

21st DECEMBER

I was awake at 8.00am and checked my voice mail from the satellite phone. I was devastated to learn that one of our good friends had died of a heart attack whilst in South Africa on holiday. I was so shocked and felt very low to learn this news. I went and had breakfast and whilst sitting drinking my coffee i heard the sound of hooves. To my excitement our mules had arrived early, although given how long it takes to get them loaded up and ready to go i didnt plan on leaving anytime soon. I found out that we were to take that huge dome mess tent with us which was annoying as i really didnt want our mules overloaded in anyway this trip. I also found out to my horror that the horse that was accompanying our mule train had a very obviously broken leg and was being made to walk back to punta del inca on a broken leg - a nine hour ride. I was mortified about the welfare of this poor animal but what can you do. I also noticed Nacho was back (thats the poor mule that fell into the river on our ride into basecamp) Camel express, Dorjes half dead mule was also here. I gave Nacho and Hamish's mule some toast and crackers which i was thankful that they ate but the other mules wouldnt let me near them.

Finally at 11.30am we were loaded up and ready to go and our manky bedraggled mule train headed out of basecamp and back to civilisation. It was a fairly uneventful ride out thank goodness but it was long and i got crosser and crosser as i saw this poor horse being made to ride out on a leg that was sticking out almost horizontally at this point. Our ride was a full 9 hours and we were all absalutely exhausted and covered in dust. Amazingly i bumped into my old guide Andres Zegggers who took me up Aconcagua in 2001. It was really nice to see him and he was heading to basecamp with one of my friend Rodrigo Mujica's groups from Adventure Patagonicas. I chatted with him for a while and was surprised that he even recognised me through all the dust on my face!

We reached the trailhead at about 7.45pm and i was pretty grumpy to say the least. We were all tired, saddle sore and dirty but at least we were better off than those poor mules. We said our thank you to the Aconcagua Express guys and jumped into our van that would be taking us back to the Hyatt hotel in Mendoza. I couldnt wait to get there and have a shower and think about a holiday on the beach. I was heading to Uruguay for a bit before heading back to Chile to collect my award from General Cheyre that i was given along with all my Chilean team in recognition of our Everest Climb. It was a huge honour and i was very excited to be receiving this award.

I was so happy to have made the summit of Aconcagua and i have to thank Adventure Consultants for being so accomodating to my plans especially on the swiftness of the Aconcagua climb and for helping me reach 5 summits on 5 different continents in 5 months post Everest. Im so happy that they are now behind me and i am now getting myself prepared to climb Denali in the spring, luckily with a little break between the climbs so i can have some form of life prior to then!!