

by Mark Quinn

# EVEREST ADVENTURE

26 year old Limerick native Mark Quinn is attempting to become the youngest Irish person ever to climb Mt Everest when he tackles the world's highest peak in March. While he needs to raise funds for his own expedition he's also attempting to raise a staggering €29,035 for local charity, The Shane Geoghegan Trust.

That's a euro for every foot of Mt Everest. Visit his website [highaltitudeireland.org](http://highaltitudeireland.org) for ways to donate.

## Follow his path to the top of the world exclusively here in Limelite

I don't know who came up with the saying 'on top of the world', because believe me, it doesn't feel that good." Words of experience from a man who has stood on the highest point in the world, and yet these words bizarrely make me more determined to see for myself... Mt Everest is the tallest point in the world. Standing at 8,848m above sea level it has claimed more than 250 lives since the first ascent by Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing in 1953.

In the highly revered death zone (over 8,000m) there is one third the oxygen in the air that you get at sea level. The body produces more red blood cells to cope and this increases the risk of pulmonary and cerebral edema- altitude sickness. Your brain function slows and the slightest movement seems like a titanic effort. Altitude is the biggest killer on Mt Everest and even those deaths not directly related to altitude like a fall, can

probably be attributed to poor decisions brought on by the effects of altitude. Altitude sickness can affect even the most experienced climbers and has defeated many hopeful climbers before they even reach advanced base camp. Reaching her summit is universally regarded as one of the toughest achievements someone can aim for.

My own quest to climb her started over three years ago. I've toured Ireland, run marathons



and travelled halfway across the world in order to train myself for what will undoubtedly be the hardest, most terrifying and debilitating thing I've ever put my body through- not to mention what it's doing to my mother. The only way to train for altitude is to experience it and test your body. This won't offer you any guarantees of success, but it is essential to put your body through the paces before heading for Everest. My training was raised to a higher level at the beginning of 2010.

In the middle of last January I landed in Mendoza, Argentina, a region visited primarily for its wine and... its mountains! A few days later I was joined by a group of nine Polish climbers including our guide, the esteemed Rysiek Pawlowski, a veteran high altitude mountaineer. He has climbed with the greatest names in Polish climbing and was on the other end of the broken rope that plunged Jurek Kukuczka to his death in 1989. It is with this great man and the rest of our group that I took on Aconcagua, the highest mountain outside of Asia.

Aconcagua stands at 6962m, featuring the notorious Caneleta, a one thousand foot 'staircase' leading to the summit. Our expedition involved making our way from Puente del Inca to Confluencia, the half way camp along the 32km Horcones Valley, continuing on to Plaza De Mulas, the

Base Camp, acclimatising there and then at two further camps, before finally summiting. The whole process took 18 days and was the single most gruelling experience of my life so far. Puente del Inca is a natural archway over the Vacas river and it is a place of stunning beauty, but my mind was on the goal: to summit Aconcagua, a big milestone on the road to Everest. While waiting for our permits to clear, we trained on nearby peaks, acclimatising and trying to suffer the unbearable 40 degree heat. We slept soundly, exhausted, under the stars, which is not so romantic when sharing a deck with 9 sweating men and women who don't speak English! When our permits cleared on the 1st of February we made our way to Confluencia where the mood at camp was grim. Storms had been pounding the summit for more than a week; nobody we met had successfully ascended. As with any climb, nature can render it impossible to complete. The next day's trek was gruelling. We made our way up the moraines and arrived at base camp, thoroughly exhausted. We pitched our tents and all collapsed into the mess tent to cook our first base camp feast. At 4,370 metres we were all feeling the effects of the altitude. Two of our team mates had turned back. Now we were only eight. We all looked around wondering who would be next to fall. Feeling the slump in morale, Rysiek

produced a bottle of Tullamore Dew and once the Poles had perfected the pronunciation of the word 'Sláinte', we enjoyed the tippie and trudged off to our respective tents.

The following day I woke with a lot more energy, my body adjusting to the decreased oxygen in the air. Our final medical check cleared all of us for the summit. The next few days were spent ferrying loads to Camp 1, Nido De Condores, at 5,570m. Tents, fuel, food. Tents, fuel, food: each trip allowing our bodies to acclimate to the higher ground. A couple of days rest gave our grateful bodies time to recover. Eventually the time came for us to move to Nido. Gone were the luxuries of Mulas-a stream that thawed enough in the afternoon to get fresh water and the tin hut that provided the all important hole-in-the-ground. Nido provided only a flat space to pitch our tents. We waited here until word came through of a break in the weather. After hearing of a three day window that was to begin on Wednesday, we made training runs to Camp Berlin and on to Camp Colera, 5,980m, from where we would make our summit attempt.....

**Continued next month!**