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Successful summit for Loeffler

by Jeff Green



Dr. TA Loeffler atop of Mount Aconcagua, South America's highest peak, late last month.

She did it! After a gruelling trek up South America's highest peak, Dr. TA Loeffler, a professor in the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation, made it to the top late last month.

It was a personal triumph for Dr. Loeffler, who has taught at Memorial since 1995.

Armed with lots of determination – and a unique training regime she developed last fall with Dr. Fabien Basset, an exercise physiologist at Memorial – Dr. Loeffler reached the top of Mount Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Southern Hemisphere, on Dec. 28, 2006.

Aconcagua, which is located in Argentina, stands an astounding 6,959 metres (22,831 feet) above sea level.

Dr. Loeffler left for her journey on Dec. 10 and returned to this province on Jan. 2.

She said despite the extreme weather she was ecstatic to summit the mountain.

"I'm tired. I'm thrilled. I'm trying to process all of the past three weeks – the extreme weather made for an intense climb and the summit was never a given," she wrote on her personal website. "We needed five days of good weather in row (after a period where it granted us no more than one nice day at a time) ... and we got them. The view from the summit was amazing."

Dr. Loeffler said she credits Dr. Basset with helping her reach her goal. He has done research at Memorial looking into the effect of high

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altitude training on sea level performance. Last semester, Dr. Loeffler used a high-tech piece of equipment known as the Go2Altitude, which Dr. Bassett uses on a regular basis in his research.

"The machine deoxygenates the air that I breathe through the mask," Dr. Loeffler explained last month. "It allows high altitude to be simulated at sea level. It has allowed me to begin the process of acclimatization before getting near the mountain. I'm likely to be the only one of my expeditions to have used it."

Dr. Loeffler said she is still coming off the high of conquering Aconcagua – the third of the "seven summits" she has attempted in the past year and a half. She climbed to the top of North America's highest mountain, Mount McKinley, in 2005 and in early 2006 attempted Mount Elbrus, the highest peak in Russia. She fell short of her goal after fierce winds kept her team from reaching the top.

Meanwhile, Dr. Loeffler said her climb up Aconcagua gives her more ambition – and energy – to reach her ultimate goal – Mount Everest, which she plans to climb later this year.

"The response from people in the province to my latest summit success has touched my heart," she said. "After weeks in the wind and cold, I have returned to a warm and wonderful welcome. I am honoured and deeply pleased that my mountaineering adventures are inspiring young and old alike to become more physically active and healthy. I know I carried the well wishes of many supporters up the mountain and I'm counting on them all being there for the 'Big One' in April."

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