



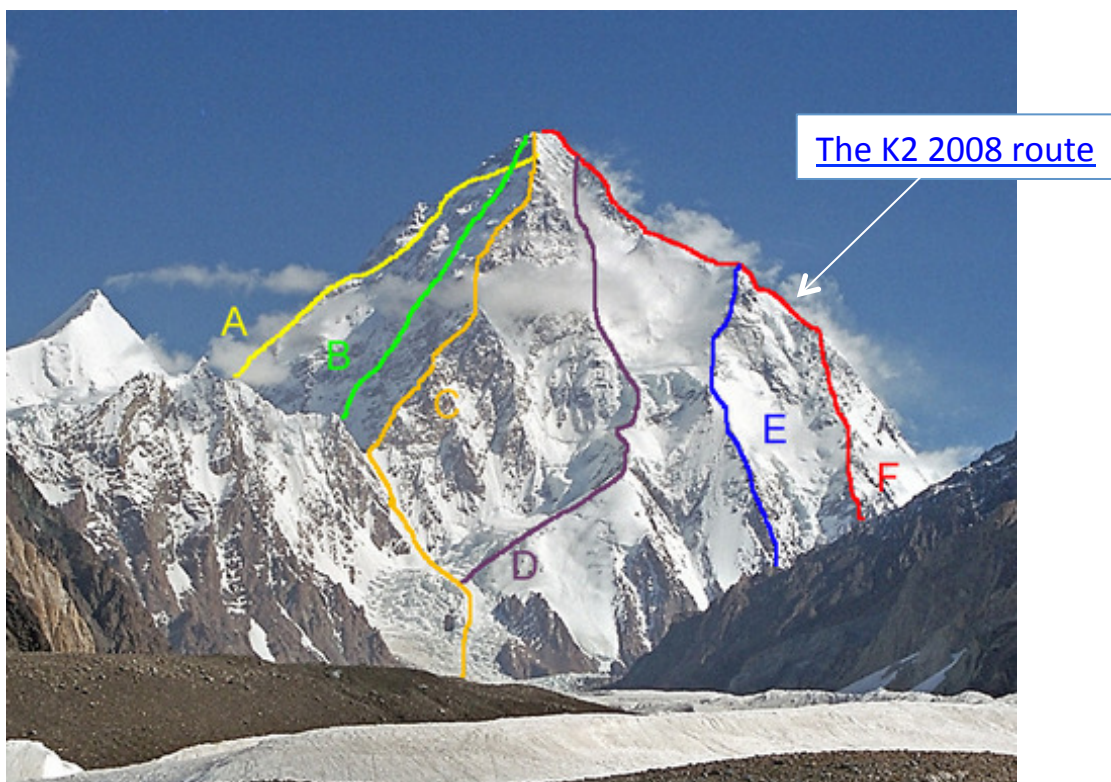
K2 AGAINST ALL ODDS

A case study of the K2 disaster of
1 August 2008 - one of the deadliest
mountaineering incidents in history

Cranfield
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School of Management



The major routes to have been climbed on the south side of K2



- A:** West Ridge
- B:** West Face
- C:** Southwest Pillar
- D:** South Face
- E:** South-southeast Spur
- F:** Abruzzi Spur



Against All Odds

Although it is not as high as Mount Everest, known as K2, is considered by mountaineers to be harder to climb owing to the fact that it is steeper and rockier and subject to worse weather. According to Reuters, more than 70 mountaineers have died on K2, while approximately only 280 have successfully reached the summit since 1954, when two Italian climbers first claimed that honour.

What happened on the mountain on 1st August 2008 became one of the deadliest mountaineering incidents in history. There have been many versions of the tragedy – this study and an [interactive web site](#) are the result of personal interviews with survivors and reference to ‘*No Way Down*’ (Bowley, G. 2010) and ‘*One mountain thousand summits*’ (Wilkinson, F. 2010)

On that fateful day, 31 climbers set out to reach the summit of one of the most treacherous mountains in the world. Eleven did not return; 6 of those became the victim of multiple ice falls and tragically, others fell down the steep slopes and succumbed to their injuries.

Everyone who reads this account of the events that occurred on K2 on 1st August 2008, will make up their own mind what happened and whether the mountaineers who perished, were just unlucky or if some of the deaths could have been prevented.

2008 Expeditions

(based on Bowley, 2010, Wilkinson, 2010)

The names in bold refer to climbers who made a serious summit bid.

Those in *italics* returned to Camp IV before reaching the bottleneck or traverse.

<p>Norwegian K2 Expedition 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cecilie Skog (Leader) • Rolf Bae • Lars Flato Nessa • <i>Oystein Stangeland</i> 	<p>Serbian K2 Vojvodina Expedition 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milivoj Erdeljan (Leader) • Dren Mandic • Predrag Zagorac • Iso Planic • Shaheen Baig • Mohammed Hussein • Miodrag Jovovic 	<p>American K2 2008 International Expedition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Farris (Leader) • <i>Eric Meyer</i> • Chris Klinke • <i>Frederik Strang</i> • Chhiring Dorje • Paul Walters • Chris Warner • Timothy Horvath 	<p>South Korean K2 Flying Jump Expedition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jae-soo Kim (Leader) • Go-Mi-sun • Kim hyo-gyeong • Park Kyeong-hyo • Hwang Dong-jin • Jumik Bhote • Chhiring Bhote • ‘Big’ Pasang Bhote • ‘Little’ Pasang Lama • Lee Sung-rok • Kim Seong-sang • Son Byung-woo • Kim Tae-gyu • Lee Won-sub • Song Gui-hwa
<p>Norit K2 Dutch 2008 International Expedition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilco van Rooijen (Leader) • Cas van de Gevel • Gerard McDonnell • Roeland van Oss • Pemba Gyalje • <i>Jelle Staleman</i> • Mark Sheen • Court Haegens 	<p>French-Led Independent K2 Expedition 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hugues d’Aubarède (Leader) • Karim Mherban • Qudrat Ali • Jahan Baig • Nicholas Rice • Peter Guggemos 	<p>Italian K2 Expedition 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marco Confortola (Leader) • <i>Roberto Manni</i> 	<p>Basque Independent climber</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberto Zeraín



The K2 Expedition Team 2008

Back row

Middle Row

Front Row

The 2008 Fatalities

Name	Nationality	Location of death	Cause of death
Dren Mandić	Serbia	Below the Bottleneck	Fell during the ascent
Jehan Baig	Pakistan		Fell while trying to recover Dren Mandić's corpse
Rolf Bae	Norway	Bottleneck	The first serac ¹ fall
Hugues D'Aubarede	France	Above the Bottleneck	Fell in descent during the night
Meherban Karim	Pakistan		Either the second serac fall or the third serac fall.
Gerard McDonnell	Ireland		After helping the injured Koreans, he was hit by either the second or third serac fall
Kyeong-Hyo Park	South Korea	Above the Bottleneck	The fourth serac fall
Hyo-Gyeong Kim	South Korea		
Dong-Jin Hwang	South Korea		
Jumic Bhote	Nepal		
Pasang Bhote	Nepal		

¹A **serac** (originally from Swiss French *sérac*) is a block or column of ice formed by intersecting crevasses on a glacier. Often house-sized or larger, they are dangerous to mountaineers since they may topple with little warning. Even when stabilized by persistent cold weather, they can be an impediment to glacier travel.
Source: Wikipedia



Climbing the Savage Mountain

K2 is located on the Pakistan-Chinese border and the range is known locally as 'Chogori' (Large Mountain) or 'Ogir', meaning Great Mountain.

K2 is often nicknamed the **Savage Mountain** due to its unpredictable weather and its reputation to claim lives. Among the 14 highest mountains in the world, K2 is the second highest (8,611 m) after Mount Everest and if one factors in the death rate, one of the most difficult and dangerous. On average, 1 in 4 climbers lose their life climbing K2, most of them during the descent..



The key factor that makes K2 challenging to climb, is its slopes that rise at 45 degrees angles or more and its surface characterised by limestone and ice.

The mountain does not forgive any mistakes. The chance to die from a fall or from being hit by an icefall is disproportionately high.

There are two basic styles of climbing – **Alpine Style** versus **Expedition** or **Siege Style**. Alpine style is mountaineering in a self-sufficient manner, carrying all of one's food, shelter, equipment etc. as one climbs, as opposed to expedition style (or siege style) mountaineering, which involves setting up a fixed line of stocked camps on the mountain which can be accessed at one's leisure. Additionally, alpine style means the refusal of fixed ropes, high-altitude porters (HAPs) and the use of supplemental oxygen.

K2 has not been summited yet in the alpine style. Climbers typically 'siege' K2 by using a plethora of porters carrying equipment and fixing ropes up to 5,000 metres.

The climbers from 7 different expeditions, line up at Camp IV on **the Shoulder**, a broad low angle hump thickly covered by ice and snow. K2 is known for its knife-edged ridges, icy slopes and a treacherous stretch called **The Bottleneck** and in awe, they look at the Bottleneck and the traverse – the final two obstacles that separate them from conquering the summit.

