

ASSISES DE L'ALPINISME

ET DES ACTIVITÉS DE MONTAGNE



MANIFESTO

**Manifesto of the 2011
Debates on Mountaineering**
A new impetus
for mountain activities

Preamble

This manifesto is the result of the work initiated in 2010 by the **Mountaineering and Mountain Practices Observatory** (l'Observatoire des Pratiques de la Montagne et de l'Alpinisme, OPMA) and based on the crucial following question: **nowadays and in the future, what room is there for mountain activities in our society?**

The word "mountaineering" alone cannot encompass these activities, which are undertaken by free choice in **undeveloped or barely developed** mountainous massifs worldwide. They require specific equipment and techniques and imply the sharing of positive values such as freedom, commitment, responsibility, autonomy, mountain team spirit and solidarity.

Today, these practices are weakened by the increasing process of land planning and development in mountain regions; they are also limited by growing environmental and security-conscious preoccupations and become marginalized since they have to face the important diversification of sports and leisure activities which particularly attract young people. **How can we preserve room for alpinist and mountain practices? How can we have them recognized as displaying major interest for society once again?**¹

A debate with national scope was opened to the attendees, through about thirty "cafés-montagne"² (meetings in various venues devoted to discussions about mountain activities) but also several meetings organized in Grenoble³ on April, 1st and April 2nd, 2011 and thanks to an open website⁴. These discussions have shown that those who practice mountain activities are indeed mobilized about these questions; however this is essentially true in a context of local stakes and occasional actions which actually deserve a more general and collaborative management. This consultation phase has thus highlighted **the necessity for increased coordination between the representatives of those who practice mountain activities, both recreational and professional.**

With this manifesto, the French Federation of Alpine Clubs and Mountaineering (Fédération Française des Clubs de Montagne, FFCAM), the French Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (Fédération Française de la Montagne et de l'Escalade, FFME), the High-Mountains Group (le Groupe de Haute Montagne, GHM, which is the French elite mountaineers' club), the National Union of Mountain Guides (le Syndicat National des Guides de Montagne, SNGM), the National Union of Huts and Halts Managers (le Syndicat National des Gardiens de Refuges et de Gîtes d'étapes, SNGRGE), the National Union of Climbing and Canyoning Professionals (le Syndicat National des Professionnels de l'Escalade et du Canyon, SNAPEC), the National Union of Mountain Leaders (le Syndicat national des Accompagnateurs en Montagne, SNAM), the Union of Outdoor Sports Centres (Union des Centres sportifs de Plein Air, UCPA), the Great Alpine Crossing (la Grande Traversée des Alpes, GTA) and Mountain Wilderness (MW) declare that they:

► **share a certain number of statements**

► **reunite and mutualise their resources in favour of a communally elaborated vision for the future of mountain practices.**

► **create a National Coordination of Mountaineering and Mountain Activities; its self-assigned mission is to initiate a common representation of those who practice mountain activities as well as to create a lobby in order to see the proposals of this manifesto through successfully.**

I. A SHARED STATEMENT

We who sign this manifesto will act having taken note of the following review⁵:

■ I.1 A weakened environment

The high mountains environment and the uplands displays contrasting situations; yet in most cases, it is under heavy pressures, among which:

- a general trend in favour of equipment and development, even if this may go against contemporary environmental stakes;
- conflicts caused by use and managing, between those who practice mountain activities (especially in situations of over-visiting), with the local populations and institutions who are sometimes tempted to limit access to the sites (for instance the Sancy reserve or the Presles's cliffs and Les Trois-Becs in the Vercors), or with the pro-environment and those who manage the protected areas (for instance in the Sixt-Passy reserve in Haute Savoie or in the Calanques National Park).

The ways of access to this environment often turn out to be unsuitable for a harmonious and sustainable development of mountaineering and mountain practices, whether it is in terms of public transportation, parking, ski lifts, hiking paths or accommodation.

■ I.2 Fragmented practices and a weakly-spread mountain culture

Although right now it is difficult to take general stock of the quantitative evolution of mountaineering and mountain practices, it is unanimously acknowledged that they are widely diversified. This trend may offer a great variety of choices to those who practice mountain activities but it is accompanied by a certain number of tendencies.

Those who practice mountain activities are increasingly solicited by activities which are being standardized or codified by the land planning and development of sites and by the methods of organisation for events or competitions. These activities, which might be used as an open door to mountaineering and mountain practices, do not enjoy enough links with the actual adventure playground; they also remain segmented.

