

29,028-foot 'steppingstone'



COURTESY OF BO PARFET

Bo Parfet holds a Michigan state flag as he sits on the summit of Mount Everest on May 17, accompanied by other climbers from his expedition.



Bo Parfet took this photograph of the treacherous southeast ridge of Mount Everest before making his final push to the summit.

Hackett grad exhilarated, humbled by Everest

By Chris Killian
Special to the Gazette

In 11 years, Bo Parfet went from being a dyslexic student at Hackett Catholic Central High School with an uncertain future to being on the top of the world.

On May 17, Parfet reached the summit of Mount Everest, joining an exclusive club of more than 2,000 people to reach the famous mountain's 29,028-foot peak. Parfet has now climbed the tallest peak on each continent,

joining only 80 people worldwide to accomplish that feat, he said.

"It was the hardest experience of my life," the 29-year-old said of climbing Everest. "I felt so small, so insignificant. The experience really changed me.

"Because of my dyslexia, some people thought I'd never graduate high school, much less college," he said. "But I turned stumbling blocks into steppingstones."

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SHAWANO CLEARY / SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Bo Parfet talks about his expedition to the top of Mount Everest. The 29-year-old Kalamazoo native has now climbed the tallest peak on each continent.

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Those stepping stones led him to a master's degree in economics from the University of Michigan and a master's in business administration from Northwestern University. He now lives in Chicago and has entrepreneurial plans to invest in green architectural projects in Idaho and other western states.

The 1995 Hackett graduate prepared for his Mount Everest expedition for several months. For conditioning, he strapped on a 60-pound backpack while exercising on a treadmill and stair-stepper for hours at a time.

This wasn't Parfet's first attempt to scale Everest, where death lurks around every corner of the enormous mountain in the Himalayan range straddling Tibet and Nepal.

While on a summiting expedition in 2005, a member of Parfet's group died from a heart attack. The group turned back.

"You are minutes away from death all the time up there," Parfet said.

The lack of oxygen wrought havoc on Parfet, as his body began to eat away at his muscle tissue and diminish his cognitive skills to those of a third-grader, he said.

"It would take me half an hour to put on one boot. You're so tired but you never close your eyes to rest because you could fall asleep in seconds."

After a nine-day hike through Nepal, Parfet finally reached Base Camp, at an altitude of 18,500-feet. After several days of rest to get his body used to the thin mountain

Mount Everest facts

Location

Mount Everest is located in southern Asia's Great Himalayan mountain range, straddling the border of Tibet and Nepal. Global positioning indicates the mountain continues to grow a few fractions of an inch each year and to move slightly to the northeast due to the shifting of tectonic plates.

Height

Mount Everest is the highest point on Earth. Satellite-based technology pinpointed its height at 29,035 feet in 1999. Everest's upper slopes are so high that the atmosphere there contains just one-third of the breath-

able oxygen found at sea level. At 28,250 feet, Mount K-2 in Kashmir is the world's second-highest peak.

Names

■ Mount Everest was named after Sir George Everest, a British surveyor who spent 25 years of his life mapping the Indian subcontinent. Everest most likely never saw the mountain himself, but his triangulation theories allowed successors to locate its summit in 1852.

■ In Tibet, the mountain's name is Chomolungma, or "Goddess Mother of the World."

■ In Nepal, the mountain's name is Sagarmatha, or "Goddess of the Sky."

Mount Lhotse, the world's fourth-tallest peak.

It's this point that begins what climbers call the "death zone" because of the lack of oxygen. It is where the true push to the top of the mountain began, a 3,000-foot drive to the summit.

Near the top, Parfet and his Sherpa guide had to cross the southeastern ridge before finally reaching the summit. The narrow, knife-edge ridge has 10,000-foot drops to either side. A day before Parfet hiked across it, a Korean climber fell off the ridge, he said.

It was a clear, wind-free day when Parfet got to the summit. He spent an hour-and-a-half there "laughing and crying" while he called his family from a satellite phone.

Reaching the summit of Everest is an accomplishment few can lay claim to, but Parfet is humble.

"I think I'm an average dude," he said. "I can't dunk a basketball. I'm a decent brother and a terrible boyfriend, but I believe in being the best I can be, and climbing Everest took me one step closer to that."

air, he began his quest toward the highest point on earth.

The first challenge was the Khumbu Icefall, the end of a massive glacier with blocks of ice that range from the size of small cars to large houses. Many

climbers have died on the icefall, where crevasses can be 1,000-feet deep, Parfet said.

From there, Parfet climbed to several other camps before ending at the South Col, a 26,000-foot camp area between Everest and