



Press Release
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Ski touring & climate change
Free Your Journey: Salewa athletes Yannick Boissenot & Arnaud Cottet
visit the mountains of Pakistan for their 'Hunza project'



Bolzano, 12. September 2024 – The Hunza Valley in northern Pakistan is a strikingly beautiful and culturally diverse region. Located in Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as the Northern Areas, it lies around 100 kilometres from the city of Gilgit. The valley stretches along the Hunza River and is surrounded by some of the world's highest mountains, including Rakaposhi (7,788 m), Ultar Sar (7,388 m) and Diran Peak (7,266 m). In April 2024, Salewa athletes Yannick Boissenot and Arnaud Cottet headed there for a rather special ski touring adventure. Together with his friend, the mountain guide Julien 'Pica' Herry, Yannick developed the idea of exploring the region on skis. A few years back, Pica founded 'Zom Connection' an NGO that supports and promotes mountain sports in Pakistan. Working with local organizations, he started bringing winter sports equipment to Pakistan's wild northern valleys. Yannick and Arnaud headed out with Pica and a group of Pakistani to search for untouched couloirs – and test the new 'Sella Free' Salewa Ski Touring Collection in the process. It proved to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience and a very special cultural exchange. However right from the start, the trip was affected by climate change and required maximum flexibility.

About Yannick Boissenot & Arnaud Cottet

Yannick Boissenot and Arnaud Cottet are both passionate about mountain adventures, steep descents, and untouched powder. Born in Switzerland, Arnaud Cottet is a child of the mountains. He learnt to ski literally as soon as he could walk and has explored mountains all over the world. From the Alps to the Rockies, from Alaska to Iran – and now Pakistan. Yannick Boissenot is an exceptional freerider, but also a cameraman and mountain photographer. He documents his adventures around the world with high-quality images and films. He also captured their journey into the Hunza Valley – the film is due to première mid-December.

The Journey

They leave Islamabad on the morning of 25 April, heading for the Hindu Kush. It takes over 20 hours on rough roads with landslides, roadblocks and police escorts to reach the Hunza Valley. Upon arrival at their acclimatization camp, they can already see that the warmer temperatures have made snow conditions unstable, meaning they will have to rule out many of their objectives. For a plan B, they hit the local slopes, a snowpark, and brush up their avalanche rescue skills. Their initial goal, a ski tour in a valley in the Khunjerab region has to be cancelled too.

Heading out again for real, they set up base camp north of Rakaposhi, a giant mountain in the Karakoram range. Under the high flanks of the 7,788-metre peak, there are a number of lower, potentially rideable slopes. From the top of Rakaposhi, you can see right over the Hunza Valley. Its base camp is popular with trekkers, who come to see the summit and its glaciers. After a day of reconnoitring, the team spot a promising slope connected to the main Rakaposhi mountain. Moving through the hours of darkness, Yannick and a local mountain guide head towards the summit, searching for couloirs. In the early morning hours, they find exactly what they're looking for – a beautiful, untouched line in perfect condition. Their patience has been rewarded. Back with the rest of the group, they ski the final descent together down to base camp – an unforgettable experience.

The group then move on into Naltar Valley and a further base camp. Here again, they're looking for couloirs at 4,000 to 5,000 metres. However, the warmer temperatures mean they've all been washed out. There's nothing left to ride. And so, the athletes head instead to Karimabad, the capital of the Hunza District, where Yannick and Arnaud stay for a couple of days to hand over the donated Salewa equipment that they've brought with them and to enjoy some typical local Pakistani hospitality. After a final chai tea and Pakistani chips – it's time to head back home.

Winters in transition

Yannick Boissenot and Arnaud Cottet's trip serves as an example of how climate change is affecting mountain sports. Ski touring is particularly affected, because snow conditions are becoming more and more unreliable and unpredictable. This means that mountain sport athletes need to be more flexible, as the two athlete's journey to the Hunza Valley shows. Despite difficult conditions right from the start, they kept looking for new ways to do things. True to the motto 'free your journey', they were able to find the freedom they were searching for and against all expectations, successfully established a number of new first lines in the mountains of Pakistan.

The new Salewa 'Free Your Journey' campaign is consciously addressing the issues posed by climate change for mountain sports and looking at how athletes can adapt to the conditions. The new 'Sella Free' freeride-orientated ski touring collection which was extensively tested by Yannick Boissenot and Arnaud Cottet in the Hunza Valley is designed to be particularly versatile to adapt and link ski touring adventures to other sports, such as trekking or mountain biking.

"Climate change is obviously not just an issue for Pakistan. It affects mountain areas all over the world – particularly the glaciers and springtime conditions, where snow is often only found at higher altitudes. For me, it's exciting to combine ski touring with other sports, such as hiking or (e-)biking," explains Yannick Boissenot on his new approach.

ABOUT SALEWA

Salewa is passionate about mountain sports – ambitious alpinism and the mountain experience. Founded in Munich in 1935, the management-led, family-owned company is now located in the Dolomites of South Tyrol. Based at its headquarters in Bolzano, the company develops technical products that combine traditional materials and progressive design. Salewa is committed to high environmental and social standards and rooted in regional identity, quality and integrity. Consistently striving to find new ways to build better, game-changing equipment, the brand has a unique understanding of mountain sports. Progressive mountaineering is about more than just performance, it encompasses an appreciation of the natural world and individual and shared experiences in the mountains. Salewa is a leading international manufacturer of mountain sports equipment with innovative products in four product categories: Apparel, Footwear, Equipment and Technical Hardware.

www.salewa.com

PRESS CONTACTS

SALEWA INTERNATIONAL

Franziska Sinn – Communication Manager
T: +39 3404207253
franziska.sinn@salewa.com

Anna Angermeier – nanacom
T: +49 15115657936
anna@nanacom.de

ITALY

Sara Gatti, Serena Adinolfi – OMNICO PR GROUP
T: +39 0262411911 M: +39 3460018463
salewa-ita@omnicomprgroup.com

GERMANY | AUSTRIA | SWITZERLAND

Nadja Schmidt – nanacom
T: +49 15236318591
E: nadja@nanacom.de

FRANCE

Benjamin Carraz
T: +33 476525959
benjamin.carraz@salewa.fr

POLAND

Monika Janecka
T: +48 536083701
monika.janecka@oberalp.com

SPAIN

Nuria Casaldaliga Sala
T: +34 637511473
nuria.casaldaliga@salewa.com

CZECH REPUBLIC | SLOVAKIA | HUNGARY

Karel Glogar
T: +42 0604 382 811
E: karel.glogar@oberalp.com

UK

Clive Allen - Ascent Marketing
T: +44 1539739995
clive@ascentmarketing.co.uk

USA

Eric Henderson - Meteorite PR
T: +1 (307) 6902984
ehenderson@meteoritepr.com