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Prof climbs Aconcagua, prepares for Everest

Students, friends inspire Loeffler to the top

By Shawn Hayward

While most people spent their holidays at home, human kinetics and recreation professor TA Loeffler spent her vacation in a remote region of Argentina climbing Aconcagua, the highest peak in the Southern Hemisphere.

Loeffler's tour guide began her party's ascent with a discouraging statistic.



Human kinetics and recreation professor TA Loeffler holds up a Canadian flag from the highest peak in the Southern Hemisphere. Her goal is to climb Mount Everest. [Photo: Submitted]

"But what can you do? You just keep moving up."
Human kinetics prof TA Loeffler.

"We learned that of the 900 people who attempted the summit that month, only six actually made it. But what can you do? You just keep moving up," she said.

While the party was eager to reach the summit, their guide suggested they wait for better weather.

High winds foiled some of the climbers, Loeffler says.

"Biggest winds I've ever seen outside – 130 to 140 kilometres per hour. It sounds like a freight train just coming down," she said.

"The head guy was brilliant, because that night, huge winds, everyone who went up got battered. They all came down the very next day and got off the mountain because they were so tired and beaten. We waited one more day and at that point we needed five days of good weather, and we got them."

By Christmas day they were well up the mountain. They climbed for five hours, then celebrated the holiday.

"I delivered mini candy canes to everyone after we set up camp. We had Christmas cake for breakfast," she said.

They arrived at the summit two days later than planned. Loeffler was one of four people to make it to the top, out of an original 10-person party.

"What was amazing was you stand there at close to 7,000 metres, the next day we dropped already to 4,200 metres. They had beer and pizza there waiting for us, so that was very good," she said.

Loeffler recalls only one serious instance of doubt.

"It was on summit day. We were coming across a place called the Windy Traverse. Always windy. Its -20, [with] wind chill -30 or -40," she recalled.

"I sat there having a conversation with myself. 'Can I stop? Well, yeah, I think the people back home would understand. I could just let them know I just didn't have it in me. It was a long expedition, hard weather,'" she said.

"Then I thought of all those kids – the 4,000 kids I talked to before coming. Then I remembered my friend Deb who's just gone through chemotherapy for breast cancer treatment and I said, 'You know what? I think I can take a few more steps.'"

With Aconcagua completed, Loeffler's next objective is the highest mountain of them all: Mount Everest. Her adventure in South America was part of the preparation for that goal.

"It was a critical expedition because it gave me chance to test out my Everest boots, several new clothing systems, my mitts, my gloves," she said. "Getting to experience that kind of high altitude at the equator; getting to practice patience."

Despite a slow start to fundraising, Loeffler is willing to make financial sacrifices for her expedition to Everest.

When asked if the trip is definite, she replied, "It's definite. It's called the credit line on the house. You can't do that level of physical preparation and mental preparation if it was a maybe."