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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2016

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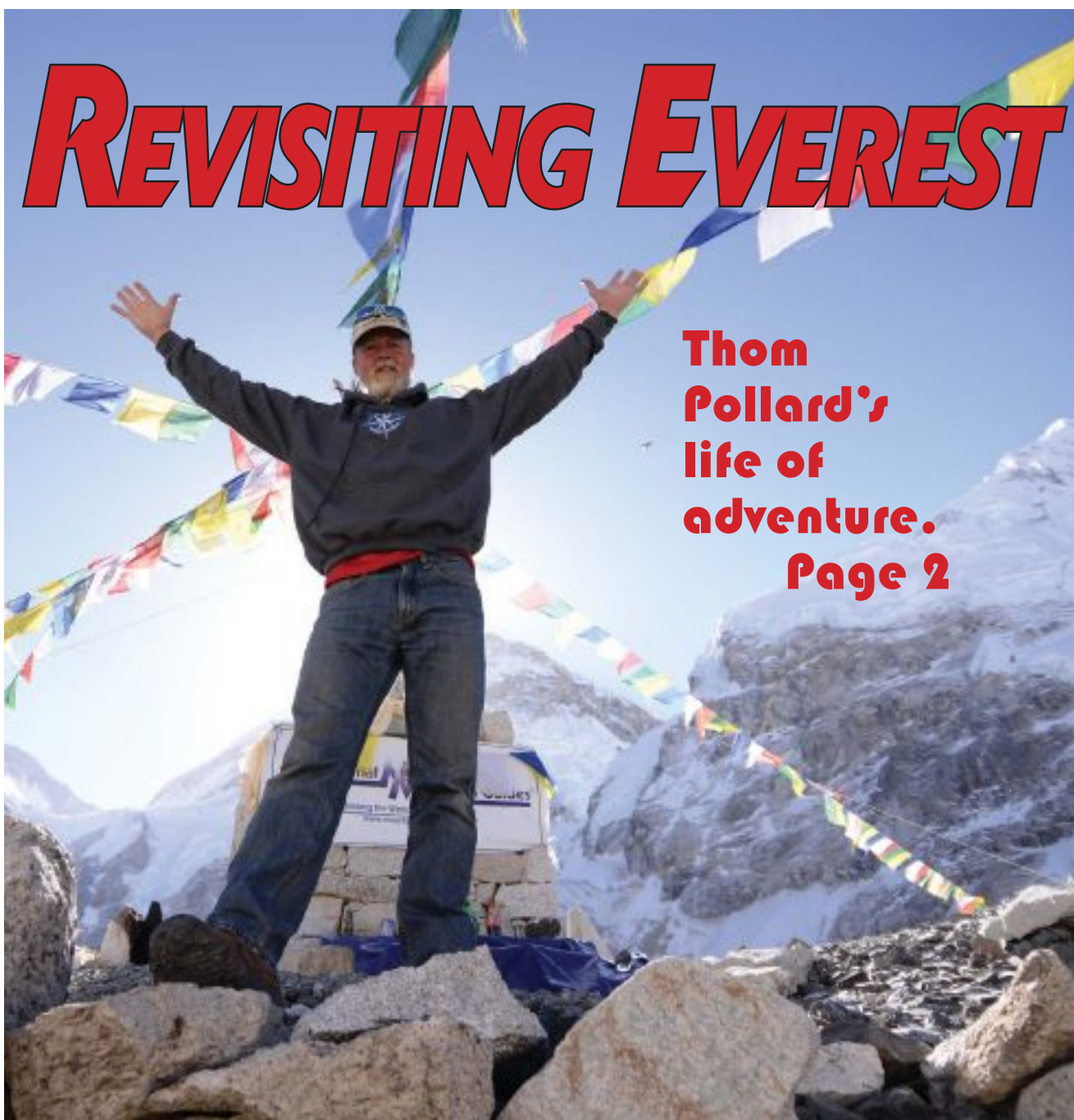
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REVISITING EVEREST

**Thom
Pollard's
life of
adventure.
Page 2**



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Thom Pollard's excellent adventures

Jackson climber to make third assault on Everest

By TOM EASTMAN
THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

CONWAY — Why climb Everest? Well, to quote late climber Sir George Mallory (1886-1924), "Because it's there."

