

CLIMBING
MONT BLANC
IS BEST LEFT TO
EXPERIENCED
MOUNTAINEERS

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MONT BLANC ISN'T EASY!



Mont Blanc is Europe's rooftop

and brings together much envy of the inaccessible. The critical limit of excessive tourism is attained, with all that implies in the way of all kinds of excesses. It is becoming necessary to give back to the climbing of the Mont Blanc its true value of an act of mountaineering, by awareness of the challenge and to respect the splendour of this magic and grandiose place.

Is the Mont Blanc a consumer object?

Considered as a consumer product to get onto someone's list of personal achievements, the Mont Blanc is often presented, supported with lovely pictures, as an idyllic expedition. Wrong. Even if it seems so accessible from the valley.

The Mont Blanc at any price?

A climb of this kind has a price to pay: that of paying respect to the mountain, to mountaineering, to the climber, to the efforts, to the elementary safety rules, etc.

The Mont Blanc is a reward!

You do not begin your mountaineering career with the Mont Blanc. Learning about mountains starts elsewhere, progressively, on expeditions that are just as lovely and challenging. The Mont Blanc then becomes part of oneself, and not a useless exploit at the limit of lacking any respect.

Some revealing figures

Excessive tourism

300 to 400 departures each day during the summer.

Risks

151 interventions of the PGHM (Gendarmerie high mountain squad) in 2001. Increasing by 15 % to 17 % per year.

Preparation for the expedition

More than 30 % of walkers returning to the refuge are injured (frostbite on the face, wounds from crampons, problems associated with altitude, etc.)

Appreciation of the difficulty

More than 50 % success with recourse to an expert (against 33 % without).



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The determination of the local authorities, associated with mountain social experts, envisages a programme of imparting a sense of responsibility through rigorous information and efficient safety dispositions. Through reminding people of climbing conditions, rules and usages to be adopted, this document puts together a procedure based on consensus of information and imparting sensibility.

OBJECTIVE :
**PRESERVING
FREEDOM
OF ACCESS TO
THE MOUNTAIN
AND AVOIDING
THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF RESTRICTIVE
REGULATIONS.**



THE EFFECTS OF EXCESSIVE TOURISM

Overcrowded refuges

- Unless he has obtained information about available places in the refuges before departure, the impromptu walker can have to sleep outdoors. The exiguity of the place does not lend itself to overcrowding in terms of safety.

Pollution of the site and bivouac places

- Too much litter is still discarded on the ground, and this seriously affects the protection of our heritage.

Misinformation

Objective risks: avalanches, falling rocks, falling serac and bad weather are underestimated. At 4 810 metres, the least weakness can be fatal, and one cannot afford to err through ignorance or thoughtlessness. Badly used equipment, ignoring weather forecast warnings and not knowing the area can have dramatic consequences (8 deaths on the Mont Blanc in 2001).



At 4810 m

we find ourselves in the high mountains; nearly “a 5000-er” and this is not banal. If climbing the Mont Blanc can be without any problems in good weather, it can become a nightmare in high wind, fog and storms. An accumulation of risks linked with altitude, changing weather, cold conditions and tiredness. The combination of these quickly become infernal...

ALTITUDE AND AMS

• At 4810 m, oxygen is rarer, causing the necessity for the body to adapt to this lack. 79 % of people interviewed on their return from the Mont Blanc suffered from AMS Acute Mountain Sickness. It is a set of symptoms due to bad acclimatisation to high altitude. They occur within 4 to 8 hours after arrival at the height, beyond 3500 m. Headaches, insomnia, breathlessness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, fatigue with physical behaviour degradation.

• There is only one way of preventing this: acclimatisation by progressive stays in high altitude refuges (3 nights below 2500m are often necessary)

• These symptoms persist and are more or less disabling, diminishing the mountaineer's physical fitness to continue his climb. They do not respond to present medical treatment.

• Some troubles can be extremely serious, like oedema of the lung, or even high altitude cerebral oedema. They are, each year, the cause of emergency rescues. AMS spares nobody, not even the guide who is not yet acclimatised at the beginning of the season.

RAPID VARIATIONS OF CLIMATIC CONDITIONS AND RISKS

• At high altitude, the weather is unstable and changes rapidly, causing climatic modifications (snow, fog) and progressing conditions (ice, frost).

• The formation of clouds is extremely fast: for those who are unaware of the famous Lenticulaire self-forming cumulus at the summit (the ass) and its promise of bad weather.

• Storm and lightning, fog and lack of visibility, wall of föehn, wind and destabilising gusts (100 km/h at the summit) endangering progression. A brutal temperature drop then follows.



INTENSIFICATION OF COLD

• The lowering of temperature is about 6 to 7 degrees every 1000 m.

• Intensification of cold by violent winds at high altitude. Strong winds associated with relief have a considerable cooling power (wind chill factor): at the summit of the Mont Blanc, a temperature of -10° without wind falls to -30° with a wind of 30 to 35 km per hour.

