

# JIM WHITTAKER

## KEY MEDIA CLIPS



June 22, 2013

<http://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2013/06/22/american-mountaineer-jim-whittaker-discusses-autobiography/>

### American Mountaineer Jim Whittaker Discusses Autobiography



**STUDIO CITY (CBSLA.com)** — American mountaineer Jim Whittaker appeared on KCAL9 News on Saturday morning to discuss his autobiography.

The book, titled “A Life on the Edge: Memoirs of Everest and Beyond,” chronicles Whittaker’s business triumphs and losses, as well as, a divorce, and a passionate new love later in life.

Whittaker became the first American to summit Mount Everest in 1963.



May 2, 2013

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=50146047n>

**First American to climb Everest celebrates 50-year milestone**



(CBS News) PORT TOWNSEND, Wash. - You might think climbing the world's tallest mountain would be enough of an achievement to satisfy anyone. But not Jim Whittaker. Fifty years ago this Wednesday, he became the first American to reach the 29,000-foot-high summit of Mount Everest. He's now 84 and still looking for new challenges.



*Jim Whittaker made history as the first American to reach Everest in 1963. President John F. Kennedy called him a national hero.*

It was a grueling, three-month, 185-mile trek uphill that allowed Jim Whittaker to make history.

"There was no feeling of exhilaration," Whittaker now recalled of that moment of stepping on the top of Everest, "no feeling of, 'Boy we pulled it off.' I was just a frail human being. We were just hanging on to life."

One member of his team died on the way up. Whittaker spent only 20 minutes on the summit.

"Fear is a good thing to have," he said. "You have to be afraid of heights or you're gonna kill yourself. But that's the fun of it in climbing. You overcome that."

He returned to a ticker-tape parade and an invitation to the White House, where President Kennedy called him a national hero. When the president was assassinated a few months later, his younger brother Bobby asked Whittaker to help him climb Mount Kennedy in Canada.

"I said, 'Yeah,'" said Whittaker. "'Does he know the mountain has never been climbed?' They said yes. I said, 'Has he ever climbed before?' 'No.' I said, 'Okay, we'll take him.'"

Along the way Whittaker and Kennedy became close friends.



*Jim Whittaker with Robert Kennedy. The two climbed Mount Kennedy in Canada named after President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963.*

"He walked up, stood on the top," remembered Whittaker. "The first human being on the peak named after his brother. That's where the tears freeze on your parka. It was just so emotional. I loved him like a brother."

Now a half-century later, Whittaker is 84 years old with two artificial knees, but he celebrated his birthday last year by hiking to the Everest base camp.

"I only walked 40 miles," he said of that hike. "But it was high, that's the difficulty." Reminded that he hiked 40 miles at high elevation in his advanced age, Whittaker said with a laugh: "Yeah, you gotta keep moving."

Now from his home near Seattle, he can see the Olympic mountains, where his life of adventure began as a teenager. His advice to kids today who seem to spend most of their time indoors in front of a video game or computer screen: "Get off your butt! They've got to get outside. Nature's the best teacher. You gotta enjoy it before you check out."

This summer, Whittaker plans to follow his own advice, hiking in as many national parks as time will allow.



April 30, 2013

## First American to top Everest still living on the edge at 84

By Chip Reid



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April 26, 2013

<http://q13fox.com/2013/04/26/american-hero-jim-whittaker-on-50th-anniversary-of-everest-climb/#ixzz2Tr2wRPmf>

**American hero Whittaker recalls Everest climb as 50th anniversary nears**



SEATTLE — Wednesday marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first American to summit Mount Everest, the world's highest peak. It made West Seattle native Jim Whittaker an American hero.

Whittaker's final assault to the top happened on May 1, 1963, when he and his Sherpa Gombu woke up at 27,000 feet in the brutal cold with savage winds.

"It was 35 below zero, and it was a ground blizzard coming up," said Whittaker. "You couldn't see your footprints because the plume, all that new snow was going in front of you. And so I looked up at the ridge where the plume was and started kicking steps up."



(Photo: Eddie Bauer)

Whittaker and Gombu made the final, harrowing assault to Earth's highest point without water.

"You get dumb at high altitudes," he said about the decision to put water they had melted on the outside of their packs. "We go to take a drink of water, and all be damned, it's ice."

Whittaker said they lasted 12 hours without water as they made the ascent to the top, which he remembers was excruciating. "You are taking five breaths to a step," he said. "Just dry as the devil."

Whittaker recalls that as they approached the top he turned to Gombu and gestured for him to go first. Gombu, in turn, wanted Whittaker to go first. Instead, they did it together. "Side by side, we walked up to the highest point of Earth," Whittaker said.

When asked what was going through his mind at the top, Whittaker said it wasn't anything to do with God or the meaning of life.

"How to get down," he recalls of his first thought. "I mean, we were in the death zone. There's not enough oxygen to support life, you know. And so if you got any brains at all, you know you've gotta get out of the death zone."