But for award-winning Jackson documentary filmmaker Thom Pollard, it's not just about the mountain; it's also because of what's there inside a climber's heart and soul.

Pollard — winner of an Emmy Award and Golden CINE award nominee — will give a presentation, "Filming Side-by-Side with Danger, Everest and Beyond," next Tuesday, Feb. 23, at 6:30 p.m. at Kennett High School.

"I was always one to do 'things out of the ordinary' — from early on, I was always one to tempt fate."

"I'm not sure what compels me to undertake a life of adventure," Pollard said in a recent interview, "but my late mother Sallie, who recently passed away, used to say I was always one to do 'things out of the ordinary' — from early on, I was always one to tempt fate ... to peer into real adventure and real danger, and to see what is in there."

Some of that attitude has been tempered over the years.

"As I have gotten older," said Pollard, 54, father of Kennett High senior and star quarterback Will Pollard and freshman QB Sam, "each adventure that I have gone on has been more and more about the relationships that are developed along the way, and about the journey inside as you challenge yourself."

He maintains his fitness, working out four to six times a week with his athletic sons.

He also Nordic skis frequently.

His Feb. 23 presentation will feature clips from his 2014 Everest documentary, during which an avalanche claimed the lives of 16 high-altitude porters and Sherpa.

He'll also share stories and images from other



Jackson documentary filmmaker Thom Pollard at Everest Base Camp on his last trip in 2014. (EYES OPEN PRODUCTIONS)

treks near and far, such as:

- A 1999 "Nova" and BBC Everest expedition, during which he filmed the discovery of the preserved body of Mallory, famed Everest pioneering climber at nearly 27,000 feet.
- Pollard's reed ship adventure to Easter Island in 2003.
- His attempt with Rick Wilcox, Joe Lentini, Maury McKinney and other climbers of Gasherbrum II in Pakistan in 1996.
- A failed winter ascent of Mount Washington with a disabled veterans group.

Pollard also will discuss his upcoming Everest expedition, set for late March through May. A summit bid is planned. No one has summited Ever-

est in the past two years, following the deadly avalanches of 2014 and '15.

The presentation will serve as a fundraiser for Kennett's 2016 Project Graduation, a safe and fun night for graduating seniors in spring, and for the Juniper Trust, which benefits families of mountain workers in Nepal.

Tickets can be purchased at the door or in advance for a suggested price of \$10. Families of four can contribute \$25.

Bigger contributions are encouraged.

There will be music at 6 p.m., as well as a silent auction with items from local businesses and restaurants.

see POLLARD page 3

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In 2003, Thom Pollard got to sail on an ancient-styled reed ship adventure to Easter Island for another film project. (COURTESY PHOTO)

POLLARD from page 2

For the upcoming expedition, Pollard's third to Everest, his group plans to visit high-altitude camps on Everest dating back to the 1950s, for the purposes of creating a traveling museum on all things Everest and the Khumbu region of Nepal.

"We want to take people on a trip to the region photographically, to help them understand and relate to what it's like to climb the world's tallest

peak, and to understand the mountain's mystique," Pollard said.

"We will be attempting to retrace the steps of Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay's 1953 expedition, regarded to have been the first successful ascent, which is far off the usual route followed now.

"It will add time to the climb, but we feel that it will be a way for us to tell the whole story of early pioneers on

see **POLLARD** page 4

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POLLARD from page 3

this incredible mountain.”

Pollard will be working alongside 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. Barber will be making a film of the expedition while Pollard shoots stills and video.

