



LAPTOP * BGAN * PHONE * SOLAR * BATTERY * WEBSITE
3.9 kg \$3,999
8848 HighSpeed



[everest] [K2] [oceans] [poles] [space] [tech] [weather] [statistics] [medical] [SPANISH]


 SEARCH

- Home
- Latest News
- Expedition List
- Web TV
- Navigation
- Everest Survival Kit
- The Dream
- Point Zero
- Ground Work
- People
- Surviving
- Oxygen
- The Climb
- Links
- Mountain Tech
- Community
- Newsletters

ExWeb interview with Joao Garcia, "K2 summit push was like a game of poker"

05:13 am CDT Apr 23, 2009
(MountEverest.net) In May 1999, Joao Garcia summited Everest north side without supplementary oxygen. 2 hours later Joao went down and brought Belgian mate Pascal Debrouwer back with him to the top. The triumph turned into a disaster on descent; when Joao separated from Pascal on the second step.

Joao spent the night in the open, and the next day tried to search for Pascal with emergency oxygen he had fetched in C3. Still without O2 (as Pascal had the only mask and regulator) and severely frostbitten Joao didn't make it far and his friend was lost.

This was only the beginning of Joao's hardship in high Himalaya, where he is currently attempting the snow-loaded and highly avalanche prone Manaslu. With 11, 8000ers summited Garcia is Portugal's most accomplished Himalayan climber and ExWeb caught up with him in BC for a chat.

Here goes the first part of the interview, about past expeditions, friends found and lost to the mountains – and the scars they left.

ExplorersWeb: *How's Manaslu? You guys were first to reach BC hoping to be done by April 18. Now work has forced Jean-Luc Fohal and Johan Perrier back home. Will you be alone for the remains of the climb or will you hook up with others such as Pauner and Co?*

Joao Garcia: There's lots of snow on Manaslu this spring. I noticed there was almost no snow during the winter so while some people say we came too soon, I dare say we came too late...

Yes, I have been climbing alone but on summit day I will climb with other teams like the Russians, Spanish, Italians... some of them know me and some are friends so being alone does not really exist here...

ExplorersWeb: *How do you feel about Everest now, ten years later, and how are your injuries today? Are they affecting your current climb?*

Joao: I feel great, very happy to have survived, but of course I wish I had my hands back! Before Everest I was a multi-climber, strong in rock, alpine and Himalayan climbing. My hands are no longer good for difficult rock but I can keep doing what I like most, alpine- and Himalaya climbing and I think that that this is one of the most important things in life - to be happy.

Pascal was a sad lesson, one that it is impossible to forget, but it was also positive in the sense that I know I did my best at the time to help someone, a friend in need. It feels good on my conscience, even having people on the radio telling me: 'Joao come down, you can not do anything for Pascal'.

Some years later I did another "stupid" climb, at midnight to help another climber in need after my summit day. It was hard and no one else came along... when I got to him he was delirious but now he is alive and I feel good about it again.

ExplorersWeb: *You climbed Kangchenjunga with Ecuadorian Ivan Vallejo in 2006; you both described it as one of the most beautiful summits of your lives. How come? Could Manaslu prove a rerun?*

Joao: Kangchenjunga is a beautiful story. At the start of the expedition I had to bring a Portuguese friend with appendicitis to Kathmandu. 10 days later, after his surgery, I returned to BC were all the others were ahead in acclimatization.

I tried to summit with them but couldn't and soon found myself abandoned in BC. I



"For self protection, I tend to make fewer friends in the mountains - I was not like that before!" Joao Garcia on Manaslu earlier this week (click to enlarge).



"Kangchenjunga is a beautiful story." Joao's Kangchenjunga summit picture with the Portuguese flag. (Click to enlarge).



"By now there were only the two of us climbing. We were both strong and motivated, and did all the tracks ourselves in the soft snow." Image of Joao carrying bamboo-sticks to mark the route on Kangchenjunga (click to enlarge).



