

Sharon Wood

First North American Woman to Summit Mount Everest

Mount Everest was a culmination of an odyssey that began at age twelve when her father took her up her first mountain. By the time she was seventeen she was devoting all her time to climbing. Laurie Skreslet met Sharon at Outward Bound and knew she was out of the ordinary. "It was obvious to me the moment I saw her that she was committed, grounded, determined, focused, persevering...overflowing with potential."

Her first break came in 1977 when she joined an all women's expedition to Mount Logan. Then in 1983 she had her first big success with the Cassin Ridge on Mount McKinley which "really changed my attitude. I didn't see myself so much as a woman but as a climbing partner. I came back with a lot of confidence." Expeditions to Makalu (1984), the south face of Aconcagua (1984) and the northeast face of Huascarán Sur (1985) followed. By 1986 she realized that she was "...ready for anything." Her ascent of Mount Everest by the difficult west ridge and north face was first for a North American woman, but as her friend Albi Sole recalled, "It's not because she was a woman that she got to the top, it's because she was the right person for the job."

After Everest she had moved on to other adventures. Much in demand as a public speaker, she travels North America sharing her experiences and her approach to risk. In 1988 she married and is now raising a family. Much of her time nowadays is taken up organizing a private school she started in her home town of Canmore, Alberta. In 1997 Sharon received the Summit of Excellence Award at the Banff Mountain Film Festival.

Sharon explained her motives in a recent interview. "The constants that I have strived to maintain through all of these things is ...the steep learning curve, the intensity, perhaps a certain degree of risk....and tremendous adventure...and that ongoing, never ending quest for self knowledge."