

VANESSA O'BRIEN WILL ATTEMPT TO SUMMIT K2

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K2 is also known as Mount Godwin-Austen, and is the second highest mountain the world, at 8,611 metres, after Everest. Although not as "famous" as Everest, the mountain is known as the "Savage Mountain" due to the extreme difficulty of ascent and has the second-highest fatality rate among the eight thousanders. Statistically, one person dies on the mountain for every four who summit, and is known to climbers as the most dangerous scale in the world.

In June of this year, Vanessa O'Brien will attempt to become the first American woman to summit K2. So far, only 18 women have climbed K2, from all over the world but for the United States. O'Brien has already scaled Everest, and holds the record for the fastest woman to climb the Seven Summits, which are the highest peaks on each continent. It's fair to say she's experienced, with also having summited the 8,000 meter peaks in Cho Oyu, Manaslu and Shishpangma.

O'Brien is a former banker at Morgan Stanley who took a break from banking during the recession of 2010. She had never climbed before, and was looking for something big to do.

"It had to be something goal-oriented, something I could measure success by, something that would take two to three years to achieve, something audacious and something not in the finance area, given that environment. When a girlfriend joked over lunch, "How about Everest?" we just laughed. But afterwards, I started doing research, and I realized that was it! Sure, Everest had happened in 1953, when Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became first to summit, but it was happening now, too. The only thing I didn't know was how to climb. But I could learn."

More than one might expect, Vanessa O'Brien credits her climbing access to the business world, which has always been big on leadership and team work, as well as embracing the culture of speed and self-confidence. "Not everything goes according to plan, and you have to do your own part to carry team morale. Within reason, speed is your friend and self-confidence is non-negotiable."

A graduate with an MBA from New York University's Stern School of Business, O'Brien is one many notable alumni, such as Thomas Murphy, CFO of General Atlantic, and Dorothy Hamilton, founder of the French Culinary Institute. Whether she summits K2 or not, there's no denying that O'Brien is one of many notable people from her university, and that great things are in store and is an inspiration to many climbers, male and female alike.

"You have to stay focused and not lose perspective, remember your goal," says O'Brien. "Whenever I think I can't go on, I remind myself I need to take just one more step. And then I repeat that."



"You have to stay focused and not lose perspective, remember your goal," says Vanessa O'Brien, the first American woman to attempt to summit K2. Image: via Facebook.