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“Our dual role as user and protector of the natural environment is a delicate balance.”

The new president of the SAC since 15 June, Françoise Jaquet, aged 56, has been a cross-country skiing specialist (with sealskins) for over 25 years. Holding a doctorate in microbiology, the native of Fribourg works for Swissmedic, the Swiss body responsible for the control and authorization of therapeutic products. She joined the SAC in 1990, initially becoming a member of the Winterthur section where she lived at the time and then the Moléson section in 2000 after the tragic death of her husband in a mountain accident. President of the Moléson section from 2007 to 2011, she joined the SAC's central committee in 2010 and became its vice-president in 2012.

Is having a woman at the head of the SAC symbolic?

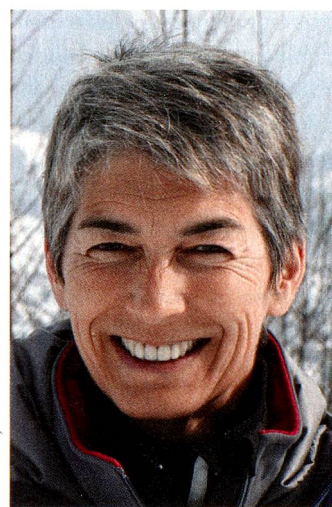
Yes, to an extent. The SAC has always reflected society. In 1907, the duties of men and women were clearly divided. What I mean by that is that men were entitled to do certain things while women were not. From the moment women tried to set things straight they were excluded. It was only after women were granted the right to vote that the SAC readmitted them in 1979. There was a time lag but this was in keeping with societal developments. And it seems that in 2013 the club was ready to have a female president.

How do you explain the sharp rise in the SAC's membership?

There is genuine enthusiasm for the mountains. The SAC has also become more modern and dynamic than it was 50 years ago. The range of sports and activities has increased significantly. There has been a snowball effect. The fact that the alpine club's activities allow people to explore the mountains in groups and enjoy one another's company on these trips is also a key factor.

What are the main challenges facing the club?

Our new strategy, which was approved by our delegates on 15 June, runs until 2020. One of the major challenges we face is volunteering, which is our main means of operation in terms of both the section committees and the course leaders. It is unfortunately becoming increasingly difficult to find volunteers. Our dual role as user and protector of the natural environment is also a delicate balance. We aim to protect untouched areas but this is not easy in the light of economic pressures. Financing the renovation of the 152 mountain huts is also a major challenge. We are trying to renovate those in need of it



while respecting the environment (sanitation systems, solar panels instead of generators). All this is expensive, especially since all the equipment is transported by helicopter. Another challenge is technical training on safety and ecology in the mountains.

What role does the SAC play in mountain rescue?

The SAC works closely with Rega. Together we set up Swiss Alpine Rescue in 2005. The club's mountain rescue services and Rega's helicopters work together on rescue operations.

What is your philosophy of life?

I love being in the mountains but also enjoy the physical exercise in achieving a goal despite the difficulties. I try to maintain my composure despite the challenges – I think I'm that sort of person. You take decisions at all stages of life and once they've been taken you have to stick with them. That's how it works. I always bear in mind one of Einstein's maxims: "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."

