



## Exclusive Pt. 2: K2 2017 Interview with Vanessa O'Brien



"When you go through Hell to get to Heaven you're not as flustered by the little things...I think I have become a nicer person, more patient, and more accommodating."



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In continuation to [part 1 of the Explorersweb interview with Vanessa O'Brien](#), today in part 2 we ask why she thinks no other team was successful in summiting this season, and how she feels the achievement has changed her.



A Typical day at K2 basecamp  
V. O'Brien

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*ExWeb: Every year, some of the best climbers in the world gather at K2 base camp to attempt the summit. How many other climbers were there at base camp this year? Why do you think they failed to summit?*

Vanessa: "I really only remember three large expeditions - Himex, The Polish and Us (K2 – The Final Conquest/Dreamers Destination).



Looking down on lower C2  
V. O'Brien



Vanessa O'Brien and the Polish team at K2 base camp  
V. O'Brien

Himex and the Polish were attempting the Cesen Route and we were on the Abruzzi Route. The Polish consisted of a mixed team, with one member trying to ski K2. Both turned around because of the weather – winds too high, snow too deep, etc.

Furtenbach did not really come over to K2 until the very end when it was time for the summit bid because they started with Broad Peak. I am not sure if these were separate climbers or Broad Peak climbers trying a two-fer (climbing Broad Peak then K2 back-to-back). In any case, I remember passing the Furtenbach team at Camp 2, which probably had the worse winds of all!

Mauricio and Badia Bonilla from Mexico did not want to climb above Camp 2 on summit day. The weather was consistently poor leading up to the summit window and they made a conscious decision not to take additional risk. I talked about the weather with

them for some time. They are seasoned K2 climbers and I highly respect them. They simply have a lower risk appetite and will live to climb a long time!

Swedish climber Fredrik Sträng aborted his attempt at 7,400 meters due to bad weather, which included deep snow and white-out conditions. He is an extremely strong climber, but I never saw him on my summit bid – it is possible I was already above him. He is also a seasoned K2 climber.

There was a Mongolian climber whose name I do not know, but his crampons broke on House's Chimney during our summit bid. I only found this out afterwards and was upset that no-one had said anything because I had a spare pair of crampons at Camp 1 – just one camp lower to House's Chimney. He could have gone to pick them up and it would have saved his summit bid. Always, always ask – you'd be surprised at extras, but do not steal!"

*ExWeb: Achieving a long-held and difficult goal almost always changes us in some way. Aside from making it to the summit of K2, what part of your experience was the most meaningful for you? Were there any personal challenges or hardships you had to overcome, or do you feel the achievement has changed you in any way?*

Vanessa: "I am extremely grateful to have added my name to those who have summited K2, especially as a woman. When you hear that three times as many women (60) have gone into space than have stood on the summit of K2 (20), it really puts the accomplishment into perspective.

I am most proud of the work I did at The Gilkey Memorial – adding 20 missing plaques across 13 nationalities to show respect for all 84 climbers that lost their lives on K2. This was a multi-year project because these tin plates had to be found in Rawalpindi and engraved, then returned and installed the following year. It might go without saying, but as the glaciers melt, more and more remnants present themselves and I have had to collect bone and skin samples for those looking for loved ones who have died on K2. There is nothing more humbling.

I've referred to our 16-hour climb as going through Dante's Inferno – an analogy I like because when Dante Alighieri loses his path he encounters the ghost of Virgil, a great Roman poet, who comes to guide him to the top of the mountain. However, to get to the top of the mountain, Dante has to pass through Hell to reach Heaven. That's K2. Every last 100 meters was a circle of hell – 9 circles of hell to K2's summit of Heaven. And indeed, when we reached the top, it was a bluebird day. So yeah, when you go through Hell to get to Heaven you're not as flustered by the little things – and other things that people think are hard, you look at and piss yourself laughing. I think I have become a nicer person, more patient, and more accommodating, but it depends who you ask." \*Grin\*

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In the third part of the Explorersweb interview with Vanessa O'Brien, we ask her opinions on the Polish attempt on K2 this winter and her plans for the future.