

Beat: Sports

FRANCE CELEBRATES THE CENTENARY OF 1ST WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES, 23 JUNE

OLYMPIC TORCH IS IN CHAMONIX/MONT BLANC

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USPA NEWS - It is a historical Olympic day, today the 23rd of June 2024 in Haute-Savoie to celebrate the centenary of the first winter Olympic Games in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc. Paris 2024 planned the Torch Relay, to coincide with this anniversary, and warming up the hearts over this nostalgic momentum.

To celebrate Olympic Day on 23rd June 2024 alongside the centenary of the first Winter Olympic Games, the Olympic Torch Relay, sponsored by Coca-Cola, Banque Populaire and Caisse d'Epargne, lit up Haute-Savoie throughout a historical and very symbolic day. The first Winter Olympic Games were organised in 1924 in the mountain resort of Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, so it was a fitting tribute to return 100 years later with the Olympic Torch Relay and the ambition to bring the Olympic legacy to life for as many people as possible thanks to a tailor-made programme. The highlights were a breathtaking climb on the Aiguille du Midi needle, with 24 torchbearers specialised in high mountain disciplines, and the golf collective relay which took place at the Evian Resort Golf Club.

The day finished on a high note with an exceptional collective relay that brought together 17 former standard-bearers including Alain Calmat and Marie Bochet, who were proud to be its captains and also had the honour of lighting the cauldron at the celebration

CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY'S LEGACY

The stage of the Olympic Torch Relay on 23rd June 2024 was especially eagerly awaited, because it was Olympic Day, the last one before the beginning of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Today, it provides a link with history: 100 years ago, in 1924, the first Winter Olympic Games took place in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc. Since then, the resort has always maintained a link with the Olympic Games because at least one representative of Chamonix has participated in each edition of the Winter Olympics. Thanks to support from the Haute-Savoie local authorities, the Chamonix-Mont-Blanc municipal authorities and those of the towns through which the relay passed, all the inhabitants of the area were able to celebrate this strong Olympic heritage today.

PROMOTING THE AREA'S EXCEPTIONAL SITES

All along its route, the Olympic Torch Relay put the spotlight on the emblematic sites of Haute-Savoie, from its huge ski resorts, through its spa resorts to its lakes. The route began from the Haute Savoie council's headquarters and then the Olympic Torch was carried from the Source Cachat spring to Parc Dollfus in Évian-les-Bains. It then visited Héry-sur-Alby and in particular the Pays d'Alby cultural and sports centre, as well as Annemasse, passing from the Martin Luther King centre to Place de la Libération. After that, it climbed up to the summit of the Plateau des Glières, an important venue in the history of the Resistance during the Second World War. The relay then travelled to Cluses, where the Olympic Torch was carried past the Lieutenant Charles Poncet sports hall, and then to Excenevex, where it boarded rowing boats on the beaches of Lac Léman.

Afterwards, the Olympic Torch was taken to Chamonix-Mont-Blanc for a return to its roots, one hundred years after the first Winter Olympic Games. After passing through Montenvers station and the forecourt of the cable car post, it visited the site of the former speed skating ring inaugurated in 1924, where sporting events were organised by the French army's Ecole Militaire de haute-montagne mountaineering academy. The celebration venue was set up on Place du Mont-Blanc and played host to combat sport demonstrations organised by the municipal and local authorities.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CLIMB FEATURING 24 HIGH SPECIALISTS

To celebrate the event and create unique memories, a breathtaking climb was held, rehearsed from the beginning of June in the early morning and in utmost secrecy, with the Olympic Torch at the summit of the Aiguille du Midi needle. Paris 2024 had been preparing this celebration behind the scenes with the Chamonix-Mont-Blanc municipal authorities for several months. 24 torchbearers, who were

all local players in the mountain environment or specialists in high altitude disciplines, took part in the adventure. They included mountain guides, Olympians and top-level athletes in various disciplines such as skiing, downhill skiing, mountaineering, high-linaparagliding and many others.

