

## VIEW FROM THE TOP |

A lifetime love of hiking and years of mountaineering lead to the summit of Mount Everest

BY MARK MILEWSKI



Mark Milewski '92 stands atop the Geneva Spur as Mount Everest looms in the background.

NIMA TSERING SHERPA AND I STARTED CLIMBING AT 10:15 p.m. The stars shined above. No wind. Pretty good weather for the South Col of Mount Everest at 26,083 feet. The terrain started gradually and then became very steep. I walked like a duck with my feet pointing a little to the left and a little to the right because it was too steep to walk normally. The wind picked up and blew about five inches of snow on the trail, slowing our progress as we slipped a bit with each step. We reached a flat spot called "The Balcony." Good time for a radio check. On this summit bid, we would call Base Camp from time to time to let them know how we were doing, and that information was relayed via web dispatches to family and friends following the climb. I took my oxygen mask off to snack and drink. It was hard to breathe due to the thin air, and the whipping wind made it very cold and unpleasant. We finished our quick break and continued our ascent. We reached a rock outcrop where we had to wait for one hour, standing in place while those in front of us made their way over the rocks one by one. Somehow I staved off the cold with my puffy down clothing, chemical hand warmers, and electric foot warmers. We moved along and passed quite a few people on the fixed line, a rope anchored to the mountain that climbers clip onto for safety. I counted about 60 people along the way. The sun rose around 4 a.m. We reached the South Summit (a little peak just about 400 feet from the

real summit) and got over the Hillary Step, a steep, rocky bulge, which this year was covered in snow and much easier to negotiate. Then at 6:10 a.m., under sunny skies but a brisk and breezy -30 degrees Fahrenheit (perhaps -40 F with wind chill), Nima and I reached the 29,029-foot summit of Mount Everest.



I STARTED CLIMBING HIGH MOUNTAINS IN 2004 WITH AN ascent of Mount Rainier in Washington state. It's a great place to learn important skills like glacier travel, self-arrest with an ice ax, identification of avalanche hazards, negotiation of crevasses, and awareness of altitude sickness. Yet my love of mountains began much earlier. When I was a kid, my family skied in Vermont and we hiked together. I went through Scouts and at age 15 hiked a week on the Appalachian Trail. Later, I took two Outward Bound courses in Colorado, thru-hiked the entire 2,163-mile Appalachian Trail, and climbed 4,000-footers in New York's Adirondacks and New Hampshire's White Mountains. I love the view from the top and the challenge of getting there. I see God in nature and I like how mountaineering shows the true character of people.

We spent 20 minutes on the top of Everest. We snapped pho-



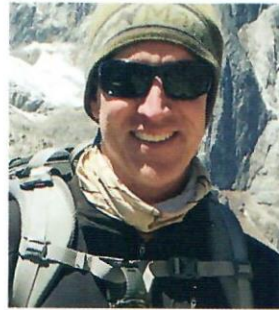
Other climbers (above left) close in on the summit on May 20, the day Milewski reached the top of the world and took in the view (above right).

tos. We peered over to the north and watched climbers coming up from Tibet. There were about 20 of us sharing this rarefied space. Prayer flags and memorabilia had been left behind by other climbers. We sat briefly and cherished the moment. Not being the best idea to sit for too long, we started to make our way down and saw everything we didn't see while ascending during the night. Jagged, snowy peaks surrounded us in every direction. I remember thinking often, "Wow, this is really steep!" It took us three hours to return to High Camp, where we arrived at 9:10 a.m. Before I could say, "Mike, I'm really tired, how about we spend the night here to rest?" to lead guide Mike Roberts, he got the first word and said, "Rest up, we're heading down to Camp 2." So I drank some hot tea, ate Ramen, laid down for a few minutes' rest, packed my things, and we were on our way down by noon. It was steep negotiating the Geneva Spur, the Yellow Band, the Lhotse Face, and finally, after passing lines and lines of climbers making their way up the mountain, we arrived at Camp 2 (20,997 feet) at 5:30 p.m. Almost non-stop movement for over 19 hours.

I GRADUATED FROM SYRACUSE IN 1992 WITH A BACHELOR of arts degree in political science. The courses I took in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs were rigorous and prepared me well for life. The Maxwell and College of Arts and Sciences faculty, particularly professors Robert McClure and Ralph Ketcham, along with many other talented faculty, compelled me to think critically. The leadership lessons I acquired as a cadet in Army ROTC and as an officer in Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity I carry with me to this day. A fraternity brother and I took a road trip to the Adirondacks. We climbed Mount Algonquin and gazed at the mountainous panorama. I ultimately reached the top of all 46 High Peaks in the Adirondacks.

Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were the first to summit Mount Everest in 1953. George Mallory and Andrew Irvine attempted to do so in 1924, but died on the mountain and no one knows whether they reached the top. Since 1953, more than 4,000 people have summited. Over 250 people died trying. For Everest, 2016 was an important year. The prior two years had been tragic. In 2014, an avalanche in the Khumbu Ice Fall killed 16 Sherpa. In

2015, the earthquake in Nepal shook the Everest region, causing an avalanche to barrel through Everest Base Camp, killing 18 climbers, the highest death toll in one season on the mountain. So it was important for the climbing community in Nepal that 2016 be a successful season. The livelihood of many Nepali depended on it. Ultimately, the season was a success, with about 400 climbers reaching the summit, although there were six unfortunate deaths.



Everest is one of the "Seven Summits," the highest mountain on each continent. I started climbing the Seven Summits in 2007 with an ascent of 18,510-foot Mount Elbrus in Russia, Europe's highest peak. At that time, it wasn't clear to me that I might climb all seven. Everest certainly didn't seem possible for me yet. In 2008, I reached the highest point in Africa: 19,340-foot Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. In 2009, I summited two more: 20,320-foot Mount Denali in Alaska, North America's highest, and 22,840-foot Mount Aconcagua in Argentina, the highest mountain in South America. Some time after Aconcagua, it occurred to me that I had done the apprenticeship and acquired the skills to climb Mount Everest competently. It took a few years before heading to the Himalaya in 2016. After all, the price tag was \$65,000, so there was a little saving to be done. Two mountains remain and I intend to visit them in short order: 16,024-foot Carstensz Pyramid in New Guinea on the continent of Oceania and 16,050-foot Vinson Massif in Antarctica.

I summited Everest on May 20. On May 21, our team celebrated at Base Camp and by May 22, we had all helicoptered to the safety of Kathmandu, with its oxygen-rich and humid air. I find myself humbled by the entire experience. One seems quite small next to the tallest mountain on Earth. I'm extremely grateful for the support of family and friends, the expertise of Adventure Consultants, and for the blessing of Miyolangsangma, Goddess of Everest, who permitted me to stand on her shoulders for a few precious moments.

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