"Accidents happen in these great mountains because they are very dangerous..." Joao in Manaslu's BC, hoping to turn Manaslu into his 12th 8000er (click to enlarge).



P50 CHARGE LAPTOP FROM SOLAR!

thin film solar
SolarBlazt

RENT ME!
Iridium Globalstar Thuraya
from \$170/month

HIGH ALTITUDE PACKAGE
EVEREST

THURAYA
SOLAR BLAZT FEATHER

HEAT





"In the end, it was a great international cooperation but until C4 I was so mad about the other teams' bluffing," Joao says about K2 in 2007. Image of Garcia leading climbing mate Jean-Luc towards Manaslu's C1 some weeks ago. All images courtesy of Joao Garcia/SIC.pt blogs (click to enlarge).

phoned a friend in Kathmandu who "bought" BC food for me and sent it with Ivan and Fernando. I kept doing my acclimatization and was determined to keep climbing alone if needed as the last of the season on the South side.

The Spanish/Basque summit attempt was unsuccessful due to bad weather. Coming down the team informed me that Ivan was waiting for me in camp 2 for another try. By now there were only the two of us climbing. We were both strong and motivated, and did all the tracks ourselves in the soft snow. It was very hard physically and in addition route finding on that mountain is terrible; no ropes, no sticks - nothing but our strong conviction that we could do it. Turning by a big rock we noticed that we still were very far from summit. "What do you think," Ivan asked. I said nothing but continued, exactly the response Ivan wanted, I think!

Manaslu could never become a second Kangchenjunga, it's too crowded right now. It could have been if it was just me and my climbing mates or the Korean team with whom I have already collaborated going to C1, C2 and C2+ (6800m). Or in the last stage, if everyone goes home and I endure to stay until May 22nd for a final summit push...

Related Links

- [Previous on Joao](#)
- [Joao's website](#)
- [Joao's Manaslu expedition blog /SIC.pt](#)

ExplorersWeb: *Later that fall (after Kang) you lost your climbing mate Bruno Cavalho on Shisha, descending from the summit he fell only 500 meters above high camp. What happened and how do you cope with the triumphs and disasters of high altitude mountaineering?*

Joao: It's difficult to cope with accidents involving good friends. Bruno was another such case and only he knows what happened... we just found him right there, lying in the snow. Bruno was really a great guy, we had much fun climbing in Portugal, Pumori, Ama Dablam and then on Shisha Pangma...

ExplorersWeb: *Do you think that after a few losses mountaineers become less sensitive?*

Joao: Maybe some do but it's the opposite for me. These accidents sometime make me wonder whether it makes sense to keep climbing... I haven't got less sensitive but for self protection, I tend to make fewer friends in the mountains - I was not like that before!

ExplorersWeb: *You climbed K2 in 2007, in the remarkable joint international summit through the Abruzzi ridge. It wasn't without complications; a young Italian perished on descent and his team was later criticized for lack of involvement. What happened then and how do you feel about what happened on K2 last year?*

Joao: I can not comment on that; the Italian team should. The only thing that I would like to say is that accidents happen in these great mountains because they are very dangerous and that is precisely what young climbers are looking for...

The evaluation of the danger...when things go wrong we pay the consequences but when victims perish, it's the family who suffers. To me this was the big mistake of the Italian team; to try and hide or delay the news until Stefano's family had to hear it from other teams.

ExplorersWeb: *You were among the first down from the summit bid - how was your own K2 climb?*

Joao: You don't want to know... well, in the end, it was a great international cooperation but until C4 I was so mad about the other teams' "bluffing".

We had 3 days of good weather and planned to use the second of them to push for the summit. We intended to go to C4 on the first day but the snow was too soft. Only I, Amin and Chris with his friends were breaking trail so we had to improvise a C3+ below C4.

