



## Ultimate mountain decision

Everyone has a different reason to climb mountains. Some would say that they love the views, others would admit that they enjoy the feeling of achieving the summit. Regardless of what the motivation is, there is one common factor that characterizes every climber – risk he or she needs to take. Mountains are beautiful. They allow people to chase their dreams and fulfill their ambitions; however, they are incredibly dangerous at the same time. Of course, the more demanding the mountain is, the more risk one takes while climbing it. It is obvious that in small mountain ranges, which are available for most of us there are not many dangers. Notwithstanding, sometimes accidents happen even on safe, not-exposed trails. However, in this case there are special mountain emergency units, which take care of harmed or lost tourists. For the purpose of this article, focus will be put on the highest, but at the same time the deadliest mountains of our globe – Himalayas. No more than 10 years ago Himalayas were accessible only for professional, high-altitude climbers. Nowadays, expeditions on famous 8-thousanders became popular amongst unexperienced tourists-amateurs. Nevertheless, those non-professionals have to encounter the same risk, which is associated with Himalayas. It means unpredictable weather, avalanches, high-altitude sickness, physical fatigue and many others. Despite the new technology, and well-developed knowledge about mountain features, accidents happen even more often, because of the rising popularity of



this activity. Not infrequently they take place on an altitude that exceeds 7500 meters, for example during a summit attack. Usually only two or three climbers participate in summit attacks, while the rest of the team remains in the base. Every time when a dreadful accident happens, a heated discussion emerges on whether the members of the summit team did everything they could to save

their partners life. Often some climbers are accused of leaving a friend on their deathbed. When the situation is critical climbers face an important decision. The decision about staying with the suffering partner, giving him a slight chance of surviving, but at the same time risking their own life. Or leaving a partner, securing own health, and trying to bring help from climbers in the base. This article is an essay on which choice is the most appropriate one.

Let's recall a story of one of the first and most epic Himalaya expeditions. It was 1934 and the majority of the world highest summits was not conquered yet. The technology, as well as the equipment were much worse than today. Especially the methods of weather forecasting.

However, a group of experienced German climbers decided to climb the Nanga Parbat(8126m). The ascent went well, and the weather conditions were decent. Finally, Germans were preparing for the final summit



[http://off.sport.pl/off/1,111379,16310475,AFP\\_\\_Masakra\\_na\\_Nanga\\_Parbat\\_nie\\_byla\\_planowana\\_\\_Chodzilo.html](http://off.sport.pl/off/1,111379,16310475,AFP__Masakra_na_Nanga_Parbat_nie_byla_planowana__Chodzilo.html)

attack. They were convinced that they are going to see clear sky at night, and later sun during the day. In fact, they found themselves in a terrible situation. An unexpected weather breakdown trapped the team at a very high altitude. The leader of the team Willy Merkl got stuck in a tent with a Sherpa (local guide, who is helping during climbs). The Sherpa was in a good condition and could try to descend on their own; however, he decided to stay with Willy, who was already suffering from altitude sickness. After nine consecutive tremendous days of blizzard, three members of the team and six Sherpas were dead. After few years, another Nanga Parbat expedition found Willy's body under snow. He was covered with the Sherpa, who until the end tried to warm the dying leader. This tragedy is a good case to study on. Nonetheless, we have to remember that after almost 90 years it is easy to draw conclusions. The

emotions of the climbers, as well as their uncertainty about the weather conditions might be easily bypassed. Trying to understand the decision of the Sherpa we can assume that he could have risked waiting with Willy in the tent, because he could have been hoping that the snowstorm will quiet down. From our perspective it is obvious that the Sherpa should take the chance of descending and bringing help from the bottom of the mountain. In such scenario at least he would survive. But in the Sherpas point of view there were many questions without answers. He did not know how long the bad weather will continue, as well as he could not have been sure about the safety of his lonely descent. Today also the knowledge about the effects of lack of oxygen at a high altitude is much more advanced. Scientific research states that in the death zone (above 8000m) human body is able to survive 3 days. Therefore, if an accident happens at this height, it is recommended to give the partner medicines (which thin blood), leave him in the best possible conditions, and then try to bring help. Otherwise, it is most likely that on such altitude both climbers will die during their joint descent. Undoubtedly, following this recommendation would be the best decision in this particular situation.

