

Stouffville Free Press

Vol. 1, No. 12

Whitchurch-Stouffville's Independent Community Owned Newspaper

November 2006

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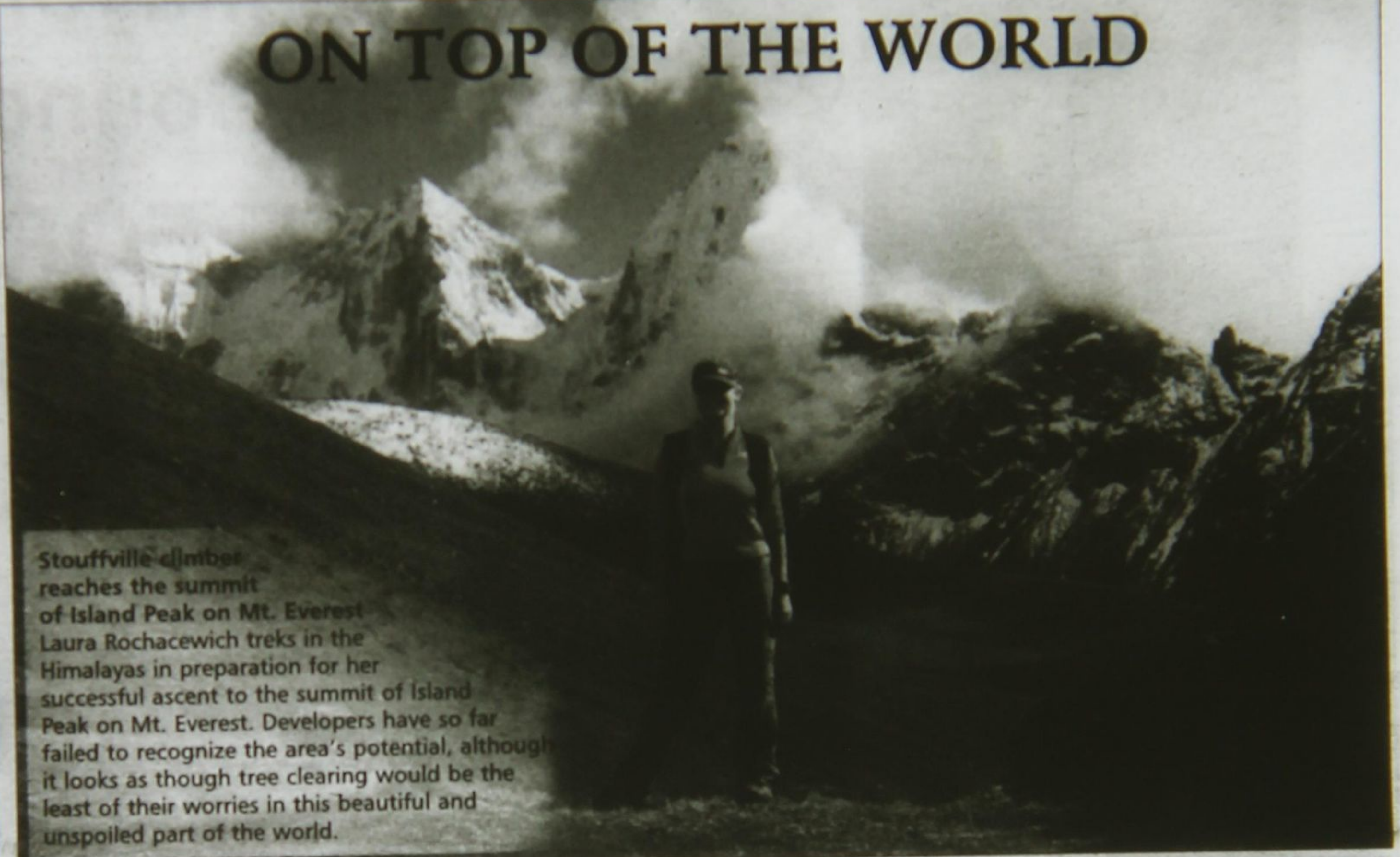
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ON TOP OF THE WORLD



Stouffville climber reaches the summit of Island Peak on Mt. Everest. Laura Rochacewich treks in the Himalayas in preparation for her successful ascent to the summit of Island Peak on Mt. Everest. Developers have so far failed to recognize the area's potential, although it looks as though tree clearing would be the least of their worries in this beautiful and unspoiled part of the world.

By Laura Rochacewich

After one year in Korea, and three months travelling in Thailand, Cambodia and India, the time for my Nepal adventure had finally arrived! Destination: Mt. Everest Base Camp and the summit of Island Peak.

A quick flight from Kathmandu and a blood pumping landing in the small mountain village of Lukla started me on the most exhilarating adventure. With three weeks ahead of trekking and climbing in the Himalayas, I was as fresh as a daisy and as clean as a new pair of stilettos.

Those stilettos quickly turned into muddy hiking boots. As we gained altitude, the effects began to show. My team and I experienced headaches, nausea and the favourite amongst all trekkers and climbers, gasping for air in the night. Our bodies began to fight the lack of oxygen and made sure that we knew it.

After days of trekking, we reached Mt. Everest Base Camp. Everything about it was amazing. From the way we were feeling due to the high altitude (5,400m), to the scenery and the knowledge of where we were. I began to think of myself as a fearless climber ready to take on the summit. I searched for a satellite phone to make a quick call to Sir Edmund Hillary for some pointers. However, I had to remind myself that I had slightly less experience and didn't actually know Hillary himself.

Two more days of trekking and we reached Island Peak, the mountain that we would attempt to summit. Our climb began at 2 a.m. under the stars and moonlight. We all clicked on our headlamps and began our slow and steady ascent.

With the help of our Serda (the lead Sherpa), Ang Nima Sherpa, we crossed deep crevasses in a glacier and approached a 600 ft. wall of ice and snow. Ang Nima told me that this was the way to the top. Had he confused me with Spider Man? My pants were blue and my boots did resemble a red colour...

The rest of my team decided to pack it in and call it a day. The effects of the altitude had worn out their bodies and they needed to get down for some richer air. They cheered me on, and disappeared into the snow.

My guide June and I continued in our bid for the summit. The two of us huffed and puffed, taking one step at a time while congratulating each other on being women. My legs were starting to feel suspiciously like logs and I'm certain that an elephant was sitting on my chest. Four steps made me breathless and left me panting for air.

June offered encouragement for me to get one more metre to the top. "Come on girl! You can do it!"

My foot hit the summit. I couldn't believe it. I had made it. Gasping for air, exhausted legs, long days and cold conditions, I had reached my goal.

Standing at 6,189m (20,305 ft), June and I scooped each other up in a hug and congratulated one another on our hard work. The sense of exhilaration was astounding.

As the only member of my team to summit, it was an accomplishment. To summit with another woman was fabulous. We were two dirty, sweaty women who hadn't showered for longer than I'd like to admit, standing on top of a mountain with the world below us. And they say girls can't play sports.



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