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## **Aconcagua by the Guanacos Traverse - Itinerary**

**An adventurous exploration of Aconcagua 6,959m. We will make a complete traverse of the mountain and experience its entire character. Our route via the Guanacos valley is a wild and pristine alternative to the heavily traveled routes of the Horcones and Relinchos valleys. Only recently explored, this route promises you freedom from crowds, clean trails and camp areas, breath-taking views of the neighboring peaks and glaciers, and abundant wildlife. In addition, the Guanacos route also offers the most gradual approach and climb of Aconcagua, with gently moderate trekking between camps. We believe that an un-hurried acclimatization will offer a safer and more comfortable climb, and a rate of success not possible on other routes.**

**Day 1** Team members meet at the Hotel Aconcagua in Mendoza, Argentina. Following an afternoon meeting with the guides, we will conduct an individual equipment check. There are numerous gear shops in Mendoza, and any needed equipment can be rented or purchased there. We will dine together at one of Mendoza's world-class restaurants. The Mendoza province is famous for its fine red wines and its wood-fire cooked beef steaks. Hotel lodging.

**Day 2** The required climbing permits are available only in person at the Mendoza Provincial Parks department. After obtaining our permits, we will transfer via private mini-bus to the ski-area village of Pennitentes. The 3-hour drive to Pennitentes follows the valley of the Rio Mendoza. In some places a mile wide and in others frighteningly narrow, this valley is a living lesson in mountain geology and erosion. This has been part of the route between the Pacific Ocean and the plains of Argentina for centuries, and we see evidence of this in ancient roadways and bridges dating from the 18th century, and the more modern railway line abandoned in the 1980's. At Hotel Ayelen in Pennitentes, we'll prepare our loads for the mules that will carry our personal and group gear to Base Camp. We'll only need to carry with us the bare essentials for the day; lunch, drinking water, sun protection, our shell jackets, and an extra clothing layer. Our mule loads will be available to us each night of the trek, so adjustments can be made on a daily basis. Hotel lodging.

**Day 3** We begin the first day's trek at Punta Vacas, where 3 rivers ( the Tupungato, the Horcones, and the Rio Vacas), join to form the Rio Mendoza. Our trek to Base Camp will follow the rio Vacas to its headwaters, only meters from its source at the Vacas Glacier. At Punta Vacas, we'll meet our team of Arrieros (professional mule drivers). In this, and many other parts of the developing world, managing beasts of burden is still a valuable trade, and these skilled men make the success of our climb possible. Our trek to Pampa Lena ( meaning "the meadow with sticks for fire-wood") usually takes 4-5 hours. Plant life is most abundant on this first day, and we'll pass through grassy river-bottoms dotted with numerous wild-flowers.

**Day 4** The second day of our trek begins with a bridge crossing the rio Vacas and continues up the valley, which becomes quite wide here. Plants become more scarce, and those found here tend to be more compact and lower to the ground than those found in the moister, lower elevations. Just before reaching the second trekking camp, we'll be treated with a spectacular view of the East Face of Aconcagua, highlighted by the Polish Glacier. When viewed from this vantage, our Guanacos route lies just out of view behind the right-hand sky-line. The trek today to Casa Piedra (meaning "stone house") is longer than yesterday's, usually taking 5-6 hours. We generally arrive in the early afternoon, allowing ample time to prepare a delicious asado (the traditional Argentine barbeque).

**Day 5** Our route today begins to take on much more of a wilderness flavor as it continues up the valley of the Rio Vacas. Climbers bound for the Polish Glacier route and its variants will diverge from Case Piedra and follow the course of the Rellinchos Valley.

Views of the peaks and glaciers of the Cordillera de los Pennitentes are quite impressive, and wildlife sightings, especially guanacos and condor, are common here.

The mules carry their loads as far as Plaza Guanacos, our base camp at 3,650 Meters and our home for the next few days.

Today's hike to Plaza Guanacos is more demanding than the 2 previous days, generally taking 7-8 hours and requiring some easy knee-deep stream crossings.

**Day 6** Today will be an appreciated rest day in Base Camp. A thorough rest and recovery of over-worked joints and muscles feels wonderful. More important, though, is a chance for the crucial acclimatization processes to catch up with our ascent progress.

We'll also use today as a chance to familiarize the team with the use of our safety and emergency equipment, including the hyperbaric chamber, oxygen cylinder, and radio and satellite telephone. We'll also discuss our movement strategies on the mountain, and prepare our first loads to carry up to camp 1.

**Day 7** We begin our movement up the mountain in "classic expedition style", meaning we'll carry loads in stages and return to lower camps for aided acclimatization. Today we'll haul a load of food, fuel, and climbing equipment to Camp 1 at 4,150 Meters. The climb is on a gentle trail ascending through moraines, and usually takes 3-4 hours.

After caching our loads, we'll descend back to Plaza Guanacos for a final night in the comfort of Base Camp.

**Day 8** Since our climbing route involves a descent via a different route, we'll need to prepare all extra equipment for the Arrieros before we leave Base Camp. This equipment will remain cached at Plaza Guanacos until we've made the final move to our High Camp, insuring it's available to us for the duration of the climb.

Camp 1 affords us some of the finest views of the route, with an eye-level vantage of the peaks and glaciers of the Cordillera de los Pennitentes to the north, and the Polish Glacier towering above us to the south. The camp is comfortable, with running streams for water near camp and shelter from Aconcagua's trade-mark winds.

**Days 9-18** We continue moving up the route in expedition style, resting as necessary, to put ourselves into position for a summit attempt. Normally, we will make Camp 2 at 4,700 Meters and Camp 3 at 5,300 Meters. Our food and fuel loads become lighter as we move up the mountain, allowing us to make the final move to Camp 4, Piedras Blancas 5,850 Meters, in a single push.

From Piedras Blancas, we follow the Normal NW Ridge Route to the summit. The climbing becomes steep in places, without ever becoming technical. Proper use of the ice axe and crampons is important in the most famous portion of the route, the Canaleta, where snow slopes reach 35 degrees. The remainder of the route is little more than high-altitude trekking on snow and scree. Our main considerations are to protect ourselves from cold and wind, and to keep a sustainable pace.

The climb to the summit from Piedras Blancas usually takes 4-7 hours, and the descent another 3-5 hours. If we summit on or before day 18, we can sleep an additional night at Piedras Blancas and descend to Plaza de Mulas on day 19. If we summit on day 19, we'll take sufficient rest at Piedras Blancas, then descend to Plaza de Mulas later the same day.

**Day 19** We'll prepare our equipment for the Arrieros, have an early breakfast, and begin our trek back to Pennitentes. It's a long hike today, usually taking 6-8 hours, but mostly down-hill and with showers and cold beer waiting for us at the hotel!

We'll spend a final night at the Hotel Ayelen in Pennitentes and enjoy a celebration dinner together.

**Day 20** Our private mini-bus takes us back to Mendoza, signaling the end of the expedition. It's possible to catch an afternoon flight, or we can help you arrange a hotel or other arrangements to extend your visit.