Overnight, Whittaker became one of the most famous Americans, right up there with John Glenn, who a year earlier had orbited the planet. "I didn't really know that until we had a ticker tape parade and went back to the White House."

Whittaker says things are much different on Everest now than 50 years ago.

"Now it's very crowded," he said. One advantage, though is that you can fly in very close to base camp and the existence of actual establishments at the bottom. "You can get a beer right up to base camp," he said.

Whittaker believes they are trying to put too many people on the top, which he attributes to the money. "Here's the client sitting there," Whittaker said. "He's paid you \$60,000 bucks to climb. What are you going to do?"

Whittaker notes that guides have died because of being pressured to take people up the mountain in dangerous conditions.

Whittaker says the best advice he gives to you kids who have big dream is to get outside. "It's a magical planet," he said. "Explore, learn, nature's a great teacher. No child left inside. No child left inside. "

The 1963 expedition was outfitted by Eddie Bauer. The company has created a new documentary film titled "High & Hallowed: Everest 1963," set to premiere at Mountainfilm in Telluride in late May.

Whittaker's great achievement is detailed in a newly re-issued autobiography, "A Life on the Edge."



April 22, 2013

<http://www.komonews.com/home/video/Legendary-climber-Jim-Whittaker-talks-big-climbs-Earth-Day-204193001.html>

## Legendary climber Jim Whittaker talks Everest, Earth Day



SEATTLE - May 1st is the 50th anniversary of the first American to climb Mt. Everest.

American icon Jim Whittaker was in Seattle Saturday, celebrating the day he planted the American flag firmly atop the mountain's summit.

Prior to the celebration, Whittaker sat down with KOMO News reporter Jeff Burnside to discuss the historical ascent.

In this unedited interview, Whittaker also speaks about Earth Day and the importance of environmental awareness amongst younger generations.



April 30, 2013

<http://www.king5.com/on-tv/evening-magazine/Jim-Whittaker-205426771.html>

The first American to conquer Everest



50 years ago Jim Whittaker embarked on what was then considered a suicide mission. Michael King sits down with the Seattleite who was the first American to climb Mt. Everest.

Jim Whittaker has a new book out as well. Visit [jimwhittaker.com/](http://jimwhittaker.com/) for more info.



April 18, 2013

<http://www.king5.com/new-day-northwest/First-American-to-summit-Mt-Eve-203604721.html>

### NW climbing legend Jim Whittaker



Next month marks the 50th anniversary for a true Northwest legend. On May 1, 1963, Jim Whittaker became the first American to summit Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain. His historic climb and all of his outdoor accomplishments have made him one of the most highly regarded mountaineers of all time.

In celebration of this Golden Anniversary, a special edition of Jim's award-winning memoir *A Life on the Edge* is being released with a brand new, updated final chapter. This special edition contains new stories and many more photos.

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

June 7, 2013

Circulation: 41 million unique monthly visitors

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/07/a-life-well-lived-jim-whittaker-advice\\_n\\_3404954.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/07/a-life-well-lived-jim-whittaker-advice_n_3404954.html)

In Short Film, 'A Life Well Lived,' Mountaineer Jim Whittaker Gives Life Advice (VIDEO)



"If you're not living life on the edge, you're taking up too much space," says mountaineer Jim Whittaker in the opening to a stunning short film titled "A Life Well Lived."

In the moving piece, Whittaker -- who was the first American to reach the top of Mt. Everest -- gives some valuable life lessons, including this one: Taking chances is what makes us better.

"Being out on the edge, with everything at risk, is where you learn and grow the most," he says.

The documentary-style video, which was directed by Seattle-based cinematographer Eric Becker and incorporates archival footage from Whittaker's 1963 trip up the world's tallest mountain, is full of similar nuggets of wisdom.

Click the video above to watch.



(AOL TRAVEL)

May 26, 2013

Circulation: 2.5 million unique monthly visitors

<http://www.gadling.com/2013/05/26/video-life-advice-from-the-first-american-to-climb-everest/>

Video: Life Advice From The First American To Climb Everest



"A Life Well Lived | Jim Whittaker & 50 Years of Everest" from Eric Becker on Vimeo.

As the first American to climb Everest, Jim Whittaker knows a thing or two about living life to the fullest. He was part of the historic 1963 expedition that broke new ground on the world's tallest mountain, which would be enough adventure for most people. But even now, at the age of 80, Whittaker continues to be active and pursue his passion for the outdoors and inspire others to do the same.

In the video above, Whittaker shares some advice on how to embrace everything that life has to offer, saying, "If you're not living life on the edge, you're taking up too much space." Those are words of wisdom for all of us and a good reminder of why we travel. To live life on the edge, experience new things and embrace foreign cultures. We might not all climb Mt. Everest, but that doesn't mean we can't find adventure in our own way.