If the wind increases to 60 km per hour, the temperature can go down to -50°. No way can a climb be envisaged.

• In normal times, suitable clothing and equipment, protecting the wearer against wind and eliminating sweat are enough to deal with the effects of cold. Meanwhile, in case of slowing of progress (tiredness, worsening weather conditions or slight injuries, etc.), hypothermia occurs within a few hours. Its symptoms are paleness, shivering, a hesitant gait and difficulty in speaking

• A climb in normal weather conditions does not incur the risks of frostbite. In bad weather, inadequate protection is the cause of superficial frostbite on the face or extremities (fingers and toes), which, to begin with, shows itself by numbness.

Deep frostbite with numbness at the extremities, then burning, blisters, even necrosis (destruction of tissue) are found in difficult situations.

From this comes the concern not to provoke these, especially by failing to keep control over fatigue. Avoiding the onset of frostbite requires good equipment, good hydration and good control over the state of tiredness.

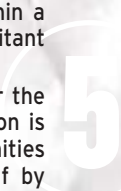
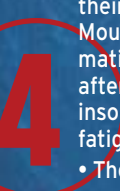
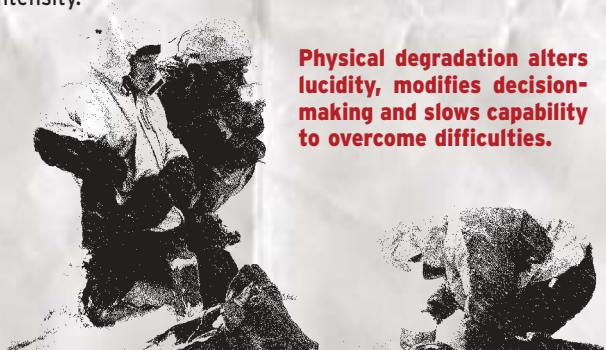
TIREDNESS

At high altitude, physical degradation comes on very fast.

Other than the lack of acclimatisation at high altitude and cold, the length of the climb is a cause of tiredness.

For an unfit subject, maintaining energy by a slow and regular pace is primordial. Climbing requires physical preparation acquired by basic training at low or moderate intensity.

Physical degradation alters lucidity, modifies decision-making and slows capability to overcome difficulties.





First of all:

Adapt the general weather forecast to the reality of the terrain.

- **Base your judgement on the interpretation of structures or local agencies**

(Weather, Site, refuge keepers). They have knowledge of the area and they deduce the state of the terrain from weather conditions.

- **Adapt it to your physical fitness.**

Difficult conditions make fatigue worse.

- **You should not challenge worsening weather:**

- **Clouds:** their formation is not necessarily announced.

- **Fog,** precipitation (snow even during the summer, hail) and their consequences: avalanche, falling into a crevasse, getting lost.

- **Thunderstorm:** it is the immediate interruption of the climb. It develops very quickly, and is not seen or heard coming. It is born right there. It is a question of getting away immediately from summits, crests or ridges, avoiding the precipitation: not forgetting to take out insurance. The thunderstorm is followed by a cold front with aggravation of weather conditions.

- **Wind:** violent squalls causing instability and intensification of cold with fatigue.

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Information on sources :

- **Site weather:** Specific reading of the forecast
English weather forecast: 0892 700 330.

- **High Mountain Office (OHM)**

- General and practical information to consult onsite: topics, maps, refuges, etc.

- Specific information on the viability of the route, updates on conditions through the return of information from mountaineers after their expedition (expedition records onsite and on the OHM Website).

- Manned office of PGHM during the afternoons of July and August

Maison de la Montagne, place de l'église Chamonix
Tél. 04 50 53 22 08 / www.ohm-chamonix.com

- **Weather forecasts:** www.chamonix.com

- **Offices of the Guides** of the Chamonix and Valmontjoie Valleys: Point Météo (St-Gervais), notice board, information and advice.

- **PGHM Chamonix :** +33(0)4.50.53.16.89

- **Infosante** (health information): www.ffme.fr/medical



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Preparing the expedition is to adapt your equipment, organisation and your mind to the conditions required by the high altitude climb, comparable to risky sports. It is to play safely...

Avoiding overcrowding the refuges:

- Book and above all confirm 3 days before climbing (weather forecast time).

- Adapt your day in function to occupation.

If there is no room, choose another day or another expedition.

- Tête Rousse : 04 50 58 24 97

- Goûter : 04 50 54 40 93

- Cosmiques : 04 50 54 40 16

- Grands-Mulets : 04 50 53 16 98

The Vallot shelter is used only for difficult situations.

Go accompanied:

At the OHM, the message book gives requests for track companions.

Prepare the route:

- Choose your route in function to its difficulty and your fitness.

- Consult information and maps.

- Know the main direction instruments.

- Do not trust traces, previous tracks, know how to rely on yourself.