Moreover, however diversified practice may be, it remains slowed down (in particular for young people and minors) by obstacles which are increasingly serious:

- financial obstacles (with expensive equipment, accommodation, coaching and insurances; see also the growing importance of the private sector)
- legal obstacles (with very rigid, complex and demobilizing regulations)
- cultural and media-related obstacles (mountain environment is becoming trivialized, mountain culture is low-spread, the media mostly cover dramas and accidents).

■ I.3 The existing organizations are too out of phase with the current evolutions

Faced by these complex situations, the existing organized and professional mountain organizations have a lot of trouble elaborating policies which could maintain the balance between various practices, validate their actions and work in conjunction with the public decision-makers (concerning planning, development or regulations) and the other protagonists from mountain circles (in the fields of economy, tourism, society, culture and so on).

These organizations also have to face the State's relative backing-out from their social or educative projects in the mountains. Financial difficulties (decreasing subsidies, increasing maintenance costs in the hosting centres, expensive adherence to the state health system) put their actions at risk.⁶

II. A common vision for the future of the mountains

We who sign this manifesto are determined that the following orientations should be pushed for:

■ II.1 Mountains should be protected as free of access

Upland and high-mountain areas have to be managed in a sustainable and differentiated perspective:

- It is essential to preserve the areas which have not been (or hardly) developed yet. This does not mean that they should not remain accessible to unobtrusive, eco-friendly practices which limit as much as possible the logic of profit and wide-scale exploitation.
- In the case of very importantly developed sites (for instance Mont Blanc) where touristic pressure has always been strong, the trend in favour of land planning and development has to be controlled and held back in order to lead those who practice mountain activities towards increased autonomy and responsibility. In these various areas, mountaineering and mountain practices are to be regarded as fully-fledged factors in the sustainable development of mountain economy. Thanks to their strong symbolic image, they are able to play a part in the respect of the environment and in the promotion of the territories.

5 - NB: This is not a protest list people in the mountain circles address to society; above all, it reflects what we have come to realize through a common and constructive process, and it will guide us in our action.
6 - The FFME signed agreements with the owners of about a thousand sites (cliffs, via ferrata etc), therefore taking full responsibility for the risks.

■ II.2 Mountain activities should be open to all

Those who practice mountain activities do their best to develop a responsible activity and, in all conscience, they take full responsibility for their degree of commitment.

They should be able to practice without necessarily being accompanied by a professional guide and they should have the possibility of benefiting from affordable insurances and from mountain rescue paid for by national solidarity. The factors which act as brakes on activity have to be removed, especially:

- by making some regulations clearer and more flexible (publication of the 2007 Hut Decree enforcement texts)
- by maintaining or restoring an accessible offer in terms of accommodation (by promoting the structures managed by organized and social tourism or by bringing new dynamism to nature study trips and residential classes in the mountains for schoolchildren)
- by giving a new boost to educative and social projects within mountain clubs as well as in public institutions and training organizations.

■ II.3 Organizations should be at the disposal of those who practice mountain activities

Internally, organized and professional institutions commit to share resources on the local and national scale, but also to disseminate best practices and to act jointly.

There is a shared desire for a coherent policy in order to advocate the various practices in a balanced way as well as push for the creation of links (from ski-runs and indoor climbing venues to the high-mountain adventure playground). Within the social area, these organizations are coming closer to the territories' institutions: representatives of the local communities on all scales, massif committees, natural parks, CDESI (the Departmental Commission for Nature Sports-Related Areas, Sites and Routes), mountain referents and so on. Whether it is to the State, but also to the media or to the professionals of tourism and culture, they defend the positive values of their activities on the social, educative, cultural and health levels.

At the international level, they do their best to act in touch with the European and global mountain authorities.

One of the top priorities: giving a new boost to the participation of youths and young adults.

The organized and professional mountain organizations:

- assert that upland and high-mountain activities have a major and undeniable utility in the social and educative system. The pedagogical contribution these practices provide is at the same time cultural, historical, civic (with values of solidarity and responsibility), environmental (discovery of Nature, respect of the environment) and psychological (self-fulfilment, autonomy, learning how to deal with risk and manage it)
- repeat the need for increased resources in coaching minors and young adults, taking into account their respective levels, and to establish suitable communications with their families. Similarly, they defend the principle of disseminating good practice which should be accessible to all, in particular to the non-professional.
- are working on the elaboration of a specific service addressed to young people according to their age, in cooperation with the youth education sector (youth leaders, teachers, community centre workers etc.) and with the relevant hosting establishment, which should be able to develop in freedom from the primary incentive of profitability in order.

III. Commitments and proposals

For the next six months, the Mountaineering and Mountain Activities Committee will be developing into a dynamic and active structure.

Prior to that, this structure will have to be adopted and backed up by the boards of directors and by those who sit on the general meetings of the various constituent institutions; the number of organisations involved might increase in the future.

