

# Tears, tequila and an attempt at mountaineering history

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

When Adrian Ballinger of Squaw Valley and crew reached high camp at Makalu the weather was more like a pleasant, bluebird day in the Sierra Nevada than what he expected to find on the fifth-highest peak on the planet.

Ballinger, 39, was leader of a crew of five ski mountaineers from the Lake Tahoe area, Colorado and Wyoming who were seeking to make the first-ever ski descent off the Himalayan peak.

Also at camp were Emily Harrington, 29, of Squaw Valley, a professional climber since her teenage years who made her name in the sport as the first female on numerous difficult routes; Hilaree O'Neill, 42, of Telluride, Colo., the first female climber to climb two 8,000 meter, or 26,000-foot, peaks within 24 hours; Jim Morrison, 40, of Truckee, an accomplished adventurer and professional skier who was making his first attempt on an 8,000-meter peak, and four Sherpa guides, a cook and his assistant. Kit DesLauriers, a professional ski mountaineer from Wyoming and the first person to have skied from the highest peak on each continent, the so-called "Seven Summits," started with the crew but bowed out at base camp due to severe altitude sickness.

On Makalu the team was enjoying conditions that are nearly unheard late in the fall climbing season at that altitude. The ideal weather and good health of the climbers made for an almost perfect setup to their pending summit attempt.

"It was the best day I had ever seen for climbing a mountain," said Ballinger, who was making his second attempt to ski from the Makalu peak. In 2012 Ballinger and a client abandoned an

attempt due to bad weather. "With those factors in mind certainly I felt a strong desire this had to be the year. We had to go for it."

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