

Bellevue climbers ready to relax

After Seven Summits, golf sounds nice

BY CAROL SMITH
P-I reporter

Now that they've become the first married couple to successfully climb the Seven Summits, the highest peaks on each continent, Phil and Susan Ershler are dreaming of something else.

Golf.

From base camp on Mount Everest, the Bellevue couple said they were ready to get back to a regular life that included restaurants, cars and golf, one of their favorite activities. For now, they're concentrating on getting down off the mountain.

But they can do it secure in the knowledge they met a personal goal a decade in the making.

"I feel great. We don't have a scratch on us and nobody got hurt. You couldn't ask for more than that," said Phil Ershler, speaking by satellite phone from base camp at about 17,500 feet. The couple tried to climb Everest in 2000, but had to turn back just 1,400 feet from the top when Phil's corneas started to freeze. This time, they both acclimatized well with no health problems. Phil, 51, and Susan, 46, each celebrated a birthday during their 60 days on the mountain.

"Everything clicked," he said. "Sometimes you just have to get lucky."

The couple reached the summit Thursday, but it was by no means a sure thing. They knew they would only get one shot.

"It's a big hill," Phil said. "It takes a lot out of you."

On the summit morning, the

route had not been fixed above the "balcony," a spot at 27,500 feet, Susan said. Without a fixed line of rope, they knew they couldn't attempt it.

"We were looking at failure," said Susan. "It was so disappointing."

But with good weather on their side, they were able to wait while a sherpa went ahead to fix the line, clearing the way for their successful ascent of the 29,035-foot summit.

"I'm absolutely thrilled," said Susan, who quit her job as vice president of sales at a telecommunications firm to prepare for the climb. "For three years, I've been working at this (Everest) climb."

Phil, a partner in International Mountain Guides in Ashford, is a professional guide who climbed Everest in 1984. But he credits Susan for the dream of scaling the seven highest peaks.

"She's the driving force behind this," he said. "I kept saying I'm too old."

The two met in the early 1990s and married five years ago. They've climbed all seven peaks together, four of them while married.

"It was so important to me to finish the seven," said Susan. "I wanted to complete that together. But now it's time to relax a bit."

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