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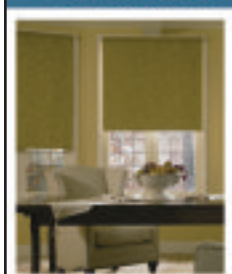
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## Livin' the dream

Thom Pollard achieves lifelong goal on Everest — Page 2

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On May 21 and 22, Jackson documentary filmmaker Thom Pollard, left, safely fulfilled his long-held wish to stand atop the world, reaching the summit of 29,035-foot Mount Everest with his climbing partner, Lhakpa Sherpa. They are shown at base camp as they prepared to leave the region. It was Pollard's third time to Everest, but his first ascent. (THOM POLLARD/EYES OPEN PHOTOS)

## Thom Pollard: On top of the world

By TOM EASTMAN  
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

**MOUNT EVEREST, CAMP 4** — There on the mountain at Camp 4, documentary filmmaker/photographer Thom Pollard of Jackson was saddened but in a way relieved. His long-held dream to ascend Mount Everest, the world's tallest peak, had been scrubbed due to bad weather.

Climbing through the Khumbu Icefall three times to reach Camp 2, and two times to Camp 3, getting acclimatized and carrying supplies, his six-man party

had made one trip to Camp 4 — located at an elevation of 26,000 feet of the mighty 29,035-foot Himalayan peak, and the highest camp mountaineers use before they launch their final push to the summit.

Now it looked like a dream deferred. At age 54, this would probably be Pollard's last opportunity to reach the summit, and that was disheartening.

Then he felt someone tapping him on his shoulder and heard a voice. It was his climbing partner, Lhakpa Sherpa, 24.

see **EVEREST** page 3

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The view from Camp 3 out the front of the tent. (THOM POLLARD/EYES OPEN PHOTOS)

#### EVEREST from page 2

"C'mon, Thom Dai (Nepalese for 'older brother'). Wake up! It's time! We have to go!"

To his chagrin and relief, the canceled climb had all been a dream. It was a go after all! Time to get ready!

It was 7 p.m. on May 21. Pollard had been napping in the tent at Camp 4 since 6 p.m. He unzipped the tent to see blowing ground snow, high winds and clouds.

"Really?" Pollard said to Lhakpa. "We're really going?"

"Oh yeah!" said Lhakpa, an experienced guide with three prior ascents of the peak known in Nepal as Sagarmatha and in Tibet as Chomolungma. "C'mon."

Six hours and 40 minutes later, under a full moon and snowy, cold conditions, he and Lhakpa stood alone atop the world at 2:40 a.m. on May 22 Nepal time (4:55 p.m., May 21, New Hampshire time).

They spent 30 minutes on the summit, then safely descended back to Camp 4.

Their companions — Rinzi Sherpa, 19, and Uberaz Rai, in his 20s — had left Camp 4 with them but reached the summit two hours later. They were making their first ascent of Everest, with Pollard and Lhakpa passing them on their way down at approximately 28,000 feet.

Expedition leader Paul Giorgio of Millbury, Mass., who's climbed Everest four times twice without supplemental oxygen, had opted to leave Camp 4

with another Sherpa and head down before the team's ascent. He had left his oxygen bottles with Rinzi and Uberaz — in essence, giving them their summit opportunity, and when it comes to guiding, anyone who has been to the summit can charge more money to clients.

Pollard and Lhakpa returned to their tent at Camp 4 at about 5:30 a.m., with the sun peeping over the horizon.

But that tells only part of their story. There was also tragedy and death — as so often is the case on Everest.

Since Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's first ascent in May 1953 (up the same South Col route followed by Pollard's group — and the 1991 New England Everest Expedition led by Rick Wilcox of International Mountain Equipment), around 800 people a year have attempted to climb Mount Everest.

More than 4,000 people have scaled the summit, and nearly 280 have died on the mountain — seven this year.

Earlier on the expedition, while climbing Lhotse Face between Camp 2 and 3, at 22,000 feet, Pollard had nearly been hit by a fellow climber's falling oxygen tank. The next day, as they were going to Camp 4, a body flew by. It was a Sherpa guide, one of the first of the seven who died on the mountain this year. A climber died of an apparent heart attack at base camp, and an Australian woman died due to altitude sickness — her body was moved to Camp 4 and later removed.

see **EVEREST** page 5



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ABOVE: Lhakpa Sherpa is seen below Camp 2, crossing a ladder en route to Camp 1. BELOW: Thom Pollard's six-man group climbed through the Khumbu Icefall three times to reach Camp 2, and two times up to Camp 3, getting acclimatized and carrying supplies before setting out to reach Camp 4 for the summit push. (THOM POLLARD/EYES OPEN PHOTOS)



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Thom Pollard is shown on the summit, holding a postcard given to him by Lama Geshe of Tibet. "He asks that once on the summit, you take a photo showing yourself with it, and he puts the photos on his wall," said Pollard. (LHAKPA SHERPA PHOTO)

EVEREST from page 3

In the Death Zone above 26,000 feet, within an hour of leaving Camp 4 to make their summit attempt, they had come upon an Indian man lying in the snow, his gloves off, hands frozen and in very bad shape. He was with two other climbers, who told Pollard and Lhakpa they should move on as a rescue party was coming from Camp 4.

