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The Salt Lake Tribune

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## Climbing Kilimanjaro

Park City resident Chris Waddell will attempt to become the first paraplegic to make it to the top of Africa's highest point under his own power.



Photos by Dean Cardinale, www.WWYTRK.COM

## Chris Waddell accomplishments

- SKIING**
- Four-time Paralympian (Albertville, Lillehammer, Nagano and Salt Lake City)
  - 12 Paralympic medals (five gold, five silver, two bronze)
  - Six World Championship medals (3 gold, 2 silver, 1 bronze)
  - 32 National Lifes Skier of the Year '94, '95, '00
- TRACK AND ROAD RACING**
- Three-time Paralympian (Atlanta, Sydney, Athens)
  - Silver Medal 200m Sydney Paralympics 2000
  - Three World Championship medals
- ODDS AND ENDS**
- People magazine 50 Most Beautiful People 1998
  - Skiing magazine 25 Greatest Skiers in North America 2001
  - Outside magazine October 1996 "Could this be the world's greatest athlete?"
  - Warren Miller's "Vertical Reality"
  - Featured in articles in National Geographic Explorer Journal, Ski and Skiing
  - Spokesman for the Utah State PTA
  - Actor ABC's "Loving"
  - March of Dimes Franklin Delano Roosevelt Award
  - Finalist for the Sullivan Award given by the AAU to the top Amateur Athlete in the country



Park City resident and Paralympic Games veteran Chris Waddell carves a turn on his monoski at Deer Valley Resort.

STEVE GAYNES/The Salt Lake Tribune

## Destination Kilimanjaro

After losing the use of his legs in a skiing accident, Chris Waddell conquered the slopes as winner of 13 Paralympic medals. Now the downhill champ looks to a new challenge: Climbing Africa's tallest peak.

# Upward shift

By BRETT PRETTYMAN  
The Salt Lake Tribune

The bottom of the mountain has always been the finish line for Chris Waddell, and getting there fast was rarely a problem. This June, the end will come 19,340 feet above sea level and may be painfully slow.

Should he make it to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro — the highest point in Africa — Waddell would be the first known paraplegic to do so. It is a feat he hopes to achieve not only for himself, but for every person with a disability and, perhaps even more important, anybody with a dream.

"Soon, I will have spent half my life walking and the other half in a chair," said Waddell, a 39-year-old Park City resident who lost the feeling in and control of his legs in a skiing accident in 1988. "That is pretty significant. I don't think the quality of my life has diminished. I've been able to do a lot of things that I would not have done before the accident."

Getting items from the top shelf in his kitchen proves a daunting task, and changing light bulbs is something he asks friends to do when they visit, but Waddell has

### More online

See a video of how Paralympian Chris Waddell plans to climb Mount Kilimanjaro at <http://one-revolution.com/>.

collected 13 Paralympic medals from the Winter and Summer Games. He swept the four alpine skiing events at the 1994 Paralympics in Lillehammer, Norway, and he also has nine World Championship medals.

"People like to say a lot of doors are closed [by similar injuries or illness], but those doors are often closed by ourselves. I never would have been the best in the world as an able-bodied skier; I just wasn't that good. I have been able to be on top of the mountain as a disabled skier," said Waddell, who was named one of People magazine's 50 Most Beautiful People in 1998 and was featured in an Outside magazine article in 1996 titled "Could this be the world's greatest athlete?"

Using a special off-road handcycle known as the One-Off, Waddell will attempt to become the first person paralyzed from the waist down to make it to the top of the African continent under his own power.

See WADDELL, E2



Courtesy Plastic Bottom Media

Chris Waddell shows off a special handcycle like the one he'll use to climb Mount Kilimanjaro this summer.

## Waddell has upward mobility

► Continued from E1

"He has made it clear that he doesn't want any help," said World Wide Trekking owner Dean Cardinale, who will guide Waddell. "I'll do my best to keep him happy and healthy."

Cardinale, with four of the Seven Summits — the highest point on each continent, including Mount Everest — already under his belt, is all too familiar with the obstacles climbers face. Even Kilimanjaro, the easiest of the Seven Summits to reach, is a challenge.

Waddell will take the standard tourist route — the Marangu Route — which climbs through five distinct temperature zones. He can expect everything from mud in the rain forest to snow near the glacier to loose scree and volcanic ash.

