6 kilometers to their house.

They live just back from the Lago Nahuel Huapi, a giant blue lake with snow capped peaks all around it. By just back from I mean it is a 5 minute walk from their door to the beach. They have giant douglas fur trees around the yard and lots of other trees I don't know their names. They live in a nice little house they built themselves. When we got there Fernando had barbequed beef cooking over a fire pit in the backyard.

Addison and I had been talking about how all the houses and stores we had seen in Chile had high fences around them and bars on the windows and doors like most all of South America and the world. But when we came into Villa la Angostura there were no high fences or bars. Villa la Angostura was just like our little town back in the US. Just



Mirta and Fernando's house



Nahuel Huapi Lake

a quant little resort town.

I was talking to Fernando about how green and lush it was and he told me they get around 2 meters of rain a year. That is close to 75 inches of precipitation.

It was somewhat ironic that only a few hours after we arrived at his house Fernando left on the bus to go to Buenos Aires to get a plane to Utah. He was going to be a snowmaker at the Canyons ski area for a few months.

12/12/13

Heading for Mendoza

As usual I was very focused on my main goal, climbing Aconcagua, so I got the first bus I could that would take me back north. I had to go to the city of Mendoza to get my climbing permit and do some last minute shopping. It cost me \$108 to get a bus from Villa la Angostura to Mendoza. I got on the bus in the afternoon and rode it all night getting to Mendoza the next morning. I was nineteen and a half hours on that bus. I had a great seat so at least I was able to sleep a bit. Addison didn't seem too sad to see me go. She just waved me out the door when Mirta took me to the bus terminal.

I got into Mendoza at 7:00 am. The first problem I had to solve was to find a place to keep my 100 plus pounds of luggage so I could move around without having it weigh me down. After a considerable amount of time wandering around the very large bus terminal I discovered there was a luggage storage place. It cost me \$5 to store my three bags for the day. Great, now to find my way to the permit office to get the climbing

permit. I was happy to find the bus terminal was right in the middle of the city and almost everything I needed could be found near by including the permit office.

The information I had said the permit office was right across the street for the San Martin Park so I got a map from an information booth that showed me how to get to the San Martin Park and headed that way. One problems with traveling around a big city is finding a bathroom and this morning I was feeling the need to find one. I pass a little hole-in-the-wall internet café place and looked in. I figured it must have a bathroom and I needed to send a few emails as well. I could always use a pastry too. I stepped in. The pretty young girl working the counter was busy talking with someone so I glanced into the back and saw a very small and dirty little bathroom barely big enough to hold the sink and toilet. I slipped in. When I came out it was obvious the girl could care less about me using the bathroom. I asked to use a computer and she set me down at the closest one.

It would seem when it comes to computers it wouldn't mater what country you are in but there are differences. I needed to write themccarthyfarm@gmail.com which seems pretty easy until you find that the @ sign is located with two other symbols and pushing shift doesn't get you an @ sign. Surprisingly it took me several minutes to find someone who could tell me how to do it. If you ever need to know it is alt-Q-2. I got my emails sent and it cost me sixty cents for the half hour I was there.

I headed off to find the permit office again. I got to the park and couldn't find the office. I started asking people and found it had moved. It was now a few streets over. I was zeroing in on it. The last guy I asked, a young man in a uniform, pointed to a white marble, spiral stair case and said "third floor". I ran up the stairs. As I reached the foyer on the third floor I was a bit puzzled to see 10 or 15 men and



women in park uniforms sitting and standing around the foyer. Some had hand painted signs. One guy quickly came over to me and asked if I was here for a climbing permit and I said I was. He then informed me that the office was closed today because the park rangers were on strike trying to get better pay and more money to run the park. I was sympathetic to his cause but very disappointed in the delay. He told me it might be open the next day but right now there were no rangers guarding the park and it might be possible to get in with no permit.

I left the building and went out front. I hadn't notice them on my way in but there were another 20 to 25 rangers gathered outside with signs protesting. I really couldn't imagine this all ending by tomorrow morning. How long could I wait? I was expecting to shell out seven hundred dollars for the permit, it would be a real savings if I didn't need the permit. But if I got up there and then I found I **did** need it I would have wasted

even more time. I still had to buy food and get white gas so I would work on that and then see what was happening with the permit later.

It took me the rest of the day to do just those two things. The food wasn't hard to do but the white gas or "BENZINA" as it is called was another story. I couldn't find it anywhere and no one seemed to know where you get it. I walk all over trying hardware stores and camping/outdoor places. In Peru, years ago, we would buy it at the "Farmacia" the drug stores. Finally I talked to a guy who said I needed to find the store that outfitted climbers. I had already been to several that claimed to do that. He didn't know the name of the place but he had an address for me. I walked on. When I finally found the place it was closed. Everything closes in the afternoon; it is just the way things are in South America, siesta time. It was already close to 5:00pm when they should be reopening. Six more people showed up to get gear to climb Aconcagua. They were all with a guide service and one of them was a guide. Most of them spoke English. Two of them were women from California. Somehow I didn't feel much of a connection to them even though we could talk and were from the USA. They were paying lots of money to have someone show them the way. Their "Company" had said they needed to rent different boots and mittens because their's weren't good enough. The guide had brought them down to this shop to rent the stuff. They were talking about the cost of hiring porters. Their "Company" had secured their permits even though the office was closed. It was a much different story than mine.

I bought two, two liter bottles of benzina, better to have too much than too little. Then I headed back over to the permit office. The protesters were just packing up to leave and I asked if the strike had been resolved and they said no. I hadn't really expected anything else. I walk on toward the bus terminal and found a hotel cheap just a block or so from it. I got my bags from the storage place and dragged them to the hotel.

Apparently the shoes I was wearing weren't very good because somehow all the walking I had done during the day had caused big blisters on the balls of my feet. That was all I needed was to start days of hiking with blisters.

I spent most of the evening sorting gear and food. In the morning I would go over to the permit office and see what was happening. If the protesters were still there and the office closed, I was going to get the 10:15 bus to the mountains and try to get in to the park without the permit. If it was open I was just praying there would be no glitches.

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The Permit Office

I was at the permit office well before 8:00 the next morning. There were no protesters when I got upstairs. The door was lock but there were people in the office. When I peered in the window they came over, opened the door and ushered me inside. They didn't know if the protesters would be back to block the doors so they were trying to get things done quickly. I think they must have been upper management people who had come in to try



to keep the flow of foreign money coming into the agency while the regular working folks were on strike. I didn't care as long as I could get my permit.

I quickly learned that somehow I had missed several things about the permit process. First was that almost no one climbs the South Wall. When I said I wanted to climb the South Wall it really took them by surprise. And of course they tried to talk me out of it. They asked me, "Do you know it is really dangerous?" I was a real anomaly in their system and I was going to cause trouble.

I'm not sure why I didn't learn more about the process before coming but I really missed a few things that could have made it easier. Maybe it was my lack of trust in the internet and the computer world. I was going by what it said in the books I had and they said I would have to go to the permit office, in person, and fill out a permit form and pay my money. The website where I found the information on the South Wall was the key. Why didn't I figure it out earlier, weeks earlier? Was it my failing or Google's or the guy who designed the website?

I was supposed to have filled out a form online. Most of it was just filling in basic information but there were a few things I needed to know that would have been much simpler back home, most importantly my blood type. My blood type would be printed on my permit so if, for some reason, I needed a transfusion they would know what type to give me. Also if I was to hire my mule through a regular guide service that guide service would then be my "Company". I didn't need to climb with them or have them provide any other service, just the mule. If I had a "Company" before getting the permit I would get \$100 off the cost of the permit. The other things were related to the new South Wall regulations, perhaps put there to help discourage people from climbing it. The \$30,000 deposit was doing a great job of that. South Wall requirements, it was written in legalese so it was over a page long but this is basically what it says:

\$30,000 deposit for rescue, medical and other cost related to removing me and my parts from the mountain.

VHF radio

Climbing resume

Emergency exit plan

Trip plan/itinerary

Note from a doctor stating physically fit enough to climb

I had quickly read through these things the night before we left but they seemed a little unimportant. Couldn't I just make up my climbing resume and the doctor's note? They could be verified so what was their value. The emergency exit plan and trip plan seemed a little simple too. I could easily give them both but I could almost guarantee they would change.

I pulled out my million dollar insurance policy and said here is my deposit. They looked at it and weren't sure what to do with it. Then they asked if I had a satellite phone. Where did that come from? It said VHF on the website. I said no, but I did have a VHF radio as required. They didn't seem too happy about that either but they accepted it. They asked if I had a company or if I was going to get one. I said no. That didn't go over well. But then I said I wanted to hire a mule. That was the right thing to say, that would give me a company and they wanted me to have a company.

There were a few other groups getting their permits by this time, one of them said they had hired “Inka Expeditions” as their company and they were very happy with them. So I said I would go with Inka, how do I sign up with them? The permit people really wanted me to find a company so they made some phone calls and got me lined up. They gave me an address and sent me off the Inka Expedition offices. There would be someone who spoke English there to help me.

When I got there the place look like a travel agency, three young women sitting at little desks with telephones and computers. They knew who I was immediately, the guy who wanted to climb the South Wall. One of the women introduced herself as Popi, a nickname. She turned out to be a great asset for me. She was an Aconcagua guide herself. Her husband who was a guide too had climbed the South Wall. She knew the mountain, she knew the system and she seem to know how to get me a permit. We started with the climbing resume.

In 1967 I was 12 years old and I went with my dad into the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming. We hiked 50 miles in 4 days. I had been hiking with him before that but that was what I see as the start of my mountaineering experience. In 1976 I started technical climbing. I climbed the Grand Teton, and Gannett Peak that summer with my dad, both peaks just under 14,000 ft. I spend every chance I had for the next 5 years climbing all over the western United States including Mt. Rainer. In 1982 I went to Peru for a couple months and climbed my first 20,000 foot peak. Kord Smith and I climb three major peaks that trip, Nevado Chinchey at 20,600, Huandoy at 20,866 and Huascaran at 22,204 feet only 600 feet lower then Aconcagua. I actually summited Huascaran twice, once alone and once with Kord on a more difficult route called the Shield. I returned to Peru in 1986 and climbed several more of the major peaks of the Cordillera Blanca. I also climbed in Ecuador, Mexico, Europe and India. It wasn’t like I needed to make up a resume. I had really spent a lot of time on big mountains.

I think that after talking with me for awhile Popi came to the conclusion that I had plenty of experience to be making an attempt on the South Wall. She did seem to be puzzled by my lack of preparedness in regard to the permit. I assured her that I was better at climbing than I was at doing official paper work. She got the resume, the emergency exit plan and the itinerary typed into the computer and printed me out copies. She said I would have to go find a doctor to write up the health statement. I asked her if she thought I was going to be able to get a permit or if I should just be going to climb some other peaks that didn’t have a permit process. She said, “We have it all don’t now. Just go give it to them and see what happens.”

I went to my favorite hole-in-the-wall internet café and looked up blood types. I found the O+ is the most common with A+ a close second. I picked A+ because I can’t be that common. I didn’t know it at the time but it seems that was a bad choice and would become a problem for Jen back home. I then typed out a letter from our friend and doctor, Sancy Leachman, stating that I was more then healthy enough to be climbing Aconcagua and had it printed off. I took all my papers back to the permit office and gave them to the person at the desk. He flipped through them, reading just the title of each page and checking them off the list as he did so. They had sent my insurance documents out to some official source to verify it would do what was required and they had reported back that the policy would cover the requirements. The papers were being transported back to the office and should be there shortly. They were going to give me a permit!

Amazing! If I got out of the office soon I would make it in time to get the afternoon, 3:15, bus to the mountains.

Because I now had a company and because I was planning to get the bus today and start hiking in tomorrow I would have to pay only 4000 pesos for the permit. Because I had exchange my dollars for pesos on the Blue Market that 4000 pesos equaled \$430.00. It cost me \$180 for the mule. Both the mule and the permit cost less than the \$700 I thought I was going to pay for the permit alone. I had to hang around for awhile waiting for my insurance papers to come back but I would soon be on my way.

While I waited I talked to some of the other people trying to get permits. One of them was a 9 year old boy who would become the youngest person to climb Aconcagua. He, or rather his dad, had spent the last 3 days in court trying to get an okay to let the kid try. They is a law that says you have to be 14 or older to go on the mountain. So at least someone spent longer getting their permit than me.

From a new report I found after returning home:

Tyler Armstrong of Yorba Linda, CA, reached the summit of the tallest peak in the Western and Southern hemispheres on Christmas Eve with his father, Kevin.

There were also four Korean guys who could barely speak English or Spanish. They had to be having a harder time communicating than me. So maybe I didn't have it so bad. It just seemed to me like I was having a hard time.

Off to the Mountains

I made it to the bus terminal in time to get the bus at 3:15. It would take 4 hours to get to my destination, a place called Penitentes. That was where I would find the Maxi, Inka equipment guys, who would get my stuff on the mule and me to the trail head. On the bus ride we drove through some powerful thunderstorms making me very nervous about what was going to happen when I got off the bus. Once we left the green vineyards surrounding the city of Mendoza the landscape became as raw and rugged as any landscape can be. The highway follows the Rio Mendoza up a rough river gorge. The river was thick with mud it was carrying down out of the mountains. The sharp, craggy, multi-colored walls on both sides were almost completely free of any vegetation.



Ravines, raw from the erosion of the last flush of water to scrape them out poured their debris into the river. It is such a contrast to the lush, green softness of Villa la Angostura. As beautiful as Angostura was I felt strangely more at home in this stark, arid place.

By the time the bus was dropping me off in front of the Penitentes sign the storms were well off to the east and I was standing under a clear blue sky. The sun was getting low in the west and a chilly

wind was flapping my pants and shirt.

