

ACONCAGUA ▲ 22,834 FEET / 6,959 METERS



Photo by Tom Torkelson

ROUTE: NORMAL ROUTE, GRADE II, 13,910 FEET ELEVATION GAIN, 19 DAYS

Deposit: \$1000

Balance Due: 90 days prior to starting date

Group Size: 6 climbers, 2 AMS guides

Cost Includes: Professional bilingual guides, expedition food and fuel, group camping and climbing equipment, mule support, airport transfer, assistance with climbing permit procedure, double occupancy hotel lodging in Mendoza with breakfast: 2 nights at beginning, 1 night at end; Lodging and meals in Penetentes 1 night.

You are Responsible for: Transportation to and from Mendoza, Argentina, meals in Mendoza, beverages in Penetentes, personal equipment and clothing, optional amenities on the climb such as high altitude porter assistance, travelers cancellation insurance (highly recommended), guide gratuities.

Group Size & Ratio: Minimum 4 and maximum 6 expedition members and 2-3 guides.

THE MOUNTAIN

At just under 7000 meters, Aconcagua ranks as the highest mountain outside of Asia. The name translates to Stone Sentinel from the Inca word, "Acon Cahuak." Located in the heart of the Central Andes, Aconcagua was first climbed in 1897 from the northwest via the Horcornes Valley. Named the Normal Route, it is the most direct way up the mountain.

Grade/Difficulty: Given a Grade II, Aconcagua's Normal Route does not require the use of ropes except for the occasional belay high on the mountain. However, that should not translate to "easy." We will not under-estimate the difficulty of extreme altitude, high winds, scree, snow slopes, and penetentes. These factors combine to make Aconcagua a great mountaineering challenge.

ABOUT AMS EXPEDITIONS

AMS expeditions have a goal of reaching the summit with safety, strength and in good health. Mountaineering is a problem solving discipline, and most failures attribute to poor decision making, while success follows attention to details and good judgment. Summit success requires some luck with the weather, but many variables are in our control and AMS stacks the odds in its favor. We aim to keep to our schedule, knowing that logistics need to be seamless. AMS expeditions travel efficiently, yet our camps are fortified; individual strength is maintained with a healthy diet, and we work together as a team. AMS guides are professional mountain guides; we are climbing instructors committed to mountaineering in a strong, intelligent, enjoyable, and environmentally responsible manner. Having

guides with a solid foundation in teaching as well as personal climbing achievement is a unique quality of AMS and adds greatly to the overall experience for all expedition members. We work hard to help all participants perform at their best.

ACCLIMATIZATION

AMS climbing strategy allows team members enough time to adjust to the lower oxygen environment found at high altitude. The lack of roped travel allows team members to set their own pace and take frequent standing breather-breaks. The menu plan reflects easy to eat foods and emphasizes hydration with soups before dinner. Guides carry altitude medications and a pulse oximeter to measure blood oxygen saturation levels. We have the utmost respect for altitude-related illnesses, prevention is the best cure.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE

Aconcagua is a tremendous challenge; people with experience, physical and mental stamina will enjoy the rigors of expedition life. As a non-technical high altitude climb, Aconcagua does not require a significant amount of prior climbing experience, but the mountain should not be under-estimated. Applicants must be in excellent physical condition and be familiar with winter backpacking, the use of an ice axe for self-arrest, and basic cramponing.

LEADERSHIP AND TEAM WORK

Successful expeditions are properly equipped and have the necessary skills, but most importantly they learn to become a strong team. Leadership reflects the art of effective team building. As a team, we are able to help if someone is having a bad day, but every member must ultimately be a regular contributor for the expedition to be successful. We want you to be rewarded with the climb of a lifetime.

GUIDES

AMS guides are unique professionals who love the mountains and have a gift for climbing, teaching, and mountain guiding. Just being good at guiding is not enough to guarantee success. Our guides are talented climbers with extensive backcountry experience to draw upon. Lead guides have a wealth of experience on Aconcagua as well as guiding on Denali and teaching mountaineering courses. All AMS staff are familiar with altitude-related problems, extreme weather, and know how to set the pace for a successful expedition. All staff have mountain rescue, avalanche safety and wilderness medical training. Their knowledge of the natural and climbing history of the area and personal stories of climbing in South America add to the climb. Their strength, stamina, and leadership are the right ingredients for Aconcagua.

TRAINING

All applicants must adopt a goal of being in excellent physical condition prior to the start of the expedition. On any mountaineering expedition there are factors that are completely out of our control, namely weather and individual acclimatization rates. By joining a professionally run expedition, you leave expedition logistics, food, equipment and leadership to us. The better condition you are in, the more you will enjoy the climb, the safer it will be for you, and the better chance for summitting.

EQUIPMENT

Clothing and equipment on an expedition is put to the ultimate test. A thought-out clothing layering system will be more comfortable, efficient, lightweight, and durable. Read carefully the Equipment List written for this expedition; it answers most questions and gives recommendations for particular items. Some rental equipment is available in Mendoza.

MEALS

AMS provides hearty, nutritious, and balanced meals on its expeditions. Using a tried and tested rations program we successfully balance calories, carbohydrates, fats, proteins and weight to create a variety of creative meals that promote strength and health. Up to Base Camp (Plaza de Mulas), mules carry fresh produce. As we gain altitude, specialized and lighter, more easily digested foods are used. Examples include: hash browns, quesadillas, noodles, rice, mashed potatoes, Ramen, couscous, soups, tortellini, dried vegetables. AMS avoids freeze-dried meal-in-a-bags which lack in substance and flavor. Our rations come from wholesalers and a modern supermarket in Mendoza.