Most of climbers have a goal to conquer as many mountains as possible, or even complete the seven summits (it means reaching the highest summit on every continent). Rarely it is so that one is fascinated by one mountain and is coming back almost every year to climb it. Tomek Mackiewicz was such a climber, whose life motto was "I prefer to live

five minutes like a lion than ten years like a fly”. He was crazy about Nanga Parbat (8126m). His ultimate objective was to reach the summit



of this mountain during winter season. He tried to reach this feat 7 times; however, the eight try was not possible for him anymore. His last, seventh

## Tomek Mackiewicz

Source: [http://off.sport.pl/off/1,111379,16310475,AFP\\_Masakra\\_na\\_Nanga\\_Parbat\\_nie\\_byla\\_planowana\\_Chodzilo.html](http://off.sport.pl/off/1,111379,16310475,AFP_Masakra_na_Nanga_Parbat_nie_byla_planowana_Chodzilo.html)

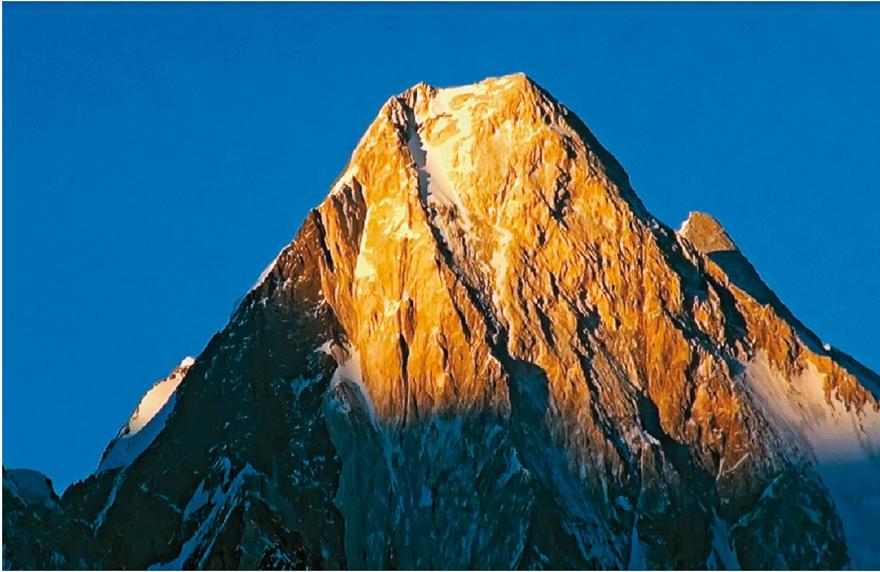
expedition ended terribly. He joined forces with a French

climber Elisabeth Revol for the fourth time on Nanga Parbat so far. The climb went surprisingly well. Although Nanga Parbat is not a very high 8-thousander, it is extremely hard to climb especially during winter season. After few days of ascending in extraordinarily hard conditions, Tomek and Elisabeth reached the summit! From this moment the nightmare began, the nightmare of descending - the time when the most accidents in mountains happen. After putting much effort to reach the summit, a climber is exceedingly fatigued, dehydrated often also affected by the symptoms of altitude sickness. In such conditions an accident is most likely to happen. Soon after they started their way down, the weather worsened. A real fight for survival began for Elisabeth and

Tomek. After a few hours it turned out that Tomek had been in a terrible condition. He suffered from multiple frostbites, and snow blindness. He could not continue the descend on his own. Elisabeth helped him to go down up to 7200m, but at this point she was on the verge of exhaustion as well. She realized that if she continues helping Tomek, they will probably both die due to hypothermia and exhaustion. She decided to leave Tomek in a glacial rift and continue alone. Soon after she was able to call for help with her satellite phone. Elisabeth was lucky, she couldn't have a better rescue team. At the same time a national Polish winter expedition on K2 (8611m) took place, headed by Adam Bielecki, and Denis Urubko. The Polish team received the information about the accident on Nanga, and immediately prepared themselves for the rescue operation. 4 acclimatized climbers were transported with a helicopter on 4900m at the foot of Nanga Parbat. They were lightning fast. After only 8 hours of night-climb, with the temperature dropping to -60 Celsius degrees, they ascended 1000 meters and finally met Elisabeth. The rescue of Tomek was impossible, because the weather was getting worse and worse. Although eventually it was impossible to save Tomek from death, all possible actions have been done. Polish climbers admitted that if Elisabeth was even slightly higher, they couldn't have been able to help her. Therefore, in my opinion Elisabeth decision was fully justified. Choosing this option gave her and Tomek the best chance of survival.

