



ARIAN LEMAL; JÉRÔME MAIRS (INSET)

Arian Lemal harvests discarded tents at 20,300 feet on Aconcagua.

## ONE-MAN TRASH BASH

Arian Lemal, "Sweeper of the Summits"

**A QUICK MULTIPLE CHOICE:** you're slogging up a mountain when —Egads!— you come upon a wad of soiled toilet paper. Do you: A) recoil in horror, and then give it a wide, wide berth, B) pull on Poochie's leash, to prevent his eating it, or C) pick it up, bag it, and carry it down?

Arian Lemal, 25, of France opts for C. Since 2007, Lemal has picked up nearly 1,000 pounds of trash on peaks worldwide. While a variety of expeditions and nonprofits also conduct large-scale mountain cleanups, Lemal is largely a one-man show—most often climbing and collecting trash solo. Dubbed the "Sweeper of the Summits," Lemal began his odyssey in 2006 on Aconcagua (22,841 feet), Argentina. "Climbers [there] were only focussed on the summit and not carrying down their rubbish," Lemal says. "Right there, I told myself I would come back to clean it up." He kept his word, returning in January 2007 for 33 days and bagging 330 pounds of refuse. Lemal estimates he traveled the equivalent of about four Aconcagua summits while ferrying garbage from various altitudes back to basecamp.

Since then, Lemal has traveled to the French Alps, Kangchenjunga, Nepal, the island of Réunion, and New Zealand, picking up any trash he finds—chewing gum, plastic bottles, tires, batteries, feminine products, and snot rags—sans gloves. ("I reckon it's cleaner to pick up a hanky in the mountains than take the Metro in Paris," Lemal jokes.) Usually, he stores the rubbish in a 100-liter plastic-and-cotton bag, and then stuffs that into an 80-liter backpack, strapping trash to the outside, too. Whenever Lemal reaches a summit, he unfurls a banner with his motto, "Our Planet Deserves an Effort." Lemal says his cleanups have inspired other climbers to "sweep," as well.

Off the mountain, Lemal attends Lincoln University, New Zealand, earning a masters in environmental management and policy. (Ultimately, he has an eye toward working in waste and energy management in developing countries.) He also gives free presentations at schools and conferences—more than 100 classes and 30 conferences, so far. In exchange, Lemal asks the classes to start cleaning projects of their own. "The kids go from being spectators to actors, and they love it," he says.

Afterward, during recess, the kids race around the playground looking for trash—even making a competition of it.

But does Lemal get frustrated with people's slovenly ways? "I do," he says, "but then the environment says 'Thank you' with a bird singing or leaves dancing in the air. ..." And thus, the Sweeper sweeps on.

—Kristin Bjornsen

### Trash Stats from the Sweeper's Journey

Since 2007, Arian Lemal has picked up almost 1,000 pounds of trash in the high alpine. A few key facts:

- **MESSIEST AREA "SWEEP":** Kangchenjunga basecamp—264 pounds in a day
- **CLEANEST:** South Island, New Zealand—1.1 pounds over eight trips
- **SNOTTIEST:** the Alps—"My record there is 134 handkerchiefs in three hours," Lemal says.
- **COOLEST FIND:** a 1950s-era ski on a glacier in the Alps. Lemal donated it to a city tourism office.
- **MOST-TELLING FIND:** a Coca-Cola can with an expiration date of 1993 abandoned near a Chamonix glacier. "If I saw it, someone else must have seen it, too," Lemal says. "But nobody picked it up for at least 14 years." —KB

### Clean up Your Act!

The next time you climb—at home or abroad—take an extra trash bag or two. You can also volunteer at cleanup and trail-restoration days sponsored by the Access Fund ([accessfund.org](http://accessfund.org)), Leave No Trace ([lnt.org](http://lnt.org)), and most local climbing, hiking, and environmental clubs. This year, the Eco Everest Expedition ([ecoeverest.net](http://ecoeverest.net)) experimented with paying Sherpas and climbers 70 cents for every kilogram of trash brought off the mountain. Additionally, many outdoor-gear companies have long sponsored cleanup expeditions to the 8,000-meter peaks, with the support of such high-profile climbers as Conrad Anker.

—KB

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