



Canada West Mountain School - Aconcagua Expedition notes

Aconcagua Traverse Expedition January 7 to January 26, 2018

This expedition is to climb Aconcagua (6,962 meters), the highest mountain outside of Asia. Located in Argentina, the peak is situated near the crest of the High Andes of South America about 10 kilometers from the border of Chile.

We will be traversing the mountain, with a start on the eastern side of Aconcagua, following the Vacas River Valley up to the base of the Polish Glacier, then traversing across the upper northern slopes of Aconcagua to finish up the western side of the summit. The descent will be via the Horcones Valley (Normal Route). This traverse route is well known for its spectacular scenery, wilderness setting and relative ease of technical difficulty.

While climbing Aconcagua is a serious endeavor on a high-altitude peak, you will not need any previous technical experience, just good health and a very high degree of fitness.

Included in the cost of the trip:

- All guiding services and organization
- all food while on the mountain
- technical climbing equipment
- tents and camp supplies
- transportation from Mendoza to the start of the climb - return
- mule support in and out to base camp
- base camp dining tent and meals
- use of satellite phone (excluding airtime charges)
- all expedition fees and permits
- two nights lodging in Mendoza (Jan. 7 and Jan 25) based on double occupancy
- lodging in Los Penitentes (trailhead on Jan. 8)
- all pre-trip and logistical support

Participants are responsible for the following:

- International travel and transportation to and from Mendoza, Argentina;
- All meals and food while in Mendoza (breakfast are included in Hotels);
- All costs of a personal nature (alcoholic beverages, laundry, internet, showers, storage fees, etc)
- Personal clothing and equipment (see equipment list);
- Cost of personal porters on the mountain (porters are optional, not required)
- Medical and travel insurance valid for Argentina;
- Recue insurance valid for mountaineering rescue in Argentina
- Costs associated with rescue or evacuation, including early departure from Expedition for any reason
- Visa's and proper travel documents for travel to Argentina (if applicable);
- Lodging while not on the mountain in case of early return (except as noted);
- Single occupancy supplement for Hotels on Jan 7 and 25
- Gratuities and tips (guides, staff, hotel staff, mule drivers, cooks, porters, etc)



Canada West Mountain School - Aconcagua Expedition notes

Overview of the trip

Our 20-day schedule allows enough time to comfortably acclimatize while on the mountain to give us the best chance of summiting while also being able to fully enjoy the ascent! This schedule includes 2 extra days in case of inclement weather, if extra rest days are required, to extend the summit window, to deal with potential logistical "glitches" and other unforeseen events, or to do some extra side trips along the way.

Day 1 (January 7, 2018) - The team will meet in Mendoza and relax, sort & confirm gear, etc. This night you will sleep low at 730m (2,430'). All team members should plan on being in Mendoza no later than January 7th, though you can also plan to arrive 1 to 2 days earlier, to allow you to deal with unforeseen glitches – lost baggage, delayed flights, etc. This also gives you some time to enjoy this beautiful city!

Day 2 - Everyone will head to the Park Office in Mendoza to obtain the Parks Permit required to enter Aconcagua Park. Each person must be there in person to get their permit. After this is done, the group will go through a full gear check, before driving to Los Penitentes with a private van. This drive is approx. 4 hours on good roads. Everyone will sleep at a hotel in Los Penitentes at 2,700m (8,860') – the first night of acclimatization. Los Penitentes is close to the crest of the Andes, and a few miles from the Chilean/Argentinean border. In the afternoon there are opportunities to go on a short hike to view the SW side of Aconcagua from the trailhead of the Horcones Valley (Normal) route.

Day 3 - This morning you will load all your gear up on the mules. Each mule carries up to 60 kgs of food, communal gear and personal equipment. Utilizing the mules spares team members from 3 days of carrying heavy loads, a crucial element to preserving strength for the upper mountain. The group will have a short drive to the Punta de Vacas trailhead at 2,350m (7,710'). You will then begin the 3-day hike up the Rio Vacas valley towards our Base Camp at Plaza Argentina. This first hiking day you will travel approx. 12 km to the first camp at Pampas de Las Lenas. This hike is approx. 4-6 hours. The gear travels with the mules and you will have access to it once you arrive at the camp. Your camp that night is at 2,950m (9,680').

Day 4 - The team will spend the 2nd approach day hiking up the spectacular Vacas valley for 14 kms to the confluence of the Relinchos and Vacas rivers. Here you will camp at Casa Piedra, the "Stone House". This hike will be approx. 6-8 hours. Again, the gear travels with the mules between camps. Your camp this night will be at 3,250m (10,600'), in an area known for its abundance of wild Guanacos, a smaller version of the Andean Llama.

Day 5 - This day you will start off with a crossing of the Vacas River, either by foot or on a mule. After this exciting start to the day, you will hike up the Relinchos Valley to Plaza Argentina (PA) at 4,000m (13,180'). This hike will be approx. 10 km and takes 6-8 hours. This will be the last day that your gear is carried by mules!

