Reaching the top of Mont Blanc
A concern for climbers

For us climbers, who sometimes travel thousands of kilometres to climb this summit, Mont Blanc is far more than just another peak to climb. It is a dream, a legend even. The amazing history of our passion has been written on these slopes. The intense efforts, unspoiled landscapes and elegant peaks, the fraternity of the roped party and the confrontation with high altitude all contribute to making this a unique experience. We all want to share it.

However, this symbol of mountaineering sometimes also conveys a negative image of our sport. The number of people on certain days, the lack of respect for the site and for other people, failures and tragedies all contribute to this deteriorating image. If we are not careful, this deterioration could result in the free access to this summit being limited. The mountain community can use its many talents to show the way to making sure that the highest point in the Alps remains exemplary and freely attainable place, by enhancing the Mont Blanc experience.

Standing 4,810m high, this summit is obviously for experienced mountaineers. Such an extraordinary climb is not for just anyone. Good preparation, information and equipment are fundamental pre-requisites. It takes time to acquire expertise in mountaineering techniques and knowledge of the mountain environment. If you want access to the untamed, wilder side of nature, you must accept the risk that comes with it. In fact, the art of climbing mountains resides in knowing how to reduce this risk. The first thing to do is therefore understand nature and identify the particular dangers you will be facing in order to create suitable solutions. Such magnificent places are also fragile.

We must leave this classified site pure, respect the rules and the recommendations applicable in the refuges, take all waste home with us and use the toilets provided.

The success of your Mont Blanc experience is more than just adding this peak to your list of climbs: it also means getting back down again safely, with a head full of exceptional memories. Faced with a climb that is harder than anticipated, mediocre conditions or an insufficiently prepared or untrained group, turning back at the right moment can be a form of group success. Perhaps another climb would be a better option for that particular day.

Freedom
means giving yourself the chance to try again.
Preparation

To attempt Mont Blanc with a good chance of success, experience of high mountains, regular training and preparation are essential. Good guides are also a decisive factor.

In terms of physical preparation for this summit, you should not only be in good physical condition, but also have tested your level of fitness at altitude. A first experience of an easier “4,000” and at least one night spent recently at more than 3,000m will give you a better idea of your real condition.

The techniques you will need to know include knowing how to use crampons, how to climb in varied terrain and cross ridges, and being able to adjust your rope (long on the glacier, short along the ridges, etc.).

Psychologically, you must be prepared for bad nights and long days in a fabulous, but hostile, different and changing environment.

Preparing your expedition means studying the terrain by reading maps, topoguides and expedition reports.

A club can help you to find a partner for your expedition, an initial experience and training courses.

A professional guide can advise, prepare and supervise you, taking on responsibility for the expedition.

Finding a club:
www.thebmc.co.uk; www.alpine-club.org.uk; www.americanalpineclub.org

Finding a professional guide:
In France: www.sngm.fr
In Aosta Valley: www.guidealtamontagna.com
In Switzerland: www.4000plus-vs.ch
Part of the expedition means finding the right equipment, remembering the essentials without weighing yourself down with the superfluous.

As well as clothing suitable for high altitude conditions and extremely cold temperatures (including spare gloves), the equipment is that of a mountaineer on a glacier (ice axe, crampons, harness, rope, etc.).

Remember that you must be prepared:

To protect yourself: helmet, glasses, sun-cream (avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe, depending on your route and local conditions).

To find your way: map, topo, compass, altimeter, whistle, headlamp (GPS).

To eat and drink: food rations, hot drinks.

For rescue operations: crevasse rescue kit (5 karabiners, 3 ice screws, self-locking pulley, 2 rope clamps, sling, cordelette), telephone or radio, appropriate first aid kit.
Conditions change quickly in the mountains and the weather changes even faster. To make the right decisions, you have to have the right information and know how to interpret it with a critical mind.

**General Advice**
- **Weather and mountain conditions:**
  - High mountain office: +33 (0)4 50 53 22 08; www.chamoniarde.com
  - Meteo France weather forecast: (France only) 08 99 71 02 74; www.meteofrance.com
  - Aosta Valley weather forecast: (+39) 0165 272 333; www.regione.vda.it
  - Swiss mountain bulletin: (+41) 0900900 162 168; www.meteosuisse.admin.ch
  - Chamonix mountain gendarmes: +33 (0)4 50 55 33 72