May 1, 2013

Circulation: 23 million unique monthly visitors

[http://espn.go.com/blog/playbook/fandom/post/\\_/id/21489/fifty-years-since-the-climb-of-a-lifetime](http://espn.go.com/blog/playbook/fandom/post/_/id/21489/fifty-years-since-the-climb-of-a-lifetime)

## Fifty years since the climb of a lifetime



Sunday afternoon, 84-year-old Jim Whittaker climbed to the top of the 10½-inch mound at Seattle's Safeco Field to throw out the ceremonial first pitch in front of 20,000-some fans at the Mariners game. Anyone who has ever been in that position can tell you how daunting it is -- [remember Carl Lewis?](#) -- but Whittaker has placed his feet atop far higher peaks.

The highest peak, in fact.

Fifty years ago Wednesday, Whittaker became the first American to reach the 29,029-foot summit of Mount Everest when he and Sherpa Nawang Gombu climbed the final demanding steps up the mountain's South Col in excruciating conditions.

"We had 50 mph winds, and it was 35 below zero," Whittaker said. "We were out of oxygen, and we were in the death zone. There is one thought that enters your mind when you place that first step on the summit, and that's how to get down.

"I pulled out my Eddie Bauer parka, grabbed an American flag, pounded it into the ice with my ice ax, grabbed my camera and handed it to Gombu. He took a picture, then we packed up and got the hell

off. There was no more bottled oxygen, and as I said, we were in the death zone and nothing lives there for any length of time."

Nothing may live in the death zone, but Whittaker's feat endures as an inspiring moment in the history of U.S. climbers. His accomplishment on Everest (as well as his work with Recreational Equipment Inc.) helped propel untold numbers of Americans into the wild and up into the heights. I still vividly recall as an 8-year-old at a Mount Rainier visitors center, staring at a mannequin of Whittaker in his climbing gear and listening to his recorded account of the Everest expedition.

"It was sort of the golden age of climbing that was started," Whittaker said. "We were behind Europe; the British, with Sir Edmund Hillary, were up Everest first. And we began to build from there, and climbing began to really catch on. Now climbing is really quite popular, rock climbing especially, but snow and ice too."

Climbing Everest has become so popular that the remote peak -- Whittaker had to hike 185 miles just to start his climb -- can become so clogged with hopeful mountaineers it's as if they were in a security line at the airport. (Fortunately, they aren't required to remove their boots.)

"All the people on the mountain create bottlenecks and people get trapped high and they can't move because of the bottlenecks and they run out of their bottled oxygen in the death zone," Whittaker said. "So that's very dangerous, and people die. People died last year, and more people will be in trouble [again]. They have to regulate the people on the mountain, like we do on Mount Rainier. There can be only so many people in order to avoid those huge bottlenecks."

Not that Whittaker is discouraging anyone from climbing. Quite the opposite. When I asked Whittaker whether, at age 51, I was too old to climb 14,409-foot Mount Rainier, he was almost disgusted by the question. After all, not only did he climb Everest in 1990 when he was in his 60s, but the Seattle native has also climbed Rainier 80 times.

"It's still there. It's not going away," he said. "You should do it. You've gotta do it at least once so you can look at the summit of the mountain and say, 'Yeah, I've been up there.' You should do it once. C'mon, get off your butt and get that thing."

Listening to Whittaker still speaking passionately about his sport at age 84, it became clear that climbing takes you far loftier places than merely the top of a mountain.

"Oh, man, it's wonderful. You learn about yourself," he said. "You leave your ego behind you. You become a frail human being. You're in tune with nature. You are sublime, almost, on some of the peaks, looking down on the rest of the world. It's a wonderful, wonderful experience. Climbing is a wonderful sport -- just to get out into nature and into this magical planet that we're lucky to be on."

"I tell people when they get out onto the edge, it's where you learn the most. Because you're pushing yourself and learning your boundaries. You're learning what you can do and what you can't. It's good to get out on that edge. If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space."

He's right. I must get off my butt. I must climb Rainier. Wherever we reside, whatever our capabilities, we all must push ourselves as high as we can, just as Whittaker has repeatedly done. Not into the death zone, but into the life zone.



May 1, 2013

Circulation: 16 million unique monthly visitors

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/05/01/first-american-to-conquer-mount-everest-still-climbing/>

50 years later, first American to conquer Mount Everest continues climb



***Jim Whittaker throws out the ceremonial first pitch before a baseball game between the Seattle Mariners and the Los Angeles Angels, Sunday, April 28, 2013, in Seattle, Wash. May 1 will be the 50th anniversary of Whittaker becoming the first American to reach the summit of Mount Everest. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson) (AP2013)***

Fifty years ago, Jim Whittaker traveled to Nepal and became the first American to reach the top of Mount Everest – and he's still climbing.

Whittaker, now 84, reached Everest's 29,000-foot summit – the world's tallest -- on May 1, 1963, in a 185-mile uphill journey that lasted three months.