The Bottleneck

The Bottleneck is characterised by a narrow, 91 metre passage (or couloir), which is overhung by seracs from the ice field east of, and only 400 metres below, the summit. The bottom end of the couloir drops to the south of the mountain and gradually steepens to 60 degrees just below the ice-field. It is not possible to climb up the ice-field, which rises vertically up tens of metres, but climbers must traverse leftwards at the bottom of the ice field for 100 metres, until it is possible to pass.

A thin fixed rope is often left on the traverse within the Bottleneck, to allow climbers to navigate this section safely and to descend quickly out of danger. However, overhung by seracs (columns of ice) which form a 100 metre ice cliff to the east of the summit, climbers still proceed dangerously close to the wall of these seracs.



The Bottleneck

They set off on a journey from which a third will not return.



A Journey into Oblivion

The following pages summarise the timelines and actions leading up to the disaster along with the perspectives of some of the survivors, interviewed since the event. More information can be found on the [interactive K2 website](#).

July 31st after 05:30

The summit attempt is set for August 1

On 31st July 2008, a total of twenty nine climbers from eight expeditions gather at Camp IV to commence their final ascent of one of the most dangerous mountains on earth— K2. It has been agreed that an advance party will precede the mass of the expeditions, leaving on 31 July at 22:00 from camp IV. They will establish a lifeline of fixed ropes and bamboo sticks for better orientation through the Bottleneck and traverse.

The leader of the South Korean Flying Jump expedition, **Jae-soo Kim**, believes that his team should form this advance team because of their equipment and experience. Joining them will be **Jahan Baig** from the Serbian team, two Pakistani high-altitude porters (HAP), the Pakistani **Karim Meherban** as well as **Pemba Gyalje** from the Norit team.



Wilco van Rooijen
Leader
Norit K2 Dutch 2008 International Expedition

We had decided to be the first expedition that season, arriving in May, establishing the camps in June and finishing the project to summit K2 before the end of July. Our first summit attempt at the beginning of July was not successful because of too much wind but we hoped to make another attempt the following week. However, by then, the weather was really bad with heavy snowfalls. At the end of July, we climbed directly to Camp II then Camp III, where we had an awful night due to a big storm. It was a really close decision whether or not to go back and quit the expedition, as we had agreed originally not to climb in August - statistically the month when most of the accidents happen. It was another 3 weeks before we could make our second serious summit attempt, leaving from Camp IV. Planned for the end of July but finally, it became the first of August, even though we had said previously we would not climb in August. We decided that due to the 3 weeks wait in July this would be our last push and we would do it even though it was August.

We discussed plans with the Koreans, with the Italians and with the Serb climbers and actually it was a good meeting. We were convinced that we had made good arrangements; some teams would bring the ropes, some teams would bring the sticks to show the route to the summit and some teams would connect the sticks with some very light-weight fishing lines, so we would always find our way back to camp IV. And we said also, that it was very important that every team should give its strongest climber to the advance team, which would leave Camp IV a little bit earlier, breaking the trail so the rest can follow and not lose too much time. So we gave our Sherpa, Pemba, other teams had their own Sherpas or strong climbers.



Chris Klinke
American 2008 International Expedition

There was a team meeting at Base Camp to decide how we were going to move up the mountain. We all agreed that in the next weather window, we would climb as a group and coordinate efforts. So it wasn't eight separate teams, we were trying to act as one team moving up the mountain. In that respect, we all donated different equipment, we selected roles and we selected who was going to fix ropes from Camp IV to the summit through the Bottleneck. The person selected to lead that, was a Pakistani who had summited K2 before and he was in charge of the rope fixing. The Korean climbing leader was in charge of the expedition and the lead groups for fixing the ropes.

With that, the Pakistani high altitude porter (HAP) guide got sick. They all got food poisoning in their tent and Eric Myer actually treated them but I didn't know that. So communication at Camp II was very poor because of the high winds and the bad weather. They made the decision to turnaround and when they made that decision, ropes and fixing equipment were left at Camp II, but nobody picked up that responsibility or knew that stuff was there until we reached Camp IV.

So my team had already gone up to Camp IV. I made the decision to go up and I left about 11.30pm and reached Camp IV at about 2am. The original plan was for the lead team, the rope fixing team to leave at 10pm but because the lack of equipment and rope didn't become known until then, there was a two and half hour delay and they didn't leave Camp IV, until 12.30am



July 31st after 22:00

A Plan Changes

At Camp IV, despite the excitement to reach to the summit of K2 the next day, some climbers try to catch some sleep. The calmness of this is suddenly disturbed by a loud argument among some Sherpas saying that some equipment had been forgotten. They discover that one high altitude porters (HAP) has already made his way back down because he was coughing blood, taking with him some considerable length of rope that was destined for the advance team. The commotion gradually dies down.

By the agreed 22:00 deadline, some climbers from the advance team have not yet arrived, including the nominated leader, **Jahan Baig** who feeling unwell, has remained in his tent at Camp III. Time passes and the members of the advance team who have arrived, make preparations to pave the way for the following bulk of climbers. They set off, considerably late.



Fredrik Strang
American 2008 International Expedition

It's the end of July 2008. and we reached Camp IV on the saddle of K2 Abruzzi spur, at the approximate altitude of 7,800m. 29 climbers are assembled. The spirit is high. There's an alluring feeling of thankfulness, comradeship and togetherness. It feels like we're a team even though we are separate expeditions, with people from Serbia, Holland, Norway, UK, Australia, South Korea and me, one Swedish guy.

We'd been helping out for the last month putting up the route and now we're pitching our tents. A shadow is soon above and around us. The sun is slowly setting below the horizon. There's not a single cloud. The weather is perfect. Anticipation is in the air and people are feeling good and saying, 'I feel much better than expected.'

The snow conditions are perfect, which means that it's firm snow and the avalanche danger is very low. The winds aren't very strong at all and have settled. Many of the climbers were afraid of the winds but now the forecast is good weather for tomorrow, our summit day, the 1st August 2008. Everyone has pitched their tents and made sure that they're secured and fastened - even strong winds wouldn't rip the tents apart.

Wilco continues



And finally the plan was very clear, we arrived at Camp IV and the first small problem happened. The Italians, who should have brought 200 metres of rope, had actually brought only 100 metres. I had to tell them that they didn't bring the rope because they were too high. High altitude porters should have brought the rope and one said simply, 'Oh I forgot 100 metres.' And we were thinking of course, that he did it on purpose because he didn't have enough energy to bring the rope. But although there was 100 metres shortage, we agreed it was not a big deal as we had 600 metres, we had 500 metres, we had ice screws and the sticks for the fishing line.

Then there was another problem. Mr Kim, the Korean expedition leader, felt it was very important that his climbing leader would also be the managing leader and we all said that he didn't care about the plan we had discussed in the meeting

The problem started because Pemba our Sherpa and also all the climbers, were asking how late do we start and do we have all the materials here in the camp, etc. But the climbing leader, who was also the managing leader - I forget his name but he didn't speak English very well - was actually too tired to do anything and was just in the tent, not communicating. So Pemba was taking over the climbing leader's role and was actually going to all the other teams, asking how they were and was everything okay.

Eventually, everything did feel okay. It was brilliant weather, all the camps were established and everyone had found his place. I was in a tent with Cas and in another 2 person tent Pemba was with Gerald.....



August 1st after 02:00

The Ascent

In the early hours of 1st August, a clear, moonless night. **Alberto Zerain** - a Basque independent climber - sets off from Camp III and reaches Camp IV just two hours later, climbing without supplementary oxygen and with minimal equipment. Without having to rely on a mass of climbers, sherpas, sirdars and high altitude porters, he left Camp III oblivious of the unfolding change in plans higher up the mountain and soon catches up with and passes the advance team.

Camp IV gradually awakens. The number of climbers eager to reach the top of K2 has swollen to twenty-nine. The summit peak is still hidden in the dark of night. Weather conditions are excellent. .



Wilco continues

We should have started out around midnight but at 12:30am there was actually no movement in the camp and we asked each other what we were going to do.

An hour later, the first party and the 12 climbers in the trail breaking party, were starting out and the rest would follow. So that was what happened.

Finally we followed the rest but after about an hour, I thought we were pretty late as the sun was coming up on the horizon. A few hundred metres further on, we saw that the first trail breaking party had stopped and we were asking why because they should have been in the Bottleneck already.



**Cas van de Gevel
Norit K2 Dutch 2008 International Expedition**

Leaving later than expected let's say 2am, or something like that, going up first part was not very difficult. There were many people together - I don't know exactly how many but something like 17-20 - some were returning early, some were going on.

We were also saying to our team, that for everybody going up it was their own day. It would not be necessary to explain if they wanted to return as it was not possible to discuss, as they may be far away from each other. Just turn around and go back down to Camp IV.

