

Gerry moves mountains to beat lung disease

A SOUTHSIDER who received a life giving double lung transplant last year is to climb some of the highest peaks in Britain and Ireland in a bid to raise awareness of organ donorship.

Gerry Walker (47) from Marlay Wood in Rathfarnham couldn't walk 100 metres without struggling to breath before he received the transplant at a hospital in the UK last year.

Now, he believes he has to give something back.

The Southsider has al-

ready scaled Kerry's Carrauntoohil and hopes to conquer Snowdon in Wales, Scotland's Ben Nevis and Scafell Pike in England to honour the anonymous donor he knows only as 'Martin' and to raise cash for other sufferers.

Gerry has the degenerative lung disease cystic fibrosis and

is one of the oldest sufferers in the country. The average life expectancy of CF patients in Ireland is one of the lowest in the world at just 30.

Gerry's 4Peaks4Life Challenge started in May when he scaled Ireland's highest peak Carrauntoohil in Co Kerry.

But he will continue the challenge next month when he attempts Snowdon on July 23, Ben Nevis on July 25 and Scafell Pike on July 27.

On each summit he is placing an engraved tribute in rock to his lung donor Martin and the sponsorship money he

raises will go towards the Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland.

Some of the funds will also help the Freeman Cardio Centre in Newcastle, England, where he had his operation in July of last year.

Gerry was first diagnosed

with cystic fibrosis when he was four. However, despite his condition, he was still an active person up to the age of 40 and climbing and marathon walks were some of his passions.

He explained how his health started to deteriorate some years back and he needed to undergo the life saving transplant.

"In 2000 things really started going downhill and by 2003 I needed the help of oxygen," he recalled. "That's when I gave up going to the gym because I couldn't work out attached to a cylinder.

"Now though I'm back in the gym and feeling great after five years of struggling for breath with the mildest exertion. Things are going very

well since the transplant. I have had a totally new lease of life. I haven't been able to breath as well since I was 15 years of age.

"I was always into mountains prior to getting really ill. I wanted to get back into it but I also felt I should give something back to try and raise donor awareness.

"I said I would do a bit of fundraising," he added. "The main work is to raise donor awareness because there are lots of other people waiting for transplants. It is a fairly harrowing experience I can tell you."

To sponsor Gerry and see how you can become a lifesaving organ donor visit www.4peaks4life.ie



Gerry and his wife Margaret are pictured at the summit of Carrauntoohil which he scaled as part of his challenge.