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Life

Everest's summit draws 2 local men

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Neal Mueller

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Mount Everest's greatest challenge seduced two men with local connections.

The mountain reaches about 29,000 feet in the sky, and is the tallest in the world. In the Asian Himalaya mountain range, Neal Mueller, whose grandmother, Flora Shinkle, lives in Cold Spring, and Tom Torkelson, a Sauk Rapids native, scaled Everest on separate trips. Both summited it earlier this month.

"I had this goal to climb the southern summit," Mueller said. "Being able to achieve what you set up to achieve makes you feel like you can do anything."

Mueller climbed the Nepal side of the mountain. Torkelson climbed the Tibet side. The trips took months to complete. Mueller of Chaska started the climb March 28, and Torkelson started in April.

Torkelson, a mountain climbing guide and videographer, is documenting a woman's quest to climb some of the world's highest mountains. Mueller wants to finish climbing the highest mountain on each of the seven continents by the end of the year.

The men don't know each other.

Conquering Everest took intense training. The terrain was rocky, steep and tough to maneuver through. The men's endurance, heart and lungs had to be in top condition.

"I've been a mountain guide for 10 years, and I was surprised how difficult it would be," said Torkelson, who will move from Wyoming to Chile soon.

Climbers work their way up the mountain at night, when the weather is better, Mueller said. On the last day of his climb, Mueller wanted to give up. The wind threw him "around like a baby doll." His body screamed in pain as he made it up the mountain. It took 12 to 13 hours to get to the top, he said.

Other nearby mountains were shadowed by Mount Everest.

"It was pretty humbling to see those giants below me," Mueller said.

Mueller wants to climb Mount Kosiuszko, the highest point in Australia, in December. He will then have climbed the highest peaks on each of the seven continents. Torkelson will document two climbs at Carstensz Pyramid in New Guinea and Mount Elbrus in Georgia, near Russia, in the next 14 months, he said.

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