August 1st after 05:00

Preparing the Shoulder

The advance team is busying themselves, facilitating the steep climb by positioning bamboo poles with red ribbons to guide any climber back to Camp IV if visibility deteriorates. They soon realise that there are fewer poles than anticipated but quickly brush the problem aside. The mass of climbers is already on the move and the advance team needs to work on getting the safety of a single line of bolted ropes in place. This fixed rope will assist the climbers in the exposed areas of the bottleneck and traverse, which has angles of up to 70 degrees and a towering balcony serac. Many climbers have been saved from being swept away by their attachment to such a fixed rope.



Fred continues.....

Marco Confortola from Italy, has put up bamboo sticks for the first 100m on the saddle, which showed the direction to where we'll go tomorrow night. So we have an indicator of where the right direction is.

Once dark, it's going to be difficult to navigate on the broad and big saddle that leads us towards the summit. Every one of us has a different task and those tasks have been appointed to us after successful meetings in the Base Camp.



August 1st after 05:30

Surprise

The mass of climbers make their way up the shoulder, a broad, low angle hump thickly covered by ice and snow, along the bamboo wands. The climb is not challenging.

Suddenly, they stumble across the beginning of ropes that the advance team has fixed. They are surprised and argue that these ropes started far too soon. However, it is assumed that the advance team has plenty of contingent rope to fix the more demanding stages, in particular for the Bottleneck and the Traverse.



Wilco continues

.....finally an hour later the first party and the 12 breaking party was starting and the rest would follow.

So that was what happened. Finally we followed the rest but I think one hour later or something we were pretty late the sun was coming up on the horizon and a few hundred metres we saw that the first trail breaking party was stopped and we were asking why are they stopped because they should have been in the Bottleneck already and the sun was rising.



**Jelle Staleman
NORIT 2008 International Expedition**

So then I went on but the strange thing is that in the night, I already how do you call it, saw the ropes on the very flat part and that is not exactly what had been planned. Because our team took I think, 400 metres of rope - the only rope that was taken up, I thought some other team must have taken more ropes with them and decided it was okay to start fixing. So I thought okay it is okay it is even safer.

August 1st after 06:30

The Danger Zone

The sun rises in front of the climbers and the awesome sight of the Bottleneck reveals a 40-50 degree narrow gully of rocks, ice and snow.

Above the Bottleneck the great Serac, a glacier of ice and snow, towers over the climbers. In the past, icefalls here have led to casualties and fatalities. In the increasing light of the day, unusual cracks are observed and it is important that this danger point of the overhanging icefall is passed as quickly as possible.



High on K2: Seracs above the Bottleneck



Fred continues.....

People were talking about their fear of the Bottleneck. It has a reputation that it deserves. It is indeed a Russian Roulette. The Bottleneck can be triggered by small, small forces which can make this huge overhanging 80m serac collide.

People have died before in the Bottleneck and it's probably the key to the entire route.

Once overcoming and passing the Bottleneck the road to the summit is open but there's no way you can surpass these routes, this tricky section - you have to climb through the Bottleneck.



August 1st around 10:00

A Traffic Jam

Light on equipment and not being dependent on fellow climbers, Alberto Zeraín reaches the top of the Bottleneck. Below, climbers are clustered together, making slow progress in moving outside the realm of the great Serac. The view is not what he expected. They are scarcely moving and each individual climber's pace is dependent on the one ahead of him.



Wilco continues

.....There is another story which I have to tell and this is confusing because I told you already that we had meetings and that we had agreed what each team would do.

Suddenly a Spanish climber appeared and he came from Camp III. He had never been in these meetings and he didn't use Camp IV. He came from a nearby mountain called Broad Peak. He had climbed this mountain so he was acclimatised. He was very fast, so he didn't use Camp IV and came straight from this other mountain, climbed to Base Camp and I guess then to Camp II, Camp III, where he got some sleep. Then, I think he started climbing in the night to Camp IV which he reached just as we were just waking up. And then this guy had already started his summit attempt!

August 1st around 10:30

The End of the Rope

Lower down, the advance group with the rest of the expeditions close behind, frantically fix ropes. Suddenly, they stop. They have run out of ropes, and they have not even reached the end of the bottleneck or the following treacherous stage of the Traverse. Having run out of a lifeline, they ask the climbers at the back to cut already fixed ropes and hand them up to the advance team. Precious time passes and the risk of descending in darkness becomes more and more inevitable.

Wilco continues finally we reached the trail breaking party and we heard that the ropes were finished and that was logical because they started fixing the lines very early, actually too early when the slope was not very steep.

When we had the discussion in the base camp Mr Kim, the expedition leader of the Koreans, said that the lines needed to be fixed also in this part because in 2004 somebody fell from there to the South Face and through the Base Camp. He was of course dead. We had told Mr Kim that we didn't have enough rope to fix that part and there should be no problem climbing there because it is not very steep terrain and that the rope is needed for the upper part, which is very difficult. However Mr Kim told his Sherpa to also fix ropes to the lower part and that is where it went wrong – right at the beginning.

..... So it was very frustrating and a big disappointment. All the climbers were really thinking this could cost our success because we could also have chosen to quit the expedition from that point. But of course after 3 months of working, you are convinced that with this kind of weather we have enough time, it is a tough job but we have to go back to cut the lines and to bring it up because it was needed in the Bottleneck that's for sure.



Cas continues

We were going on and there was a problem higher up, there were no ropes left to fix. People were coming down to ask for ropes, we were descending a little bit taking all the ropes which were already fixed lower down. We were giving them to one of the Nepalese boys to take higher up. That is how we were fixing the last part of the Bottleneck, it took much longer than expected.

It was now daylight, and was a beautiful day, wind still, warm, some perfect conditions to climb a high mountain because a lot of wind can kill you on high mountains.



August 1st around 10:00

The end of the rope continued..



Chris Klinke continues...

As we continued up, dawn broke and I saw Fred and Eric turn around. I waved to them and got a thumbs up from them that everything was okay. So I continued up and at the point I reached the bottom of the fixed lines, I was getting indications from the Norwegians that I needed to cut the line because they were running out of fixed line at the front.

I don't know whether it was Lars or Rolf but one of the guys sent down their knife for me to cut the lines, which they then started pulling up.

I walked up, un-roped, to catch up with everybody and caught up with the main group just at the base of the Bottleneck. Chhiring, Cas, Wilco and the Norwegians were there.



Fred continues.....

There's a problem here - people are coming up to us asking where are the ropes. Suddenly we're out of ropes. We're asking around in the camp in the middle of the night, weren't you supposed to carry the ropes? Where is this guy who was supposed to carry this and that? Suddenly there are people missing. There's been no warning; there's been no sign or notification that responsibility for the essential gear needed to climb the route safely, up and down, had been given to another person.

Suddenly we're missing several hundred metres of rope, ice screws, snow bars and the vital and very essential bamboo sticks that are crucial for making a visible route and direction for the first 800m between Camp IV and the rock band on the couloirs towards the Bottleneck. Without those bamboo sticks I won't be able to attach the fishing line that I have with me. Fishing line is used as a guiding direction in case we're coming down from the summit in dark.

August 1st between 10:00 and 11:00

First doubts

Based on the delays and limited progress, the climbers could be forced to return through the bottleneck in the dark. Although eager to reach the summit are Eric Meyer and Fredrik Sträng from the American international expedition, make the decision to turn back and descend to Camp IV. However, one of the largest groups of climbers ever on K2, continue their ascent.



Wilco continues

Finally I lost my patience and quit the rope and passed Sessiu, who was in front of me. I tried to get as high as possible to ask what is happening, why are we not moving. And then when I came to the plateau where Pemba and the other first climbers were, I made a small mistake because I was het up and I almost slipped. I steadied myself and they grabbed me of course. We started to discuss what was happening and Pemba tried to explain that the pace was not faster because the Koreans were having some problems in making the traverse.

Chris Klinke continues...

So we would be descending the shoulder during the dark, not going through the Bottleneck, but going down the long gentle slope as the light started to fade. Given our later time, we thought that we would still be able to enter the Bottleneck in daylight.

When I looked at my watch and it was close to 10 o'clock I realised that at the pace we were going and if everything worked perfectly, we would summit just before dark. However, if it was dark when we summited, on our descent we would have to enter and traverse the Bottleneck in the dark. This was a very scary prospect because the entrance to the Bottleneck is actually a very narrow corridor that is hard to negotiate. You are looking at a field of white trying to pick up this one little feature but if you go too far to the right of the climbers on the way down, it is an avalanche slope and too far to the left and it is serac, cliffs and crevasses. So going the wrong way was very dangerous and if the winds came up it could blow our tracks away in about 10 minutes.



August 1st after 10:30 The Mouth of the Traverse

The first climbers reach the diagonal passageway. Alberto Zeraín climbs ahead of everybody and then ascends the diagonal traverse. Below, the ascent through the Bottleneck has come to a standstill.



