

Face to Face

A MAGAZINE SUPPLEMENT
TO THE EXHIBITION
ABOUT SLOVENE WOMEN
ALPINE CLIMBERS

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*Female
Courage!*



Did you climb your first pitches with men or women?



Irena Mrak and Mojca Švajger on their first expedition to Gasherbrum II, 2004, personal archive

► **Irena Mrak:** I climbed my first pitches with Andrej Zaman. There were no exclusively women's expeditions because there were also men looking after the logistics in the base (guides to the base, porters, the cook...) On the mountain it depends. I personally operated in a female rope team only with Mojca Švajger, which was always a more than good experience. Some of my experiences with men in a rope team were also good, others less so.

► **Marija Štremfelj:** When I started climbing there were very few women climbing, it was the guys who taught us our early pitches. If any of our male alpine climbing colleagues noticed that they could climb with you, they would take us along and teach us the basics at the same time. I soon also started climbing with my sisters Barbara and Joži (for example in 1977/78 – the first female repeat of the *Velebitaška* route in Paklenica).

► **Maja Lobnik:** I started off in the male company of 'experienced' alpine climbers from the TAM climbing section. We were caught by a storm, more like a weather front, and by the night, so it was all even more dramatic. I remember I even climbed with my hand in plaster 😊.

► **Aleksandra Voglar:** In the early nineties where my climbing roots reach, it was mostly the men who climbed at our club. Most participants at the climbing school were also men. We girls followed the boys, but

I soon managed to turn that the other way. I wanted to climb more and more.

► **Sanja Vranac:** I completed my first ascent with Ines and Peter. We all started off in alpine climbing at the same time, we were in the same year at school, in parallel classes. We were connected both in the mountains and otherwise.

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** My first pitches were climbed in the company of men. I continued for quite a while to climb in rope teams with male colleagues. Not many girls were into alpine climbing at our section, especially not ones who would climb as the lead in a team. A really great experience when I was in a rope team with a woman for the first time was the first women's climbing camp in the Carnic Alps. Great stuff. The weather held as well 😊.

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** I began climbing with my father (the *Slovenian* and *German* routes on Triglav), then also in teams with other male climbers. It was only later that I managed to get girls who climbed in artificial walls to start climbing in natural ones.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** What I remember most are the boulders at Okrešelj that I would climb in the summer when my father Rajko Rojs (Rajč) would be on duty there with the Mountain Rescue Service team from Celje. This was before I went to primary school, under the watchful eye of older climbers who carefully observed our stretching and games.

► **Vlasta Kunaver:** Most people think that I began climbing because of my father [the alpine climber Aleš Kunaver, author's note], but that wasn't the case; I fell in love with an alpine climber. Father was in fact against it and had a prejudice towards women in alpine climbing. But half a year after I had enrolled on an alpine climbing training course, he once came into the room and said, "If you've made your mind up that you really will climb, I will help you." Later we climbed together a number of times. Our first climb was the *Bavarian* route in the North Face of Triglav. His first anchor point in our first pitch was totally unsuitable with a single peg. Without

saying anything I fixed it and from then on the belay points were as they should be. Father also no longer complained about women in mountains. A year before his fatal accident we also climbed the longest route in Europe, from Courmayeur to Mont Blanc. Father was very happy because he thought that he would no longer attempt such feats because of his age...

► **Lidija Honzak:** I did not start in a feminist way at all. I took my boyfriend (later my husband Janez Marinčič) and his co-climber a beer up to the top of the wall and hoped that he would take me climbing with him. And in winter I helped drag equipment from the starting point to the North Pillar in Šite. This 'timidity' and kindness of mine paid off later when I became more independent and began climbing in female rope teams. He supported me throughout. "Of course you can manage that route, no problem," he would often assure me and explain the details about the route.

Lidija Honzak, first climbing season, on the summit of Stenar, 1978, photo by Janez Marinčič





Monika's eldest son Grega climbing the *Long German* route in the North Face of Triglav, photo by Monika Kambič

► **Monika Kambič:** I mostly climbed with the girls and with my children.

► **Ines Božič Skok:** I climbed my early routes with male colleagues. In fact only the first few with men more experienced than me, then we started being foolish and climbed in rope teams with just enthusiasts and beginners. We were lucky that we survived this training period with little more than a few scratches.

► **Tina Di Batista:** To start with I climbed mostly in the company of men with whom we had been to climbing school together. I also had my friend Anja Brvar. Three years later I managed to persuade her and Mojca Žerjav to come to Denali with me and we were the first women to ski from the summit. That was also my first independent expedition.



Nastja and Tina on the summit of Fitz Roy, Patagonia, photo by Tina Di Batista

► **Nastja Davidova:** My first expedition was a women's expedition. In 2004 when I had just enrolled in my first year in Physiotherapy, Mojca Žerjav called me and invited me to an expedition to Fitz Roy. I felt I had to go, and accepted the invitation. Monika Kambič and Tina Di Batista, who was always my role model, also came on that expedition.

