

Survival in the Andes

◀ Mario Perez and Ricardo Peña place a Uruguayan flag at the crash site to remember the 29 passengers who did not survive.

1 On Friday, October 13, 1972, a small plane flying from Uruguay to Chile with 45 people on board accidentally flew too low and crashed into a mountain in the Andes. How some of the passengers managed to live is one of the greatest survival stories ever told.

Thirteen people died in the impact, and in the weeks that followed, 16 more would as well, including eight who were killed by an avalanche.¹ The survivors were dressed only in street clothes and had no supplies that would allow them to **endure** the mountain's temperatures, which at night at an altitude of 3,600 meters (12,000 feet) sometimes dropped to 30 degrees below zero. The survivors stayed inside the remains of the **aircraft**, using thin seat covers for **blankets**, and waited for a **rescue** that never came.

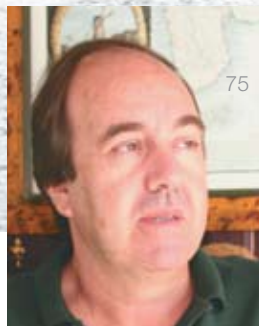
15 Days turned into weeks. It was urgent, the survivors knew, to find a way to escape before others died. Three of the passengers—Roberto Canessa, Nando Parrado, and Antonio Vizintín—**volunteered** to journey through the mountains to search for help. On the day of their departure, each man wore similar clothes: three pairs of socks, a plastic bag around each foot to keep the water out, boots, four pairs of pants, and four sweaters. Many of the clothes came from those who had died in the crash. The escape team also carried a crucial piece of

survival equipment: a sleeping bag they had made and **sewn** together using wire² from the plane. As they departed the crash site, the three men promised the remaining survivors that they would survive and bring back help.

And so their journey began. For part of the first day, they made **steady** progress, thanks to mild weather. But none of the young men had mountain-climbing experience, and as the land and weather changed, climbing became **tougher**. By the second day, they were climbing steep, icy peaks, hoping to reach the mountain's summit. After several days, exhausted and cold, they reached what they thought was the top. There the men paused. They had imagined this moment for days. On the other side of the summit, they hoped, would be a valley leading down and out of the mountains. But instead of a valley, they saw more of the same snow-covered peaks. They weren't near the end of the mountains, they realized; they were in the middle of them.



Roberto Canessa



Nando Parrado



Antonio Vizintín

▲ Peña (left) and Perez climb the mountain where the aircraft crashed. The plane hit the ridge (A) and slid more than 1,000 meters (3,000 feet) into the valley, where it came to rest (B).

But all hope wasn't lost. Parrado was able to spot two low summits about 65 kilometers (40 miles) away that didn't have snow. If they could get there, he **rationalized**, they would be out of the high Andes. Reaching the two peaks would require more days of walking, and they didn't have enough food and drink to **sustain** them. But Parrado had a solution: Vizintín could return to the plane, and he and Canessa would take his supplies. They agreed on the plan, and Canessa and Parrado continued their journey.

Walking toward the two peaks was difficult. But as the two men continued their hike, little by little, the landscape began to change. The men discovered a small stream of water; the sun was also warmer, and it stayed lighter for more of the day. Within a few days of walking, the snow had disappeared completely, and flowers were everywhere. "This is the valley," Canessa said. "This is the way out."

Within days of reaching the valley, the first signs of humanity started to appear—a few cans on the ground, some farm animals in a field. It was December 19, and they had been walking for eight days. By December 21, the exhausted pair made it to the town of Los Maitenes in Chile, and a rescue team was sent to save their 14 fellow survivors who were still high in the Andes.

In the end, all of the remaining survivors were saved. The memories of the crash in the Andes would be with the friends forever, but for now, their ordeal³ was over. They had made it out—alive.

¹ An **avalanche** is a large amount of snow that falls down the side of a mountain.

² A **wire** is a long, thin piece of metal. Sometimes, it is also covered in plastic.

³ An **ordeal** is a very difficult or stressful situation