Wilco continues

..... Finally, we got moving again but it was very slow going and of course everybody is tired. We eventually reached the upper part of the traverse where actually, the hardest part is over. But from then on, you have I guess, at least 3 hours of climbing to the real summit and although the slope is not that steep any more, it is long and you are tired. You are climbing at about 8000 metres so it is really, really heavy going and the risk of avalanche danger is still there because the slope is not that steep, so there is a big chance that there will be an avalanche.

So still, you feel the pressure to go as fast as possible and know that you have lost a lot of time but the weather is great.



Chris continues...

As the day continued to warm up the snow became heavier and heavier, but in the morning hours it had been pretty light and fluffy.

The thing that was going through my mind was that this was the first nice day with no wind, no snow and great sun, that we have had in almost 16 days. That always leads me to believe and think about is what the avalanche dangers are in your surrounding environment. In my mind, they were pretty high because as snow condenses it becomes heavier and there was this other layer underneath that was sheer ice. So that was always at the back of my mind.

August 1st around 11:00 The First Casualty

Nervous about the slow progress, some climbers unclip themselves from the safety of the anchored ropes and free-climb their way, attempting to bypass the single line of climbers. Among them the Serb, Dren Mandić, waiting nervously at the top of the Bottleneck, unclips himself to fix an alternative line of ropes. Suddenly, he slips! Unclipped from the safety of the fixed rope, he tumbles down the Bottleneck and its sharp rocks..

Wilco continues

Suddenly, we heard a scream and we looked around. It was very strange – one second you thought you could to give your hand to save him and then the next, he was gone, falling down 300-400 metres. And of course it is a shock because everybody is there waiting under pressure, in the queue in the Bottleneck and you see the first victim falling - of course you are on K2 but this was a really stupid accident, and we didn't know why he unclipped from the line. A few minutes later I did the same and was OK, but Dren did it and he was gone.

We could see that 400 metres below, he was moving and thanked God he had not been killed. Hopefully we can save him and soon his whole team - all the Serb climbers - were turning around and going down to help this guy. There were also 2 climbers; Eric an American climber and Fredrik, a Norwegian climber, who had only just left Camp IV. They were really, really far away but they joined the Serb climbers in the rescue attempt.

We had a discussion about what to do - it is late, we have had the first accident, we are in a queue here, is it smart to go on? I had a discussion with Pemba and Gerald and actually I said to Pemba, "Listen it is a good day, we have time enough if we are patient and we can move on and reach the summit without any problem." Gerald especially was hesitating but we convinced them because the weather was good, we had the whole day and if we could speed up, it wouldn't be a problem and hopefully, Dren will be the last victim for the season

Chris continues...

.... My headache was a pounder and having talked with Eric, I made the decision to keep going down. When I reached Camp IV, I had been at the tent maybe 20 minutes and had just started drinking some water when Roberto from the Italian team, said, that somebody had fallen and we left the tent to try and see who had fallen and where.

We were taking pictures trying to zoom in so we can see something, we had radio contact with the group who said that he was moving and he was alive. It turned out it was the Serbian, Dren who had fallen. At that point Eric and Fred decided to go up and try to help. I made the decision that I was going to descend to a lower altitude, with Roberto, who was feeling pretty sick. It took Roberto about two and half hours to get his stuff together and then we left Camp IV about 1.30pm.



August 1st after 11:15 On of many rescue attempts

The Serb climbers, Predrag Zagorac and Iso Planić, followed by Muhammad Hussein, turn around and head towards Dren. The summit attempt by the Serb team is aborted and preparations are made to rescue him.

Fredrik Sträng, having returned to Camp IV sees a body tumbling down the bottleneck. He prepares himself to treat an injured climber and rushes towards the spot where Dren came to a standstill. Jahan Baig, who felt sick the previous night, follows him to provide assistance.



Fredrik Sträng continues...

It's Cecilia Skog who's crying out loud a couple of times and we know instantly that something very bad has happened. We rush out of the tent, and I take my camera trying to zoom in and identify what's going on. We expect that either there's an avalanche or serac fall, or someone has fallen. Roberto from Italy, is moving up to us and he gestures with his fingers, rolling with fingers saying, I see, I see someone fell. Eric is trying to communicate with Chhiring Dhoje on the radio.

After a while Chhiring answers our calls and he says that one Serbian climber had fallen down. And we can see now from where we're standing, that he stands up so is still alive. Very soon after we negotiate with the Base Camp to get their approval to make a rescue attempt. While the [base camp] administrators are making their decision, I'm packing one oxygen bottle with mask and regulator, water, some chocolates, some basic first aid kits, sleeping pads and some ropes to carry him down if necessary.

We get the signal to go and then I start rushing up climbing very fast towards the spot. During this time Eric is coming with more medicines and moving behind me, much slower. I'm using Roberto's radio but unfortunately this radio isn't compatible with Chhiring's radio, so it's difficult to communicate and in fact I don't get any messages whatsoever.

August 1st around 12.45 A Strange decision

Fredrik Sträng reaches the group of Serbian climbers, huddled around an apparently lifeless body. Dren Mandić is not moving. He has succumbed to his injuries.

Predrag Zagorac, Iso Planić, Fredrik Sträng and Jahan Baig decide to slide the body of Dren down the slope, attaching it to a line of short roped climbers. Suddenly, the body of Jahan Baig bounces into the back of Fredrik. Still holding onto the rope in bewilderment, Jahan threatens to drag everybody down the steep shoulder with him. He is urged desperately, to let go of the rope which he does, but begins quickly to slide again. Disbelievably, Fredrik sees Jahan closing in on a drop of three-hundred meters. He vanishes from their sight.

Fred continues..... About 50m from the spot where Dren Mandic ended up, I can see four other people standing around dragging a body down the mountain. I get up to them very quickly, explain who I am, what I've heard and ask them what the current status is. Soon it's too late, Dren is dead. He died of his head injuries when he fell. One of the Serbians explained what happened and I'm actually filming this because I want to have the evidence about what we did, how and why.

They're asking me to help them carry the body down and I think this is a stupid idea. He's dead and there are better things to do, like safety first but they're really trying to push me. I told them fine, we'll do that but only if we're capable of doing it. So I'm asking around in the group how they feel and are they strong enough. I'm giving them water and chocolate etc. We're sitting down.

Meanwhile I'm wrapping up Dren Mandic's body and explaining how we should proceed with carrying him down to the highest camp - Camp IV - and give him a proper burial there, instead of leaving him on mountain. Four of us try to take him down, two on each side of the body held in a rope with a loop. Hand over hand, we slowly make our way down. Soon after, Jehan Baig from Pakistan is very close to me all the time, which is kind of frustrating and irritating as it's dangerous, because if he falls, I fall. So we stop a couple of times.

At one stage Jehan fell with his entire weight on my back, forcing me to go forward almost losing the grip of the rope and Dren's body. Jehan is then sliding on my right side, losing his footing and then he stops. He holds on to the rope with his left arm, his ice axe is dangling from his right hand. He doesn't make a sound -not one single word- he just collapsed. We're screaming out for him to release the rope - what Jehan is doing right now is risking the lives of the entire groups. *continued on next page*



Fred continues from the previous page ...

The rope is around my knees taking Jehan's entire weight, plus Dren Mandic's dead body weight, and I can feel that I'm sliding, almost falling over. The two Serbian people on my left struggle to carry the weight from Dren Mandic and Jehan. I know that if they hold on very much longer I'm not going to be able to stop this and we're all going to fall, perhaps to certain death. But Jehan isn't responding and just hangs there like a lifeless glove. And then suddenly he released the rope and starts sliding down the mountain - we scream out stop, stop, encouraging him to use his ice axe but he's making no effort at all - nothing. He just starts falling down, first on his back and then flipping over because his crampons get stuck in the ice, so he is now moving down on his chest with his head in front. His rucksack is falling off, as is his ice axe and glove. He's getting dangerously close to the edge, free falling for a couple of hundred metres. We're screaming out stop and as he passes Eric, he is just a couple of metres away from him but there's nothing anyone can do to stop his fall.

At one stage we think that the shoulder itself can save him because it slopes towards Camp IV and stops but then we realise that the direction he is going is just a couple of metres too much to the left and he's slowly turning left. Before we know it he's fallen out into the sky and he's gone.

The rest of the team gets assembled. The Serbians are putting a Serbian flag on Dren's body. And then we start to move down together to Camp IV. On the way to Camp IV I can see one of our friends coming up from our second team and he tells us that when he saw Jehan Baig falling he thought it was a rucksack but he then realised it wasn't a rucksack but a person and there was nothing any one of them could have done.

August 1st after 13:00 A question of turning around

The attempt to bring down Dren's body is now abandoned. Fredrik Sträng, Predrag Zagorac, and Iso Planić return to their tents and the other teams are debriefed. In the distance, whilst trying to battle the bottleneck, the remaining climbers continue.

As they are already considerably late, the prospect of descending through the night becomes more and more likely. Some decide to abort their summit attempt. They are Jelle Staleman, Nick Rice, Roberto Manni, Chris Klinke and Oystein Stangerland.