How is everyone's work on expeditions organised? Do you get to do mainly the tasks seen as 'women's jobs', cooking for example?



Irena Mrak in camp, personal archive

► **Irena Mrak:** Not at all – I always do everything! I dig snow to set up camp, put up the tent, cook... on expeditions gender does not come into it – if we want to succeed we all need to do everything, otherwise the expedition has no chance of going well.

► **Maja Lobnik:** No, not necessarily, the guys are just as good at slicing dried salami or adding a few things to a sauce (bacon, chilli...)

► **Sanja Vranac:** We had a cook on the expedition and a 'kitchen boy' as well, so we did not have to deal with any of that. In the end we did bake a cake though (or something that was supposed to look like a cake).

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** In camp or on a portaledge the men are surprisingly willing to take on the cooking and I am happy to leave that to them, occasionally making sure we have a few vegetables in our food (because they usually just cook pasta, and without salt 😊).

► **Staza Černič:** I never accepted any division of labour and this was why my fellow climbers saw me as their equal. Because I also liked climbing alone, there was not much need to worry about it anyway.

► **Mira Zorič:** I never saw it as a problem, if I had to, then I cooked.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** Andrej and I went mostly on expeditions 'on our own steam,' meaning we had no cooks or extra personnel. On such expeditions there

is no division according to gender, if you want to eat you need to cook, if you want to sleep you have to do something about it, and the dishes are cleaned by the one who didn't cook. Only once all the basic things are done can you start thinking about what to climb.



Andrej and Tanja Grmovšek in camp, personal archive

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** My experiences from climbing trips is that everyone does everything. It's not really a problem to cook some pasta. Here and there you get someone who is not a fan of vegetables and after a few days feels the lack of meat and grabs hold of the cooking spoon. There's usually more discussion about who will do the washing up. The guys are in charge of cold beer and opening bottles of wine. 😊

► **Ines Božič Skok:** All the expeditions I participated in were ones I organised myself, with my husband or a few friends, so I was never subject to any special treatment or even criticism. I was an equal member of the expedition and never felt any scruples about gender.



Ines Božič Skok with fellow climbers, personal archive

How do you experience expeditions with female participation only?

► **Maja Lobnik:** A special energy. I always first call my 'old' climbing mate Monika.

► **Sanja Vranac:** It's different in a girls-only company to a mixed group; different conversations, different pranks, different jokes... Each company is different, some are brilliant, others not so. I always felt well though because there were excellent people with us.

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** The energy in female rope teams is different; I can't say better or worse. There's usually more chatting, the backpacks are heavier because we tend to bring more 'rags' along with us.

► **Lidija Honzak:** Of course women's expeditions are different. For the Pamir we had to get ourselves a supply of tampons and sanitary towels to take with us beside the climbing equipment and high-altitude food. Male expeditions clearly don't have to take stuff like this with them 😊. I always liked to climb in female rope teams, we especially got on really well with Vlasta. Even when it was hardest we found something amusing or funny. Even now we laugh when we meet. Men *conquer* a peak, we women just climb to the summit. That's what I like most about female rope teams.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** I was part of female rope teams but on expeditions there were always some

men who came along; a mixed crowd at base camp is always welcome. I really liked climbing with other women. Perhaps the feeling I liked most was that there is no giving in, it all depends on you and your female companion. I had some really super co-climbers and in vertical walls we had numerous wonderful and sometimes also entertaining adventures. I am always amazed at how many incredible places and people you come to know through climbing.

► **Aleksandra Voglar:** I always wanted to be at least an equal member of a rope team. If anyone had other ideas, I just became more determined. In a female rope team our climbing day, route and expedition was always well organised. Details thought out and divided in advance. When the ascent began it was all just more spontaneous and entertaining, relaxed, un-competitive and equal.

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** I have great memories of female ascents. Not because of the difficulty, complexity, or the goals achieved but because of the stories, the process. First ascents, psychologically the hardest routes, unforgettable, unplanned and uncomfortable bivouacs with Marija Jeglič and of course the epic rock climbs with Maja Šuštar. They were my favourite rope teams, climbing with them was (and will always be) a real enjoyment.



Vlasta near Camp II during the Yugoslav women's expedition to the Himalayas. Without using high altitude porters, the women equipped a long and demanding ridge on Annapurna South. 1986, personal archive

► **Vlasta Kunaver:** In a female rope team there is no sense that in the event of not being able to do something, someone else will. I mostly climbed with Sandi and, even though we took turns in leading, Sandi was always the 'emergency exit.' Generally what is important in male rope teams is the achievement; the route should be difficult enough, you should be at least the first to climb a route or the fastest. Whenever I climbed with Lidija, what was most important to us was that we had a good time. I think there are numerous misconceptions about women wanting to compete with men. I have had a go at many adrenalin sports that are traditionally considered to be more 'male', from gliding, paragliding, diving, mountain biking... When Sandi and I kayaked across Lake Bohinj, he was concerned with how quickly we could do it, I enjoyed more the reflection on the water, the smell, the ducks. The same lake, the same route, but an entirely different experience.