All the others (Russians, Koreans, Sherpas, and Italians) arrived one hour later. When they found that there was no more trail they left their O2 and other stuff and went back to C3 saying "we will come back when trail is made to C4!"

I couldn't believe it. This should have been our summit day in order to have another day of good weather for safe descent to BC. Instead, the five of us broke trail to C4 the next day and camped there. At this stage no one was speaking to anyone about their planned departure for summit that night - it was like a poker game.

I left about midnight and everyone was on their way. A Nepalese Sherpa fell a few hours later and the other Sherpa came back down. At this stage the Russians on O2 were in front and I have to say they did a great job putting the fixed line under the Bottleneck. After that, it's just enduring altitude for another 300 m, no big deal!

I knew this was our last day good weather so once I got back to the tent in C4 I called a friend (Vitor Baia) who had provided me with weather forecasts for some years. I asked him if the expected winds were confirmed and should I descend that night. He told me there was a delay of 12 hours but we should be below 6000 meters latest 6:00 am as 100km/h winds were arriving.

Fog and wind was already there when we left C4. I used my GPS to find C3 at times looking back to save my face from the wind. I noticed about 8-10 climbers behind me that didn't have a clue if even I knew where I was going!

There was a lot of snow and I could only recognize the slope where we had spent hours making trail. I also recognized the big serac above our improvised C3+. Just when I thought we were about to reach C3, my GPS battery died. To my surprise at this point the quite and scared people behind me were screaming of joy - we could see the tents of C3. We descended to C2 that same day, rested a while and reached BC three hours after that. By then the Russians seemed like different people, they hug me, gave me vodka to drink, snapped pictures... It was the only summit day on K2 in 2007.

Tomorrow part 2, final.

Portuguese Joao Garcia (born on June 11th, 1967) is currently climbing Manaslu. Should he succeed, he would only have Nanga Parbat and Annapurna to go, in order to complete the 14x8000ers list.

[Top Feature Stories](#)

[Latest News](#)

[more news](#)



LAPTOP * BGAN * PHONE * SOLAR * BATTERY * WEBSITE
3.9 kg \$3,999
8848 HighSpeed



[everest] [K2] [oceans] [poles] [space] [tech] [weather] [statistics] [medical] [SPANISH]



- Home
- Latest News
- Expedition List
- Web TV
- Navigation
- Everest Survival Kit
- The Dream
- Point Zero
- Ground Work
- People
- Surviving
- Oxygen
- The Climb
- Links
- Mountain Tech
- Community
- Newsletters

ExWeb interview with Joao Garcia, final: "Mountains are fair, only the committed get the top"

09:00 am CDT Apr 24, 2009
(MountEverest.net) Yesterday Joao told ExWeb how he, to guard himself from loss, makes fewer friends in the mountains these days. He spoke about his climb on K2 in 2007, and recalled sweet memories from Kangchenjunga.

In this second and final part of the interview, Joao talks from Manaslu BC how he discovered climbing on Mont Blanc at age 16, what he thinks about mountaineering in general, and the role of genes on altitude.



Joao's dramatic climb on Everest in 1999 was published in a beautiful limited edition comics book illustrated by Ricardo Cabral (click to enlarge).



How it started. Joao climbing a local granite crag in 1983 (click to enlarge).



A break on the way to Manaslu's C1. All images courtesy of Joao Garcia/SIC.pt (click to enlarge).

ExplorersWeb: Your Everest climb was published in a beautiful limited edition comics book illustrated by Ricardo Cabral. Will there be a K2 follow up?

Joao: A friend challenged me to turn my Everest story into a BD or comics book. The idea was mostly to allow kids to understand what happened to me on Everest, but I guess their parents loved the book even more than their children did... If I'm lucky to summit all the 14, 8000ers I may ask Ricardo Cabral to collaborate with me again.

ExplorersWeb: In your previous interview with ExWeb some years back you said, "I think there's a lot of cruelty on Everest – it is actually different on all other mountains... Everest is more than a mountain: It is a symbol of power. Therefore most people attempting to reach that summit are not true climbers; they are rich guys searching for a trophy to take home."

It sounded a lot like Inaki Ochoa, Juanito Oiarzabal and others - do you still feel that way and do you think that this is a general opinion among mountaineers, or just the view of a select few?

Joao: I don't know, I don't discuss these kind of things with other climbers. But one thing is certain, an increasing number of people trying Everest have never climbed a 7000 or 8000 meter peak before! And they are using artificial O2 more and more - these are just plain stats!

ExplorersWeb: You said that the problem with supplementary oxygen is that it provides an artificial aid which if something goes wrong with it, leaves the climbers with no resources and energy reserves to survive. How many of your own summits were without oxygen?

Joao: I never ever climbed with artificial O2! Simply because that's the way I want to climb: doing something superior and keep growing as a climber as well as a human being.

ExplorersWeb: You became the first Portuguese Everest summiteer, and last summer the first Broad Peak Portuguese summiteer. How many of your peaks were Portuguese firsts?

Joao: Cho-Oyu, Dhaulagiri, Everest, GII, GI, Lhotse, Shisha Pangma, K2, Broad Peak, 9 in total if I'm not mistaken.

ExplorersWeb: Portugal is fairly unknown as a high mountaineering nation; shadowed by one of the greatest: Spain. Why do you think that is?

Joao: I guess Portugal is a little behind for lack of organization and national representative. The Portuguese UIAA representative is a Camping Federation!

There are good rock climbers in Portugal; we have great natural resources along with nice weather. Which explains why we don't have a single climbing gym - not even one on 8 million people. At that same number in population they have about 200 in Belgium...

ExplorersWeb: So where do you go climbing in Portugal, and any cool treks you'd recommend? Btw, can people hire you as a guide?

Joao: Portugal is a great place to visit in general for its culture and tasty, Atlantic food. If you are a climber or simply a trekker, there are lots of places to go and things to do.



NET POWER 50
P50
CHARGE
LAPTOP
FROM SOLAR!

thin film solar
SolarBlazt

RENT ME!
Iridium
Globalstar
Thuraya
from \$170/month

HIGH ALTITUDE PACKAGE
EVEREST

THURAYA
SOLAR BLAZT
FEATHER

HEAT



I live close to Lisbon (Ed note: the capital and largest city of Portugal) where you have 2 or 3 good places for sports climbing or even classic rock climbs within 30 minutes. If you are looking for a big scenario, I would advise Serra da Estrela 300km NE of Lisbon where you can trek and climb nice granite. I don't guide anymore but I can recommend some good friends for the job.

ExplorersWeb: *Some climbers say they have a gene making it easier for them to endure altitude; have you tested for it?*

Joao: Well, yes and no... I did those VO2Max tests and other but they don't offer the maximum for what I do best - climbing at 8000m. While I may have some kind of a special gene, mostly I think that I'm fit because I have done lots of sports since childhood. I did triathlons when I was younger and worked as a guide for more than 10 years. Only in 2003 for instance I went to Aconcagua, Pumori, the Alps, Elbrus, Himlung Himal and Vinson - all in one year... such things make me fit I think.

Genes are not everything; take the children of my Kathmandu agent. They studied in KTM and then abroad. Now they can't climb half as fast as I can and they are Sherpa blood. Yak boys who didn't have the same chance could eventually become altitude Sherpas because they are fit. My theory is that the new generation of strong altitude porters is the Tamangs, Gurungs and Gurkas as they have minimum 15 years of hard training/hard work while most Sherpa children are in Kathmandu.

ExplorersWeb: *You seem to keep your sponsors over long periods; what is your advice for such long-term partnership?*

Joao: I guess that the many years of small television documentaries I gave to the Portuguese public at some point made me a credible publicity investment.

