

Dromara man heads

for 'eco challenge' in the Andes



Noel Hanna being presented with eight Crag Hopper rucksacks by Roger Warnock of Raw Outdoors, Hillsborough, for his imminent Eco-Challenge in Argentina. US46/128 SG.



by NEIL GREENLEES

NOEL LOOKS FORWARD TO PATAGONIAN ADVENTURE

A DROMARA man who took part in a trek through the Himalayas for charity has now been selected as a member of the Irish team to compete in a global 'eco challenge' in the Andes.

Noel Hanna will set off for the Patagonia region of Argentina in less than a fortnight and will not return to Northern Ireland until the week before Christmas.

During his time in South America he will take part in a variety of sports including rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, kayaking and sea kayaking, white water rafting, running and horse riding.

It's a daunting itinerary and Noel admits he has little competitive experience of any sport other than running.

"I have canoed and taken part in mountaineering before - but never on a competitive basis," he said.

"I can ride a horse - all four of us in the team have taken lessons in this - but the whole experience will certainly be something a bit different."

Noel is one of two people from the North to be selected for the Irish team.

The other two members - one male and one female - come from the Republic and together they will compete with people from across the globe.

All four Irish competitors were hoping to take part in the eco-challenge as a fund raiser for charity.

Response

However, the response they have received from businesses in both parts of Ireland has been disappointing.

"It is costing about £12,000 for us to take part in the challenge and so far we have received only £1,200 from local businesses," said Noel.

"But at the end of the day we are doing it for ourselves and we are paying £2,500 each for the privilege."

However, one company has come up trumps for the intrepid travellers.

During their trip to Patagonia, the Irish team will use items made by 'Craghoppers', a major UK manufacturer of outdoor equipment.

These include rucksacks and climbing harnesses, and have been supplied through 'Raw Outdoors', a newly opened shop for people who enjoy outdoor activities in Hillsborough's Lisburn Street.

Arduous

The journey to Argentina is arduous. The team must first fly to London, then to Paris and then to Buenos Aires.

Finally, they have to take an internal flight to the town of Bunloche close to the Chilean border - a total of 20 hours in the air.

Noel said they will then have four or five days in which to acclimatise to the altitude before the competitive events begin.

"We will be going up two mountains which are over 4,000 metres high (about 12 to 13,000 feet) so we will have to be sure we are ready to cope with that height," he explained.

"But we're really looking forward to taking part. It should prove the experience of a lifetime."