

New York, N.Y.  
Daily 930000  
Sunday 1100000

# At 69, climber is peaking

Two weeks ago, Werner Berger became the oldest North American man to scale Mount Everest — at 69 (a 70-year-old Japanese man did it in 2003). Berger's May 22 ascent also made him the oldest man to climb the "Seven Summits," the highest mountain peaks on each continent.

Born in South Africa, Berger, a corporate consultant and father of four, divides his time between homes in Ontario and Yardley, Pa. He recently took a moment to talk to the Daily News about his rare feat.

## Q: What made you want to climb Mount Everest?

**Werner Berger:** I was in a self-development workshop. The facilitator said to jot down three things you would love to do, but don't think that you ever will. I [wrote] "climb Kilimanjaro, Matterhorn and see the Mount Everest base camp." I honestly thought this would never, ever happen.

Then in 1992, I went to Nepal with my son and we trekked into the Everest base camp area. I'd never climbed before, but I absolutely fell in love with the mountains. I had a vision that I wanted to sit on top of Mount Kilimanjaro on the morning of my 65th birthday and see the sun come up over the continent that I was born on. That happened. Then I thought, why don't I go for the Seven Summits?

## How did you prepare yourself to climb Mount Everest?

Since I did the Seven Summits in the last five years, it's kept me physically ready to climb. I did a lot of cardio work, and also weight work for upper-body strength.

## What was the climb like?

It was extremely exhausting but phenomenally exhilarating. The exhilaration came from the absolute beauty of that environment. We flew in on April 2, and got back out on the 57th day.

## What did you miss most on the climb?

Sleep. I found it very hard to sleep at that altitude.

## What went through your head when you made it to the top?

I felt total exhilaration. It was even more accentuated when I could see the summit in the distance. I knew this was the day I was going to stand on the highest point in the world.

## Did you encounter the bodies of climbers who didn't make it to the top?

Five people died on our side of the mountain, and an additional five people needed to be rescued. We didn't actually find [the bodies], but we saw some being brought down. It was just an awful, awful feeling. The thought of these young people in the prime of their lives, attempting something that not too many people attempt, and instead of coming away exhilarated, they come back as dead bodies.

## Why is it such a dangerous climb?

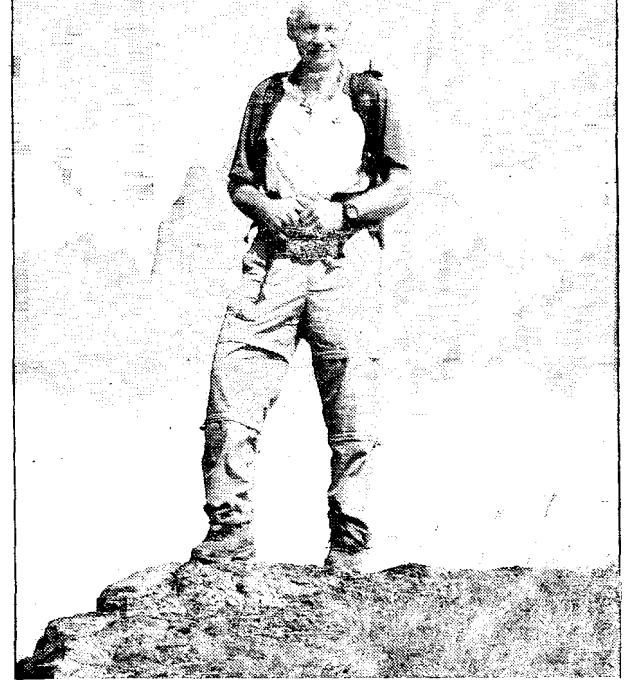
We had to climb through an ice fall, which is a frozen river with huge ice chunks in it. You never know when one of those blocks is going to collapse. Within eight hours of us passing through, the whole area collapsed. The steepness is dangerous. Any one slip can result in somebody falling 2,000 feet. And people can get altitude sickness.

## You did the climb as part of an upcoming documentary, "Meet Me at the Top."

The film's intent is to wake North America up to the really awful state of Americans' health. We used the climb as a metaphor for optimum health.

## How do you think your achievement will inspire other senior citizens?

Werner Berger, 69 (shown on the Matterhorn), is the oldest man to climb all the "Seven Summits" — the highest peaks on each continent.



Every one of us has a Mount Everest to climb. Go for it!  
**What are you planning next?**

I'm going back to Mount Kilimanjaro next year, and we invited Matt Lauer [from "The Today Show"] to accompany us. But he only tentatively said he would be interested.