The Pamir 1982 team, in front: Lidija Painkiher, Marija Štremfelj, Ana Mažar; standing: Marija Frantar, Irena Komprej, Irena Podbevšek, Lidija Honzak; 1982, personal archive

► **Marija Štremfelj:** We really had a good time when we went on the women's expedition to Peak Kommunizma in 1982, the atmosphere was excellent. We were closely connected prior to going and we functioned well together, also helping each other. We had a common goal and desire to reach it. All of us reached the summit apart from Marjana who unfortunately fell ill with typhoid. Mariča and I were already mothers at the time but we quickly adapted to the lively, still-single girls. Three of them really were the raw energy of the group, a real magnet for everyone in the camp. We were all the heart and soul of that base camp.

► **Ines Božič Skok:** I don't have experiences of women's expeditions but when it comes to female rope teams it was mostly a case of friendship and being tuned in with each other, gender was not prominent. Sanja and I climbed together a lot because we knew each other well and got on, climbing and everything else around us was fun. Later I completed a few climbs with Meta Meh and only one or two with other girls. I am an intuitive person, so to me the 'vibes' I got with the other person were always important. Even now I sometimes prefer to set off alone, which means that I have to choose an appropriate goal, cycling or skiing, rather than just go climbing in a team with anyone merely for the sake of it.

► **Nevenka Dolenc:** I never saw it as very different. Perhaps we took a more analytical approach.



Participants in the first Yugoslav women's expedition to the Himalayas, 1986

► **Mira Zorič:** I still hold dear to my heart the memory of the first Yugoslav women's expedition to Annapurna South (7219 m) in 1986. There were nine of us and we were on the expedition for two and a half months. Of this time we spent a month and a half at base camp. Due to the difficulty and length of the route that we wanted to climb (5 km of the SW ridge), the continuous bad weather (it snowed every day), and because we had no high altitude porters, we really had a hard time. We carried backpacks that weighed over 20 kilos. We were totally cut off from the world – the only connection was a courier – porter who came once a week from Kathmandu with letters from home with a month's delay. Understandably there was also some disagreement and dissatisfaction, especially at the end when we needed to make the decision to retreat from the mountain. But they were forgotten in the end. In Kathmandu, before returning home we all – as women would – went shopping and each bought ourselves a fur coat.

I also always enjoyed climbing in female rope teams, it always felt 'right.' It is all a little harder though and you need to take responsibility without relying on a 'man's help' at critical moments. That's why I see climbing in female teams as worth a great deal more.

What happens if you get your menstrual period during an ascent?

► **Marija Štremfelj:** In the era of wet wipes and sanitary accessories this has become less of a problem. On month-long expeditions it is inevitable that you will have to deal with menstruation and you have to adapt to it. When in base camp you are able to wash and keep things hygienic, on the mountain you have a special corner, a pocket, bags etc. where you can put things that need to be carried back down into the valley. Sometimes the stress of it all can even delay menstruation.

► **Monika Kambič:** During the main climb most of us seemed to menstruate (at least one if not two at a time). If the weather is right and the climb planned, there is nothing you can do, you have to set off.

► **Irena Mrak:** Stories about this could fill a book of considerable length; always at the highest camps, at the most impossible locations, unexpectedly... You need to not think about it in the mountain, not feel sorry for yourself. You simply get over it and get on with everything.

► **Sanja Vranac:** I climbed mostly with Ines, so we perhaps understood each other better. As if a sort of rule, we seemed to have climbed our best ascents when we had our periods. Usually both of us. 😊

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** As with all the other 'essential' needs... you need to accept it, try your best to handle it and leave as few traces behind as possible. In El Capitan you have to carry a 'toilet' up into the wall with you anyway, with wet wipes it is all quite hygienic.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** I never concerned myself with this. If I had it, I had it and then it was over. I best recall once in Patagonia when I was very glad I was wearing some black trousers that invisibly absorbed most of the unexpected 'share'. Later, washing your clothes obviously showed signs of your exertions in the wall.

► **Aleksandra Voglar:** I'm a sports faculty graduate. During exercises, training, exams, nobody ever asked me about my menstruation. Why would it be any different in alpine climbing? It is a process in my life and it is mine. It is part of me at home, at work, on the playground, in the theatre, and also in the wall. Perhaps the legs feel a little heavier, there is some back pain, but it's not a reason for not completing the tour.

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** The process is no different from when you are not in the wall. A tampon, a wet wipe... I must admit though, my menstruation is virtually painless, I almost don't know I have it.

► **Ines Božič Skok:** Just like in the valley, with a little extra improvisation. I never had pain, and in fact climbed many of my great climbs when I was having my period.