One member of his team died on the grueling climb, and difficult breathing conditions meant Whittaker spent only 20 minutes on the summit.

"There was no feeling of exhilaration," Whittaker told CBS News, recalling the moment he stepped on top of Everest. "No feeling of, 'Boy we pulled it off.' I was just a frail human being. We were just hanging on to life."



Whittaker began climbing the Olympic mountains while a teenager growing up in Washington State. Last year, to celebrate his birthday, the octogenarian celebrated by climbing to the Everest base camp.

"I only walked 40 miles," he told the station of the 2012 hike. "But it was high, that's the difficulty."

This summer, Whittaker has plans to hike as many national parks as he can.



May 1, 2013

Circulation: 219,000 unique monthly visitors

<http://www.voanews.com/content/first-american-conquered-everest-fifty-years-ago/1652577.html>

## First American Conquered Everest 50 Years Ago



*Jim Whittaker is interviewed for 50th Anniversary Celebration of the First American Ascent of Mount Everest, in Berkeley, California, February 2013.*

Wednesday marks the 50th anniversary of the first American to reach the top of the world's highest mountain, Mount Everest.

On May 1, 1963, Jim Whittaker reached the summit of the 8,850-meter tall mountain, just 10 years after New Zealand's Edmund Hillary and Nepal's Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers to conquer it.

Talking to U.S. media about that day, Whittaker remembers waking up to a blizzard with freezing

temperatures and brutal winds.

The now 84-year-old Whittaker was last on Everest in 2012, reaching 5,200 meters before turning back. Over the decades, he has made several other major climbs, including the first American ascent of K2 - the world's second highest peak - and a climb to Everest's top along with colleagues from Russia and China in 1990.

Since 1953, climbing Mount Everest has become a major tourism draw for the Himalayan country of Nepal. More than 3,000 people have climbed it.

Meanwhile, Nepalese authorities are still investigating reports of a fight between three European climbers and a group of local Sherpa guides at a high altitude on Everest several days ago. The experienced climbers from Britain, Italy and Switzerland were about 2,000 meters below the summit when disagreements began between the two sides. Both sides accuse the other of starting the brawl.

Sherpas are locals around the world's highest peak, who are known for their climbing skills and knowledge of the region. They are responsible for fixing ropes up the mountain, and they accompany most foreign climbers to the summit.

# Bloomberg

April 20, 2013

Circulation: 9.5 million unique monthly visitors

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-04-18/mount-everest-s-first-u-s-conqueror-recalls-1963-climb.html>

**Mount Everest's First U.S. Conqueror Recalls 1963 Climb**



Subel Bhandari/AFP/Getty Images

Mount Everest, at 8,848 meters, is the world's tallest mountain. It is shown here in front of Khumbu Glacier, one of the longest glaciers in the world.

April 20 (Bloomberg News) -- Fifty years ago, in 1963, Jim Whittaker became the first American to reach the summit of Mount Everest, the world's highest peak at 29,035 feet.



American climber Jim Whittaker holds up flags on Everest's summit in gale-force winds on May 1, 1963. Photographer: Nawang Gombu/National Geographic via Bloomberg



"A Life on the Edge: Memoirs of Everest and Beyond," by Jim Whittaker. The first American to summit Mount Everest just re-released his autobiography, published by Mountaineers Books, 2013.

Photographer: Jim Clash/Bloomberg



Jim Whittaker at The Explorers Club. Now 84, Whittaker recalls his historic 1963 Everest climb in the re-release of his autobiography. Photographer: Lee Langan via Bloomberg



Mount Everest, center, and The Himalayan mountain range, some 140kms (87 miles) northeast of Kathmandu. Photographer: Prakash Mathema/AFP/Getty Images



Don Walsh, John Glenn and Jim Whittaker at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Whittaker was the first American to summit Mt. Everest, Glenn was the first American to orbit the Earth, and Walsh was the first to the ocean's deepest point in the Mariana Trench. Photographer: Jim Clash/Bloomberg



Himalayan mountain peak K2, the second-highest mountain on Earth, in 1955. It has an elevation of 8,611 meters. Source: AFP/Gettyimages

Since then, more than a 1,000 hearty Americans have followed in his footsteps, but “Big Jim,” as the six-foot-five climber is affectionately called, was first.

In 1978, Whittaker also led the first successful American ascent of K2, the world’s second highest peak (28,252 feet), and in 1990 he brought together a Russian, a Chinese and an American on Everest’s top during the famous peace climb. But Whittaker’s 1963 Everest expedition will always define him.

This spring he re-released his autobiography, “[A Life on the Edge: Memoirs of Everest and Beyond](#)” (Mountaineers Books). I caught up with the 84-year-old legend to discuss his life and big anniversary.

Clash: Why did it take America 10 years to duplicate Sir Edmund Hillary’s 1953 Everest ascent?

