



INTERNATIONAL

# EXPLAINER: K2 beckons the daring, but rarely in winter



FILE - In this June 15, 2017 file photo, British-American mountaineer Vanessa O'Brien gives a news conference after arriving in Pakistan to attempt to summit K2, the world's second highest peak, in Islamabad, Pakistan. O'Brien went on to become the first American-British woman to summit K2. Dwarfed only by Mount Everest, K2 at 8,611-meter (28,250-foot) is one of the deadliest, that kills one in every four climbers who attempts it summit. (AP Photo/B.K. Bangash, File)

by: KATHY GANNON, Associated Press  
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ISLAMABAD (AP) — K2's "savage" peak beckons the daring, but rare is the climber who answers the call in winter.

Dwarfed only by Mount Everest, K2 is the world's second highest peak at 8,611 meters (28,250 feet), and it is one of the deadliest, killing one climber for every four who succeed in reaching its summit through its steep rock faces, glacier climbs and devastatingly brutal weather.

In winter, the odds are even worse.

This week, hope is waning for some of the latest mountaineers to attempt it. Ali Sadapar of Pakistan, Jon Sorri of Iceland and Juan Pablo Mohr of Chile were last heard from on Friday and were reported missing Saturday. Heavy clouds obscuring the mountain have repeatedly forced halts in the search for them.

American climber George Bell enshrined K2's reputation — and a nickname that stuck — after a 1953 summer attempt during which he and his team members nearly plunged to their deaths. He told a reporter: "It's a savage mountain that tries to kill you."

### HOW DEADLY IS K2?

K2, on the Chinese-Pakistani border in the Karakorum Range, has one of the deadliest records: 87 climbers have died trying to conquer its treacherous slopes since 1954, according to Pakistan Alpine Club secretary Karrar Haidri.

That's compared to 377 who have successfully reached the summit, Haidri said. In contrast, Everest has been summited more than 9,000 times, while around 300 have died on the mountain.

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Winters on K2 are so much more dangerous that climbs are rarely even attempted. Winter winds can howl in at 200 kilometers an hour (124 mph), and temperatures can hit a bone-chilling minus 60 Celsius (minus 76 Fahrenheit).

Only eight expeditions have attempted a winter ascent, Haidri said.

Only one has succeeded, just last month, when 10 Nepalese climbers summited on Jan. 16. That same day saw the confirmation of the death of Spanish climber Sergi Mingote, who fell hundreds of meters as he tried an ascent without supplemental oxygen. Two weeks later, a Bulgarian was killed.

As difficult as the ascent is, the descent is even deadlier, said Vanessa O'Brien, the first American-British woman to summit K2.

On 8,000 meter-plus peaks, "85% of deaths happen on descent ... because climbers use all their energy for the summit bid and leave no reserves."

#### WHY IS K2 SO DANGEROUS?

K2 is a collection of nightmarish natural challenges, one more daunting than the other. It is the coldest and windiest of climbs. At places along the route, climbers must navigate nearly sheer rock faces rising 80 degrees, while avoiding frequent and unpredictable avalanches. Glacier ridges can suddenly explode into cascades of giant chunks of ice.