



Conquerors return

Friends raise \$13,000 for The Children's Hospital

Shireen Khalil

THEY saw, they climbed, they conquered.

After climbing Mt Kilimanjaro, which is the highest peak in Africa at 5895m, in just three days, Darren Wise and his former military friend Shane Pophfer agreed it was time for a new challenge.

The pair recently returned from a five-week expedition to Mt Aconcagua in Argentina, which is the highest mountain in the western hemisphere, and Russia's Mt Elbrus.

Mr Pophfer didn't complete the Mt Aconcagua climb as he assisted in rescuing a woman who fell after she tried to reach the summit too late in the afternoon.

Mr Wise, of Rhodes, climbed both mountains, totalling 13,106m and together the men

raised \$13,000 for The Children's Hospital at Westmead.

"Part of the reason in doing this was because my sister was killed by a drunk driver when she was 12 years old. I carry her photo in a locket up every mountain I climb," Mr Wise said. "There's a fair bit of sentiment attached to The Children's Hospital because that's where she stayed."

But the life-long friends' adventure started way before they even got to Argentina.

"Our plane was diverted to Chile because of the earthquake and we stayed in a hotel on the top floor. With all the aftershocks, not even the doors would shut properly," Mr Wise said.

The next day they hopped on

a bus and despite the caved-in roads and fallen bridges, arrived safely in the Mendoza province of Argentina 10 hours later.

"Because we arrived too late, we climbed too quickly to catch up and got altitude sickness – but we kept going," Mr Wise said.

Mr Wise, who carried 20kg on his back up the mountains, said Mt Elbrus was by far the more dangerous mountain.

"Mt Aconcagua was definitely tough to climb but there were huge ice sheets and a lot more crevices on Mt Elbrus."

Next on Mr Wise's to climb list is Mt McKinley, also known as Denali, in Alaska, said to be the coldest mountain on earth.



Darren Wise, Tianna Zilifian, 4, who is awaiting a liver transplant, and Shane Pophfer at Westmead Children's Hospital.

Picture: ISABELLA LETTINI