

Cool: Speed climb and successful ski down Gasherbrum II

After a fast ascent the two extreme mountaineers Benedikt Böhm (29) and Sebastian Haag (27) from Munich and members of the Dynafit – GORE-TEX® team reached the peak of the 8,035 m high Gasherbrum II in Pakistan for the second time in one week.

The Idea

For the two ski mountaineers no form of transport is more enjoyable or smooth than travelling by ski both in climbing and descending the mountain. With this motivation, the two guys advanced to the peak of the 13th highest mountain in the world, the 8,035 m high Gasherbrum II. The basic idea was to move a ski touring race to the highest mountains on earth. A daring and dangerous mission, no more than a handful of ski mountaineers have managed to successfully ski down the steep ice passages of this gigantic body of ice and rock.

Obsessed with speed, the two Munich mountaineers decided to go for speed during the second ascent. That meant going from Base 1 to the summit without pausing at the higher camps. A normal expedition would mean climbing Gasherbrum II in 4 to 7 days. Benedikt Böhm, Sebastian Haag and the guide Luis Stitzinger, were back in Base 1 within 17 hours. Base 1 lies at an altitude of 5,900 m.

The First Ascent

It was the 29th July. After the usual time-consuming acclimatisation the two guys from Munich were ready to storm the summit for the first time. They started out at midnight from Camp 3 at 6,900 m. From this point they had 1,135 m left to climb.

Dangerous Territory

With overhangs of up to 50 degrees and passages lined with icicles that could only be crossed with the aid of ice picks and crampons, it was impossible to proceed on skis. Back in Base Camp Böhm later said "while we were climbing, we thought skiing down would be out of the question". After 8 hours hard work, they were finally standing on the summit of Gasherbrum II. It was 8 am and the sun was beaming down. However the difficult descent on skis presented them with the greatest challenge yet on this expedition. As they crossed a narrow ridge there was a dramatic drop of 1,000 m on each side. From there it was a journey through steep passages of ice and wind-blown overhangs. A high level of concentration was essential because "a fall here would mean the end for certain" said Haag after the successful conclusion of the expedition.

Descent without ropes

The extreme skiers travelled 2,500 m in altitude from the summit to the renowned ice break 500 m above Base Camp without once taking off their skis or abseiling. Only a few mountaineers can count this excellent achievement among their successes. Böhm and Haag then had to struggle through ice and slush, all the time coping with the other trying conditions associated with these high altitudes.

Speed climb with obstacles

On the night of the 3rd August the mountaineers prepared for the speed climb with Luis Stitzinger, the leader of the expedition. The stop watch started ticking shortly before midnight. After just 6 hours the sportsmen passed Camp 4 at 7,500 m. In such a short time they had managed to complete three quarters of the way to the top. At this point they were taken by surprise by a 50 cm fall of snow. In bad weather and after a couple of diversions due to restricted visibility they reached the summit after a further six and a half hours of tough climbing.

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For the second time the ski mountaineers were facing the challenging and dangerous descent. The conditions were certainly less favourable than the first time and they had to fight their way down on tightly compressed snow. The danger of an avalanche was ever present as the sportsmen skied past glacial cracks as high as skyscrapers that were disintegrating in the bad weather. "You had the feeling that the mountain was opening up slowly and melting away" said Böhm. After a further four exhausting hours they were delighted to reach Camp 1. Made it! They had done it by "fair means", in other words without stores along the way or the support of high camps. All they had with them as supplies were 15 power gels and two litres of water.

Ideal Equipment

The prerequisites for such an undertaking are not just physical fitness, great technical skills and skiing ability. On expeditions such as these, the equipment also plays a pivotal role. With continuously changing weather and the extremely low temperatures found at altitudes of over 4,000 m, both the equipment and the skiers are put to the test. Sponsors Dynafit and GORE-TEX® provided the team with absolute state-of-the-art materials. "We are delighted with the equipment supplied by our sponsors. We couldn't have done it without the very best gear", said Benedikt Böhm.

Dynafit-Gasherbrum Skis

The skiers were using the new Dynafit-Gasherbrum II skis that were designed specially for conditions on Gasherbrum II. A very light wooden centre as well as special shaping give the skis optimum hold on steep slopes and are suitable for varying snow conditions. The product specialists at Dynafit were very well prepared. "The bar is high when you send your athletes and friends into dangerous territory with a lightweight ski. But with experience, passion and collaboration with all sides, we have created to an unbeatable product" according to Reiner Gerstner, Brand Manager and Head of Development at Dynafit Skis.

The new high altitude mountaineers

Using both speed climbing and successful ski touring on Gasherbrum II, Benedikt Böhm and Sebastian Haag represent a new generation of high altitude mountaineers. With the support of their extremely light and state-of-the-art equipment they have shown that you don't have to stand on top of an 8,000 m summit wearing a thick down jacket.

Better performance by using the best materials is absolutely essential for success in Karkorum. This is what gave the two young ski mountaineers the edge to go beyond the limits and fulfil their dream on Gasherbrum II.

"Where surfers go to Hawaii to get the ultimate kick from the big waves, skiing down the Gasherbrum II is the ultimate challenge for ski mountaineers" said Böhm upon arrival in Base Camp.

Mammut/GORE-TEX® European Outdoor Film Festival

The experienced ski mountaineer and owner of the film production company "Tierras de Adventura" Xavier Campos from Grenada in Spain accompanied the two extreme skiers in the Karakorum mountains and stood with them on the top of the 8,000 metre high colossus. His impressive film footage is part of a documentary about the two sportsmen from Munich produced by "Moving Adventures Medien Ltd." and premiered at the Mammut/GORE-TEX® European Outdoor Film Festival

See www.eoft.de for screenings in Germany

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Name: Sebastian Haag
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Occupation: Vet

Extreme skier, member of
Dynafit- GORE TEX® Team



Name: Benedikt Böhm
Age: 28
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Member of German Ski Mountaineering team,
member of Dynafit-GORE TEX® Team
Sporting successes: 5th place in the German Cham-
pionship in Ski Mountaineering 2004 and 2005

