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## K2 summiteer Anja Blacha: “More flexible on the mountain without breathing mask”

She is a late bloomer as climber, but one who then hit the ground running. Only in 2012, at the age of 22, did Anja Blacha buy her first mountain boots for a holiday trip to Iceland. At the beginning of 2015, she scaled the 6,962-meter-high Aconcagua in South America, her first of the “Seven Summits”, the highest mountains of all continents. By the end of 2017,

*Anja Blacha on the summit of K2*

Anja had completed her collection with the ascent of Mount Vinson in Antarctica, 4,897 meters high. In the same year she had also summited Mount Everest, from the Tibetan north side, with bottled oxygen. At the age of 26 she was the youngest German woman to reach the highest point on earth.

### First German woman on K2

She could lose this “record” one day. But she will always be the first German woman to scale the second highest mountain on earth: Almost two weeks ago, on

25 July, the now 29-year-old stood on the 8611-meter-high summit of K2 – without bottled oxygen. At the beginning of July, Blacha had already scaled the neighbouring eight-thousander Broad Peak (8,051 m) without reathing mask. And she has planned another adventure for this year: She wants to reach the South Pole on skis, from the Antarctic coast.

Anja Blacha grew up in Bielefeld in North Rhine-Westphalia. Now she lives in Zurich. There she works in the management of a Swiss telecommunications company. When she returned from Pakistan, she answered my questions.

*Anja, first German woman on the K2 – how does this feel for a mountaineer whose roots lie in Bielefeld, which is just 118 meters above sea level?*

I guess I compensate a little for what I missed in my childhood in Bielefeld. And I am still amazed at how few female expedition mountaineers there are still in Germany and around the world – there were probably only about 30 women worldwide on the top of K2 so far.

*As on Broad Peak, you were climbing without bottled oxygen. When did you decide to attempt K2 without breathing mask and what were your reasons for doing so?*

For me it was clear from the start that I wanted to attempt K2 without bottled oxygen. In 2017 on Everest, I didn't have the opportunity to try an ascent without bottled oxygen due to my prior agreement with the expedition operator, although I felt very well during the acclimatization phase and would have liked to try it without it. Since then, I've been wondering if I could have done it. On K2, I didn't want to leave this question unanswered for me. You also save weight and are more flexible on the mountain if, for example, there are delays on the ascent or descent.

*View from Camp 4 to the 'Bottleneck'*

*Were you at the limit in the summit area of K2, possibly even beyond it?*

Unlike on Broad Peak, where a very long ascent exhausted me quite a bit, among other things because we had to wait several times at night in the cold for the belaying of the route, I was able to walk at my own pace on K2 and I felt good in the summit area. I only had to take a break just before the summit to snack, since after the almost 11-hour ascent the hunger was vehemently announced...

*Descent from K2*

*With the Ecuadorian Carla Perez and you two women have summited K2 without breathing mask this season. How do you feel as a woman in the mountaineering scene, which is often described as dominated by men?*

From my daily work I am used to being on the road in male domains. Any reservations and stereotypical role models can be overcome quite quickly in personal contact, so that I usually feel welcome and well accepted. Nevertheless, I am increasingly happy to meet other women on expeditions – even more when they bring their own strengths to the mountain.

*Descent from Broad Peak*

*You climbed Everest at the age of 26, then completed the Seven Summits, now attached your eight-thousanders number two and three, even without bottled oxygen. Do you want to continue at this pace?*

*Tired of camp life?*

sleeping bag. I don't know yet whether in the end I will be tired of my expedition life or whether I will pursue it even further.

A lot of things have worked out without me having big ambitions regarding fast ticking off or even completing lists. Last year, I deliberately focused on my job and time with friends instead of climbing more high peaks. However, I have actually planned a larger project for 2019 – altogether I will then have spent almost half the year in my

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# **ANJA BLACHA, BROAD PEAK, K2, MOUNT EVEREST, SEVEN SUMMITS, WITHOUT BOTTLED OXYGEN**

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