"It never comes easy and it certainly won't be any easier for Chris," Cardinale said. "The variety of terrains will be a challenge."

The biggest issue for all climbers on Kilimanjaro is the altitude. Cardinale said it hits most people when they reach 17,000 feet above sea level.

"We are expecting that there will be some long days with the goal of climbing about 3,000 vertical feet on days we do climb," he said.

"This route is usually done in five days. We are going to give ourselves 10. It is important that Chris stays healthy because of the altitude, and he is going to have to pace himself to accomplish the climb."

Waddell will not be alone. He expects somewhere between 15 and 20 people to join his "support team," which in reality will end up being family and friends who just want to be with him when he reaches the top.

Among the team will be good friend Nate Bryan, who knew Waddell before the December 1988 incident. Bryan, now an orthopedic surgeon in Sandy, was a freshman along with Waddell on the Middlebury College, Vt., ski team. He was inspired and amazed, but not surprised, by his friend's desire to return to the slopes and the studies.

"To me, the exceptional part is not that he did so well at skiing. That is just icing on the cake. The really exceptional part is that he came back to college and carried on his studies and participated in a sport all while dealing with a new life in a wheelchair," Bryan said. "He would go out and party with us and be there to train in the morning. We would find him on his face in the shower and he would just ask us to give him a hand. He never let anything block him. I don't know if I could do that."

While recuperating in the hospital, Waddell used his athletic training to focus on "getting past" the injury and dreamed of skiing down a slope for his personal form of

therapy. He set a goal to be back on the slopes before the snow melted in the spring of 1989. He didn't make it, but 362 days after his accident, Waddell climbed on a monoski for the first time. He competed in his first race a month later.

"I had no business racing. I was going like 5 mph and it felt like 500 mph leading up to that first race," Waddell said. "Something funny happened. I was completely out of control and went twice as fast as I had gone before and I won. I think it was because I had to."

Waddell ended up competing not only on the national and eventually international levels as a monoskier, but also as a member of the Middlebury College team.

Bryan is confident that, barring health issues, his college buddy will make it to the top of Kilimanjaro.

"Over the years Chris has demonstrated an amazing ability to organize and be involved in some great movements. When he has an idea, I usually pay attention," Bryan said. "This is a good way to see something different and get me away from things and be involved in one of Chris' inspirational activities."

Waddell is now scouting for a possible documentary deal on the climb at the annual Sundance Film Festival in his hometown and is seeking sponsors for the trip.

He will use a one-of-a-kind, four-wheel One-Off in his bid to make it to the top of Africa. He is borrowing the contraption from a man who had the vehicle built so a paralyzed nephew could make it to the top of Mount Fuji. Waddell started training on the One-Off in the fall of 2007.

"You can go pretty much wherever you want. You are limited only by your imagination," he said about the device.

Waddell and Cardinale are modifying the One-Off and plan to take as many spare parts as they can on the trip. Cardinale also had to obtain a special permit for Waddell to use the One-Off on the trail to the top of Kilimanjaro.

Waddell hatched the idea of attempting Kilimanjaro while trying to sell the idea for a new program to adventure travel television. Waddell pictured a show called "I Wish I Could Do That," the gist being that if a guy in a wheelchair could be doing some unique travel activity, then couch potatoes at home might figure they could do it as well. He proposed Kilimanjaro as an example.

The networks didn't bite, but Waddell had convinced himself the climb was worth doing with or without television.

"I realized the idea incorporated everything I believe: that one person can make a difference. I touched a number of people as a Paralympic athlete, but it was a relatively small group. I saw an opportunity to reach a larger group and was disappointed when it seemed like it wouldn't happen. I decided to do it regardless of what response I got from television," he said.

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STEVE GRUFFIN/The Salt Lake Tribune

Chris Waddell chills out in his monoski at Deer Valley Resort. Waddell, paralyzed in a 1988 skiing accident, has won 13 Paralympic medals in skiing and track. This summer, he will direct his efforts uphill: He plans to become the first known paraplegic to summit Mount Kilimanjaro.



STEVE GRUFFIN/The Salt Lake Tribune

On his way to silver medal, America's Chris Waddell catches some air in the men's Paralympic downhill at Snowbasin Ski Resort in 2002.