

Vanessa O'Brien believes guardian angels helped her scale treacherous K2

BY FARID SABRI , (LAST UPDATED AUGUST 15, 2017)



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- People sent just enough goodwill to make sure the journey was a success

Vanessa O'Brien, a 52-year-old ex-Morgan Stanley banker from New York, reached Islamabad on Tuesday where she briefed media about her journey of climbing K2— which is considered one of the world's most dangerous peaks— the world's second highest mountain at 28,251 feet.

O'Brien said that she believed in guardian angels and those angels helped her in scaling K2.

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After three desperate unsuccessful attempts at the dangerous mountain in 2015 and 2016, she became the first American woman to summit Pakistan's K2 on July 28, 2017. Reportedly, she failed to scale K2 because of bad weather.

O'Brien is the 20th woman to reach the top of K2.

She expressed that those people that painstakingly followed her Garmin tracking device or even periodically checked in during those 16 hours to the summit sent just enough goodwill to make sure our journey was a success.

"There was so much positive energy," she said.

She described the bad weather conditions she had faced, including winds, high precipitation [mostly snow] and low temperatures.

While describing the harsh conditions she had to face, she said, "It was July 27 and we were at camp four. 12 of us left around 11 pm. The snow was incredibly deep. So in some cases, we were breaking trail, which took us longer. Unfortunately, there was fresh powdery snow, while we were walking uphill, there were also situations where you took one step forward, and you slipped slightly – thereby having to take another step to get back in place – two steps for every time," she said.

She said that as she climbed up there was a massive ice serac showing signs of erosion; it loomed above threatening to fall as you climb up.

"Once you reach this ice serac, you get to the bottleneck traverse on ice that is frozen solid and extremely slippery. [...] Once you make it across the traverse you start your ascent towards the summit ridge through deep snow and eventually you'll find you cannot walk anymore. Besides, what is underneath your feet – be it ice or deep snow – you have the wind gusting at 50 km propelling snow on your face. So, this often blinded us or fogged up our glasses or goggles, and this was happening throughout the climb both up the bottleneck couloir and across the ice traverse," she explained.

She said that this time she knew she could do it because she was willing to take the additional risk and the whole team was very supportive as we all made sure that each member was comfortable in hostile weather.

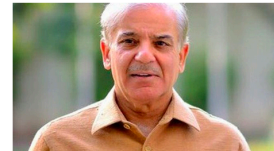
In addition to O'Brien, an Explorers Club member, 11 other persons summited. The clients were John Snorri Sigurjonsson, the first Icelander to climb K2, and three Chinese climbers – Zhang Liang, Jing Xue and Azong.

The seven Sherpas who topped out were Mingma Gyalje, Dawa Gyalje Sherpa, Tsering Pemba Sherpa, Nima Nuru Sherpa, Lakpa Nuru Sherpa, Nima Tshering Sherpa and Ang Tsering Sherpa.

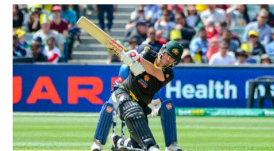
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She said that she was extremely proud of the whole team for their dedication, perseverance, bravery, and commitment to reaching the summit of K2 and to take the additional risk.

“We suffered no loss, no frostbite, no accidents,” she maintained.

She went on to say, “In 2016, she solicited help from Pakistan Air Force Major Shoaib and Flight Lieutenant Rahim as well as Di Gilbert, the leader of the 2016 K2 British Team, to identify how many of the 84 climbers that lost their lives on K2 had memorial plaques, and have been succeeded to identify 20 plaques across 13 nationalities.”

She succeeded to identify plaques of: Muhammad Ali, Pakistan, 1986, Juan Apellaniz, Spain, 1994, Rolf Bae, Norway, 2008, Igor Benkin, Russia, 1996, Daniel Culver, Canada, 1993, Javier Escartin, Spain, 1995, Michelle Fait, Italy, 2009, Klaus-Dieter Grohs, Germany, 2003, Alfred Imitzer, Austria, 1986, Muhammad Iqbal, Pakistan, 2002, Reinmar Joswing, Germany, 1993, Ali Kazim, Pakistan, 1979, Peter Mezger, Germany, 1993, Nima Nuru [Nima Norbu], Nepal, 2007, Alan Rouse, UK, 1986, Hannes Wieser, Austria, 1986, Wojciech Wroz, Poland, 1986, and Yukihiro Yanagisawa, Japan, 1982.

O’Brien climbed Mt Everest, the world’s highest peak at 29,035 feet, in 2012 en route to becoming the then-fastest woman to climb the Seven Summits – the highest mountain on each continent – plus ski the last degree to the North and South Poles, doing all in just 11 months.

“It is said when you climb Everest, you are a mountaineer in the eyes of the world, but when you climb K2 you are a mountaineer in the eyes of other climbers,” said O’Brien before her climb. “K2 fascinates me because while it is not quite as high as Everest, it is technically more challenging with exposed rock, steeper terrain and higher avalanche risk.”

In her previous press conferences, she had talked about the difficulty of K2 statistically, how less than 400 people have summited K2 and even for every 5 that summit K2, one dies.

This compares to Mount Everest where over 7,500 people have summited that mountain. As far as women who have climbed K2, I am officially 20th women to climb K2, just a speck compared to Everest’s 489 women.

She believes one should set their sights high, announce their intentions, ask for help, learn from their mistakes, believe in guardian angels, and not let others tell you it’s over until you say it’s over.



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