

# **GASHERBRUM II EXPEDITION 2008**



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## INTRODUCTION

In the Balti language, Gasherbrum, or “Gras Brum” means a shining or beautiful mountain, which is an extremely appropriate name for a range of mountains that are noted for the beauty of their profiles and the luminosity of their limestone summits at dusk.

Gasherbrum II, rises to 8,035m above sea level. When deciding on an expedition to undertake, first of all I looked for a mountain that was within my capacities and skills, given that it would be my first 8000m mountain. My first option was Cho Oyu, as it is said to be a good first 8000m peak, but due to the problems in Tibet and China, I had to change and decided instead to go to the “shining or beautiful mountains”.

I have a long and difficult task ahead of me. Between now and the end of July, there will be a lot of hard work to overcome all the hurdles in my path, nevermind the three unseen gods of the mountains, snow, wind and cold.

The journey begins on the 2nd June when I go to Buenos Aires. From there, I fly to Pakistan via London on the 7<sup>th</sup> June to join the expedition in Islamabad. The expedition proper starts on the 15<sup>th</sup> June with an 8 day trek through the Braldo Valley and via the Baltoro Glacier, until we can set up base camp at 5300m. From there I have to progressively ascend the mountain, moving equipment and my camp to Camp I at 5900m, Camp II at 6700m and Camp III at 7150m. And then finally, I will hopefully reach the summit towards the end of July.

Mendoza is Argentina's mountaineering centre and is also an important mountaineering and winter sports centre on a worldwide level. Therefore the participation of a “mendocino”, a native of Mendoza, in this expedition reflects well on the city.

To date, the expedition has the necessary permits, visas, flights to Pakistan, the land transport, and is practically 100% self-financed, but due to the difficulty in organising of an expedition of this magnitude, there are still things pending, for which the expedition is seeking sponsorship. The cost of the expedition is in the order of \$36000 Argentinian pesos (£6000), which is a considerable amount, given the level of incomes in Argentina.

The expedition has the support of the Argentinian newspaper *Ámbito Financiero*. The editor has committed to publish news of the expedition and to publish an article at the end of the expedition, which will include mention of sponsors. Therefore I can offer my sponsors the opportunity to appear alongside the expedition reports and publicity after the expedition.

The progress of the expedition will be reported regularly on the internet.

## THE PROJECT

My ideas about this project evolved time whilst I was in Aconcagua during the last expeditions of the 2007/08 season. Having climbed in the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the mountains of Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Argentina, I began to think about “a greater” mountain. I said to myself: “It is time to go to other mountains”. I thought about two expeditions to McKinley (Alaska) and Kilimanjaro (Africa). But due to the cost, I had dismissed the possibility of a “great mountain” in the Himalayas or the Karakoram. But once I started working out the budget for these two expeditions, (McKinley and Kilimanjaro) I still felt restless and started to wonder if it would be possible, in economic terms, to climb a mountain of this type. Thus I started to investigate the possibilities and I found that, with some effort, I could undertake a 8000m project.

And now it is almost time for the project to become a reality. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> June, I will leave Mendoza to undertake an expedition to Gasherbrum II in the Karakoram, Pakistan.

## THE MOUNTAIN

All the mountains in the world over 8,000m are in Asia. There are 14 of them in the Himalayas and Karakoram ranges. The Karakoram mountain range is in the north-west of Pakistan and the south of China, and is 450km in length and between 100km and 150km in width. Its eastern end is in the territory disputed by India and Pakistan, Kashmir.

A third of the surface of the Karakoram is covered by the most extensive glaciers on earth outside of the polar regions. The longest one is the Siachen which is 70km in length. But the 58km wide Baltoro Glacier, which we will cross, is the most impressive, because the Karakoram has the densest concentration of high mountains on the planet, and in the High Baltoro area, four of the 14 8000m peaks can be found within a few square kilometers - K2 or Chogori at 8611m, Broad Peak or Falchan Cangri at 8047m, Gasherbrum I or Hidden Peak at 8068m and Gasherbrum II or K4 at 8035m.