- Acquire experience of the terrain from local people: information on the state of routes, technical advice about the weather

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Physical preparation:

- Basic preparation: 3 months before departure.

Preparation of the circulation system, muscles and ligaments by practising activities of endurance type (hiking, cycling, jogging). 8 to 12 hours of hiking are necessary.

- Technical preparation: Acquire the technique so as not to waste energy in intense effort, and gain over fatigue:

- getting over a glacier, use of crampons/ice axes,

- roping together suited to the terrain,

- steep and snowy slopes.

Acclimatisation: Stays in refuges above 3 500 m, by stages, over 4 days. (minimum time to avoid AMS).

Preparation of material: autonomy

- Traditional equipment already mastered.

- Several layers of light garments and wind breaker in a material favouring respiration and avoiding condensation. Spare clothes: any damp material loses its insulating qualities.

- Waterproof boots suitable for mountaineering.

- Several pairs of gloves suited to the temperature, with spares.

- Ice goggles with side blinkers.

- Refuse bag.



Rules and usage:

More than simple behaviour, a reflex.

Preserve the harmony of the climbing party

- Adapt your rhythm.
- Observe the signs of tiredness.
- Master the technique of confidence.
- Succeed together, without a spirit of competition.

Know and respect the capacities of your body:

- Adequate acclimatisation and training time.
- Succeed through dosed effort: a good marathon runner does not necessary conquer the Mont Blanc.
- Know the difference between AMS and a passing feeling of tiredness.
- Know how to keep yourself hydrated and fed at the proper times. Give priority to quality: artificial things (energy supplements) don't get you to the top.
- Adapt your garments to the temperature. Keep yourself from getting wet, avoid sweating.

Behaviour before the expedition:

- Check your equipment.
- Listen to weather and technical advice from local experts.
- Information on expedition conditions.

Behaviour during the expedition:

- Avoid situations that make you expend energy uselessly.
- Anticipate objective risks: avalanche, falling rocks, ice, etc. by an expert reading of the terrain.
- Watch the time: respect the hours.
- Be aware of terrain and human dangers.
- Stop the climb and descend immediately if there are serious first signs of AMS.
- Limit the effects of your passing: falling rocks, stopping in dangerous areas.
- Remain attentive to weather developments.

Overtaking, a technical gesture, no prowess:

- Overtake or cross the paths of the other roped parties without disturbing them.
- Be careful about the reactions of others.

A moral challenge:

- Keep control of effort.
- Free yourself from danger to avoid panicking.



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ACQUAINTANCES

The reflex is acquired only through an intense learning period.

If the risks and climbing conditions go beyond acquired capacities and skills, knowing how to say no keeps you alive.

Give yourself time:

- Take time to learn and make progress: Putt off the date of climbing for adequate acclimatisation, and go ahead only when your mastery of techniques and training are acquired.
- Faced with bad weather, an advanced state of tiredness, there is no shame in stopping the climb and turning back: the Mont Blanc will still be there tomorrow.

Know how to say no.

- A gesture of freedom and humility faced with the omnipotence of the mountain.

Pride has no place when your own life and that of your companions and rescuers are at stake.

RESCUE BY THE PGHM

• Only in emergencies:

If your life or that of another is threatened and nothing can be done about it.

Do not call for rescue except as a last resort:

- accident (fall, fracture, open wound, major injury, serious malaise connected with altitude, etc.),
- Lost and in difficulties, the time (or conditions) impeding progress,
- Overcome by the weather or the mountain (stopped in bad weather, big technical difficulties, objective risks).

Before anything else: no panic, no unnecessary risks.

The first gestures:

- Protect the victim, check his state and the situation,
- Alert (04 50 53 16 89 or the 112) - give precise information: place, altitude, characteristic point, clothing recognition signs, number of victims, nature of injuries, name and mobile phone number.
- First aid: signal visibly your presence with your arms in a Y form.

When the helicopter is making its approach, stay still and wait for the complete stopping of the aircraft and for the rescuers to disembark.

Stay confident and protect yourself.



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Why not take full advantage of the wealth of the massif of the Mont Blanc, the greatness of the area to live the life of the Mountain. Climbing the Mont Blanc is only a great moment of happiness to share in this great place.

IMPARTING SENSIBILITY AND INFORMATION

The mayors and town councils of Chamonix and Saint-Gervais, all the guides, refuge keepers, the French mountaineering club and the high mountain Gendarmerie and safety agents are together in a commitment against the effects of uncontrolled excessive tourism on one of the most prestigious European sites.

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THE MONT BLANC, SPACE OF FREEDOM TO BE PRESERVED.

A new procedure has been launched: the mayors and town councils associate with social experts in their action for safety and the practice of risky sports.



TEACHING

It is a true lesson in the taking of calculated risks in full knowledge and consciousness.

RESPONSIBILITY

So that individual responsibility and conscientiousness will replace regulations and the risk of prohibition.



WITH THE SUPPORT:

