

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 for ways to donate.

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

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After moving to Camp Colera, we woke at 4:30AM on Thursday 11th of February, ready for the final push. It took about an hour to prepare our packs and to melt enough snow for a cup of coffee. We set off at 5:30AM. I was completely focused and ready for the climb and I shot off ahead of my group. Conditions are perfect, no excuses, you have to make the summit.

It was pitch black but in the distance ahead I could see a pair of headlamps, and I caught up and passed out two more climbers shortly before reaching the shoulder. Here I met a couple of climbers who had stopped to photograph the sunrise that was just beginning to stain the sky crimson. Watching the sun rise over the Andes that morning is still one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen, but I

refused to take a picture and continued ahead. I had taped my camera battery to my chest after it had frozen several days earlier. I couldn't risk missing out on the all important summit picture. I progressed for several hours, enjoying the challenge of picking out the best route and stopping to load up on precious calories and tea. Eventually I reached the ridge at Independencia Camp and began crossing the traverse.

I can't tell you how long it took to make the traverse, the altitude was really taking affect, and it was sometimes hard to keep going on. Freezing winds battered the exposed slope and screamed in my ears. The gravelly scree fell away beneath my crampons and plunged hundreds of meters to an unseen fate. Step after exhausted step. Eventually I just watched my feet. Every time I looked up I saw an impossible distance ahead of me. I just watched my feet and eventually the wind died down. I'd made it across! I dragged myself over to a convenient outcrop of rock to sit on and ate further into my supplies. I watched another climber struggle in my shadow along the traverse without envy. When he reached me he looked as shook as I felt. We exchanged food and drink and eventually came right again. My new German friend looked at me with a smirk. "You know, the hardest bit is still ahead." We both looked to the right and up, to the Caneleta, a thousand foot staircase to the summit. Together we embarked on the final assault. Again, I can't tell you how long

we were on there. One foot in front of the other. I walked as long as I could, stopped for breath, went again. Every step was a struggle in that final push. One foot in front of the other, until we looked up and there was no more up. Just Andes in every direction, disappearing into the horizon on a beautiful clear day. I checked the time, 10:37AM. We spent twenty minutes on that peak taking pictures and revelling in the moment, but then the descent. The Caneleta took concentration on the way down and at the base we met the first of the climbers behind us, including one of the pair I had started that morning with. She told me that the other had been turned back by the altitude. On the traverse I met Rysiek, who shook my hand and smiled. "I'll see you in the Himalaya." I didn't find out until we were back at camp that we had smashed the average summit time of eight hours. It was an incredible, testing expedition that I am incredibly proud of. However, Aconcagua was only a step on the road to Everest, a road that started three years ago with Carrauntoohil. I'm not sure

what I am now but when I started on this road I was no sportsman, no athlete. To be honest if Aconcagua is the highest mountain I ever summit I will still consider this whole endeavour a hugely fulfilling life experience. Anyone can come this far, you just need to see your goal, see the road and put one foot in front of the other!

Visit our website www.limelitemag.ie to read Mark's full story and for exclusive video diaries of his training as he prepares to tackle Everest!

to be continued next month!



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