Penitentes is a ski resort. There is no town, just hotel buildings and lodges. As I looked around the place seemed completely deserted. Back in Mendoza, Popi had told me the bus would drop me off right in front of the hotel where I would find Maxi and the equipment warehouse but I was in front of at least four big white buildings that all seemed to be hotels. When they built things in Penitentes they had lots of room so they spread out. Everything was set well back from the highway. I dragged my bags behind the Penitentes sign and went in search of Maxi.



I found him in the basement of the big hotel on the river side of the highway. He and a couple other guys were packing and weighing boxes and bags of food and equipment that would be loaded onto mules and transported up to Plaza de Mules the next day. They pointed me towards a table to sort my stuff and put it into the boxes and bags they gave me. By the time I had sorted my 18 days worth of food and piles of climbing gear and clothes it was already starting to get dark. I left all the stuff with them, just taking a day pack with the stuff I thought I would need for the hike in the next day. I went around to the front of the hotel to find a place to sleep for the night.

When I went into the hotel there was a pretty big group of people sitting around a big table in the dining room. I recognized several of them. Some were the people I had met at the climbing store who were renting better boots and mitten. The four Koreans from the permit office were there too. I went to the front desk and asked how much it would be for a room. I was a little shocked when the front desk women told me it would be \$80 for the night. I said that was a little steep for me and went out to find something cheaper. I walk to the far end of the complex of buildings to a much more rustic looking little place called Refugio Cruz de Caña. It still cost me \$25 but it was much more my kind of place. It had probably been there since they build the railroad way back when and it hadn't been upgraded much. It had dorm style rooms but I was the only person staying there so I had four beds to myself.

I was back at the Inka Expedition warehouse at 9:00 the next morning. The sky was clear blue with not a breathe of wind. A perfect day for a hike. The Koreans where there too. Apparently they were getting a ride with Maxi too. Maxi was in his mid twenties with a beard and long hair pulled back into a bun on the back of his head. He spoke very little English but he was still quite personable and friendly. We loaded into



his little white bus and headed up the valley to the Horcones Canyon and the entrance to the Aconcagua Park.

I was nervous about entering the park. I would have to show my permit stamped with a big “PARED SUD” (South Wall) and

highlighted in yellow and it would be scrutinized to be sure I was doing it right. I was supposed to demonstrate my radio and show my climbing gear to the rangers so they would know I really had all my stuff. But because of the strike things were pretty backed up. The Koreans had given their permits to Maxi so I did too. He showed them all at once but when the young girl checking permits saw "PARED SUD" high lighted in yellow, stamped on my permit she looked up and said, "Oh, there you are" and handed all the permits back. She couldn't have cared less. But this was just the park entrance. We still had to check in at the Ranger Station.

We climbed back into the bus and drove another kilometer up the road. There was a big yellow helicopter sitting on a pad and a small group of official looking vehicles and a couple small buildings. A young man in a uniform came down from the building to greet us. It seemed like these people knew I was coming. I can't believe they greet all the visitors coming into the park like that. In fact the Koreans just grabbed their day packs and headed up the trail. Maxi introduced me to the young ranger. His name was Ruben and he didn't even tell me how crazy I was or how dangerous it was on the South Wall. I asked if he wanted to check my radio and he said that would be a good idea. We walked up to the buildings and talked about my route and I drew it on a photo for him. He introduced me to the helicopter pilot, a real nice guy in his early forties. They told me a few stories about some rescues they had done on the South Wall and said that the last guys were some really stupid Argentineans who made some really stupid mistakes. Later I thought to myself, "I sure hope I don't make any really stupid mistakes". After about 45 minutes we shook hands and I headed up the trail.

I felt much better about things after talking with Ruben. He knew about climbing and that you have to make decisions as you go, that it can be dangerous but that the danger is relative to your knowledge. He spoke good English too and that would make a lot of difference when talking on the radio.

PART 2 The Work Begins, Into the Mountain

The first evening in my tent I wrote, "I realize no one will ever care about these stats but I like to write them down so here goes;

Penitentes was at 8,600 ft

Horcones Ranger station about 9,500

Confluencia 11,155

Plaza Francia 14,000

I hiked 11.5 miles, gained 4,500 vertical feet in 6 hours"

At first the hiking seemed easy but after 12,000 feet it started to wear me down. My blisters from Mendoza were hurting, my knees hurt for some reason I couldn't understand. I had developed a headache and I felt pretty tired. Hiking 11.5 miles with 4500 vertical feet of climbing to 14,000 feet may have a lot to do with it. It took me 6 hours to hike in and that included a stop at the tent city of Confluencia.



Most people stop at Confluencia for at least the night and most for a couple days to acclimatize. In fact the park service requires a medical check for everyone going past. They check heart rate, blood oxygen level, and listen to your lungs and heart. If you don't meet the requirements they won't allow you to go on. I also had to check in with the ranger. Her name was Vanesa and she didn't speak much English. The doctor, Carolina, spoke good English so she translated for us. I had to, once again, fill them in on all my plans and schedule. I was supposed to do most of my communicating with these people so I wanted to make sure we could communicate well.

Both women were pretty young and they didn't seem to be climbers. They really didn't know anything about the South Wall and it was just 7 miles up the trail. It is probably just part of the speech she gives to everyone but I found it humorous that Carolina, the doctor, was telling me that I had to drink a lot of water up here, at least four liters a day. I didn't say anything when she told me but I thought it would be pretty tough for me to drink that much water without it being a lot hotter out. I said I was already getting sunburned so she asked if I had sunscreen. Both questions seemed quite ridiculous to be asking someone who was going to climb such a difficult route. But she is used to talking to people who really don't know anything about high mountains and I guess they make really stupid choices. In any case I passed my medical check up and continued up the canyon.

The name Confluencia comes from the location of the camp at the confluence of the Horcones Inferior and Superior Rivers. The main trail continues up the Superior to Plaza de Mules and that is where everyone else was going. But I was turning off and heading up the Inferior. Some people stay an extra day in Confluencia and take a day hike up the Inferior but it is against the Park rules to camp anywhere up there unless you have a permit to climb the South Wall. Of the people who hike up the Inferior only a handful of them make it all the way to Plaza Francia where I would be camping. I got the impression from talking to Ruben and the heli pilot that it had been a couple years since anyone had attempted the South Wall. I would be all alone up there.



A couple miles up from the confluence I ran into my mule driver, or arriero as they are called. An arriero is someone who transports good by pack animal. My arriero's name was Ramon and he was coming back down after dropping my stuff off up at Plaza Francia. We talked for a few minutes before heading off in our own directions.

I was tired and feeling ill by the time I got to Plaza Francia. I put my tent up and I crawled in for a nap. I was

surprised that I was feeling the altitude as much as I was. It was only 14,000 ft. but I had that dull headache and nausea that comes with altitude. I somehow thought I was tough enough to be that high without any effect. I thought I wouldn't get it until above fourteen thousand. For some reason my legs and feet hurt a lot more than they should have. I didn't think I could have gotten that out of shape in the couple weeks I hadn't exercised. All in all I was feeling pretty beat up.

I made myself get up and make some dinner before it got dark. I also needed to do my radio check-in with the park ranger. We had decided I would check-in each evening at 7:00 to let them know what I was up to and get the latest weather report. It was kind of a strange thing having people keeping such close track of me on a mountain. It was a little scary. I thought I was going to be talking to Vanesa at Confluencia instead I got Ruben at Horcones. That was better because Ruben's English was much better.



1/15/13

A REST DAY

I had a restless night, getting up to pee every hour or so, another effect of altitude, but in the morning I was feeling better. It was supposed to be a rest day but there was no way I was going to be able to just lay around. The upper canyon was calling me and I really wanted to get a good look at the South Wall. I took a couple ibuprophen (IB) tablets, through some food and water into my pack and started up the canyon. I don't know if it was the IB or just getting out moving but I was feeling a lot better once I got going.

Plaza Francia is right at the base of the South Wall's western edge. The wall towers 9,000 feet, nearly straight up, over the canyon floor. It completely fills the sky. I couldn't see the upper most parts of the mountain because it was cloaked in clouds and fog but I could see the lower parts and it was awe-inspiring. I had been studying picture of it for months but now that I was getting a real look at it I was feeling pretty confident that it was possible for me to climb it. There were flaws that I could use to get up it.

I climbed out onto the Horcones Glacier and toward the back of the canyon. It looked relatively flat but my legs and lungs didn't think so. By the time I was to the back of the canyon I had only gained a thousand feet and covered about two and a half miles. I was still feeling good so I turned and climbed another 800 feet up to a shelf on the south side of the canyon. It would have been an amazing view of the South Wall but the clouds had lowered even more and I could only see the bottom third of the face.



There is a strange phenomenon that happens on snow fields on Aconcagua, and probably other mountains in South America. The sun starts melting out sun cups in the snow. The cups get deeper and deeper until all that is left are towers of snow, fields of these snow towers. I had never seen them before and thought they were fun. I encountered a lot of these fields in the back of the canyon. These snow towers are called penitentes.

When I returned to camp my GPS told me I had reached an altitude of 15,280 feet, covered 5.5 miles and it had taken me 5 hours. I guess that could be considered a rest day.

The blisters on my feet seem to have fixed themselves. At least they weren't bothering me anymore. My knees and legs were still feeling bad. When I returned to camp I spent some time stretching and it seemed to help. I was going to have to find time to do more stretching.

There was a noticeable lack of life in the canyon. Somewhere back down the canyon below my camp I left all sign of life behind. There is almost no vegetation and only a few birds, just rocks, ice and water. There is almost continuous rock fall. I could hear them clattering and crashing all the time. Once or twice an hour a big crash would catch my attention when something really big would fall and make a big noise and dust cloud.

I made my radio call again at seven. I was surprised when I got someone from Plaza Argentina which was clear on the other side of the mountain. Somehow the signal was going up and over the ridge above me and down the other side. He said it was supposed to rain/snow the next morning but clear as the day went on. It was already showing signs of that where I was. He spoke okay English but I had no connection with him and it seemed like a useless exchange.

12/16/13

Cerro Mirador

There was an inch and a half of snow on the tent in the morning. But the sky was blue and the sun was shining on the wall above me. I packed up my sleeping bag, bivy sack, stove and some food and set off up the canyon once again. My plan was to move a temporary camp up onto the shelf I had been on the day before and then climb Cerro Mirador, the peak that makes up the south side of the canyon. Mirador is 18,280 feet above sea level. The north side had some snow fields and there were some difficult looking rock areas but I was pretty sure I could get through the minor cliffs on the east side of the face.



My route up Mirador

I found a nice flat place to camp, dropped my camp gear, grabbed my ice ax and some lunch and continued up. The clouds were moving in already. The upper part of Aconcagua was cloaked in clouds again. I was just hoping that when I reach the summit of Mirador I would be able to see something. It took me five hours to go from Plaza Francia to the summit including my stop to drop off my camp stuff. I climbed 4,300

vertical feet total, less than a thousand feet an hour. Back home if I'm not doing 1,200 feet per hour I am going slow. It didn't feel that slow at 18,000 feet. A big part of the climb was on loose talus with just enough snow on it to make it difficult to see what I was stepping on. It made for frustrating climbing.

I didn't actually make it to the very summit. I was within 10 feet of the top but I couldn't figure out how to make the last move up the rock. It was snowy and slick and exposed and I decided it wasn't worth making a mistake and getting hurt. Besides I couldn't see any more from there than where I was standing with the clouds sitting on the summit.

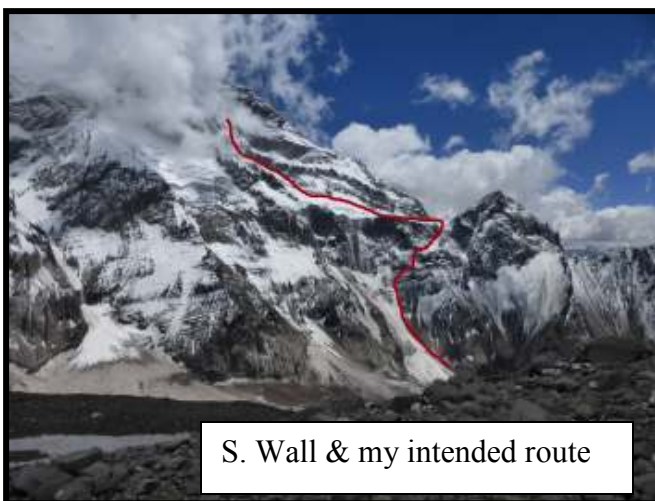
The snow covered talus was no easier going down than up. I had to pick my way down carefully and the fog and snow made route finding challenging. At high altitude it's so much easier going down than up. Even though it was slow it was still a lot easier than going up.

I made it back to the flat spot I had picked out earlier and set up a camp. I got out my sleeping pad and spent some time stretching. It was really helping. My legs were feeling so much better.

I got out my monocular and studied the South Wall. How many times was I going to change my mind about that face? I would decide it look doable, at least I had a chance of making it up. Then I would look from a different angle and decide I didn't have a prayer of making it up there. I knew before I ever came down to Argentina that I would need a lot of luck to make it up. Now that I was there I had to admit I had probably bitten off a bit too much. This was really a serious climb.

I filled my water bottle and pot from a near by rivulet of water. By morning it would be difficult to find water because everything would be frozen. I heated up some mac and cheese and sat looking at the huge wall in front of me. It was enormous. It looked like I could reach out and touch it. The fog on the summit would lift a little now and then and give me little glimpses of the final spur I would have to climb before reaching the relatively flat summit ridge. It looked really difficult and cold. It was nearly 6,000 feet above me. I couldn't see much detail even with my monocular.

