

South Bay Eagle Scout treks Antarctica

Former San Ysidro Scout shares tales of historic trek to inspire others

By [Allison Sampite-Montecalvo](#) [\(/staff/allison-sampite-montecalvo/\)](#) 3:22 p.m. Jan. 23, 2014

CHULA VISTA — South Bay native Aaron Linsdau spent 82 days skiing alone from the edge of Antarctica to the South Pole just to see what he's made of and then share his experience with the world.

Linsdau, 40, grew up in San Ysidro and became the second American to complete the journey alone from the Hercules Inlet and is considered to be the 29th person in history to complete the trek.

Upon returning, he began booking speaking events to share his experience, photos and video, hoping to motivate others to pursue their dreams.

A special opportunity came up Jan. 13 in Chula Vista where he presented to about 60 boys, ages 11 to 18 from Boy Scout Troop 1194.

An Eagle Scout himself, Linsdau grew up with a love for the outdoors.

Linsdau now lives in Jackson Hole, Wyo., where he is a commercial and adventure photographer with degrees in engineering and science.

He began his journey Nov. 1, 2012, with the intention of completing an unassisted, solo round trip in 90 days. Unfortunately not far into his journey, Linsdau began experiencing poor weather conditions, developed bronchitis and had some equipment failures.

This forced him to bury about 70 pounds of supplies that were picked up by a scientific crew and later forwarded to another location for pick up by Linsdau a few weeks later.

"It was a great emotional struggle to drop the supplies, as it dramatically altered my style," Linsdau said. "But potentially not making the pole ... was not an option."

Dropping the supplies cost him his "solo" or unassisted status, but he still finished the trek without the aid of dogs or kites on Jan. 21, 2013.

"I already wasn't making enough distance per day, so if I didn't drop it there wasn't a good chance I'd make it," he said.

Linsdau set his eyes on the trek to the South Pole for something more adventurous about 10 years ago after completing several 85- to 100-mile skiing trips at Yellowstone.

Linsdau towed a large truck tire attached to his body with a climbing harness up to eight hours a day year round to train for the expedition.

"You have to be a very self-motivated person to keep yourself going," he said. "You have to have patience and perseverance."

Once on the ground in Antarctica, Linsdau lugged more than 300 pounds of food and gear on a sled for about 700 miles.

He dodged crevasses and 9-foot-tall sastrugi, sharp irregular grooves or ridges that form on a snow surface due to high wind. He fought near white-out conditions, temperatures between 5 degrees below zero to 45 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, and gale- and hurricane-force winds.

"Antarctica is the coldest, windiest, harshest place on Earth," he said. "It's not a place to be trifled with."

In order to keep his energy high and stay hydrated, Linsdau had to drink five liters of water and eat 6,000 calories a day. His diet consisted of two sticks of butter, one bar of dark chocolate, shortbread cookies and a variety of freeze-dried food, among other items for nearly three months.

Despite the near-triple increase in calorie intake per day, by the time Linsdau reached the South Pole, he'd lost 28 pounds.

Chris Lines, scoutmaster of Troop 1194, said he wanted the troop to hear learn about overcoming obstacles.

"There's a tremendous amount of planning that went into what he did," Lines said. "The Scout motto is 'be prepared' and he had some real adversity thrown at him. It was a great lesson for the boys."

Linsdau used satellite phones to communicate coordinates and send text messages to friends and family.

For company, Linsdau brought along his version of "Wilson" from the movie "Cast Away," a stuffed animal he called Monster.

"When you are out there, you're literally alone," he said. "After so many days being by yourself, you do talk to yourself, you do talk to little stuffed animals."

Linsdau said traveling to Antarctica was a personal test.

"I wanted to go there to discover what's inside of me — to find my edge," he said. "After 10 years and 82 days, I was able to make it to the South Pole and my dream became a reality. But the interesting thing is that when I walked up and touched that pole it was almost a letdown because I knew that journey was over."

But another will soon begin.

Linsdau plans to hike Gasherbrum II in August — the 13th-highest mountain on the planet, on the border between Pakistan and China.

He is also looking at a trek to the North Pole in 2016 if he can raise enough money.

allison.sampite-montecalvo@utsandiego.com (619) 293-1394 Twitter: allisonUTSD

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