

December 17, 2004

Disabled, but mountaineer still aims high

By Christopher Lim

LOCAL mountaineer David Lim is preparing himself for his next big challenge - scaling Ojos Del Salado, the world's tallest volcano and the second highest peak in the Americas.

But for the first time in Mr

Lim's mountaineering career, he is going solo to scale the mountain straddling Argentina and Chile.

While a solo expedition would be daunting for even the most seasoned able-bodied mountaineer, the challenges Mr Lim faces will be compounded by his physical disability.

He was struck down in 1998 with Guillain Barre Syndrome, a rare nerve disorder that causes a person's body to attack its own nerves.

Paralysed from the eyes down, he fought to regain mobility through an iron will and extensive rehabilitation.

Today, his lower right leg is still completely paralysed. His left arm and leg also have restricted mobility.

Said Mr Lim, 40: "I'll have to expend 30 per cent more energy climbing than a healthy person would."

But while his family wishes he wasn't going alone on this expedition, which will last from Jan 4 next year to Jan 28, he is not too worried.

He said: "My body adapts reasonably well to high altitudes."

Ojos Del Salado can be approached from Argentina or Chile. Mr Lim attempted the summit from the Chilean side in 2001, but had to turn back when he was 200m from the summit.

But he says it is the journey that matters most, not the destination. He added: "I know it sounds corny, but it's true."

This time, he will scale the volcano from the Argentinian side.

There will be 10 days of climbing.

His preparations for the physical exertions include training on a device called a "hypoxifier", which resembles an oxygen tank but functions by decreasing the oxygen level inhaled

to simulate the rarified high-altitude

air of Ojos Del Salado.

The device is the first of its kind in Singapore, according to Mr Lim.

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