I had, by now, decided I had to try to climb it in 3 days. One night on the Pasic Glacier at around 17,000 ft. and a second night just below the final spur around 21,000 feet. Each day would have it's own crux. The first days it would be the 80 degree frozen waterfall just below the shoulder of the Pasic Glacier. It was a short pitch but it was near



vertical water ice and water ice is not my specialty. If I made it up that the next day I would have to find a way through the serac and onto the Upper Glacier. The Upper Glacier is sliding over a cliff and as it does the edge of the ice flow breaks off forming a near vertical jumble of ice. It is constantly

changing. The route that is there one year might be gone the next. It could be relatively easy or it could be completely impassable. I could see what seemed like a doable route similar to what was shown in pictures I had seen but once above the ice fall I could see what looked like very large crevasses, possibly impassible. It would be a very difficult section and once above it retreat would be pretty challenging.

Both the Pasic and the Upper glaciers would be relatively flat but that too had it's challenges, crevasses and deep snow. For months the question had been running through my head, what about the crevasses? I could be happily walking across the snow on one of these glacier and fall into a bottomless pit. There was no way to protect against it without a partner. Looking through my monocular I couldn't see any sign of crevasses but that wasn't very settling. The other problem areas was deep snow, it could stop me or at least slow me to a deadly slow crawl. I might not have the strength to push throw waist deep snow at 20,000 feet. It could take me a day or more just to cross the flats.

I really had no way of knowing what it was going to be like until I got up there. I would just go until something stopped me. I was feeling strong. I was willing to except that I might not make it but I was going to give it my best shot.

The shelf under Mirador was an amazing place to spend the night. Just before sunset I heard a rumble from the South Wall and watch as a huge avalanche crashed down the face. It was part of the upper glacier falling over the edge, tons of ancient ice crashing down a couloir. The dust cloud grew and grew and eventually covered a big part of the south face. As the sun set the clouds broke up so I could see the full moon rise out of the ridges to the east and climb the east ridge of Aconcagua. It was much colder just 1,200 feet higher than Plaza Francia. My bivy sack had a heavy, white frost on it in the morning.

The next day I climbed a route on the western side of the north face of Mirador. I picked the route because it would be mostly on snow and I wanted to practice my

snow/ice climbing skills. My plan was to climb as far as I could get in two hours and then turn around. Once the snow ran out the rock climbing was challenging and my progress was slow. Backing down what I had already climbed would have been tough so I ended up climbing for two and a half hours to where I found an easier place to descend. I didn't make it to the summit but I did reach 17,500 feet. It would give me a better acclimatization base.

I couldn't get any higher then the 18,280 feet on Mirador without



going up Aconcagua. So I wasn't going to get more acclimatized than that. I guessed I was ready to start on the South Wall. My plan was to return to Plaza Francia and spend the rest of the afternoon resting and eating. The next day I would attempt climb up to the frozen waterfall on the South Wall with just a day pack to see what it looked like and get a feel for how hard it would be. It shouldn't take me all that long without a pack and I would then return to Plaza Francia for more rest and packing for the full ascent. I was feeling pretty good about things at this point and was excited to get up on the wall and see how hard it was going to be. I was feeling strong and ready.

THE STOVE

That evening I got out my MSR Whisperlite stove and set it up to cook dinner. My old stove, like so much of my climbing gear, was over twenty five years old and in questionable condition. I had decided I didn't want my stove falling apart up on this big face so I spent the money for a new one. That evening I notice that my new stove wasn't burning right. The flame was weak and not heating the water. I shut it off and started to take it apart to clean the jet out. Being a fix it guy I know that anything that has small parts needs to be taken apart over a smooth, flat surface so when you drop something you can find it. Knowing it and doing it are two different things and I didn't do it in this case. As I pulled the jet assembly apart a small filter like piece fell out and onto the ground.

I spent the next two hours looking for it. I sifted all the dirt in the area through a mess bag trying to find it. It wasn't like looking for a needle in a haystack. I knew right where I dropped it and it really wasn't that small. I should have been able to find it but I didn't. The reality of the situation was clear to me. The importance of the stove was not for cooking it was for water. Up higher on the mountain there was no water unless you melted ice or snow. Without the stove I would have no water.

I had a repair kit for the stove but somehow this small part was not in it. I put the stove back together without the part and it still didn't burn right. I had a cold dinner and went to bed so I could worry about it in comfort. I had to fix the stove or get a new one. How could I do that? I realized that I had to either go out to Penitentes or go to Plaza de Mules where there were people with lots of stuff. There were lots of climbers coming off the mountain and maybe I could buy a stove off someone if I couldn't find parts for mine. It would take days to get over there and back and I was ready to start climbing tomorrow. I was so bummed. I kept asking myself, "Why did this happen?"

Sometime during the night it occurred to me that if I went around to Mules I would be at the base of the Normal Route and I could climb the peak while I was over there. That would be the best acclimatization I could get. If I was going to climb this side in three days I should be able to climb that side in less than three days. With this insight I started feeling better about the situation. Maybe this stove thing happened for a reason, to make me take more time to really get acclimatized. Maybe it was meant to be. I needed to slow down, see some more of the country and enjoy myself. By morning I had a plan and was feeling pretty good about the turn of events.

I would do a quick reconnaissance climb on the South Wall. I really wanted to do that. I could go around to Mules knowing a little bit about what I was going to be doing when I came back. I would get up early and spend an hour climbing as high as I could get in that much time. Then I would return to camp, grab enough gear and food to get

around to the other side and back and to do a speed ascent of the Normal Route. I would come back here fully acclimatized and ready to climb.

I climbed about a thousand feet up the apron to where the technical rock climbing began. The apron was a bit harder to climb than I had expected but the technical rock looked easier up close than it had from across the canyon. That is often the case. The East Ridge of the Grand Teton looks impossible from the highway but when you get up there it is not hard at all. I thought I could probably find an easier way up the apron too.

It took me one and a half hours up and back. I had to break my camp and hide the gear I wasn't going to be taking with me. I was on the trail to Confluencia by 11:00. I had talked to Ruben on the radio to tell him my plan and he said I should check in with the ranger at Confluencia. I was talking to the folks there by 1:15, I had dropped nearly three thousand feet and covered 7 miles in two hours. I wasn't sure why I was in Confluencia. It was half a mile out of my way. I talked to Carolina, the doctor that spoke good English and I was able to fill her in on my new plans.

While we talked she did another med check on me. When I had come on the 14th my blood oxygen level was 90 and pulse 82, now I was at 95 and 82. She said it showed I was acclimatizing well. She told me she was going to be moving up to Plaza de Mules the next day so I would see her there.

Confluencia is around 11,000 feet and Mules is a little over 14,000 feet. It would be 10 miles and 3,000 vertical feet to Mules. I was leaving Confluencia at 1:30. It didn't seem likely that I would make it all the way before night and I didn't. I passed some mule trains and a number of tourist trains in the first hour but after that I was on my own. It was too late in the day for people to be on the trail. It is a rough, rocky trail that follows the long, wide, flat canyon around the west flank of Aconcagua. After the first couple miles the canyon floor becomes a wide grey, flood plain, in places a third of a mile across. If the trail only had human foot traffic it might smooth out and be an easy walk but with hundreds of mules a day churning up the rocks and sand I would guess it never smooths out. I had every kind of weather on this march as well, sun, rain, wind, snow. And I just kept marching on and seemingly not getting anywhere. Seven miles from Confluencia the trail had gained 1,500 vertical feet. I still had three miles and another 1,500 feet to get to Mules. It was 7:00 pm and I was done. I setup my tent beside the river at a place called Piedra Ivanez, (Ivanez's Rock). The sky was dark with storm clouds and it was half snowing, half raining. I had a few snacks and drank some water and crawled in to the tent for the night.

Marching up the Horcones Superior



12/19/13

Plaza de Mules



The sky was clear the next morning and the sun was just raising on Plaza de Mules as I crested the headwall and entered the tent village. The Horcones Superior Glacier was shining bright on Cerro Cuerno above. I stopped at the ranger station to check in and the ranger seemed confused. He didn't seem to know where I had come from or what to do with my papers. He didn't speak English so there wasn't a lot of explaining to do. I walked up to the red, white and blue tents of the Inka Expeditions camp and who were the first people I saw, my four Korean buddies. They were so glad to see me.

At some point at one of our previous meeting they had understood that I was climbing the South Wall and I had suddenly been elevated to some kind of hero status. They had already taken several pictures with me and them. They ushered me into their lodging, set me down in a chair and gave me some coffee. I tried to explain that I don't drink coffee and would rather have tea. I might have gotten that message across in Spanish but these guys were speaking Korean. They were packing up their stuff to start up the mountain that morning. They had come into the mountains the same day I did, five days earlier. What had they been doing that they were still here in Mules?

After drinking my coffee I went out to find someone who could help me with my stove. I found a group of Inka employees sitting around a table in the kitchen tent. I told them the story of my stove problems. I talked in both English and Spanish because some of the group didn't speak English. When I finished they all just sat there looking at me. Did I confuse them that badly? Had they understood me at all?

Finally a woman asked, "You have no company?"

I said "you are my company."

"Oh, oh, good, but" she said, "We don't have any stoves or stove parts. I don't think we can help." That was not the response I was expecting but what could I say to that? I thanked them and walked out.

I sat in the sun on a stone wall and debated what to do next. There were several other companies and I would go around and see if I got any better response from one of them but what if I was wrong about them having everything here? Then one of the guys who had been at the table came over and sat down beside me and in a conspirator

whisper told me that if I couldn't get my stove going or find another to come find him and he would get me one. It would have to be our secret because the women who told me they couldn't help was his boss and he could get in trouble for getting me a stove. I don't think it was his real name but everyone called him Pela and he was the equipment issue guy. He was in charge of setting up all the expeditions with tents, stoves, pots, etc.. He said he would have said something inside but he couldn't because his boss was there. I thanked him and went off to see if anyone else could help me.

I talked with several others about my problem and the response was much more what you would expect. Almost everyone had advice and some tried to help me fix it. One guy completely took it apart and clean everything. Some of them were sure you didn't need that piece for the stove to work. I listened and learned from all of them. I did notice that the guy who took it all apart and cleaned it had removed the gas jet, looked at it and the other jet from my repair kit. He apparently decided they were the same and put the new one back into the stove instead of the one that was in it. He then attempted to light the stove to test it. It was kind of like a flame thrower and he concluded that it still wasn't fixed. Eventually I went back to Pela. He snuck me into the equipment issue tent and got me an older version of the same MSR Whisperlite stove as mine. I would either bring it back to him after making it to the summit and coming down this side or if I didn't make it I would get it back to Maxi down in Penitentes and Maxi would get it back to Pela.

It had been two days now since I had last had a hot meal and one of the Koreans had told me it was really pretty inexpensive to stay and eat in the Inka camp. I asked if it would be possible to buy some lunch. I was told lunch was normally served at 1:00 but they would be happy to make me a lunch earlier. And what a lunch it was. I couldn't even finish it all. The girls in the kitchen made it for me and served it to me at the same table everyone was sitting at when I had first come. It was a big piece of meat with melted cheese. This cut of meat served this way is called Loma. It came with a big salad with tomatoes, olives and cabbage and lettuce, bread and a whole pitcher of coolaid. I had to go up to the office/internet tent to pay for my meal and that is when I figured out I might not be able to understand Korean. My lunch cost me \$30.00 and that wasn't because it was a special lunch just for me. That was what lunch cost up there.

The office/internet tent had everything in the way of high tech stuff. You could send emails, make phone calls, charge batteries, use wireless internet on your own internet device. Of course everything had a cost.

There were all kinds of employees living in Mules; cooks, porters, guides, construction workers, etc. They seemed like a happy friendly group. Many, particularly the porters were rather alternative looking guys with dreadlocks and rasta beads and baggy pants. Pela had most of his hair shaved off with a long double pointed beard. One of the cook girls, a very cute girl of 20 who spoke good English, laughed as she told me "we call him Pela because of his hair." Pelo is hair in Spanish.

I was less impressed with the foreign climbers who were paying to be there. The situation was even worse than I had thought it would be as far as paying your way up the mountain. Not only did they pay to have their stuff brought in on the mules but then they were paying to have piles of food and luxury items carried up the mountain for them. These young rasta porters were spending their days carrying large packs full of other people's stuff up to various high camps. A lot of these people were not fit enough to

climb the mountain if they had to carry their own stuff. And the hardship of having to eat only the stuff they could carry would make the suffering unbearable for many.

When these large guided groups travel it is kind of like a chain gang. They line up, ten or so people in a row, nose to butt, a guide in front and another behind, and they march. I would not do well in this setting.

THE CLIMB

I think it was around 1:00 in the afternoon when I finally headed out of Mules and up the mountain. My plan was to go to Nido de Condors (camp two) but after climbing 2,000 feet up to Camp Canada (camp one) I was just too tired to keep going. Canada was at 16,600 ft. I had come from 12,500 feet that morning. As I was climbing I saw a guy in an orange jacket coming up behind me. He was gaining and we ended up getting to Canada at the same time. It turned out to be a woman. She only had a day pack which accounted for her speed but even still she must have been in pretty good shape to be moving that fast. We sat down to rest and she offered me some hot tea from a thermos.



Camp Canada - 1

She didn't speak much English but we were able to communicate pretty well. It has to do with willingness to communicate. She was willing to talk slow and try different words if I didn't get her first word. She was just

out for a little exercise. She worked someplace on the mountain. I didn't figure out just what it was she did. She seemed to know the two mountain rescue guys we met as they passed through. She then offered to help me put up my tent. It was windy and she said it was always easier to put up tents in the wind with two people. I was pretty sure I could put my tent up without assistance but I accepted the offer. Once the tent was up she said good-bye and headed back down the trail.

