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Youngest to Conquer the Bulger List

Summits 100 tallest peaks in Cascade Range

As a youngster, Linsey Warren heard the mountains calling. The urge to climb knows no age, so, just eight years old, Warren tried to run away from home to climb the gem of the Northwest, Mount Rainer. She didn't succeed in that caper, but she did summit The Mountain at age 16, when most teenagers focus on less challenging tasks.

So it's little surprise that Warren, a Washington native, stands proud as the youngest climber — male or female — to complete the prestigious Bulger List (see sidebar), made up of the 100 tallest peaks in the Cascadian Range from Mount Rainier to Flora Mountain.

Warren first heard of the Bulger List when she was 22 years old. Though she had been indiscriminately peak-bagging in the area for years, she only had climbed three of the Bulgers.

"Like most outdoor stories it was practically a dare," said Warren, explaining why she took on the Bulger challenge. "I was on a mountaineering trip the summer of 2009 after I graduated from the University of Puget Sound and someone mentioned the 'Bulger List.'"

After hearing a few of the named summits, she estimated she had done at least one-tenth of the list; however, it turns out she had only topped three.

Warren and another person on the same trip paired up to attempt a few more Bulgers that summer, and thus the quest to complete the list began.

First Up

Warren's acceleration into mountaineering came in 2003 when she was 16. She lobbied the Seattle Mountaineers to allow her to go through its Basic Mountaineering program without parental supervision. Before the Mountaineers offered youth climbing programs, young climbers needed a parent to

accompany them during training.

She was accepted, and without hesitation, selected what was called the "high intensity mentor group" and was assigned a male mentor who in her words "either drew the short straw or was brave enough" to take on a teenage girl.

"In hindsight, it really was a remarkable circumstance," Warren said. "A unique situation with the potential for serious issues, and yet everyone gave the benefit of the doubt and acted on faith, so that I could participate at the level I wanted to."

The other woman in the group, Ann Mecklenburg, regularly invited Warren to carpool and tent with her. Warren has high praise for the mentor group that not only took her in but pushed her hard.

"I almost never heard anything about my age or gender," Warren said. "But I was an outlier in those two categories and as a result, I knew going in that I'd have to be just as good, if not better. If I struggled, it wouldn't be because it was hard, it'd be too easy for someone to point to my age or gender or both, and make that their reasoning. My situation at the time was fairly unique."

"In some ways it felt like a 'going first' situation in that I knew I owed it not just to myself and my own expectations, but also to any like-individual who might want to come after me."

Twenty-three in Four Months

When Warren was 27, she topped out the list on Windy Peak (8,334-foot elevation) on Sept. 27, 2014, with friends and family. The Bulger group counts the mountains she had already summited at age 16 as the initial start time of Warren completing the list, meaning it took little more than 10 years for her to qualify as a Bulger finisher.

However, she completed 97 of the capstones in five years, culminating in



Linsey Warren completed the 100-peak Bulger List in September, 2014 atop Windy Peak. Photo courtesy of Linsey Warren.

a final push of a grueling 23 peaks in four months, a feat requiring precision, planning and execution. According to Warren, she had made "Go Packs" for the remaining mountains so if the weather or a partner changed at the last minute she could reroute a trip according to the best conditions and chances for success.

Advice for the Motivated

Warren lives in the United Kingdom with her husband, Kyle Finnegan, near Leeds, England. They have completed a few local peak lists and she recently took a solo-week to the Highlands in northern Scotland and crowned a few of the noted summits called the Munros.

"Aside from tenacity and passion for

the outdoors perhaps, looking at it as objectively as I can, I can't find there is anything particularly special about me," said Warren. "I'm not a super athlete and I don't follow any diet or training program. I'm quite your average person, so if I can do it, I have the firm belief anyone can." 🌲

Kris Parfitt is grateful for the detailed contributions to this article from finishers Linsey Warren and John "Rhino" Roper, one of the original Bulgers, who finished the List in 1987 but had already peaked 34 of the Bulgers by 1976.

Resources

Bulger List: www.rhinoclimbs.com/Top100Finishers.htm

John Lixvar's Blog: www.rhinoclimbs.com/bulgers.html

Linsey's Blog: www.thewarrenvariation.com/thewarrenvariation

The Bulger List

In some Pacific Northwest mountaineering circles, when someone mentions the Bulger List there is a wide-eyed look and a grin accompanied by chortling sounds of excitement.

A unique concept in the early days of mountain climbing in North America — a catalog of peaks to summit over a course of time — the Bulger (pronounced buhl-er) List was the first of its kind upon its inception in 1976. While less than 100 people have finished the list, only a dozen or so have been under the age of 30 and even fewer have been women.

Finishers

The list was conceived of by John Lixvar, one of the six founding members of the Bulger's Group, a climbing assembly of men and women committed to climbing the tallest mountains in the Cascadian Range, in the mid-1970s. The list was made public in the late 1980s.

At 14,411 feet, the tallest on the list is Mount Rainier, whereas Flora Mountain, catalogued as number 100 in the lineup, tops out at 8,320-feet.

Anyone who summits all 100 peaks is considered a "finisher." The fastest person to crest all 100 mountains was Franklin Bradshaw who completed the index in four years, reaching the top of Chiwawa Mountain (8,459-foot elevation) on Oct. 13, 2011.

The oldest finisher is Roy McMurtrey who crowned Flora Mountain on Oct. 1, 2006, just two weeks shy of his 78th birthday. He started checking off the Bulgers in 1977, soon after the original list was conceived.

Bette Felton was the first woman to complete the famed inventory when she crested the Southeast Twin Spires of Mox Peaks on Aug. 24, 1986. At 8,504-foot elevation, this summit is also known as Hard Mox because it's technically one of the hardest mountains on the list.

While at least five more women climbers are working on being Bulger finishers, to date, only nine have accomplished the full catalog.

- K.P.

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