Despite the tragic circumstances and painfully slow progress, the remainder of the expeditions presses on. The unease of some climbers is quickly brushed aside by the reminder of how much distance they believe they have made since the start of their ascent.



Cas continues

We were in the upper part of the Bottleneck when someone was falling very close to us and you think he is going to stop because to start with the fall was very slow. Then he keeps turning and falling and rolling down, getting more speed. He did stop and at one point, we saw him moving and thought that he was still alive.

Some people were turning around to go and help, others who had already started going down, were walking back up again. So we said okay, we are a big group and four or five people are enough to help and it was a good day, so we decided to go on with the big group. I wasn't sure how he was. In the beginning perhaps he was still alive but he died very soon, I think. We didn't hear exactly until we were on the summit.

There was some talking at the top of the Bottleneck, especially between Pemba and Gerald, about whether we should carry on. It was a little bit like a couple. Marco was saying for example, let us go on it is a beautiful day and like we had said, it was everyone's own decision whether to go on. The technical difficulty of 8,000 metre peaks is less most of the time but the views you see when you get above all the mountains, are very beautiful as you get higher, higher and that is also very attractive for people to keep going on.



Jelle Staleman continues

Because I was the youngest in Base Camp and the one with the least experience, I already decided that I didn't want to descend in the dark. However, because we had to pick up the ropes, it took us four to five hours longer than we planned and that meant I would have to descend in the dark. Actually that was the biggest reason - I just thought I wasn't experienced enough to descend in the dark but there was another reason.

What happened as well was due to the altitude, I was falling asleep sometimes - just standing and falling asleep. Not for hours but just for a minute and that tells you that your mind is influenced by the altitude.

When I was awake, I really had a feeling I could still think properly and also talked with Cas a little bit and Gerald. I didn't think I was thinking strange, but I realised that something was not normal. Those were the reasons for me to turn around.

And when I turned around, I wondered if I had made the the best decision when it was so close to summit. But in the end I was pretty happy that I didn't go on. Yeah that was a pretty big disaster afterwards ...



Continued from previous page



Chris Klinke continues

I come to the conclusion that it is not safe for me, I have a discussion with Wilco, I have a brief discussion with Chhiring and I make the decision to turnaround. I tried to talk to Chhiring into coming back with me but he says no, no I go.

At that point I said make sure you have your radio on, I gave him extra batteries for his radio and I turned around and descended. On my way down, because I was moving fast and didn't have oxygen and dehydration, my headache that was slight became very severe.

I got to Camp IV very quickly actually about 11.30. So about an hour and half from the base of the Bottleneck to Camp IV.



Fredrik Strang continues...

We can't climb this mountain safely - that's the voice I hear repeatedly in my head. I said to Eric, lets go down to Camp IV and wait for the others. Let's get prepared for the worst. At that time I didn't know how true those words were. We got back to Camp IV, the sun was up and extremely hot. In fact it was so hot that we were in our tent at 7800m in only T-shirts and underwear. We put our down suits on top of the tent to get some shelter but the inside the tent was crazy and staying outside it's dangerous ultra violet radiation. We're drinking and monitoring the radios. There's no communication whatsoever.

We told Base Camp that we have abandoned our summit attempt and now we'll rest here and be available in case others need our assistance.

August 1st after 14:00

Climbing the Traverse

The climbers enter the Traverse, clipping themselves to a single fixed rope with their karabiners. Some of them have been climbing in excess of 24 hours. The pace remains painfully slow. Rolf Bea mentions that he is having problems and further ahead, Karim Meherban is also concerned about the condition of his leader, Hugues d'Aubarède. Nevertheless, everyone continues.



Jelle Staleman continues

There is no written or unwritten rule to say that you can descend or you can't descend in the dark. It is not like that, but it comes with experience too. The more experience you have the stronger you are, the better you are in your head.

In my opinion it is a bit more dangerous to descend in the dark, but it is everybody's own decision.



August 1st around 14:30 Time is passing

Alberto Zeraín, the Basque independent climber, who has been fixing most of the ropes along the Traverse, urges the following line of climbers to fix the rest of the line quickly. Patiently, everybody observes the South Koreans fixing the remainder of the ropes. Doubts about continuing emerge but are cast aside.

August 1st after 14:30 Light at the End of The Tunnel

The first climbers reach the snowfield leading up to the summit. Rolf Bae, conscious of his physical state, tells Cecilie Skog that he will not make it to the top and will wait for her.

August 1st around 15:30 The Summit

Impatiently, Alberto Zeraín pushes ahead and reaches the summit of K2. He knows he is late and he turns around quickly. On his way back, he sees other climbers passing him, still full of excitement.



Cas continues

I remember seeing Alberto who was on the way down. He was the only solo climber and nobody in the other expeditions knew that he would be part of the whole climb. He overtook everybody on their ascent and was one of the first ones to come down. Everybody started from Camp IV, apart from Alberto. He started from another Base camp, and went straight up without much stopping. That is the big different to 'siege style mountaineering'. You travel light and you are on your own.

August 1st after 17:30 A Pyrrhic Success

Gradually, everybody reaches the summit. Pictures are taken, videos shot and climbers embrace each other in celebration. Many look exhausted. Some remain for significant time at the summit to savour their success in reaching the peak of one of the most dangerous mountains.

Cas continues

It was very beautiful on the summit... Hugues was there with Pemba, the high altitude porter from Pakistan, then Gerald, Wilco and me. It was a very good moment, which still stays in my mind very much because after the summit everything seemed to go wrong. But the moment of the summit is more in my head than all the rubbish that happened after.

It was very warm, we were holding each other, laughing, talking, everybody very happy. We were looking at the beautiful view, where we saw very deep valleys and very high mountains. We were much higher than all the mountains around us and it was becoming evening time, so the shadow which was coming from K2 with the very low sun was very long. The views were really beautiful, magnificent.



Wilco continues

Looking to the horizon we could see the bending of the earth, so it was really a magical moment and we were crying. It was the most brilliant weather with no need for us to wear gloves. We could phone home, with the satellite phone and the news of our success after 3 months of hard work was getting around.



August 1st around 20:00 An Emptying Summit

The sun is sinking fast. With the departure of the Dutch team, including Wilco van Rooijen, the summit proves conquered once more. Now, the most dangerous part of the climb, the descent, begins. This is in darkness so that the risk is multiplied. A long line of exhausted climbers now need to make their way back through a hazardous environment characterised by avalanches and icefall; the most prominent of which is the great Serac.



Wilco continues

So we thought okay, going down is just routine, it was late, the sun was setting but we were thinking even in the night we can go down. Always in the winter time in the Alps, in the darkness you go to the last line, you connect to the line and you follow the line back to camp. We made contact with our weather master and he warned us to be careful as most of the accidents happen on the way down. We said yes we know, we would be careful, don't worry.

Just before we went down, Marco came with the last guy on the summit and he asked Gus to take some pictures of him. I was going down already with Gerald and actually, Pemba had gone down first, saying that he would control the ropes while we were making some pictures and video.

August 1st after 20:00 Probability Turns into a Terrible Fact

The Norwegians; Rolf Bae, Cecilie Skog and Lars Nessa clip themselves onto the anchored rope leading down the traverse. Whilst making some progress, the traverse is suddenly rocked by an icefall. Rolf Bae vanishes into the darkness. The icefall has taken lives from the expeditions. Cecilie and Lars realise that the single anchored rope has been cut.

August 1st around 21:00 What To Do

Bewildered, Lars Nessa and Cecilie Skog wonder what to do. They take out some spare rope and ice screws and scramble along the traverse, down to the remaining piece of the fixed line of rope.

August 1st after 21:00 Signs of Disintegration

Further up the mountain, climbing down the snowfield, Sherpa Chhiring Dorje tries to keep everybody together and guide them down a fixed rope that unbeknownst to everybody else, is cut further down. After some time, individual climbers unclip themselves and wander off towards the Traverse. Jumik Bhote, whilst encouraging the South Korean Flying Jump team from the rear, to move quickly down the snowfield, he notices the two leaders, Kim-Jae-Soo ('Ms. Kim') and Go Mi-sun ('Ms. Go'), rushing ahead of the group. As they disappear in the fading light, he is left alone with the remainder of this team; of which two seem to be increasingly despondent. They are dying.



Wilco continues

For example, when we were on the summit, we were communicating with the satellite phone successfully and the next challenge was to go back to the Base Camp.

But the strange thing is when you go back from the summit, everybody is thinking that it is just a routine job ... we go back to the last part of the ropes, we connect to the ropes, follow the lines and we are back in Camp IV. And everybody knows also that if somebody falls you can't do anything for him, so there is a sort of gentlemen's agreement to go as fast as possible back to Camp IV, because the faster you are, the more safe you are..

continued



Continued from previous page..



Cas continues

There was a stop I remember, when some people were talking about going left or right and about fixed ropes. I am getting a little bit irritated about the slow progress. And far, far down I see lights and because of the slow progress I decided okay, I will go straight to the lights and that is what I do. I am not looking any more what's going on behind me, I am following the lights - that is it.