Whittaker: Climbing in America wasn’t a big deal back then. I was at Recreational Equipment Inc., and we had a small inventory of ice axes and crampons, but it was just professionals. The kids hadn’t come out yet. Climbing started in [Europe](#), so the British and Swiss had done Everest. We were just catching up.

Clash: What do you remember most about being atop Everest May 1, 1963?

### **Snow Blizzard**

Whittaker: Thinking about how to get down [laughs]. No, we crawled out of the tent early that morning at 27,000 feet. It was minus 35 Fahrenheit with 50-mph winds, 80-mph gusts. It was a snow blizzard. We couldn’t even see our feet. Hillary, who was in the valley nearby, said, “They won’t climb it today.”

Clash: Why would you even try under such conditions?

Whittaker: If we had to turn around, we'd turn around. Our team had worked for four months to get somebody on top. I had guided Mount Rainier in college and learned you've got to start, no matter what the weather. On Rainier you get up at midnight and climb with headlamps until it's light.

A few times, the wind was blowing so hard that rocks were flying over the roof of the [Muir] hut at 10,000 feet. You think, "To hell with it, we're not going" but in the morning when the wind has died and the sun has come up you're looking at a client who has paid you to take him to the summit. You know the guy is thinking, "Why aren't we climbing?"

Clash: Did things get better as you went higher on Everest?

## High Anxiety

Whittaker: I don't remember that happening [laughs]. We ran out of bottled oxygen on the summit. We left a full bottle half way up. You do dumb things at altitude. We had spent two hours melting snow for water before we left. I put it in two plastic bottles, then put them in the outside of my pack.

What happens to water at 35 below? When we went to take a drink halfway up, ice! To show how really dumb I was, we put the two ice bottles back in our pack and carried them to the top, but to carry less weight we left the full oxygen bottle there.

Clash: There's that epic shot of you on the top.

Whittaker: My Sherpa, Nawang Gombu, had probably never seen a camera, let alone taken a picture. But he held it up, then turned it to get a vertical shot. I'm thinking, "Geez, just take the picture -- don't drop the thing." Later a runner traveled 185 miles out with the film.

Eight days later we got a call at base camp: "Jim, we just heard from National Geographic" -- and I'm thinking, 'Damn, the photo didn't turn out' -- and the guy says, "It's beautiful!"

## Bobby Kennedy

Clash: You guided Senator Robert Kennedy up a peak in the Yukon in 1965. What was that like?

Whittaker: After President Kennedy was assassinated, they named the highest unclimbed peak in Canada Mount Kennedy. I called National Geographic to see if they would fund a climb there. They agreed but quickly called back to say Senator Kennedy would like to go along. I asked if he had climbed before, and they said no.

I called Kennedy and told him it was going to be difficult because, as with any unclimbed peak, we didn't know what was up there. I also asked what he was doing to get in shape. He said running up and down stairs practicing how to yell "help."

Clash: Was he in shape?

## Glacial Race

Whittaker: Going up the mountain, there's a picture of me turning around -- and Bobby close behind me with all this slack between us on the rope. Now we're going up a glacier with hidden snow bridges where you can drop into a crevasse in an instant, so I said, "Bobby, could you slow a bit so the rope is taught?" He responded, "Can't you speed it up a bit?"

When we got near the summit, I stopped 50 feet below and said, "It's yours." He went up and became the first human to stand on top of the peak named after his brother. He was a great guy.

Clash: "If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space," is a quote of yours.

Whittaker: If you want a life that's reasonably full, you have to go out of your comfort zone. Hell, for me it's just coming to New York from the northwest and riding in a cab from the airport [laughs]. When you get out of your comfort zone, you learn the most about yourself.

Clash: Given all the inexperienced climbers on Everest, is another 1996 "Into Thin Air" disaster looming?

Whittaker: Without question! People who have never climbed are going up now -- and paying guides to take them.

The guide wants his \$65,000, so he is motivated to get the client up. You run into situations where even guides die. My advice: Go out and climb first, knock off some smaller mountains. Find out what it's like to be turned back. I was turned back on a lot of mountains before I got up Everest.

