

*A passion for adventure
and the mountains
drives the climbing
partnership of Spanish
brothers Iker and
Eneko Pou.*

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FOCUS ON WINNERS: IKER AND ENEKO POU

Spanish climbers Iker and Eneko Pou recently opened a new route on Mont Blanc, naming it the 'Classic Modern'. Highlighting the importance of wearing the right apparel in tough conditions, the brothers say the clothing they wear has saved their lives on countless expeditions.

Mapping new ground

On August 1 this year, Iker and Eneko Pou opened a new route on the Italian face of Mont Blanc, christening it 'La Classica Moderna'. Together with Italian athlete Hervé Barmasse, the alpinists free-climbed the Freney side of the Mont Blanc south face, Valle d'Aosta, in full autonomy and without bolts. The team carried only essential materials in case of unexpected bivouacs on the ascent, and used basic traditional safety equipment, such as four pitons.

The climb included one night's stay at Rifugio Monzino (2590m) and one stop at Bivacco Eccles (3850m). One bivouac was established on the top of Mont Blanc on the Courmayeur side (4765m), where temperatures fell to near -10°C. Accumulating a total vertical gain of 3,300m from the approach to the Creste del Brouillard at the top of Mont Blanc, the team took the descent on the French side of Mont Blanc arriving in Chamonix after a total vertical gain on rock of 380 metres.

In naming the route, Mr Barmasse said: "The ascent resembled the ethics and philosophy of Walter Bonatti who, in 1959, was the first person to climb on the monoliths of this side of Mont Blanc. I would define the style as modern-classic; a style that mirrors those of the pioneers, who, to get back home, had to reach the top of Mont Blanc. Hence the name La Classica Moderna."

Iker and Eneko Pou are the first Spanish climbers to have opened a new route on the south face of the Mont Blanc. "The bivouac was fantastic, and the scenery was just stunning. We are very tired, but super happy. It's a great achievement for all of us," said Eneko Pou.

The team's ascent of Mont Blanc was the second of a trilogy of climbs within The North Face expedition, Exploring The Alps – but is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the Pou Brothers' achievements in climbing.

Born to climb

Hailing from the Basque Country of Northern Spain, the brothers journeyed often into the Pyrenees and the Alps with their parents. In 1998, Eneko, the older of the siblings, was



selected as a member of the first Spanish Young Mountaineer Team. While deeply committed to mountaineering, Eneko was not content to limit himself to rock climbing, and instead explored the many disciplines of mountain adventuring: rock climbing, ski mountaineering, ice climbing and high-altitude alpinism. At the same time, Iker was expanding his climbing vocabulary to include sport climbing, big-wall free climbing and ski mountaineering.

By 2002, when both siblings had garnered many awards and honours for their abilities, Eneko dreamed up a new project that would allow the brothers to join forces to explore the unknown. The Seven Walls-Seven Continents project would take up the next five years of the brothers' lives, and see them free climb a significant and characteristic big wall on each of the world's continents. Starting in 2003 with two free ascents of El Niño on Yosemite's El Capitan and Zumbeltz on the Naranjo de Bulnes

Iker and Eneko Pou climbing Panaroma on the West Cima di Lavaredo, Italy.

Damiano Levati/Red Bull Content Pool

in Northern Spain, the brothers journeyed to Madagascar the following year and managed the first free ascent of Bravo les Filles in the Tsaranoro Massif. In 2005 it was the turn of Australasia and the famous Totem Pole off Tasmania. During the same year, the brothers travelled to Pakistan for their most ambitious project at the time, the first free ascent of Eternal Flame on Trango Tower. Although they completed the ascent of the Karakoram route, they failed to climb every pitch free. Their sixth continent was South America, where on their second attempt they made a free ascent of the Supercanaleta on Fitz Roy. As a climax to the project, the Pou brothers climbed a new route on the Antarctic Peninsula at the end of 2007. In a 24-hour round trip from their base camp in the Lemaire Channel, the brothers made the first ascent of the 'Three Pigs' via a route they named Azken Paradisua, a 400-metre rock wall followed by 200 metres of mixed and ice terrain to the summit.

As the brothers are sponsored by The North Face, they are often asked to use and test the brand's apparel and equipment before it hits the market. "We try them out in the harshest of conditions, and offer feedback on what works and what doesn't," says Eneko. "We have input during and after the design phase."

"The North Face is a brand that has a really strong focus on athletes," says Iker. "Most of the time, when we give feedback to the designers we discuss if we need something specific for a particular expedition or climb. This is then worked into the design of the products."

The extreme conditions of the final climb of the Seven Walls-Seven Continents project in Antarctica pushed the brothers' apparel to the very limit, according to Eneko. "For us, Antarctica was definitely one of the hardest and most difficult due to the conditions we were under. However, we felt really relaxed about the challenge ahead due to the kit we had," he says. "This climb was extremely difficult and something that required our upmost concentration in very harsh conditions. The North Face Summit Series kit gave us full protection and warmth against the elements and temperatures that dropped to -25°C. Without the right products and clothing it is very easy to freeze!"

According to Eneko and Iker Pou, Gore-Tex's Pro Shell fabric, which is used to produce waterproof and breathable outerwear, is one of the greatest innovations in outdoor clothing in recent years. "It is lightweight and enables extreme mobility," says Iker. "In the past we have worn jackets that are quite heavy and bulky for a climbing jacket, but Pro Shell fabric combines the perfect weight and consistency for our expeditions."



Facing challenges

The Pou brothers say the most enjoyable part of climbing for them is the challenges they overcome along the way – rather than merely reaching a new summit. "It's the path that we take during our climbs that give us that feeling, rather than what we are going to find at the end," says Eneko. "We are met with a range of challenges throughout, which are the exact reasons why we do what we do."

One of the brothers' more recent challenges was their 2010 adventure, The Hardest of the Alps. On an epic road trip which spanned a full summer and winter, Eneko and Iker travelled across the Alps, following in the footsteps of some of the most prominent climbers in history, and repeating some of the most iconic routes in big-wall climbing.

"The Hardest of the Alps was really important for us. It's not easy to focus on something so intense for such a long period of time," says Iker. "The views were out of this world and something we will never forget. Some of the hardest climbs we have faced took place during this expedition. We met an array of people along the way who had no idea who we were or what we did, but now understand climbing for what it is and what it really entails."

After achieving so much in the climbing world, it is hard to imagine what Iker and Eneko will do next to top reach higher, more challenging goals. For now, however, their ambitions for the future are to "discover new climbs, complete new expeditions, continue to meet new people and carry on as we have for years to come. The climb is only one part of our life." 🌐

The Pou brothers at the opening of the new North Face store, Liverpool, UK in April this year

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