Gasherbrum II straddles the border between Pakistan and China, with its southern slopes in Pakistan and its northern slopes in China. Located at 35° 45 North and 76°39 East it is part of a chain of peaks that form a horseshoe. The Gasherbrum group consists of six summits among which Gasherbrum I, which was initially known as K5, is the highest. Gasherbrum II, initially known as K4, is known for its pyramid shaped summit, and Gasherbrum IV is known for its graceful trapezoidal summit. The group is close to K2, which is why the region was first explored.

Gasherbrum II's summit was not reached until the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1956, the year in which an expedition organised by the Austrian Himalayan Society first explored what is now considered to be the normal route. Fritz Moravec, the expedition leader who would give name to the route, Sepp Larch and Hans Willenpart reached the summit after setting up base camp in the confluence of the Abruzzos and Gasherbrum glaciers, Camp I at the end of this glacier at the foot of what would be known in the future as the “Moravec Spur” and three more camps along this spur. The summit would not be reached again until 19 years later in 1975 by a French group. The first Argentinians did not arrive until the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2006, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first summit. They were Juan Pablo Terrado and Darío Brácali.

## THE ROUTE

The ascent begins from the base camp at 5,400m which is in the central moraine of the Abruzzos glacier next to its confluence with the South Gasherbrum glacier. The ascent route has three distinct parts:

### ***I- Base Icefall***

To get to the base of the route up Gasherbrum II, you have to first traverse the small icefall outside of base camp. The route is maintained and marked by the expeditions that are on the mountain, as there are cracks, projections, lagoons, glaciers and avalanches in the slopes, and other obstacles that can change as the result of the movement of the glacier.

Camp 1 is very close to the base of the SW ridge, at just under 5900m. The normal traverse time is around 7 hours, but this decreases considerably with acclimatisation.

### ***II - The Moravec Spur***

The Spur is a well defined ridge of snow with a steep glacier to the right and crevasses of snow and rock to the left. The route swings between the snowy slope and the arête, looking for the easiest way. The slope is very steep (more than 60°) and is one of the more exposed sections and you gain altitude quickly between Camps I and II. Camp II is at 6,450m on a large sheltered ridge, and Camp III is sited at just under 7000m, just above and to the right of Camp II, at the top of the same spur and is also relatively well sheltered area. There are fixed ropes all the way along the spur which not only help the ascent but also mean you can get back down again quickly in case of bad weather. Once acclimated, with these fixed ropes, the time between each one of the camps is about 3 to 4 hours.

### ***III - The Summit***

From Camp III it is necessary to continue along the arête to 7.400m under the perfect pyramid summit. Sometimes Camp IV is set up here, to facilitate a safe descent. From here it is necessary to make one long diagonal traverse across the smooth snowy slopes of snow, below the summit pyramid, to reach the east ridge. This is at an altitude of 7750m. From here there is a slope that though steep, presents few difficulties, apart from the final steep rocky 50 meters, and then we reach the summit.

## ORGANISATION

In order to climb a mountain like this, a lot of things have to be put in place – all the logistics to get to the base camp, contracting Sherpas, buying internal air tickets and the 4x4 transfer, food, getting the expensive and difficult permits etc, but thankfully companies exist to do these things for you. In the end I chose a North American company, Field Touring, as they can organise everything as far as base camp. After base camp, I will be depending entirely on my experience and capabilities to capitalise on and take advantage of whatever conditions I meet on the mountain, in order to get to the top.

## **VISA**

I have already sent all the required documents to the Pakistani embassy in Buenos Aires in order to get my visa, and I will go to collect my passport and visa on the 3rd June.

## **PLANNING**

The most important aspect of this type of expedition is to anticipate and prevent problems arising, and this starts in the early stages of the expedition organisation, with the medical examination, the vaccinations, the training plan, the choice of equipment and the acclimatisation programme.

