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#### AOL NEWS

## Everest's Youngest Climber Prepares for Antarctica Adventure

Michael McLaughlin

He stood on the top of the world when he reached the peak of Mount Everest in 2010 at the tender age of 13, but Jordan Romero thinks he can still scale to new heights in 2011.

Romero, now 14, is the youngest person to climb the world's tallest mountain, and he's attempting another record-setting year. His sights are set in reaching the peak of Mount Vinson, Antarctica's highest point. If he succeeds, he'll be the youngest person to climb the tallest mountain on each of the seven continents.

"I just wanted to do this at a young age and for that I feel really lucky," Romero said about possibly completing the Seven Summits circuit. "What I believe in is somebody climbing for the right reason and that's for the experience, not for records," he told AOL News. He's not alone in his quest to finish the Seven Summits tour. His father, Paul Romero, and his father's girlfriend, Karen Lundgren, formed a traveling mountaineering family in 2006 when they climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the first of their continental conquests. During the southern hemisphere's summer in December, the trio departed for the 16,050-foot Mount Vinson, which is not as difficult to climb as Mount Everest or Denali in Alaska, North America's highest point. However, the polar location poses unique challenges, Romero said. "The logistics of getting there is the most difficult part," the younger Romero said. "That's what makes this mountain the most difficult to get to and perhaps the most expensive one as well." The new year will be a busy one for Romero even before he launches the three-to-five-week expedition to

Antarctica. The ninth-grader from Big Bear Lake, Calif., plans to crisscross the country, climbing the highest mountain in every state as part of a campaign to encourage kids to exercise and enjoy the outdoors.

"I'm really stoked about touring all 50 states. We're giving presentations to schools and clubs. We're going around to get the message to kids across the nation to go outdoors," he told AOL News.

A ski bum in the making, Romero wants to eventually study ski-area management in college. He also likes mountain-biking, kayaking and any other adrenaline-packed activity. "You look at the youth today -- it's all about video games, soda and not doing stuff with family," said Romero. "For me it's been the opposite. I don't drink soda. I've never really owned video games in my whole life. We're just about spending time together as a family." The physical feats and outdoor lifestyle also led to commercial success for Romero. Sporty products, like the natural energy drink FRS made him a spokesman, and he was promoting the beverage on New Year's Eve atop the company's billboard in Times Square in New York City. Don't expect Romero to grow roots in a crowded, urban setting. "I'd probably go crazy with all the cars and the city. I want to be in mountains with the snow," he said before ringing in the New Year.

Critics attacked Romero, his father and Lundgren in their quest for high-elevation dominance, especially last year's ascent of Everest, where deaths are not uncommon, and the body's limits are tested in the thin oxygen above 26,000 feet. "It is totally against the spirit of true mountaineering. This sounds like it's about mass marketing, money and it's verging on child abuse," said David Hillebrandt, medical adviser to the British Mountaineering Council, *The Guardian* reported last April. But the youngster brushed off the naysayer. "Age does not definitely matter, but I would not recommend all young kids to wake up and say 'Hey, I want to go climb Mount Everest. It took me four or five years of climbing other mountains, and a lot of training,'" said Romero.

"If you think you are prepared and you have a really good team and your parents are behind you, then go for it," he added.

Since he climbed Everest last April from the Tibetan side of the mountain, the Chinese government imposed an 18-year minimum age to get permission to climb. On the other side of Everest in Nepal, the minimum age is 16, so Romero's record could stand for some time -- not that it matters to him.

"The record is something I could really care less about. If a kid were to break my record," Romero said, "Kudos to the kid."