

Gerard (37) attempts climb to fame

Lucky to escape alive in first mountain assault in 2006

By Lorraine Carey

A LIMERICKMAN is close to making history this week, by becoming the first Irishman to reach the peak of one of the most dangerous mountains in the world.

This is Askeaton native, Gerard McDonnell's second attempt to summit K2 in the Himalayas near the Pak-China border. In 2006, he climbed to nearly 8000m of K2 Mountain's 8611m before sustaining a serious head injury when overhead rocks fell on him. "He was lucky to escape with his life", recalls his mother, Gertie McDonnell, who admits to being more than a little worried about her son's safety.

Ger, son of a County Limerick dairy farmer, grew up in the Kilcornan with his parents and four siblings before flying the nest to study engineering in DCU. Upon graduating in 1993, Ger, now 37, travelled the world, including 48 states of America, before settling in Alaska, where he has lived for the last 10 years and where he has made a name as a talented bohran player.

"He was always adventurous growing up" recalls Gertie, fondly. "He has great energy and a great spirit - he's far from a home bird!" She adds,

Ger also climbed Denali in 2005, and Foraker and Broadpeak in 2006.

While not the highest peak in the world (it's the second highest), K2 is considered the most deadly, hence its moniker, 'Savage Mountain'; its savagery is not just borne from the mountain itself but rather its harsh climate and conditions, and it is feared amongst the most hardened climbers.

To date, only 130 climbers have managed to summit the great snowy peak, and it has claimed the lives of close to 50 mountaineers. Ger's odds of reaching the summit are 1 to 10. The target date for the team's first joint summit bid is this Thursday, July 31. If their weather predictions are correct, they will commence their descent four

days later.

"He's not doing it because he wants to be the first to do it; he's really just doing it to do it. He came so close the last time before he got injured. His father passed away 17 years ago and he said he had a very spiritual experience when he was on the top of Everest and he felt a great close-

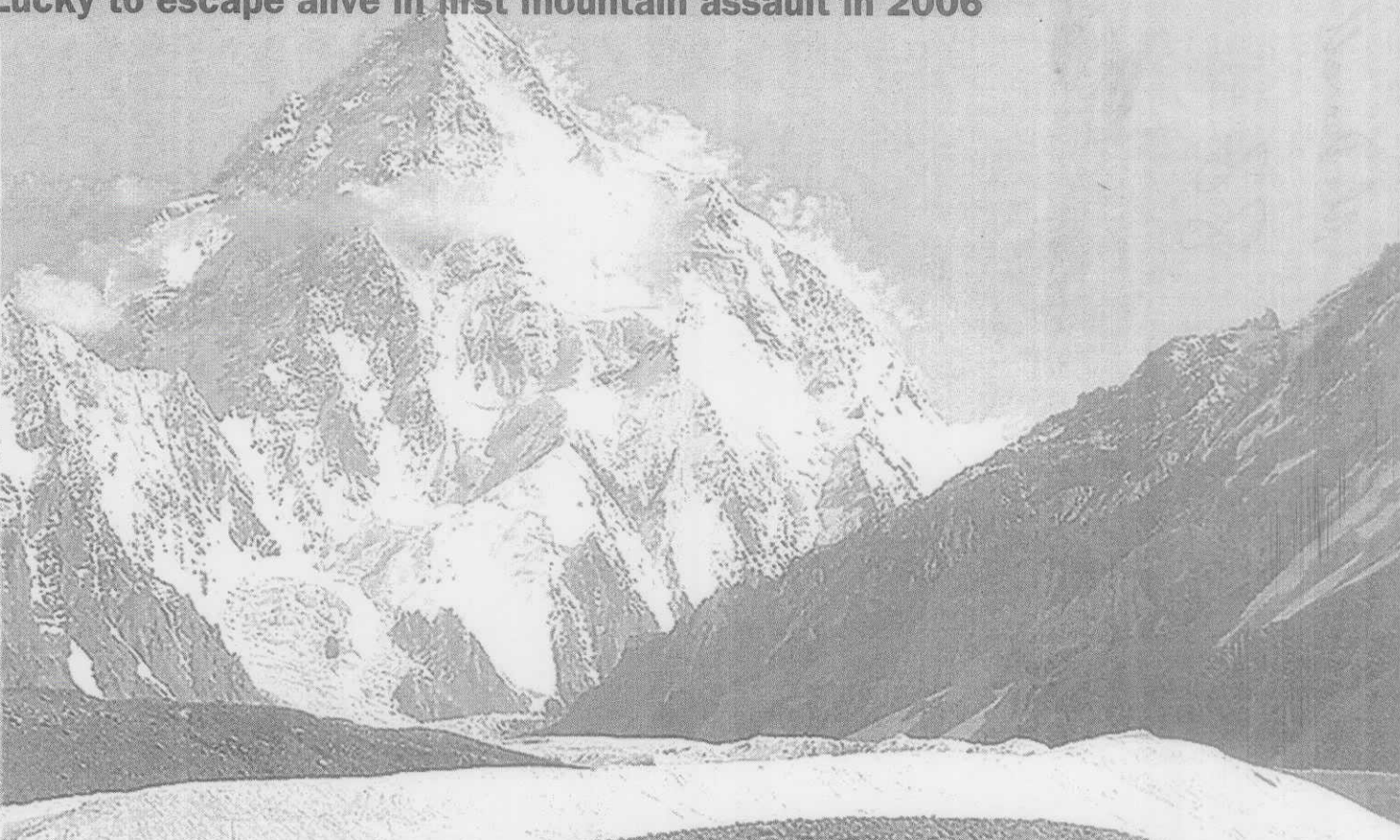
ness with his father at that moment", explains his mother.

Ger and his team of 8 (5 Dutch, 1 Nepalese, 1 Australian, 1 Irishman) converged at Islamabad in May before setting off on their journey to the K2 base.

Ger and his expedition team have been submit-

ting updates and photographs of their trek through a website (nortik2.nl).

In his log entries, Ger reflects jovially on his experiences, most of which require extreme endurance, and County Limerick phrases like 'There's fear of us' are regularly peppered throughout his dispatches, making for interesting reading.



Mans swallows

Boy airlifted after Kilkee accident