

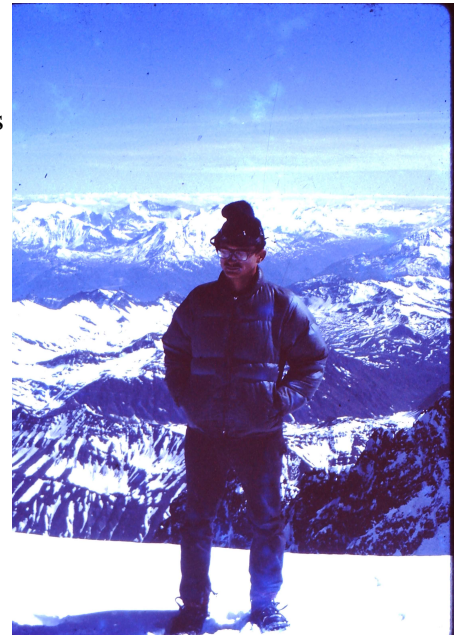
## Mont Blanc Ascent

In 1972, Joanne and I drove my sister's Volkswagen from Ankara, Turkey all the way to southern France. I was dead set on climbing Mont Blanc. With its altitude of 15,777 feet, Mont Blanc is the pinnacle of the French Alps. Joanne purchased a Eurail train pass which allowed her to go to Norway to visit her ancestral towns.

I drove the Volkswagen to Chamonix, France and purchased a backpack for my climb. I already had climbing boots, crampons, ice axe, carabiners and climbing rope (See notes below). I then drove the Volkswagen up a dirt road as far as possible in order to get started on my climb. After sleeping in the car overnight, I began my climb by walking further up the road. Eventually, I reached an area called Nid d'Aigle (Eagle's Nest) where I set up my tent. Not wanting to climb by myself, I decided to wait for someone to climb with. Soon a fellow from England named Jackson arrived, and we agreed to climb together. We would share my rope using the standard mountaineering technique called "belaying", This technique is used on a steep slope. One person climbs higher with one end of the rope attached while the other stays behind with the rope anchored to the surface. If the climber loses footing and falls, the anchored rope will stop the fall. After a good day's climb, we reached the high altitude cabin to prepare for our final assault on the summit. Other climbers, both German and French, arrived. After consuming some of the food that we brought with us, we settled down to get a few hours of sleep before the next day.

Bright and early the next morning, as climbers assembled their equipment. I heard a Frenchman say "à la Montagne". After a quick breakfast, Jackson and I began our ascent. With great care, we made our way up the steep icy slopes. The altitude, ice, rock and snow made the climb difficult. As one of us climbed, the other would belay from below. On icy slopes, our crampons would adhere to the surface. On snow, we would thrust our boots into the surface to create a "step." As we advanced up the mountain, a spectacular view was to be seen with distant peaks with ice, snow and glaciers. We finally reached the summit and took photographs of the incredible view. The Alps, which surrounded us completely, were magnificent and breathtaking. After enjoying the view for a few moments, we began an uneventful descent. We then parted ways at Nid d'Aigle. I never saw Jackson again.

I then walked down several miles to the car and drove to a camp ground in the Swiss Village of Martigny, where I was to spend the night. There was a small restaurant there, and I was really hungry. I sat down and took the menu and noticed there was a pizza called "La Martigny". With that name, it seemed like a good choice, so I ordered one. A delightful waitress served a beautiful pizza which had chanterelle mushrooms with tomato and cheese. I devoured it immediately! I then called her over to the table and said "Un autre, s'il vous plait". She looked astonished and after taking the order, I heard her say to someone "Mon Dieu! Cet Américain a commandé un autre Martigny!"



That's all I remember of that memorable occasion!

Crampons are metal plates with spikes, fastened to climbing boots with a strap; an ice axe is a climbing tool with a metal pick and adze on one end connected by a shaft to a metal spike on the other end used on ice and snow in mountaineering; carabiners are metal snap links used to attach various items to rope.