



The Madison Mountaineering Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit launched in 2025 as the philanthropic partner of Madison Mountaineering LLC. Our mission is to support direct-action efforts that remove waste and restore fragile environments in high-altitude climbing destinations around the world. Through our conservation initiatives, we unite climbers with local partners in a shared commitment to a more sustainable future for the alpine communities and ecosystems we cherish.

Though we are a young organization, the Foundation has already completed two very meaningful environmental restoration projects, made possible by the generosity of nearly 100 donors.

Gavin Attwood
Chief Executive Officer
Madison Mountaineering Foundation

2025 K2 Cleanup Report

Madison Mountaineering has been guiding expeditions on K2 in the Karakoram since 2014. However, 2025 marked the first year that the Madison Mountaineering Foundation organized a dedicated cleanup effort at K2 Base Camp and in the surrounding area.

Led by expedition lead guide Terray Sylvester, staff and volunteers collected more than 600 pounds of accumulated trash. Central Karakoram National Park (CKNP) staff received the waste at K2 Base Camp and transported it out of the mountains to Askoli using pack animals. In Askoli, the waste was sorted, with glass, metal, and other non-burnable materials separated and sent to Skardu for disposal at a landfill. The remaining waste was burned in Askoli. These steps reflect standard waste-removal procedures within the national park.



The cleanup effort employed 20 local staff members, supported by five expedition volunteers. The group conducted three cleanup sessions between July 5 and July 14.

Session 1:

Trash was collected from the southeast side of K2 Base Camp, extending from the Madison Mountaineering camp area to beyond the easternmost tents at the upper end of base camp. The majority of waste was found on the slope just below base camp, with additional debris located among the ice pinnacles of the Godwin-Austen Glacier on the opposite side of the creek. Collected items included food packaging, clothing, plastic bottles, a metal cooking grill, and a plastic chair.

Session 2:

Cleanup efforts focused on the northwest side of K2 Base Camp, again spanning from near the Madison Mountaineering camp to above the easternmost tents. Most of the trash was located on the slope below base camp, with additional waste collected farther northwest on the glacier between base camp and the lower flanks of K2 and Angelus Peak. The majority of items recovered during this session consisted of food packaging.



Session 3:

Trash was collected from K2 Advanced Base Camp (ABC), the lower slopes of the Abruzzi Spur just east of the climbing route, and along the southeastern edge of the Godwin-Austen Glacier. A significant amount of camping debris was removed from the creek running through ABC, the slope above the creek, and the moraine on the opposite (southeastern) side. Much of the waste found on the slopes at the base of the Abruzzi Spur and on the glacier farther south had likely fallen from higher on the mountain.

Across all sessions, collected items included food packaging, abandoned tents, numerous fuel canisters, plastic bottles, stove components, fragments of oxygen cylinders, an oxygen respirator rope, white sacks, clothing, and other debris. Notably, the team recovered a GoPro camera lost by Tenji Sherpa at House's Chimney during Madison Mountaineering's 2024 K2 ascent!

2025 Gokyo Ri, Lobuche East, Island Peak Environmental Restoration Expedition.



The Madison Mountaineering Foundation, supported by contributions from Steve McConnell, conducted waste-collection efforts on the summit of Gokyo Ri on October 26, 2025, and at Lobuche East High Camp between October 25 and 27, 2025.

All waste collected from the summit of Gokyo Ri consisted of old prayer flags. Modern prayer flags are typically made of nylon and do not biodegrade; instead, they accumulate over time in locations where they are traditionally tied, becoming a source of environmental pollution. Because of their spiritual significance, prayer flags

are not disposed of with other waste. Local custom requires that they be ceremonially burned. The collected prayer flags were given to a lodge owner in Gokyo Village, who kindly agreed to burn them at no cost.

Waste collected from Lobuche East High Camp was separated into burnable and non-burnable materials and turned over to the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), which manages waste removal for companies operating semi-permanent expedition facilities at the site.

In addition to the cleanup efforts, Madison Mountaineering lead guide Terray Sylvester conducted a Leave No Trace workshop for eight members of the Nepali staff at the Himalayan Guides offices. Aang Phurba Sherpa served as translator and facilitated group discussion. Leave No Trace educational materials were provided to participating staff members, along with a selection of materials distributed to staff at the SPCC in Namche Bazaar.

In total, 170 pounds of trash were collected and removed by 11 local staff members, with assistance from all five members of the climbing expedition. The total cost of the cleanup was \$830, equating to approximately \$4.80 per pound of waste removed.



Session 1:

Trash was collected from Lobuche East High Camp and the surrounding area. Items recovered included food packaging, fuel canisters, batteries, glass bottles, clothing, and other debris. The team collected a total of 35 kilograms of burnable waste and 26 kilograms of non-burnable waste.

Session 2:

Old prayer flags were removed from the summit of Gokyo Ri. Prayer flags present a unique environmental challenge. Historically,

they were made from cotton and other biodegradable materials and would naturally decompose over time. Modern prayer flags, however, are typically manufactured from plastic-based materials. Rather than breaking down, these materials persist in the environment, accumulating on summits, bridges, and other landmarks where prayer flags are commonly placed.

Costs:

The Madison Mountaineering Foundation is able to keep the per-pound cost of waste removal exceptionally low by integrating its clean-up efforts directly into Madison Mountaineering expeditions. Many core expenses, including lead guide support and local staff wages, are already covered as part of the expedition logistics.

As a result, we removed waste from K2, one of the world's most remote and inhospitable environments, for less than \$5 of donor funds per pound. Costs were even lower during the Gokyo Ri, Lobuche East, and Island Peak expedition, where each pound of waste was removed at an average cost of just \$2.70 of Madison Mountaineering Foundation funds.

Going forward, we can expect cleanup costs to vary due to the challenges of operating in remote, high-altitude terrain, but we plan to continue maximizing cost efficiency by working closely with Madison Mountaineering expeditions.

Please visit <https://madisonmountaineering.com/foundation/> for more information on the Madison Mountaineering Foundation and the work we do. You can also donate on the page.

All photos by Terray Sylvester