

Recommendations from the Conference on “Glaciers as indicators of global warming: mountaineering and climate change”

The Conference on “Glaciers as indicators of global warming: mountaineering and climate change” took place in Benasque on 20th September, organised by the FEDME (Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports) Scientific Advisory Board on Mountain Regions, with the collaboration of the Regional Government of Aragon, Barcelona Provincial Council, Benasque Town Council and the Aragon Mountaineering Federation (FAM).

The Conference brought together 60 people from the research, science and mountaineering sectors in various autonomous communities, who were able to learn about the studies carried out on glaciers in Spain and the rest of the world from eminent scientists Mr Antonio Gómez Ortiz, Mr Javier Martín Vide, Mr Adolfo Eraso Romero, Ms Carmen Domínguez Álvarez, Mr Fernando Lampre Vitaller and Mr Javier del Valle Melendo.

Scientists have recorded the rapid retreat of glaciers both in Spain and throughout Europe and the other continents. Climate models coincide in painting a picture of a warmer planet over the coming decades, with less rainfall in some areas and higher temperatures. The data recorded in the Pyrenees and Sierra Nevada is similar to the data obtained at the poles or in the large mountain ranges of the Himalayas and the Andes.

At the end of the presentation given by the researchers, there was a round table discussion on the Spanish climbers’ view regarding the glacier situation. Lorenzo Ortas, Jordi Camins and Jaume Altavill showed the audience some images of glaciers, including both current and past views, to serve as a contrast showing how they had retreated around the summits and massifs of the most emblematic mountains in the climbing world.

In light of the studies and research work presented, it is clear that the glaciers have been shrinking over the past decade, and thus FEDME believes the following recommendations are in order:

1. The promotion and encouragement of good environmental practices in sporting activities run by the federations, and collaboration with the various public administration bodies in activities leading to the conservation of natural environments where mountain sports are conducted.
2. Collaboration with the Public Authorities responsible for mountain regions with glaciers, with a view to establishing updated information networks reporting on the situation of the glaciers, preventive measures, and environmental education and awareness-raising activities, both for the mountaineering sector and also for the general public.
3. The increase in prevention and safety measures in areas where the situation has deteriorated and glaciers have retreated to avoid hazards associated with falling rocks, ice, etc.
4. The exchange of information through the various Boards concerned with this matter in FEDME (Nature Access Committee, GAME, EEAM, etc.) that might help climbing activities to be conducted in a safer and more precise manner in these environments.
5. Review and update climbing guides to adapt routes and ascents to the current reality, in line with the passage of glaciers and ice fields, as the situation on the ground changes very rapidly.
6. Dissemination amongst the more than 75,000 federation members and 1,200 clubs in Spain of the studies and conclusions of this Conference, in the desire to provide up-to-date information on the glacier situation.