According to what the work topic is, the Committee, which will be driven by all its members, will rely on several committees composed of experts representing various partner bodies.

Within the Mountaineering and Mountain Activities Committee-to-be, we who sign this manifesto will do everything in our power to achieve, among others, the following goals:

■ III.1 Reinvesting the mountain environment

- In each area of practice, we intend to develop greater dialogue and consultation with local representatives, populations, local agents, planners and developers, but also with environmental organizations, Education Offices, public prosecutors or with legal experts. We will play an active part in all the committees dealing with land planning and development.
- Alongside with nature environment managers, we will conduct pedagogical actions to increase the environmental awareness of those who practice mountain activities. At the same time, it is important to re-examine the bivouac legislation to make access to the mountains easier.
- We will promote mountain activities as potential driving forces for local economic development.

■ III.2 Giving practice a new boost

- Set up and pilot a guiding pattern for training, in cooperation with the French National Mountain Sports School (ENSM), aimed at developing mountain culture as well as directing people practicing standardized activities⁷ towards the adventure playground.
- The mission of huts must be reconsidered: it is important that reception and development should be more adaptable according to the various places and people; that hut managers should be backed up in their role as facilitators; that the existence of rooms where people can eat their own food (not just that which is prepared and/or sold by the hut) should be preserved, and that the legislation concerning the reception of young people should become more flexible, etc.
- The social dimension must become part again of the clubs' offer, for instance with a fitting pricing policy.
- We will support mountaineering as candidate for becoming part of the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage⁸.
- We will participate in the creation of an International Observatory of Mountain Practices, which was initiated by the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (the UIAA).
- We will also support the creation of a public and cross-border aid radio network.

■ III.3 Defending the social role of mountaineering and mountain practices

- It is important to achieve better institutional recognition of upland and high-mountain activities (for instance through the creation of a delegation for Mountaineering).
- It must be ensured that the institutional structures dedicated to mountain activities (such as the French National Council for Mountain Sports, the Conseil Supérieur des Sports de Montagne) work in a regular and efficient way.
- Communication about mountain activities and their promotion must be improved: by supporting and developing web portals dedicated to these activities (these websites should especially list the various public transportation offers adapted to the mountains); by developing a communication strategy underlining the values defended by mountain practices, in cooperation with the tourist offices, the ski resorts and all the other actors of leisure; by multiplying events with great potential and discovery campaigns; by relying on the positive images conveyed by/embodyed by the "mountain activists" (high-mountain guides and mountain leaders, climbers, coaches from the clubs, hut managers, park rangers, shepherds...)
- The major potential contribution provided by high-mountain activities in terms of health must be articulated, especially in the fields of telemedicine, accident research, aid in extreme conditions, and medicinal experiments or research.
- Partnerships with the academic sphere must be established in order to develop socio-economic and environmental research work on mountain activities⁹.

7 - See I.2.

8 - This candidacy was launched on April 16th, 2011 by the agglomerations of Chamonix Mont-Blanc (France) and Courmayeur (Italy).

9 - See the potential research program (available in the attached documents).

Specific actions addressed to the young

- The educational role of upland and high-mountain activities must be recognized by the ministries concerned (in particular the Department of Education and the Department of Sports), as well as by the Junior Minister for Organizations and the Young. We will fight for this, while also participating in the proposed working group which was suggested by Luc Châtel (the French Secretary of State for Education) and which will focus on the "distinctive nature of education in the mountain environment". In cooperation with the Department of Education, we intend to write a methodological guidebook to help those who take schoolchildren to the mountains for discovery campaigns or to practice mountain activities.
- We will back up the project aiming at creating a "young" group/office within the French National Council for Mountain Sports (CSSM).
- It will also be important to create a new opportunity addressed specifically to the under-age and to those who have recently come of age; this offer should be differentiated according to their needs and expectations (from total supervision to autonomy) as well as spread and promoted via the various networks they use (for instance on the Internet). Publicly-funded youth policies should be overseen by an organisation which needs to be created, and which we will be part of.
- With the help of mountain clubs, we will create, run and develop an intermediary (linking) network aiming to get in touch with the young and their families. Information offices such as the Mountain Centre (la Maison de la Montagne) in Grenoble or the High-Mountains Office (Office de Haute Montagne) in Chamonix, must be developed.

1 - See the « Pourquoi des Assises de l'Alpinisme? » (Why were Debates on Mountaineering organized?) text.

2 - See the summary of what was said during the cafés-montagne.

3 - See the summary of what was said during the Grenoble meetings.

4 - www.assisesdelalpinisme2011.fr



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