Barber — who attended Madison Elementary and Tamworth Learning Circles, and graduated from Kennett in 2008 — said he is looking forward to capturing the beauty and culture of Nepal.

“I am ready to make a movie on Everest that brings new understanding to the everyday person while still being a movie that has a strong hold in the mountaineering community,” said Barber, also a graduate of Champlain College in Burlington.

The expedition leader is Paul Giorgio of Millbury, Mass. Giorgio has climbed Everest successfully four times, twice without supplemental oxygen.

A writer for Outside Magazine will be chronicling the expedition.

A mini-version of the film is slated to debut at the Explorers Club’s annual dinner in New York City in March 2017.

“Paul (Giorgio) and I are both members of the Explorers Club,” Pollard said, adding that Giorgio was granted an Explorers flag by late mountaineering cartographer Dr. Brad Washburn of the Boston Museum of Science, “and we plan to carry that flag with us. We also plan to meet in Kathmandu with Peter Hillary, the son of the late Sir



Everest was the scene of devastation the last two climbing season. Pollard speaks with Nepalese who lost loved ones in 2014. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Edmund Hillary.”

Pollard also carried an Explorers Club flag on the Viracocha II reed ship expedition in 2003. There are 202 numbered flags, each with its own history, he said.

“To carry the club’s flag is an honor

and a privilege. It has flown at both poles, from the highest peaks of the greatest mountain ranges, to the depths of the ocean, to the lunar surface and outer space,” Pollard said.

He hopes the group will summit the mountain, but if it doesn’t, he’s

OK with that, too. “While I will give it 110 percent,” said Pollard, “I honestly don’t care if we get to the top. I do, don’t get me wrong, but that’s not everything.”

Again, he emphasized, it’s about the see **POLLARD** page 6



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Thom Pollard has devoted his life to recording adventures in the mountains as well as on the open sea. He is shown above in 2009 on western Argentina's Aconcagua. (COURTESY PHOTO)

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Thom Pollard is shown in his base camp tent during his halted Everest expedition in 2014. (COURTESY PHOTO)

POLLARD from page 4

journey, the friendships, the relationships you build along the way.

"You see and learn a lot about yourself when faced with discomfort and hardship," he continued. "Even the constant droning of missing home every day, of thinking of your kids and loved ones, it impacts you. ... Then your journal entries become that much more introspective, and you appreciate and understand the finer points of life."

Last trip to Everest

It's a lesson he learned vividly on his last trip to Everest, in 2014.

His assignment was to film the story of a 68-year-old trying to become the oldest American to climb the mountain. Then the April 18 avalanche near Everest Base Camp struck, claiming the lives of 16 Sherpa and porters. The Nepalese government literally closed off the mountain. The trajectory of the film immediately changed course from following a person to the summit to the Sherpa families who had lost loved ones.

It goes without saying there's a real connection between Mount Washington Valley and Nepal.

Last year, when an earthquake and strong aftershocks flattened Nepalese villages and triggered another avalanche on Everest, Pollard worked along with 1991 New England Everest Expedition leader Rick Wilcox and his wife, Celia Wilcox, to raise equipment and funds for the local families. The Wilcoxes were in the country when the temblors happened.

Schoolchildren at Josiah Bartlett Elementary School also helped raise

see POLLARD page 7



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Thom Pollard first went to western Argentina's Aconcagua, the highest mountain outside Asia, in 1993. (COURTESY PHOTO)

POLLARD from page 6

funds for a school in Nepal, while students and staff at Conway's SOLO (Stonehearth Open Learning School) and local college student Molly Shannon (who was in country at the time of the quakes) undertook their own fundraising efforts.

