

Presidents report – 13th August, 2016

Our regular club meeting was changed to accommodate and combine Illawarra Rotary Club meeting at Dapto Leagues Club to hear from Rotarian Ken Hutt. Ken climbed near the summit of the 8,000m Himalayan Cho Oyu and flew his paraglider in a world first attempt to raise money for Rotary International End Polio Now campaign.

Ken pulled out the paraglider which had a long bright red sail which read "End Polio Now" and featured the Rotary gearwheel. Ken said "I had no idea about the distance I was going to need to run to inflate the glider to support my weight and all the gear I carried, so I took off a little blind to what would happen".

Ken said "It began when a friend invited me on an expedition to climb Cho Oyu and suggested that I make the descent by paraglider. My first thought was, that's a little bit beyond my capabilities". Ken at that stage had nearly 25 years of climbing experience but only three years as a paraglider.

Ken said "after a while I thought, well, I'll give it a go. And I decided to convert it into something that would be useful for charity." Polio eradication was an obvious choice because I have raised money for Rotary's End Polio Now campaign through my local Rotary Club.

During April 2014 Ken spent a couple of weeks in Kathmandu. Afterwards, climbed to Everest Base Camp with other members of the expedition to adjust to the altitude". Four Sherpas and a guide joined the team for the ascent to Cho Oyu advance base camp (ABC).

For several days, the group had to wait at Cho Oyu's ABC, at 5,700 meters, for powerful jet stream (winds) that battered the mountain to subside. Ken described watching climbers return to ABC, their summit dreams were defeated by the difficult conditions higher up.

It was 6am on 23 May; Ken described the sun had risen over the summit. The wind was almost calm. This was the weather window that they had been promised. However the weather forecast was dictating his opportunities and unless he took advantage of the current conditions, paragliding would be off the agenda.

Then Ken described that the object of this expedition was to climb as high on Cho Oyu as possible and make an attempt to launch a paraglider from the mountain and fly back to ABC. Reaching a point high up the mountain it was decided that this would be Ken's best position to launch of Cho Oyu. Ken knew the glider would take his weight – he just didn't know when the sail would inflate. He estimates that he ran 20 odd meters, short of breath and bursting with adrenaline, before the sail pulled him up.

Thirteen minutes later, he made a hard but safe landing on rocky terrain near Cho Oyu's Advanced Base Camp. Ken's flight down Cho Oyu has brought in

nearly \$40,000 worth of donations to date from people who heard about the expedition and wanted to help. It also has given him a platform from which to speak about End Polio Now.