

14th DECEMBER

Hamish woke me at 7.00am so that we could do some filming prior to our 9.00am departure. At 9.15am we were at the trailhead with all of our mules milling around. An hour and a half later our mules were loaded and we were ready to go, or so i thought, when suddenly one bolted off back to its coral with all the others following at a gallop. One mule managed to buck off its load to add to the craziness. Miraculously it didn't take too long for them to be brought back and re loaded and we were finally ready to try and catch up with the 3 teams that had left ahead of us on foot whom by now had more than a couple of hours on us! I chatted with a few of the South African team, Barry and Russell, i think they were a group of about 10 people and they were about to start walking in too. Everyone walking in would effectively be a day behind us in getting to basecamp. Finally our mule train started to head out onto the trail. Hamish's mule called Danielle had ears that were so long and constantly on this full rotation mode that i thought perhaps he might fly into base camp. Dorjes mule we named camel express - poor thing looked like he should be in retirement - very thin and fragile but amazingly enough despite his scrawny appearance, he kept up well by doing a very fast jiggling type of walk which caused Dorje a huge amount of pain on his backside as he got bounced around in the saddle!! Luis did whatever his mule wanted and was often found grazing leisurely or breaking into a trot whenever it felt like it. I got my come uppance at our spot that we stopped at for lunch. Hamish wanted to film a scene and told me to get back on the mule. As i sprung into the saddle with my back pack on, the weight from the top of the pack sent me continuing over the saddle and down the other side so that i was hanging upside down from one stirrup. Luckily my mule didn't walk off or i would have been hurt but as i was yelling to the boys for help from my rather undignified position of hanging upside down off the mule all i could hear was hysterical laughter and no one came to help me!! I managed to get my foot out of the stirrup eventually and scarlet faced with rage saved myself, the boys still laughing!

After 7 hours in the saddle on the thinnest of sheepskin saddles we are all in agony. My legs almost seized up to the point whereby i couldn't dismount. We are now at camp 2 and I'm lying immobilised in my tent. We are meant to be able to see stunning views of Aconcagua from here but there is bad weather concealing the mountain. I am praying that this weather clears soon so that we can get a shot at our proposed rapid ascent.. Im going to ease my aching muscles into my sleeping bag now - I still can't believe I'm already attempting to climb another mountain.