Suddenly I see a fixed rope so I go to it. I look back I still see the lights and think there was no problem. However, in such a small space, it is hard to see if the lights are in front or behind but it should be okay, everybody is moving. Going down is like that in the altitude when you are already so long above the 7,500 meter you are thinking you cannot remember everything anymore. That is the thing you have to accept when you are alone in that high altitude.



Chris continues

I wouldn't say it was gradual, it was pretty quick. Climbing K2 or any mountain, you get a huge endorphin rush to get to the top. The most dangerous part is always the descent because you are tired, you are exhausted, your endorphins are done. The adrenalin is gone so you got get down on sheer will power. If you are on oxygen or run out of oxygen, which those three Koreans did, that is a big deal. That is a big mental hurdle to overcome as well as the physical one.

So I look at it and say that it could mean a lot of different things, but leaving people behind sounds really harsh but ultimately, you have to make a decision that is best for you personally. You can try and help other people but you can't make them do what you think is right. They are going to do what they think is right.

August 1st around 22:00

Making Sense of the inevitable

Eric Meyer and Fredrik Sträng don't notice the arrival of Cecilie Skog and Lars Nessa at Camp IV. However, the quiet and emptiness of Camp IV concerns them, in particular the lack of radio communication. After frantic and then jubilant exchanges from the summit, radio traffic has been suspiciously quiet. Frequent communication is essential to establish what is happening and to coordinate activities in surroundings where visibility is restricted. Despite agreeing on a single frequency, not everybody carries a radio and the Dutch handsets do not always work. In addition, the Koreans use it to communicate in their own language and, as a result, other expeditions have switched to their own frequency. Other climbers have simply left theirs behind.

Puzzled, Eric and Fredrik, (the only ones at that time, capable of launching a co-ordinated rescue effort), are oblivious to the abyss that is towering over the remaining climbers



Fred continues

Eric and I are in Camp IV waiting to hear any signs of life whatsoever but there are none. It's about midnight when we get a distress call from Chhiring. He talks about ropes that are missing and that they had been avalanched away from a serac fall. So they are on their own. There's nothing we can do because we can't see anything above us. But what we do have, is a set of bamboo sticks and we put up a strobe light which is extremely bright. That works as a guiding light for many of the survivors and as the survivors said later, without that lamp very few would've made it back to the Camp.

It's the middle of the night and people are dropping in one after the other. We're giving them water, medicine and something to eat. They're tired, exhausted. Everyone is trying to get a clear picture of what's going on but it's anything but clear. We don't sleep much that night. Early in the morning we wake up, boiling more water and supplying people with water and food and looking at people's injuries and taking care of them.

We can now say that there are at least four people above the Bottleneck who are stranded and there's nothing we can do to help them. They haven't been moving since last night. They don't answer on their walkie talkies. So it's up to them now. Actually Base Camp is refusing to let us go. They can't allow us to do that because it's too risky.



August 1st around 22:00

A Question of Bivouacking

Marco Confortola and Gerard McDonnell feel exhausted and decide to bivouac – to without a tent, sleeping bag, food or oxygen.

On top of the great Serac, Karim Meherban and Wilco van Rooijen are desperately seeking a way down. They are lost. The four South Koreans, Hwang Dong-Jin, Park Keyoung-Hyo, Kim Hyo-Gyung, Hwang Dong-Jin and Jumik Bhote decide to continue and lurch ahead, oblivious of the severed life line.



Wilco continues

And then of course, you feel enormous exhaustion because you are so unbelievably tired. You are thinking now I am going down - I have time but have to keep my mind on the job, be patient and not make any mistakes because I am too tired. So sometimes I sat down to get a little more energy and then I went on all on my own. Eventually, I lost all the other climbers but I saw their torches and was thinking it doesn't matter because I will catch up with them a little while later. I went on and on and it got darker and darker. And then finally I reached the upper part of the traverse, which is pretty flat and then suddenly there is a drop of a few hundred metres as you come over the edge of the traverse and see the Bottleneck.

But when we were there, we couldn't recognise anything and we were searching for our ropes but couldn't find them. I saw this edge dropping and the terrain falling away. So I was looking and looking and suddenly I saw two other torches in the snow. I went over there and it was Gerald and Marco, I said "what are you doing here, we have to keep on going to go down." But they replied, "Yeah, we can't find the ropes, so we have decided to make a bivouac over here." I tried to energise them saying that we must find the ropes. Marco stood up and together we tried to find the ropes and climb down but then Marco was screaming to me not to go down any further because it is too steep and I would fall. So I climbed up again to search somewhere else and I started shouting to other climbers - the stupid thing was, a few hundred metres down we could see their head torches. We were hoping if we could communicate with them, they could shout whether to go to the left or to the right, but they didn't give any reaction because they were too far away to hear us.

So finally, Gerard and Marco convinced me we must make a bivouac because tomorrow we would then find the way down in the daylight. And I thought maybe this is the best solution because still it was a calm brilliant night. I was sitting a little bit further from Marko and Gerald because they were sitting together and I was alone in the snow. We were trying to sleep but of course you are not sleeping really.

August 1st after 22:30

A realisation sets in

Three Sherpas; Chhiring Dorje, alongside Pemba Gyalje and 'Little' Pasang Lama, reach the Traverse and arrive at the end of the anchored rope. Chhiring Dorje radios back to Eric Meyer that the rope has been cut.

Descending in the dark, exhausted, running out of oxygen, and hindered by a severed lifeline, it dawns on Eric Meyer and Frederik Strång that they have a critical situation on their hands. However, specifics of the unfolding crisis remain unclear. Where is everybody and what state is each of the climbers in? Without such information, a coordinated rescue attempt from the relative safety of Camp IV will prove to be a shot in the dark.



Cas continues

The first thing you have to do is to make a long traverse, so you have to follow the rope. So when I saw the rope which was hanging down vertically, I saw that it was not the way I climbed up. I was thinking that the rope at the end was not fixed anymore and had fallen away, so I said yeah I am not going to traverse there into the dark as I can't see anything. I am just going to follow the rope very slowly to descend so that I am not going to slip off the rope. I could already see that rope was very long when I pulled it up first and I couldn't see any end, so it must be a long rope. I thought okay I will just follow and try to reach the bottleneck so by the vertical rope.

So I didn't know it was an emergency rope and there was no other rope. It looks good for the rest... I knew it was our rope - the rope that Gerald had brought from Alaska. So the rope we were using was not an old that I was going to follow - I was following our own rope, so that was what I was doing.



August 1st between 22:30 – 01:30 Free Climbing

Unaware of the emergency rope already fixed by Cecilie Skog and Lars Nessa, the three Sherpas; Chhiring Dorje, Pemba Gyalje and 'Little' Pasang Lama, short rope their way through the Traverse. Connected by a six-foot long rope to Chhiring Dorje, any small slip could potentially result in the death of all three.

With a sigh of relief, they all make it through the Traverse to safely reach Camp IV. They are met there by a concerned Eric Meyer and Fredrik Sträng. Looking up the mountain, the headlights of the remaining climbers indicate that they are continuing their way down the snowfield towards the treacherous passage below the great Serac. They are unaware their descent will encounter an almost insurmountable obstacle.

August 1st around 00:00 Searching for a needle in a haystack

The Sherpas; Tsering Lama (Chhiring Bote) and 'Big' Pasang Bhote, who are due to commence their ascent that night with the second group of South Koreans, set out into the darkness to look for the missing Koreans and Tsering Lama's cousin, Jumik.

Packed with spare rope, oxygen, food and sleeping bags they stumble across Kim Jae-Soo, the leader of the South Korean expedition, and enquire what has happened and where everybody is. Unable to obtain many details from him, the two Sherpas continue moving up the mountain and looking out for indications of any headlamps.



Fred continues

The South Koreans send up some of their Sherpas. They didn't come voluntarily, it was an order - this is what you're going to do - go up and save them. So the Sherpas go and one of them dies in their summit attempt. I'm sorry for their rescue attempt. More avalanches are coming down.

August 2nd Saturday around 01:00 A small mistake

Cas van de Gevel moves step by step along the Traverse where he meets the leader of the French-led expedition Hugues d'Aubarède. Noticing that he was no longer with his High Altitude Porter Marim Meherban, Cas exchanges a few words with Hugues and then passes on. He reaches the end of the severed rope loosely dangling across the rocks and, with some relief, recognises the emergency ropes. Continuing downwards, he suddenly notices a body to his left plunging headfirst into the darkness. No sound, no shout. Unaware of the loose end of the severed rope, Hugues d'Aubarède has abseiled off its end.



Cas continues

I see a light which is coming closer - I am catching up with Hugues, who is in a fixed point. I meet him and we do not talk very much. I ask Hugues how he is and he replies that he is doing OK but as he is going more slowly than me, he asks me to go first. So I pass behind him, go to the next fixed rope and I descend in front of him.

