

GER SPENT NIGHT WITH SURVIVORS

By ALAN OWENS

IT IS believed that Limerick mountain climber Gerard McDonnell may have spent his last night alive in the company of two surviving members of the disastrous expedition to the summit of K2.

Dutchman Wilco Van Rooijen, team leader of the Norit K2 expedition the Kilcornan native was a member of, is believed to have told rescuers that he spent the night huddled in the snow with Mr McDonnell and Italian Marco Confortola following the ice avalanche that is responsible for the loss of eleven lives.

The men were above a section 350 metres below the summit of K2, known as the "Bottleneck" because of its layout and difficulty. A serac - or huge column of ice - had previously detached itself from the mountain and swept through the gully, taking some of the climbers with it and stranding the rest of the group

by removing the safety ropes.

Mr Van Rooijen is believed to have picked his way through the gully once day broke, leaving the two men behind. Marco Confortola also survived the descent, but it is not known whether Mr McDonnell died in a fall or from exposure, although one report has suggested he was seen falling from the slope.

The Dutchman also suggested that poor preparation for the descent of K2 may have contributed to the death of the Limerick mountain climber and 10 others, it was claimed this Tuesday.

He has claimed that advance climbers laid ropes in the wrong section of the Bottleneck area, and that the team had spent valuable hours moving the ropes to their correct position.

Mr Van Rooijen said that: "Everything was going well to camp four, and on summit attempt, everything went wrong. The biggest mistake we made was that we tried to make

agreements. Everybody had his own responsibility and then some people did not do what they promised."

Pat Falvey, family friend and fellow climber of Mr McDonnell's last night dismissed claims that the team had suffered from "summit fever" and said that Annie Starkey, partner of Mr McDonnell, and his brother JJ are set to fly to Pakistan this week to meet the leader of the ill-fated expedition, and collect some of Mr McDonnell's belongings. It is likely that his body will never be recovered from the mountain.

Tributes to the Limerick man have been pouring in since news of the accident broke, with President Mary McAleese expressing her sympathies at the "truly heartbreaking" events. A special Mass for the family was held on Sunday in Kilcornan, while a memorial service is being planned following the return of his family from Pakistan.



Kilcornan's Gerard McDonnell, pictured on the ascent of K2 - the world's second-highest mountain, the Limerick climber reached the summit but is feared dead following an ice fall as the group descended

Robbery and Traveller 'jamboree' puts damper on Kilkee

PETULA MARTYN

A BAR in the coastal resort of Kilkee - owned by a Limerick publican - was targeted by a gang of thieves who stole €20,000 over the Bank Holiday weekend.

The theft took place at Scott's Bar on O'Curry Street between 3.30am and 9am on Saturday. The premises, which is owned by Michael Martin, who also owns a pub on Thomas Street in Limerick, was unoccupied at the time.

Kilkee gardai are investigating the robbery and so far no arrests have been made.

The cash was stolen a day after hundreds of Travellers descended on the Clare resort and took over a public car park overlooking the ocean.

Holiday-makers left Kil-

kee and a number of businesses were forced to close when 60 caravans parked in the town.

One businessman said there was "total revulsion and anger" over what he described as a "Travellers jamboree weekend" on what is usually the busiest summer bank holiday weekend in Kilkee.

Manuel Di Lucia, the town's former Mayor, said: "The laws are not tight enough that we could make them vacate, and they know their rights."

He said visitors could not park in the public car park which was surrounded by horses, belonging to the Travellers, who were grazing on green areas.

A local dive centre located beside the car park had to close because of the intrusion from members of the travelling community

who were using the centre's facilities.

A number of younger Travellers took to the beach with jet skis. "They were causing havoc and speeding inside the 'no speed zone'," Mr Di Lucia said. "They put swimmers and kayakers in danger. When lifeguards spoke to them, all they did was rev up their engines and spray them with water."

The families were moved on by gardai yesterday and "left total devastation behind them", according to the local businessman.

Barriers will be put in place by the council in the coming weeks to prevent caravans accessing the car park in future.

A clean-up operation to remove rubbish left at the site is underway.



Some of the caravans and camper vans parked in the public car park in Kilkee over the Bank Holiday weekend

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