Broad Peak (8051), a beautiful, but at the same time unforgettable mountain for Poles. 6 Polish climbers have died trying to conquer it. The

story of Maciej Berbeka is one of the most touching and emotional. An elite climber, who was the first human to ever bypass the boundary of 8000 meters in mountains during winter. He had uncleared bills with Broad Peak since his first expedition there in 1988, when he had to give



up the climb 12 meters before the summit. 25 years later, at the age of 59 he decided to try on time. He was intrigued by this challenge, as Broad Peak has not been

## Board Peak

Source:<https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/ludzieistyle/1580479,1,broad-peak-cien-wielkiej-gory.read>

climbed yet during winter.

Berbeka was an alpinist, who

adhered to the principle of the ‘brotherhood of the rope’. It means that he would never leave his partner alone in mountains, it was his character. In winter 2013 the polish Broad Peak expedition leaded by the legend of mountain climbing Krzysztof Wielicki started. Media cover around this ascent was massive. Poles were waiting for another immense success of their nation in the highest mountains of our globe. On the fifth of March 2013 an information about four climbers reaching Broad Peak summit for the first time in winter spread around the world. Berbeka was amongst them. The celebration of this huge success began too early,

because the climbers haven't descended safely yet. Broad Peak is known for its long ridge; therefore, during the descent climbers had to do a long traverse on a high altitude, before actually going down. The first climber was on the summit 40 minutes before the last. This caused the spread during the descent. When two of them went down safely to the camp, the

other two were still fighting for their lives on the slopes of Broad Peak. Berbeka with his companion Tomek were still up there.



Tomek was

running out of energy;

Source: <https://facet.onet.pl/maciej-berbeka-zycie-i-jego-tragiczny-epilog-pod-broad-peak/2e23j62>

Maciej Berbeka

Berbeka was slightly ahead of

him. It is believed that when Berbeka saw that Tomek stopped on the mountain pass, he decided to wait for him. The details about what exactly happened next are limited. What we know for sure is that they were descending the whole night a distance one could pass in one hour. They didn't have a tent to shelter in. In the morning for a moment Berbeka was seen descending; however, there was no trace of Tomek. Soon both men were considered lost. There are a few speculations about organizational issues of the expedition that could have been a direct reason of this tragedy. The first is that there was a serious problem in

terms of communication in the team – two-way radios were not working properly during the summit attack. Two climbers were much ahead of the rest of the team, and it is considered as a result of miscommunication. Furthermore, there are opinions claiming that the team started the attack too late. Those two faster climbers are often accused of not being sensible enough. What about Berbeka? He was a very experienced climber. He knew that in mountains you shouldn't bite more than you can chew. Despite that, he probably decided to stay with his partner, and this costed his life. In my opinion the only mistake he made was stopping for a while, not moving at all. As mentioned before, it has to be avoided in when the temperature reaches -40 degrees. If he had felt powerful enough to make a step back and check what happened to his partner, it wouldn't have been a bad decision in my opinion, as it was more probable that they would survive the night together than separately. The other option is that he wasn't physically strong enough to help his friend, and the only argument, which made him choose this option was his 'mountain codex'. This decision would be then unreasonable. It was 2013, the team had good quality walkie-talkies. Berbeka could have informed the base, and other climbers what the situation was. For unknown reasons he did not do that; furthermore, there was no communication with him during most of the climb.

The main conclusion which I, being at the beginning of the mountaineering path, may infer from the above analysis is as follows. The most important action to perform for climbers in crisis situations, is

to most accurately assess the situation. There are several most decisive aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Most important are: altitude on which the accident happened, weather, what happened to the partner, own condition. After considering those, a right decision, and then action must be conducted. In my estimation the decision should be made through brain, not heart. It should be as objective as possible. Probably there is no one correct receipt how to behave in mountains. Every case is different. Although eventually the choice should give the greatest chance for both climbers to stay alive.



Source: <https://www.thomsontreks.com/kilimanjaro-experience/kilimanjaro-facts/>