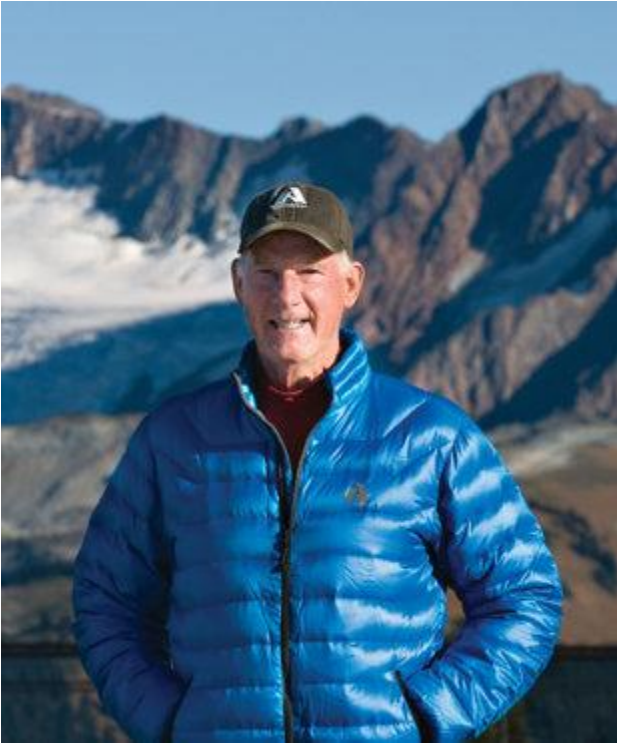


**April 30, 2013**

**Circulation: 54 million unique monthly visitors**

<http://travel.yahoo.com/blogs/compass/five-miles-jim-whittaker-195849622.html#>

**Five Miles Up with ... Jim Whittaker**



Fifty years ago, on May 1, 1963, Jim Whittaker became the first American to climb Mount Everest. To celebrate, the 84-year-old mountaineer is releasing a special edition of his memoir, "A Life On The Edge: Memoirs of Everest and Beyond." "The summit of Everest is 29,000 feet, about five miles up, so this interview seems appropriate," he said when we spoke with him. As one would expect, the avid adventurer has covered a lot of territory. "Nature is a great teacher," he said. "People need to step into it to learn about the planet and themselves." When it comes to favorite destinations in nature, Whittaker doesn't play favorites. Indeed, he can't seem to pick just one.

**What's something you never fail to pack in your suitcase/backpack?**

A toilet kit packed with the usual accoutrements – medications, sunscreen, toothbrush, razor -- is essential.

**Carry-on or check-in?**

I do both – a fast trip carry-on, a long trip, check-in.

**Window or aisle?**

I love the window. You can look at out at the magical planet and see the country as you fly.

**Do you catch sight of places you've hiked to?**

Oh yeah. When flying out of Sea-Tac Airport ([Seattle](#)), I look at Mount Rainier, which I've hiked up 80 times or, when flying north, Mount McKinley. When flying into [Bangkok](#) you can see the Himalayas. And then there's the Antarctica ... We really do live on a magical planet

**What's your idea of the perfect vacation?**

A vacation that's close to nature – in the mountains or at the seashore – topped off with a visit to a big city. There are so many different varieties of landscapes to see.

**Tell us about a vacation you've taken that's come close thus far.**

There are the short ones that last two weeks to places like [Sun Valley, Idaho](#), for great skiing. Then



there were the four years we sailed our 50-foot pilothouse ketch, "The Impossible," through French Polynesia. [Bora Bora](#) is a helluva spot. But then, so is [Kicking Horse](#) up in Golden British Columbia.

### **What's the worst mishap you've had while traveling?**

I've had close calls and been in avalanches. You learn something each time. Last May, I was trekking up Everest in [Nepal](#) and, at 17,000 feet, got the worst diarrhea I've ever had. I had to turn around and head back down to Base Camp, where the sanitation and toilets are still pretty primitive. The good part was heading to the Mandarin Oriental in Bangkok where, after no shower for 10 days, there was hot water and all the comforts of home. I've stayed there several times; it's my favorite hotel.

### **How would you describe Mount Everest?**

The summit of Mount Everest is the roof of world. It's incredibly beautiful and majestic. It was well-named by the Tibetans and Sherpa as *Chomolungma*, Goddess Mother of the World. It's the highest point on the planet; above that you step into air.

### **Where has been a favorite trekking destination?**

Antarctica. I'm used to snow and ice at altitude in the death zone, where nothing lives. Antarctica was a surprise. It's all ice, so you'd think there'd be nothing there, but it's teeming with life – penguins, seals, whales ...

### **What's the most unusual souvenir you've ever brought back?**

An ivory Buddha from Everest before the ivory curtailment, a palm tree from [Hawaii](#), which we planted in the backyard, and rugs from Tibet.

### **Ever try a food that you wished you hadn't?**

Recently, the Explorers in [New York City](#) had their annual dinner and honored me, Don Walsh and John Glenn as the first American to climb the highest, the first to dive the deepest and the first to orbit the Earth. As appetizers, they served rats, scorpions, worms and goat. I tried everything. The goat was OK

### **Biggest regret you've ever had while on vacation?**

Not wearing enough sunscreen in [Auckland, New Zealand](#), where, because of the ozone layer, the sun is so much more intense. I got terribly sunburned when there attending the funeral of Sir Edmund Hillary, the first mountaineer to climb Everest.

### **The one thing you're willing to splurge on above all else.**

A good meal and a local excursion into the natural environment.

