



## American-European expedition to the Tibetan 8000 meters high mountain Shisha Pangma

Karsten König, professor at the Saarland University and CEO of the laser medicine company Jenlab GmbH, climbed on October 1, 2009 the top of the Tibetan mountain *Shisha Pangma* (8012 m). The ascent was the goal of a five-week American-European expedition ([www.summitclimb.com](http://www.summitclimb.com)) under the guidance of the well-known US American Daniel Mazur. Other members were Alejandro Fernandez from Spain, Bart Dirven from the Netherlands, Richard Pierse from Ireland, the Greek urologist Haris Kiriakakis as well as the Sherpas Jangbu and Gyalje, the cook Kipa and the Tibetan Chumey. The German camera assistant Marcus Lauterbach joined the team for some days.





*The participants Karsten from Germany, Bart from Holland, Haris from Greece, Alejandro from Spain, Dan from USA/UK, Richard from Ireland, Jangbu, Gyalje and Kipa from Nepal, Chumey from Tibet and the trekker und camera assistant Marcus from Germany.*

Other expeditions were also present on the mountain of the *Shisha Pangma* at this late summer period including about 50 professional Tibetan climbers and Spanish groups. Among them the world-best 8000 m peak climbers Juanito Oiarzabal (22 successful climbs) and Ederne Pasaban who had the chance to become the first woman to climb all fourteen 8000 meters high giants. The *Shisha Pangma* could be number 13 for her. Unfortunately, she did not succeed. Other climbers at this time on the mountain were Italians, two Swedish women, the US photographer Nick Rice, the Polish alpinist Kinga Baranowska, 18 French climbers with two medical doctors among them and Andrew Lock. Within the next days, Andrew had the opportunity to become the first Australian who managed to climb all 14 peaks over 8000 m. Unfortunately, not everybody would leave the mountain alive.

The *Shisha Pangma* is the smallest but the most seldom climbed mountain among the fourteen giants. The first ascent happened in 1964 by a Tibetan-Chinese expedition that included 195 persons. Ten of them reached the summit. The second ascent was in 1980 by Germans. Many times, the Chinese Communist authorities closed the mountains for foreigners such as in 2008 due to the uprising of the Tibetan population and the Summer Olympic Games. Nowadays the access to Tibet is nearly impossible due to the 50th anniversary of the escape of the Dalai Lama.



*The Shisha Panama: The rarely climbed number 14 under the 14 giants higher than 8000 meters.*

More than 2000 kg of luggage were transported by trucks from Kathmandu over the Nepal-Tibetan border to the 5000 m high base camp (Chinese camp) with stops at Zhangmu (Dram, 2300 m), Nyalam, the 5050 m high pass Yakri Shongla and Tingri in September. 28 Yaks brought finally the whole equipment to the snow-free advanced base camp (ABC) at 5600 m altitude. Diesel generators and solar power stations as well as a dining tent, a shower, and a toilet tent were available. Everybody had his own tent with a thick mattress. At this time the temperatures were warm +17°C during the day and -10°C at night at this comfortable campsite.



*Hundreds of woman and some men carry the luggage over the car-free „friendship bridge“ which combines Nepal with Tibet.*



*Hotel in the Tibetan town Nyalam (3750 m). Police and army are always present.*



*Tingri at 4340 m altitude.*



*28 Yaks transported more than 2000 kg of expedition luggage.*



*Base camp at 5000 m and walk to the Advanced Base Camp (ABC).*



*ABC in the glacier valley with its thousands of seracs.*



*Buddhist ceremony (Puja). Half camp at 5830 m.*

A further camp (half camp) was used at 5830 m near the end of the valley with its thousands of séracs (towers of ice). The further ascent required special equipment including ice axes and crampon. It took two hours to traverse the glacier. Afterwards the steep climb started to the camp I at 6360 m. Members of other expeditions reported the first accidents such as broken ribs and symptoms of high altitude thickness. Daniel Mazur injured his leg. Marcus became altitude sick. Also Karsten König was diagnosed with lung edema. He had to stay alone in camp I with emergency oxygen over night and climbed down to the ABC the following day. Fortunately, the diagnosis was not confirmed.