Twenty-five minutes later, they came upon a woman lying in the snow, also with her gloves off, and with two people standing over her. Again, they were told a rescue effort was underway.

"As it turns out, the man died, even though he was at a lower elevation, but the woman lived as she was brought down to Camp 4 and airlifted off the mountain," said Pollard. "On our way down, we came upon the bodies of two

men who were very close to Camp 4." Keenly aware of the dangers, Pollard and Lhakpa pressed on.

They paused for their only sip of water, at a place called the Balcony at about 28,000 feet, and also split a granola bar.

"Lahkba had been telling me the whole time at Everest that I was very strong, but I thought he was just trying to keep the old man's spirits up, you know? But we were moving along at a very good clip," Pollard said. "He turned to me and said, 'Are you ready?' I said, 'Do it!'" He gave me the thumbs up and said, 'All right!'"

"Now, I'm not saying I kept up with a Sherpa, but he went and I was right behind him — we really didn't stop until we were pretty much on the summit."

see EVEREST page 8

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After summiting 29,035-foot Everest, and having the summit to themselves for 30 minutes, Thom Pollard, left, and Lhakpa Sherpa posed with the full moon setting in the distance, at about 28,000 feet. The photograph was taken by an American from Washington D.C., who trained on Mount Washington for his shot at Everest.



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The steep, continuous climb from the Balcony, up the South Summit, over the Hillary Step (a 40-foot section of rock climbing) to the summit took them an estimated three hours — estimated only, because Pollard said he vowed he would not take off his gloves to check his watch.

"It was fully dark by this time — there was the absolute full moon that night. We hit darkness, but the moon was glowing and everything was lit up. It was gorgeous — we probably could have climbed without head lamps, but that would have been a little silly," said Pollard.

The last 10 minutes were the most breathtaking.

"We're at 28,500 feet, and the last section turns to a little knife edge and snow with no fixed rope and a 6,000-foot drop on one side to Nepal and the other to Tibet," said Pollard. "I was terrified: it was the first time I thought I was going to have to crawl to the summit on my hands! Lhakpa laughed and said, 'No, we're good' — and we walked to the summit."

It was cold, with 15 to 20 mph wind gusts. He had fulfilled a promise by scattering the ashes of a friend at base camp, and now, those of his late father, mother and brother at the summit.

"Especially with my mother, who had recently passed away prior to the trip, it was not solemn, but joyous — I felt like I had really set her free," said Pollard. "I got the OK of Lhakpa to scatter their ashes, as it is a sacred place for the Sherpa people. I kept my thin gloves on and unscrewed the tiny container, and threw the ashes — and they blew back in my face! We did not want it to be solemn or sad — I could feel Sallie, my mom, and we just howled. It was perfect."

Pollard, owner of Eyes Open Productions and a new digital sign business in the Mount Washington Valley, also planted a New Hampshire State Police flag, keeping a promise he made to local Trooper Seth Turner. It's usually placed at the grave of a fallen officer. He also planted an Explorer's Club flag.

After 30 minutes on top of the world, they began their descent.

As Everest summiter Wilcox has always said, climbing doesn't count if you don't make it back down. They achieved that feat, returning to Camp 4 that morning. There, they rested a few hours, before departing and heading down to Camp 2, where they spent the night.

The next morning, they got through the dangerous Khumbu Icefall to base camp by 12:30 p.m. — just in time for lunch. They stayed in base camp for four days, trekked the 40 miles to Lukla, and flew to Kathmandu on May 28.

Pollard returned to Jackson on June 4.

Above all, he said he was grateful for the encouragement of his sons, Will, 18, and Sam, 14, who lent their earnest support from afar via Facebook, as well as that of his former wife, Kristin Honsberger.

see **EVEREST** page 9

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EVEREST from page 8

He trained for the ascent with his football-playing sons at Cranmore Fitness Center. Will, who was a star quarterback at Kennett, is soon off to the University of New Hampshire as a red-shirted freshman, and Sam will be playing football for Kennett as he enters his sophomore year.

"My boys had more faith in me than I did in myself at times, and it charged me and energized me every step of the way," Pollard said.

Pollard made his third trip to the region as part of a film group whose goal was to visit high-altitude camps on Everest dating back to the 1950s. They want to create a traveling museum on all things Everest and the Khumbu region of Nepal.

Working with Pollard on the film were Burlington, Vt.-based filmmaker Scott Barber, son of rock- and ice-climbing legend Henry Barber of North Conway and Jill Barber of North Conway and Florida.

Pollard shot stills and video, while Barber will be producing the film. Also helping out was local resident Parker Haynes, son of Sandy and Bobby Haynes of Eaton.