I got out my stove and the one Pela had given me. I took Pela's stove apart to see what was different about it and I found that it didn't have that little filter part in it either. Maybe the guys who said you didn't need it were right. So what was keeping mine from working? I took the jet out again. With my glasses on I could just see some microscopic sand like particles in the hole where the filter would be. They were similar to ones I had picked out of the jet the night it stopped working. I got a needle out of my first aid kit and worked on removing them from the opening. I put the proper jet back in and tested the stove. It worked just as well as Pela's. I used it to cook up some hot water for tea and it worked just fine.



The Koreans were camped here too. Beside them were some Europeans. There were three Americans camped just next to me, Tom and Thomas, a father and son team from Georgia, and their American guide, Kevin, from Seattle. They invited me over for dinner and I was more than happy to join them. They had tortellini with fresh out of the jar pasta sauce and fresh vegetables. They had way more than the four of us could eat. Kevin had an iPhone device and a solar charger just like mine but my charger wasn't

going to be leaving base camp. It was too heavy. They had a company but they weren't using the company guides. They were going to carry loads up to camp two the next day then return to camp one for another night. I was very impressed that these guys were doing this under their own power until the morning when they laid out three giant bags of stuff. I couldn't figure out how they were going to carry all that stuff. Then I realized that was the porter pile. They had three porters coming up to carry the bulk of their stuff up the hill. That was how they could have such extravagant food and equipment.

I have to take a minute to explain the effects of over population on a mountain. Back at the Horcones Ranger station they issued me a garbage bag with a number that was registered to me. At Confluencia they issued me a hand full of plastic bags with my registration number for human waste. I was supposed to use those bags to poop in them. When I left the Aconcagua Park I had to account for all the bags or they could fine me up to \$200 per bag. I could check bags in at Confluencia or Mules by depositing them in their disposal stations and they would reissue me new bags. There are two trails in to climb Aconcagua, Horcones and Vacas. Horcones takes the majority of the traffic. Thousands of people and mules follow this narrow ribbon of land. Few people venture more than 20 or 30 feet to the right or left of this ribbon. At Confluencia and Plaza de Mules they have outhouses with 55 gallon barrels that are setup for airlifting them out of the mountains. They have other barrels where climbers can deposit their poop bags and they will be airlifted out.

At Plaza de Mules they issue each climber another special red poop bag for the actual climb. In this climate organic material will eventually degrade but it takes a long, long time. Some kinds of organic materials could take many years but due to the amount of traffic it might just get ground up under the sole of the many boots. Before the mules, the porters and the commercial guide services there were only a handful of people coming into the area. The process of decomposing probably didn't quite keep up but it was a slow build up of trash. The human waste was only a problem up high where it stayed frozen. As more and more people came to climb the trash and shit built up faster and faster until it was truly a disgusting place. It started to cut into the commercial operations because people who came were so disgusted they wouldn't stay, come back or recommend it to others. The companies and government had to do something



so they made it a national park, started charging fees to cover the cost of clean up and management.

But even with the regulations the problem still persists. People are tired and lazy and feel an imposition when they have to go to the trouble of getting out a bag when they need to poop. It is too hard to walk out of camp to pee so they pee in the empty tent site next to theirs. That left over tortellini is heavy and if you dump it under a rock you won't have to carry it. So all along the narrow ribbon that people follow it is a mess. There is toilet paper and poop behind every rock and garbage in every crack. The park service works hard to control it and clean it up but it is hard to clean up behind hundreds of people a day in this setting. I was there at the beginning of the climbing season. I can only imagine what it must look like by March or April.

It is actually an economic problem. Money is being made here, that is why there are so many people and it is the number of people that determines the size of the problem. If there were no porters there would be significantly less people. If the services at Plaza de Mules and the porters weren't there, there would be even fewer people. If the mules that carry things in, the services and the porters weren't there, there would be almost no one on the mountain and it would be a very small problem. As humans we are always trying to make more money. We want to exploit whatever resources we can to make more money. If the resource is a big mountain you have to get more people coming to the mountain and charge them for the services. The easier the climb can be made the more people will come. And of course the more people the more poop. Tom, Thomas and Kevin not only had fancy food but they also had a steel toilet stool that they attached their poop bags to making it easier to relieve themselves on the mountain. The porters would carry the toilet up to the next camp for them.

12/20/13

My Birthday, 57 years old

I got up on the morning of my birthday, packed my gear up and started up the mountain. This side of the mountain is basically a giant gravel pile. Some of it is small, loose, slippery stuff, some is soft smooth dirt and some is rocky talus. There is some snow but not a lot and much of what is there is either too soft or too hard for good walking. I didn't have crampons or an ice axe, just one ski pole. I had 50 pounds of stuff on my back and that slowed me down a lot. I was going from 16,600 to 19,800 feet. I was acclimatized pretty well to 18,000 feet but that last thousand feet I could really feel. It was mid afternoon when I arrived at Camp Còlera, (camp 3). I put up my tent and crawled in. I was feeling sick from the altitude and I had to make myself get up and get out my stove to make dinner.

On my way up I only ran into a few people which surprised me. I thought there would be more people. I met a guy and his 22 year old son from Bellingham, Washington. They were really doing it on their own. They had hired mules to take them to Plaza Argentina but then they had climbed to the summit on their own and were now going to descend to Mules and go out that way. I also passed a guy from Brazil who was not looking so well. He was going really slow. We talked a bit when I passed him and I thought it was doubtful he could recover from his altitude sickness without going down. His guide was waiting for him at Camp Còlera. The guide was from Ecuador and spoke good English. I talked with him for a minute as I came into camp.

There were 10 or 12 tents in the camp but very few people were out. It turned out they were all up trying to summit. While I was cooking dinner they kept straggling into camp in small groups. Some seem to be Americans but I didn't talk to any of them.

When I went to bed I was thinking I might not be getting up in the morning to climb. I had a headache and nausea, the usual altitude stuff; it would have to go away before I went higher. During the night the wind came up and was rocking the tent. That made me think I had even less of a chance of climbing.

When I woke in the morning I found I was feeling okay. It was 11 degrees out and the wind was still blowing but the sky was clear. I heated some water for a hot drink and oatmeal. By the time I finish breakfast and got myself ready to go it was 7:20 and the sun had hit my tent. I started up the trail and saw a person not far above me headed up. Someone else was going to climb this morning.

I had a lot of clothes on and more in my pack. I was prepared for some pretty severe weather but with the sun and working hard I wasn't having much trouble with the cold. I just kept putting one foot in front of the other and breathing. I couldn't figure out what happened to the guy I had seen. Then I looked back and there was a guy behind me. Was it the same guy? Had I passed him somewhere and not known it? He was gaining on me so I might find out.



I was 1,200 feet below the summit in an area called the Canaleta when I saw a guy coming down from above. I figured this must be the guy I saw earlier. We soon met and he turned out to be the Ecuadorian guide. His client was too sick to climb but he had left camp just ahead of me and ran to the top. He was now hurrying to get back to his client. He had

made it to the summit in an incredible two and a half hours. I was going to feel real good if I made it in four hours. The guy behind me had stopped gaining. We were now staying 300 yards apart.

The last 1,000 feet took forever I had to keep talking to myself about not stopping. I would count out 100 steps before I could let myself stop for a few seconds. Then count out another 100 steps to the next stop. If you have spent much time working in the cold you know how my nose just kept running and I kept wiping it with the back of my mitten. What I didn't realize was that I was wiping the sunscreen off the underside of my nose. Missing that little detail would haunt me for many days to come.



I reached the summit around 10:40. It was a clear beautiful day. There was very little wind on the summit plateau and it seemed reasonably warm. I sat down for a few minutes but I wanted to get a look at the South Wall and if I didn't do it soon I might not have the energy or will power to do it later. I knew that if I walked very far down the snowy East Ridge it would be difficult to walk back up but I did it anyway. I had to go farther then I hoped to get a look at where I would be coming up. The final spur, the last big

obstacle looked difficult but maybe doable. It was hard to tell from that distance. It looked really cold down there. Plaza Francia was so far below but I could see where it was. Even Cerro Mirador looked like a little ant hill from up there. I took several pictures and turned to go back up to the summit. It looked a lot farther up than it had down. And yes, it was at least as hard getting back up to the summit as I had feared. It is amazing how much easier going down is than going up. It seemed like it took at least an hour to get back up there. I wondered if this was how I was going to feel when I came up this ridge after climbing the Wall. I could hope I would feel this good.

When I reach the summit again the guy behind me was just making it to the summit from the other direction. We both sat down on each side of the summit cross to breath. When we started talking I found he was a porter. He didn't speak any English but this was a place where the topic is pretty set and I could keep up with what he was saying. He was maybe twenty years old with dreadlocks. I was amazed to find that he had come up from Plaza Argentina that morning. He had climbed over 9,000 feet. No wonder he had slowed down a lot at the end. He wanted a picture on the summit so he could prove he had made it but then he discovered his camera battery was frozen and wouldn't work. I told him I would take a couple pictures of him and leave them on the computer down at the Inka camp in Mules and he could get them from there. I stayed on the summit for 25 minutes or so before heading down. The porter started a minute or two behind me.



Looking down the South Wall.
The red star is Plaza Francia, the yellow is the summit of Mirador.

There was snow on the upper part of the climb not a lot but enough to travel on. I made good time on the snow that first 1,000 feet. Then the snow got harder and I had to slow down. Before long I was out of the snow all together. About half way down I met three guys working there way up. It seemed late and they were moving slow. I thought it was unlikely they would make it to the summit.

I made it back to Camp Còlera, spent some time resting and eating while I worked on taking down my tent and packing my big backpack. I was just about ready to leave when the porter from the summit showed up. He sat down next to some rocks and took a nap. A group of ten or eleven people came up from camp 2. They were American with American guides. I was intrigued with the mountain of gear that was already sitting in camp when they came up. The porters had already come up and dropped it off. I talked to one of the guides for a minute but I was more interested in getting going. Once I got moving it didn't take me long to get down. I made it to Plaza de Mules by 5:00 that afternoon.

I setup my tent next to some Czech climbers that I had met a few days earlier on my way down from Plaza Francia. They spoke good English and were very nice. They

were doing the climb with no guide but I think they may have been hiring some porters. I was pretty tired so I mostly laid around and rested the rest of the evening.

12/22/13

Back to Plaza Francia

I tried to wait for the sun to come up and warm my tent but it still hadn't hit me by 8:30 and I decided I had to get up anyway. I packed up my stuff and prepared to head back to the south side of the mountain. Before I could leave I had to get the pictures of the porter on the summit onto the Inka camp computer. I took my card out of the camera and put it in their computer and loaded two pictures off the card.



The kitchen tent

While I was there I decided to pay for some computer time to check my email and send Jen one. I had several emails from Jen. She was very concerned about my blood type. Back in Mendoza I had sent her an email asking her to see if she could find out my blood type. It took her a few days but she finally got it from my mom. She then talk to Mike Duggin who told her if I had O+ blood and they gave me A+ it would kill me. By the time she learned this I was in the mountains and out of

communication. I sent her an email and I assured her I would work on changing that information. But she had already figured out how to contact Popi at the Inka office and Popi was going to let the park service know. They must have thought I was pretty stupid.

After taking care of that business I went over to the medical building to talk to Carolina and let her know that I was heading back to Plaza Francia and when I was planning to start the South Wall. When I found her she was giving a checkup to a European guy. Everyone is supposed to pass a checkup before they are allowed to climb beyond Mules. Somehow I had missed that part. The reality is no one "official" even knew I had gone up the mountain. This European guy was failing his checkup. He had some fluid on his lungs and his oxygen levels were poor. It turned out he had the flu. I guess they do have to protect people from themselves.

When Carolina finished the checkup I told her I was heading back to Plaza Francia but I wasn't going to stop at Confluencia because it was too far out of my way. I said I probably wouldn't make it to Francia but I would get as far as I could. When Carolina translated that to the ranger he said that was "impossible". The only place anyone could camp was in Mules, Confluencia and Plaza Francia. I said, "I will make it to Francia" but I thought, "impossible, I can prove that wrong." I think Carolina was reading my mind but she didn't say anything.

After dropping off the extra stove with Pela and thanking him I was ready to get on the trail. My backpack was getting a bit lighter but carrying all that weight is really a pain. I could have run down the canyon without it but as it was I was restricted to



plodding along. I made it to the turn off up the Inferior Horcones and left the people behind. My pace slowed considerably as I started climbing.

During the hike I had taken some pictures and my camera popped up some message about storage space. I had been thinking that my card might be getting full. I had been using the same card since we left Utah but it was still taking pictures so I didn't pay much attention. My spare card was up at Plaza Francia anyway. Then it stopped taking anymore picture so I decided I needed to delete a few so I could take more pictures. There are always pictures that aren't that good that you can delete. But I could only find about 10 pictures on the camera, the ten I had taken that day. Where were all the other pictures? It suddenly hit me, I never got the card out of the computer up in Mules. I was so mad at myself. I might not have any pictures to show for this whole trip. I had another camera and more cards back in my stash in Plaza Francia so I could keep taking pictures but I couldn't do anything about the past. Why didn't I get that out immediately? There was nothing I could do now. It was too far away.

After climbing 2,000 feet up the canyon I decided it was time to camp. I found a really nice, flat, sandy place to put up my tent. I kept say to myself, "it's impossible."



The Impossible Camp

12/23/13

Back At Plaza Francia

The next day I was at Plaza Francia by mid morning. I needed a day of rest and I needed to organize all the gear I would need for the big ascent.

I wrote in my journal:

"It is really hot out. The sun is baking me. It is 120° in the tent and no breeze. At least laying out here in the dirt there is a breeze. This morning I was wishing for the clouds to go away and now I'm wishing they would come back.