PORTERS

Mules are used from Confluencia to Plaza de Mulas. From there, human porters are available for group or personal gear. We'll be making double carries from Plaza de Mulas to Camp 1 (Canada) and from Canada to Nido. Many climbers on Aconcagua elect to hire porter support, some will do so only on move day, others will not hire porter service. If you are training for Denali, you may wish to choose not to hire porter support. The decision to arrange porters can be made at Plaza de Mulas, payable in U.S. Dollars or Argentine Pesos.

ITINERARY

Our climbing strategy and itinerary is designed to provide us with the most enjoyable experience and the best opportunity to summit.

Day 1, Mendoza

Most flights arrive mid-day and in the afternoon. A driver will meet you outside the baggage claim area and drive you to the El Portal Suites in Mendoza. Normally, we check equipment in your hotel room this afternoon. Should your baggage fail to arrive, we will check your equipment the following day.

Day 2, Mendoza

Logistics day in Mendoza, pick up extra items, hydrate, retrieve lost luggage if necessary, get climbing permits, expedition meeting before dinner.

Day 3, Mendoza, 2428'/740m to Penetentes, 8500'/2600m

After breakfast we check out of the hotel and load our gear into a private mini-bus. Our first stop is the Aconcagua Provincial Park office to finalize our permits. From there we drive on a high way that runs along the Rio Mendoza. After an hour we enter a small village, Ushpallata, and stop for a quick lunch. Another couple hours of driving brings us to a wide mountain pass cresting the Andes Mountains. Penetentes is a ski resort village near our trailhead, where we stay in a hotel and take a short acclimatization hike for views of Aconcagua. Extra gear and valuables can be stored at the hotel.

Day 4, Trailhead, 8924'/2720m to Approach Camp I "Confluencia", 10,500'/3200m

After we have breakfast and check out of the hotel, we drive a short distance to a scenic lake, Laguna Horcories, just northwest of a small army base called Puente del Inca and begin our mule-assisted approach up the Horcories Valley to base camp, Plazas De Mulas. Our first tent camp, Confluencia, is at the confluence of the Rio Horcories Inferior and Rio Horcories Superior. 5 miles hike.

Day 5, Acclimatization Day

Day hike to Aconcagua's South Face, one of the biggest mountain faces in the world and a great photo opportunity day. Of note, the Park Service does not allow camping between Camp I and Base Camp. With such a big elevation gain early in the climb it makes the most sense to take an acclimatization day and spend two nights at 10,500' before moving higher.

Day 6, Approach Camp I "Confluencia" to Base Camp: "Plaza de Mulas," 13,450'/4100m

A 10 mile day up the majestic Horcories Valley to Plaza de Mulas Base Camp.

Day 7, Rest Day

Organize loads for the next day.

Day 8, Carry to Camp I "Canada," 15,750'/4800m

Climb out of Basecamp up steep scree slopes with switch backs to Camp Canada and return to Basecamp.

Day 9, Acclimatization hike up Cerro Bonete, 16,700'/5100m

This is a great way to acclimatize with light daypacks and set everyone up for being strong when committing to the upper mountain.

Day 10, Rest Day Base Camp, 13,450'/4100m

We take another rest day; it is the best way to build strength after exposing oneself to a higher elevation.

Day 11, Move to Camp I: "Canada", 15,750'/4800m

We leave the comforts of base camp and commit ourselves to the upper mountain.

Day 12, Carry to Camp II "Nido," 17,700'/5400m

Exposing ourselves to higher altitude continues the acclimatization process.

Day 13, Move to Camp II "Nido", 17,700'/5400m

With the help of high altitude porters we establish ourselves on the upper flanks of Aconcagua.

Day 14, Rest at Camp II "Nido" or move to Camp III "White Rocks", 19,400'/5900m

After evaluating acclimatization amongst the team we decide whether to take a rest day or make a move to high camp.

Day 15, Move to Camp III or Rest at Camp III "White Rocks", 19,400'/5900m

Porter assisted move to our high camp.

Day 16 or 17 Summit Day, 22,834'

We leave our High Camp for a 12 hour day summit day. The first landmark we pass is Independencia, 20,790' - the remains of the highest hut in the world. We'll soak up the first rays of sun here before moving into the shadows again for El Paso del Viento, Pass of the Wind. This long and exposed traverse leads us into La Canaleta, 21,450'. The Canaleta is a 930' scree ravine and the longest and hardest part of the day. We'll hope for hard packed snow covering the scree. Nearing the top, expect a pace of 4-5 breaths a step. The final 300' traverses the summit ridge with spectacular views down the 10,000' south face. We like to spend an hour on the summit as long as conditions remain stable. Our controlled descent back to camp is rewarded with thicker air with every step.

Day 18, Descend to Base Camp, 13,450'/4100m

The descent is more direct than the ascent and is made easier by the scree.

Day 19, Hike out to Trailhead

Enjoy the hike out to the trailhead with light daypacks. Our mini van meets us at the trailhead. We drive back to Mendoza and the hotel to check into our rooms and go out for a tasty Mendoza dinner.