

Going to great heights

Narrabeen adventurer Peter Wells is preparing for the climb of his life, writes **LISA MUXWORTHY**

THE lure of the Himalayas is irresistible for mountaineer Peter Wells, who admitted to an element of fear when considering the magnitude and power of the ranges.

But the Narrabeen resident said the challenge to climb the famous peaks was enough to ensure he would achieve his lifetime ambition.

Wells is planning to climb 8201m above sea level in August when he joins a six-week expedition of the Himalayan mountain ranges.

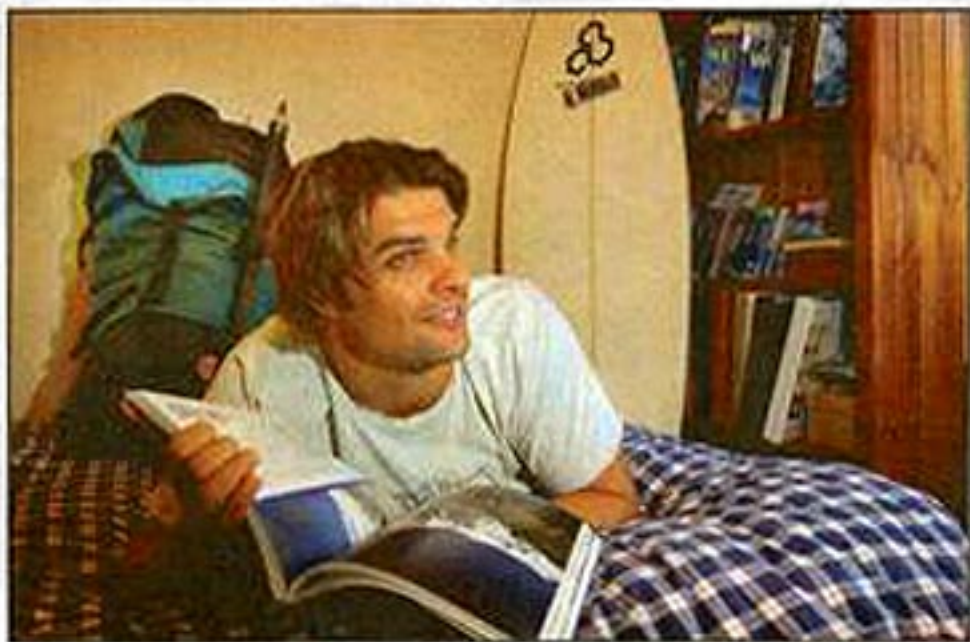
The mountain Cho Oyu is the sixth highest in the world. It sits on the Nepalese-Tibetan border and towers above the Himalayan ranges.

The 32-year-old adventurer said this was the biggest climb he had ever tackled - in fact, it added an extra 2km to his previous endeavours.

There is no doubt this is a dangerous sport and lives have been lost in the mountains. Trekkers face extreme conditions and both mental and physical fitness is of great importance.

"I'm just intrigued by this challenge," Wells said. "I know there is danger there but it takes a calculated risk."

Wells said many climbing accidents occurred because of inexperience and people taking insufficient precautions. He said he planned to arrive at the Everest



base camp three weeks prior to the climb to acclimatise and "thicken up the blood".

He said most climbers used bottled oxygen closer to the summit to enhance their ability to cope with the low oxygen levels. The assistance of oxygen would also help the body keep warmer in the dangerously freezing temperatures on the mountain.

Wells is also making good use of living on the northern beaches by taking part in a rigorous fitness program to make sure he is ready for the adventure.

The long-time surfer said he was running and swimming at the beach twice a day and also heading to the gym for a

regular workout. "There is a bit of nervous excitement about the fitness level required for this climb," he said.

Wells made his first climb in 1999 of the highest peak in Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro, and said he had not looked back since.

"That really sparked it - that was it for me," he said.

Next on the list was the Everest region of the Himalayas, summitting Island Peak (6189m) in 2002, Pokalde (5906m) in 2003, and falling just short of the summit of Lobuche East at 6119m.