I am so very tired. I have been on this mountain for ten days now and climbed 33,000 vertical feet so far. I am supposed to start the South Wall in the morning but I don't feel like it. I feel like sleeping but it is too hot to sleep. I have blisters on my toes from my big boots. My calves hurt from hiking in the big boots. My hips and shoulders hurt from the backpack and my legs are just tired. Under my nose is raw and blistered from the sun and cold and my arms are sunburned. Did I miss anything? Oh, ya, I am really hot."

Sometime in the middle of the afternoon three guys came over the little ridge on the other side of the basin that is Plaza Francia and sat down under the "Plaza Francia" sign. About the time I thought I would wander over and say "hi" they started coming over my way. As they came I noticed they were all dressed alike. Then I realized they were all in range uniforms. They had come to see me before I started the climb. Vanesa, the first ranger I had talk to at Confluencia had told me she would come up the day before I started the climb but that schedule had been thrown out a long time ago. I didn't understand then why she would want to come up and I still didn't understand why they would feel the need to come up but here they were. We sat and talked for 20 minutes or more but none of them spoke much English so we were pretty limited in our conversation.

While we sat they got a call over their radio. It was about someone near the summit who had slipped and their crampon had caught in the ice and broken their foot. A rescue team from that side was being dispatched to go up and rescue the person. It reminded me how dangerous crampons could be. Before they left they asked if they could have some water. The little stream below Francia was running red with mud as it did most afternoons. I gave them what I had but I found it somewhat amusing given that they had people telling climbers they had to drink at least four liters a day.

Before they left I gave them a note and asked them to contact Inka Expeditions at Plaza de Mules and ask them to please check their computer for my camera SD card and if they find it could they please have it sent to Maxi in Penitentes. I knew there were a lot of things that could go wrong with this plan but it was the best I could do. I really wanted to get that card back.

I spent the rest of the afternoon sorting through my food and gear trying to picture just what I was going to need up there. Part of the problem was I had so much stuff. I was prepared for everything. I just couldn't carry all of it so I had to cut it down to just what was absolutely necessary. The question being what was absolutely necessary? I needed ice pro, and rock pro and rope and crampons and ice axes, a stove and fuel and a cook pot, plenty of warm clothes, a headlamp and a first aid kit. I needed the VHF radio and my helmet and harness. I would need to carry at least half a gallon of water and that



is four pounds. I needed enough food that if it didn't go well and I got stuck in bad weather I could wait it out. If my pack was much over 50 lbs I wouldn't make it. There would be just too much weight and I wouldn't be able to lift it up the 9,000 feet required. I kept going back and forth on the tent. I could just take my bivy sack and save 4 lbs but if anything went wrong I would be stuck in a bag under a snowdrift. In the end I decided I had to take the tent. I didn't have a scale but I'm guessing when I picked up my pack the next morning to start climbing the pack was 60 lbs give or take a few.

Lying around that day I had some apprehension about the climb. I had this feeling that it was too much for me alone. The South Wall has been climbed two ways. One way was with a massive expedition type push, lots of people and equipment and time, tons of food and gear. They would fix ropes all the way up and spend weeks moving up and down slowly pushing higher and higher. The other way was very small, very fast, teams or solo individuals. These small teams were totally committed. If something went wrong that was it. Hopefully all they lost were some fingers and toes from frostbite and not their lives. I read about a guy who had put up a new route in 2009. He climbed it in 30 hours or something like that. He crossed back and forth across the same couloirs that I had seen two massive avalanches roll down. He had got stuck for a few hours, in the middle of the night, on the upper glacier with no tent or sleeping bag. He was lucky enough to not lose any fingers or toes but he did frostbite his feet badly. Many people weren't so lucky and lost fingers and toes and some had lost their lives. I was one of those small fast moving types but I was having a hard time being so committed. So why was I here?

That day I was feeling like it might not be worth the risk but somehow I had to at least try. Nothing had stopped me yet so why was I feeling like I shouldn't even start? I knew that it wouldn't be good if I got scared up there and lost my confidence. Once I lose my confidence everything is harder. It's hard to move. I was counting on what I call the "Caroni Effect". When Jen and I were in Venezuela paddling the Rio Caroni it was very easy to get scared lying in bed knowing that in the morning there would be big rapids to run. My imagination would go crazy with things sneaking up on me. But once I was on the river I wasn't scared because I knew how to paddle and I knew things weren't going to just sneak up on me.

I really didn't like the fact that there were so many people waiting to hear how I was doing, so many people going, "oh, the guy on the South Wall". It put pressure on me I didn't want or need. I felt like I would be letting them down if I didn't give it a try but who were those people? The Koreans, the Ecuadorian guide, Ruben the ranger, Jen? Or was it me? Was I going to give all those people who told me it was crazy to go up there, that it was a stupid idea, that I shouldn't be doing it, was I giving them a reason to say, "I told you so"? I have always felt that I should keep going until something turns me around but I was feeling like I might pass the point of no return, the point where turning around is no longer an option.



My route up the South Wall. I got as far as the red line.

12/24/13

Up the South Wall

Even though all these thoughts were going through my head I still got up early the next morning to climb. I had to pack up my tent and sleeping gear and stash the stuff I wasn't taking with me. A hundred yards behind my camp I had found a place where two big boulders leaned against each other forming a kind of cave. When I went around to Mules I had stashed my stuff there. I packed it all back into the little cave. I was ready to climb.

The weather report was for at least three days of warm, sunny conditions. This morning was beautiful, the sun was shining up on the face, there was no wind and it was 26° in Plaza Francia. I was feeling pretty good as I crossed the boulder field and headed for the apron below the Pasic Glacier serac. As I worked my way up the apron I notice there was a lot less snow than there had been a week earlier. The main avalanche path was the only place there was still snow and it was more ice than snow. When I passed

my previous high point I noticed that what snow there was, was full of deep holes where rocks had blasted into it from high above. It made me a little nervous to say the least. I crossed onto the more technical rock section. Even though it was loose, unstable rock I was moving up nicely. If I hadn't had such a big, heavy pack it would have been simple scrambling. I would have been moving considerably faster. With it I had to move slowly and deliberately to keep my balance. If I slipped with so much weight I would have a hard time catching myself. I couldn't afford even a small mistake.

I then came to a place with a steep step up and then a big slap of rock I would have to ascend. The easiest way to get up it would be to stay on the left edge and follow a crack system up the slab but when I moved in to position to pull myself up the step there were small rocks buzzing all around me. Most wouldn't really hurt me but some were bigger and some were going really fast. I would be in the rockfall zone all the way up the slab. I couldn't or wouldn't take the chance. I moved over to the right side and looked for a way to get up the step. On this side it was completely vertical for about 10 feet before the more laid back slab began. I tried once and found I wasn't going to make it with my pack on. I would have to tie a rope to it and pull it up after me.

It took a long time to get me and my pack up the slab and onto the next scrambling section. I started up a snow patch and notice it was completely full of rock holes. I only made it up a short distance before I had rocks coming down on me. These were bigger dangerous rocks. I felt like I should be going up that direction but the rocks were going to keep me from going there. I moved out onto a scree covered ledge to my right. It seemed to be free of falling rocks but was I going to be able to get anywhere from there? By this time I was quite exposed. I was at least 1,600 feet up on the wall. Below the ledge was several hundred feet of vertical rock wall. It wasn't a place to make any mistakes. I followed the ledge around to the right trying to find some way to go up. It ended with a narrow slab of sloping rock maybe 3 feet wide with vertical wall below it. I was surprised to see an old rope rapping around the thin ledge and disappearing out of sight around the corner. Someone had been here before me. The rope was too rotten to be trusted and besides I wasn't sure I wanted to go that way. If I rounded that corner somehow and it didn't go anyplace I would have to return. And what if there were rocks coming down around the corner. I didn't like it.

I sat down on the ledge and looked out over the canyon. I could look almost straight down on Plaza Francia just a little to my left. The upper glacier stretched out to my right. The top of Mirador was still above me but not that much. The frozen waterfalls below the Pasic serac were almost to far around the corner to be seen but I was up equal to their height. There was nothing falling on my little ledge but I could here rocks clattering all around me. The sun hadn't hit this part of the mountain yet but it would in less than half an hour and when it did things would really start warming up and that would set everything off. The ice would really start melting and releasing rocks. It would become a continues shower of rocks and ice. It was just too warm. It had never occurred to me that it could be too warm to climb.

I seemed to be safe on the little ledge for now. I could sit here all day and wait for it to freeze up again, probably the next morning. I could dig out a flat enough spot to put up my tent and spend the night. It was only a little after 11:00. I would be sitting here a long time. There were a lot of rocks falling back were I had come from. In an hour there would be more and it wouldn't be an option to go back down that way until the

next morning. If rocks started falling on the ledge I was sitting on when the sun came out what would I do then? That one settled it. My best bet was to get up off my ass and run for it as fast as I could.

Almost as soon as I made the decision a sense of panic set in. Time was everything. If I was still on this wall when the full sun hit things would get real bad. I would have to force myself to be calm and careful getting down across the slab and I would need to rappel the ten foot step. I couldn't make any mistakes. By the time I was off the slab and step there were a lot more rocks coming down all over. A lot of them were plenty big to kill me if they made contact. I had to make the traverse off the last technical rock without slipping and at the same time keeping an eye on the cliffs above me to watch for rocks. I was just getting to the very top of the apron when a barrage of rocks hit a ways above me and started a rock slide. I duck under a small ledge and the rocks poured over on top of me landing on my pack and helmet. I threw my crampons on so I could move down the ice along the side of the avalanche path. I would have to be on ice at least part of the way and I wouldn't be able to move fast enough without the crampons. Some big sets of rocks came down to my right but they stayed to my right. Another set came off to my left but I wasn't so lucky and one about the size of my head took a wild bounce and came across toward me. I watched it trying to figure out which way it was going to go but I couldn't tell. Just as it took another big bounce I duck down putting my head under the edge of a rock. The rock flew over me and took another big bounce twenty feet down the hill. I was on my feet and moving before it bounced again. I was looking uphill while running, hopping, sliding down the hill. I was scared to death. The words kept running through my head, "I don't want to die here; I don't want to die here."



Another rock was coming my way but this time I just ran across the ice as fast as I could with a 60 lbs pack and crampons on. The rock passed behind me but I slipped on something and went down on my back. I tried to push myself up with my hands but I couldn't get my feet under me and the ice was cutting my hands. I flipped over and dug my ice axe into the ice to stop myself. I got up and ran on.

Only a few feet farther down the hill I slipped and went down again. This time I went straight for the ice axe arrest but as I rolled to drive my axe into the ice one of my crampons caught. I was moving just fast enough that my body kept sliding over my imbedded crampon. My knee came up as far as it could and then my ankle rolled under, my hip bumped over my foot. I felt a serious shot of pain as my ankle twist way too far. I thought my knee and hip might do the same but they both held as I flipped over. I got my ice axe in and stopped myself but I knew my ankle was in bad shape. I jump up on one foot and gave a tentative test of the ankle. It was like it was

paralyzed. I didn't seem to have control of it. I couldn't put it down with the crampon on. Using my ice axe for a crutch and hobbled and hoped the few feet off the ice. I pulled



I was near the red X when I fell and twisted my ankle.

my crampons off and clipped them to my harness. Without the crampon I could at least put some weight on the hurt ankle. I was still very much under fire. I had to keep moving. My ankle hurt like hell but I told myself it couldn't be broken until I was out of the line of fire. Maybe ten minutes more and I crossed under the rock buttress on the left side of the apron. I was safe for the moment at least.

I stopped to look around and breathe and try to calm down. I needed to assess my situation. I was at least safe for now. I gave a huge sigh of relief then focused my attention on my foot. I picked it up and tried moving it around. That hurt a lot. As long as I put most of the weight on my heel and as long as I didn't let it tip or

twist I could move on it well enough. I was pretty sure if I let it sit still for any length of time it would set up and it would be really hard to get going again. I need to use the adrenalin that was pumping through my system while I still had it. I had to cross some steep side hill. It was mostly dirt covered snow. Then I had a gully full of large boulders to get up, after that it was fairly easy terrain getting back to Plaza Francia. I told myself I had to get to the top of the boulder field and then I could sit down and rest for a minute. I headed across the side hill.

I was dripping with sweating when I reached the flat spot above the boulders. I took off my pack and sat down on a big rock. My fingers were bleeding from the cuts and scrapes I got when I fell. I still had my harness and helmet on and pro hanging off my harness and neck. My crampons were still hanging at my hip. I looked at the boot on my bad foot considering whether to take it off to check the damage. If I got the boot off and couldn't get it back on I would be screwed so I decided whatever was wrong with it the boot was helping support it, no need to change it. I got out some ibuprofen and took 800 milligrams. I checked my watch so I would know when I should take more. I took off my harness and all the pro and put them in my pack. I got out my ski pole so I could have two crutches.

When I stood up again the ankle was already setting up. It took several steps to get it moving again. I had only gone a few hundred yards when I heard the sound of rolling rocks and looked up to see another barrage of rocks coming from high above me. Fortunately they past ahead of me and I didn't have to do any evasive moves.

I would need water back in camp so I had to make a detour down to my little afternoon water hole to fill my bottles. From the flat spot above the boulders it took me an hour and a half to get back to camp. I had covered that same distance going up in 15 minutes. Once I was back in Francia I had to get all my stuff out from under the boulders

and move it down onto the flats. I didn't stop and rest at all. I had a pretty good idea that once I stopped it was going to be hard to get going again.

By the time I had camp put together it was mid-afternoon and hot. I laid my sleeping pad out and sat down to take my boot off and see what my ankle looked like. It was swelling nicely and it was already starting to change color. I tried to think how I could ice it. I should have grabbed a bag of snow back when I had it. There was no snow down here. I thought about going to the little stream or back to the water hole but both were too far away. I would just have to elevate it and keep taking the ibuprofen.

