



Afsaneh Hesamifard immortalizes her ascent to Nanga Parbat, also known as the "Killer Mountain," by posing for this photo atop the peak and the clouds.  
● IRNA



Afsaneh Hesamifard points to a flag that she planted on top of Mount Everest, the tallest mountain in the world, in May 2022.  
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way. But I tried never to let these limitations get in the way of my dreams. I deeply believe that dreams know no borders, and that women possess a unique energy — one that, when they tap into, can help them clear any obstacle from their path.

**Climbing such a number of high and dangerous peaks has surely come with countless memories. Which of these ascents have stuck with you the most and turned into truly memorable experiences?**

Each of the 14 eight-thousanders holds its own special set of memories for me — some tough, but most of them sweet and unforgettable. Yet, the climb up Everest stood out as both a major goal and the kickoff for this ambitious project. Standing on top of the world fills you with an incredible feeling. My ascent of Everest taught me that if I stick to a steady routine, train properly, and keep at it with patience and determination, I can even make it to the world's highest summit.

The second remarkable climb I should mention is K2 — a mountain many Iranian women had long dreamt of conquering. Several had even set out for it, including the late Leila Esfandyari, who tragically lost her life in July 2011 on Gasherbrum II.

In fact, K2 and the uniquely wild landscape of Pakistan put my determination and efforts to a real test — one I eventually pulled through. The next special peak for me was Nanga Parbat, better known as the "Killer Mountain". I must admit I feared it from the start, but with practice, hard work, and drawing on the experience of those who had climbed it before me, I managed to summit it without difficulty. The memory of that ascent will always stay vivid as the route was extremely challenging and the weather bitterly cold at that time. Still, those hardships pushed me to go beyond my limits and gave me stronger faith in myself.

Finally, during the climb up Cho Oyu, I faced entirely different weather conditions. We had a heavy snowfall, with snow piling up to more than two meters. Knowing it was the last peak of the project, I felt something very special — as if I had finally reached a place of stillness and complete success. That climb means a great deal to me and will always stay ingrained in my mind.

**Since you've just returned from summiting Cho Oyu, could you tell us more about how that ascent went?**

Climbing Cho Oyu was indeed a unique experience. According to the plan I had laid out, I was supposed to wrap up the 14 eight-thousanders project in the fall of this year. But when I went to Nepal to get my visa, I ran into serious problems. Due to the revolution and regime change in Nepal, the political scene had turned tense, and China's visa wasn't granted easily. I really had to hustle to get it, and at the very last moment, I finally succeeded and set off for China.

As I reached base camp, severe weather hit the region. Heavy snowstorms struck, and almost every team gave up hope of making the climb. Two meters of snow, freezing winds, and white-outs at high altitude convinced many that summiting was out of the question. But patience often pays off in the mountains. After waiting in the base camp for the weather to ease up, our team went ahead with the climb, and I managed to reach the top of my final 8,000-meter peak.

**When you're trapped in snow, blizzards, and biting cold, do you ever feel fear or hopelessness creeping in? Have you ever thought of the worst in those situations?**

Climbing the 8,000-meter peaks always comes with its dangers. Anyone who thinks everything will go smoothly and there will be no risk is living in a dream world. It's not always like that. Climbing the peaks where oxygen is scarce, the cold is severe, snow is endless, and avalanches are always a threat, surely comes with its own set of dangers. Many times, I felt danger breathing right down my neck. On Nanga Parbat, Kangchenjunga, and Annapurna, I faced life-threatening moments when disaster was only a step away. Still, none of these risks ever made me back off, question why I was there, or decide that I should let go of my dreams. I always believed that by pushing harder, I could move things forward and take a positive step toward my goal.

Twice, I had to turn back due to harsh weather, but I later went for it again and succeeded. Of course, the mental and emotional support from my friends and family helped me get through the roughest conditions and make it to the top.

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For women in Iran, especially those stepping into adventurous and high-risk sports, there have always been particular obstacles. Early on, my family's resistance was the main challenge. Social constraints, along with judgmental views about a woman's capacity, also stood in my way. But I tried never to let these limitations get in the way of my dreams. I deeply believe that dreams know no borders, and that women possess a unique energy — one that, when they tap into, can help them clear any obstacle from their path.



Iranian mountaineer Afsaneh Hesamifard rests under a blanket in a tent during harsh weather at one of the world's highest peaks.  
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**Now that you've conquered all the world's towering peaks, has that affected your motivation to keep climbing?**

It's understandable if some people think that after scaling all 14 of the world's highest summits, I'd have no goal left and might feel a loss of drive. But quite the opposite — I feel like my work has just kicked into gear. Ending the 8,000-meter project doesn't mean the end of my mountaineering world. I plan to carry on in two directions: first, to pass down my experiences to younger climbers, which is something deeply meaningful to me and a path that I must definitely pursue; and second, to embark on new climbing projects. With proper sponsorship, I aim to put Iran back on the map of global mountaineering.

**As you implied, climbing must be financially demanding. How have you managed to cover the costs? Does the Iranian government support you?**

Mountaineering is indeed a pricey sport. At the beginning, the fi-

nancial burden — permits, flights, gear, and logistical support — was what really held me back from higher ambitions. I never received government funding, and my early climbs were entirely self-financed. But from the third ascent onward — starting with K2 — I was backed by a strong sponsor, Vita-biotics, a company with a progressive view of sports and women's capabilities. Their support helped me speed up the project and bring it to fruition much sooner.

**How long do you think you can keep climbing professionally?**

Most sports have an age limit, meaning that you can keep pursuing them up to a certain age or until you meet certain conditions. However, mountaineering is one of those disciplines where, if you can keep yourself in shape, you can continue well into older age. This year, I met an 86-year-old man who successfully summited one of the eight-thousanders. To achieve such feats, one must train constantly and scientifically to stay on top of physical fitness and take on the mountain's challenges.

My hope is for Iranian women in mountaineering to build up a strong, safe, and enduring movement. Our women must truly believe in their own potential and realize that no wall is too high for human will.



Afsaneh Hesamifard rests in a tent on Dhaulagiri, the seventh-highest mountain in the world at 8,167 meters.  
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