Another SA team jets out to take on Everest

By LINDA RULASHE

SOUTH AFRICA's second Everest attempt begins today with the departure of a five-member team from Johannesburg international airport. It is the culmination of a three-year dream for the climbers, some of whom have known each other since their school days.

The team hopes to scale the summit, without oxygen, from the less-popular and more difficult North Ridge — and they hope that they will not be dogged by the controversy that plagued Ian Woodall's expedition earlier this year.

Alexander Harris, the team's leader, said the drama of the earlier South African attempt had had a negative effect on their expedition. “It has made it harder for us to find sponsors, but people are rooting for us nevertheless.”

The team — which includes Mountain Club of South Africa members Sean Disney, Mark Campbell, Anton Erasmus and Robin Walshaw — has already raised R95 000 and another R150 000 worth of equipment and food. However, they still need a further R200 000 to cover government charges and logistical support from the Tibetans.

Harris said the team had spent almost every day of the last five months together. “There was a lot of hectic preparation. A farewell party we had on Friday night with family and friends was the first time we were really able to get our minds off things.”

While Harris said they were not feeling nervous, “our first concern is to get back safely”.

The team arrives in Katmandu tomorrow before transferring to their Base Camp the next day. After acclimatising and establishing Camps 2 and 3 on the North Ridge, they plan to scale the summit on October 20.

The team have committed themselves to a long-term development programme aimed at promoting rock climbing and mountaineering among disadvantaged youths.

Four affirmative action candidate climbers with leadership skills will be selected for the programme, which is being run with the Gauteng government and the Mountain Club.

The four candidates will join four of the expedition members to form a team which will attempt to climb the sixth highest peak in the world, Mount Cho-Oyu, in Tibet, during March.