

REPORT OF THE EXPEDITION SERBIA K2 2008

After the successfully realized project "Everest 2006", Mountaineering Association of Vojvodina has in cooperation with Mountaineering Association of Belgrade started in the realization of the new project under the title "K2". With this project it has been anticipated that the mountaineers from Serbia ascend the highest peaks of Pakistan and finally the highest peak Caracoroom and the second highest peak of the world, K2. The peaks Gashebroom 1 and Gashebroom 2 have been ascended during the expedition in 2006. Broad Peak has been ascended without the use of bottled oxygen in 2007. After this ascends the decision has been made to start the expedition K2 in 2008.

Aiming at as better conditional preparation the members of the expedition of SERBIA K2 2008 as possible, the professional trainer Nenad Njaradi from Vrbas has been engaged. Besides the common trainings in Vrbas, he has to each of the members of the expedition on the basis of tests in the Provincial Institute for sport in Novi Sad determined dynamism of personal trainings. It has been proved as the right action because all the members of the expedition were excellently prepared and they had not any problems either with the condition or with altitude sickness. Aiming at to make the ascent easier three high altitude porters from Pakistan were engaged: Shaheen Baig, Muhammad Hussain and Muhammad Khan. All the three of them were on the top of K2.

During the previous expedition to the Broad Peak weather forecast by satalite from Serbia was sent by Rade Radovanovic, an instructor in the school of JAT in Vrsac, the member of Mountaineering Association of Vojvodina management. This time, for the needs of expedition K2 was engaged besides Rade, and a meteorologist from the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Novi Sad, Albert Ruman, so that the meteorological prognosis has been provided from two independent sources. For the needs of making the prognosis and following the situation on the terrain, the expedition has acquired a mobile weather forecast station, which was installed in the Basic camp.

To the existing equipment the device GPS Garmin Colorado 300 was added.

The device was acquired for the needs of orientation in the case of cloudy weather above the Camp 3.

The set of drugs and medical equipment was prepared in cooperation with experts of the institution Apoteka Subotica and on the basis of former experiences and included the necessary drugs and equipment for the members of the expedition, attendants in the Basic camp and porters during the tracking.

The existing equipment for the expedition, which was used during the former expeditions, was renewed with the new sleeping bags, ice axes and the other specific equipment, which was necessary for this ascent. Expeditions had 9 tents of the firm The NORTH FACE and one of the firm RP which is the sufficient number taking in consideration the number of altitude camps (four camps and depot). Each member of the expedition had two sleeping bags in altitude camps and one in the Basic camp and with one support in the Basic camp and one support for altitude camps. Anoraks and trousers filled with downs (feather) for the final ascent had each member of expedition.

Expedition had 1700 meters of fixed ropes of which for the mountain was placed about 1400 meters.

The nourishment in the altitude camps during this expedition was based on the dehydrated food, energy gels and beverages provided in Hungary.

Except the condition preparations, which were done in Subotica, Belgrade, Vrbas, and Novi Sad, the members of expedition were during 2008 prepared in Kamena Gora, Ovcar-Kablar, Komovi, Kopaonik and Frushka Gora.

On June 2nd, 2008 the expedition started from Belgrade consisting of: Milivoj Erdeljan, the leader of the expedition and the members: Iso Planic- leader of ascent, Predrag Zagorac- Pedja, Dren Mandic and at the beginning of July in the Basic camp

Miodrag Jovicic joined them. The aim was K2, 8611 m high, the second highest peak in the world and the greatest challenge of the alpine mountaineers by no means for classic expeditions. We knew that it would be long and tiring and that we would need each experience, which we gained in the previous 5 expeditions in Himalayan and Karakorum.