"It has become a passion of mine," Wells said.



HIGH ACHIEVER: Peter Wells will spend six weeks trekking the Himalayas and (inset) on an earlier climb on the Island Peak summit. Picture: Virginia Young

"It's a strange passion as I don't get to dabble into it often."

Although the climb is a personal challenge for Wells, he is also donning the mountain boots to help raise awareness for BeyondBlue - an organisation that is working to address issues associated with depression and anxiety.

Wells said he wanted to increase community awareness of depression and help reduce the suicide rate. He is searching for corporate sponsors to help achieve his goal and further details are available on the webpage www.flagship-graphics.com.au/beyondblue2006

Himalayan climb to raise awareness of depression

Wells responds to higher calling

By LOUISE TURK

SHELLHARBOUR mountaineer Peter Wells will contend with extreme cold, oxygen depletion, 300km/h winds and possible avalanches in his attempt to reach the top of the world.

The super-fit 32-year-old is taking on the challenge of reaching the summit of Mt Cho Oyu, an 8201m mountain in the Himalayas, to help raise awareness for the Australian depression initiative beyondblue.

Mr Wells said he decided to use his climb to help lift beyondblue's profile after he became aware of several Illawarra people who had committed suicide or were debilitated by depression.

"This is the greatest challenge I have ever taken on," Mr Wells said. "There are parallels between me achieving a life goal of climbing this mountain and others facing their own struggles and challenges with mental illnesses."

Mr Wells, who is a town planner when he is not adventuring, has previously climbed in the Everest region of the Himalayas.

In 2002, he made a 6189m ascent on Island Peak, and in the following year reached the top of Pokalde (5806m).

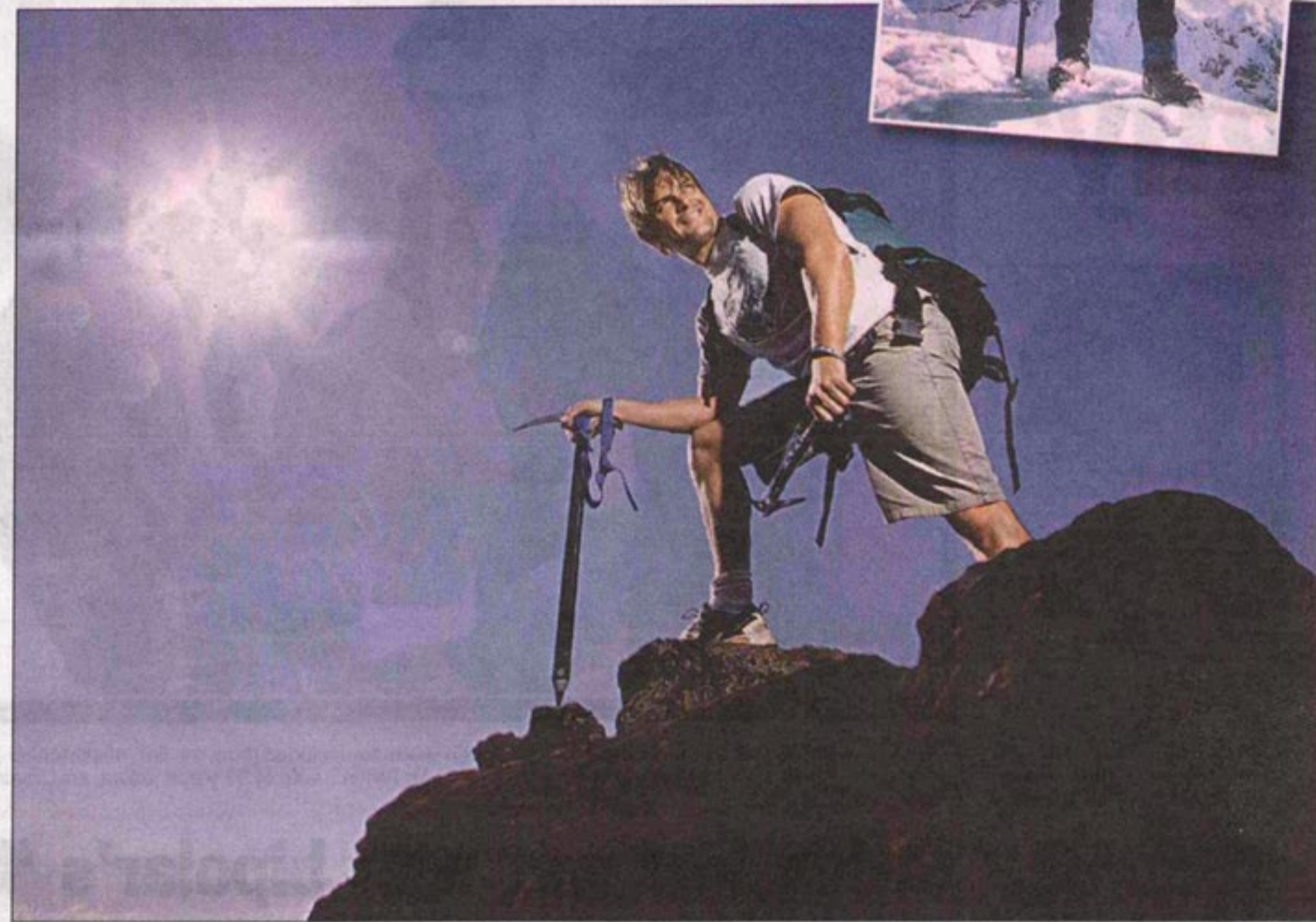
He climbed just short of the summit of Lobuche East (6119m) in 2003.