## **PREPARATIONS**

As the preparations continue, and the date approaches, the list of things to do seems to increase exponentially. This makes me feel anxious which doesn't help, but I am trying to keep calm.

## **MEDICAL TESTS**

It is important to have a number of medical tests as I want to start this expedition in the best possible condition and so I need to be aware of my capabilities and level of fitness. The test programme was designed by, controlled and evaluated by a competent professional.

In addition to this, I am taking medical test equipment with me so that I can continually assess how I am adjusting to the altitude – equipment to measure my blood pressure, the level of oxygen in my blood, my temperature and my level of acclimatisation.

### **Cardiac Stress Test (Exercise Electrocardiogram)**

Carried out by Dr Pablo Senatra, to evaluate the health and strength of my heart during physical exercise. Carried out on 14/11/07

### **Echo-Doppler Evaluation**

Carried out by Dr Pablo Senatra, to evaluate my blood flow and therefore the health of my heart, with a view to preventing possible complications.

### **Dental examination**

Tests and treatment carried out by the dentist Pablo Mussuto.

### **Other examinations.**

Test programme decided upon and evaluated by Dr Alberto Ribas.

Blood test

Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate (ESR) Test  
Blood sugar test  
Renal analysis  
Liver analysis  
Urine test  
Ultrasound of the abdominal cavity

## **VACCINATIONS**

I have had the following required vaccinations:

Hepatitis A 16/05/08  
Typhoid 16/05/08  
Polio 16/05/08  
Yellow Fever 2001, valid for 10 years  
Hepatitis B 2001  
Hepatitis B Booster 16/05/08  
Japanese Encephalitis pending, not available in Mendoza

## **TRAINING**

You have to be in the best physical shape possible to climb an 8000m mountain. I was looking to improve my aerobic capability, i.e, my resistance during prolonged physical exercise. Therefore I have been concentrating on my aerobic training and also my gym training in order to strengthen my muscles, such as those in my back, around my spine, my abdomen and my legs. I have also been training by mountaineering. This season I completed 7 commercial expeditions to Aconcagua, 5 of which made it to the summit, and so through these, my body will have some measure, some memory, of acclimatisation. I have also had to alternate my training with periods of rest in order to regain the weight lost during these 7 expeditions and to rest my body.

## **FIRST AID KIT**

Gasherbrum II is one of the highest mountains in the world and the approach to base camp from where the ascent begins is through hostile and isolated country, where the medical and sanitary conditions and the potential for an organised rescue are low, and in some places, non-existent.

I will have access to Field Touring's medical kit up until base camp, but thereafter I have to be self-sufficient, and so I am carrying my own medical kit containing:

Aspirin - 1 box  
Antibiotics – various  
Vitamins – 1 box  
Dexametasona – to be bought in Islamabad  
Diamox – to be bought in Islamabad  
Nifedipine – to be bought in Islamabad

# GENERAL STRATEGY ON THE MOUNTAIN

On these large mountains, it really makes sense to work as part of a team, and it pays off too. Up until base camp, it appears that Field Touring will co-ordinate everything and smooth my way through the bureaucracy that is associated with an expedition and a mountain of this scale. After base camp, everything is a bit more uncertain as I will be on my own, with all the advantages and disadvantages that come with that. Only one person has to take the decisions and one person can sometimes proceed more quickly and be more flexible. I won't be using supplementary oxygen during the climb. From base camp onwards, it will be a solo, alpine-style expedition. I will also be doubling up on equipment so that I do not need to dismantle one camp before setting up the next one.

