

1997 SUMMIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

SHARON WOOD

MOTHER, MENTOR, MOUNTAINEER

Sharon Wood is one of Canada's elite mountaineers. Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Sharon grew up in Vancouver before moving to the mountain town of Jasper, Alberta, at the age of 16, where she found work as a tour guide at Maligne Lake. While attending an Outward Bound course in 1974, she met Laurie Skreslet, one of Sharon's first mentors who would later become the first Canadian to climb Everest. In 1976, she began her career as a climbing instructor and guide with Yamnuska Mountain School and subsequently became the first Canadian woman to achieve full climbing guide status in the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides.

In 1977, Sharon successfully summited Mount Logan and in 1983 she climbed the Cassin Ridge on Denali (Mount McKinley), North America's highest peak. The following year, she joined a five-person Canadian/American team that spent three months on the West Ridge of Makalu (8,470 metres) in Nepal, her team coming within 100 metres of the summit before being turned back by darkness. She also succeeded on the huge South Face of Aconcagua in Argentina. In Peru, Sharon established a new route on the North-East Face of Huascarán Sur (6769 metres), despite suffering a broken shoulder from a falling rock on the second day of the five-day climb. She later made an alpine style repeat of the French route on the South Face of Huascarán Norte (6655-metres).

Sharon's crowning climbing achievement, however, came at 9 p.m. on May 20, 1986, when she reached the summit of Mount Everest and survived an epic descent in the dark. Sharon's climb was the first Sherpa unassisted ascent of a new route on Everest by a woman and she is the first North American woman and only the sixth woman in history to reach the top of the world. "It was the accumulated investment of epics and failures that I celebrated, cherished and drew from that got us down that night," reflects Sharon. For this achievement and many others, she received the inaugural Tenzing Norgay Award as "Professional Mountaineer of the Year" from the American Alpine Club and the Explorers Club of New York.