



# IWLS

International Wilderness Leadership School

## Aconcagua Leadership and Guide Training Course

Cerro Aconcagua is located in the central Andes of Argentina near the border with Chile. At 22,841ft (6,962m), it is one of the seven summits and the only peak outside of Asia that reaches this high altitude. Aconcagua is a focal point of activity in the international outdoor recreation industry. It is high quality, non-technical climbing in a pristine environment. IWLS director Sean Gaffney pioneered the first ascent of the Guanacos route in 1996.

Picture yourself waking up at first light to start melting snow for water, trekking among a field of penitentes as you haul a load to camp II, and assessing the groups' acclimation trends using a pulse oximeter. You'll climb high and sleep low as we ascend the mountain, learn to recognize symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness, and lead the group in setting up high camp in fierce winds.



This unique leadership and guide training course is truly one of a kind. The challenging environment of Aconcagua's high mountain slopes demands high quality leadership and technical competence. Students have an opportunity to learn from the best, climb the highest peak in the Western Hemisphere, and develop the experience and leadership skills needed for leading on the tallest peaks of the world.

### Course Goals:

This course requires that all participants have basic mountaineering experience.

- Students will gain a technical mountaineering skill set and appropriate traveling techniques as they apply on Aconcagua.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to professionally deal with emergency scenarios while in the field as they apply on Aconcagua.
- Students will be able to use and teach state-of-the art minimum-impact camping and travel techniques to move a group with minimum impact.
- They will be able to exercise good quality judgment and decision-making skills within a leadership position to help avoid potential accident and survival situations and develop a comprehensive understanding of safety considerations in the high altitude mountain environment.
- They will be able to recognize their own leadership and physical abilities and limitations within the context of a group. Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to make decisions and lead small groups to high altitude.

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## Course Itinerary

**Day 0:** Arrive in Mendoza. An instructor will meet you at the airport with an IWLS sign.

**Day 1:** Mendoza to Penitentes. In the morning we will get our park service climbing permits, and go over risk management considerations for expedition planning. Then we travel by private passenger van for approximately 3 hours to the winter resort community of Penitentes where we will spend the evening. Penitentes, situated at approx. 9,000 ft., is a good elevation to begin acclimatizing. After getting situated in our rooms at the lodge we will do a check of everyone's equipment, pack clothing and gear for the next morning, and pack bags for the mules. Dinner is in the lodge.

**Day 2:** Penitentes to Pampa Lena.

After breakfast in the lodge, we will trek for approximately four hours up the Vacas valley to our first camp at Pampa Lena (9,200 ft.). The valley is spectacular and the hiking is in a warm, high Andean landscape.

**Day 3:** Pampa Lena to Casa Piedra.

After packing up in the morning we will use a mule to ferry us across the Vacas River. Hiking time is approximately six hours to our camp at Casa Piedra (11,000 ft.). The deep valleys open up as we travel forward, and we get our first views of the mountain.

**Day 4:** Casa Piedra to Base Camp.

Hiking time is approximately eight hours to our Base Camp (12,800 ft.). There is a lot of opportunity to see wild guanaco, a relative of the llama, throughout the day. We also have beautiful views of the Vacas Glacier and all of the glaciers in the upper Vacas valley.

**Day 5:** Rest/Acclimatization Day.

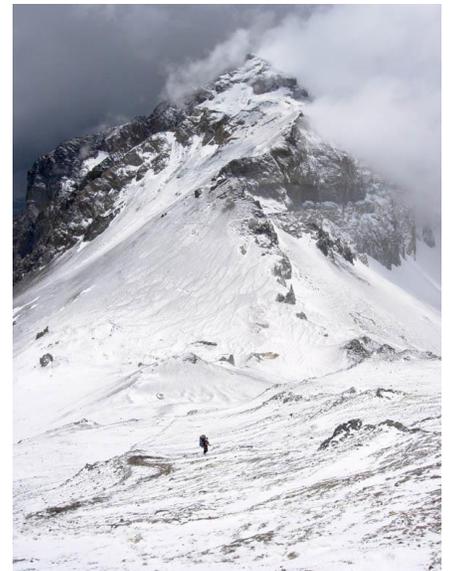
**Day 6:** Carry Equipment and Supplies to Camp 1 (14,800 ft.).

Hiking time is approximately six to eight hours round trip.

**Day 7:** Rest/Acclimatization Day.

**Day 8:** Move to Camp 1.

Hiking time is approximately four to six hours. Camp 1 has spectacular views of the upper mountain.





**Day 9:** Rest/Acclimatization Day.

**Day 10:** Carry Equipment and Supplies to Camp 2 (16,000 ft.).  
Hiking time is approximately six to eight hours round trip.

**Day 11:** Move to Camp 2.  
Hiking time is approximately six to eight hours.

**Day 12:** Rest and Acclimatization. Mid-course evaluations: Lead instructors will assess participants' level of involvement and assessment rubrics associated with the IWLS curriculum. These, in conjunction with peer evaluations, allow participants to receive positive feedback and develop awareness in regards to fulfilling the requirements to receive certification as an outdoor leader.

**Day 13:** Carry Equipment and Supplies to Camp 3 (20,000 ft.).  
Hiking time is approximately eight hours round trip. High Camp is located at White Rocks on the North Ridge. It is an outstanding high camp that is one of the best protected on the mountain. It is less crowded and more sanitary than other high camps, and its placement saves an hour of travel time on summit morning relative to the regular high camp on the normal route.