- **Refuges and huts:**
  - Tête Rousse: +33 (0)4 50 58 24 97; booking is compulsory: refugeteterousse.ffcam.fr
  - Goûter: +33 (0)4 50 54 40 93; booking is compulsory: refugedugouter.ffcam.fr
  - Tré la tête: +33 (0)4 50 47 01 68; www.trelatete.com
  - Gonella: (+39) 0165 885 101; www.rifugiogonella.com
  - Monzino: (+39) 0165 809 553
  - Cosmiques: +33 (0)4 50 54 40 16
  - Grands Mulets: +33 (0)4 50 53 57 10
  - Conscrits: +33 (0)4 79 89 09 03
  - Durier: +33 (0)6 89 53 25 10

- **Lifts:**
  - Opening hours: www.compagniedumontblanc.fr
  - Aiguille du Midi cable car: +33 (0)4 50 53 22 75
  - Bellevue cable car: +33 (0)4 50 54 70 93
  - Mont-Blanc tramway: +33 (0)4 50 47 51 83

- **Tourist information:**
  - Chamonix: +33 (0)4 50 53 00 24; www.chamonix.com
  - Les Houches-Servoz: +33 (0)4 50 55 50 62; www.leshouches.com
  - Saint-Gervais-les-Bains: +33 (0)4 50 47 76 08; www.saintgervais.com
  - Val Montjoie: +33 (0)4 50 47 01 58; www.lescontamines.com
  - Vallée d’Aoste: (+39) 0165 842 060; www.lovevda.it
  - Valais: (+41) 27 783 2717; www.st-bernard.ch
The hazards of the normal route

The Goûter couloir is where most of the more serious accidents occur.

From 1990 to 2011, 74 people died and 180 were injured along this route, between the Tête Rousse and Goûter refuges. Studies are underway to attempt to limit the high risk presented by rock falls.

In its current state, mountaineers must be aware of the dangers of this itinerary and be prepared to face them.

Approximately half of all accidents occur along the 100m couloir crossing, and one third along the ridge.

Most are caused by a climber falling, often directly or indirectly related to a rock fall. In relation to traffic, there are at least as many accidents on the way down, particularly along the ridge. We also know that two thirds of all casualties were not roped, and that fewer accidents involve people accompanied by a professional guide. A study carried out in summer 2011 concerning the couloir alone estimated that one thousand of the estimated 17,000 crossings of the couloir were affected by rock fall. While rock falls can occur at any time of day or season, certain factors can aggravate or reduce the risk.

Risk aggravating factors:
- Temperatures above zero.
- Dry air: nice, sunny weather.

The most critical time is between 11am and 1.30pm.

Risk reducing factors:
- Temperatures below zero.
- Cloudy weather, with little sun. The presence of snow in the couloir has no influence on the regularity of rock falls. However, it does help to prevent other blocks being pulled down and rocks rebounding along the couloir.

For more information:
www.petzl-foundation.org

How to cross the Goûter couloir?

As with all the other parts of the routes, assessing the current conditions remains an essential factor when choosing the techniques to be implemented. The main principles to be remembered include:

- Always wear a helmet and stay roped together.
- Prepare your equipment a good distance before crossing the couloir and not close to its edges, which are highly exposed.
- Check current conditions before deciding whether or not to cross the couloir.
- If possible, keep a lookout from a sheltered position for the roped party before you.
- Do not waste time in the couloir, but do not hurry unnecessarily either.

- If the snow means your crampons hold well, you may not need the cable. Otherwise, use the cable according to recommendations (attached with a suitable technique, using a “floating” karabiner between two members of the roped party).
PROTECT
Before doing anything else, prevent further accidents by protecting others. Never move a casualty unless he/she is in direct, imminent danger, in which case, be careful to keep the torso/neck/ head aligned and protect against the cold.

ALERT
Telephone network and radio coverage (150MHz) is generally good in the Mont Blanc area. If neither work, send a messenger (not alone if possible) to inform the nearest refuge or find an alert area. A single emergency number: 112

FIRST AID
While waiting for the rescue team to arrive, you may have to take action quickly to open the casualty’s airway, stop bleeding, give CPR if the heart is not beating, secure a conscious or unconscious casualty. These are reactions that must be learned. All mountaineers should have appropriate first aid training.
Guide the emergency team by forming a “Y” (yes) with raised arms or by signalling SOS with a torch or mobile phone screen at night. Depending on the terrain, try to clear a landing area. When the helicopter arrives, stay where you are and wait for further instructions.

Useful phone numbers:
Valdotains alpine rescue: +39 (0)800 319 319
Switzerland (Rega): 1414 or from abroad +41 333 333 333
Do not confuse difficulty with danger. The busiest routes to Mont Blanc are not particularly demanding technically speaking. However, they involve all the dangers inherent to this environment. To limit risks, start by identifying the hazards of the terrain, finding out current conditions and the capabilities of your party.

