



Interview



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Alain Beaujouen is a primary school teacher in Andorra and a passionate mountaineer. He made his first summit, Mont Valier (Ariège Pyrenees, 2,838 m), when he was 20. But his passion for mountaineering came 30 years later, in 2010, when Alain climbed Mont Blanc with his friend, Benoît. Alain says: "If I hadn't succeeded in Mont Blanc, I would have stopped mountaineering!" So far, he has done "a good dozen" summits in Europe, Asia and Africa. He told us about mountaineering in general and the adverse effects of climate change that he saw with his own eyes in the mountains as well as shared with us his prior experience climbing Manaslu (8163m in Nepal).

-In your opinion, can mountaineering be considered part of mountain tourism?

-Mountaineering is, therefore, not tourism at all. Mountain tourism looks more like trekking - we are talking about summits around 5000-6000 m, which are considered easy. Mountaineering is above: you must be well equipped, train, and prepare yourself ...

-According to scientists, there are fewer and fewer glaciers on the peaks yearly, and their current state causes more and more avalanches. Do you agree with this observation?

-Global warming in the mountains is a real disaster if we talk about the Alps. The glaciers are retreating, and rocks are coming out, which causes avalanches and rock falls. There are climbs in the Alps that can no longer be done at all, yet they were possible 30-40 years ago. In the same Alps, some peaks are inaccessible even in August because it is too hot.

As for Nepal, last year there was a lot of rain and, as a result, snow on the peaks, which constantly caused avalanches. Global warming is definitely causing climate change.

-Do you agree that mountaineering is becoming more and more popular in the world?

-Every year we can see more and more discussions on the Internet, sometimes negatively due to accidents and avalanches and sometimes we learn about successes of various expeditions.

-Mountaineers from which countries have you met most often during your ascents?

-It depends on where I'm going. I saw people from Europe (Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Austria, Italy, France), Russia, the United States, and Iran...

-Any Andorrans?



Alain Beaujouen

School teacher in Andorra and a passionate mountaineer

«The Pyrenees are ideal for starting mountaineering»

-I only met them in Andorra. But it's curious because I often spoke Catalan in the mountains with other people from Catalonia.

-How long does it take to train to prepare for an ascent?

-I try to do sport every day, not exactly a lot, but regularly. Cycling, hiking or Skimo in winter make me feel good in terms of preparation.

I try to keep my gym activities indoors (treadmill, spinning) to know how I progress. The most important thing is that I don't hurt myself. I do sport gently and always for fun.

Another very important point

is my weight. Before leaving, I stop drinking alcohol and eating bread, cheese, and cold cuts. On the other hand, I keep the proteins (meat, fish, eggs, etc.) ... For weight loss, it's the most effective! On the other hand, I know that I will lose 6 to 10 kg with each expedition.

-Do you have complete confidence in yourself?

-Yes. I manage myself. That's why I go alone but always accompanied by a local professional mountain guide. I know in advance that it will be very difficult ... I mentalize myself the efforts to be made.

Fear is a bad advisor. When you

have doubts, you must stop. But the decision to turn back is very difficult. This happened to me once in Bolivia. I always remember it! On the other hand, in case of failure, we also learn. We become more modest and humble, even if it is difficult for our ego...

To be motivated, you can also compare yourself to other mountaineers you meet. Sometimes it helps... Sometimes not!

-You said that before each ascent, you climb the Canigo. Is it a tradition or a sign of good luck?

