

South African heroine tells her story



Seven summits: Tuesday Rostrum guest speaker Mandy Ramsden, (left) who has climbed the highest peak on each continent, with Beth Adie at the June meeting.

P1230843j



Out to lunch: Tuesday Rostrum committee members Marion Cross (left) and Georgie Strydom, at their club's June luncheon.

P1230847j

While conquering the seven summits, she learnt many valuable lessons.

JUDI DAVIS

AT a cellular level, you are slowly dying from lack of oxygen at the top of Mount Everest.

But from the summit of the earth's highest mountain, you can see for 100 miles.

As Mandy Ramsden discovered, your perspective on life changes dramatically when you have faced terrible risks and awesome challenges to stand on top of the world.

Mandy is the first South African woman to climb the so-called 'seven summits', the highest peak on each continent. She shared the joy, despair and triumphs of her incredible adventure with Tuesday Rostrum members at the June luncheon meeting.

A thoroughly entertaining speaker, she had everyone's undi-

vided attention as she spoke of her seven climbs. However, she tended to gloss over the difficulties and to highlight the excitement and joy she finds through mountain climbing.

Kilimanjaro was her first challenge although, when she succeeded in climbing Africa's highest peak, she had no real ambition to climb the other six of the seven notorious summits.

Bug

However, she had been well and truly bitten by the mountain climbing bug. Tackling Kilimanjaro had been a childhood dream.

"I had this vision of a snow-covered peak with acacia trees and giraffes at its foot. It intrigued me," she explained.

She also found it filled a space in her life where something was

missing. At that time Mandy, a mother of four, was successfully juggling the demands of a high-powered career and motherhood. Her life was busy, happy and successful.

"But something was missing. Do you remember that excitement you felt as a child on Christmas Eve? I rediscovered that that sense of excitement when I climbed Kilimanjaro," she explained.

After she had successfully climbed the next of the seven peaks, Mount Elbrus, the highest peak in Australasia, she received an SMS from a friend - 'Two down, five to go'.

The message inspired her to start toying with the idea of trying to climb the seven summits. When a place became available on an expedition up Mount Aconcagua, the highest peak in South America, she jumped at the chance.

She successfully summited this mountain peak; then Castenz Pyramid, the highest peak in Oce-

ania; then Dennell or Mount McKinley, the highest peak in North America; then, the sixth and penultimate peak, Vinson Massif in frosty Antarctica.

Each peak offered new challenges and required new skills. As she summited six of the seven peaks she learnt to cope with altitude and extreme cold and how to tackle the more technical climbs. On one climb she had to carry a pack half her body weight.

Peak

Now, six climbs done and dusted, she faced the ultimate challenge - Mount Everest, the highest peak in Asia and the highest mountain in the world.

"I was tempted to think of it as just another mountain in a beautiful place that didn't need to be topped," she said.

Of course, the Everest challenge was just too beguiling. She realised she would have to draw heavily on all the lessons she had learnt along the way. And face a

new challenge, that of dealing with extreme oxygen deprivation by making use of supplementary oxygen.

Again, Mandy made light of the extreme difficulties she faced in a place where she was, at times, literally a step away from death.

Instead, she spoke about the excitement of living in the 'soap opera' that was the temporary village at Base Camp; of the many people she met and befriended; and of the sheer beauty and thrill of the actual climb.

She also downplayed her achievement, giving great credit to her sherpas and guides who inspired her every step of the way, particularly when she faltered near the summit.

Sharing her triumphs and infectious excitement was a joy for her listeners.

By the end of her fascinating talk they were inspired to go out and climb their personal 'mountains', in the quest for a fuller, more exciting life.