

CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN

A climber of Mount Everest and other lofty peaks now helps others reach their own mental summits

THE YEAR was 1982 and John Amatt of Canmore, Alberta, had fulfilled his 16 - year dream of climbing to the top of the world. Yet he wondered what to do next.

By Elsie Rose

"You've climbed Mount Everest, now you've got to go one step beyond," his wife Peggy said. At the time, John had no idea his next step would take him into corporate boardrooms around the world.

One year later John formed One Step Beyond, a Canmore - based consulting firm dedicated to helping others reach their highest goals. John and his associates conduct presentations, wilderness-based team-building seminars and audio-visual seminars for corporate clients.

His pet peeve is being called a "motivational speaker." Rather, the **Adventure Attitude** is central to his psyche. "I speak from my own experience. That's all I can do. This is my mission in life - to encourage people to reach their own potential."

Since 1983, with more than 600 presentations to his credit, he has inspired many large organizations including IBM, AT & T and Motorola, by offering an invitation to use Mount Everest as a metaphor for the

challenges and changes in our lives.

That's remarkable for a formerly shy Englishman born in 1945. He was the son of an English bank official and full-time homemaker. His love of climbing grew out of reading his father's personal library of mountaineering and adventure books. When John was about 11, the family hiked up Scotland's Ben Nevis, the British Isles' highest mountain of 1,343 metres.

Typically, Ben Nevis became cold, windy and rainy and the tired and bored John announced he wanted to go down. "If you turn around now", said his father Sid "you'll regret it for the rest of your life." Those words helped John make it to the top.

"At the time it meant nothing to me, but when I look back it was probably the catalyst which made me the person I am today," said John. "Without that event, I could have abandoned mountain climbing completely. My father's words turned me right around." John joined the school's scout troop where he discovered a self-confidence and independence he never knew he had. Gradually, his adventures included a 50-mile hike in the Scottish highlands, an Austrian climbing adventure and joining a climbing club when he was 16.

"Mountains have always been very significant to me. My entire personality has evolved through my experience in the mountains," said John. "Growing up



John Amatt climbing in Scotland

in a very protective environment, it wasn't easy to take risks. Because of that, I had no way of developing my own self-confidence and I was very shy."

After graduating from secondary school at 18, John organized an expedition to Arctic Norway with a few friends. Together they made four or five ascents of unclimbed peaks in three weeks. "From that point everything I did I tried to do in areas where nobody had been before. Rather than imitating others, I wanted to be first."

John said his most significant climbing adventure was the world's tallest granite wall, the 1,500 metre-high north face of the Troll Wall in Norway. Experts said the wall was smooth and without holds for a vertical mile making it impossible. In July 1965, John and his two companions made world history by making an 11 - day ascent.

That accomplishment marked the first time John had experienced true personal success. The unknown climber also began to make a name for himself in climbing circles. "From there it became what's next, what's bigger, what's better. How do I grow?" Within months, he was rubbing shoulders with the world's best climbers.

Shortly after, he climbed the north edge of Alpamayo in Peru, a 6,096-metre trapezoid of fluted ice often called "the most beautiful mountain in the world." The five-member British team made the first complete ascent of the north ridge, and produced a film that later won an international award. It was around this time that the Everest dream began.

With hopes of living and teaching in the mountains, John immigrated to Canada in 1968 after finishing teacher's college. The closest he got to the mountains was Medicine Hat. He met Peggy, from the nearby town of Golden Prairie, who became his wife a year later. In 1973, he moved to Banff where he taught school and organized ambitious outdoor expeditions such as Baffin Island in Canada's Arctic.

Years later, John left teaching to conduct management seminars through the Banff Centre for Continuing Education in Banff. While in Banff, John founded the renowned Banff Festival of Mountain Films, the second largest festival of its kind in the world.



John Amatt climbing on Troll Wall, Norway - at 1,500 metres the world's tallest vertical face

In 1979 Bill March, the leader of the 1982 expedition to Mount Everest, asked John to be the expedition's business manager. John gave up his teaching job and sought financing for the project for the next two years on a weekly salary of \$250. He raised \$1 million and created intense public interest in the journey. National television and magazines covered the climb.

"For me, Everest was the ultimate dream," John said. It took 16 years to get to Everest, but I never forgot the dream. My path was not a straight one, but because I had the vision, I eventually got there."

He said the real learning came in the journey to get there, not in reaching the summit.

"We faced death, deterioration and despondency on

Everest. We dug deep. In the process we discovered we were capable of more than we ever thought possible, that we had the resources to keep on going no matter what the setbacks."

"Life, like Everest, is a series of changes, from valleys to peaks and back down again. We attain goals, we suffer setbacks. The art, I think is to remember what we felt on the heights when we are down in the valley." The lessons of Everest included accepting the challenge, preparing, working as a team, treating people as equals, adapting to changing conditions, facing inner fears, setting goals, coping with setbacks, recognizing the need for support and remaining open to the next horizon.

In recent years he has branched out to other passions. His latest project includes a five-year, \$4 million, 3,680-kilometre re-enactment of Alexander Mackenzie's 1789 journey to the Arctic Ocean.

After repeated rejections by publishers, John self - published **One Step Beyond: Rediscovering the Adventure Attitude**, a book about adventure and Canadian achievers like Laurie Skreslet, the first Canadian to climb Mount Everest and Sharon Wood, the first North American woman to climb Mount Everest.

John said Peggy and daughter Jillian, 15, have sacrificed much to support his dream. "Now it's my turn to help them realize theirs," he said. "So, in other words, I'll explore until I die. I'm never satisfied, always challenging, discovering and I'm never complacent. My life is going to be a trajectory from birth to death - from the bottom to the top."