I was still thinking I would be able to walk out if I didn't have to carry a pack and if I took my time. I called in on the VHF radio and told Ruben I had been chased off the wall by a barrage of rocks and I was done climbing. I asked him to contact Inka and have them send a mule up to get my stuff. I didn't tell him I was hurt. By the time I was going to bed I was realizing that getting myself down to the highway seemed pretty questionable. I was having a hard time making it across the flat sand of Plaza Francia let alone descending 5,000 feet and 11 miles down a very rough and rocky trail.

12/25/13

Christmas Day - Getting out

I called again in the morning to say I wasn't going to be able to walk out but I got the ranger from over at Plaza Argentina. When I told him I thought my ankle was broken and I couldn't walk out he didn't seem to understand. He told me to just wait for the arriero and the mules. He knew the arriero was on his way and that it should be to me pretty soon. I think it was around 11:00 when the arriero and the mules showed up. The arriero's name was Marro. He was a little wiry guy, maybe 40 years old, with the typical white, knit beret of the Argentinean arrieros. He had leather gaiters over his hiking boots and a red Inka Expedition jacket on. He was riding one mule and leading another with a pack saddle to load my stuff onto.



Marro loading his mules.

He didn't speak any English but as usual I was able to talk with him pretty well. I explained my situation and showed him my foot. I told him he should call the rangers and explain to them. He was happy to do it and it was obvious he was used to using radios and talking with the rangers. I tried to listen to what was being said but I only got the gist of it, there would be no rescue today.

After he said good-bye on the radio he explained to me that it was Christmas day and the heli pilot was not working. If I wanted a heli ride out I would have to wait until the next day. But then he said if I could ride his mule he would walk and I could get out with him today. I had thought about that possibility during the night and it had hurt my ankle just thinking about it. Also I

have never been that excited about sitting on the back of an animal walking down a rocky, slippery, very steep and treacherous trail. I can picture the animal tripping and falling down a steep bank, both of us rolling over and over, me on top, the mule on top. On my trek over to Plaza de Mules I had passed no less than 7 dead mules in various

stages of decay. But now I was having to reevaluate the situation. Did I want to sit here for another day and night or did I want to get out now. My ankle was very swollen and almost numb. It could hurt to ride but it hurt just sitting here too. If I got on the mule I would be out to civilization by dinner time tonight.

Marro made a few minor adjustments to my packing job and loaded all my stuff onto the pack mule. Then he adjusted the riding saddle for me and helped me get up on the mule. I first tried to get on the left side but it meant I had to lift myself with my bad foot in the stirrup and I couldn't do it. We moved to the right side and the mule didn't seem to mind. Once I was on Marro took off his spurs, took the lead rope and started out of camp.

Surprisingly it didn't hurt my ankle all that much riding. Getting off was another matter. It took us two hours to get down to Confluencia. When I went to get off I could barely stand. I wasn't sure what we were doing there but I knew I wanted to keep going with Marro.



The people at Inka Expeditions wanted me to go see the doctor but I told them I didn't think the doctor could do anything for me and I didn't want to walk over to where the doctor was. We sat in the kitchen tent and they fed Marro and me a snack. I wasn't sure what we were waiting for. Then the doctor showed up to see me. I guess if I wasn't going to him....? He was actually pretty good he looked at it and asked me a lot of questions about how I was taking care of it. He agreed with my care and

assessment including that he couldn't do anything for me and I should just get to the city and a real medical facility. After 45 minutes at Confluencia Marro help me back up on the mule and we started off again.

As we approached the river crossing I wondered if I should tell Marro that I could take the mules across the river and he could go down to the little foot bridge but I decided against saying anything. He let me off at the bridge, climbed on the mule and headed down to the river crossing. As I watched him make the crossing I was so glad it was him not me with those animals. The dark, red swift moving water was deeper than the mule's belly. Just as he was starting to get his front feet up to the bank his back end started washing down river. Nothing happen but if the water had been just a little swifter or deeper it could have rolled him over and all three of them would have been swimming.

A ways past the river crossing the trail becomes a road. I thought the road was closed to vehicles but as we rounded a corner there was a pickup truck coming toward us. I was surprised to see one of the rangers who had come to Plaza Francia the day before. He was coming up to get me. He ushered me into the truck, Marro rode on with the mules and I sat in the truck. I was concerned that somehow Marro and I were going to end up in different places but the ranger assured me I would be seeing him again. It was less than a mile out to the Horcones Ranger station anyway. Ruben and several other rangers were waiting for me when we got there. Even Maxi from Inka was there. I was feeling kind of like a failure but they were still treating my like a celebrity.

I had to tell the story of my failed attempt a few times and they signed off my permit without even asking for my garbage or poop bags. Then they loaded me into Maxi's pickup truck and we headed down the road. We went down to what turned out to be Marro's house and stable and waited for Marro and the two mules to show up. They came in at a full gallop in a cloud of dust.

On our way to Marro's place Maxi pulled a little hand rapped package out from under his seat and hand it to me. I couldn't believe it. It was just so amazing. It was my camera card. Things were really coming together.

I had told Marro that I wanted to pay him directly for the second mule rather than paying Inka. I am sure he only got a small part of the \$180 I was paying. I also figure he was my best choice to give all my spare food to. For some reason I was surprised to find out that he was actually the owner of the whole mule business. He owned 140 mules that he sent out with the other arriaros like Ramon who had taken my stuff in. He was the boss. He was certainly competent. I gave him \$150 and a lot of food then Maxi and I got back in the pickup and went on to Penitentes and the Inka warehouse.

When we got there I asked where I was to pay for the pack mule. Maxi told me I had already paid for it. At first I was confused until I realized that the \$180 was for a round trip. That was a really good deal. Marro got a great Christmas present too. It was worth it anyway.

I had less than an hour to get all my stuff packed up and ready to catch the bus at 5:00 PM to Mendoza. My head was spinning things were happening so fast.

Once on the bus I finally had time to think about the last couple days. I had been feeling bad that I hadn't gotten farther on the South Wall. I hadn't even made it to the Pasic Glacier. Once I hurt myself I didn't get to reevaluate whether I could make it a different way. It would be much colder above the first glacier. Perhaps the warm temperatures wouldn't effect the climbing like it had down lower. If I could have gotten up high maybe it would have been okay. As I went over it all in my head I realized that maybe hurting my ankle was a good thing just like my stove not working had really been a good thing. If I had gotten higher what kind of trouble could I have gotten myself into. Maybe it was better that I couldn't find out. I was feeling a little relieved that I had been stopped and that was okay. Yes, it was a bummer that my ankle was hurt but it would get better with time. It could have easily been so much worse. I had made it to the summit and all in all I had a great adventure. I could be happy with that.

PART 3 WOUNDED & WANDERING IN ARGENTINA

12/26/13

Back in Mendoza



The hospital in Mendoza was a block from the bus terminal and right across the street from the hotel I had stayed in when I was first there. I hobbled down the street to the hospital. It took me a few minutes to find the emergency room but as soon as I walked in I knew I was in trouble. I was in a huge foyer packed with people. I walked around trying to figure out what I had to do to get assistance but I wasn't seeing anything obvious. There were all kinds of sick and injured people standing and sitting around the place. I started wondering what I was going to do if I got in and they said I had a broken ankle. I didn't think I did but what if it needed surgery? Or they said I had to keep it elevated for two weeks? How long did I want to stay in Mendoza? It was very hot and steamy. I wasn't used to the heat. I decided I would rather get back to Villa la Angostura and see a doctor there than be here all alone. I left the hospital and started making plans to get back to Angostura.

Mendoza, Neuquen, Bariloche, Villa la Angostura

The only bus from Mendoza to Bariloche left at 9:45 PM. I was too late to get that bus. I would have to wait until the next day. I figure out that I could get a bus to Neuquen at 9:30 AM. I could probably find a bus from Neuquen to Bariloche when I got there. I spent the evening trying to get my three bags of stuff into two but I failed. I was going to have to get three bags plus my backpack to the bus terminal. I had hired a taxi to get me and my baggage to the hotel but the taxi driver had been a real jerk when he found out I was only going one block. I left myself 45 minutes to get the one block to the terminal. I was proud of myself when I made it in just 25 minutes.

My foot only got bigger than it already was during the 13 hours on the bus. It was purple and yellow and starting to look like a balloon. I figured I would have to spend the night in Neuquen and get a bus in the morning but when I asked about the next bus to Bariloche the girl in the ticket office said there was one at midnight, only an hour and a half away. I felt it would be better to spend the rest of the night on the bus than in some field behind the bus terminal. I bought the ticket and went out to the lawn in front of the terminal to try to nap for an hour. I was back in plenty of time to get the bus at 12:00 but when the bus came and started loading I was confused because no one who was getting on was going to Bariloche. It wasn't my bus. So where was mine? I hobbled back to the ticket office where I had purchased the ticket but it was closed and the girl was gone. The guard told me my bus would be over on the other side of the street. I started hobbling that way but I would never make it if the bus was leaving at 12:00 but I didn't make it across the street because a couple guys came along and told me I couldn't be where I was.

I never figured out how it all happened but somehow on this night the bus came at 1:00 instead of 12:00 the guys who stopped me knew it, the terminal janitor knew it,

several other people knew so why did my ticket say 12:00 and why did the lady who sold it to me tell me the bus left at 12:00? It certainly added some stress to my evening.

I got off the bus around 7:00 the next morning in Bariloche with a very swollen foot. I checked my baggage in the bus terminal and set off to find the hospital. I asked at the information desk how to get there and the lady said it was very close, an easy walk. I suppose she was unaware that I had a bad ankle and walking was not easy at all. But I took her at her word and decided to walk instead of taking a taxi. It was about a mile away and by the time I got there I was really regretting my decision.

When I finally found the emergency room I found 8 people ahead of me waiting to be seen. They were sitting on benches around the perimeter of the small yellow room. There was an opaque window with a hole cut in the glass like a teller but someone had place a piece of cardboard over the hole from the other side so you couldn't see in. There was a lady tapping on the glass trying to get someone's attention. I had decided I would spend however long it took to see a doctor. So I took a seat on one of the benches to observe how things worked. After a few minutes the lady tapping sat back down. Just then a guy in a black running suit came in and banged on the window. Still no luck. He sat down and developed a very bad stomach problem groaning and moaning. While he groaned another guy on crutches came in with the assistance of a friend and they tried banging on the window. Still no luck. I guess the guy with the stomach problem decided he was better because after a while he got up and stormed out to the room.

Eventually a guy removed the cardboard from the little hole. Everyone in the room jumped up and ran to the window. The guy took everyone's names and what their ailment was. I waited my turn to give him my information. Right away someone came out and took the guy on crutches away through the big door leading back into the hospital. It seemed reasonable since it was pretty obvious that he had some kind of a messed up knee from a recent accident. I couldn't see anything wrong with anyone else in the room. Twenty minutes later someone came out the door and call four of us back. We went down a hall and were instructed to sit on some different benches in another hall. We had been sitting there for half an hour when a flustered woman came down the hall with her arms full of stuff. She managed to get some keys out and opened the door to a room just in front of us. She disappeared inside for a few minutes then reappeared with a white coat on and said, "Who's first". I was the last of the four of us to get to go in and see her.

She spoke very little English but she had an interest in communicating with me so we did pretty well. I explained my situation to her, she asked me some questions and then she explained she would need to get some x-rays. A quite unfriendly guy came and got me and took me to the imaging department.



The building was very old. It reminded me of something from a 1950's movie. I noticed some four inch thick marble steps that were worn down in the middle to only about 2 inches. The doctors room had old wooden cabinets with glass front doors. It had 12 foot high ceilings and was painted a nice lavender color. The x-ray machine looked old too but when the tech brought out the film it look just like an x-ray. I

took it back to the bench in front of the lavender room but by now there were new people sitting on the bench.

I waited another twenty minutes and then the doctor came out and saw me. She called me in ahead of the others and looked at the x-ray. I had already studied it pretty hard and couldn't see anything that looked like a break and the doctor confirmed my opinion. It didn't seem to be broken. She gave me a prescription for an anti-inflammatory pill and a walking brace and told me to rest it, elevate it and ice it if I wanted to. And that was that. I went back out on the street and headed back to the bus terminal. I had thought I would get a taxi back but I didn't manage to flag one down and before I knew it I was back at the terminal. An hour and a half later I was in Villa la Angostura.

If I hadn't had a bad foot and three large bags I would have found my own way to Mirta's house but as it was I couldn't see how I was going to get there without calling Mirta to come get me. The problem was I didn't have a phone. People kept telling me I could walk a couple blocks to the phone shop but if I could do that I could just walk all the way to Mirta's. I finally got some sympathy from a young woman who let me use her cell phone. Mirta was there picking me up in twenty minutes.

Back in Villa la Angostura

My ankle was quite sore. It was black and blue and swollen like a balloon. I could barely get a shoe on my foot. The pills the doctor prescribed help some with the swelling and I was finally able to ice it. I tried to spend a lot of time lying on Mirta's couch with my foot up on pillows but it was hard just lying around while Mirta and the kids were doing things. I was up too much.



Tadeo Kayaking

Mirta and Fernando have three kids; Olivia 13, Tadeo 10, and Tomas 8. Olivia and Addison were busy doing things with each other and Olivia's friends, Elisa. I wanted to do something with Tadeo and Tomas. We loaded up their tandem kayak on the pickup truck and took it down to the lake to try paddling. It was hard on my foot but I wanted to get out on the lake. It was a rainy, windy day and the lake had big, white capped waves rolling across from the northwest. It would be too

dangerous to paddle out into those waves. I decided we could paddle along the north shore of the bay where the wind was blocked by the trees and ridge. It took up a few hours of my day and got me off the couch but it didn't help my foot much.

