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# Seven of the best

## HEATHER WALKER

Parkview's Mandy Ramsden wanted to see the world. So she climbed a mountain, and then another.

Four years later, standing on top of Mount Everest, she became the first African woman to complete the seven summits, the highest peak on each continent.

When the *Gazette* met Ramsden in her Rosebank office shortly after her return from Nepal, it was hard to believe the smartly-

dressed investment banker was the same woman who enjoyed trekking in freezing temperatures.

"In 2006 I was newly divorced and hadn't travelled much. Climbing Kilimanjaro was a lifelong dream so I took the plunge - and loved it," she explained.

Ramsden's next conquests were

Elbrus and Aconcagua, Carstenz Pyramid in 2007, Denali in 2008 and Vinson Massif in 2009.

"I didn't plan to do all seven, but after climbing Elbrus I took on the challenge. I'm proud of my achievement but its significance is intensely personal.

"I've had a wonderful time using up my leave balance to explore hidden corners of the world and make new friends. It's hard to see that as laudable - other mountaineers have achieved far

more. I'm simply a high altitude tourist."

"My most interesting experience was being smuggled, disguised as a miner, through a mine to reach the base of Carstenz Pyramid. The snowy Himalayas are awe-inspiring, but my first love is Kilimanjaro because there's different scenery every day."

The single mother of four is a fit long distance runner, but Everest was the first mountain she trained seriously for. This consisted

of pilates, gym and hitting the suburban hills with a laden backpack.

"Being a woman in a male-dominated sport is not a problem. Men have been nothing but welcoming, and altitude treats both genders equally."

Of Ramsden's children (aged 11 to 22) her youngest son Matthew is the most taken with her achievement. They plan to climb Kilimanjaro together next year.

- heatherw@caxton.co.za



Mandy Ramsden makes her way up Everest.