### **Three artists on your travel playlist?**

From Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr. to Mud Honey and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

### **Where would you take someone visiting your hometown of Port Townsend, Wash., for the first time?**

I'd bring them to the house for the view of the Olympic Mountains, where I first started to climb. They're only 8,000 feet high, but they have glaciers year-round on the peaks. Next, we'd go to the Boat Haven or Point Hudson marinas for boating to look at orcas, seals and blackfish. Then, deep into a forest, where it's so quiet, you can't hear anything but true silence.

### **You only get one more trip in your lifetime. Where will it be?**

I'd take as many friends and family as I could to Antarctica.



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**Top 10 facts about Jim Whittaker's historical climb of Mount Everest, in honor of 50th anniversary**

**He was first American to summit; did you know he was afraid of heights?**



As stories surface about Jim Whittaker and the celebration of the 50th anniversary of his becoming the first American to summit Mount Everest, a few interesting facts rise to the peak of the human interest chart.

You might already know that Whittaker made history on May 1, 1963 when he stepped foot on the summit of the world's tallest mountain, at 29,035 feet, doing so 10 years after Edmund Hillary became the first to accomplish the feat.

But did you know Whittaker was afraid of heights, and still is?



From stories about and interviews with Whittaker in [Outside Magazine](#), [Pacific NW Magazine](#), [Men's Journal](#), and [Bloomberg Businessweek](#), we gleaned our favorite facts about the historical climb of Mount Everest—facts you might never have heard before—and put together a Top 10 list of them. Here, then, is that list:

1. Whittaker is afraid of heights. “Climbers say to me, ‘I’m afraid of heights,’ and I say ‘Good, or else you’ll die,’” he told Men’s Journal. “Even now, when I get to a tall building, I look out the window and feel, Eeeeeee! But you learn to overcome it.”
2. Before the climb, Whittaker was the first store manager of REI.
3. Jake Breitenbach, a 27-year-old member of the expedition team, was killed in the icefall. “We didn’t hear any talking [on the radio], but then we heard cries for help, so we roped up to the icefall and started digging,” Whittaker told Men’s Journal. “We got only four or five feet down; we couldn’t get to him. We cut the rope and had to leave him in the ice.”
4. After Breitenbach’s death, the expedition briefly considered quitting and going home, but instead discovered a newfound determination. “We knew that the best memorial [for] Jake would be just clobbering the hell out of the mountain,” climber Barry Bishop said in an audiotape debriefing after the expedition, according to Outside.



5. On summit day, Whittaker and Sherpa Nawang Gombu set out first at 6 a.m. in a gale. They couldn't see their feet. Before they started, Whittaker and Gombu melted snow for water and put the bottles in their packs instead of under their jackets. As a result, the water froze and they were without liquids for the climb. "Dumb as hell," Whittaker told Outside.
6. Gombu was the nephew of Tenzing Norgay, who accompanied Hillary on the first ascent of Mount Everest.
7. Just moments after the pair began to descend after 20 minutes at the summit, Whittaker attended to some toilet business, dropping his pants and moving his bowels. When he removed his backpack, his camera went tumbling down the side some 80 feet. He briefly considered leaving it, but luckily—thankfully—he did retrieve it. That camera had the historic and iconic photos of him at the summit, along with the American flag planted on the peak.
8. A bus-sized portion of the summit-ridge cornice broke free and tumbled thousands of feet below. "We were lucky," Whittaker told Pacific NW Magazine. "It could have easily been tragic."
9. Upon his return to the states, Whittaker received a ticker-tape parade in his hometown of Seattle and a ceremony in the Rose Garden with President Kennedy.
10. As a result of his achievement, Whittaker was chosen in 1965 to guide Sen. Robert Kennedy on the first ascent of Mount Kennedy, a 14,000-foot peak in Canada. "Going up the mountain, there's a picture of me turning around — and Bobby close behind me with all this slack between us on the rope," Whittaker told James M. Clash for Bloomberg Businessweek. "Now we're going up a glacier with hidden snow bridges where you can drop into a crevasse in an instant, so I said, 'Bobby, could you slow a bit so the rope is taut?' He responded, 'Can't you speed it up a bit?'" Kennedy was the first to step foot on the peak and planted a half-dollar coin in the snow.

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<http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2013/04/20/a-kennedy-a-governor-a-whittaker-saluting-americans-on-everest/>

## A Kennedy, a governor, a Whittaker: Saluting Americans on Everest

The Mountaineers threw a big-scale celebration of Americans' first climb of the world's tallest peak on Saturday night, with an autographed ice axe auctioned for \$5,000, a lifetime achievement award to Big Jim Whittaker — first U.S. climber to reach the summit of Mount Everest — and tales of high adventure and romping, athletic Kennedy children.

The “Everest 50” event celebrated the golden anniversary of the American climb, with celebrity environmentalist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on hand to fete Whittaker. Big Jim guided his senator-father to the summit of Mount Kennedy in the Yukon, after Canada named its highest unclimbed peak for the 35th president.



