

9th DECEMBER

I was woken again by boots and crampons crunching on the ice and as i poked my nose out of our tent i saw Phil's group starting to leave camp 3 already. We got up and started packing up all our gear, our rucksacks were going to be even heavier as we had two loads worth to carry down to camp 1 and then onto basecamp. Hamish and i wanted to put a "for sale" sign on our taj mahal tent but needless to say Luis vetoed that idea. I have never seen Luis in such a bad mood as when we made the terrible discovery that we had a phantom sprayer in our poo bag. To make matters even worse Luis lost a bet with Hamish about whom would carry the poo bag down the mountain and in loosing the bet it was decided that it would go ontop of his already very heavy pack. I was busying myself trying to find the culprit and was accusing everyone in Guys group of using our bag. This is what happens when you spend 10 days in the mountains!

I was in a foul mood coming down the headwall my pack was so unbelievably heavy and my hip, back and shoulders were in such pain. With a sulky face we finally arrived back at camp 1 whereby we could at least re distribut the weight of our packs ( not get rid of it i hasten to add!) by putting them in our sledge. We then got news that we would be flown from basecamp to Patriot Hills tonight at 10.00pm so we quickly got the sledges ready and started back down to basecamp. I didnt know why at this stage but i was put to the back of our sledge line instead of my usual place in the middle. It didnt take too long for me to figure out why i was at the back... after my sledge had rammed into my heels 15 times as we descended, bursting my blisters as it hit me hard on the back of my ankles. I then got tripped up completely and Hamish oblivious to my plight kept motoring down the hill and in doing so dragged me along the snow tangled up in the ropes. I finally lost it especially after spotting Vern at the back of his rope team. I switched places with Hamish and resumed my role in the middle of the rope and i listened to Luis as he told me to keep the rope tort so as not to bang his sledge into his heels. WIth an evil glint in my eye and my heels still throbbing i took on board his instructions. Just outside of basecamp somehow my rope developed some slack and i saw Luis jumping a foot into the air as his sledge rammed him hard on his heels! Oh im so sorry Luis i muttered insincerely!!

Finally we were back at basecamp and Rob Cracked open wine, champagne and beer and we began to celebrate their wedding in style. It was so cool hanging out at basecamp eating and drinking whilst enjoying some of the most stunning scenery on earth. The twin otters arrived and Phils group went on the first plane and Andronicos and Verns group went on the second plane. I watched the planes take off and i have to say i was worried about Andronicos plane that seemed to take ages to gain any elevation. It just seemed a little overloaded but finally they started to gain altitude and dissappear over the horizon.

Our plane came 2 hours later with the same canadian pilots who flew us into basecamp flying it, we all clambered eagily on board, said goodbye to Neil and Heather whom were staying at basecamp until january and soon we were lifting off

the snow and headed to Patriot Hills. This flight i was sitting next to John Rost and only had to grab on a couple of times, im such a nervous flier that inevitably i always end up clinging to someone. We landed at Patriot Hills and i was met off the plane and told to join Andronico and Gabby at the ALE tent where they had provided dinner. Taking Kat and Rob with me we went over and joined them and hung out there for a couple of hours whilst waiting for the illusion jet to land. The winds were picking up now and it was fifty fifty whether the plane would be able to land at Patriot or not, it was expected to arrive at 3.00am and we were supposed to leave at 5.00am. Finally i spied it in the distance and ran out of the tent frantically waiving my arms in the air in the vague hope that they would see us and try really hard to land! Luck was on our side and soon that beast of a plane was touching down on the ice. I was so excited about being able to leave!!

At 5.00am we were ready to board the plane. We walked to the plane in an icy wind and i watched with horror as two landrover defenders were parked in the middle of our plane. How heavy was our plane going to be i thought to myself as i saw the two landrovers, 40 peoples worth of expedition equipment, barrels and barrels of used toilet waste etc all being loaded onto the plane. I scrambled on through the back of the plane and sat with Andronico and Gabby. Eventually we were ready to go - short of the tents at Patriot Hills, i felt like we had everything conceivably possible on board. The take off was so scarey, we finally took off and about 20 minutes after take off as we were bouncing around, i saw the steward ( if you can call him that) looking visibly terrified. I looked out of the window, i was sitting next to the one small window on the plane and to my horror i saw that we were still only about 50 feet off the ground. I lost it and started sobbing into Andronicos shoulder, absalutely convinced that this was it. I couldnt believe we were still so low after being in the air 20 minutes! Finally we started to gain altitude but i was a nervous, tired wreck. After about 5 hours of trying to sleep we started our descent into Punta Arenas and before i knew it we were on the ground, off the snow and ice at last! We all headed back to our hotel and we were all exhausted having been awake the whole night, I arranged for Luis, Hamish and myself to fly to Santiago the next day and then onto Mendoza to get ready to start our next climb Aconcagua. We had a great team farewell dinner last night and im now sitting on the plane as we fly back to Santiago. I cannot actually believe im about to start another climb on Monday ( its now saturday) Im aching in every bone, i have four huge blisters on my feet and ive lost weight which i dont like to do. The plan is to ride into Plaza Argentinas on the mules to save some time, i guess we can look forward to a different stiffness after 2 days in the saddle, i just hope my mule is more obedient than my sledge that i was towing on Vinson! Vinson was a wonderful trip for me, Kat and Rob Fellows were such great company, we always had a laugh even when we were waiting anxiously for the weather. JR and Andy were great to have around and it was so fun to beat John at backgammon, the fact that we set the board up completely wrong was inconsequential to my defeat!! Hamish is so fun to have around and always makes me laugh and Luis and Guy were fantastic team leaders. Im so happy to have reached the summit of Vinson..... next goal Aconcagua..