

Riddlers' quiz has the answer for wildlife

Kevin Cronin

ENDANGERED wildlife in Africa will benefit from a pub quiz being held in Riddler's Bar, Sarsfield Street, this Sunday evening to raise funds for Namibia's protected animal species.

Organised by Limerick animal-lover Michelle Costello, the quiz will kick off at 8pm, with proceeds going toward Ms Costello's volunteer work in the Namibia Wildlife Sanctuary scheduled for this June and July.

"I will be working hands on in helping to develop and maintain a sanctuary for the rehabilitation of Namibia's exotic wildlife," Ms Costello said. Her daily activities will include throwing meat to lions, leopards, cheetahs and African wild dogs; hand-feeding meerkats; and

preparing fruit and vegetables for the baboons.

"Participation in the programme provides employment to the local Bushman community and ensures the rescue, survival and rehabilitation of the animals, which are housed in natural environments around the site," she added.

Ms Costello explained that the wildlife sanctuary is dependent upon the work of volunteers, who in turn need donations to continue their good work. Orphaned baboons are also taken care of in the sanctuary, which include 16 aged one to two years old and five baby baboons aged between three and eight months old.

"Volunteers will take the baboons on a walk at least every other day in the field to allow them to forage

naturally and to give them regular exercise. We will also have responsibility for bottle feeding, walking and sleeping overnight with the five baby baboons, which are currently too small to live in the camp with the young baboons," Ms Costello said.

With her experiences set to be charted in a blog, Limerick contributors will have the opportunity to follow Ms Costello's progress in the wildlife sanctuary online.

The cost of entering a four-person team on Sunday is €10 a head, with spot prizes and raffle prizes promised throughout the evening.

Hosted by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Madonna Lucia, the wildlife fundraiser could well prove to be a roaring success.

Climber Ger was a hero, says team leader Wilco

Limerick man fought to save the lives of three climbers



The late Gerard McDonnell pictured on the ill-fated climb of K2 which was to claim his life in August 2008

Alan Owens

DUTCHMAN Wilco Van Rooijen, who lead the ill-fated expedition to the summit K2 that saw Limerick man Gerard McDonnell lose his life, has described his friend as a "hero" who "fought for the lives of three strangers".

A recent documentary by a Swedish climber had brought into question the team's decision to aim for the summit after delays had held up the expedition, but Van Rooijen dismissed such concerns, saying in a recent interview with the Explorersweb.com website that he "considered our decision to continue safe".

Mr Van Rooijen, who lost all of the toes on one foot in the expedition and was enormously lucky to survive the disaster, deals in detail with the expedition in his new book "Surviving K2", which goes into detail about Ger McDonnell's role on the ill-fated expedition.

Speaking recently about writing the book, Mr Van Rooijen said: "My objective was to

explain how this disaster happened and how Gerard McDonnell, my dear friend and climbing partner, was killed".

"It took a lot of work. I needed to verify information, separate fact from fiction, and speak with other survivors," he explained.

Mr Van Rooijen deals in detail with the events surrounding Ger's death, who he says was a climbing partner "I could trust 200 percent".

"I can still hear Ger howling with joy: 'We are at the summit of K2!' What happened on the descent is unbelievable. All the ropes were there... and suddenly they were missing," said Wilco in the interview.

The Norit K2 team, of which Van Rooijen and McDonnell were part, reached the summit of K2 at 6.39pm on August 1 2008, but falling ice chunks or "seracs" tore out their fixed lines in a section 350m below the summit, known as the 'Bottleneck'.

After spending a night huddled together above the Bottleneck, Van Rooijen picked his way through the ice and descended, while McDon-

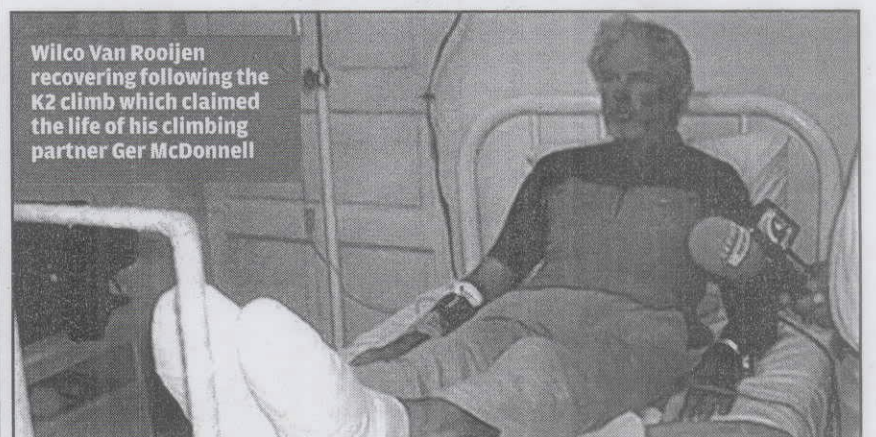
nell attempted to come to the aid of a group of Korean climbers, one of whom was hanging upside down from a rope.

"In my book, I describe evidence that Gerard completed the rescue of at least two men, who were tangled in the fixed lines," said Van Rooijen.

"Later, Big Pasang Bhote, a porter assisting in the rescues, saw Gerard alive and descending with the survivors. We have photographic evidence of Ger's continued rescue efforts. Gerard's heroism initially went unreported, partly because witnesses were not alive to tell their story. Big Pasang, Ger and the others were killed by falling ice and avalanches on descent."

He added: "Gerard McDonnell is a hero. He fought for the lives of three strangers."

A number of other books are in the offing with regard to the tragedy, while members of Ger McDonnell's family and friends recently met with RTE and Image Productions in order to collaborate on a television documentary telling the Kilcormac man's "side of the story".



Wilco Van Rooijen recovering following the K2 climb which claimed the life of his climbing partner Ger McDonnell

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