He also conquered Africa's highest peak, Mt Kilimanjaro, in 1999.

But Mt Cho Oyu - the world's sixth highest mountain - will be a more difficult feat.

"It is one of only 14 mountains on earth above 8000m and has seen both triumph and tragedy since it was first climbed by an Austrian team in 1954," he said.

Mr Wells will attempt the Mt Cho Oyu ascent in August



Mountain man: Shellharbour's Peter Wells is preparing to climb the world's sixth highest mountain in order to raise awareness about the Australian depression initiative beyondblue. INSET: Standing on the summit of Island Peak in 2002. Main picture: KEN ROBERTSON

and has been preparing for the past eight months.

"The Cho Oyu climb exposes the climber to some of the harshest conditions on the planet," he said. "My training program for this climb has been significantly more rigorous than for others to account for its extremity."

The daily training program includes gym work, pool work, ski paddling and run-

ning, with an emphasis on leg strengthening.

Over the next few months, Mr Wells will also prepare himself mentally for the tough challenge and ensure he has the right equipment and clothing.

He will be climbing with leading sherpa guide Namgya Sherpa, who has twice made the summit of Mt Everest.

Mr Wells expects the ascent

will take about six weeks, but he will arrive in the Everest region three weeks earlier for a pre-acclimatising climb.

"There is no doubt there are dangers involved in this climb," he said. "But even though Mt Cho Oyu is one of the highest mountains in the world it is also considered to be one of the easier mountains to climb and it is used by Everest climbers as a training

ground before they attempt Everest."

Oxygen levels will be significantly lower than at sea level and Mr Wells is taking two bottles of oxygen with him for the final stage of the climb.

People wishing to sponsor Mr Wells or follow his progress can visit his website at flagship-graphics.com.au/beyondblue2005

Festival to help bridge the divide

PITTWATER Council is inviting people to participate in a festival this weekend which will help to celebrate Indigenous culture.

The Bilarong Cultural Festival will be held tomorrow and Sunday at Bilarong Reserve, off the Wakehurst Parkway near Narrabeen Lakes.

The event will showcase indigenous artists playing and singing traditional and contemporary music, with workshops in everything from Aboriginal storytelling through to bush regeneration and lantern-making.

