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This year, the Mountain and Travel Film Series celebrates its 27th edition in Andorra. The screenings and conferences take place from January 25 to March 29, 2023. One of the protagonists, Gonzalo Fernández, 30 years old, a Galician mountaineer, has been living in Andorra for more than 20 years. He will present a documentary «Manaslu, luces y sombras en el corazón del Himalaya», which follows his last year's film about the expedition to Gasherbrum II (8,035 m). He told us about his solo ascension without sherpes and oxygen to Manaslu mountain (Himalaya).

–Tell us about your last experience «Manaslu luces y sombras en corazón del Himalaya», your solo ascension without oxygen. How long did the ascension last?

–Manaslu is the eighth-highest mountain in the world at 8,163 m above sea level. It is in the Nepalese Himalayas, in the west-central part of Nepal. This year our expedition lasted a little over a month, and we continued the same climbing style as before - without sherpas and artificial oxygen. (Sherpas are Nepali people who live in the rural villages of the Himalayas and carry loads of gear for trekkers, climbers, hotels, and lodges. Porters can work 5 to 10 hours a day and carry weight from 10 kg to 100 kg using a namlo, which is a strap that rests on the front of their heads and around their load.

–This is your first solo ascent, right? What feelings do you have when in such extreme conditions you can only rely on yourself?

–Initially, we were a team of five people. After we experienced several problems, such as injuries or team members struggling to acclimatise, I went to the summit alone, which was a really hard test on a psychological level. When I was alone at extreme altitudes, the truth is that in my case, I forgot about fear and tried to focus on my «mission.» It was to try to get to the top and come down unharmed. Although this year I couldn't reach the top.

–What did the rest of the team do? Were they waiting for you at the camp?

–The rest of the team was scattered. Two girls attacked another summit, Lluís Cortadellas was injured and another teammate waited for a later window of good weather, which unfortunately did not come.

–The name Manaslu is derived from the Sanskrit word «manasa», which means «spirit» or «soul.» Now you know why?

–The inhabitants of the region of Tibetan origin gave the name, and in this region, almost everyone professes the Buddhist religion, which says that spirits live in high mountains. Actually, Buddhists have a quite curious outlook on life.



GONZALO FERNÁNDEZ

Gonzalo Fernández

Mountaineer

«It was a really hard test on a psychological level»

–A year ago, you told me about your ascent of El Gasherbrum II (8035 m). Manaslu has a height of 8163 m. Is that a noticeable difference?

–These 100 metres of vertical drop are not that very noticeable. The biggest problem was that the last camp was at a rather low altitude compared to the summit, which forced me to attack the summit from 6700 metres. This makes the

ascent very tough, especially if you are climbing alone.

–How did the acclimatisation process go?

–Acclimatisation was actually quite disastrous due to the weather. We always had bad weather with a high risk of avalanches. The acclimatisation technique is to ascend very gradually to set up high-

altitude camps and supply them with materials such as food and gas.

–How did you relax, where did you spend nights, and how and what did you cook and eat?

–At altitude it is always difficult to have a good rest, you always sleep and wake up with a slight headache. We always spent nights in loaded tents, and for cooking, we used

small primus with which we heated water, and prepared sublimated food. Freeze-dried food is naturally cooked food dehydrated at low temperatures in freeze dryers. You add hot water, and in a few minutes, everything is ready to be used.

It is a special food for expeditions to the mountains. And always supplemented it with ham and Pyrenean sausages.

–What were the most memorable moments of the expedition? I imagine it was more than super hard...

–One of the hardest moments was when we arrived at 6000 metres feeling very tired and saw that a heavy snowfall destroyed our tent, forcing us to set up a new one in the middle of a snowstorm. It was the worst night in the mountains of my life.

–What do you need to take with you from the material on such an expedition to the mountains?

–Hehehe... The truth is that for 8000, you need many things, but the most important thing is a big dose of motivation and caution because mistakes can be made all the way.

–What was the budget for the expedition?

–It was around €10,000, which is a

fairly cheap price since people who usually take sherpas and oxygen can pay €25,000.

–They say that the main thing is not to climb the mountains, but to come back home. Do you agree that the descent is more difficult than the ascent?

–The great Austrian climber Kurt Diemberger says that eight thousand belong to you only when you return to camp. Until you return, you belong to them. Without a doubt, the real challenge is not in the ascent, but in the ascent and calculation of forces for the return to camp.



«Eight thousand belong to you only when you return to camp. Until you return, you belong to them»

–You have participated in various expeditions, races and solo bike tours and experienced more than one extreme adventure. Tell us about the most interesting (routes and details).

–Throughout my life, I have made quite a few unusual trips, such as a solo bike ride from Portugal to Bosnia-Herzegovina. I did this every year, travelling for two or three months, each time starting where I left off the year before.

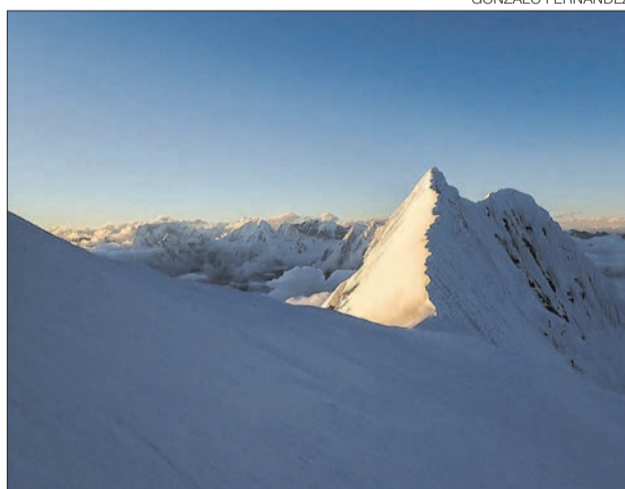
I participated in many races, but the most beautiful and difficult was Euphoria at 233 km and a positive vertical drop of 20,000 m. It was five days of very hard work, day and night, but during this time, I made very good friends.

I climbed several times in North Africa (Atlas Mountains), where there were ascents in the Caucasus, both from Russia and from Georgia, climbed the peaks of Nepal, and went mountaineering in the



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mountains of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania.

There are many mountains that I need to visit, but I have very little time and a limited budget to carry out these plans. But I can't complain.

What are the plans for next year? What do you dream about?

I am now working on a new expedition with a good friend, who is the reference for the Andorran Himalayas. But I can only say that it would be the biggest and most dangerous challenge I would have ever faced! =

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