The 1963 American expedition put six climbers, five from the U.S. and a Sherpa from Nepal, on the summit of Mt. Everest.

It was a very macho evening, but with a nervous undertone: The mountaineering and conservation communities fear they are losing the interest of young people, who prefer electronic gadgets to God's great out-of-doors.

“Anybody who climbs in the Himalayas today is climbing in the footsteps of giants, and giants were members of the 1963 American expedition on Everest,” declared MC Brent Bishop, whose father summited in the expedition. A moment later, introducing Robert Kennedy Jr., Bishop declared: “His C.V. (curriculum vitae) goes on for page after page.”

The young Bobby Kennedy paid tribute to Whittaker as “a part of the family,” saying: “He taught my father things about wilderness and the importance of wilderness that became part of my father’s gestalt . . . Jim Whittaker is the example of the best thing our country produces.”

But Kennedy winged his way into several amusing bloopers.

Noting the presence of Gov. Jay Inslee, Kennedy said: “This is the best guy we had for leadership in the Senate.” Inslee served in the House. A moment later, he described Mount Kennedy as “the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies.” Actually, the 14,000-foot peak is hundreds of miles away in the St. Elias Range, near the Yukon-Alaska border.

Kennedy spoke of starting a river raft-guiding business with his brother, saying, “We did first ascents on rivers all over North America and in South America.”



Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.: The celebrity environmentalist saluted Jim Whittaker, first American atop Mt. Everest: “He taught my father things about wilderness and the importance of wilderness . . .”

The lawyer-environmentalist evoked Holy Scripture, urging listeners to “understand that there’s a God out there that’s bigger than us,” and sounded a Thoreau-like theme: “If you want to see the soul of American democracy, you must look in the mirror of Walden Pond.”

Whittaker is now a very well-preserved 84 years old. He’s still plainspoken and avuncular, saying: “Thank God for people like Bobby Kennedy: Maybe there’s hope for this planet,” and of the Kennedy family: “They’re tree huggers and outdoor nuts like all of us here.”

The 1963 climb was dominated by Northwest climbers, four of whom reached the 29,028-foot summit of Everest. Why? Just look at the 14,410-foot volcano on Seattle’s southern horizon. “We had the glaciers and the altitude and the storms on Mount Rainier,” said Whittaker, who with his brother Lou started guiding there at an early age. “It was this club (The Mountaineers) that got us going.”

Big Jim has gone on to other adventures, notably leading two expeditions — one a flop, the other successful — to 28,250-foot K2, the world’s second-highest peak (and a much tougher climb than Everest) and organizing the Mount Everest Earth Day 20 International Peace Climb in 1990, which put American, Soviet and Chinese climbers on top of the world.

Among the Americans on the Peace Climb, joked Whittaker, “We had three lawyers. I asked one of them, ‘How did you sleep?’ He replied, ‘I slept like a lawyer. First, I’d lie on one side and then I’d lie on the other.’”

Actually, there are two celebrations of the 1963 Everest climb. The first, Saturday night, featured Whittaker’s autobiography “A Life on the Edge,” being reissued this year by Mountaineers Books. The second, on May 22, will celebrate reissue of Tom Hornbein’s classic “Everest: The West Ridge,” one of the greatest mountaineering books ever written about one of the greatest climbs ever done.

After Whittaker and Nawang Gombu summited via the South Col route on May 7, 1963 — a climb now done by hundreds, with fixed ropes — Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld set out to scale the unclimbed West Ridge.

“We felt the need to do something new,” Hornbein said in an earlier interview. “We wanted to do something different. The fact that the South Col route had been done a few times didn’t quite click. We needed more uncertainty. We needed a crack at a second route.”

They ascended the West Ridge, determined that it would be suicidal to descend a couloir of loose rock, so traversed the mountain after reaching the summit in late afternoon. They descended the South Col route, where they met up with Barry Bishop and Lute Jerstad, who had summited via the South Col earlier that day.

Such challenges as the Hillar Step did not have fixed ropes in place at the time. Darkness descended. The four climbers spent a night at 28,000 feet. They survived because, miraculously, jet stream winds did not buffet the upper reaches of Everest that night. Still, Unsoeld lost nine toes to frostbite.

Looking out at Hornbein in the audience Saturday, Whittaker quipped: “I still don’t know why the hell he went up there and spent the night at 28,000 feet.” It was said in jest, of course.

Willi Unsoeld was later killed in an avalanche on Mount Rainier while leading a late fall climb with students at The Evergreen State College. His widow, Jolene Unsoeld, would become a front-rank advocate for open government and limiting toxic wastes, served in the Washington Legislature and was elected three times to Congress. She was at the dinner Saturday night.

What did her husband say about a night at 28,000 feet? “He told me, ‘It must have been a beautiful night. It must because the wind did not blow. I remember none of it.’”