We formed the Basic camp on June 18th, on 5.020 meters above sea level and after a few snowy days, on June 21st we started to the mountain. We put the depot on 5.250 m and immediately the same day we went on up to the C I. As the first who in this year started to the mountain along Abruci Ridge, we, high altitude porters and the members of the expedition, put fixed rope to the height of 5600 m. Pedja and Iso also took part in it and, because of that they were some of rare foreigners who "led" (were putting the fixed rope). Later Sherpas and high altitude porters from Pakis1an mostly placed the fixed rope.

Before the final attempt of climbing to the peak we climbed Abruce Ridge four times more: the second time to C 1 (6.050 m.). We slept there and came back then the next time to C 1 (slept) and to C2 (6.780 m) where we slept and came back to BC then to C3 and down (slept in C 1) and two nights in C2, there we slept and came back down.

Before the completed ascent in C 1 we spent three, and in C2 four nights. Towards the camp three we went twice, once we reached 7.000 m and the second time to 7.350 m. (C3).

During the long stay in the Basic camp we kept our fitness doing exercises, going for walks (to the Basic camp Broad Peak, Depot and Memorial), ascending to the Polish Basic camp on the Polish route and climbing on the steep cuts of the glacier Goldwin Austin. This last one we did with the aim to prepare for climbing hard details, which expect us and to prepare that if it would be necessary in Bottleneck that we could lead and climb solo without fixed rope.

Together with the Korean expedition we placed three kilometres of the fixed rope to the Camp 3, which is on the height of 7.347 m.

Several meetings were held in the Basic camp with other expeditions (Dutch, Italian, Norwegian, French, Korean, and American and Singaporeans) and it was agreed that the final ascent and the insurance of Bottleneck would work together and all expeditions take part according to the accurately defined agreement signed by all expeditions.

The occasion for ascent in the sense of weather prognosis appeared in the period from July 28th to August 3rd. Previously, with acclimatization, equipped three of necessary four altitude camps. It was left to place the Camp 4 on the height of about 7.800 m and to wait the time for final ascent. In cooperation with the rest of expeditions: Korean, Dutch, American, Italian and the heterogeneous French-American and the agreed cooperation on the ascent in the sense of placing the ropes and the rest of the insurance.

Dren, Pedja and Iso started the ascent on July 27th, in rather bad weather with the aim to place the Camp 4 and to wait for the occasion to start to the peak. In C 1 the real surprise was waiting for them: the tent because of broken rods was out of use for sleeping. Luckily one of neighbouring camps was empty and we used it for that night. We had to stay in C2 for two nights because of strong wind, which did not allow the further ascent to C3. During the second day of stay in C2 one of our high altitude porters Shaheen got seriously ill and started to vomit blood. The next day in the morning with the help from the Basic camp we sent him down and then went on to C3. On the arrival to C3 we started that the two left porter forgot the food in C2 and that we would the following days be in the mountains without food. Still we succeeded to find some sweets and soup in our rucksacks and to borrow some food from other expeditions.

Until the end and the descent we did not have anything to choose but we were not very hungry. In C 4 we arrived the next day. While putting the tent because of the strong wind it came to mishap, one of the rods was broken. That detail took us about an hour of time: we had to bandage the rod and the case of the tent in which it came in to cut to be able places the tent. Some time later our second porter, Muhammad,

told us in the tent that he did not feel well and that he had a headache. We gave him bruffen and tried not pay attention to that problem. Later we agreed among us that it was enough for Muhammad to carry out two bottles of oxygen to the place where we change them and if after that he did not feel well he might return. We may conclude that the ascent to C 4 passed with smaller problems: which are quite usual on such expeditions.

All our climbers without any health problems came to this camp and they were in every sense ready for ascent. According to the opinion of high altitude porters~ and the members of other expeditions, our team belonged to the most ready and most capable. We believed that, if the weather and conditions allow we would surely ascent the peak. There were enough bottles of oxygen and the rest of equipment. Each climber had two bottles of 5 kilos on disposal and the Russian system with oxygen from C 4.