## ITINERARY

Day 1: 2<sup>nd</sup> June: Depart Mendoza for Buenos Aires  
Day 2-5: Obtain visa in Buenos Aires  
Day 6-7: Journey to Pakistan  
Day 7: 8<sup>th</sup> June: Arrival in Islamabad  
Day 8-10: 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> June: Preparation in Islamabad  
Day 11: 12<sup>th</sup> June: Visit to the Pakistani Ministry of Tourism  
Day 12: 13<sup>th</sup> June: Flight to Scardu or overland to Chilas Scardu (8-10 hrs)  
Day 13: 14<sup>th</sup> June: Transport in Jeep to Askole (8-9 hrs.) height 3,000m  
Day 14: 15<sup>th</sup> June: From Dumordu to Jhola (8-9 hrs)  
Day 15: 16<sup>th</sup> June: Trekking to Paiyu (7 hrs)  
Day 16: 17<sup>th</sup> June: Free Day in Paiyu to acclimatize.  
Day 17: 18<sup>th</sup> June: To Khuburtze (5-8 hrs) 4.000m.  
Day 18: 19<sup>th</sup> June: To Urdukas (4-5 hrs)  
Day 19: 20<sup>th</sup> June: Goro II Glacier 3-4 hrs. 4.500m.  
Day 20: 21<sup>st</sup> June: Concord 5-6 hrs  
Day 21: 22<sup>nd</sup> June: Gaserbrum II Base Camp 6 hrs.  
Day 22-47: 23<sup>rd</sup> June – 18<sup>th</sup> July: Ascent of Gasherbrum II  
Day 47-53: Between 18<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> July: Return to Askole and transfer to Skardu.  
Day 53: 24<sup>th</sup> July: Flight to Islamabad or in jeep to Chilas  
Day 54: 25<sup>th</sup> July: Free day in Islamabad or in Jeep from Chilas to Islamabad.  
Day 55-63: Between 26<sup>th</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> August: Tourism in Pakistan-India  
Day 64: 4<sup>th</sup> August: Flight from Islamabad to London  
Day 65-93: Between 5<sup>th</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> September: Cycle-tourism in England, Ireland, Spain  
Day 94: 3<sup>rd</sup> September: Return to Buenos Aires  
Day 95: 4<sup>th</sup> September: Return from Buenos Aires to Mendoza.

## FLIGHTS

British Airways

6<sup>th</sup> June Buenos Aires – London

7<sup>th</sup> June London - Islamabad

4<sup>th</sup> August Islamabad - London

3<sup>rd</sup> September London - Buenos Aires

## EXPEDITION MEMBER

### Ignacio Javier Lucero (Nacho)



National mountain instructor, Argentina

AAGM Guide (Argentine Association of mountain guides)

More than 16 years working on Aconcagua

Languages: Spanish, English, French

### **Ascents**

#### ***Argentina***

Aconcagua 6962m - 33 summits by different routes

Tupungato 6800m

Mercedario 6770m

San Francisco 6100m

Plata 6000m - Nacho was the first person to snowboard down Plata

More than 30 mountains between 3000m and 6000m

#### ***Chile***

Ojos de Salado 6891m

Villa Rica 2847m

#### ***Peru***

Toquiaraju 6036m

Chopicalqui 6354m

Urus 5430m  
Ishinca 5530m

### ***Ecuador***

Chimborazo 6310m  
Cotopaxi 5897m  
South Iliniza 5263m  
North Iliniza 5216m

### ***France***

Mont Blanc 4810m

### ***Spain***

Aneto 3404m  
Almanzor 2592m

## **EQUIPMENT**

- Four season tents
- Medical kits
- Radios
- Fuel and equipment for cooking and heating
- Snow shovel
- 6 snow stakes
- 2 technical ice axes
- 1 mountaineering ice axe
- 2 climbing ropes, 50m long
- 1 descendor
- 6 Spirit Express
- 1 solar panel to recharge batteries

### **Clothes**

- Warm hat – wool or synthetic
- Balaclava in polypropylene or capilene
- Face Mask
- Baseball hat or similar to shade eyes
- Lightweight underwear including leggings – polypropylene or capilene
- 2 pairs liner socks – polypropylene or capilene
- 3 pairs of heavy wool or synthetic socks.
- Fleece jacket or top
- Jacket with fleece or thermal lining and hood
- Waterproof, breathable jacket with hood e.g. Goretex.
- Fleece trousers or thermal overalls
- 1 pair nylon pants for trekking or around camp
- 1 pair nylon shorts – running shorts or other quick dry type
- 1 pair hard shell pants – waterproof, breathable with full side zips – Goretex or equivalent
- Overboots or Gaiters
- 2 pairs of thin gloves – fleece or polypropylene
- 1 pair of mittens, fleece or thermal

- Goretex outer mittens with reinforced palms.
- Plastic bags to keep clothes dry.
- Clothing to wear in the cities.

