

Researchers to study the impact of mountaineering activities on the world's highest peaks

DARWIN, NT - NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA, February 26, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A Charles Darwin University (CDU) researcher will climb the highest peak on each continent, known as the Seven Summits, to study the impact of mountaineering activities on these isolated and unique environments and communities.

The [project](#), led by CDU, is being conducted in collaboration with global mountaineering guide service, Climbing the Seven Summits (CTSS).

Researchers will investigate the impacts on the social and environmental ecosystems of traversing the highest peaks on each of the seven continents: Mount Kosciuszko in Australia, Mount Everest in Asia, Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa, Denali in North America, Aconcagua in South America, Vinson Massif in Antarctica, and Mount Elbrus in Europe.

The project will assess the effectiveness of management strategies, investigate the environmental psychology of mountaineers, and review industry practices, with the aim of improving mountaineering practices to support the social, environmental, and economic sustainability of these regions.

To do this, CDU Lecturer in Sustainability Leadership and Management and adventurer [Dr Chrystie Watson](#) will be climbing each of the Seven Summits with CTSS to observe the environmental conditions, mountaineer behaviours, and industry practices.

This project is in response to media coverage in recent years highlighting issues of



The lead researcher of the project will climb each of the Seven Summits to observe conditions in relation to the impacts of mountaineering activities on the sustainability of these regions.

Picture: @beckeradventures

environmental degradation and overtourism, which raise questions about the long-term sustainability of mountaineering on the world's great peaks.

Dr Watson began the research field work and her Seven Summits mountaineering skills training last August at Mount Kosciuszko, as part of CTSS's all-women's Australian Alpine Academy team.

Dr Watson said undertaking this project was critical both for environmental conservation, and to support the regional communities to sustain economic and social activity generated through the mountaineering industry.

"It is important that we look at sustainability from environmental, social, and economic perspectives," Dr Watson said.

"This project is providing us with insights into how we can foster sustainability best-practices within the Seven Summits regions through collaborations with mountaineers, industry, management, researchers, and local community groups and advocates."

The Kosciuszko expedition has provided early insights into the level of understanding mountaineers and guides have regarding environmental protection and sustainable mountaineering practices.

These insights are informing recommendations on industry best practices and discussions around collaborative initiatives to support environmental and social research and advocacy integration on expeditions and within mountaineering operations.

The next planned research expedition is to Europe's Mont Blanc in July 2025 (as a proxy for Mount Elbrus, located in Russia).

CTSS, as the main industry partner on this project, is providing support through logistical, safety, planning, and industry insight.

CTSS co-owner Caroline Pemberton said the project would support the company's ongoing efforts to advance its sustainability practices and agenda, and help to shape a future where the Seven Summits continue to be an achievable goal for mountaineers.

"The mountains are more than just landscapes—they are powerful, transformative places that inspire and challenge us," Ms Pemberton said.

"As stewards of these wild spaces, it is our responsibility to protect our playground, so that we can continue to experience their beauty and wonder."

A key part of the project involves surveying and interviewing mountaineers to understand their

attitudes and behaviours around environmental, social, and economic sustainability in the Seven Summit regions.

The project is a multi-disciplinary collaboration between CDU's Faculty of Arts and Society and Faculty of Health.

Dr Watson and Dr Michael Erdiaw-Kwasie from the Faculty of Arts and Society at CDU will be leading the business sustainability research, with Dr Kim Caudwell and Dr Matthew Abunyewah representing psychology from CDU's Faculty of Health, and Dr Suman Laudari playing a key role in the educational components of the project.

The project aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG15), 'Life on Land', to 'protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems' and Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD), identified by the UN as a priority area for 'generating and strengthening knowledge about the ecology and sustainable development of mountain ecosystems'.

The UN Secretary-General SMD report (2016) highlighted the need for special attention to the sustainability of vulnerable mountain communities, ecosystem impacts, and conservation.

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