

By Tom Earle

This is just a bit of info on how University of Limerick Outdoor Pursuits Club got on during their recent expedition to climb Aconcagua. The team comprised of: Frank Cox, Darragh Dolan, Barry Watts, Liam Gahan, Ed. Earle, Jp O' Gorman, and myself. I am proud to tell you all that on Monday the 10th of Feb 2003. Darragh Dolan, Tom Earle and JP O`Gorman were at the summit of Aconcagua(6962m). The following day, the 11th of Feb, Frank Cox also climbed to the summit of Aconcagua.

On the 30th of January we left Puente del Inca (2700m) and started the 3 day ascent to Base Camp (4200m)(BC). This involved 42kms of a walk in and nights spent in Las lenas and Casca de Piedra. On 1st of February, we reached Base Camp and spent that evening and the next day organising equipment and resting for the days to be spent above Base Camp. On the 3rd of Feb. the team of seven carried their first load to Camp 1 at 5000m and descended to BC. This was a tough day on the team as they were beginning to feel the altitude. The next day we repeated this carry so that Camp 2 (5900m) could be successfully established. On Wednesday the 5th of Feb the team rested in BC in preparation for the move to Camp 1 the following day.

The following day all 7 members moved to Camp 1 leaving the relatively rich air of Base camp behind. On the 7th of Feb, Darragh, Ed, Tom and JP carried loads to Camp 2 at 5900m. Frank, Liam and Barry were a day behind with respect to acclimatisation so they used this day as a rest day in Camp 1. The following day these 3 carried a load to Camp 2 while the other lads had their rest day in camp 1.

At this stage of the expedition, Darragh, Ed, Tom and JP were a day ahead so were planning to summit a day before Frank, Liam and Barry. The 4 lads moved to Camp 2 on Sunday the 9th of Feb. The decision was made to spend as little time as possible at Camp 2 due to altitude so they planned leaving Camp 2 for the summit on the morning of the 10th of Feb. During this time Frank, Liam and Barry were still in Camp 1 and were in contact via radio.

At 6.00am Darragh, Tom and JP left Camp 2 for the summit via the Falso Traverse Route to the summit of Aconcagua. The original Polish Glacier route was not in condition for climbing due to recent storms and heavy snowfall. Ed did not leave Camp 2 for the summit due to severe headaches.

At 10am, Frank received radio contact to say that Darragh, Tom and JP were at 6400m and were all feeling strong. The next radio contact would be at summit due to geographical features which were blocking radio signal. By 2pm, Frank and Liam climbed to Camp 2 for the summit

attempt of the next day. At 3.00 pm, the Darragh, Tom and Jp arrived at the summit and were able to contact the other lads via radio in Camp 2. At around 3.30pm they descended from the summit. Tom, Darragh and JP returned to Camp 2 at approximately 7pm absolutely shagged, and rested there for the night with the plan to descend to base camp the next day.

Frank left Camp II alone at 5.30am for his summit attempt. Liam was unable to leave camp 2 due to severe altitude headaches. By 9.30am Frank was at 6400m and was feeling the strain of the altitude but still very strong. The wind was very cold but overall the weather was perfect. At 6400m he made the last contact with the lads in Camp 2 and kept moving for the summit. Moving up steadily he reached the summit of Aconcagua at 3.15pm. The last 100m to the top had taken him around 2 hours to complete. He gave a quick radio call to Camp 2 and then started his descent. At around 7pm he reached Camp 2 and then descend to C1 with JP and Liam who were waiting for him in Camp 2.

The day after we were all reunited in Base Camp with all the equipment retrieved from the mountain. The lure of a shower, food in a restaurant and the beautiful señoritas enticed us to hike from Base Camp to the trail head, Puente de Vacas in one long day!!.

So that was about it. We had a week free after which allowed us to interact somewhat with the locals! It was a fantastic expedition and fare play to Frank Cox for organising it from the beginning. We would like to say thanks to all our sponsors and everyone who helped us out.