I follow the ropes and we are going at our own speed. I see Hugues' light behind me and then one moment later he is not there anymore and I am just alone again in the little dark world. Suddenly I see that the fixed rope is finished. I remember from the way up, that there was a rope there in a sort of traverse, going from left to right but it is now hanging straight down. So I am thinking something must have gone wrong with the rope and perhaps the next fixed point had got loose and the rope had fallen down. Fortunately, two people from the Norwegian team had put an emergency rope there, which they had in their back pack. I was descending that rope very carefully because I was afraid to slip off the end.

I reached let us say halfway, in the Bottleneck with the emergency rope and from there on, I left the rope and carried on down. I was climbing down, a little bit at a time with my face close to the ice now and then I hear some noises very close to me. I look up and in the light from my helmet, I see Hugues, the colour of his suit and things ... he is falling head first, already at a very high speed over the ice.

He is not shouting or making any noise and he is going too quickly for me to do anything. He is too far away - not very far but five or ten metres perhaps. I am going on down to understand a little better and to try and make contact by radio so they can send up somebody to look to help him or whatever.



August 2nd after 02:00 Broken Communication

Sherpas Chhiring Bote and 'Big' Pasang Bhote progress further up the Bottleneck, close to exhaustion. A desperate plea for help catches their attention and they stumble across Go-Mi Sun, the second leader of the Korean Flying Jump team. Unable to contact the remaining four Korean climbers due to a malfunctioning radio, they return and reach Camp IV at 04:30. Both Korean leaders have also reached the safety of Camp IV. It's a clear night, and the two Sherpas begin packing again, planning to go out and look for those who have so far failed to return safely.



Cas continues

There were only a few radios - I had one but not everybody did. And it was a little bit confusing because the Koreans were speaking on their radios only in their own language and they were also using a different channel to the one that we were using for contact with Base Camp. That channel was working well, except it was difficult to get a very good connection with Base Camp when using the radio in the Bottleneck. From the summit area, reception is very good and from the shoulder, also a good connection. So some people had radio, some people not....

But if you need to make difficult decisions or you see something like somebody falling down, then you do need to make radio contact. There must be a point where you say okay, now it is time to use the radio but others may think what they are doing is more important.. for example the Norwegians who were fixing the emergency rope may have felt that people coming down behind them would find out the rope is hanging down and they would be okay, so did not make radio contact.

We made contact with Camp IV after Hugues fell, telling them what had been happening and then people were coming up from Camp IV and other people going down...



Chris continues

Both Chhiring and I had a radio, Fred and Eric both had sat phones because up to that point Fred and I have been climbing together and Eric and Chhiring had been climbing together. The thought process was then we would have at least one form of communication if we got separated. But it never worked out - I was able to communicate with Chhiring via radio but I wasn't able to communicate with Eric and Fred.

We had two groups of teams coming up; one coming up the Cesan and one coming up the Abruzzi. Because no-one had taken ultimate responsibility for the whole operation, no-one was coordinating or communicating with all the teams. So when the managing leader got sick he talked with Eric and he didn't communicate the fact that he was going down. Again it is not Eric's fault - it is one of those things.

It was assumed that somebody was going to pick up the rope and that arrangements were made for somebody else within their party to carry the rope up, but it wasn't. Or if it was, whoever had that responsibility didn't follow through on it, I just don't know. Keeping in mind there are eight teams, speaking eight native languages, communication was difficult sitting face to face let alone across the radio.

August 2nd after 02:30 An entanglement

The four South Korean climbers, Hwang Dong-Jin, Park Keyoung-Hyo, Kim Hyo-Gyung, Hwang Dong-Jin and Jumik Bhote make their way down to the beginning of the Traverse. Suddenly, they stumble. One Korean tumbles down the short distance towards the steep edge, and disappears. Jumik Bhote and the three remaining Koreans get entangled in the ropes and their fall is halted. Three climbers are now trapped on a mountain, waiting for the others to notice and release them.



August 2nd around 03:00 So close yet so far..

Above the entangled climbers, Marco Confortola and Gerald McDonnell try to stay awake. They dig a hole and move around to keep their circulation going. The lights of Camp IV can be seen and appear to be quite close. All their signals of yelling, shouting and waving of their headlamps, however, goes unnoticed.

Suddenly, a figure appears, moving towards them out of the darkness. Wilco van Rooijen, who has struggled to get down the snowfield, has noticed their headlamps. The three climbers try a final time to attract the attention of Camp IV, without success. They settle down to wait for first light to assist their climb down.

August 2nd around 06:00 Snow blindness

Wilco van Rooijen detects symptoms of snow blindness. He tells Marco Confortola and Gerald McDonnell that he should descend quickly. He soon loses his bearings however and, hampered by deteriorating eyesight and an incoming bank of fog, he struggles downwards by feeling his way. Having left his lightweight GPS at Camp IV he takes out his satellite phone and, unable to read the electronic address book, he dials the only number he remembers - his own. His wife picks up the connection via Base Camp and Camp IV is established to locate his position. He does not know where he is and the only option for him is to continue downwards.



Wilco continues

So the next morning when the sun was rising, we saw the terrain but didn't see all the ropes. We thought okay, now we start looking again and Marco was looking to the left, I was looking to the right and Gerald was also looking. But we couldn't find it again and then we got a strange feeling that probably we were lost in the mountains - maybe we had chosen the wrong direction but we were convinced that the ropes must be there, because a few hours ago we had left them there.

I lifted my goggles to see a little bit more and that is why I got some snow blindness because of the light of course. Later on, I felt the beginning of the blindness and in that moment I started panicking a little because I realised that if I really do go snow blind, I had a very real problem because nobody can do anything for you, also not with a body of 80 kilos, so you are lost.

So I was direct and said, listen guys I am getting snow blindness and I have to go because I have no time to lose. That is what I did, I just climbed down. I didn't know where to go really, I just chose a direct line downwards.

August 2nd around 07:00 A Gordian Knot

At first light Marco Confortola and Gerald McDonnell, when making their way into the Traverse, notice the three trapped climbers. On this steep 30 to 40 degree incline, one is hanging down headfirst and the other one is barely alive. Jumik Bhote has lost his boot, his foot now being exposed to the unrelenting forces of wind and cold.

They attempt to untangle the three climbers for three hours – an endeavour which is both risky and, given the state of the rescuers, a near impossible task. Marco Confortola decides to descend. Gerard is not to be seen again.

Wilco continues

When I was going downwards, I think half an hour later, I looked to my right and what I saw was shocking - there were 3 climbers hanging beneath each other on a rope. They didn't scream but they were still alive and the last guy asked me if I could get some help.

I didn't have a clue what happened and didn't really realise at that moment, that they were also belonging to the summit party. I was wondering where those climbers were coming from and I was really, really confused. I said to the last guy, "I will get some help if I get down but do you have radio?" And he said "Yes I have radioed already that we need some help and they tried to get some help." And he then asked me, "Do you have some extra gloves?" He didn't have any gloves left anymore so I gave him some and then I had to go on down because I was trying to survive as well.

So I kept my emotions in check and I followed the way down until I couldn't go any further. It must be again half, three quarters or one hour later I looked up and I saw Marco and Gerald coming down the same way. So I felt a little more happy and thought this is probably the right way down but then when I tried to start going down again I couldn't, because there were steep rocks. In the end, the only way I could go was up.



August 2nd after 08:00

A lone figure

Karim Meherban from the French-led expedition, wanders aimlessly along the top of the Serac, zigzagging in pure desperation to find a way down. He wades through thick snow towards the lip of the great Serac – and then falls. .

August 2nd after 10:00

The big picture

Those who remain at Camp IV now take stock. Wilco van Rooijen , Gerald McDonnell, Marco Confortola, Jumik Bhote, Hwang Dong-Jin and Park Kyeong-Hyo are still unaccounted for. Eric Meyer tries to contact anyone who is still up on the mountain, attempting all possible radio frequencies, but to no avail. They would initiate a rescue if able to detect any signs of life. However, with the only contingency of a single oxygen bottle and no spare rope, any rescue attempt at this stage would be a futile and excessively risky undertaking.

By noon, most of the climbers decide to descend down to Base Camp because of their deteriorating conditions. Only a few, among them, Cas van de Gevel and Pemba Gyalje, stay to wait for their friends to return. Any help at Camp IV for those that are still high up at the mountain is gradually diminished.



Wilco continues

Yeah it is very simple for people say don't you have radios, don't you have this, don't you have that? We can bring everything but you know one thing for sure, you have to bring it all yourself in your own backpack. If you have only one thing too much in your backpack, you will get frustrated because you think, I have this or that too much in my backpack and I have to get rid of it because it saves me energy. If you go for 17 hours from Camp IV to the summit and then you have to go back 17 hours you are in the death zone with only one third of oxygen.

So not everybody take satellites phones or radios or solar panels and GPS' or other things. So we said okay, we are the team with 4 people, we have one radio and we have one satellite phone. With the satellite phone we communicate to Holland and our Base Camp there and with the radio, we communicate to the Base Camp on K2. And in the K2 Base Camp they communicate between Holland and the K2 base camp, so it was very clear about how our communication works.



