

Couple climb into the history books

Husband and wife team scale peaks on 7 continents

BY KRISTIN DIZON
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Phil Ershler had climbed the Seven Summits, the seven highest points on each continent, including Mount Everest.

But for the Bellevue man, completing that feat by reaching the summit of Everest on Thursday with his wife, Susan, was marital and climbing bliss.

The Ershlers are now the only married couple in the world to have completed the Seven Summits, an odyssey that took a decade.

"They were just ecstatic," said Dan McConnell, a longtime friend who spoke with the couple over a satellite phone. "They were relaying this through the base camp radio. You could just hear screaming and hollering 'we made it!'"

"Phil said, 'Now I don't have to come back here. We've both gotten up,'" McConnell recalled yesterday.

Buoyed by a wave of good weather, a total of 54 people in about 11 teams reached the summit of the world's highest mountain on Thursday – the largest number to reach the top in a single day, according to Nepal's Tourism Ministry.

Among them was a foursome guided from Seattle company Mountain Madness.

The Ershlers reached the 29,035-foot summit at 10:20 a.m. Thursday in Nepal, or 9:20 p.m. Wednesday local time. They've been climbing and acclimatizing on the mountain since April 4.

Phil Ershler, 51, is a professional



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Phil and Susan Ershler of Bellevue are shown in this 2001 photo at a campsite on Mount Everest. The couple have scaled the Seven Summits.

mountain guide and one of the owners of International Mountain Guides, based in Ashford. A veteran of more than 400 Mount Rainier climbs, Ershler had been to Everest's apex in 1984.

Susan Ershler, 46, is a telecommunications sales executive who left her job to train for the grueling

climb. She's climbed 11 mountains over 16,000 feet.

An avid outdoorswoman who likes to ski and golf, she began climbing after meeting Phil through a mutual friend.

The couple climbed Kilimanjaro, the first of their seven summits in 1992, before they were married.

PEAK PERFORMANCE

The seven summits that Phil and Susan Ershler climbed are:

- ▶ Mount Everest, 29,035 feet in Nepal and Tibet (Asia)
- ▶ Aconcagua, 22,840 feet, Argentina (South America)
- ▶ Denali (Mount McKinley), 20,320 feet, Alaska (North America)
- ▶ Elbrus, 18,481 feet, Russia (Europe)
- ▶ Vinson Massif, 16,023 feet (Antarctica)
- ▶ Mount Kilimanjaro, 19,340 feet (Africa)
- ▶ Mount Kosciuszko, 7,310 feet (Australia)

"They really wanted to do this as a couple," McConnell said of his friends. "It's one thing to be able to go mountain climbing and say you've done these things, but to do it with your husband or wife is pretty darned special."

Last year, the Ershlers missed the top of Everest by a mere 1,400 feet. Phil Ershler's corneas started to freeze and he couldn't see, so they ended that attempt.

The seven summits are a source of debate in the climbing world. Some say that Carstensz Pyramid in Indonesia should count for the Oceania continent, while others say Australia is a continent, and its highest point is Mount Kosciuszko.

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