

Press release, 13 June 2019

Matterhorn Ladies

29 June to 27 October 2019
Gornergrat Shelter, Zermatt
Opening times: 9 am to 6 pm
Free entry

An exhibition about fourteen brave women who climbed the Matterhorn.

In 1871, six years after the first ascent, Lucy Walker became the first woman to reach the peak of the Matterhorn. The current pop-up exhibition at the Gornergrat Shelter in Zermatt examines not only her story, but also those of bold female alpinists from all around the world who have also climbed the mountain of all mountains.

Without exception, the Matterhorn Ladies were the pioneers of their day. Some of the achievements of these early female pioneers are quite amazing even by today's standards. For instance, young Zermatt residents Josephina Aufdenblatten and Martha Inderbinen climbed the Matterhorn the very first time they went mountaineering – roped up to their brothers. To take another example, one of the subjects of the exhibition achieved something that no one else before her had managed: in 2014, Géraldine Fasnacht from French-speaking Switzerland became the first person to fly from the summit wearing a wingsuit.

The “Matterhorn Ladies” exhibition tells the stories of fourteen female pioneers hailing from all over the world. The exhibition will include photographs and drawings, books, articles, and pieces of equipment. Lifesize figures of the Matterhorn Ladies show visitors the way from Riffelberg mountain station to the exhibition in the shelter.

“Matterhorn Ladies” is the fourth pop-up project on the Gornergrat organized by the Swiss Alpine Museum. It was created in close collaboration with the open-air theatre Zermatter Freilichtspiele, Gornergrat Bahn, and the Kultur- und Sozialstiftung der Burgergemeinde Zermatt.

Timeline

1867: The first woman on the Matterhorn

The eighteen-year-old Italian Félicité Carrel from Valtournenche is the first woman climbing on the Matterhorn. She is forced to abandon her ascent at over 4,300 metres when the wind begins to blow in her skirts, almost casting her into the abyss.

1871: The first women on top of the Matterhorn

On 22 July 1871, the thirty-four-year-old Lucy Walker from England is the first woman to reach the summit of the Matterhorn (4478 m). The American Meta Brevoort refuses to be discouraged by Walker's success, making her own successful ascent along the Hörnli ridge and descent along the Lion ridge, making her the first woman to traverse the Matterhorn.

1932: The first true women-only ascent

Alice Damesme from France and Mirian O'Brien Underhill from the United States make their ascent along the Hörnligrat on 13 August 1932 – the first true women-only ascent.

1944: The first woman on the Furggengrat

On 20 August 1944, Loulou Boulaz from Geneva is the first woman to ascend the mountain along the Furggengrat, the Matterhorn's most difficult ridge.

1965: First ascent of the north face by a woman

Yvette Vaucher from Geneva is the first woman to climb the Matterhorn's north face.

1967: First women-only ascent of the Matterhorn's north face

Michiko Imai and Yoshiko Wakayama from Japan pair up to climb the Matterhorn's north face on 18/19 July 1967.

1993: First solo ascent of the Matterhorn's north face by a woman

Alison Hargreaves from England ascends the Matterhorn's north face on 29 June 1993 – the first female solo ascent.

2014: The first wingsuit flight from the Matterhorn summit

Géraldine Fasnacht from Lausanne is the first person to fly in a wingsuit from the Matterhorn summit on 7 June 2014.

Five stories provide a foretaste of what is to come

Lucy Walker (GB) and Meta Brevoort (USA), 1871:

The first women on the Matterhorn

At the age of thirty-four, Lucy Walker became the first woman to reach the Matterhorn's summit on 22 July 1871. When she heard of plans by the American Meta Brevoort – her greatest rival – to ascend the mountain, she put together a climbing team in one day and reached the summit in her first attempt while wearing a flannel skirt – the typical attire for the era. Brevoort refused to be discouraged by Walker's success, and so on 5 September 1871 she climbed along the Hörnligrat to become the second woman to reach the summit. She made her descent along the Liongrat, making her the first woman to traverse the Matterhorn.

