



Professor Randall Koper (r.) at the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, East Africa.

Below: Koper at Kala Pattar in the Nepalese Himalayas with Mt. Everest in the background.

FLYING HIGH:

BY PATRICK GIBLIN

The journey of a man and a flag

In early February, Dr. Randall J. Koper, a Professor of Communication in the College of the Pacific, told Vice President of Student Life Elizabeth Griego that he was about to leave for Africa and Asia to work on a research project. He said that he hoped to make time during the trip for visits to the mountains, and he mentioned that he wished that he had some sort of symbol of Pacific to take with him.

“The next morning, a courier delivered a flag from Elizabeth to my doorstep,” Koper said. The “traveling flag” sported a large, Pacific Tigers Power Cat, and, along with Koper, it was about to begin an amazing journey.

The purpose of Koper’s research was to collect data on how different cultures perceive social and emotional competence. He also needed some time away from the demands of the classroom. Just two years ago, he suffered a serious heart attack and was told that his coronary arteries were 90 percent blocked. Stent surgery provided relief.

“For a year, I thought I was a dead man,” Koper said. “Then, when I was offered a sabbatical for this research, I decided that, along the way, I’d visit some of the highest mountains in the world. I really thought that I might never have another chance.”

In Africa, he went to Tanzania’s Mount Kilimanjaro, one of the Seven Summits (the highest mountain on each continent). After climbing all night, he reached the peak, 19,341 feet above sea level. “It was a very emotional experience,” Koper said. “I was

overwhelmed when I thought about the many people I brought with me in spirit.”

Next, he traveled to Nepal to visit Mt. Everest, another of the Seven Summits. Koper and his three sherpas trekked as high in the Himalayas as legally allowed without a climbing permit, high above Everest Base Camp, to Kala Pattar. Invigorated and exhausted from more than 200 miles of demanding trails, Koper reflected on the self-confidence he had acquired by making the journey.

“Nobody does Kilimanjaro and the high Himalayas in quick succession. I was able to see and experience so much in such a short time, and it changed the way I think about spirituality, culture, interpersonal competence and, especially, my own future,” Koper mused. “This was such a broad and profound experience. And it might never have happened if the University hadn’t given me the opportunity for sabbatical leave.”

Koper brought the flag to campus after its around-the-world journey to share with the University community. He provided it to Regent Jose Hernandez ’85 to take with him on his recent Space Shuttle mission, adding another 5.7 million miles to its already rich history.

Koper hopes the flag will continue to make other seemingly impossible journeys, and that those who take it will share their experiences with the Pacific family. Koper observed, “The flag is really a symbol of the transcendent spirit of Pacific.”