

Kit DesLauriers

The first person to ski from the top of the Seven Summits and the winner of consecutive Freeride World Tour titles, DesLauriers is one of the most accomplished ski mountaineers in history.

After graduating from the University of Arizona in 1991, Kit DesLauriers moved to Telluride and immersed herself in the mountains, fully realizing that she was really “a Rocky Mountain girl born to New Englanders.” She quickly found her sense of place in the high spaces of the San Juan Mountains, and the record she then compiled is even more impressive, almost inconceivable, given this relatively late start.

In 2004 and 2005, DesLauriers became the first female to win back-to-back, season-long titles on the Freeride World Tour, despite her being, at age 35, roughly a decade older than the rest of the international field, many of whom grew up on skis. A backcountry skier at heart, she had managed to curb her this appetite long enough to allow for non-stop 4,000-vertical-foot training laps on the Jackson Hole tram, transforming herself—practically overnight—into one of the best big-mountain skiers on the planet. At the same time, DesLauriers was embarking on her breakthrough journey to become the first person, male or female, to climb and ski from the top of each of the Seven Summits, the highest peaks on each of the continents, climaxing with a 2016 climb and ski on 29,035-foot Mount Everest.

None of this was accomplished in front of stadiums packed with flag-waving fans or for six-figure payouts; in fact, in the early years she juggled numerous ski-bum jobs before eventually becoming an accomplished stonemason and then ski mountaineer.

DesLauriers, née Katzenbach (she married renowned big-mountain-skier-turned-Jackson-Hole-lodge-developer Rob DesLauriers in 1999), grew up in Massachusetts. She competed fiercely in many sports: soccer, softball, volleyball, tennis, track and cross-country. When the family moved to Arizona, they started to

make annual ski trips, first to nearby Sunrise and then to Sun Valley. As an undergraduate, DesLauriers found herself on frequent 12-hour drives to Telluride for long weekends. Further attracted to the mountaineering life by a semester spent abroad at the University of Marseilles with weekend trips to Verbier, and then a summer with the National Outdoor Leadership School in Alaska, she vowed to move to Telluride as soon as she graduated.

Along with her wolf pup Alta, DesLauriers settled into a cabin in nearby Ophir, eventually joining the ski patrol and the Search and Rescue team. She worked on her backcountry skiing, bagged many of the significant local peaks, and honed her rock climbing. On her first big international ski mountaineering trip, a North Face-sponsored expedition to the Russia-Mongolia border, she reached the top of Mt. Belukha, the highest in Siberia. DesLauriers set a goal to earn a place on The North Face team, and also met her husband-to-be, Rob, who grew up skiing and working at the family's Bolton Valley ski resort in Vermont, then became a ski-film mainstay and longtime TNF athlete.

When Rob and Kit married the next year—she admits that the groom's promise of season passes at *both* Jackson Hole and Grand Targhee further sweetened the deal—the couple eventually settled down in the mountainside Teton Village at Jackson Hole, where they have now lived for 21 years. Living slopeside for the first time in her life ("I didn't have to drive to ski!") while her husband set out on a busy career as a lodge builder-developer, DesLauriers set out to ramp up her ski volume. "I pushed myself to evolve my skiing," she says, which included everything from getting comfortable in the air to opening up big arcs on steep, rocky terrain. Rob provided helpful guidance when he could pry himself away from work, while Kit set out to prove to herself that she could compete at the highest level.

Although Kit had her moments on the podium, she was first-and-foremost a mountaineer, and that mindset was confirmed when she climbed and skied 20,310-foot Denali in Alaska in May 2004. It was at a dinner eight months later with Snowbird founder and the first Seven Summits climber, Dick Bass, that the goal of climbing and skiing all of those peaks coalesced. "I'm honored that my Seven Summits experience prompted her to discover whether she could ski those

summits," said Bass, who climbed his seventh peak in 1985 and after their dinner left her as copy of the his book, *Seven Summits*. (Bass died in 2015.) After winning her second WFT title in 2005, she then climbed and skied 18,510-foot Mt. Elbrus, a dormant volcano in the Caucasus Mountain in southern Russia that is the highest peak in Europe

At Camp II on Everest in October 2006, poised to complete the two-plus-year Seven Summits journey, DesLauriers told her husband that if they survived, once they returned to Jackson she would be ready—finally—to start a family. They battled minus-45-degree temperatures and blue ice on Denali. Kit notes that they did not ski the Hilary Step, having run out of oxygen and finding that snow wouldn't stick to the vertical wall. They did descend the Lhotse Face, the most difficult skiing they've ever done and a feat that has not been repeated. (Kit and Rob, who accompanied her on five of the Seven Summits, used oxygen and Sherpas for Everest, but not for any of the other climbs.)

Kit has also completed several first ski descents of the highest peaks of the Brooks Range in Alaska, became the first woman to climb and ski New Zealand's Mount Aspiring, and is only the third woman to do so on Wyoming's notorious Grand Teton, which she has done 10 times, including solo. Her focus in the past decade has been on expeditions to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, including mapping the highest peak in the Brooks Range, for which she was honored as the National Geographic Adventurer of the Year in 2015.

DesLauriers' memoir, *Higher Love, Skiing the Seven Summits*, was published in 2015. She is a natural storyteller in high demand as a speaker, and indeed has been a member of the The North Face Global Athlete Team since 2005. With her high interest in getting youth outdoors, she is particularly proud to have influenced the company to offer a line of outdoor apparel for youth.

The DesLauriers' two daughters share their parent's sense of adventure, have climbed many of the highest mountains in the Tetons with their parents, and have already made the family trek to the Mt. Everest base camp. Tia, 10, is on the local Nordic ski club team, while Grace, 12, passed her Level I avalanche

training and has already skied Corbet's Couloir. The whole family appeared in the final segment of the Warren Miller's 70th film, 2019's "Timeless."

Career Accomplishments

1991: Graduates from University of Arizona with honors, moves to Telluride.

2003: First female ski descent of Mt. Aspiring in New Zealand.

2004-05: First female winner of consecutive World Freeskiing Tours.

2004: Climbs and skis the first of the Seven Summits, Denali in Alaska.

2006: Completes the finale of the Seven Summits, Mt. Everest.

2014: Publishes her autobiography, *Higher Love*.

2015: Named National Geographic Adventurer of the Year.

Born: Nov. 29, 1969 (Albany, N.Y.)