**Altitude**

The higher you go, the less oxygen there is. AMS (acute mountain sickness) is a constant threat. Headaches, insomnia, breathlessness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting... the main symptoms can appear even at 3,500m. There is nothing to do but turn back. Proper acclimatisation can help prevent AMS.

**Cold**

At high altitude, close to 5,000m, the weather can change very quickly, bringing all kinds of problems: fog, cold made worse by violent winds, snow, frost, storms, lightning. It is important to be able to recognise the warning signs and to know when to retreat.

**Getting lost**

One of the main dangers of Mont Blanc is getting lost in sudden fog, particularly close to the summit or between the Aiguille and the Dôme du Goûter. Never set out without a map, navigation instruments and the knowledge of how to use them. Know precisely where you are during your entire itinerary.

**Falling**

The danger of falling increases with the steepness of the slope and the steepest areas include the Goûter ridge, below the Mont Maudit pass or the Bosses ridge. Although fresh snow offers serene landscapes of beautiful slopes, these same slopes become treacherous when the snow is hard. Good technique and suitable roping methods are essential.

**Busy periods**

The presence of other groups is reassuring, often too much so, particularly along the normal routes. The presence of other people offers a false sense of security. You happily follow in their footsteps, perhaps losing your own concentration. During the busiest periods, having to slow down and even stop for others adds further difficulties to crossings and can increase exposure to hazards.

**Extreme fatigue**

Altitude, cold, height gain and lack of preparation can result in profound fatigue. It is important that group members look out for one another.

**Crevasses**

Glaciers are very broken up in parts, particularly at the Jonction. Appropriate roping techniques and crevasse rescue equipment on each harness are essential.

**Seracs Falls**

Glaciers move at their own, imperceptible pace. Balanced seracs can fall at any time, without warning, particularly under the Mont Blanc du Tacul, around the Petit Plateau and the Grand Plateau. Avoid these areas or if not, at least do not linger there.

**Avalanches**

At altitudes like these, there is no season for snow. After a period of bad weather, extra care should be taken on gradients of more than 30°, particularly in the Goûter couloir or below Mont Blanc du Tacul. In summer, the snow cover generally stabilises more quickly. Remember to take an avalanche transceiver, shovel and probe and know when it is best to wait.

**Rock falls**

Rock falls, whether natural or caused by other climbers, demand the greatest care, particularly whilst within the Goûter couloir (see over).
A concern for climbers

When a mountain expedition goes wrong, whether due to unexpected snowfall, a misjudged route or an insufficiently prepared or untrained group, turning back at the right moment means giving yourself the chance to try again. In fact, the art of climbing resides in knowing how to reduce this risk. The first thing to do is therefore understand that such an extraordinary climb is not for just anyone. Good preparation, information and equipment are fundamental pre-requisites. It takes time to acquire expertise in mountaineering and you must accept the risk that comes with it. In fact, the normal Italian route is a long and beautiful snowy itinerary on a glacier that can be complicated. Possibility of an intermediate night stop at the Goûter refuge.

1. The normal route via Goûter.
Alpine grade: PD (somewhat difficult). Ascent: 1450+1000m or 800+1650 (overnight stop at Tête Rousse)
With an overnight stay at Tête Rousse, the altitude gain is higher (1650m), but you will be crossing the couloir at the right time and you can stop at the Goûter refuge on the way back.

2. The three summits. (Tacul, mont Maudit, mont Blanc).
Alpine grade: PD+ (somewhat difficult+). Ascent: 1200m
More technical and physically demanding than the normal route, this itinerary is attracting increasing numbers of climbers. Descent via either Goûter or Grands Mulets.

3. Grands Mulets and the Dôme du Goûter ridge
Alpine grade: PD+ (somewhat difficult+). Ascent: 700+1800m.
A classic on skis and far descent, this historic route is not recommended on foot because it means being exposed for too long to the risk of serac falls from the Petit Plateau. The alternative is to climb the north ridge of the Dôme du Goûter from the Goûter refuge before reaching the Vlalot hut.

4. Italian normal route (or Aiguilles Grises)
Alpine grade: PD+ (somewhat difficult+). Ascent: 1300+1800m (or 800+1000m) (overnight stop at Tête Rousse)
The normal Italian route is a long and beautiful snowy itinerary on a glacier. It may be more fun, particularly during the busier periods, to take one of the less traditional routes. The more technical passages demand substantial experience. In order of difficulty and mostly of risk exposure:

5. The Royal Traverse. Illeges, Bonnassay, Mont Blanc
Alpine grade: AD (fairly difficult) (exposed). Ascent: 1450+1100+1650m
Long expedition with sharp ridge passages that are very tricky.

