SA team to begin Everest climb tonight

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But a lot depends on the weather and the advice given by their “forecaster”, Rene Hochreiter, from his home in Bramley.

Sean Disney and Vaughan de la Harpe are planning to start out for the summit from Camp 4 tonight and if they are successful, they will become the seventh and eighth South Africans to reach the top of Everest.

Initially, four South Africans were hoping to summit Everest this year, but two of them had to turn back.

Hochreiter was one of them.

He returned to South Africa after he suffered frostbite, but now watches weather and talks with his climber buddies by satellite phone.

- Sapa-AFP

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SA duo reach Everest summit

By Alex Eliseev & Shaun Smillie

Two South Africans watched the sun rise on top of the world’s highest mountain this morning. Sean Disney and Vaughan de la Harpe had reached the summit of Mount Everest at 2am SA time (5.30am Everest time), said their partner Rene Hochreiter, who was forced to return home earlier after suffering frostbite.

The pair stood on top of the world for between 30 minutes and an hour and enjoyed a window of "absolutely clear weather". There were no clouds and winds were blowing at a meek five to 10km/h.

"I have never heard (Disney) so happy. He usually doesn't say much, but (this morning) he was ecstatic," Hochreiter said.

"He said the sun rose just as they got there."

Disney phoned home at about 6am, once they had returned to Camp 4. "It was the wildest day," Disney had said.

With this morning’s summit, Disney, 34, and De La Harpe, 49, join the Seven Summit club, which sees daredevils conquer seven of the world’s highest peaks across seven continents.

They are the seventh and eighth South Africans to conquer Everest, approaching the peak from the south side.

"I'm very happy for them," Hochreiter said from his home in Johannesburg today. "Obviously I am also a little sad that I couldn't be there. But the mountain is still there and I'll give it another bash in a year or two."

He has been keeping an eye on the weather over the internet; he was the one who spotted the weather window this morning. He said the two had encountered dangerous icy patches and had had a hard slog to the top.

For Disney, the summit was his third attempt at the peak. De La Harpe was luckier, succeeding on his first try.

After leaving home on March 22, and taking a week to reach the summit of the 8 848m mountain, the two are due home at the end of this weekend.

Hochreiter said this Everest climbing season, which closes at the end of the month, would see about 300 summits from climbers around the world.

Tragically, however, the same season has claimed the lives of 11 climbers.

Disney and De La Harpe reached the top with two Sherpa guides, one of whom reached the summit for the sixth time. Disney was part of the Discovery team that climbed Everest in 2003, but did not make it.

"The problem then was that they did it too early in the climbing season. He had to turn back at 8 400m because of high winds," said Hochreiter.

In preparation for their shot to the top, said Hochreiter, both men had been carbo-loading and trying to get as much sleep as possible at Camp 4, which is 7 950m above sea level.

- Bad weather thwarted Cape Town climber Ronnie Muhl's bid to summit Everest at the weekend. It is unclear whether he will try again.

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