The conditions for final ascent on August 1st, in the morning were good because there was the sky without clouds and with only a little wind and tolerable temperature. The wind stopped to blow after the ascent of all teams to the Camp 3 during the night on July 30th and 31st

The ascent was started at 1.30, on August 1st, 2008 when the first team started for placing the insurance. While our porter Hussain, one of rare who knew the direction of movement he started with the first group in which there were only Sherpas. Dren, Pedja and Iso with Muhammad started to the peak after 3 and 30 in the morning. We considered that we were quicker than the average group and that we would reach the group and that it was not necessary for our climbers to move with slower tempo, which carries the risk of getting frostbites. Our height altitude porters persuaded us because they had experience that we could reach the peak in about 6 hours time. It happened that ~ the line of climbers who went behind the sherpas who were putting the fixed ropes, caught up with after about two hours of ascent before Bottleneck. Then the progress went on very slowly. The main cause was because the placing of the fixed rope started too early, on the relatively mild slope that proceeded Bottleneck. In that way the time was spent but also the fixed rope. It happened that on Bottleneck the ropes ran short so that the climbers to the end of the line had to put off the previously placed ropes on the milder parts and carry them forward. The slow progress was becose the hard icy. The reason for that it might be the strong wind that blew previous days, which blew away the loose snow, so that on some parts there remained only the hard blue ice.

A great number of climbers started to the peak on that day, about 30 persons. The trouble arose first of all because a great number of expeditions used that one, might be the only convenient day in season. But it ought to be told that many expeditions still in the Basic camp divided into two groups wishing to perform the ascent in two days in that way to avoid making the trouble. The fusion of many groups arose in C2 when ours, the first group, paused two days in C 2 because of the strong wind. Then many of them, who wanted in a day behind us, joined the first group and made a crowd. Except of the expeditions communicated mutually and had some agreement, in Basic camp there were many single persons, who climbed independently, without agreement, but they used the ropes, paths and convenient circumstances which for them created greater expeditions. They joined the line by their own will, without agreement.

About 11 o'clock about 30 climbers found themselves in the place called Bottleneck (neck of the bottle), by its peak when it had been waiting for the additional ropes for further insurance. Iso Planic was our first climber who reached the peak of Bottleneck, behind him with other climbers there was Dren Mandic and below him there was Predrag Zagorac. The previous agreement, which was made on the way, was that the bottles with the oxygen ought to be changed on the peak of the Bottleneck. It is on the height of about 8.200 meters. After that place there were still about four hours to the peak on average and the further ascent was after the short traverse, relatively mild. Coming out of the Bottleneck we were aware that we conquered the last technically hard detail of the ascent to K2. As Muhammad still had a headache, we thought that the end of Bottleneck was a good place to hand us the bottles and to

return to C 4. Yet, he did not come to the end: about 50 meters before the exit he told that he had to go back. Although I repeated Dren, who was under me not allow him and to tell him to endure still a little of time, Muhammad stick to his story, and Pedja and Dren took from each of them one bottle which they soon carried to the end of Bottleneck.

When Dren came to the traverse in Bottleneck he started to the left side opposite from the place where Iso was and behind him there was the Norwegian alpinist Cecilie Skog. There were several reasons why Dren changed his decision to shift to the right side of the mentioned traverse: he wanted to avoid the crowd on the left side and to join Iso and on the way to change the bottle with oxygen. However, he had to pass by Norwegian Cecilie for which he had to unbutton his insurance. The tragedy which followed was probably contributed by the crowd which was made because of the waiting of the great number of climbers to place the fixed rope in traverse (about 50 meters), after that there was not any need for the fixed rope. Many climbers were there at the end of Bottleneck looked for a convenient place for the rest and unbuttoned from the fixed rope. Then the tragedy happened because in that passing each other Dren lost the support because of the swinging of the rope and the ice shelf on which he was standing. He fell together with Cecilie who was saved by insurance and because Dren was unbuttoned from the rope nothing could stop him. The moment of his fall only Cecilie saw and Iso and Pedja saw Dren when he was falling.

