

## Dignified burial sought for Aussie climber at K2

Matthew Eakin died on July 25, 2022, on his descent from the summit of K2, the world's second highest mountain, in Pakistan. It's unlikely the exact circumstances of his death will ever be known, but he fell on the Abruzzi route and was found just a few metres above Advance Base Camp.

Matt was found by two men, and just after they left to get help a small avalanche struck and buried him. Over the following two days, teams attempted to dig Matt out of the snow and ice, but despite their very best efforts were unsuccessful at that time. Matt remains buried, but his location is well known.

An expedition is now being organised from with climbers from Australia and Canada to attempt to find Matt and bring him home. "A very generous group of Matt's close friends has offered to go to Pakistan to attempt to retrieve him, so that he may be buried with respect and dignity", explained Matthew's sister, Danielle Bonnington.

"Usually following an avalanche, a deceased person's location is unknown. But in this case, Matt's location is known, and the geography of that location means that his body can't move far from where he was found. Given this, we have an opportunity to retrieve and bury him with dignity, rather than risk the possibility of snow melt uncovering his body sometime in the future. Our family, understandably, doesn't want this for Matt," Ms Bonnington added.

"If it is safe for members of a search team, we believe that all climbers who die in the mountains while pursuing their passion should have a chance to be found and buried, to ease the grieving process for families and friends. Our family is incredibly humbled by the offer of Matt's friends to help to lay him to rest with dignity. We know their offer to help reflects their love for him.

The small team plans to head to Pakistan over a 3-week period in February 2023. This is when it is expected that conditions are most optimal and safest. Matt's location has been marked by GPS so the chances that he can be found are high. The team also plan to use a ground-penetrating radar to improve those chances even further.

"As far as we are aware, this type of operation to retrieve a loved one several months or years after the incident, has only been carried out on very rare occasions in the history of mountaineering. Deceased climbers are often left on the mountain where they died if they aren't recovered straight away," Ms Bonnington said.

K2 is located in the Karakoram region of Pakistan. It is an isolated area in the north-east of the country, bordering China. The operation won't be an easy task. Just trekking to K2 Base Camp from the nearest village will take 7 days as there are no roads.

Funds raised will help to pay for the trekking permits, local trekking operator fees, flights, and hire of equipment needed to help recover Matt. Matt's family has advised that any funds raised that aren't used for the expedition will be donated to the Black Dog Institute.

**About Matthew:**

Matthew grew up on a farm at Cumnock, in central west NSW. He has family connections in Orange and Gilgandra. He spent his high school years at Red Bend Catholic College, Forbes, and St Joseph's College Hunters Hill. At university, he studied law and finance and was a highly regarded business tax lawyer in Sydney.

Matt was an avid adventurer and lover of the outdoors, getting his adrenalin hit through mountain biking, skydiving, BASE jumping, and rock and high-altitude mountain climbing.

Matt was also the co-founder of Mountaineers Down Under, an online community with over 3000 members aiming to connect Australians passionate about climbing.

Matt was particularly passionate about high altitude mountaineering, and successfully climbed and lead expeditions in Nepal and Pakistan over the past eight years.

Among the mountains Matt successfully summited are K2 8611m (Pakistan), Broad Peak 8051m (Pakistan), Manaslu 8163m (Nepal); and Cholatse 6501m (Nepal).

Matt was a much-loved son, brother, uncle and dear friend, with a zest for life like no other. He lived life to its fullest.

"We have been left with a massive Matt-sized hole in our family," Ms Bonnington said. "The tributes and immense outpourings of grief from his friends and communities he was involved with has helped us realise the impact his life had on so many people right across the world. He considered these friends his family too. His death has left a hole in their worlds too."

**Key points:**

- Family would like burial rather than risk Matt's body being uncovered through snowmelt.
- Matt's final location is known, and his body is unlikely to have moved.
- Matt's family want him to be buried at the base of K2, alongside his team-mate who was killed in a separate incident.
- Six of Matt's closest mountaineering friends will make the attempt to retrieve him, led by alpinists experienced in the Karakoram region.
- Team members are from Canada and Australia.
- A retrieval operation of this kind is rare in the mountaineering world.

**For more information or to organise an interview please contact:**

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