

History of the UIAA

Twenty mountaineering associations met in Chamonix, France in August **1932** for an alpine congress. They decided to found an international federation which would be in charge of the “study and solution of all problems regarding mountaineering”. No small task one would say. One of those problems was the lack of a universal climbing grade system, which was finally resolved with the creation of the UIAA climbing grade 40 years later. Count Charles Egmond d’Arcis from Switzerland became the first president and he gave the new federation the name UIAA – Union Internationale des Association d’Alpinisme.

The new federation worked hard over the following years. Between 1933 and 1939 the UIAA produced more than 25 detailed written reports on various topics. Many of these are still very relevant for our organisation today, such as mountaineering education for youth, avalanche studies and the protection of mountains.



Despite the increasing political instability, 11 organisations met for a General Assembly in Zermatt, Switzerland nine days before the outbreak of the Second World War. During the war however, there was little contact between the members, although some could get in touch with the UIAA by post. When peace came, president d’Arcis made a great effort to reconstruct the federation. He believed that mountaineers and the UIAA could have an important role in the “moral reconstruction of the world”. In 1947 the UIAA had its first post-war General Assembly, and in 1950 it had grown to represent a total of half a million climbers. The UIAA bulletin was created in 1957 and the developing of safety standards and the testing of ropes started in 1960. The first rope testing machine was in fact invented by the head of the UIAA Safety Commission.

Another big project in the 1960s was to stop a proposed Italian project to construct a cable car to the summit of the Matterhorn and a Swiss plan to build a railroad to the top of the Jungfrau. Both of these protests were successful, but the UIAA could not prevent other projects, such as the construction of cable cars in France (Aiguille du Midi to Col du Géant connection) and Switzerland (Mount Pilatus).

In 1960 the UIAA Safety Label for mountaineering equipment was created, and it was approved internationally in 1965. The Label needed to have a logo, and as the job had to be done quickly, committee member J. Juge asked his son to draw a mountain, then added the letters UIAA and the circle. Now mountaineers knew what symbol to look for when buying equipment, and for many

young mountaineers, seeing that logo is their first meeting with our federation.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, there was an increased awareness of the environmental impact of mountaineering, which in 1982 resulted in the UIAA Kathmandu declaration; a call for action against the degradation of mountains. The Safety Commission developed standards for karabiners, helmets and harnesses and in 1982 the golden anniversary was celebrated in Chamonix and Kathmandu. Another important issue was access to mountains. The UIAA also agreed on a 7th grade of difficulty on the climbing scale.



In the early nineties, the first climbing competition World Cup was held, laying the ground for our competitive sports. There was an increased awareness about ethical issues related to mountaineering and the General Assembly unanimously adopted a motion against sightseeing flights in mountains. In 1995, the International Olympic Committee confirmed that the UIAA was recognised as the federation representing mountaineering sports. The UIAA also published a multilingual dictionary of mountaineering terms, to make it easier for climbers from different countries to communicate.

In 1999, the UIAA's International council for ski mountaineering competitions (ISMC) was created and in 2003 a commission for Ice Climbing competitions was formed. In 2002 the UIAA published a "Summit Charter" describing the values and principles of the organisation. In this decade an 8th grade on the UIAA scale was also created.

In 2006 the UIAA General Assembly recognised that it was no longer possible to keep all the sections of the UIAA together as a single federation. Therefore an independent International federation for climbing competition, the International Federation of Sport Climbing came into being. Ice Climbing remains a part of the UIAA. In 2007 the UIAA celebrated its 75th anniversary, and in 2009 the federation counted almost 1.3 million members world wide.

In 2009, the UIAA at its General Assembly approved the Mountain Ethics Declaration, a code for mountaineering values and spelling out sportsmanship ethics and respect for cultures and the environment.

Source: UIAA