

Athletes head off to the wilds of Borneo

By Marie Foy

TWO superfit Northern Ireland people are heading off to the remote forests of Borneo next month on the challenge of a lifetime.

Dromara man Noel Hanna (33) and Alison Morris (24), from Saintfield, will cycle over rough terrain past wild animals and swim in sheer blackness through infested waters with a 20 kilo rucksack on their backs.

They will tackle jungle trekking, caving, mountain biking, kayaking over white water rapids and scuba diving — and cover over 300 miles in 12 days.

The pair are part of an Irish team competing against 80 international groups taking part in Eco Challenge 2000.

Eco Challenge is the world's premier expedition race attracting the best adventure athletes from around the world.

Noel and Alison are currently putting themselves through exhausting paces to improve their fitness and stamina.

The other members of their team are Timmy Flavin, from Co Kerry and Ian Cummings, from Co Louth.

Noel, a civil servant and fitness instructor who will lead the group, said: "We are up against 80 very strong teams from all over the world. My own team is quite inexperienced and in 35 degree heat, 95% humidity and since we have to carry all our own food and water, my main aim is just to finish," he said.

"To prepare for the race I have been doing a lot of cycling and trekking in the Mourne's.

"I expect that quite some time will be spent in the jungle, although there is little that I can do to recreate those conditions over here."

Noel was a member of last year's Irish team which was the first to finish the challenge in Patagonia, Argentina.

This year's competition offers a chance to explore one of the last truly wild places on earth.

The team is being supported by Bridgedale outdoor sock manufacturer and Clarins, but the competitors must raise most of the £15,000 cost of the trip themselves. Anyone interested in lending their support can contact Noel on 0411 216612.