### **Footwear**

- Trekking shoes
- Mountaineering boots – double plastic
- Trainers
- 1 pair sandals

### **Sleeping Gear**

- Expedition quality sleeping bag rated to at least -30oC
- Sleeping pad – neoprene or Thermarest
- Bivi bag

### **Backpack**

- Backpack with an internal frame - 110 litres.
- Smaller rucksack – 45 litres
- Two large strong bags in which to transport all the equipment, with secure fastening – each 25kg weight when full
- One small duffle bag for leaving any belongings in the city

### **Miscellaneous**

- Lip balm of SPF 20-40 – 2 off
- Sunscreen of SPF 30-40
- Glacier glasses – 100% UV protection with side shields
- Contact lenses and prescription
- Headlamp with spare bulb and batteries
- Pocket knife – Swiss Army type
- Personal first aid kit
- Personal toiletries
- 2 water bottles – 1 litre, wide wide mouthed
- Thermos – one litre
- Cooking and eating equipment
- Water purification – iodine tablets or Polar Pure crystals, or a water purification filter
- Bottle for urine
- Hand wipes
- Camp towel
- Ear plugs
- Favourite snack foods – small amount
- Paperback books, cards, mp3 player
- Binoculars
- Camera
- File containing travel documents
- Passport
- Airline ticket
- Money, credit card, ATM card or travellers cheques
- 3-4 large plastic bags to keep belongings dry
- Nylon stuff sacks for food and gear storage

## OTHER EVENTUALITIES

**Evacuation** in helicopter, if required, from base camp. If necessary, there is the option to be evacuated by Field Touring, with the costs incurred being reimbursed to them within 30 days.

**Oxygen** - I am not intending to use supplementary oxygen for the ascent. If it does become necessary, for any reason, it is available at base camp.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

Pending

## COSTS OF THE EXPEDITION

(in Argentinian pesos, approx £1 = \$6 ARG, €1 = \$5 ARG)

Logistic, Transport 4x4, Sherpas, Base camp service, food, climbing permits, hotels.	\$19680
Flights	\$ 7962
Land transport	\$ 280
Hotels not included above, 3 nights	\$ 480
Vaccinations	\$ 313
Food and fuel for 15 days at higher camps	\$ 1400
Equipment still to purchase	\$ 3000
Miscellaneous	\$ 1000
Travel insurance	\$ 1800
Helicopter rescue	Not included
Supplementary Oxygen	Not included
<b>Total of the expedition</b>	<b>\$35915</b>

## OUTSTANDING EQUIPMENT

Overboots  
Goretex overalls  
Gas and benzene (two required)  
Lenses  
Mittens  
Descendor  
Quilted jacket  
First Aid kit  
Some toiletries  
Suncream protectors  
Hand warmers  
Freeze-dried expedition food  
Vaccination for Japanese Encephalitis  
Travel insurance  
Bivi bag  
Small camera small

## **PUBLICITY**

The most important variable in all this, is whether the expedition will succeed or not. Even though just embarking on this type of adventure is a personal achievement in itself, the success of an expedition is normally measured by whether or not you reach the summit and descend safely again. The interest in photographic records, articles in newspapers and magazines, and audiovisual presentations depends on this type of success. When it comes to getting sponsors, a sponsor who has been part of the expedition from the start, rather than giving support after the event, will, of course, get a better deal.

I already have the support and commitment of the Argentinian newspaper, *Ámbito Financiero*. They have agreed to publish news of the expedition, as well as a complete report at the end, and there will be space available alongside these reports for sponsors.