An update on that recovery will be part of the new film, Pollard said.

see **POLLARD** page 8

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LEFT: Thom Pollard today has lost none of his taste for adventure. (TOM EASTMAN PHOTO) ABOVE: Everest, at 29,028 feet, is the tallest peak in the world. This view was shot during Pollard's 2014 expedition. (COURTESY PHOTO)

POLLARD from page 7

"While there has been much rebuilding, some of the remote villages are still in need of supplies and help. I intend to find out firsthand how at least my friends in the Khumbu region are doing, and donate some funds and supplies to the effort to help those in the farthest reaches that are still in need," he said.

At 29,028 feet, Everest is the tallest mountain in the world.

As of 2015, approximately 4,000 people have summited the peak since Hillary and Norgay's ascent, and an estimated 200 have died trying, including the 19 who died in the deadly year of 1996 as chronicled by writer Jon Krakauer in "Into Thin Air."

Still resonates

Pollard said Everest still resonates with the world's imagination, 92 years after Mallory and Sandy Irvine's fatal attempt, and 63 years after Hillary and Norgay's ascent.

"For any adventurer, whether armchair or the real thing, there is something sacred about the highest, deepest, farthest reaches of the planet (and universe) that has always held our imagination," he said. "I used to love the idea of regaling my friends with tales of being trapped high up in the Death Zone during epic Himalayan storms and the like, and I guess I can do that now."

"I was fortunate," he continued, "to have produced the film about Rick Wilcox's successful 1991 Everest expedition (which was then picked up by PBS' "Nova" after the 1996 disaster on Everest, thus beginning my relationship with them), and then travel with him to Nepal to guide a peak in the Annapurna region. Significantly, I joined the Gasherbum II Expedition in Pakistan and real-

see POLLARD page 9

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Pollard in 1999 was part of a project that succeeded in finding the remains of famed Everest mountaineer George Mallory, who died in May 1924. His boot is seen above. (COURTESY PHOTO)

POLLARD from page 8

ized that this was no fluke, that I had not only an affinity for high-altitude climbing, but actually got stronger as the teams went higher, while many of the people around me got weaker. So, I guess physiologically, I'm well-suited to the whole Everest thing."

Asked what it was like to be there when the "Nova"/BBC expedition discovered the remains of Mallory, Pollard said it stays with him in profound ways. The question over whether Mallory and Irvine died on their ascent or on the way down remains one of mountaineering's all-time debates. Some say that if climbers were to find Irvine's camera, the film inside it could possibly be developed, proving once and for all whether they were the first to reach the summit.

After their discovery of Mallory's body, the group covered his body with rocks and consecrated the site.

"To this day, I feel that the day I visited the site where George Mallory lay as one of the most powerful and significant days of my life," Pollard said. "I was awed by the fact I was standing next to one of the greatest explorers of that generation. Couple that with the fact that Mallory and Irvine are known to have climbed to over 28,000 feet in altitude with clothes and footwear that literally we would not want to wear when shoveling our driveway. Whether they made it or not, and I do not believe they did, I hold their

accomplishment as one of the great climbs of the modern era. I was lucky enough to be part of a team that was akin to an all-star cast of Olympians, including Conrad Anker, Dave Hahn, Jake Norton, Andy Politz and the one and only Eric Simonson, the leader of the expedition. I was pretty green on that trip, and learned enough on that trip to write a book."

Pollard is owner of Eyes Open Productions, a film company that shoots documentaries and produces videos for clients, including Memorial Hospital and local ski areas, including Cranmore Mountain.

He also recently founded Great Northern Networks, a digital signage company. In 2013, he

produced a ski history documentary on Cranmore Mountain's 75th anniversary.

Pollard's previous fundraising talks for organizations such as the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust were well-attended.

The Feb. 23 talk at Kennett also is expected to be a sellout, so people are urged to get their tickets early.

They can be purchased in advance at the Mount Washington Valley Chamber of Commerce on Main Street in North Conway (ask for Melody).

For more information about the event or about Project Graduation 2016, contact Julie Levine at juliesara143@gmail.com.

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"I was lucky enough to be part of a team that was akin to an all-star cast of Olympians. ... I learned enough on that trip to write a book."

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