Maud Wundt-Walters (GB), 1894: The Matterhorn as the love of her life

The Matterhorn honeymoon of Maud Wundt-Walters from England and Theodor Wundt from Germany in the summer of 1894 nearly ended in tragedy: "At the summit a terrible storm rose up, which threatened our lives with lightning and winds, snow and hail and which required the utmost effort as we sought to force our way back to the inhabited world." In a more relaxed moment during their adventurous journey, she was rumoured to have told her husband: "Do you know, it's quite nice to do the cooking up here, but I'm letting you know now that when we get back home, you won't see me in the kitchen." Even her daughter Nora referred to the pair lovingly as "Matterl" in reference to the mountain of all mountains.

Maria José (Belgium), 1941: The first princess on the summit

Maria José of Belgium, then the Princess of Belgium and for forty days in 1946 the last queen of Italy, ascended the Cervino (the Italian name for the Matterhorn) on 12 September 1941. Afterwards, the "Queen of the Matterhorn" told of how she sat upon the world's most beautiful throne atop the mountain's majestic summit.

Yvette Vaucher (Switzerland), 1965:

First the north face, then to the hairdresser

“The Eiger is imposing and austere, the Matterhorn elegant as a flame,” answered Yvette Vaucher when asked about the differences between Switzerland’s two famous north faces. The native of Geneva was familiar with them both from personal experience: she was the first woman to ascend the Matterhorn along the north face. And what does a lady desire after conquering the north face? “I wanted to visit the hairdresser and have a large green salad. When I got back down to Zermatt, I received a voucher from the hairdresser and the innkeeper prepared a salad for me. Une grande salade verte,” she explained with a grin in a 2001 interview.

Géraldine Fasnacht (Switzerland), 2014: The first wingsuit flight

“It wasn’t the most dangerous nor was it the most difficult flight of my life, but it was certainly the most beautiful,” remarked the woman from Vaud in an interview: on 7 June 2014, Géraldine Fasnacht of Lausanne became the first person to fly from the summit of the Matterhorn in a wingsuit.

Impressum

Project management:

Beat Hächler

Scenography and graphics:

Atelier Philipp Clemenz

Contents and research:

Daniel Anker

Translations:

Tradukas

Construction and engineering:

Arjen Damen

Project partners:

Kultur- und Sozialstiftung der Bürger
gemeinde Zermatt, Gornergrat Bahn,
Freilichtspiele Zermatt

Additional information:

Beatrice Häusler

Alpines Museum der Schweiz | communications

0041 (0)31 350 04 48

beatrice.haeusler@alpinesmuseum.ch

Images

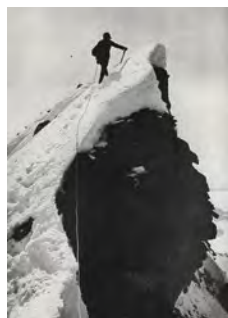
Images for download are available at alpinesmuseum.ch/en/media



MAUD WUNDT-WALTERS VOR DEM MATTERHORN, 1894
(FOTO: THEODOR WUNDT)



YVETTE VAUCHER, 1965
(FOTO: RUEDI HOMBERGER/ALPINISMUS 11-1965)



ALICE DAMESME, 1932
(FOTO: «GIVE ME THE HILLS», 1956)



MIRIAM O'BRIEN, 1932
(FOTO: «GIVE ME THE HILLS», 1956)



GÉRALDINE FASNACHT (FOTO: DAVID CARLIER, 2015)
MAUD WUNDT-WALTERS (FOTO: THEODOR WUNDT, 1894)



LUCY WALKER, 1868
(FOTO: ALPINE CLUB PHOTO LIBRARY, LONDON/ATELIER PHILIPP CLEMENZ, CHRISTIAN STERN)



MARIE JOSÉ VON BELGIEN, 1941
(FOTO: FONDS DEFFEYES, AOSTE/ ESCALADES ROYALES, 2016)



GÉRALDINE FASNACHT
(FOTO: DAVID CARLIER, 2015)

Other projects on the theme of "Women on the Mountain"

Matterhorn: No Ladies Please!, freilichtspiele-zermatt.ch

Side events in Zermatt – Matterhorn, zermatt.ch/ladiesplease