The next day I told the boys if they could find some scrap wood we could build bird houses. I had them draw their birdhouses on paper and then they went out to find some wood. Mirta helped. The saw mill just down the hill from their house had plenty of good scrap wood. We spend several hours cutting the wood and building birdhouses. It actually took a few days to get them finished and hung.

New Years Eve

Mirta had a plan for us to go camping New Years Eve. The problem was it was rainy and windy. She studied the weather maps and decided we should go north to Junin (Huneen) and the Lanin (Laneen) national park. We loaded all our camping gear into the back of their little white pickup. The truck has a double cab with a back seat but it was pretty small for four kids but we managed to squeeze all six of us and all our gear into the truck. We drove north through beautiful forests, past clear blue lakes and along cascading rivers flowing under green canopies of leaves. We stopped in the tourist town of San Martin de Los Andes but it was so cold and windy we didn't stay long. We drove on to Junin de Los Andes and as Mirta had predicted the weather was much better. We stop in Junin at the visitors center to get directions to a place to camp.



Lanin is a big volcano along the Argentine Chilean boarder to the west of Junin. There is a giant lake that extends east several miles from the foot of the volcano. From pictures it looks like an amazing place. I actually saw the snowcapped peak from hundreds of miles south when I was on the bus to Neuquen. But we never saw the mountain or much of the lake on this trip. As we drove north out of Junin into the mountains, the clouds grew darker, the winds picked up and before long it was raining. We started around the lake on a rough dirt road. The wind was driving the



rain horizontal and pushing the surface of the lake into rolling white caps. I made the kids get out of the truck for a quick picture and we all agreed it was miserable out in the weather. After driving 5 miles around the lake we decided that if we made it back the twenty miles to where we wanted to camp and it kept raining like this we might not make it out and we sure weren't going to have any fun. We turned around and went back

down into the valley.

We found a campground along the river and determined it was a good place for us. It was still raining but the rain was light and coming straight down. It was a pay campground so we had an indoor toilet, a barbeque pit and lawn to put our tents up on. It rained the whole time we were making dinner. Everyone was soaked through. (Of course I had all my mountain gear so I wasn't wet.) But it was warm around the fire and the wind wasn't blowing. We had brought a big steel pan to cook dinner over the fire. Mirta put a cut up chicken, potatoes, canned tomatoes, onions and carrots with spices and water in the pan over the fire and we all stood around watching it cook. It took awhile to but it was really good. By the time we were done with dinner it stopped raining. Even though the sky was clearing we were all in bed before midnight. Happy New Year!

We drove back to Angostura a different way. We saw some beautiful country but I think everyone was ready to get there by the time we made it home. It's a small truck for six people.

1/2/2014

Ken and Addi Go to Town

I talked to Jen who had been talking to Jared Nielson, a friend of ours who is a holistic medicine guy, he had told her that I needed to take the swelling problem very serious. It could cause permanent damage to my foot. He recommended alternating heat and cold several times a day and doing exercises to get it moving to push out some of the fluid. I hadn't gotten the walking brace the doctor had recommended. I had to go to Bariloche to get it. Before we left camping I decide I should take a trip into Bariloche to get it, but now I was thinking it might be too late. I needed to start using my foot and loosening it up. I wanted to get some buckets that I could put the hot and cold water in to soak it.

I asked if anyone else wanted to go along and to my surprise Addison said she did even though Olivia wasn't going to go. Mirta offered to let us take the pickup truck so we had more freedom to do what we wanted, so the two of us set off to town. It is a slow windy road around the lake to Bariloche but it is a beautiful drive. We were able to stop and get picture along the way which you can't do when you are on the bus.

Addison had been to Bariloche with Mirta and wanted to go back and do more shopping for gifts and chocolate. It is a tourist town with a busy main street where travelers wander up and down looking for places to spend their money. It has the usual t-shirt shops, nick knacks, candles and postcards stuff and chocolate. Bariloche is famous for it's chocolate and had many chocolate shops in the tourist area. There was a local artisan area that Addison wanted to shop. I wanted to go look at the walking brace to see if I thought I should buy it.



We agreed to meet in front of the big mural next to the artisan shops in 45 minutes. I hobbled off up the hill to find the brace place. I was not walking very well at this time but fortunately it wasn't too far. It was going to be almost \$50 to get the brace and I would probably only use it a few days so I didn't buy it.

I was back in the tourist area with time to spare so I looked around for some plastic buckets with no luck. I returned to the big mural and lay down on the grass to rest my foot since I was there a little early. I was glad to rest until I realize Addison was now twenty minutes late. She had brought me to the place with the mural because she knew that was where the artisan shops were. She knew how to get here. I started think about how I would find her if she was lost but worse what if something had happened to her. I walked up and down the streets realizing I really had no way of finding her if she didn't show up here.

I had worked my self up into quite a panic. I figured she would be able to see me if she was just in one of the shop and had forgotten the time. I finally went in and walked through the artisan shops, a long “U” shaped hall with shops along both sides. When I reached the end of the farthest leg I saw her looking at jewelry complete oblivious to my panic. She didn’t realize I meant out in front of the mural, she just thought the area.

We shopped around a little longer then found a little restaurant for lunch before heading back home. We stopped on a beach along the lake and took pictures of the big waves the wind was pushing up.

One of the best reasons for the whole trip to Argentina was that I would get to spend time with Addison. Going to a place like Bariloche and having lunch together and stopping to play on the beach for a few minutes and talking about the differences between here and where we live. It was all worth it.

1/4/2014

On the Road Again

I spent another day lying on Mirta’s couch resting my foot but I was afraid I was wearing out my welcome. Having an extra kid for a month isn’t too bad but having the kids dad laying around the house for a few weeks can start to cramp things a little. I wanted to get out and see some more of the country and give Mirta a little more room for a while. I studied the maps and decided a trip south to El Bolson would take me past some really great country even if I couldn’t do much I could look at it. I asked once again if Addison wanted to go but she wanted to stay with Olivia.

I could take the bus but Mirta offered the truck again and I knew it would give me a much better look at the country than from the bus. I was a little nervous about using it too much. What if something happened to it? I went a head and took the truck anyway. It was so nice to be able to stop anytime I liked and take pictures and see things I wouldn’t see otherwise. It was also peak tourist season and all the buses were quite full.

Most of my drive was in the Nahuel Huapi Nactional Park which encompasses a large region of lakes and mountains. Much of it is inaccessible wilderness. I drove all the way to El Bolson the first day getting there in the afternoon. I was just in time for some kind of a big festival in the town square. There were hundred of venders selling all



kinds of things. It was like a farmers market, crafts fair, music festival rolled into one. There were thousands of people there, once again all looking for someplace to spend money. I bought some food but I decided to take pictures of all the different patterns and colors of the shops rather than shopping for stuff. It was interesting looking for the most interesting patterns and colors.

I had seen a dirt road turn off on my way to El Bolson and decided to go back to it to find a place to camp for the night. It is not that easy to find places to camp but this road did the trick. It was at the head of a lake call Lago Guillelmo but I never made it to

the lake. The under brush was so thick I couldn't get through and there didn't seem to be any paths. Mostly the under brush is bamboo. I camped along the road next to a little creek where I could soak my foot in the cold water. I was soaking it and giving it massages regularly now.

I was up early the next morning to drive into a place called Pampa Linda. I wasn't sure what was there but it sits right below Cerro Tronador, a beautiful glacier capped peak straddling the Argentine/Chilean boarder. I had looked at it on the internet before I left home. It looked like a great peak to climb. It had crossed my mind that I should have really been climbing a peak like Tronador instead of Aconcagua. It would be a fun and exciting climb in the ice and snow but without the nausea and headaches from altitude.



I didn't realize it at the time but being so early in the morning had it's advantages. I could stop and take pictures and look around leaving the pickup right in the middle of the road. There were no other cars. It seemed I was going to be out here all alone. The



problem is they have a lot of traffic on the road in the summer, so much so that they have instituted a one way road system. From 10:30 am until 2:00 pm you can only drive in to Pampa Linda. Then from 4:00 pm until 6:00 pm you can only drive out. But from 7:30 pm until 9:00 am you can drive either way. I was driving in during the quiet time when you could go either way.

After a long rough drive on dirt roads I found myself at Pampa Linda, a couple lodges or hotels, each with a restaurant, a commercial campground and a ranger station. There were an amazing number of people there considering how difficult the road was.

Behind me more and more cars were showing up. You could rent horses to ride on the many trails. There were Refugios (huts) to hike to and stay at. There were beautiful waterfalls and forests and above it all was the snowy glacier of Tronador. What a great



place to be if only I could do more than hobble around. I did a short hike to a waterfall and on my way back I stopped and soaked my foot in the stream. It was almost too cold being only a few thousand feet from being snow and ice.

It was a much different place than that up under Aconcagua, not nearly as raw and harsh a place. Up on the glacier it was probably more harsh than down at its foot but I think you still wouldn't have the extreme temperatures and thin air. The icy

summit of Tronador was not even as high as Confluencia the lowest of the camps in the Horcones valley.

I spent the afternoon lying on the grass in the campground looking up at Tronador picking routes that I would like to climb if only I could walk. Instead of climbing it I soaked my foot and kept it elevated as much as I could. It was still very swollen. I could still barely get my shoe on but it was getting better.

I was going to spend the night in Pampa Linda but by late afternoon I was feeling restless. I wanted to see Cascada Los Alerces which was up another canyon next to the one I was in. I had several hours of day light left so I decided to go for it and drive around. It was a long rough drive around but I made it with enough daylight left to do the short hike to the falls and take some pictures.

The river, Rio Manso, has a number of popular kayaking and rafting sections on it. In fact there is a kayak run that starts at the waterfall I had come to see. The falls didn't look run-able to me but there was a kayak shuttle vehicle sitting at a turn out just a half a mile above the falls. Together the river and the landscape would have made for some awesome kayaking. I decided to camp next to the shuttle vehicle even though there was a sign saying no camping. I really wasn't going to camp; I would just sleep.



I started to lock up the pickup to get things ready to go to bed but when I tried to roll up the automatic windows the drivers side window didn't go up. Something wasn't working. That door had some trouble already. The warning buzzer that told you the door was not fully closed went off randomly all the time. Mirta had talk about taking it apart to fix. I couldn't figure out anything to do so I went to bed hoping it would fix itself over night. No such luck. I had to drive all the way home the next day with the window open. That wasn't so bad but I felt really bad about it not working after I was driving it.

I had spent 2 nights and three days traveling around. On my way back through Bariloche I stopped at the bus terminal and bought bus tickets for Addison and I from Villa la Angostura to Buenas Aires. But we still had one more adventure before living Mirta's house.

1/7/2014

Cascada Dora Y Santa Ana

Olivia's best friend, Elisa, had spent most of the last month hanging out with Addison and Olivia swimming, taking hikes and sailing lesson and in general being inseparable. Sofia, Elisa's mother was good friends with Mirta. Sofia was going to lead us all on a hike to Dora and Santa Ana waterfalls just across the Argentina boarder.

There is some stress to crossing the border. Most importantly you must have all the right papers with you and of course most of that responsibility falls to Mirta. Addison and I had our passports but did Addison have hers with her? Fernando wasn't along so Mirta needed a special paper stating that he new she was taking the kids out of the country. Thomas has a US passport and an Argentine passport so he is well covered. It cost \$160 for each Addison and I to enter Argentina, a reciprocating fee. It's because the US charges Argentineans, and just about anybody else, that much to enter the US. As we pulled up to the border I started looking for my receipt showing I had paid the fee but couldn't find it. I was sure the boarder person kept it when I showed it to them when we first entered. When we got to the border of course it is quite crowded. We stood in line. I don't really know what all Mirta had to do but first she had to talk to them about my entry fee. They found it right away on the computer but Addison's didn't show up until they figured out it was listed with mine.

We made it through customs and were ready to drive on but Sofia's car was leaking fuel. It's a diesel. It seemed a hose to the fuel injectors was cracked. I was able to fix it by cutting off the cracked area and reconnecting it. And we were on the road again.

For the first time since I hurt it I had finally manage to get my hiking shoe on my foot. It gave my ankle pretty good support. We started out on a smooth, almost sandy trail. It was actually volcanic ash from the big volcano that was only a few miles away from where we were hiking. The trail stayed pretty good until we dropped down to the river near the first waterfall. The kids all scampered across



the rocks and up to the falls while I hobble over them as best I could. After checking it out we hiked on to the next falls. It was farther and harder to get to. I was a little nervous about getting back out but I had come this far, I figured I had to keep going.



It was a beautiful waterfalls going over an undercut wall leaving close to a hundred feet between the water and the rock. The kids hiked up behind the falls while I soaked my foot. We were all sitting on the rocks in the river eating lunch when Mirta slipped on a rock, fell and hurt her ribs and her leg. It turned out to be as tough for her hiking out as it was for me. I left the waterfall and start out before the others figuring it was going to take me a long time. It wasn't long before Addison caught up with me and we hiked out together. My ankle didn't seem to hurt any more hiking fast than it did slow so we went pretty fast.

We made it back to the cars and headed for home. Not far down the road Sofia's car started having more trouble. Another hose split but it was too short to fix it this time. We ended up towing it most of the way back to Angostura.

1/8/2014

Heading for Home



Olivia and her puppy putting Addi on the bus.