6. Tourmente spur
Alpine grade: AD (fairly difficult). Ascent: 1700+1400m.
Long, exposed expedition in wild terrain; involves committed climbing with traditional protection.

7. Innominate ridge
Alpine grade: D+ (difficult+). Ascent: 900+1500+800m.
Long, exposed expedition along a complicated route.

There is more than one way to reach the top of Mont Blanc.

routes to the tip of the Alps

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Identifier et comprendre la nature et la particularité des dangers auxquels on se confronte dans les montagnes consiste à savoir réduire ce risque. Pour cela, la première démarche est de bien vouloir accéder à une nature belle et sauvage, on accepte le risque. Mais tout l’art de gravir provoquera pas candidat à une ascension aussi peu banale. On se prépare, on s’informe et on respectera sa réglementation et les règles de bonne conduite en refuge, redescendons tous exceptionnels. Devant un terrain plus difficile que prévu, des conditions médiocres, un échec n’est pas synonyme de déception. Les échecs constituent un élément d’apprentissage. Échouer un certain nombre de fois permet d’acquérir la patience et l’endurance nécessaire pour réussir. À nombre de talents, la communauté des montagnards peut montrer le chemin pour que le point d’arrivée soit un point d’orgue.

Il n’y a pas qu’une manière de réussir l’expérience du mont Blanc ce n’est pas seulement accrocher un sommet. Les alpinistes qui gravissent le mont Blanc le font pour transmettre leur expérience à la nouvelle génération. Echouer sur le mont Blanc n’est pas une défaite, c’est se donner la chance d’une nouvelle tentative. À chaque échec est une multiplication par deux des chances de redescendre en bonne santé, avec le plein de souvenirs et la fraternité de la cordée ou la confrontation à de hautes altitudes, cette expérience demeure unique.

Une affaire d’alpinistes, mais pas d’un niveau technique très élevé. En revanche, ils rassemblent tous les dangers propres à ce Grandes Jorasses 4326 m
dent du Géant 4013 m
aiguille du Midi 3842 m
mont Blanc du Tacul 4240 m
mont Maudit 4465 m
refuge du Tacul 3617 m
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Plan de l’aiguille

Cot. : PD. Dénivelé : 1450 + 1000 m ou 800 + 1650 (nuit à Tête Rousse)

7 voies vers le toit des Alpes

- Arête de l’Innominata
  Grande course sauvage avec escalade sur coinceurs et engagement.

- La voie du pape
  Plus technique et physique que la voie normale, cet itinéraire séduira de plus en plus de grimpeurs.

- Les Grands Mulets et l’arête du Dôme du Goûter
  En plus d’alpinistes. La descente peut se faire par le Goûter ou les Grands Mulets.

- Montjoie
  Le danger de chute augmente avec l’inclinaison de la pente, comme sur l’arête du Goûter, sous le col du Maudit.

- Vallot
  Dévissage d’orientation.

- Grandes Jorasses du Tacul, au Petit Plateau et au Grand Plateau. Évitez ces lieux ou ne vous y attardez pas.

- Chutes de pierres naturelles ou provoquées par d’autres cordées, les chutes de pierres réclament la plus grande attention, en particulier sous le mont Blanc du Tacul, au Petit Plateau et au Grand Plateau. Évitez ces lieux ou ne vous y attardez pas.

Pour l’ascension de l’arête des Bosses, il faut une grande expérience. Par ordre de difficulté et surtout de danger, voici une sélection d’itinéraires possibles :

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3. Les Grands Mulets et l’arête du Dôme du Goûter
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6. Vallot
   Dévissage d’orientation.

En particulier durant les périodes de forte affluence, il peut être plus pénible de déambuler dans les montagnes. Pour les alpinistes qui ont l’habitude de se déplacer en groupe, il est conseillé de se rendre dans un refuge et d’y rester pour une nuit.

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The national coordination committee for the development of mountain and climbing activities (Coordination Montagne), created in January 2012, comprises: FFCAM (French federation of mountain climbing clubs), FFME (French mountain and climbing federation), FFRP (French hiking federation), GHM, (high mountain group), SNGM (union of mountain guides), SNGRGE (refuge warden union), SNAPEC (union of climbing and canyoning professionals), SNAM (union of mountain monitors), UCPA (union of outdoor sports centres), GTA (Grande Traversée des Alpes), MW (Mountain Wilderness), ANCEF (association of mountain and cross country ski centres), CIPRA, the Petzl Foundation, En Passant par la Montagne, Sportsnature.org research network, the Mountain Biker’s Foundation.

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