ExplorersWeb: *Have you suffered in the current economic downturn?*

Joao: No, on the contrary. My image has become even more important now to show the public that Millennium and I don't give up: that you can climb even the highest mountains with organization, hard work and passion.

ExplorersWeb: *You started using high-speed modems early. What are the pros and cons?*

Joao: No cons on the contrary, small is beautiful but so limited... the society wants more small films and nice pictures with less written text. The only thing about high-speed modems is that they are still limiting the quality size of the videos, but personally I can't complain. High speed modems are tools of the modern professional climber.

ExplorersWeb: *Should you succeed on Manaslu; which two tops are left and what's your plan for them?*

Joao: Although I summited the last 9, 8000m mountains in my first attempt I can't guarantee success on Manaslu which is also taking longer than I thought. Nanga Parbat will be next if I feel OK for it. I will try Annapurna in 2010. Carlos, Edurne and all the Spanish gang will be there and it will be fun for sure.

ExplorersWeb: *Any thoughts yet of what's next after you're "done"?*

Joao: I honestly don't know. I'll have to ask my body and my wife...

ExplorersWeb: *Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?*

Joao: Home and well! This is the most important in an expedition, to give your best and to come back home in one piece. The summit is only a bonus, the cherry on top of the cake!

ExplorersWeb: *You've set camp 1 and camp 2 on Manaslu, and made a carry to camp 3. What are the tricky sections and what is your biggest worry right now?*

Joao: I don't trust C2 for its avalanche danger. The way from C1 to C2 is full of ugly crevasses so I only keep a deposit there with less important gear. I will try to go back to C3 in the next days to sleep a night at 6800 meters and then go back to BC.

Vitor (my weather man) says that even though the air is dry the wind is still too strong on summit level. We will have to wait for a big front to arrive and push the jet-stream away. We have no idea when that will happen and this is the fun of it!

[Ed note: the interview was made over last weekend.]

ExplorersWeb: *What has been the most important lesson from the mountains and anything you would have done different in hindsight?*

Joao: I was 16 when I climbed for the first time. It was on Mont Blanc and I was with a climbing group of adults. I was the kid no one counted on but I summited before them and some didn't make it at all.

At that top I discovered that this is a fair job, a fair sport - where only those who commit and make a big effort succeed. Not those who are older, have more money or better gear! For more lessons, you'll have to read my first book!

Portuguese Joao Garcia (born on June 11th, 1967) is currently climbing Manaslu. Should he succeed, only Nanga Parbat and Annapurna would remain on his 14x8000ers list.

Top Feature Stories



Manaslu: ExWeb interview with Joao Garcia, "K2 summit push was like a game of poker"

Full Story



ExWeb series special: the search for Andrew Irvine, by Tom Holzel

Full Story



ExWeb 2009 sky-descent special: surfing down frozen giants

Full Story



Manaslu: ExWeb interview with Carlos Pauner, "you either win or lose; there are no ties here"

Full Story



Winter Makalu debrief interview with Denis Urubko, "we were in the right place at the right time"

Full Story

Latest News

[more news](#)

[Himalaya wrap-up: Manaslu summit push, Annapurna deserted, Everest Sherpas fixing the Lhotse face](#) Apr 24, 2009

ExWeb interview with Joao Garcia, final: "Mountains are fair, only the committed get the top" Apr 24, 2009

Manaslu: ExWeb interview with Joao Garcia, "K2 summit push was like a game of poker" Apr 23, 2009

Denis Urubko for new line in alpine style on Cho Oyu South-East face Apr 22, 2009

[Himalaya wrap-up: collapse in Everest Icefall, Nives & Romano moving to Kangchenjunga, climbers on Cho Oyu. Polish back to Nanda Devi East](#) Apr 22, 2009

The Search for Andrew Irvine: Q&A with Tom Holzel Apr 21, 2009

[Himalaya wrap-up: Minarik & Revol reach](#)