

Making mountaineering history

At the beginning of April, just a few weeks before his 17th birthday, George Atkinson arrived in Kathmandu in Nepal. The schoolboy from London was about to begin the final stage of his quest to become the youngest person to climb the highest peak on each of the world's seven continents. **(1)**..... It was just Mount Everest to go – the mightiest of the lot.

As an 11-year-old, George had been with his father on an organised trip up Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain. But George's dad got a stomach bug before the final ascent to the peak. 'I felt very weak and dehydrated', he said, and had to go back down. **(2)**..... And as George continued to the top with the rest of the group, his father endured an anxious wait. 'Seeing him coming back down again was indescribable.'

The next few years saw George build up his mountaineering skills and his fitness to prepare for his epic challenge. He spent his weekends carrying a heavily laden 80-litre backpack and walking from the family home to Richmond Park in London, which he'd then complete two full circuits of, making a round trip of 30 kilometres. At 29,029 feet, Everest is over 6,500 feet higher than any of the other mountains on George's list. He knew it would be a challenge and was aware of the risks that being at such high altitudes carries, but he wanted to stand on top of the world. On checking in to the Hotel Everest View, at 12,729 feet, he got a glimpse of Mount Everest, and imagined looking back down to the hotel from the peak. He phoned his mother, Penny, and spoke to her. **(3)**..... And she knew just how much this climb meant to him.

But as they got closer to the summit, the weather turned bad. There were nervous moments for George and his group as they waited to see if the weather would improve and the wind would drop to a safer speed of below 30 miles an hour. George didn't know how long he might have to wait for another opportunity. **(4)**..... An American climber, Jordan Romero, who was two

months younger than George, only needed to scale Vinson Massif in Antarctica to complete his set of seven.

But eventually they made it, and George achieved his dream. But there was hardly time to celebrate on the peak. **(5)**..... By the time they got back down to the bottom, George and the rest of his group were all exhausted.

George intends to keep climbing and carry on with his studies. He says he is looking forward to life getting back to normal. And he's planning another mountaineering trip with his dad, this time up Mont Blanc in France. But the question is, will the elder Atkinson make it all the way up to the top this time? **(6)**.....

- A** 'I've seen it,' he said, 'and it's huge.'
- B** He had already conquered all but one.
- C** But he knew he still needed more practice.
- D** 'I hope so,' he says, 'George is going to carry my stuff.'
- E** But George knew what he wanted: he was going to carry on.
- F** And by then, someone else might have snatched the record.
- G** Almost immediately, they had to begin an exhausting, non-stop 20-hour descent.