*Traverse of the glacier with the amazing séracs. Camp I at 6360 m altitude.*



*Camp I. Emergency oxygen and walkie-talkie. Crevasse between camps I and II.*

The typical temperature in camp II at 6900 m were  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  at night. Two steep climbs and one large crevasse had to be crossed on the way.

All expedition members had good oxygen saturation levels in their blood after several ascents and overnight stays at camps I und II and following rests at ABC. We were ready to start to climb the summit. We arrived at half camp on September 27, the camp I the next day, and camp II on September 29 with excellent weather conditions. Camp III at 7430 m was reached after some steep climbing passages in the afternoon of the last September day. The night was short. We started shortly after midnight covered with thick down suits, headlamps, and with oxygen masks for most of us. We passed the „gendarme“, the significant rock that seems to control the entrance to the region of the summit. Slowly the sun rose. All climbers with oxygen arrived at the 8012 m top around 7 o'clock. The sherpas arranged prayer flags and Karsten König placed a coin from the Saarland („Saartaler“) and an ensign of the science city Jena in the snow of the summit.. Finally Bart reached the Central Summit (8012 nm). We had a perfect view and nearly no wind and we could see the 8000 m peaks Mount Everest, Cho Oyu, Makalu, Kangchenjunga, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri. We were only 100 meters away from the main peak at 8046 m, however, we did not try to climb due to the significant danger of avalanches.



*On the central summit of the Shisha Pangma at 8012 nm altitude.*

The stay at over 8000 meters was short, followed by the dangerous descent. Many accidents occurred on the way down. Bart weakened to a point where he could not go on any further and collapsed. He received emergency oxygen and went short-rope down to camp III where we arrived around 1 o'clock. We decided to continue further down. In the afternoon we reached finally the "corridor" at 7000 m altitude. The most difficult climbing areas were behind us. However, our strength had diminished and we had run out of water. We started to eat snow and willed ourselves to continue in the direction of camp II. At sunset all of us except Bart arrived at the camp. The sherpas started to search for him. Shortly after midnight he was finally found and rescued. Bart had lost his sense of direction as well as major equipment, but most importantly - he was doing OK. Within the next two days all of us reached the ABC ....

There the yaks were waiting for us. Dan had "booked" them by satellite phone. It took us five hours to reach the base camp. The yaks needed eight hours. Three weeks ago the yaks made this way from the base camp to the ABC much faster than we climbers who were not adjusted to the high altitude at the time. Shortly after our arrival at the base camp, the jeeps arrived. We were leaving the Tibetan plateau with an amazing sunset on one side and the full moon on the other side. The border town of Zhangmu was reached at night. The next morning we crossed the "friendship bridge". Eight hours later we had a nice dinner including a huge steak, beer, and Tiramisu followed by a hair cut and long phone calls to our families and friends in Europe. On October 8, the Lufthansa plane arrived Frankfurt.

Currently, there is still a lack of sensitivity in the fingertips and toes as well as blood pressure irregularities and problems with the ability to focus the eyes. There is an "out-of-body" sensation and a heightened need for calories and sleep. The adjustment from Tibet to Germany seems to require time ....

It was the second ascent to the top of the *Shisha Pangma* for Karsten König. Twenty years ago, in October 1989, he escaped from East Germany in the direction to the East in order to realize his dream to climb a mountain higher than 8000 meters and to move finally to the Western part of Germany. His route took him through Siberia, Mongolia, and China to Tibet and later to Ulm in West Germany. Finally in May 1990, he and his East German friend Reinhardt Tauchnitz managed the successful ascent to the 8012 m top of the *Shisha Pangma* with homemade equipment, no permit, and without oxygen. They were the first and simultaneously the last mountaineers from East Germany who climbed a peak higher than 8000 meters. The German Democratic Republic (DDR, "East Germany") ceased to exist in October 1990.