► **Nastja Davidova:** Sometimes I had my best climbs on the first day of my period. It probably depend on which stage in your life you're at. Now the first days are much more painful and sometimes I have to stay in bed for half a day. I explain this and the boys show great understanding.

► **Tina Di Batista:** I had my period on most of my expeditions. I never used to complicate things. I did find out that on the first day of my period I was always strong – very strong! I climbed really well then.



As a woman, did you ever feel weaker when climbing in a team with men?



Marija and Andrej ten days after conquering the summit of Mount Everest, Kala Patthar, Nepal, 1990, photo by Žare Guzej

► **Marija Štremfelj:** No, I never felt that men saw me as weaker or less capable than them. Quite the opposite, when they see how you operate in the wall when you are acclimatised, their view of you changes.



Tina and Tomaž Jakofčič after completing a new route in the Cordillera Paine

► **Tina Di Batista:** To begin with I felt weaker with Tomaž (husband) because he was much better. Then we became more equal and I even became better (in the Eiger it was I who pushed ahead in the hardest pitches and insisted that we should go on). Sometimes though it happened that things I climbed then lost their difficulty grade (for example that winter, unlike any before, another 5 rope teams climbed the Eiger after I did).

► **Monika Kambič:** Well, it's a fact that physically you ARE weaker, and that you ARE slower, it's not something we can change. Everyone who ever set a speed record in climbing has been a man. Even if we want to equal them and do the same things, this is a fact. This is one of the reasons I climbed so much in female rope teams where I felt equal.

► **Irena Mrak:** No, quite the opposite, I always carried more than the men, precisely so that nobody could accuse me of being weaker! One of my fellow climbers called me an 'animal' and sometimes men who had not climbed with me in a rope team would try and make out that I was the weaker part of a team, as the woman who the man had 'dragged' along a route or to the summit. These things always annoyed me and that was why I decided to form a female rope team.

► **Lidija Honzak:** I never felt weaker. In fact we women have a few advantages. We usually develop a good climbing technique faster than men who rely on their muscles. We also adapt more easily to high altitudes and do not grumble when things don't go as planned.

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** It's a fact that women are in general weaker but we are also often technically more resourceful and thus also more economic with our strength, which in the end gives a similar if not better result.



Staza Černič with Miha Arih in the Martuljek range, before 1944, personal archive

► **Staza Černič:** Not at all. I was aware of my inferior physical strength but was able to compensate in other ways.



Maja climbing the *Cassin-Ratti* route, Cima Ovest, the Dolomites, 2009, photo by Matjaž Dušič

► **Maja Lobnik:** No, certainly not. When it was not just a case of me securing a male colleague in a difficult route that was solely his own aim, then certainly not. Mostly I had a go at routes I knew I would be able to climb independently, so as an equal with my fellow climber, male or female.

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** Yes, perhaps physically, but our resourcefulness, strong-headedness and technique often save us. This way I can easily compete with male biceps.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** Physically women can be weaker of course, especially in the early years when they start climbing, but at key moments we can often be stronger than our male colleagues. Even as a trainee I had my first unplanned bivouacking at the summit of Tofana di Rozes. The member I climbed with totally stopped functioning when darkness began to set in and storms were predicted – to me it was quite natural to help and take on part of the burden and uncertainty. We completed the climb successfully but were unable to begin our descent due to bad visibility. The storms that raged all night around neighbouring peaks fortunately left us alone. To me this was an invaluable experience, a night without sleep and a great view, and even then I realised that in crunch situations I am not the weaker member at all, quite the opposite.

► **Sanja Vranac:** I never really felt weaker. Where men could use strength, we women would choose a different technique.

► **Vlasta Kunaver:** It's not all about mere power. You can often make up for strength with specific techniques, with a slightly different approach. I learnt technical climbing from Lidija who always knew how and where to step. Especially in long approaches it is not just strength that is an advantage, but persistence.

Are there any taboos when you are climbing with men?

► **Marija Štremfelj:** When you have to have to spend a month with 12, 10, 7 men in such a raw environment as a glacier, for example, conversations become very gentle, very deep. With men there can be the occasional switch to a rougher level, perhaps just so they cover up their gentler side this way. Men can be very direct, very open, and they are not short of comments – usually with a joke or other kinds of comments, they let us know that our problems as women are different to theirs.

► **Maja Lobnik:** Almost none at all. Perhaps I didn't exactly go into long conversations about love issues/problems with them.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** I don't know of taboo issues, either with men or with women. I've always believed you needed to say what you feel and what you experience, and always tell the truth, even if sometimes you might want to stay quiet about certain things, or fog them over for the sake of a more desired result. You must also learn how to listen to intuition, undefined feelings, and yourself. I still believe that anything you try to hide or cover up, or if you think ill of someone, can all come back as a boomerang.

► **Nevenka Dolenc:** When we were climbing we always talked about the same thing – the route. A best friend can be either a woman or a man. Then there are no taboos.