The next morning we started the long journey to Buenos Aires, Atlanta and Home. The first leg was a 23 hour bus ride from Villa la Angostura to Buenos Aires. At 10:10 am we waved good-by to Mirta and Olivia as the bus pulled out of the terminal and headed for Bariloche. Amazingly the next time Addison would touch ground would be 9:00 the next morning. I jumped off the bus a couple times for just a minute at a couple of the stops we made along the way. These buses are quite luxurious. It is more like an airplane kind of experience. Almost all the long haul buses are double deckers. You can book two different kinds of seats. They have comas that go almost flat and almost turn into a bed. The semi-coma is the standard seat and the kind we had. It leans back quite far and has a piece that flips up to support your legs at about a forty-five degree angle, pretty nice but not a bed. Every few rows of seats have a video screen above so you can watch movies and they serve food and drinks several times throughout the ride. You can watch a lot of movies in 23 hours. Maybe half of them were in English.



We got off the bus in downtown Buenos Aires and had to transfer to a local bus to get to the airport. The heat was shocking to poor Addison. She had spent the last month up in the cool mountains beside the lake. Now she was down in the hot flat country with high humidity and she was feeling it. We had to schlep all our baggage across a large plaza/park area and up the street a block to the Tienda León Bus Station. People and cars and buses were all moving fast, another shocker when you are coming from the peaceful mountains. We made it to the Tienda León Station and spent another 45 minutes riding their bus to the international airport.

The only Delta flight out of Buenos Aires leaves at 9:00 PM. We were there with plenty of time to spare, like over nine hours. Little did we know how much time we were going to spend in this little corner of the world. The international air terminal was pretty quiet when we first got there but by 5:00 pm it was crowded. That was about the time Delta officials showed up at the Delta desk but immediately there was a long line. I needed to find out how getting on the standby system worked. In asking around I met a guy who knew a lot about it because he and his family had been there the last three afternoons trying to get on a Delta flight standby and hadn't made it out yet. I found a phone store over in the domestic terminal and called Mike. He didn't think it looked too good either.

There were maybe 25 or 30 people standing by hoping to get on the plane. Many of them had been there several days. The guy with the family who had been educating me was one of the lucky ones to make it on. It was an occasion of great joy among his family and friends. We did not make it on. That left us with a problem. It was 9:00 at night; the airport is in the boonies, with only a few high end hotels around. We had to pack all our luggage because there was no place to store it. The buses had stopped running and a taxi into the city would cost \$50, a hotel in town would be close to the same. I had about \$400 including both pesos and dollars. That wouldn't last too long if we were spending \$150 or more per day.



I had thought about all this early and had taken a walk around the parking lots and airport grounds. Out past the parking lots, almost out of the airport grounds were a large area of grass with some trees along one side. It wasn't that far to walk even with our bags. We could pitch my tent under the trees or just lay out on it and my pads if the weather was okay. It was still 80° out so staying warm wasn't an issue.

Over in the domestic airlines terminal there was a phone and internet store. It was a ten minute walk around through the parking lots to that terminal. We dragged our baggage over there to call Jen and tell her the news. She had been planning to meet us at the airport in SLC the next morning. That was off now. It created a problem because she didn't have anymore days off.

After calling Mike and making plans for the next flight, twenty four hours away, and getting something to eat we wandered out to the trees and set up camp. I told Addison I thought it would be too hot in the tent so we should just lay on it. That lasted about half an hour. First the mosquitoes began attacking but more importantly the

flashing lights off in the distant sky were not so distant anymore and rain drops began falling.

We jumped up and stood the tent up and crawled in just before the skies turned loose; high winds, pouring rain, thunder and lightening, we got it all, a good old tropical thunderstorm. The good thing was it only lasted an hour and it cooled things down a lot so it was quite pleasant in the tent and the mosquitoes couldn't get us. I lay awake for awhile thinking about what we were going to do the next day.



Lying there under the trees beside the airport is not the same as lying under the South Wall of Aconcagua. It might be an adventure but the goal had now become getting home. The drive that pushes me up that mountain was now pushing me to get home. I wanted to get home and sleep in my own bed, snuggle up close to my wife. I wanted to hug her and

kiss her. I wanted to listen to her tell me about what her day. I wanted to sit around the dinner table and have a conversation with Ria and Addison. I wanted to sit in my chair next to the wood stove and feel the soft heat on my face. My goal was now to get home and when the goal is to get home anything that hampers achieving the goal becomes a hindrance.

In the morning we packed up the tent and other sleeping gear, loaded it back into our luggage and started the trek back to the terminal. As we passed by the car entrance building a guy in a uniform saw us and yelled to us that it was illegal to camp there. He said it in Spanish, of course, and we pretended we couldn't understand. Besides we weren't camping, just sleeping. We tried to stash our bags in some trees at the edge of the parking lot but the parking security people saw us and made us take the bags back out of the trees. They told us there was no place to store them. We would just have to take them along.

We found a taxi driver who said he would take us into the city for \$33. That was a good price so we went with it. His name was Javier and he was a very nice guy. He was really proud of Buenos Aires and told us many things about it and things to do and see. It was nice to meet such an enthusiastic and friendly guy. He dropped us off at the bus terminal because we could store our baggage there and not haul it around with us.

The City

Addison had been telling people that she didn't think much of Buenos Aires. When we first came in on the bus we had seen a pretty run down part of the city. Then the heat and the traffic left a negative impression on her. But she was willing to follow her dad around and see whatever else there was. Javier had told us there were free bicycles to ride around the city. He said you could just find a bike stand and check one out. He said we could go to the information desk at the bus terminal and find out how and where. The lady at the information desk gave us a map and said there was a bike stand a block or so away.



That got us started but we never manage to get bikes but we had a great time walking all over. At first we were in some kind of high end area with very fancy restaurants and high rise apartments, spotless sidewalks and building fronts. Then we passed into more normal but not very interesting areas. I was looking for the really busy, hustle and bustle, part of town but we weren't finding it. My ankle was killing me and we were getting a little tired so we stop at a restaurant and had lunch.

After lunch we looped back and started toward the bus terminal. We hadn't gotten far when we entered a narrow street that had been turned into a walking street, no cars just people and shops of every kind. It was fun and interesting just walking along watching everyone. There were money exchangers, food hackers, strangely dress guys, beautiful women. It had a lot to offer. We spent quite a while wandering the streets all the while getting closer to the bus terminal. In the end we left the walking streets just a few blocks from the terminal.

We went back to the Tienda León bus station and got a bus back to the airport. I have never been all that interested in seeing big cities but this one had impressed me. It was better than most. There were some great old statues and cool buildings, great architecture and the walking streets. It changed Addison's impression of the city as well.

I am going to gloss over the rest of the day and evening. It was long and boring. Addison had been praying we would get first class seats but now she was just hoping we would make it on the plane even if it was in the baggage compartment. We didn't get on the plane again. There were even more people trying to get on standby and only a few

made it. It was depressing. That said, Fernando who was in Utah at the time, came through for us. He called a friend of his who lives not too far from the airport and setup a great adventure for Addison and I.

1/10/14

The Delta House



Marcelo and Ale
In their back yard.

Around 10:30 pm Fernando's friend, Marcelo, and his son, Matello, came and picked us up at the airport and took us to their house where we met his wife, Alejandra, (Ale) and older son, Luka. They fed us and let us shower and sleep there. They also gave us all the information on how to get to Fernando's family house in the river delta east of Buenos Aires. Fernando set it all up and Marcelo made it happen. When we started the operation I told Addison it would be a miracle if we actually made it to the house because there were way too many things that would have to happen. One mistake and we would be lost.

Before we came to Argentina the plan had been that Mirta and the kids would leave Villa la Angostura while I was in the mountains and go to their house in the river delta, east of Buenos Aires. The delta is at the confluence of the Uruguay River and the Paraná River and surprisingly it doesn't flow into the ocean but rather into one of the widest river in the world, Rio de la Plata. I would go from Mendoza to Buenos Aires and meet them at the Delta House. Fernando had told me about the delta and the house and I was excited to get to see it. But then Mirta decided it would be really hard getting all four kids clear across the country all by herself. I would say she was exactly right. The car isn't big enough for all the kids and their stuff. Then a 23 hour drive with one driver would be a killer especially with four kids? It was not worth it. They would just stay in Angostura. I was disappointed to miss out on seeing the Delta House but thanks to Fernando it actually could happen.

The next morning, after taking us shopping for food, Marcelo dropped us off at a bus stop to catch a regular city bus back to downtown Buenos Aires. It took us almost an hour to ride it all the way to the city center. This bus cost us only a few cents instead of the \$20 we had been paying for the Tienda León bus. We got off the bus and walked a short distance to the train station and caught a train to the town of Tigre.



Tigre was a bustling tourist place on the river. Being a Saturday it was really crowded. It took a little doing and a lot of standing in line but we actually manage to buy tickets and get on the right boat to take us out into the delta and then get dropped off on the right dock or pier.

All we had to do now was find the old guy, Cachi, to let us into the house. Just as Fernando had said we found Cachi at the first house on the right just up from

the pier. His wife, Anita, took us over to the house and helped us open it up. Apparently

the storm that hit Addison and I the night before last had hit very hard out on the delta. It had toppled trees and taken down power lines. The result was there was no electricity at the house. After a while I figured out how to turn on the gas so we could heat water but we didn't really have anything to cook. Without electricity it was kind of like camping with a really big tent. We lit candles when it got dark so we could see.



We mostly just laid around the rest of the day. The long bus ride, the time at the airport and the city was all pretty stressful and finally there was no stress. We had a good place to sleep and nothing to do. It was really relaxing. Addison spent a long time writing in her journal and I did nothing. Day two looked a lot the same until about noon when I started getting a little bored with laying around.

There were only a handful of boats that would take us back to Tigre. Fernando had said to catch the first boat around 6:00 am to get back to the airport in time. But Anita, Cachi's wife said we couldn't get that boat, I never figured out why. She said we would need to get the 10:00 am boat. That was going to be a little tight getting back. Then it hit me that we didn't have to stay out there another night. Tigre was a bustling tourist place with museums and markets and art shops etc.. We could get a hotel room there and spend the rest of the day being tourists. We jumped up and began packing. By late afternoon we had a hotel room in Tigre and were on our way to the "Puerto de Frutos" to check out all the things to do. The Puerto de Frutos was once the port of fruit, where they used to bring boats in and unload all the fruit and sell it. Now the fruit boats are mostly gone and the port is an "everything" market selling stuff to tourists.



The next morning we reversed our trip out; train, bus, pick up bags at Marcello's and then a taxi to the airport.

Getting On

We knew the routine; wait in line to check in, sit around and wait until most of the regular passengers have checked in, then when the lady comes out and starts calling names, pray she says yours. We hadn't been doing very well with our prayers; she hadn't said our name yet. It wasn't looking very good this evening either. The lady had already come out twice and called other peoples names. Addison was looking very depressed. Where were we going to spend the night this time? We had less then \$300 between the two of us and we could go though that in just a couple days if we had to stay in hotels. I was stressing out.

Then the lady came back and started flipping through her slips of paper and then she said "McCarthy". It was a very joyous moment. After checking our bags we ran out to the gate. There was no reason to run; we still had to wait for all the paying passengers to get on the plane before they would let us standby types on. When they finally gave us seat numbers I noticed they were really low, like row three. When they turned us to the left instead of right as we walked on I knew we were in "FIRST CLASS".

Addison was in the right side window seat next to single guy I was on the left of the center row. I asked the guy next to Addison if he would mind trading with me so we could sit together. I think he may have been standby as well. He seemed very impressed with being in first class too and could really care less about which seat as long as he was there.



I sat down next to Addi. She didn't seem to know she was in first class so I told her. She looked around and went giddy. She stayed giddy for the next two hours. It might have been her highlight of the trip. I have to admit if I got to fly first class I might be more willing to take long trips.

The young college student sitting across the aisle from me seemed to be quite used to sitting in the front of the plane. He looked like most any well kept twenty year old, in his blue jeans and plaid shirt, but he was not impressed by the pampering service like Addison and I. To him it was just what flying is.

We had exactly the opposite situation when we change planes in Atlanta. We got right on the plane without any drama but our tickets were in row 58. We were in the farthest back of economy. There were no seats behind us. My knees hit the seat in front even before the guy tipped his seat back the two inches it could move. There was a wall behind our seats so they didn't tip back at all. It was a nice contrast. It made us really appreciate the luxury of the other experience.

Jen had to work that morning so she drove down to the airport and drop off a car for us and then got a ride back up to Park City from Julie Davis, a friend who lives in Salt Lake.

The Salt Lake Valley looked stark and cold after being in full green summer for the last 5 weeks. The sun was noticeably low in the sky giving a cool blue light contrasting with the dry, gold grass and dead grey trees and bushes. But there was a distinct lack of snow. It was rather strange to think that just the morning before we had been in the green tropics and 85° in Tigre, Argentina 9,000 miles away on the other side of the world. We do live in a crazy world.

THE END



Textures from the market.

A CONCLUSION

For most of my life if someone asked what I would do if I had all the money in the world, without hesitation, I would have said, “travel the world looking for adventure.” That seems to have changed somewhere along the way. I don’t have the same drive. I am much less interested in putting up with the discomfort and stress of adventure travel. I suppose if I could travel first class, stay in the best hotels and pay to get from one place to another without the stress of finding the cheapest way, I might be willing to go almost anywhere. But that isn’t the kind of adventure I once loved. I loved living on the dirty edge. The places you find real adventure don’t have fancy hotels and there is no easy way to get there. When you have to find a place to sleep and eat in a village that has no hotels or restaurants you are destined to meet some real people and eat real local food. But that kind of adventure is mentally difficult. Maybe I’m not as patient and tolerant as I once was.

I also have some doubts about the consumption involved in international travel. The world is at a turning point. It won’t be long before the luxury of travel of any kind will be out of reach for most of us. Air travel consumes huge amounts of fuel and spews lots of carbon into the atmosphere. I have been responsible for plenty of airplane carbon spewing and fuel burning. Maybe I should save some of that for my children.

There are so many adventures to be had right here in the USA, Utah and even the Heber Valley. I’m going to work on those closer to home adventures for a while.