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Well-known prof trains for latest summit



By Jeff Green

Tackling South America's highest peak is often considered a rite of passage for consummate climbers but for one Memorial professor the gruelling expedition is preparation for her next journey – conquering the world's tallest mountaintop.

Dr. TA Loeffler, a respected and award-winning member from the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation, is spending the holidays this year on a backbreaking climb up Mount Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Southern Hemisphere. Located in Argentina, it stands a staggering 22,831 feet (6,950 metres) above sea level.

She left St. John's on Dec. 10 and flew south of the border where she and a team of 10 climbers and three guides met for their journey, which began on Dec. 13. She's expected to summit Aconcagua on Boxing Day and return to Canada early in the new year.

Before heading to South America earlier this month to climb the highest mountain in the Southern

Hemisphere, Dr. TA Loeffler spent many hours training on the St.

John's. Here, she's seen using a special piece of equipment known as

the Go2Altitude which is used by Dr. Fabien Basset, a colleague of hers from the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation.

If the weather's holds up, Dr. Loeffler will have plenty of strength and energy to reach for the top thanks in part to a unique training regime developed this fall with an exercise physiologist here at Memorial.

"Thanks to Dr. Fabien Basset, who does research investigating the effect of high altitude training on sea level performance, I have had access to very specialized equipment," Dr. Loeffler said before her trip.

For several weeks this semester, Dr. Loeffler strapped on a special mask in the basement of the Physical Education Building and "worked out" on a treadmill. The mask was part of a high-tech piece of equipment known as the Go2Altitude which Dr. Basset uses on a regular basis in his research.

"The machine deoxygenates the air that I breathe through the mask," Dr. Loeffler explained. "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."

Aconcagua is the third of the "seven summits" Dr. Loeffler will attempt in as many months. She reached the top of Mount McKinley – North America's tallest mountain – last year, and earlier this year she attempted Mount Elbrus, the highest peak in Russia. She fell short of her goal after fierce winds kept her team from reaching the top.

Although she'll be away from home for the holidays, Dr. Loeffler knows the experience will last a lifetime.

"I've packed battery-powered lights for my tent, candy canes and a Santa hat from Lisa Hollett, director of HR, to make sure I can create some Christmas spirit on the mountain," she said, adding she has spent the holidays away from home before, climbing Mexican volcanoes and a summit in South Africa.

Before suiting up for her latest expedition – and in between her tough exercise route – Dr. Loeffler also spent time speaking with more than 3,000 young students across the province about her upcoming plans to tackle Mount Everest in 2007. Her theme for the presentations has been Big Dreams, Big Goals. She's hoping to inspire others to follow their dreams and become more physically active.

"I hope the university community will follow my latest expedition up Aconcagua – and when I tackle Everest – online at <http://www.taloeffler.com/> and cheer me on," she said. "I need all the luck, prayers and good wishes I can get."

While on her expedition, Dr. Loeffler is posting written accounts and photos on her Mount Aconcagua

[website.](#)

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