

# Natural High

**FRIENDS TRADE SAN DIEGO'S SUN-KISSED BEACHES FOR SOUTH AMERICA'S HIGHEST REACHES**

BY BRANDON HERNÁNDEZ



PHOTOS BY KEVIN JACKSON AND JOHN ARNOLD

The most epic journeys begin with but a single step, so it's important to put your best foot forward.

Such was the mentality of lifelong friends, John Arnold, a La Mesa CPA, and Tracy Webster, owner of Webster Insurance Agency in North Park. The duo closed out 2008 by embarking on a mammoth quest to scale the highest mountain in the Western Hemisphere, Argentina's mighty Mt. Aconcagua.

Courageous, yet admittedly green where climbing's concerned, the duo enlisted the services of Kevin Jackson, a professional guide they'd met through the San Diego Rotary Club. Jackson's job was to get Arnold and Webster over the hump (literally) by joining them on their adventure and preparing their bodies for the bitterly cold 21-day trek over steep, unforgiving terrain. Doing so required more than just extended hours at the gym; a challenge this daunting called for custom calisthenics.

"The training needs to be specific to the type of activities, as well as the conditions," advises Jackson, who cites coping with extreme altitudes as the main challenge associated with a climb of this magnitude. "Keeping with

the program used for marathons or general fitness will not give you the outcome you need."

To prepare Arnold and Webster for Aconcagua's natural highs, Jackson devised a rigorous six-day-a-week physical regimen that went into effect eight weeks prior to the climb. The training included mountain biking on hilly terrain at Mission Trails to increase anaerobic thresholds. The weight-training component of the preparations aimed to strengthen the climbers' quads, backs, hamstrings, shoulders and abdominal muscles.

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"The mountain biking was the best preparation we did," notes Jackson. "The ability to optimize oxygen really helped us when we reached the higher altitudes."

Aconcagua is not to be taken lightly and has claimed the lives of many unprepared adventurers. Driven to

succeed and survive, Arnold further expanded his routine, strapping on a 40-pound backpack and boarding a stair-climber to acclimate his body to the weight of the gear, equipment and provisions he'd need to shoulder.

"I got some strange stares," says Arnold, who also wore his backpack while going on 12-mile runs. Looking back, he says that all of these activities got him ready for Aconcagua.

"Train hard and devote plenty of time ahead of the trip," he advises prospective climbers. "Have the best gear you can afford and do not underestimate the physical and physiological stress you may encounter."

While conditioning himself for Aconcagua, Arnold tore a muscle in his calf and had to choose between abandoning his mission and compressing six weeks of rehab into just three. He opted for the latter.

Despite not reaching the peak of the mountain, Arnold and Webster came out on top. The duo's devout commitment to physical preparedness not only helped them through their high-altitude, high-stakes adventure, but also raised their already lofty friendship to unrivaled heights.

## PEAK PERFORMANCE

For these adventurers, scaling a nearly 23,000-foot mountain wasn't enough. They added a humanitarian aspect to their mission, donating \$1,500 worth of clothing and soccer equipment to the people of **San Juan Province**, an impoverished township at the base of Mt. Aconcagua. "It was our way of saying thank you to the town for lending us their mountain," says Jackson.



Tent village at basecamp.



Kevin Jackson, Dee Brewer, Tracy Webster, John Arnold.

## MOUNT UP

Kevin Jackson and his colleagues at The Southern Terrain will be putting together a band of thrill-seekers to scale Mount Kilimanjaro. The group will touchdown in Arusha, Tanzania, in early October and train in-country before starting their ascent. The all-inclusive adventure (without international airfare) costs \$5,850 per person. Journey to [thesouthernterrain.com](http://thesouthernterrain.com).