

## Alpinism

Pontresina has been a renowned mountaineering village since the mid-19th century, thanks to its proximity to the Bernina Massif. Piz Bernina, at 4,049 meters, is the only four-thousander in the Eastern Alps and the highest mountain in Graubünden. The ascent via the Biancograt ridge is particularly famous. Climbing Piz Bernina is a highlight for all mountaineers. Piz Palü, at 3,900 meters, is also very well-known – considered the most beautiful snow and ice mountain in the Alps.

The first mountaineers in the Engadine were locals, including foresters and hunters. With the first ascent of Piz Bernina in 1850 by the mountaineer and topographer Johann Wilhelm Fortunat Coaz, the world learned of the beauty of the Bernina Massif. “Thousands and thousands of mountain peaks surrounded us, rising rocky from shimmering glacial seas,” Coaz noted after the first ascent. Mountain tourism subsequently experienced a major boom. In 1871, the Pontresina Mountain Guides Association was founded, officially recognizing the profession of mountain guide. It was only the third mountain guides association in Switzerland. Twenty years later, the Bernina Section of the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) was established. Under its auspices, club huts were built, which still serve today as base camps for high-altitude tours and as shelters during sudden weather changes.

For a long time, the Alps were considered threatening and inhospitable. Legends told of demons. British visitors played a crucial role in the development of alpinism and tourism in Pontresina. They were instrumental in the golden age of alpinism during the second half of the 19th century. One female pioneer was Elizabeth Maine. The English photographer, writer, and mountaineer, born in 1861 and died in 1934, made first ascents – including the first winter ascent of Piz Palü. In those pioneering days, mountaineers wore only simple leather boots with nailed soles for traction. Crampons were made of iron spikes and strapped to the boots. Their gear included trousers, wool jackets and sweaters; women wore skirts. With ice axes and ropes, they ascended to dizzying heights. Long wooden walking sticks served as aids, and the hemp ropes were not waterproof and therefore often froze. Images from the early days of mountain tourism often show how difficult sections of rock and ice were overcome with the aid of ladders. Elizabeth Maine was not only an enthusiastic mountaineer but also took around 400 photographs of her adventures in the Engadine. Her photos bear witness to an untouched Upper Engadine landscape and the newly discovered Alpine world. These images are now housed in the Upper Engadine Cultural Archive.

The Pontresina Mountaineering School was founded in 1935 by Chasper Grass, himself from a mountaineering family. Today, the Pontresina Mountaineering School is one of the most renowned in Switzerland. Mountain guides for high-altitude tours and ski tours can be booked, as well as glacier hikes, ice climbing, sport climbing, and canyoning. The „Museum Alpin,“ located in the heart of Pontresina in the „Chesa Delnon,“ offers further fascinating information about mountaineering. The „Museum Alpin“ was founded in 1971 by the Pontresina Mountain Guides Association.

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