Day 6 - This is a very welcomed rest day and allows time to sort gear and prep for the upper mountain. You will sleep at PA at 4000m (13,180').

Day 7 - This day is used as either another rest day or as a carry-day to move gear and food up to Camp 1 at 5,000m. You will sleep at PA at 4,000m (13,180').

Day 8 - Move to Camp 1 approx. 4 hours (optional extra rest day used at PA). You will sleep at Camp 1 at 5,000m (16,400').

Day 9 - This day is a rest day at Camp 1. You will sleep at Camp 1 at 5,000m (16,400').

Day 10 - Carry to Camp 2 at 5,500 (18,000'), via the col between Ameghino Peak and Aconcagua. This is a long day, approx. 8 hours return. You will sleep at Camp 1 at 5,000m (16,400').

Day 11 - Move to Camp 2. This is a shorter day with approx. 4-5 hours of travel. You will sleep at Camp 2 at 5,500m (18,000').



Canada West Mountain School - Aconcagua Expedition notes

Day 12 - Rest day and acclimatization hike, possible carry to Camp 3/Colera Camp. You will sleep at Camp 2 at 5,500m (18,000')

Day 13 - Move to Camp Colera at 5,900 m (19,360')

Day 14 - This day is scheduled as a possible rest day at Camp Colera or you may choose this as the first summit day if the team is well acclimatized.

Day 15 - Summit day! You will get up at 2:30 am and have a light meal, fill your water bottles with hot fluids, and head out by 4 am. This day is a long day, approximately 12-14 hours return and 3,000' (1,000 meters) of vertical climbing. You will possibly begin the day wearing crampons as often snow is encountered at the elevation. On your return you will sleep at Camp Colera at 5,900m (18,900').

Day 16 - This day will be your first descent day, down to the Plaza de Mulas Basecamp on the Western side of the mountain, in the Horcones Valley. Once in Basecamp at Plaza de Mulas, you will celebrate with a good meal while enjoying the "thick" air back down low! You will spend this night at 4,370 m (14,340 ft)

Day 17 - The final day is spent hiking back out Horcones Valleys to the trailhead. The final night is spent either back in Penitentes, or if you arrive out early enough you may drive back to Mendoza.

Day 18 (January 24, 2018) - This will be a day to drive back to Mendoza and enjoy the fine food and celebrate the climb!

Please note this schedule allows for 2 extra days to be used at any point as required – weather delays, acclimatization needs, logistics, etc. that one extra day is held in reserve for a potential weather or logistics delay, so your homebound flights should not be booked for earlier than January 26th, as the final return date to Mendoza may be January 25th.

This itinerary is of course dependent on many different factors, including weather, acclimatization rates, weather conditions on the mountain and other factors beyond the control of the guides or of the team. Please remember that this is only a guideline, the actual schedule on the mountain may vary, including camp locations, routes and timing. It is quite possible that a variation of this route may be taken that does not include a traverse of the mountain and has our team descending the Vacas Valley approach route.

Fitness and Training

Though non-technical, the climb of Aconcagua is *very strenuous*. The terrain is rough and the conditions are harsh. Though we will travel at a slow pace, being fit is the best way to avoid excess fatigue on the mountain and will greatly increase your chance of summiting. As a measure, you should be comfortable carrying a 20-25 kg pack in steep hiking terrain for a few hours at a stretch without feeling excessive exertion. On the upper mountain you will be expected to carry all of your personal gear plus a portion of the communal gear and food between camps. Typically this will mean loads of up to 20-25 kg per person, and the carries between camps can be up to 2,000' (600 meters) and require hiking with a pack for 4 hours or more. This will also include descents over the same terrain (on the final day with equally loaded packs).

Participants should be training on a regular basis well in advance of this climb, with a training schedule that includes at least one long hike (+6 hours) every week in addition to some form of outdoor aerobic exercise at least 3 times per week for a minimum of 1-2 hours (hiking, biking, XC or backcountry skiing, running, walking, etc). Training while carrying a pack is advisable (not for biking though), but keep the pack weight reasonable to avoid injury.

If this plan is unrealistic, please contact the CWMS office to discuss your fitness and training.



Canada West Mountain School - Aconcagua Expedition notes

Altitude

Our Guides are trained and experienced in High Altitude medicine and altitude related illnesses. Our expeditions have a portable Pulse-Oximeter for testing the Oxygen Saturation levels of the team members at all camps. There is also a permanent Medical Doctor stationed at Plaza Argentina and Plaza de Mulas that all team members will have access to.

Above 4,000 meters almost every person feels the effect of altitude, though they will not necessarily become sick. Typical (and normal) effects of going to altitude are simply less energy than at lower elevations, the need to go slower when hiking and an awareness that any physical exertion is more tiring and requires more breathing.

