

Successful or not, return safely from the peak: Kaltenbrunner

Press Trust of India | Mumbai July 16, 2017 Last Updated at 11:13 IST

Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner loves the mountains and has tall fetes to her credit, including being the first woman to scale all the 14 Himalayan peaks above 8,000 metres sans supplementary oxygen or help from porters.

However, unconventional it may sound, the summit for the 46-year-old Austrian mountaineering legend is reaching the base camp safely after a successful climb.

"You climb to the top of the peak but the summit is only when you descend to the base camp safely. The highest priority is to come back safely," Kaltenbrunner told PTI on the sidelines of the 16th Girimitra Sammelan here last week.

The mountaineer revealed that she turned back 150 metres shy of the Lhotse summit in 2009, and that too after turning professional.

She has done 21 expeditions in total (for the 14 peaks), which means at least seven unsuccessful attempts.

Starting the quest of climbing the formidable 8,000 metre peaks -- considered as the 'death zone' for mountaineers -- with the Cho Oyu in 1998, Kaltenbrunner turned professional after climbing the Nanga Parbat (her fourth 8,000 m) in 2003 and completed all of them by 2011 after scaling the K2.

The K2 was the most difficult peak and required six attempts, Kaltenbrunner admits.

In 2010, her climbing partner got killed while climbing, but she returned the next year to finish the summit via the difficult north route.

The peak, arguably the toughest of all the 14, tested the resolve of the legend. Two of the six fellow climbers dropped out with the disappearance of favourable weather windows which tested their patience.

But why climb without supplementary oxygen or high altitude porters, as both are almost mandatory? "It's more exciting that way," she says and then gets down to explaining what the obsession entails.

Starting with intense training and meditation that help her control breathing, she says there are special food choices while up on the mountains.

Even though piling calories is a must, a high fat diet that requires higher amount of oxygen for digestion is a big no-no. So, typically it is mashed potatoes and baby food on the higher camps and high fat content as you head down to the base camp, she says.

Recounting a night at the K2, Kaltenbrunner says special choices of resting also have to be exercised. She 'slept' in a sitting position and kept the zipper of the tent open on the summit camp, just to ensure that she took as much as oxygen available in the thin and frosty air.

At the Girimitra Sammelan, a congregation for mountaineers held here, the 500-strong audience responded to every word the legend uttered.

There were multiple rounds of claps, chuckles and laughs in the 90-minute presentation focused on the K2 climb.

But it's Kaltenbrunner's advice, and a wishful sign off that shall linger the longest with the local mountaineers.

"Be enthusiastic, plan really well, be prepared for any unforeseen events, be disciplined, patient and reflect well on yourself," she said adding "And yes, all the best to your eight-thousanders."