

# Govt backs new Everest expedition

Development project to  
culminate in a group climbing  
Cho Oyo in March

By **NIKKI WHITFIELD**

**T**he Gauteng government has pledged its support for the new South African Everest team, which leaves for the Himalayas next month on the first leg of a development project aimed at introducing mountaineering to the masses.

MEC for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, Peter Skosana yesterday outlined details of the project which will culminate in a band of people from disadvantaged backgrounds attempting to scale Tibet's tricky Mount Cho Oyo in March next year.

And there to help with the final selection will be the five members of the expedition who plan to leave for Everest on August 8 - leader Alex Harris, Sean Disney, Mark Campbell, Anton Erasmus and Robin Walshaw.

But, unlike Ian Woodall's highly publicised trek which saw him and Cathy O'Dowd scaling the south face with the aid of oxygen, the team will climb the north face without oxygen.

Skosana said the expedition would be used as a "learning opportunity by the climbers in preparation for Cho Oyo".

"Their utmost priority is to return safely with knowledge of the Hi-

malayan mountains which they can pass on to the four prospective team members who would have been selected before January next year," he said.

The final four will be selected from about 200 people chosen from businesses and corporations in Gauteng. Each person selected must be from a disadvantaged background, be between 22 and 28 years old and have an aptitude for sport.

The 200 will be whittled down to 20 after a series of outward-bound courses, then down to 10 and finally, by mid-January, to four.

And, if literature on Cho Oyo is anything to go by, those four will have to know their stuff. The mountain, at 8 201m, is the world's sixth highest and is a western neighbour of Everest (8 848m).

Harris and his team plan to return from Everest by late October or early November. While their air fares have been paid for the by Mountain Club of SA and they have found a sponsor willing to put up R50 000, they are still short of another R50 000.

They will probably have to make do with no sherpas - either for carrying or climbing aid.

Should anybody be interested in sponsoring the expedition, telephone 482-7112.