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## Bellevue couple scales peaks on 7 continents

BY GINA KIM  
*Seattle Times staff reporter*

A Bellevue couple conquered a new peak today. Literally.

In reaching the top of Mount Everest at 10:20 a.m. Nepal time, they also became the first couple to have climbed the highest peaks on all seven continents, according to their friend Dan McConnell.

Known as the Seven Summits, "today in climbing circles, this is sort of the next step," said McConnell. "It used to be just Everest, but now it's all seven summits."

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### CLIMBERS

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Phil and Sue Ershler left Bellevue in March. They arrived at the 29,035-foot Everest April 4 and set up a base camp in Nepal. They began their ascent at 10:30 p.m. Nepal time yesterday, McConnell said.

He said Sue Ershler used oxygen for the climb and that Phil Ershler most likely did.

Phil Ershler, 51, is a professional climbing guide who has climbed Mount Rainier more than 400 times and already had scaled all seven peaks.

When he climbed Everest the first time in 1984, he was the first American to do so via the North Wall through China. He met Sue through a mutual friend more than a decade ago, and the couple soon began climbing together, scaling Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania in 1992.

Sue Ershler, 46, worked as a sales executive for a telecommunications company before leaving her job to focus on Everest.

The other five summits the couple have conquered: Mount Aconcagua, Argentina; Mount McKinley, Alaska; Vinson Massif, Antarctica; Mount Elbrus, Russia; and Mount Kosciuszko in Australia.

They tried to reach the summit of Everest last year, but bad weather thwarted them.

"It did become a sort of crusade for them," said McConnell. "When someone's been weathered off the mountain, they just want to take time off. But they didn't have that attitude. They just wanted to get back up there."

This time, they had a window of good weather.

"They're ecstatic about this," McConnell said. "Phil has been extremely proud of what Sue has been able to do. She's a good athlete and a runner, but didn't climb at all until she started going with him."

The couple will stay on the mountain until the end of the month, when other climbing groups return from their summit attempts.

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