

“THIS ICE AXE, WHICH HELPED ME TO VICTORY”



Mr Maurice Herzog hands over the Annapurna ice axe to President Juan Antonio Samaranch.

By Maurice Herzog

After giving his ice axe to the IOC President, Mr Herzog recounted in a short, very moving speech, its history...

Many years ago when I was a student, I developed a passion for mountains, and I absolutely had to have that instrument which is indispensable to any climber who wants to make a career of it and who has found a vocation. With the modest savings I had at the time, this was my first investment. And so I went to the specialist in my little village of Les Bossons near

Chamonix to try to obtain the best tool, in the noblest sense of the term, that is to say an ice axe which would come to form almost a part of myself and would allow me to undertake my adventures in the high mountains. Together we chose the rough metallic shape; together we chose the wood and the point, and then this skilful craftsman, Claudius Simon, produced a

work of art. For me it was the beginning of an adventure. After that I climbed all the faces of all the summits in the Alps, in all conditions, good weather, bad weather alike, and this ice axe helped me to victory,.. and helped to save my life. Then, in what was the greatest moment of this beautiful ice axe's career, on 3rd June 1950, as my faithful friend Louis Guirandou-N'Diaye so kindly said, I had the good fortune to reach the summit of Annapurna, the first 8,000 metre peak ever to be conquered by man. The axe's final deed was to act as a kind of anchor to hold the French flag and that of Nepal, the host country. And since then it has accompanied me in retirement, in the saddest and most tragic times of my life. On one day even, the whole expedition was halted because I had mislaid my ice axe and I cared about this instrument more strongly than anything else, as it had accompanied me throughout my life.

Today I have decided to give this ice axe to the International Olympic Committee, and that is why, Mr President, dear Juan, I am happy to be able to give it in these circumstances. For a climber, an ice axe is more than a tool; it is a part, an extension of himself. It has helped me, true enough, but it has saved me on many occasions too. I never gave this ice axe a special name, although many climbers give pet names to this peaceful weapon. But how can you give a name to one of your limbs? Would I give a name to my arm or leg? It was, quite simply, myself. Thus I thought that it would end its days with me, in my tomb, like the knights of old who took their sword, which had defended them all their lives, with them into the grave. But this idea was perhaps too romantic, and it would also have taken this ice axe out of the sight of the general public. Thus I thought that, if it were to be the last thing to accompany me, it would be better placed in the magnificent Olympic Museum in Lausanne, which will be the most beautiful one in the world, and which the International Olympic Committee, and more especially President Samaranch, have so longed for. I must say that this gift I am making, with some emotion I must confess, is also in consideration of the friendship I

have long had for my friend, Juan Antonio Samaranch. For, indeed, when we first met he was not yet married. Nor, of course, was his wife who is here today. And we undertook all our family, sporting and other adventures together. Thus it is as a mark of gratitude, of thanks to him that I have the honour and profound joy to present this ice axe to him today.



A photo from the archives. In 1950, Maurice Herzog on the "Roof of the World".