Pollard made his first trip to Everest in 1999 as a member of a "Nova" and BBC Everest expedition, when he filmed the discovery of the preserved body of pioneering climber George Mallory at nearly 27,000 feet — Mallory and Sandy Irvine had not been seen since their 1924 attempt. (Whether they fell on the way up or on their way down after a successful first ascent of Everest remains one of mountaineering's biggest and most hotly-debated mysteries).

In 2014, Pollard went to Everest with a man attempting to be the oldest man to ascend the peak. During that trip, an avalanche claimed the lives of 16 high-altitude porters and Sherpa, and all climbing was called off.

Now, after 17 years of thinking about Everest, and two prior trips to the region, Pollard was relieved to get the proverbial Everest monkey off his back.

"This trip was really different," he said. "It was all at the 'extreme' level: extremely bored at times, extremely afraid of being killed by something completely outside my control and being totally exhausted physically."

"At times, I found myself immensely bored with the whole climbing thing and at same time terrified about the objective hazards of other human beings on the mountain and how that could potentially be the disaster that could end it all," he said.

Ultimately, he dug down deep.

"As I got ready to leave Camp 4, I recalled a quote a friend had shared with me back in 2014, made by writer Hunter S. Thompson," said Pollard. "He

had said something to the effect of 'You bought the ticket, now take the ride!' So, that's what my frame of mind was: The weather looked bad, but Lhakpa said it was OK — so I didn't question his judgment one more time. I had bought the ticket, so now we were going to take the ride."

It's all in the rearview mirror now — and he is overjoyed.

"Was it worth it? It was 150 percent worth it," said Pollard. "It's not that it was the only important thing I have ever done in my life, but I have to admit there have not been many nights that I have gone to sleep since the 1999 'Nova' trip, when I had been just a few hours from the summit, that I haven't thought, 'Wow, I hope I get to the top someday.'"

"But you know, now that I have summited — it's like a huge burden has been lifted off my back, and I feel as though I'm an extra inch taller, and that I'm floating."

And what about those dream episodes about Everest? "Now, when I go to sleep, I think — I did it. I don't have to worry about it anymore."

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Wednesday, Aug. 10th

**SENIOR DAY**

Exclusive Bonus Savings for Seniors! ...and if you say it's for a senior, you get the deal!



**Mark Your Calendars!** Upcoming Exclusive Events...

**SENIOR DAY!**  
Wednesday, Aug. 10  
Specials storewide! Extra savings for our mature customers!

**CLEARANCE EVENT!**  
August 12th & 13th  
Extra 10% Off Our Already Drastically Reduced Closeout & Clearance Items!

**FAMOUS FRIENDS & FAMILY & YOU SALE!**  
Sun & Mon, Aug. 14th & 15th  
Exclusive Bonus Savings on Almost Everything!

**SEARS CARD CREDIT EVENT!**  
Extra 10% to 15% Off Storewide on Purchases over \$299 & \$499

Depending on what you want and when you want it, we have numerous opportunities to get you the best deal. We shop, you save... In-store or online, we make your timing perfect!

**WE DO REPAIRS on Lawn & Garden Equipment!**  
Super Fast & Very Reasonable! At the Store, or At Your Home

IT ALWAYS PAYS EXTRA TO HAVE & USE YOUR SEARS CARD!  
Additional 5% Off Most Everything, Every Price! No Card? No Problem!  
Get one in minutes at your Hometown Sears Store and pay less for your purchases most of the time!

**Biggest Selection, Better Service, BEST PRICES!**

**As Always... LOW PRICE GUARANTEE!**

Online or In-store, you're guaranteed to get your **BEST DEAL!** Get it right, and faster. Ship to store or directly to you!

**WE SHOP... YOU SAVE... WE DO IT ALL!**  
• Deliver • Install • Assemble • Remove • Repair  
• Parts • On-Line Ordering

**GET A SUPER DEAL NOW!**  
Defer payment and pick it up or have it delivered when **YOU** want it!

**sears** of North Conway,  
Your Hometown-  
Outlet Store

Always Open  
Sundays 9am-4pm  
Out Of Town Phone  
Orders Accepted!

**356-5777 • RT. 302, REDSTONE**  
HOURS: MON-SAT 9-7PM; SUN 9-4PM  
\*SOME EXCLUSIONS APPLY, WHILE QUANTITIES LAST.  
SEE STORE FOR DETAILS. PRIOR SALES DO NOT APPLY.

**HARVEST GOLD GALLERY**  
EST. 1985  
IN THE MOUNTAINS OF MAINE

**PLEIN AIR PAINTING EVENT:**  
*You're Invited*  
Stop by on August 6th,  
10:00am-5:00pm, to see some  
of your favorite local artists  
set up their easels throughout  
our gardens!

Open Daily: 10:00-5:00  
(207) 925-6502  
harvestgoldgallery.com

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