

Buzz Aldrin: Altitude sickness forced South Pole evacuation

December 4 2016, by Nick Perry



In this Friday, Dec. 2, 2016, photo provided by Christina Korp, right, Buzz Aldrin lies in a hospital bed in Christchurch, New Zealand. Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon, was evacuated from the South Pole to New Zealand where he was hospitalized in stable condition. (Christina Korp via AP)

Buzz Aldrin said he was evacuated from the South Pole last week because he became short of breath and began showing signs of altitude

sickness.

The 86-year-old adventurer, who was the second man to walk on the moon, released details on Sunday of his dramatic medical evacuation from Antarctica. He is continuing to recuperate in a hospital in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Because of the thick ice that blankets Antarctica, the South Pole sits at an elevation of 2,835 meters (9,300 feet).

Aldrin said in a statement he still has some congestion in his lungs and so has been advised to rest in New Zealand until it clears up and to avoid the long flight back to the U.S. for now.

Aldrin, his son Andrew and manager Christina Korp had been visiting Antarctica as tourists on a trip organized by the White Desert tour company. They left last Tuesday from South Africa. "South Pole here I come!" Aldrin wrote on Twitter at the time.

He said the trip began well, and that he'd been planning to spend time with scientists who were studying what it would be like to live on Mars because the conditions in Antarctica were similar.

"I had been having a great time with the group at White Desert's camp before we ventured further south," he said.

"I started to feel a bit short of breath so the staff decided to check my vitals. After some examination they noticed congestion in my lungs and that my oxygen levels were low, which indicated symptoms of altitude sickness."



In this image made from a video, Buzz Aldrin is wheeled from ambulance into hospital in Christchurch, New Zealand Friday, Dec. 2, 2016. Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon, was evacuated from the South Pole to New Zealand where he was in a hospital on Friday in stable condition. Aldrin was visiting Antarctica as a tourist when he fell ill. (TVNZ via AP)

Aldrin said he was put on the next flight, a ski-equipped LC-130 cargo plane that took him to McMurdo Station, a U.S. research center on the Antarctic coast. "Once I was at sea level I began to feel much better," he said.

From there he was flown to Christchurch, where he arrived at 4:30 a.m. on Friday. His manager described the evacuation as "grueling." She posted a picture of Aldrin on his hospital bed, on oxygen and with an IV in his left arm.

The following day he was looking upbeat as he welcomed NASA Deputy

Administrator Dava Newman.

Aldrin posted a photo of himself wearing pajamas and sitting up in bed with Newman by his side. Both were giving the thumbs-up sign.

"I had a surprise visitor this morning. My longtime friend," Aldrin wrote. "She beat me to the South Pole by one day."

Korp, his manager, wrote on Twitter that "Buzz is ok. Resting but flirting with all the nurses!"

She said she'd told Aldrin he now holds the record as the oldest person to reach the South Pole, according to the National Science Foundation.

"He'll be insufferable now," she wrote.



In this Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2015, file photo, Buzz Aldrin, former NASA Astronaut and Apollo 11 Pilot, prepares to testify on Capitol Hill in Washington, before the Senate subcommittee on Space, Science, and Competitiveness hearing on human exploration goals and commercial space competitiveness. Officials said Aldrin, one of the first men to walk on the moon, has been evacuated by plane from the South Pole for medical reasons. An association of Antarctica tour operators said Thursday, Dec. 1, 2016, that Aldrin was visiting the South Pole as part of a private tourist group when his health deteriorated. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File)

Indeed, the achievement completes a remarkable list of extreme locations visited by Aldrin. In 1966, he spacewalked while in orbit. In 1969, he and Neil Armstrong became the first men to walk on the moon.

In 1996, Aldrin voyaged to the bottom of the North Atlantic in a mini-submarine to view the Titanic. A couple of years later, he travelled to the Arctic aboard a Russian icebreaker.

Aldrin is now focusing on getting back to his home in Satellite Beach, Florida, which is not far from Cape Canaveral and its launch pads. But he's eyeing more distant horizons.

"I'm looking forward to getting home soon to spend Christmas with my family and to continue my quest for . a permanent settlement on Mars," he said in his statement. "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

More information: Buzz Aldrin: buzzaldrin.com/

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