Bilarong is a joint effort between Pittwater Council and the Local Guringai Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group.

It was been created from the need to provide a forum where all Sydney residents could be exposed to Australian indigenous culture.

Pittwater Mayor Alex McTaggart said: "We hope that peninsula residents will join people from all over Sydney in sharing their different cultures at this wonderful family festival."

Lowdown on high life



Mountaineer Peter Wells will share some of his experiences in a film to be screened at Australian Geographic.

LISA MUXWORTHY

MOUNTAINEER Peter Wells achieved his lifetime ambition when he climbed 8201m above sea level and now the Narrabeen resident has a chance to share his journey.

Mr Wells first spoke to the *Daily* last year before he joined a six-week expedition to the Himalayas.

The mountain Cho Oyu is the sixth-highest in the world. It sits on the Nepalese-Tibetan border.

The adventurer said this was the biggest climb he had tackled – in fact, it added an extra 2km to his previous endeavours.

And on Tuesday at 7.30pm Mr Wells will present a documentary titled *Meeting The Mountain Goddess* at Australian Geographic, Mona Vale Rd, Terrey Hills.

He said the film would "put the audience in the thick of the action".

"This includes a blizzard, climbing the dangerous vertical ice-fall section at 7000m, a humorous side to waking up to splitting headaches at altitude, and incredible summit footage," he said.

Tickets for the lecture are \$15, with all proceeds going to the Australian Geographic Society. Phone 1300 555 176.

Climber's heights of success

By LOUISE TURK

SHELLHARBOUR adventurer Peter Wells was in peak condition during his recent ascent of one of the world's highest mountains - and he needed to be.

The 32-year-old climbed to the summit of Tibet's Mt Cho Oyu in late September after an arduous 18-day trek which stretched him to his physical and mental limits.

He set out to conquer the 8201m mountain in the Himalayas to raise awareness of the Australian depression initiative beyond-blue and to achieve a life goal of climbing the notorious mountain.

Many people have died trying to reach the top of Mt Cho Oyu - a fact which influenced Mr Wells' pre-climb preparation and training, and his approach to the summit with his Sherpa guide.

In the lead-up to the adventure, the super-fit town planner increased his body strength with an eight-month rigorous training program. Mr Wells said reaching the summit, on September 26, was one of the highlights of his life.

"As soon as I saw Phura (my sherpa) at the summit flag jumping up and down and waving his arms I nearly cried," he said.

"It was the best thing. When I got there he gave me a bear hug and nearly squeezed the life out of me.

"I was completely exhausted and ecstatic at the same time. I was able to take in an awesome view of Mt Everest for about one minute before fast-moving clouds blocked the view. It was a classic and breathtaking perspective of Everest."

The journey was not without its troubles. The climb was plagued by unpredictable weather, which included blizzard conditions, and the perennial climbers' problems of sleep deprivation and lack of oxygen.

Mr Wells began the summit climb at lam after illness and numbness in his toes allowed him to sleep for only 30 minutes.



Calm before storm: Peter Wells relaxes at advanced base camp before his final assault on the summit of Mt Cho Oyu.



Mission accomplished: Peter Wells finally reached the summit of Mt Cho Oyu after an arduous 18-day trek.

On the way up, one of his oxygen bottles malfunctioned.

"By the time I reached the top I could have easily fallen into the snow and slept," he said.

"During the ascent I was so exhausted I was counting targets in my head - telling myself I had to take another 20 steps and then counting each step out. It was the only

way I could take myself higher.

"I was kind of scared of expecting to get any higher than where I was at any given time. There were climbers turning back at every camp with headaches and exhaustion. You've really got to take every day as it comes, but of course we all had a dose of summit fever."

Mr Wells arrived in Tibet in August and

spent time acclimatising before arriving at the advanced base camp (5800m) on September 8. It took another 18 days before his expedition made the summit.

He said his climb would be featured in an upcoming edition of Australian Geographic.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Mr Wells is planning another adventure in 2006, which he plans to keep at sea level.