AIMING HIGH: Clockwise: Theo-Mari du Rand waves the SA flag on the summit of Mt McKinley in Alaska; reaches the top of Carstensz Pyramid in Indonesia; tries out tree climbing; and then it's back to climbing at a Free State resort.

Q: Why do you want to climb the seven summits?
A: It's my dream. I am a mountaineer and only eight women in the world have got to the top and they were all 33 or older. The only South African who has done it was a man [Sean Woodley], nine years older than me.

Q: How did you get interested in mountaineering?
A: From the age of two, my parents took me on day hikes and at university I started rock climbing. When I got my degree [in sports science], I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to celebrate. I summited on December 31, 1998. I enjoyed it and realised I was doing well. Altitude and the lack of oxygen affects people differently.

Q: From Africa's highest peak, how did you gain experience?
A: I went to Mount Elbrus in Russia. It was all new to me, the crevasses, the cold. I was very fit and fast. I had a green fleece and got the nickname 'Green Pocket Rocket'. We summited on August 1999.

Q: Where did you go next?
A: In December 1999, I went to Argentina, where I summited Mount Aconcagua on the 16th. We almost didn't get to the summit, there were two storms and we were running out of fuel and food.

Q: What happened during your first attempt to summit Mount McKinley in Alaska in 2000?
A: I got dehydrated and didn't eat and then I was physically weak and needed a rest day. The rest of the team made it up. It was the longest, most horrendous 11 hours of my life. Getting out of the tent was hard, I had frostbite on my cheeks.

Q: What was your happiest moment?
A: My best day was when I got to the top of Mount McKinley on May 28 2001—a year after I had to back down. It was a very emotional day for me and I didn't even notice I had frostbite on my cheeks.

Q: Which was the most adventurous trip?
A: Going to climb Carstensz Pyramid in Indonesia. It was a clandestine operation as we climbed without a permit, after two expeditions had been cancelled. Rainy up we thought we would be forced to go back down again but we summited on October 25 2003.

Q: Who has inspired and supported you?
A: Alex Harris and Sean Disney. They have climbed most summits and Du Rand has climbed with them.

Q: What makes a great climber?
A: Enjoying mountains, determination and self-discipline.

Q: How do you prepare for a climb?
A: I train very hard: swimming, running and climbing. I have done a triathlon and would like to do adventure racing.

Q: What is it like being a woman in a male-dominated environment?
A: I'm one of the boys and sometimes I would like to feel more feminine. I don't want special treatment and we carry food, for example, we divide it equally even if I'm half the weight of the boys.

Q: Who are your role models?
A: My parents. They have been very supportive of me and what I am doing.

Q: How are you going to fund your future expeditions?
A: I am searching full-time to find sponsors to climb Mount Vinson in Antarctica and Mount Everest in May 2005. I raised money myself for the other trips but these two will cost R700 000.

Q: What do you do to relax?
A: Anything adventurous. I like white-water rafting and paragliding. I also like spending time with friends.

Q: What's your message to potential mountaineers?
A: Go for it and never give up on your dreams.

Q: What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
A: Never give up.