-It's a habit I got into. I feel like it

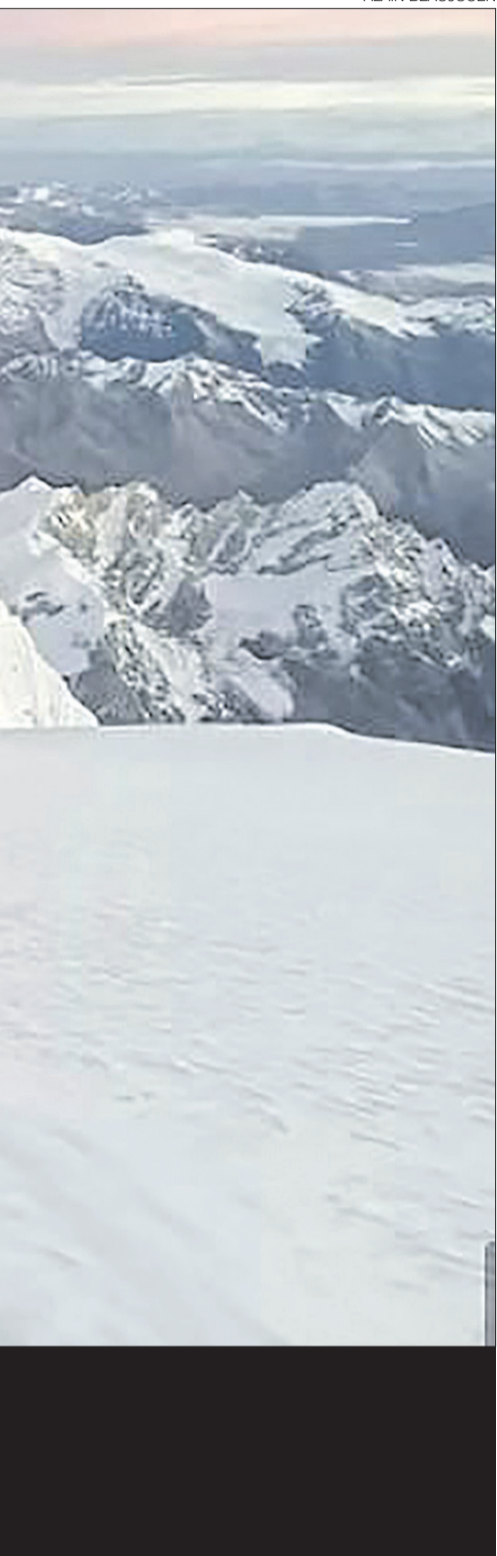
brings me good luck!

-Tell us about your last ascent in Nepal. How was the acclimatization process?

-It was the ascent to Manaslu. For acclimatization, I spent ten days at Annapurna base camp (4130 m), where I hiked 4-5 hours every day and got used to sleeping at altitude (with that, I had no problems).

In Manaslu, there are four altitude camps. Once accustomed, you climb to camp one (5400 m), spend a night there, climb to camp two, and you go down to base camp, where you rest. Then you go up to camp three and down to base camp

ALAIN BEAUJOUEN



another time. There you have a rest for two or three days.

It must be done to avoid acute mountain sickness (it can be fatal). The body is not used to the altitude; it can cause headaches, loss of appetite, poor sleep...

But little by little, the process of acclimatization takes place. You have to watch the weather when you are well-acclimatized and in good shape. If the weather is favorable, then you try the summit. When you are at camp four (7400 m), you leave in the headlamp's light at night. You should arrive at the top around noon. If around 2 p.m. you don't reach the top, you must go down.

-And what was the feeling of this long-awaited last leg in complete darkness?

-It was extremely hard. The ascent was very long, almost 10 hours. I climbed these last 760 m very slowly... Even with the oxygen mask... It was around -20°C, but hopefully, there was no wind.

I would say this is the most intense effort I have ever done. Normally, it was the most extreme summit I have ever reached ... And all that for 15 minutes of triumph!

-Do you agree that the descent is more difficult than the ascent?

-Yes, going down from camp four to camp three, around 7100 m, the guide and I, we were caught in an avalanche. I tried to stay on the surface of the snow by "swimming." I was secured on the rope, which kept me alive on the surface!

The avalanche continued to descend. Luckily, stayed on the rope, alive and uninjured. Then we called the rescue helicopter. But we had to go down lower to camp three because the helicopter couldn't climb to us so high.

-What were the most memorable moments of the expedition?

-There are moments in the mountains when your morale drops. I spent three weeks on the last expedition. Obviously, I needed my little moments of pleasure. I always have something to read and music ... I always carry sweets, chestnut purée, cakes, and Manchego.

The other mental aspects are everything related to my family,

my wife, my children, and my grandchildren ... In the mountains, I feel more sensitive.

In addition to the emotions, one of the most memorable moments was the helicopter's arrival after the avalanche.

The arrival at the summit was also a symbolic moment. You do not feel the altitude because all the peaks are very high. But it's so beautiful anyway! 8000 m is just a number, but it makes sense!

-What advice would you give to beginners?

-I always go with a local agency. That way, my guide speaks the local language, and in case of trouble, he has the connections to call and ask for help quickly.

To come back alive - that's the most important thing! So always be modest, consult more experienced friends, and do it gradually and always for your own pleasure. I started mountaineering mainly in the Pyrenees. They are ideal for beginners. ≡

It was the most extreme summit I have ever reached ... And all that for 15 minutes of triumph! ▶▶

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