

Australian climber Gilian Lee recovering in Kathmandu after dramatic rescue high on Mount Everest

By South Asia correspondent [Siobhan Heanue](#) and [Brooke Wylie](#)
Updated May 29, 2019 07:31:19



PHOTO: Canberra man Gilian Lee is recovering in hospital in Kathmandu. (Supplied)

The Australian climber who fell into unconsciousness while attempting to summit Mount Everest was coughing "continuously" and encouraged to turn back, according to his sherpa guide and a fellow climber.

Canberra public servant Gilian Lee's fourth attempt to scale the world's tallest mountain nearly ended in disaster as he had to be rescued high up on the northern slopes.

Tibetan climbers found Mr Lee unconscious at an altitude of 7,500 metres last Wednesday.

The ABC understands Mr Lee, who is recovering in Kathmandu's Grande hospital, was attempting to reach the summit without oxygen tanks.

He is now in intensive care and barely able to talk.

"He loved to climb mountains and he wanted to summit Everest," said Tashi Sherpa, part-owner of the expedition company Mr Lee paid to climb the peak.

"He had a big dream to do this but the thing is he did not want to use oxygen."

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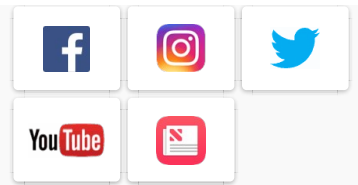
Key points:

- Gilian Lee is attempting to climb 14 mountains higher than 8,000m without oxygen tanks
- He fell unconscious on the slopes of Everest and was carried back to camp on a yak
- Eleven people have died trying to climb Everest this year

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PHOTO: Tashi Sherpa has summited Mount Everest eight times and is a part owner of the expedition company that Mr Lee paid to climb the mountain. (ABC News: Siobhan Heanue)

"His mind is a little bit stubborn ... he can't understand clearly our people.

"My leader managed [to find] some yak to carry him to Chinese Base Camp."

'The mountain doesn't forgive'



PHOTO: Tashi Sherpa said his team leader managed to find a yak to take Mr Lee back to Chinese Base Camp after he fell unconscious attempting to summit Mount Everest. (Supplied)

Mr Tashi said Mr Lee's health was "not really good" at the 7,000 metre-mark.

"Our team guide suggest him to [go] back from the North Col but he didn't accept and he continued to 7,600 metres."

Italian mountaineer Jean-Marie Rossi was on the same expedition and said he saw Mr Lee deteriorate.

"[He had] so much trouble with his acclimatisation. [He was] always coughing, continuously," he said.

"[He was] always smiling, always trying to do his best, but the mountain doesn't forgive."





PHOTO: Italian climber Jean-Marie Rossi said Mr Lee was constantly coughing as he attempted to summit the world's tallest mountain. (ABC News: Siobhan Heanue)

'I have put a lot of pressure onto myself'

According to his blog, Mr Lee's goal is to climb 14 mountains higher than 8,000 metres without supplemental oxygen or drugs.

This was his fourth attempt to reach the summit of Mount Everest after three unsuccessful attempts in 2015, 2017 and 2018.

"I have put a lot of pressure onto myself. I am running out of [money] to keep chasing this dream," he wrote on his blog about his latest climbing expedition.



"This will be the last throw of the dice."

Climber complained of chest infection prior to ill-fated climb

The day before his rescue, Mr Lee complained on Twitter that he had a chest infection with a "killer sore throat".

External Link: [@GilianLee Rough night at C1 due to persistent chest infection](#)

Mr Lee arrived in Nepal to climb Mount Everest in April.

Stuck at Chinese Base Camp (CBC) ahead of his climb, Mr Lee took to social media to vent his frustrations as he waited for conditions to improve.



PHOTO: Mr Lee posted this image of the Chinese Base Camp last month. (Facebook: Gilian Lee)

"Plans getting worse by the day. Lot of wind at the summit from the south side direction," he wrote on Facebook on May 9.

"[North] side windy as well. Chinese rope fixing team not at CBC so every day of delay is a nightmare."

Eleven die during tumultuous season on Everest



PHOTO: Climbers wait in line to summit Mount Everest on the Nepalese side of the mountain. (Nirmal Purja/ @nimsdai)

A record number of climbers have died or gone missing on Mount Everest since the beginning of the season.

American climber Christopher John Kulish died on the descent from the summit earlier this week.

That takes the number of people who have perished on the mountain this year to 11.

Most of the deaths on Everest have been blamed on exhaustion, exacerbated by the crowded route to and from the summit on the Nepalese side.



VIDEO: Mountaineer says inexperienced climbers created problems on Mount Everest (ABC News)

A photograph posted online by former Gurkha Nirmal Purja revealed that climbers were spending hours waiting for their turn to reach the top.

The last time 10 or more people died on Everest was in 2015, when they were hit by an avalanche.

Mr Rossi said sherpas were incentivised to take climbers up to the summit to earn money for the year ahead, but Mr Tashi said he didn't agree with some climbers' attitudes that the summit was the most important part of the climb.

"Summit is just bonus. But success is not the summit, actually — your life is more important," he said.

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