The group featured athletes who have taken part in the Winter Olympic Games, such as local legend Blaise Giezandanner (skiing), Margot Ravinel, who took part in the Youth Olympics (in downhill skiing), Cédric Amafroï-Broisat (para-skiing), Christophe Ville (ice hockey) and Jonas Devouassoux (ski-cross). Many others who took part have distinguished themselves in their respective sports, such as Nathan Paulin (highlining), Coralie Bentz (cross-country-skiing), Baptiste Ellmenreich (competitive ski touring), Enora Latuillière (biathlon), Sandie Cochepain (paragliding), Sandra Deleglise (short track skating) among others.

Several high-altitude professions were also represented in this climb such as mountain guides with Fleur Fouque from the Compagnie des guides de Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, Elodie Lecomte from the Ecole Nationale de Ski et d'Alpinisme skiing and mountaineering school, Yann Gérome from the mountain police platoon Peloton de Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne based in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc and Guillaume Baillargé from the French army's Ecole Militaire de Haute Montagne mountaineering academy. Sonia Popoff, an emergency mountain rescue doctor, also took part in this exceptional climb. Thanks to the support of the Chamonix-Mont-Blanc municipal authorities and the Caisse d'Epargne Rhône Alpes bank, a 3-minute-long film was produced by Bertrand Delapierre, a mountaineer and director. It was shown to the many spectators who came to the celebration venue at Place du Mont-Blanc to cheer on these athletes who are in a class of their own.

TWO EXCEPTIONAL COLLECTIVE RELAYS !

The celebration venue also played host to another of the day's highlights. A collective relay was organised with 17 former standard-bearers. Martin Fourcade, the most well-known of France's biathletes and a five times Olympic champion, passed on the Olympic Torch to the first representative of the collective relay, former skier Carole Montillet. Alongside her were Tessa Worley (skiing), Jason Lamy-Chappuis (Nordic combined), Kevin Rolland (freestyle skiing), Philippe Candeloro (ice skating), Vincent Defrasne (biathlon) and Nadine Laurent (downhill skiing). Marie Bochet, who has won eight titles at the Winter Paralympic Games, and Alain Calmat, a silver medallist at the 1964 Olympic Games in ice skating who lit the Olympic Cauldron at the Grenoble Winter Olympics in 1968, were the two captains of this relay and had the honour of lighting the celebration cauldron together to bring a thrilling day to a close.

A little earlier in the day, another collective relay was organised in Evian-les-Bains by the French Federation of Golf, taking place at the Evian Resort Golf Club, one of French golf's gems and a course which plays host to major tournaments each year. The relay travelled from hole number 2 to the 18th green and was commenced by Magali Genevray, a course superintendent who has devoted herself to golf for the last two decades. Locally well-known sporting figures, all members of the French Federation of Golf, but also boasting other talents, took part, such as Peggy Bouchet (the first woman to have rowed across the Atlantic Ocean), the two Olympians Florence Masnada and Léo Lacroix (skiing), Émilie Mollard (speed-golf) and Benjamin Cavet (freestyle skiing). Young golf hopefuls and para-golfers were also present, including Mélody Roccaz and Issa Nlareb Amang.

160 TORCHBEARERS ON A HISTORICAL DAY

Elite athletes were especially well-represented among the day's other torchbearers. Emblematic figures from skiing and mountaineering were present, such as Christine Janin, the first woman to have climbed Mount Everest in 1990, but also Olympic skiers Victor Muffat Jeandet and Clément Noël, as well as two Paralympic skiers, Thomas Clarion and Lou Braz Dagand. Mike Horn, one of the greatest adventures of modern times, who has been pushing back the boundaries of exploration for 30 years, also had the honour of carrying the Olympic Torch. His unrivalled list of achievements includes being the first man to cross both the South Pole and the North Pole.

Like him, many torchbearers from the general public with especially inspiring life stories also carried the Olympic Torch. Such was the case for Meije Bidault, renowned for her para-skiing talents, Fanny Desplaces, a volunteer guide, Laurent Favario, who coaches

young firefighters, or Stéphane Loison, who has been involved in community sport in the area for over 30 years.

On completion of this particularly celebratory and symbolic day, accomplished thanks to the involvement of the Paris 2024 teams and the sponsors of the Olympic Torch Relay, namely Coca-Cola, Banque Populaire and Caisse d'Épargne, tomorrow will be a day of respite. All the teams will be able to take a rest on Monday before recommencing again on Tuesday, for a day in the Doubs which will finish in Besançon.

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