

ON TOP OF THE WORLD



Melbourne's Dan Bull is in the record books and planning his next challenge, writes **Stephen Drill**

AMELBOURNE IT worker has become the world's youngest person to complete the Seven Summits, Seven Volcanoes climbing challenge.

And he made the final climb with his 99-year-old Nan.

Dan Bull, 37, has this month officially been recognised by Guinness World Records for his achievements.

"I decided to make (Mount) Kosciuszko the last. My family came with me. Dad had just had a pretty major hip replacement and my sister came and Nan did too, despite turning 99 on that day," he said.

"We all drove to Thredbo and we were climbing Kosciuszko; that's how much support I had from my family."

His Nan, Evelyn, who still lives independently in Melbourne, didn't reach the top, but the climb put her grandson's name in the record books.

To complete the challenge, climbers must reach the top of the seven highest summits and seven volcanoes on each continent.

Mr Kosciuszko at 2228m was among his smallest climbs.

Elbrus in Russia was his first taste, Everest almost killed him and he went up Kilimanjaro in Tanzania for a charity run.

But when you've been on top of the world, it can be hard to work out what to do for your next challenge.

Mr Bull has that covered.

He is going to swim to Ojos del Salado on the Chile-Argentina border. It's the world's highest — and possibly coldest — lake.

And he plans to do it in his Speedos.

"I spotted this lake on one of my climbs and I found out it was the highest lake on the planet," he said. "I love water and I love climbing. Even though I'm not really a swimmer I loved the idea of combining the two."

Mr Bull plans to tackle the lake challenge in water temperatures of as low as -1C, in the next few months.

He has contacted Guinness to find out how long he must stay in the water to earn the record. It's one he thinks that no one will break.

Mr Bull asked a few climbing friends in Melbourne to come along on his icy adventure.

But they either didn't have the money, or the time — or their "wife said it was too dangerous".

"I plan to do it in my Speedos. I should only be in there for a matter of minutes," he said.

But when asked if he had spoken with a doctor about his plans, he replied: "Do I sound like I'm crazy? You're echoing some of the concerns that my Dad has."

If Mr Bull only focused on the dangers, he would never have done half of what he has achieved.

He may have even thought twice about the infamous north face of the Eiger in Switzerland,

which is more than 1500m of vertical climb on brittle rock dubbed the "murder wall."

He has sacrificed a lot for his climbing — holidays, home ownership — so when he sets his mind to a task he sticks to it.

The St Bede's College graduate began his love affair with climbing after seeing clips on TV.

"Everest was definitely the dream," he said.

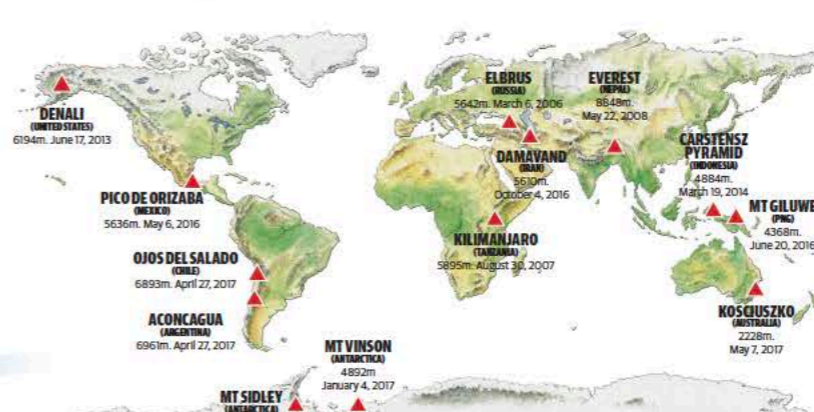
"I remember seeing old footage on the TV in our lounge room.

"And then it was turning that dream into a goal, that was a big part of it."

He took some smaller steps to train for Everest, which formed the basis of his Seven Summits, Seven Volcanoes achievements.

Mr Bull reached the summit of Everest in May 2008. But he speaks about it as though it were yesterday.

"It was just this moment of exhilaration when I reached the summit,"



he said. "I was above the clouds, I was above everything."

"And then there is this feeling of dread because you start thinking 'I have to get down'."

Mr Bull said that on his way back down he almost died.

The thin air meant that he was taking up to 10 breaths in and out for each step, making him feel "as drunk as you've ever been".

And when he sat his 190cm, 90kg, frame down in the snow for a break it was almost the end.

"I sat down and it takes a huge amount of energy to get back up again," he said. "I was aware of it but I didn't care. I would have stayed there longer but I noticed another guy on the left sitting in a similar position to me."

"I was relieved because having someone around you is reassuring. But I looked again and I noticed that he'd been there for a while, probably years, because there was a layer of ice over him."

"That triggered me to get up and I went barreling down the hill."

On another climb, he was the first to abseil

down a rope that had been left out in the snow overnight. A layer of ice had formed over the rope so instead of slowing, he fell about 30m.

"I was flying down the rope and I thought this is out of control," he said. "I started kicking the hell out of the wall in front of me and the spikes in my boots stuck in."

"I was holding on for my life and because there's a bit of bounce in climbing ropes I managed to get a grip."

The way he describes it sounds like something Wile E. Coyote would do in a Road Runner cartoon.

But the danger has never stopped him. It almost drives him on.

For now he keeps training by swimming in the bay and trips to an ice bath that gets him down to 5C.

"That's the coldest they can do," he said.

Mr Bull thinks his Nan, who will receive her birthday card from the Queen in May, might have something to do with his determination.

"I had done some training on that 40C day on the weekend and it was about 4pm so I thought I'd call Nan and check on her," Bull said.

"She'd been out all day and was just about to sit down in front of the air conditioning but she said she had to go outside and feed the birds."

"She's a machine; maybe that's where it comes from."

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VIDEO
See highlights of Dan's climbing challenge
heraldsun.com.au

(clockwise from main) Dan Bull making the first ascent of an unclimbed, unnamed peak in Greenland, April 2015; with the Aussie flag atop Mt Sidley, Antarctica; a map showing the peaks Bull has conquered; on the summit of Mt Vinson, Antarctica's highest point; leaping above a rock formation known as the Troll's Tongue over a fjord in Norway; during a training climb on the Swiss/Italian border in the Alps; halfway up Kosciuszko with the family; from left, mother Jill, father Martin, Dan, sister Bridle and grandmother Evelyn.