► **Aleksandra Voglar:** I don't know of taboos. The more taboo something is supposed to be, the more entertaining it is. Men are straightforward creatures. Taboo?

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** Oh I don't know, perhaps I can talk about my experience as the first female member of the Slovene Youth Alpine Climbing Team. For the first year and a half I was the only girl in the group. Generally conversations were very open, about all kinds of things, life, love, emotions, relationships, not just about climbing. Boys wouldn't be boys if in the end there was not some mention about big boobs and hot arses. Well, then I preferred to just not take part.

► **Ines Božič Skok:** I can't think of any. Perhaps some specifically women's issue, like menstruation, pregnancy, the menopause.

Were there ever any privileges in the wall because of being a woman?



Mira climbing with Jasna Bratanič in the *Bonatti Pillar* in The Aiguille du Dru, photo by Jasna Bratanič

► **Mira Zorič:** On expeditions I always carried my own equipment and also common equipment when necessary. I never demanded or sought privileges for myself.

► **Marija Štremfelj:** On expeditions where I was usually the only woman, we functioned so that every member had to do their part. The men would usually clear the plateau for a camp, I would help them, then there was putting up the tents for the night, cooking and such. You always do everything. How long you work and what you get done also depends on how well you are acclimatised.

► **Sanja Vranac:** No, I never got the feeling that there were any differences between genders. Everyone made sure they did their stuff. Although I knew that the guys would come and help me if necessary.

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** Not really. Well, if the backpack really was too heavy I could perhaps give a rope to one of the guys, but I don't really want to complain too much about heavy backpacks.

► **Lidija Honzak:** When Ana (the alpine climber Ana Mažar from Split in Croatia) and I climbed Grossglockner at the age of forty we had this very discussion. We laughed at how we used to refuse help if some cavalier would offer to carry some of our weight. Now we would happily allow them to do it but nobody offers to do it any more. There were a lot of young men at the hut under Grossglockner. When I was climbing up the ladder onto the communal bunks, one of them offered to help. No, no need, I said and pulled the backpack closer to me. Oh, how silly I am, I then thought. Is it really possible that in all this time I have barely changed at all?

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** I wouldn't say that you had any privileges in alpine climbing because you're a woman. In relative terms you are more likely to carry a greater load in relation to your body weight than someone who weighs twenty or thirty kilos more, and the strain on their body is considerably lower. Especially in the past when equipment was much heavier, it was very difficult to be a woman in Alpine and Himalayan climbing.

► **Ines Božič Skok:** This was and still is most obvious with the weight of the backpack, it would be a few kilos lighter.

► **Vlasta Kunaver:** There was no 'chivalry' in alpine climbing in the sense that someone would help you do something that was physically demanding. We shared the equipment equally. I never had the feeling that anyone underestimated me. I do now sometimes get 'chivalry' in other sports; when we go diving I do not need to lug around the cylinders, when I go flying with my son he carries my parachute and things like that.

► **Maja Lobnik:** Hmmm, not really. I wouldn't want it that way.



Tjaša in a rope team with Tadej Krišelj, Enverse des Aiguilles, 2014, photo by Tadej Krišelj

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** I never felt such privileges, or I would just not allow them. A rope team is always one of equals, that's when you can enjoy climbing most. The access equipment is divided equally if possible, you climb alternately, each for a pitch. Generally male co-climbers took me quite seriously, there was never a sense that anyone would underestimate me or say I could not do something because I was a woman. There were occasions when the male half 'lost their strength' and I had to continue in the lead for the rest of the route. I think we women climbers are very stubborn as far as this is concerned 😊.

Did giving birth change your attitude to climbing?

► **Marija Štremfelj:** A month after giving birth I had a huge shock when my sister Barbara died in a fall while climbing in Šite. But then, when I realised I was turning into a bitter woman without the energy of life, I discovered that, despite everything, the mountains were indeed my path in life.

► **Maja Lobnik:** I stopped climbing after I gave birth. My baby did not like car journeys, being breastfed on climbing grounds or sleeping in a basket. I also breastfed for a long time, so for at least two years after the birth of my son, there was no climbing at all for me. I returned spontaneously; first by going ski touring, trips to the mountains, sports climbing and only after that alpine climbing, ropes and ice-axes in the winter.



► **Danica Blažina:** Initially it was quite hard, it was not easy to go around with a child. A few times when we went climbing with a team, I left Neva at my mother-in-law's in Trieste. Later, when she was still in nappies, we spent ten days in Vrata. I still have a photo of us once reaching the saddle between Triglav and Stenar to look across into the Trenta Valley. When Neva was young, I would tell her stories while we walked, which made it easier for her.

