

Press Release of the King Albert I Memorial Foundation

Five Gold Medals for Five Mountain Experts

On September 6, 2008, in the Santa Maria Church in Pontresina, the King Albert I Memorial Foundation assigned the golden King Albert Mountain Award to French climber Catherine Destivelle who “gave proof of a singular talent combined with an adventurous mind, great courage and strength” with her winter solos of the Eiger, Grandes Jorasses and Matterhorn (Bonatti Route) north walls. The foundation, which honours the Belgian King Albert I, has awarded four additional gold medals to German climber Kurt Albert who, by developing the Red-Point idea and reducing climbing to its essence, “became a pioneer of modern climbing”; to German filmmaker Gerhard Baur whose documentaries “are fascinating glimpses of the thin divide between triumph and tragedy in mountain climbing”; to Swiss Jon Mathieu, professor at the University of Lucerne, for his “studies on culture and history of the Alps, his leading role in shaping alpine research institutions and especially for his scientific collaboration with partners in the Andes and the Himalayas”; and finally to Canadian Hanspeter Schreier, professor emeritus of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, for his “research and publications focusing on natural and human aspects of water resources and watershed management in the Himalayas, the Andes and the Rocky Mountains”.

The King Albert I Memorial Foundation, registered in Zurich, was founded by Walter Amstutz in 1993 in honour of King Albert I of Belgium (1875-1934), a great alpinist who died while climbing in 1934. The foundation’s aim is to honour individuals or institutions which, through their efforts in any topic pertaining to the mountain regions of the world, have obtained outstanding and lasting achievements.

On September 2, 2006, in the Segantini Museum of St. Moritz, the golden King Albert Mountain Award had already been assigned to German Werner Bätzing, “the leading expert for the problems of the entire Alpine region with an interdisciplinary and international perspective”; to Ursula Bauer und Jürg Frischknecht from Zurich, for their creation of “a new type of literary tour book”; to the mountaineer and author Harisch Kapadia from India, „for his longstanding commitment to the Indian Himalayas and his unique contribution to the sustainable development of its people”; to Swiss-Austrian Oswald Oelz, a leading researcher in high altitude medicine, successful mountaineer and writer; and finally to Mountain Culture at The Banff Centre in Canada and its directors Bernadette McDonald and Leslie Taylor.

Four years ago the King Albert I Memorial Foundation assigned its gold medal to English alpinist and author Stephen Venables, to Lawrence Hamilton of Vermont (USA) for his lifelong dedication to the protection of mountain regions and their networks, to French mountaineering publisher Michel Guérin, to Peter Rieder from ETH Zurich for his studies on primary production in the Alps and his concern for the mountain farming community in a time of rapid change, and finally to the Swiss Alpine Museum in Berne.

In 2002, the King Albert Mountain Awards were received by five individuals and organizations who all distinguished themselves through their outstanding achievements for the protection of mountains. In 2000, the five photographers Jürgen Winkler, Germany, Shiro Shirahata, Japan, Walter Niedermayr, Italy, Didier Ruef, Switzerland, and Simon Carter, Australia, were honoured. Previous award ceremonies were held for Lord Hunt, Great Britain,

Wanda Rutkiewicz, Poland, from the USA Dr. Bradford Washburn and Dr. Charles Houston, and from Switzerland Professor Augusto Gansser, Silvia Metzeltin Buscaini and Erhard Loretan. Additional achievement medals were granted to Elisabeth Hawley, Kathmandu, Pit Schubert, Germany, to the team of the TV documentary series *Land der Berge* of the Austrian television network ORF, as well as to the Belgian charity organisation *Intersoc*, which since 1949 has enabled more than two million Belgian children and adults to take vacations in the Alps.

Visit the foundation's website: www.king-albert.ch