**Day 14:** Move to Camp 3 (High Camp- Cholera)

Camp 3 is at approximately 20,000 ft. and is located just below the Polish Glacier. We traverse from Camp 2 to meet up with the upper portion of the Guanacos route and Camp 3. White Rocks possesses the excellent combination of being high enough to keep the length of summit day to an appropriate duration, without being too high and having the increased likelihood of sleeping poorly/difficulty with altitude. The next protected spot for a high camp is much further up and it is too high to sleep well there. Camp 3 offers breathtaking views of many of the highest peaks of the Andes!

**Day 15:** Summit Day!

We are up early to prepare. Summit day is usually eight to fourteen hours.

It is a demanding day, but climbers are rewarded with stunning views across the Andes in all directions. Don't forget your camera!

**Day 16-17:** These days are included to accommodate time for additional acclimatization/rest, and weather days. These extra days are built in to provide the best possible conditions for each individual to summit. Ample contingency days are important to accommodating changing individual and group needs. In the last few days of the course we will have final peer and instructor evaluations. Students will be evaluated on their understanding and completion of the IWLS curriculum.





**Day 18:** High Camp to Plaza Mulas.

We will descend from our High Camp to Plaza Mulas, the base camp for the normal route. We carry all of our equipment in one load for the 6,000 foot descent.

**Day 19:** Plaza Mules to Penitentes.

We hike for approximately eight to ten hours down the Horcones Valley to the trailhead. We use mules to help carry the majority of our loads to Punta de Vacas. The Horcones Valley is quite different from the Vacas valley that we use for our approach. It is interesting to see both sides of the mountain. By hiking back out from the mountain this way we complete a circumnavigation of Aconcagua!

There is a ranger station at the trailhead where we will check out of the park, and meet our ride back to lodge in Penitentes.

We plan to stay the night at the lodge in Penitentes, but it is sometimes possible to arrange for transportation back to Mendoza that same evening.

**Day 20:** Penitentes to Mendoza.

After a good breakfast in the lodge we will travel by private passenger van back to Mendoza. In the evening we like to have a celebratory dinner in one of Mendoza's many outstanding restaurants.

**Day 21:** Flights Home.

*\*Aconcagua is a summit oriented learning opportunity. Actual course duration will be a function of weather, acclimatization, objectives accomplished, and the rate at which the team absorbs the IWLS course curriculum. If for any reason the course ends early, students are responsible for the associated costs of returning to Mendoza early.*

### Course Curriculum

The International Wilderness Leadership Schools' educational model nurtures leadership development and creates an awareness of the guiding mentality that is essential for leading safe, fun adventures in the mountains. The combination of technical skills training, practical leadership experience and a true wilderness expedition make the IWLS curriculum world class.

We believe that experiences drive our learning and therefore we use formal and informal classes taught by both instructors and students. Instructors are eager to help facilitate the learning process but ultimately, how much you learn will be dependent on the amount of effort you put into the course.





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## *IWLS General Curriculum*

- **Leader of the Day:** Opportunities to lead the group will be abundant and you'll have the time to learn and practice multiple styles of leadership.
- **Situational Based Decision Making:** Over the course of 12 days, we'll discover ways to make effective and safe decisions in the field.
- **Focused and "Big Picture" Awareness:** Learn to identify objective and subjective hazards in a backcountry setting.
- **Logistics:** Develop the ability to efficiently plan and pack for an extended expedition in the backcountry.
- **Communication Skills:** Learn to communicate to a wide variety of audiences and provide constructive and appropriate feedback during daily group debriefs.
- **Teaching and Lesson Plans:** You'll have the opportunity to develop lesson plans, teach in front of the group, and learn the importance of progressions for teaching technical skills and leadership.
- **Expedition Behavior and Group Dynamics:** As this course is a true wilderness expedition, interactions between group members need to be supportive and contribute to the efficacy of the group. Learn the finer points of teaching these facilitation skills.
- **Camp Set-up and Maintenance:** Mastering these essential skills will prove valuable whether you are pitching a tent in gale force winds or melting snow for drinking water.
- **Nutrition and Cooking:** A healthy diet is vital for maintaining energy throughout an expedition. Learn to appropriately prepare nutritional and tasty backcountry meals.
- **Navigation:** Learn how to take a bearing, read a topographical map, triangulate your position, and navigate in a whiteout.
- **Weather:** Will the storm arrive in the next 12 hours, or the next 48? Understanding weather patterns and trends will help you plan successful trips in a wilderness setting.
- **Leave No Trace® Ethics:** As adventurers in some of the most pristine environments on the planet it is our duty to respect the natural world.
- **Natural and Cultural History:** Having a strong understanding of cultural history, flora, and fauna is an integral part of leading people in an outdoor environment. You'll learn some of the botany, ecology, and geology that apply to this remarkable area.



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## Journal Writing

Keeping a wilderness journal can help students to record, reflect, and gain from experiences throughout the expedition. The following are examples of topics that may be assigned throughout the course: First-Aid SOAP notes, incident management forms, leadership analyses, trip reports, lesson plans and decision making analyses.

## Evaluation and Grading

Students who take this course for credit will receive a letter grade. Grading is a measurement of one's knowledge of material, participation, written and oral communication, and one's judgment and awareness. Students will be evaluated on their skills, level of participation, their knowledge and awareness of their own abilities as outdoor leaders, their level of judgment as applied to decisions, and written projects assigned during the trip. Students that don't take the course for credit will receive a written instructor evaluation in place of a grade.



## Certifications

Upon completion of the 20-day Aconcagua expedition leadership course, students will be eligible for the following certifications:



**20 Day Guide Training Certificate of Completion**  
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