



## AAC Publications

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### Artur Hajzer, 1962–2013

Artur Hajzer, one of Poland's best high-altitude climbers from the "golden age," was killed while retreating from Gasherbrum I on July 7, 2013. He was 51.

Born on June 28, 1962, in the Silesia region of Poland, Artur graduated from the University of Katowice with a degree in cultural studies. His interests in music, history, and art remained important throughout his life. He started climbing as a boy and soon progressed to increasingly difficult routes in the Tatras and the Alps, in both summer and winter, in preparation for his real calling: Himalayan climbing. He joined the Katowice Mountain Club, along with the likes of Jerzy Kukuczka, Krzysztof Wielicki, Ryszard Pawlowski, and Janusz Majer.

His Himalayan adventures began at the age of 20, with expeditions to the Rolwaling Himal, to the Hindu Kush, and to the south face of Lhotse. Although the Lhotse expedition was unsuccessful, it was the beginning of his climbing partnership with Jerzy Kukuczka. Together they did the first winter ascent of Annapurna in 1987, a new route up the northeast face of Manaslu, and a new route on the east ridge of Shishapangma. Artur climbed seven 8,000-meter peaks and attempted the south face of Lhotse three times, reaching 8,300 meters on the formidable face. He even concocted a plan to climb all 14 8,000-meter peaks in one year, a scheme that was foiled by Pakistani officials when they refused him the required permits. Artur proved he was more than a climber when he organized the massively complicated "thunderbolt" rescue operation on Everest's West Ridge, a disaster in which five members of a 10-member Polish team were killed.

When Jerzy Kukuczka was killed on Lhotse's south face, Artur stopped climbing for 15 years. Instead, he went into the outdoor equipment business with Janusz Majer. But eventually Artur returned to the mountains, and in 2010 he launched an undertaking that would occupy the rest of his life: the Polish Winter Himalayan Mountaineering Project 2010–2015.

Under the leadership of Andrzej Zawada, Polish climbers had dominated winter climbing in the Himalaya up until 1988, by which point they had made seven first winter ascents of 8,000-meter peaks. Three more 8,000ers fell between 2005 and 2011, but not to exclusively Polish expeditions. Artur decided to finish off Zawada's mission by climbing the remaining 8,000ers: Nanga Parbat, Gasherbrum I, Broad Peak, and K2. To accomplish that dream, he began nurturing a cadre of keen Polish alpinists, providing a bridge between the "golden age" climbers and the young ice warriors. They succeeded on Gasherbrum I and Broad Peak, and were preparing for more. Although he was harshly criticized for accidents and deaths in the revamped winter program, he was equally admired and valued for his leadership, his energy, and his revitalization of Polish Himalayan climbing.

Just as they had 24 years earlier for Jerzy Kukuczka, the Polish climbing community gathered with family and friends in the Katowice cathedral to pay tribute to this multi-faceted man: high-altitude climber, businessman, family man, author, and mentor. Artur Ma?ek, who summited Broad Peak last winter, reflected: "I think the most important lesson to be learned from Artur Hajzer is the Gasherbrum one.... It was his last lecture on high mountains. People die in the mountains, even the best ones." It was common knowledge among the Polish climbing community that Artur's dream was to lead a team to the summit of K2 in winter. Now it will be up to someone else to fulfill that dream in his memory.

Bernadette McDonald

## Images



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