

K2: 8 Things You Never Knew About the Second Deadliest Mountain in the World

 outsider.ie/lifestyle/k2-need-to-know

K2 Mountain is well known in the climbing and mountaineering community as one of the most difficult, arduous and dangerous mountains in the world. It is also the world's second highest mountain, at a massive 8,611m above sea-level.

Mount Everest seems to be getting all of the attention and praise for being the tallest mountain in the world, however, what **K2** lacks in height, it makes up for in brutality. K2 is part of the Karakoram Mountain Range on the Pakistani-Chinese border and is one of the 14 “eight-thousanders” in the world. The “eight-thousanders” are independent mountains that all reach over 8,000m above sea-level. All of these mountains are located in the **Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges** in Asia.

For almost a century, climbers have tried to conquer this towering mountain, with some failures, some successes, and even some fatalities. Ridden with unpredictable weather, storm surges, sudden terrain changes, falling rocks, avalanches, steep ledges and lack of sufficient oxygen, K2 has proven to be one of the most dangerous mountains to ascend. Here are 10 things that you probably didn't know about K2.



Image: Jason Black

1. The Name of the Game

The name “K2” was established by Thomas Montgomerie, a British surveyor who took part in the Great Trigonometric Survey of India in the 1850s. Montgomerie surveyed the Karakoram from Mount Haramukh and took note of the two most prominent peaks, naming them “K1” and “K2,” with the “K” standing for Karakoram. Mountain “K1” is now named Masherbrum. For such a majestic mountain, the name “K2” sounds robotic, calculated, and mathematic. When there was no local name for the mountain yet, the name “Mount Godwin-Austen” was suggested, honouring Henry Godwin-Austen, an English topographer and geologist. But, the name was rejected by the Royal Geographical society. K2 is also called Chhogori, Kechu, or Ketu in the Balti language.

2. The Most Dangerous Section of the Climb is called “The Bottleneck”

The Bottleneck is a narrow gully with a steep gradient on the Abruzzi Spur track on K2. This gully lies about 400m below the summit and is overhung by blocks and columns of glacial ice that are easily shaken and very likely to fall. Due to the steep gradient at about 50-60 degrees and its location at 8200m, this is the most dangerous part of the hike.



Image: K2 Facebook

3. It has the Second Highest Fatality-to-Summit Rate of any Mountain

Of all of the people who have attempted to summit K2, 306 of them have been successful and 77 have died. Annapurna has the highest rate, with a staggering 191 successful attempts to 61 fatalities. Many of the conditions contribute to these fatalities. In 1986, five mountaineers died during an expedition due to a storm that severely weakened the group, leaving them exposed to the elements, freezing and dehydrated. In 1995, a group of six men and women had successfully reached the summit but died on the way down when a brutal storm with 161 km/h winds hit. Then, in 2008, an avalanche claimed the lives of 11 climbers, one being Gerard McDonnell, the first Irish man to successfully summit K2.

4. Its Summit is in the “Death Zone”

At 8,611m, the summit of K2 is in what is known as the “death zone,” which means that that altitude does not have enough oxygen to sustain human life. Many hikers use oxygen tanks in order to perform to the best of their ability at this altitude.



Image: K2 Facebook

5. K2 has Never Been Summited in the Winter

For this mountain, the prime time for ascending is in the summer between June and August. Due to horrible weather and plummeting temperatures, every attempt to scale this mountain in the winter has failed. Recently, a team of Polish explorers tried to accomplish the feat of summiting in the winter, only to have to turn around due to treacherous weather where the snowfall had accumulated 203cm in 10 days.

6. The First Attempt to Reach the Summit was in 1902

The first attempt to conquer K2 was undergone in 1902 by Oscar Eckenstein, Aleister Crowley, Jules Jacot-Guillarmod, Heinrich Pfannl, Victor Wessely and Guy Knowles. Due to the lack of our modern transportation, it took the team a grueling 14 days to even reach the

base of the mountain. The team reached 6,525m before having to turn around due to illness, exhaustion and injury. But, reaching that height without the aid of modern hiking technology is still extremely impressive.

7. It is Known as the “Savage Mountain”

To climbers, mountaineers and sherpa alike, K2 has been rightfully nicknamed the “Savage Mountain.” The weather, terrain and elements on this mountain are unforgiving. In the summer, the temperature at the summit averages at -26°C (wind chill, -41 °C) with winds up to 60 km/h. In the winter, the average temperature reaches -40°C (wind chill at -65°C) and winds, again, up to 60 km/h. Hikers constantly have to be wary of crumbling terrain such as rocks, snow, and ice. On a recent 2018 attempt to summit the mountain, a rock the size of a fist pelted Polish mountaineer Adam Bielecki in the face, breaking his nose – and that is a mild injury compared to what the mountain can do. Spontaneous avalanches have buried camps and taken lives, blizzards have separated frostbitten parties and gale-force winds have nearly tumbled climbers to their deaths. Despite all of these conditions, the bravest and most daring mountaineers consistently attempt to conquer this majestic peak.



Image: K2 Facebook

8. There are 10 Different Routes to the Summit

Abruzzi Spur: Of all the climbers that have ascended K2, 75% of them have used the Abruzzi Spur. Base camp lies at the bottom of this track.

North Ridge: Ascends from the Chinese side of the mountain and is more difficult than Abruzzi. Very few teams use this as their way to the summit due to the difficulty of accessing the track itself.

Northeast Ridge: Finishes on uppermost part of Abruzzi route.

West Ridge: This route starts on the distant Negrotto Glacier and then becomes an unpredictable endeavour.

Southwest Pillar: The second most demanding route. Only one climber has ever successfully used it.

South Face: This route is considered to be the most dangerous due to its exposure to the elements and its high concentration of avalanches.

Northwest Face: Falling rocks and ice are known to burden this route.

Northwest Ridge: Finishes on the North Ridge.

South-southeast spur: Meets up with the Abruzzi Spur at 8,000m.

West Face: This route is made of entirely snow crevasses and couloirs.



Image: K2 Facebook

The adventurers who attempt to summit this mountain are the best of the best. These are the people who risk their lives in order to attain something bigger than themselves, to push themselves to their physical, mental, and emotional limits to reach the biggest goal they can imagine — conquering K2.

By: Bri Doherty
