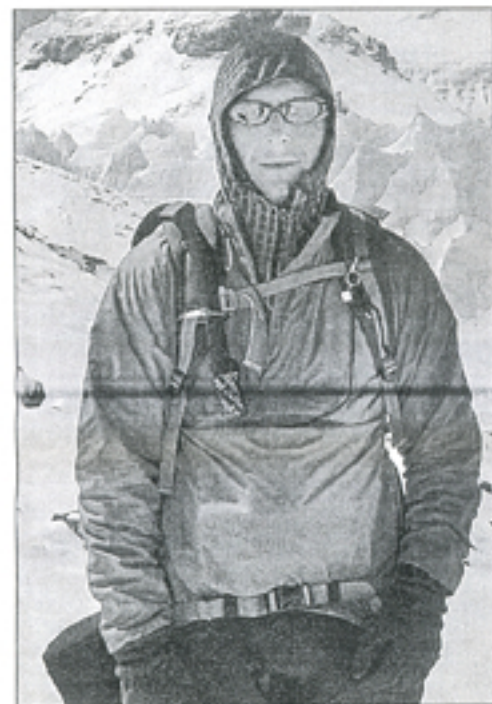


Noel eyes Seven Summit record

REACHING the summit of Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world, would be enough for most people brave enough to attempt such a dangerous, arduous climb.



At the North Col, at 7,000 metres.



Noel on his way to advance camp.

But for adventure-seeking, death-defying Dromara man Noel Hanna, who has just returned home after conquering Everest, what's the point of stopping there?

Noel has his heart set on bigger and better things.

And after contacting the Guinness Book of Records, the 39-year-old adventurer is determined to be the only man to have climbed the highest peak in each of the seven continents (The Seven Summits) before travelling to sea level by human effort.

His record-breaking attempt began in 2004 when he and his wife Lyn climbed Mount Aconcagua, which is part of the Andes, in Argentina.

That climb, which was 6,960 metres high, took 28 hours to complete and was rounded off by a gruelling cycle to Chile.

Former Dromore High School pupil Noel embarked on the next stage of his adventure last year when he and Lyn both attempted to scale the 29,029 feet to the summit of Everest.

The couple, however, had to abandon their attempt when bad haemorrhaging in his eyes at 7,000 metres prevented Noel from venturing any further.

He reluctantly made his way back to base camp and his hopes of breaking into the record books were hampered further when doctors advised him that further attempted climbs could cause permanent blindness.

Having come to an unexpected crossroads in his life – should he give up for good or give it another try? – the determined adventurer defied doctors' orders and successfully navigated his way to the summit of Everest, via the North ridge, last month.

Setting off from base camp in Tibet on Tuesday, April 18, Noel, who was in the company of 20 others from sevensummits.com, completed the climb in less than five weeks – arriving at the summit on Sunday, May 21.

A brief rest at the top of Everest was all Noel could afford, given his desire to then proceed to sea level.

Another death-defying challenge awaited him – this time his descent down the mountain – and there was no time to waste.

An upward 33-day trek was completed in just two days on the way down.

Once at base camp, Noel had to make his final preparations for the cycle that lay ahead.

Over 1,800km awaited the Dromara man whose planned finish was Jampet, in the Bay of Bengal, India.

Noel had given himself to June 11 to complete the second leg of his journey.

But he reached his final destination five days early (June 7), giving him a few extra days to celebrate his feat.

"We celebrated in Katmandu, India, for about a week," revealed Noel.

"There, we had a few drinks and some food – I lost a lot of weight during the expedition and needed to replenish it.

"I then flew back home on June 18, but within five days I had started training again.

"I have nothing concrete planned, but I would like to go on the next leg of my challenge at the end of July or the start of August.

"Mount Elbrus in Russia is my next target and I'd like to get going soon."

Report by

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For most, the aches and pains of an 8,848-metre climb and a 1,800km cycle ride wouldn't have healed in such a short space of time, but Noel is determined to venture forward with his dream.

Explaining the logic behind it all, Noel said that this was something he just had to do.

"I've been involved in adventure racing for over 10 years and I always wanted to do something that had never been done before," he said.

"I contacted the Guinness Book of Records about three years ago and they told me that nobody had ever climbed the continents' highest peaks and then made it to sea level by human means immediately afterwards.

"It was something completely different and I just decided that I would give it a go.

"I climbed Mount Aconcagua in South America and cycled to Concon, Chile, in 2004.

"I've now climbed Everest and cycled to the Bay of Bengal.

"Mount Elbrus in Russia is now my next aim."

Enthusiastically, Noel reads off his list of achievements with great ease, making it sound as if it had only taken minimum effort.

He said that he felt "good" after completing the near-five-week climb up Mount Everest.

He also complained that the weather wasn't that good once he got to the summit.

The reality of it, however, is that Noel had completed a climb that had claimed the lives of many explorers that had set off many years before him.

A fact that was very often evident the higher he progressed up Everest.

"We passed about a dozen bodies on the way to the summit," said Noel.

"Nobody can come and rescue them and so, they lie there frozen.

"One body that I saw was one of last year's team – Marco from eastern Europe.

"It was still lying there, while two out of this year's group also died on the way up.

"It is something that you are aware of before you set off, but there's no time to think about it.

"If you thought about it too much, you'd never attempt the climb."

Noel said he was particularly conscious of those that had perished on the mountain when he set off on his descent.

But, yet again, he never let it put him off.

"I stood at the top of Everest knowing that I had completed only half of what I set out to do," he said.

"There was still the descent to do, which can be just as dangerous as the climb.

"I was also aware that some of the bodies that I encountered could have died on the descent down the mountain, so I still had to be careful.

"I felt strong, however, and had plenty of oxygen with me.

"I got to my first camp after four hours and was at base camp in two days."

Noel said that the thought of a 1,800km cycle ride didn't seem that difficult when he set off on the next leg of his journey, accompanied by an Italian friend and a Jeep for support.

"The first couple of days were hard, but I was fine after that," said Noel.



Noel finally takes a well-earned break at the Bay of Bengal, India.



Noel at the summit of Everest.