



Andrew Lock

Andrew Lock has drawn a line under perhaps Australia's greatest mountaineering record – a career that saw him summit all 14 of the world's 8000+ metre peaks, some more than once.

It was during a recent re-attempt on Everest, in the dark and without supplementary oxygen, that he decided his mind and body had risked enough. "It would have been nice to tick the big E without gas (supplementary oxygen) and thereby make a clean sweep of all the 8000ers without O2 but I just can't justify going back.

"After 25 8000-metre expeditions, I've spent about four years in total on the sides of these hills. I think that's enough.

"I still have all my fingers and toes and the only rescues in which I've been involved have been of other climbers.

"Those are both statistics that I'd like to maintain."

Andrew's obsession with getting on top of the planet's high places began after watching a talk given by Tim Macartney-Snape and Greg Mortimer in 1985. It was a modest slideshow attended by about 20 people in Wagga Wagga town hall. "Luckily," he tells *Rock*, "I was one of them."

He was in his early 20s and had never climbed before. He fronted up to the talk after first being captivated by a story he'd read some years earlier about Macartney-Snape's and Mortimer's summit of Annapurna 2 in an early edition of *Wild* magazine.

"It must have been one of the first editions of *Wild*. It was an evocative piece a few years before they climbed Everest and the pictures were beautiful," he answers, pausing thoughtfully to remember the exact details. "There was the piece about the Annapurna 2 expedition then not long after, maybe a few years later if I remember correctly, there was one about their Everest attempt that was also beautifully photographed," he explains. "It was the Annapurna piece that first peaked my interest then the report on the Everest expedition, again with beautiful photos, followed by the Wagga slideshow that really got me hooked in."

After the slideshow, with mountain fire truly ignited in his belly, he promptly joined the Sydney rock-climbing club and immediately started catching up on what he soon realised had been gnawing away at him his whole life.

"I'd always loved the outdoors," he says. "We all have skills and it's the lucky ones who discover what these are. Luckily for me I was right into the outdoors – I went through scouts and so realised early, through my experiences with the scouting movement, that I loved the outdoors. It was the next logical step in a funny sort of way.

"As soon as I discovered mountaineering it was just a natural fit, I couldn't get enough of it, and so I kept going back, I kept picking up and developing new skills to the extent where it became an overwhelming over-arching passion that took over my life and I've sacrificed everything and anything I've had to sacrifice along the way to pursue that passion," he says. "I needed to keep going back, and it's only now where my body and psychology have had enough, that I feel prepared to call it quits."

Andrew's style has been characterised by those who have climbed with him as being about resilience, extraordinary powers of endurance and razor-sharp, almost uncanny awareness and respect for the environment despite oftentimes acute hardship.

"I've always been into long endurance-style stuff, I'd routinely go into the Blue Mountains from Sydney on weekends and do big, challenging treks around the Grose valley," he explains. "Physiologically I'm just more suited to that, so training and fitness was just something I did, it was just my natural thing."

But it's not just his natural endurance that makes him so talented in the world's high places, it's also an appreciation of what the mountains give back to him. "I allow myself to get worn down by society and then have to get back to the mountains to recharge. I need the spiritual rejuvenation the mountains provide me.

"I'll be physically and emotionally shattered

after a big expedition, but I'll be spiritually charged-up and refreshed, calmer. This has been a crucial part of my life's course so far."

The respect he has for the world's highest peaks is demonstrated by an account he tells about the climb he did on Annapurna in 2007.

"There was a constant, throat-clenching, heart-in-the-mouth fear of an avalanche on every step. We risk assessed every metre of the way. In the end we called it right, but we still had to push through our fear. Dangerous as it was, we realised this was the only way – to have absolute respect for the calamitous possibilities, to be aware of our fears and to manage them. Our respect for what we were trying to do within the confines of a magnificent, albeit terrifying, place gave us the confidence to overcome our fear."

Later, back at base camp, he vowed never to return to the mountain again. He'd had two dreadfully difficult climbs, the first in 2005 claiming the life of a friend. It was a similar life-threatening issue that caused him to end his adventures in the death-zone.

"I'd always promised myself to stop after the 14th, but I found a reason to go back – that being to do Everest without gas. On that trip, because of the shape of a hill, I had to set camp at 8300-metres and spend an extra day climbing at that altitude. Luckily for me I was able to identify what was wrong with me and turn around before it overwhelmed me. Once you've had cerebral oedema, you're more likely to develop it again in any future expedition, so really, that's sign enough for me to retire – it's not worth going back. Let the oedema be the line in the sand."

So what's next then, if not preparing for adventures in the death-zone?

"Oh, plenty of things. I want to do the Franklin again soon and I love ocean racing, I'd love a gig on a Sydney-Hobart yacht this year."

Who better to have on your crew? He'd certainly be more at home than most on the crest of a massive ocean-roller.

Andrew Lock spoke with Aaron Flanagan.