In addition to this, some people will show symptoms of early, or mild, **Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS)** by the time they reach 4,000 meters. These symptoms include nausea, sleeplessness, headaches, lack of appetite and fatigue. Early AMS is generally not a cause for serious concern and usually will pass with proper acclimatization. Many people will experience these symptoms on the lower mountain, yet after a couple of rest days will continue without any problems to the summit in fine health. Early AMS is not considered life threatening.

More serious to the health of a climber is Advanced AMS, which can lead to **High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE)** or **High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE)**, both considered lethal if untreated. People with advanced AMS will have the same symptoms as with early/mild AMS, though more severe. In addition, **HAPE** is often accompanied by a persistent cough, respiratory distress, and mild chest pain. With **HACE** there is often a severe, throbbing headache, disorientation, vomiting and severe nausea, though these symptoms are not always present.

These illnesses are caused by high altitude. Contributing factors may be fatigue, dehydration, cold and lack of fitness, though many cases are reported where none of these have been a factor. The best prevention against altitude sickness is a slow ascent and proper hydration. Generally, we will gain an average of 300-350 meters a day between sleeping camps to help our bodies acclimatize to the higher elevations. In addition to a slow ascent, we will ensure that everyone is well nourished, hydrated and rested every day. As an added precaution, the drug **Diamox** may be taken each night to help alleviate symptoms and allow for ease of sleeping. The herbal supplement **Ginko Biloba** is also supposed to have beneficial effects in alleviating symptoms of altitude sickness.

If someone is unable to acclimatize or experiences advanced AMS, the best (and only!) effective treatment is to descend to a lower elevation. One advantage of our route on Aconcagua is that it allows for easy and quick descent in the event of Altitude illness threatening anyone's health. Additionally, if HACE is suspected, the drug **Dexamethozone** can be used to reduce intra-cranial pressure in addition to descending.

Recommended Reading for information on Altitude

- *Altitude Sickness* by Peter Hackett, American Alpine Club, 1979
- *Medicine for Mountaineering 4th Edition* by James A. Wilkerson, The Mountaineers, 1992



Canada West Mountain School - Aconcagua Expedition notes

Weather

On the lower mountain and during the approach/descent, expect desert-like conditions with temperatures in the mid to upper 30's, though thunderstorms bringing rain at these elevations are not uncommon. The upper mountain can have severe weather conditions, with temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius, and high winds over 100 km/hr occurring during periods of unsettled weather. In addition, snowfalls up to a meter in depth can accompany storms during the climbing season. Even when the mountain is clear of storms, the winds and cold temperatures combined can keep climbers off of the summit for days on end. Our best methods of dealing with weather related concerns are to be properly prepared with our equipment and camp set-up, and to base our on-mountain travel plans in accordance with local weather patterns. To this end we are very strict about all the equipment used.

Water

Water-borne diseases are probable on the mountain, so all water will be treated with chemical purification on the lower mountain, and boiled on the upper mountain. Base-camp water is from a pure source. Personal water bottles with built-in filters are useful for collecting water on the trail approach.

Flights and other travel details

You will be responsible for your own flight arrangements to and from Mendoza, Argentina. Most major airlines operate service into both Santiago, Chile and to Buenos Aires, Argentina, with domestic airlines servicing Mendoza with many flights daily. Visas are not required for Canadians in either Chile or Argentina, only a passport. If you plan on visiting Chile, an entry "tax" is applied at the border for Canadians and citizens of some other countries. This does not apply if you are only transferring through the international airport in Santiago.

It is recommended that you carry flight cancellation insurance, travel insurance coverage and any other emergency coverage you wish to get.

Emergency Rescue service

Emergency evacuation services from Aconcagua are NOT included in the Aconcagua Expedition fee. All medical and evacuation costs are the responsibility of the participant. Canada West Mountain School recommends that each team member purchase independent Travel Medical Insurance coverage that will be appropriate for emergency evacuation from Aconcagua.

Please consult with your personal physician or local travel clinic for immunization information.

Currency

The currency in Argentina is the peso. The exchange rate (as of November 2011) is \$1 CAN = 13.7 Argentinean Pesos. Local currency is easily obtained through cash ATM machines located throughout Mendoza, or cash can be exchanged at banks and Currency exchange centers.

Local culture and region

We start our expedition in the city of Mendoza, in the heart of the wine region of Argentina. Mendoza is very well developed for tourism, primarily for Argentinean and Chilean tourists. As it is also the starting point for all expeditions to Aconcagua, there are many climbing related and outdoor adventure related stores and services. If you have any gear requirements at the last minute, virtually everything that you require for the climb can be obtained in Mendoza.

The weather in January in Mendoza is very pleasant - mid-summer conditions with daytime temperatures in the mid-30's and slightly cooler in the evening. Thundershowers in the evening are not uncommon. Casual dress and attire is totally acceptable. Be aware that there is a strong siesta tradition in Mendoza - all the shops will close between noon and 4 pm every day.

Restaurants are abundant throughout the city. A continental buffet breakfast is included at the hotel, but there is no shortage of eating options for lunch and dinner. Dinner is typically not started until after 9 pm though.