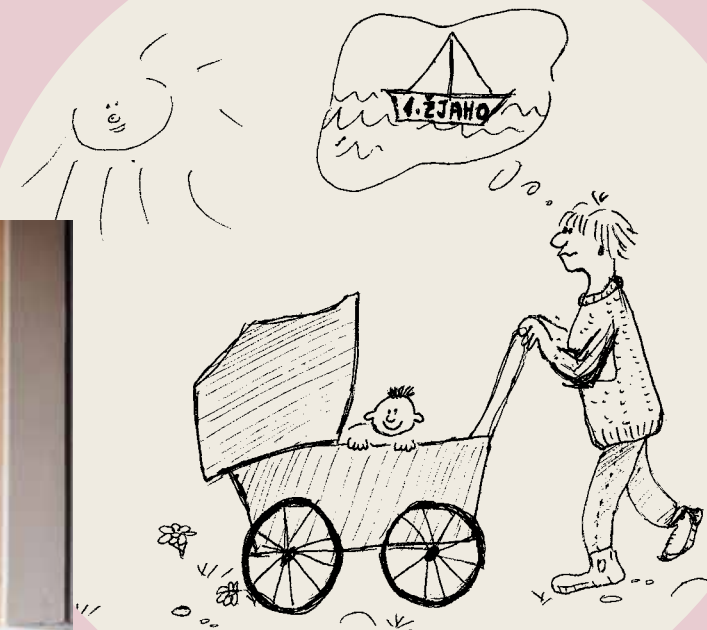


► **Monika Kambič:** Giving birth did not change my view of climbing. I feel most exposed in the car, more at risk than in any wall. When climbing I have also never experienced the adrenalin shocks I get on the road... With my children I began discovering another aspect: walking in the mountains. Admittedly we all soon also began climbing together.

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** I still climb with the same enjoyment and at about the same level, I just have less time and organising things is more difficult, so I now don't go into longer walls where you would stay for more days. Climbing is thus shorter and more concise. With my husband we do still get to go into a few longer routes that take a whole day, for which I have to thank both grandmas and an aunt and uncle for looking after the children.

► **Staza Černič:** After my children were born I had to look after certain segments of family life, which meant I could no longer climb as much as I wanted, and especially not whenever I wanted. What I did do was ski more. And not on easy pistes.

► **Mira Zorič:** After giving birth I continued climbing as soon as it was possible and I did not choose any easier routes. I felt good, of course things needed to be coordinated and worked around childcare.



► **Nevenka Dolenc:** I stopped climbing even before I gave birth, but I continued to be active in other sports. When you get a child everything changes. What I find important is that the child also develops in a broader motional sense as they grow up, not in a single field. My daughter has so far not been climbing because she prefers to dance, ice-skate, play golf, swim, rollerblade, cycle... So I too have less time for climbing now.



► **Sanja Vranac:** After the birth of my son many things changed for me. Apart from the fact that it was difficult to coordinate everything time-wise, a feeling of responsibility, you could even say fear, was also very much present.



In Paklenica with baby Ana - men also participate, 1986, photo by Lidija Honzak

► **Lidija Honzak:** Ana (who is now 33) was the first baby to camp in Anića Luka in Paklenica. Janez climbed a new route for her, *Mala Ana* in Glavica, and I walked up and down with her at the bottom where others climbed shorter routes. I asked them to hold my baby while I also had a go. Grade 7, they said it was. That was my upper limit when I was climbing. When I asked whether I needed chalk, someone said, "Oh, you don't need chalk for as far as you'll get." Wound up by this answer, I climbed the route to the top and expressed my regrets to the men that they cannot get pregnant because once they would give birth and get rid of the extra weight gained during pregnancy they could be much better. It's interesting that I got a real 'iron psyche' after my first child. I climbed in female rope teams (often first female repetitions) on very difficult routes. It all only stopped later, after my second and third child.

► **Aleksandra Voglar:** After my first child I had a short pause as I had a difficult time giving birth and it was a real shock for me and my body. Then the training sessions and tours changed. From rock climbing I went into combined climbing, drytooling, and also took part in ice climbing and speed climbing competitions. These goals forced me into more intensive and more controlled training sessions and I got myself into an even better

shape. I also took part in a successful expedition. After my second child I reduced my climbing activities in the mountains and gave priority to my family. I compensate my desire for climbing by running climbing sessions and climbing schools, work at my local alpine club and, of course, family trips to the mountains.



► **Tina Di Batista:** When my daughter Ula was two years old I had already bought an airplane ticket for an expedition to India, but I cancelled it three days before we were due to leave because I could not bear leaving her. After giving birth I climbed objectively safer routes. It was also different time wise - I could not afford 3 to 4 hours a day for training. After the birth of my second daughter I also slowly decided to put serious alpine climbing behind me. I still did a lot of sport climbing, work as a mountain guide and am active in classical routes, but nowhere near top alpine climbing.