Cas continues

Next morning started with looking for people and contacting Base Camp because also for us, everything was very unclear in the beginning. I saw the boy falling down the Bottleneck, and I see Hugues falling, so that is clear. But for the rest, I see that morning that there are no other climbers of my team.

August 2nd around 12:00

From bad to worse

The two Sherpas; Chhiring Bhote and 'Big' Pasang Bhote, secure the Bottleneck as they notice a climber, Marco Confortola, crawling on his hands and knees. Pemba Gyalje sets off from Camp IV in an attempt to get him down safely.

'Big' Pasang moves ahead when another icefall sweeps him away. On his pursuit to rescue other climbers, 'Big' Pasang will become another victim of the Great Serac .

August 2nd around 14:00

The cruel mountain takes its toll

Big' Pasang Bhote struggles to get the three remaining climbers down the Bottleneck. They hardly notice the further collapse of the great Serac and four more climbers are dragged down the steep angle of the Bottleneck by the resulting avalanche. The steep, rocky surface has taken another terrible toll.

Further down, Pemba Gyalje frantically drags Marco Confortola away from the path of this deadly avalanche. He hears a shout and sees Chhiring Bhote coming towards him, in tears and at the end of all his resolve. .



August 2nd around 15:00

In pursuit of order

At Base Camp, Chris Klinke and Roeland van Oss are collating information about those returning to the safety of Base Camp. They also take stock of those who have lost their lives. The treacherous route along the Black Pyramid and the House's Chimney, poses additional challenges to the tired and distraught climbers who have just made it passed the Bottleneck. Among those presumed missing is the one who lost his way – Wilco van Rooijen.



Chris continues

We set up a command tent at the Dutch team, we had seven radios sitting on the table and we had everybody in the room.

Yeah, well effecting a rescue at that altitude too, is really difficult. Our best bet was the people from Singapore who were sitting at Camp III but they never switched on the radio because they didn't have anybody in Base Camp...

August 2nd after 17:30

On the Wrong Path

Wilco van Rooijen has used his mobile several times. A chance arises to trace his calls and pinpoint his actual location. His last two calls indicate an area towards the Black Pyramid. Chris Klinke, however, spots a lonely figure near the Cesan Route. Unfortunately, it is once again becoming dark. .



Wilco continues ..

So there was little chance that this is our route as our route was completely destroyed. I could go down a little bit further with this short rope but then it was finished again. I had to climb down without a rope and eventually, after a long story, I came across the traverse and finally under the Bottleneck.

And then the terrain was not that difficult anymore and it was a big relief for me that my chances to survive were improving. Then I had the next problem. I was on the shoulder and didn't know which way to go, because the shoulder is really huge - if I go to the left you ended up in China and to the right you come back to Pakistan. But even to the right it is a huge terrain and you have many choices of ways to go.

In the meantime the weather had changed and there were clouds hanging around K2. They weren't clouds of bad weather, just condensation clouds but with these, you can't see very far so it is very difficult to make a choice where to go. Finally, I chose one direction and started out because the only thing, almost a mantra in my head, was that I have to go down. It doesn't matter which way - I need oxygen and if I have oxygen, my whole situation will improve and I can make all the choices I want but I have to go down, it doesn't matter which way. I carried on down and then again I was in a place where I couldn't go down any further because there were all black rocks and it doesn't make sense anymore, either to the right or to the left.

This was the first time that I thought maybe I am trapped. And it was also the first time that I took my satellite phone and phoned home to my wife and 7 month old child. My wife was speechless and I told her that I was lost on the mountain and that I was trapped and couldn't go any further. And of course she knew already that something must have happened because there was the awful night without any news and she tried to give me energy. She was asking if I was sure I was not climbing on the Chinese side and finally she said you have to keep on going and this is what I said to her, "Listen everything will be alright and I will call you back in 24 hours," but of course it was a stupid promise because 2 hours later it could have been done.

This telephone conversation made me try to get some energy and I closed my eyes. I realised at that moment that I must think very logically. I said to myself you have 2 options; one option is to just jump because I saw that a few hundred metres below me there was snow, a plateau and snow terrain. I thought of the story about these two English guys in 'Touching The Voice' who fell into a crevasse and one broke his leg and couldn't reach Base Camp. I had the opportunity to jump, but there was a chance that if I did, I would probably break my leg but the chance was there, to get off this mountain and maybe to reach Base Camp.

The other opportunity was just to sit and wait and to believe that there is a solution but the only thing is, you don't know when and you don't know how. You can compare it with a big storm. If you are in a storm you have to believe that the storm will end somewhere, but you don't know if it is in 24 hours or if it will last for one week.

Don't ask me why, but I chose to sit there and close my eyes to pray for a solution. In my imagination many hours passed but I must have closed my eyes many times and each time I opened them I could see my watch which was registering the altitude every 15 minutes.



August 3rd – Sunday around 05.30 Another night

Wilco van Rooijen spends another night in sub-zero temperatures. At first light, Cas van de Gevel and Pempa Gyalje manage to locate him. They bring him to Camp IV and then, under extreme difficulties, on to Base Camp. The last of the survivors finally make it back. .



Wilco continues

And that night I had really strange hallucinations - I was thinking that I was sitting beside a dead person, there was a corpse lying there but I didn't have the guts to go to it or to take a photo. I knew I was still alive but because there was a dead person there, how long will I last before I was also be a dead man?

So it was really a strange night but the next morning when the sun was rising, I had to make a choice which way to go because again I could go over the glacier with the risk of falling in a crevasse, or I could also climb over a ridge. This ridge took a lot more energy and I also didn't know how this ridge would end.

Finally, I chose to go in between with the glacier on the right side and the ridge on the left side. I thought this was a good solution because you can't fall in the crevasse and you are not on a difficult ridge. So I just went down the middle of those two terrains. And then it was unbelievable, my phone was ringing which I could hardly believe, as I had tried to phone home again the previous night but I kept losing the connection. I hadn't got the guts or the energy to switch the phone off the night before, as you had to push the button a little while longer before it went off, so it was on the whole night. Then suddenly my my wife was calling and for her. it was also amazing because she had been trying to call but not believing that it would be successful.

I told her that my chances for survival were good because I was climbing down and I thought I had seen the Base Camp already, but that was also in my imagination. I did see the Base Camp but it was 3000 metres lower. In your imagination you cling on to everything you know, to believe that you are almost there but in reality there was still a long time to go. But I told her I was almost there but we must hang up to conserve the battery and I would call her back.

Of course she was very happy because that night people were thinking that I couldn't survive a second night at 8000 metres. Later on, I saw a camp but I didn't recognise it. It was actually our Camp III. I saw a tent and 2 people one in a blue down suit and one in an orange down suit and if I'd had a clear mind, I would have known immediately that it was Pemba and Cas because Pemba was the only one in a blue down suit and we were the only ones in the orange down suits. But I was confused and I didn't remember them or recognise them but I was moving towards them of course because when you see other human beings you think okay, I have to go there because they can save me.

Then when I was only 50 metres or so away, suddenly I saw it is Cas and then of course we hugged each other and started crying and he told me that he didn't believe that he would ever see me again and things like that. At long last you are saved, you are still at 7000 metres but you still had a long way to go. They gave me oxygen, food, drink etcetera and then they told me that what had happened and that Gerald probably hadn't survived.














August 4th – Monday Against All Odds

A sombre mood settles down at Base Camp. Two days before, twenty nine highly technically, versatile mountaineers set off from Camp IV to reach the summit of K2. The Savage Mountain kept eleven in its grasp. Six of these climbers became victims of the Great Serac: the towering ice wall which in the past has allowed a number of climbers to pass unharmed. Is this just an unlucky occurrence or have the climbers collectively pushed the element of risk beyond the manageable?

It dawns on everybody that this climb is unlike any other. People do die in such environments. Climbing K2 remains a high risk undertaking. Before Base Camp is left to its surrounding elements, the Gilkey Memorial, which is positioned near the camp receives eleven additional plates to commemorate those eleven that lost their lives in August 2008:



The 2008 Fatalities

Name	Nationality	Location of death	Cause of death
Dren Mandić	 Serbia	Below the Bottleneck	Fell during the ascent
Jehan Baig	 Pakistan		Fell while trying to recover Dren Mandić's corpse
Rolf Bae	 Norway	Bottleneck	The first serac ¹ fall
Hugues D'Aubarede	 France	Above the Bottleneck	Fell in descent during the night
Meherban Karim	 Pakistan		Either the second serac fall or the third serac fall.
Gerard McDonnell	 Ireland		After helping the injured Koreans, he was hit by either the second or third serac fall
Kyeong-Hyo Park	 South Korea	Above the Bottleneck	The fourth serac fall
Hyo-Gyeong Kim	 South Korea		
Dong-Jin Hwang	 South Korea		
Jumic Bhote	 Nepal		
Pasang Bhote	 Nepal		