

Review of our county edition



Family and friends gather to pay tribute to a legend

KILCORNAN

Norma Prendiville

MUSIC, which was so much a part of the life of one of Limerick's greatest sportsmen Ger McDonnell, will, this Sunday also feature in the memorial ceremonies in Kilcornan marking his tragic death.

The 37-year-old intrepid mountaineer made history on August 1 when he became the first Irishman to scale K2, the world's second highest mountain. But triumph turned to tragedy on the descent when this most dangerous of mountains claimed further victims, among them Ger McDonnell.

The series of events which led to Ger's death and that of 10 other climbers is believed to have begun when a fall of ice severed fixed ropes at the dangerous Bottleneck. A number of climbers fell off the mountain as a result, while others were trapped above in what is known as the Death Zone.

Two climbers, including the leader of the Dutch-led expedition of which Ger was a member, eventually made it to safety. But as the hours passed, hopes for Ger's survival faded, and by Sunday afternoon, his family in Kilcornan accepted that he would not be returning from the mountain.

Because of conditions on the mountain and safety hazards, any attempt to retrieve the bodies of those who had died was ruled out.

Members of Ger's family

travelled to the Himalayas last weekend to try and piece together the events which unfolded on K2. Ger's long-time partner, Annie Starkey, who is also a mountaineer; his brother, JJ and his partner, Joanne; his sister, Denise, and her husband, Damien O'Brien, made the long, harrowing journey to the area in the north-east of Pakistan bordering China.

There they were expected to be debriefed by survivors of the world's worst climbing disaster – and to reclaim his belongings.

They are expected to return to Limerick early this Thursday and to make a final statement on Thursday or Friday in advance of Sunday's memorial services.

Huge crowds of friends, neighbours and admirers of Ger's are expected in Kilcornan where the memorial Mass and celebration of Ger's life will begin at 1.30pm in the community centre. Marquees are to be erected on the grounds of the centre in anticipation of large, overflow crowds.

The family, in a short statement issued earlier this week, requested no flowers, but said people, if they wished, could make donations to Ger's favourite charities – the Irish Mountain Rescue Association, Milford Care Centre, Concern, the Irish Heart Foundation and the Nepalese Children's Education Fund. Even in death, it seems, the big-hearted man that was Ger McDonnell is helping others.



Limerick mountaineer Ger McDonnell pictured during his climb on K2 in the Himalyas, which was to claim his life

The family also thanked the media for respecting their request for privacy to date.

Mountaineering friends from Ireland and from around the world are expected to attend Sunday's ceremonies. Friends from Alaska, where Ger had lived for the past 11 years, are also expected.

Last week, friends of his from the world of music, among them Liam O Maonlai and the band, Kila, indicated they, too, would be there to mark the passing of an extraordinary man.

Ger, the son of Gertie and the late Denis McDonnell and brother to JJ, Martha, Stephanie and Denise, grew up on a farm in Kilcornan and went to school locally in Kilcornan and in St Mary's in

Askeaton. His fascination with mountains and with climbing began as a teenager when he and a friend joined a climbing club.

He wanted always to climb higher, and ever higher, a former teacher said of him.

In 2003, that fascination with climbing ever higher reached its climax when Ger scaled the world's highest mountain, Mount Everest, becoming only the fourth Irishman ever to do so, and following the route pioneered by Hillary.

Typically, Ger marked the moment by belting a sliothar off the peak with the hurley he had carried all the way with him.

But long before Ger became the first Irishman to climb K2, he had built a

solid reputation as a climber. Ger, said climber Pat Falvey this week, was one of the strongest and safest climbers he knew.

To hone his mountaineering skills, Ger moved to Alaska and made it his home 11 years ago, where his achievements included scaling McKinley, Foraker and other Alaskan peaks.

In 1999, he was nominated for the Denali Pin, an award given to mountaineers who perform acts of heroism on Mount McKinley. He and another climber guided five exhausted climbers, including one with snow blindness, down from the summit ridge in rapidly deteriorating weather.

He was a team leader in an Antarctic expedition in

honour of Irish explorers Shackleton and Crean.

A previous bid to scale K2 ended when Ger was hit on the head by rock fall but he returned, earlier this year, to the challenge – and to both triumph and tragedy.

The mountain where one in five climbers dies, also claimed Ger – and the world lost a daring, modern hero and one of its best human beings.

Since his death, heartfelt tributes have been paid to a man known for his sense of fun, his generosity, his big smile and his big-hearted attitude to life.

Those tributes, without doubt, will also be heard on Sunday when the world will make its farewell to Ger, the legend who is sadly no longer among us.

Morning glory: Aoife is festival rose



Aoife Barron, Knockainey, who was crowned Morning Star Rose at Bruff Festival, with the winning escort, James O'Shaughnessy, Holycross

BRUFF

Aine Fitzgerald

SEVENTEEN dazzling young ladies and 17 dapper young gentlemen battled it out in Bruff over the weekend to secure the title of the Morning Star Rose and Escort which formed part of the three-day Bruff Festival.

Officially opened by Munster rugby star Paul O'Connell, the festival included a road bowling competition and a family fun day at the Grove on Sunday, where children enjoyed a bouncy castle and a GAA blitz.

"The festival was opened by Paul O'Connell, who gave a magnificent interview on stage with John Fitzgerald about rugby, and had all the youngsters enthralled," explained organiser Mary

O'Keeffe.

"From there on in it was a brilliant success. We are hoping for bigger and better next year, with perhaps even a marquee," she revealed.

For the first time in the festival's history escorts were included in this year's competition.

Girls and guys from Bruff, Kilmallock, Knockainey, Hospital, Galbally and Holycross put their best foot forward over the two-day judging period, but only one winner could be being named in each category.

Interviews took place in the open air over two days, Saturday and Sunday in the town centre, with career coach John Fitzgerald of Hormonics Career Crafting posing the questions.

One-to-one interviews took place in Clancy's Bar

between the contestants and the six-person judging panel that included model Sally Anne Hartigan; Lorraine Turner, runner-up in Miss Universe Ireland; Pearl and Sinead of Fashion House, Little Ellen Street, Limerick; Ailish Murphy and Grainne Vaughan of Joli Accessories, Limerick.

The Morning Star Rose was finally unveiled as Aoife Barron from Knockainey, who took home over €2,000 in prize money and will now go forward to complete in the heats for Rose of Tralee 2009.

The winning escort, meanwhile, was named as James O'Shaughnessy, representing Reardon's pub in Holycross, who was praised highly by Limerick's escort in this year's Rose of Tralee Festival, Tim O'Donoghue from Newcastle West.

Flood clean-up to cost tens of

The well of the saint: faithful are set to drink deeply on Pattern Day

BARRIGONE
Norma Prendiville

Ex-hurler Houlihan to contest elections