► **Tanja Grmovšek:** Andrej (Grmovšek, married since 2002) and I initially climbed a lot and did not really have any wish for 'early' parenthood, and in the end we had to wait for it for a long time. Due to problems in conceiving, I deliberately reduced my activities over the years and paid more attention to getting the appropriate lipid and hormone levels that I had previously been using up from my body without knowing it. In the autumn of 2014, two months before she was due, we became the happiest parents of baby Tara, only 1600 g in weight and 41 cm long when she was born.

Over the last few years we have of course adapted our activities, although it didn't prevent us from going on trips to favourite places only two months after Tara's birth, starting with a winter trip to the Dolomites. I also changed my participation in sport climbing because I didn't want my lactation to be affected. Andrej was also on paternity leave for more than half a year and there was enough time even for a long-planned but never-before-realized climbing trip to Spain.

► **Ines Božič Skok:** Considering that I became a mother quite late, after I was forty, and that by then I had already had 25 years of climbing routes from my wish-list, I didn't find it that hard to adapt to the new situation, make a change in priorities and temporarily lower my expectations. My husband and I did not change our lifestyle but we climbed more on local climbing grounds and forgot about expeditions to other continents for a while. We did take our daughter with us most of the time, which also meant taking along at least one other person, usually my mother, to look after her when we were climbing.

How do you handle being away from your children during climbing expeditions?

► **Monika Kambič:** I have very independent children who are used to mummy going away on expeditions since they were young; they had to be resourceful. Now they are old enough for me to leave them at home alone and are even happy if I do. My children know how much this means to me. I get all nervy if I don't go for a long time. Recently I have calmed down a little and if I spend the occasional weekend at home it does not mean the end of the world to me.

► **Irena Mrak:** Children? No! It was never an option! If you are bound to high mountains (expeditions to the highest peaks), the risks are incredible and with this children are out of the question. It simply isn't responsible to be realizing your dreams of reaching the highest peaks and have children at home who have nothing to do with these dreams, constantly worrying about you. Children want their mother close to them, not somewhere in the Himalayas...

► **Martina Čufar Potard:** I didn't have extensive periods of being away from my children, a week at the most. I must admit that the occasional three-day break can quite 'suit you' so you have some time on your own again, but after that something is missing. Anyway, we



► **Marija Štremfelj:** Of course I missed my children when on expedition, but I never left them at home with a heavy feeling, knowing I was leaving them in capable hands. I knew that Andrej would also go to the mountains (as usual) when I was away, but I also had my sister, mother and mother-in-law. I lived in a house with twenty people in it – when the two of us left there were still eighteen left. The family support was there all along.

would always see each other on Skype or speak on the phone.

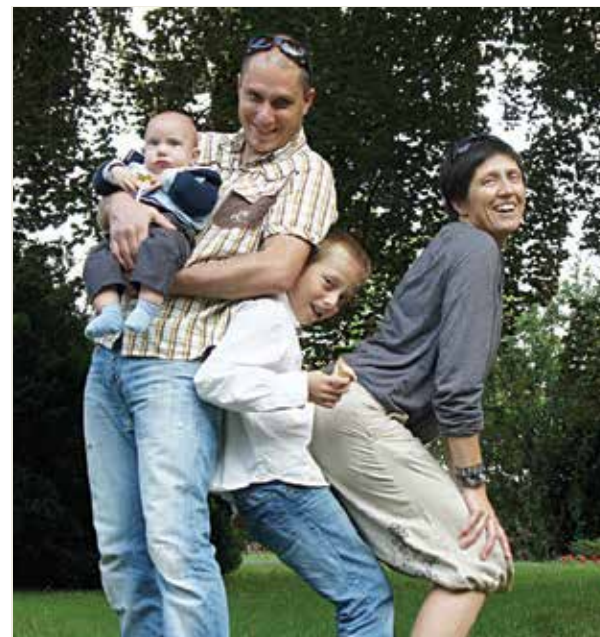
► **Mira Zorič:** Surely nobody handles being separated from their children very well – I didn't either, but if you climb it's hard to avoid it. My son Gorazd had an even harder time with it, especially in the early years. The first time my husband and I left him with grandmother for a few days was when we went on a May Day climbing camp in Paklenica. He was 11 months old at the time. I still vividly remember how, when we came back, he walked towards us alone, he had learnt to walk while we were away.

It was also difficult when my husband and I went on an expedition to the Pamir in 1990 (to Peak Korzhenevskaya – 7105 m). He was two at the time and grandma kept telling me how much he missed me. One day we arranged for a neighbour to call and talk to him on the phone, pretending she was me. In those days it was hard to get a line through from these distant destinations, and virtually impossible from base camp.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** In fact I was not really away from Tara a lot. I breastfed her for over a year and a half and mostly didn't feel the need to go very far because of my own desire to climb. With over 20 years of active climbing, I had had plenty of fun climbing and an old injury in my elbow also kept me at bay, but especially the joy and passion for the new challenges brought by my professional career as an arborist and having my own company.

► **Ines Božič Skok:** So far I have not indulged in any particularly long absences, so there were no major 'traumas' in that respect.