Predrag immediately descended to the place on 8020 m on which Dren's body was retained but he found him lifeless. He tried reanimation but without answer and success. After a few minutes Iso joined him. The leader of the expedition, Milivoj Erdeljan, was informed immediately and he stopped the expedition at once. Iso and Pedja did not want to leave Dren on the path and they were trying in the next three hours to lower his body to the Camp 4 and some more suitable place for his burial. Swede Frederick and an American doctor helped them who also gave them the bag for the wounded in which they wrapped his body with the flag over his face and chest. In the painful, hard and dangerous job high altitude porter Jehan Baig wanted to help them. He for the needs of the French climber D'aubarede Hugues Jean - Louis Marie carried the bottle of oxygen to the end of Bottleneck after which he returned to C 4. He offered his help and started together with Frederick, Pedja, and Iso to take down the body of the afflicted to C 4. Hussain took as his responsibility to take the rucksacks down the slope. In that descend on 7.900 m Jehan Baig slipped and fell into the icy gorge. Unfortunately he was never seen again. Then the decision was made to put down the body beside the path. There on the height of about 7.900 m is the permanent home of Dren Mandic - citizen of Subotica, alpinist, a friend and a brave good man.

Iso and Predrag together with the high altitude porter Hussain immediately started to the Camp 3 and descend to the Basic camp.

Behind them tragedy was preparing never seen and expected on K2. The weather did not change as well the conditions for the ascent and the climbers slowly, and it would be shown too slowly and relaxed climbed to the peak and the mountain was preparing, freely to say a trap. Namely the first climber were on the peak at 15.00 (3PM) and the last one at 20.30 (9.30 PM) when the next accident happened because while coming down along Bottleneck the ice pinched off and as avalanche gathered the ropes for descend and on the way killed the Norwegian Ralph Bae who moved immediately behind his wife on the rope. She successfully with one Norwegian came down to Camp 4. Then above Bottleneck five Koreans were caught in the mountains and their Sherpas, a leader of Dutch expedition Vilco and the Italian Marko. Already earlier there was an information that some where under the peak on the ice plates slipped and disappeared the Frenchman D'aubarede Hugues Jean - Louis Marie, his assistant from Pakistan on the ascent Meherban Karim and the Irishman Gerard McDonnell- the member of Dutch expedition. The Koreans decided to insure themselves with their own ropes and try to climb further along Bottleneck. From six of them, four of them pinched off and slipped to the foot of the mountain and broke their limbs. Three Koreans and Sherpas met with accident. To help the other Sherpas came in the morning and tried to pull him to Camp 4 but both of them met with

accident because they slipped along the mountain to Pakistan side. Then there were 11 shipwrecked in the mountain and two of them who descending from the mountain-wandered looking for the way to C 4. Both of them saved Sherpa Pemba (Pemba Gyalje Sherpa) because the Italian Marco Confortola by happy coincidence found him sleeping in the vicinity of Camp 4 after 24 hours wandering in the mountain. The Dutchman Wilco van Rooijen was found after the search in which joined the Company of satellite communications TURAJA trying to locate him in the mountain and was saved by our binoculars of expedition with which, he was spotted in the dusk of the second day in the height of about 7.700 m on the so called Spanish route. During the night Sherpa Pemba approached him with lifesaving tea. Both of them, Marco Confortol and Wilco have serious frostbites of legs and hands and were taken away from the mountain by helicopter.

On our return from the mountain we informed the first police station on the death of Dren Mandic, which is situated in Shigar. From them we got the record in which, it was stated that Dren_met with_accident. We tried to get the death certificate but not any of the doctors was ready to sign that Dren was dead because they had not seen his body. On the recommendation of our Embassy in Peking the police report was certified by Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad The same document on our return to Serbia was certified by Embassy of Pakistan in Belgrade and our Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the basis of this document the death certificate for Dren Mandic was issued in Subotica.

The leader of Expedition
Milivoj Erdeljan