# Your invitation to Everest

## Thornton adventurer to lead charity trip

BY SAGE SWINTON

IT'S one of the world's most popular bucket list items and this autumn it's being offered by a few of Maitland's own.

Thornton adventurer Gavin Vickers will lead an expedition to Everest Base Camp and local residents are being invited to take part.

The trip is all in the name of Hunter charity the Umbrella Foundation, which raises money for Nepal to fund projects such as building schools, buying women's sanitary items and rescuing children from trafficking.

Mr Vickers, who is an Umbrella Foundation patron, has hiked to Everest Base Camp five times and made it to the top of the beast. He's also climbed to peaks above 8000 metres three times.

The expedition leader said he had no travel plans this autumn so when Umbrella Foundation chairperson Linda Harwood asked him about running a trip, he jumped at the chance.

"They do such good work," Mr Vickers said. "And I can use my skills to help."

Mr Vickers said he loved introducing people to Nepal, which he said was like his "second home".

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>
> **Gavin Vickers**

"It's a very special part of the world," he said. "I've been there nine times. The people really make it for me.

"It's one of the poorest countries in the world, so it just really makes you feel good to give back.

"It makes me thank my lucky stars every day that I can do things here like go to the tap and drink the water without getting sick."

The 17-day trip in April and May involves the base camp trek as well as the opportunity to attend an Anzac Day ceremony at the Australian Embassy in Kathmandu.

Mr Vickers said while base camp was "quite a difficult trek" due to the high altitudes, he encouraged anyone to take part.

He said he was also happy to advise participants how to best prepare, but said there was no hard and fast approach.

"You just have to be consistent with your training, then everything else falls into place," he said.

"The fitter you are the more you enjoy the trip. But we go very slowly. We have acclimatisation days. On rest days we go up higher then come back down to sleep."

Mr Vickers said they were seeking about 10-12 people to take part. All profits from the trip will go to the Umbrella Foundation. For details, visit the Umbrella Foundation website.



**AMAZING VIEWS:** Thornton's Gavin Vickers climbing Grey Tower on Ama Dablam in the Himalayas. He will lead a trip to Everest Base Camp for the Umbrella Foundation in April.

# Ex-firefighter takes aim at entitlements

A FORMER Hunter firefighter who spent 32 years in the service believes he was misled over pay he should expect after a medical discharge from Fire and Rescue NSW.

But FRNSW says Mark Goffett, 62, is being treated within the law.

Mr Goffett said a return to work coordinator told him in mid 2017 he would receive 80 per cent of his pay until he was 67 if he accepted a medical discharge. He did not want to retire despite a doctor diagnosing him with knee, back and shoulder problems along with post traumatic stress disorder.

Mr Goffett reluctantly accepted the medical discharge, and said he received 80 per cent of his wage for six months before it was wound back to about $370 per week.

"I thought after 30-odd years you could trust someone," he said. "If I'd had a mortgage, I'd have lost the house."

Mr Goffett said he wanted to return to work at the FRNSW communications centre, and applied for a position there in mid 2016 but was unsuccessful. He said he had lodged two applications since then, but received no response.

FRNSW said it had no record of his two latest applications. It said Mr Goffett received 26 weeks full pay, then 12 months at 80 per cent pay before he was put on the statutory rate of about $370 per week.

"Due to multiple medical conditions identified by his treating doctors, Mr Goffett was deemed unfit to safely return to work in any capacity with Fire and Rescue NSW without further risk to his health," FRNSW said.

"Mr Goffett applied for an On-Duty Total and Permanent Incapacity benefit which was awarded to him on 21 June 2018 and he now is in receipt of a fortnightly pension until he is 67 years old, in addition to any workers' compensation benefits."

– NICK BIELBY

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