► **Tina Di Batista:** After Ula was born I went to Patagonia and Kyrgyzstan. Both expeditions lasted 25 days. It was hard to leave home; especially on the days when we had to wait it was harder than on days when there was action and we managed to not think about the children. It was difficult when we had to decide whether to go climbing or not because of the weather – you see, there is always a risk. I climbed more 'safely' than before, changing my mind sometimes...



► **Aleksandra Voglar:** I always, still now, go on an expedition or weekend tour after discussing it with Martin. We are both equal parents in our family and dedicate the same effort and time to our child. His "Of course you should go, prepare yourself well and enjoy it," always filled me with hope. Our parents were also a great help to us. This way I could be calm and concentrate on my aim, and I certainly didn't have a bad time doing it. It's harder if you don't succeed in reaching your goal and then start thinking that you've been away for so long for nothing.

Matija didn't show any particular signs of sadness in my month and a half of absence. When he was brought to the airport to meet me, he didn't want to come close to me. He hid behind Martin. He was three at the time. I could understand it, I was away for long. To me the minutes he stayed away seemed very long. Then he made his mind up and he ran into my arms, hugged me and stayed in my lap for hours.

► **Maja Lobnik:** I was never away from Bine for more than a few days. I always start missing him on the first evening when I come back from the wall/the competition/the tour, so as soon as the 'action' is over.

When is a female alpine climber's path finished?

► **Marija Štremfelj:** With me, I have noticed that at 60 I can no longer climb the difficult routes in high walls I used to climb. I can still manage a difficulty grade 6 where there is less explosiveness (a quick answer to a problem) but the persistence remains. With my co-climbers (Andrej, Anže) I go and repeat the occasional old classic 6-grader. Altitude is also an issue. I don't think I would like to go on another eight-thousander. I would probably need a lot more energy than I did when I was younger.

► **Monika Kambič:** When Nastja Davidova and I went to Torres de Paine, we experienced a terrible storm. That was the first time in my life I asked myself what I was doing there and why I had to do this? It was my breaking point. After that I have been choosing easier and less extreme goals. I intend to climb to the end, just that my goals will change. Even if it means I am just climbing grade 3 climbs in the end, I don't care at all, as long as I'm climbing.



► **Lidija Honzak:**

I hope with me that it will be only when the Reaper comes to get me.



► **Martina Čufar Potard:**

If you are healthy and motivated for the mountains, you can climb all your life!

► **Maja Lobnik:** I don't think it ever really ends. It changes, becomes less intensive, more adapted to opportunities.

► **Sanja Vranac:** I don't think there's a general rule here. Each one of us operates according to our own feelings, abilities and in the framework of the circumstances of our lives.

► **Staza Černič:** With me, the real end came when I had a road accident when I was already pretty ancient and I could no longer go to the mountains after that.

► **Vlasta Kunaver:** Sandi and I climbed a lot in France. We would spend three weeks in Chamonix every year where we saw the French flying with parachutes. This was how we were introduced to the sport of paragliding and stopped climbing.

► **Mira Zorič:** I do not intent to finish – at least I hope so – for as long as my health will allow it.

► **Tanja Grmovšek:** Probably never. With a variety of activities you switch from one to the other, but the enthusiasm is still there, regardless of all the things you do in between. I think that you carry all the friendships built, the stories and adventures from alpine climbing on through life in your everyday world, work and parenthood.

► **Nevenka Dolenc:** For some, like me, the day comes. For others it never comes. Even when I will no longer be able to climb I will still help younger hopeful climbers. With ideas, experiences, organisation, direction. That is how I have and still do build my own self.

► **Tjaša Jelovčan:** I hope never. Once you are in this it becomes a kind of addiction for which there is no cure or antidote. Even if you discover something new in between, a new sport, have children, are injured, the mountains are still part of you. Perhaps in a slightly different, milder form, with a child on your back, a paintbrush in hand, a bike, a parachute... Even a weekend spent on Pokljuka counts.

► **Nastja Davidova:** I felt that the time had come for a change in life, that I needed to create something else, that alpine climbing was just once chapter in my life. Before I would be in two minds when the weather was good whether to work with my mother in her massage parlour or go climbing. Now I am also interested in my work – massage and active tourism. Alpine climbing used to come above everything else and it means you don't see friends, don't go out, you go climbing for yourself (and cannot even help at climbing school), you do not follow traditions (don't spent time with your family over the holidays), all your money is spent on expeditions...



Face to Face, a magazine supplement to the exhibition about Slovene women alpine climbers

The magazine supplement was created from conversations with or written answers by the women alpine climbers who are included in the exhibition | All photographs are from the personal archives of the alpine climbers |
The front page photograph is from the photographic archive of the GMJ - Slovenian Alpine Museum | Author of exhibition and texts: Saša Mesec | Supervisor: Irena Lačen Benedičič | Magazine supplement editor:
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