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GIROPARCHI NATURE TRAIL: CONTINUING AN EXCELLENT TRADITION

All projects nominated for the UIAA Mountain Protection Award receive close support and promotion from the UIAA during their lifecycle. For the annual winner of the Award, there is the added factor of global publicity and prize money. In this mini series, the UIAA speaks to the past three recipients of the Award to discuss their recent progress and the positive impact winning the MPA had. All three of the past editions were supported by the Bally Peak Outlook Foundation.

The UIAA Mountain Protection Award, partnered by Bally Peak Outlook Foundation, marks its tenth anniversary this year. Application for 2023 is now closed and the nominees will be announced shortly. The overall winner will be confirmed at the UIAA General Assembly in Trabzon, Türkiye on 21 October.

This second article focuses on the winner of the 2020-21 Award, Giroparchi Nature Trail by Fondation Grand Paradis. The UIAA spoke to Luisa Vuillermoz, Director of Fondation Grand Paradis, an foundation which organises nature trekking activities located in the heart of the Gran Paradiso National Park and is open to teenagers between the ages of 11 and 14 from both the local Aosta Valley region and all over Italy.

In parallel with the trekking component, teenagers acquire tools to communicate about the potential of national parks, improve their vocabulary, learn English expressions and develop curiosity about natural resources. Furthermore, it is a great opportunity for participants to learn more about the history, role and values of the protected area, the work of the park rangers, the figure of the ibex – its symbolic animal – and all of the park's wildlife. The English-language trek was conceived by Fondation Grand Paradis and organised in collaboration with – and with the financial support of – the Park Authority and the Alpine Convention. Since its establishment in 2013, each year has been dedicated to a new theme.

This a project which aligns closely with the UIAA's own values notably its current [Strategic Plan priorities](#) of **Goal 1:** Supporting the growth and development of climbing and mountaineering sports worldwide, **Goal 2:** Encouraging safe, environmentally and culturally responsible open access for climbing and mountaineering and **Goal 9:** Supporting and rewarding sustainable practices and innovative initiatives in low impact mountain recreation and mountain protection.

UIAA – How has your project progressed since winning the UIAA Mountain Protection Award. And how did your special 2022 event go?

Gioparchi Nature Trail: In 2022, Gioparchi Nature Trail celebrated its 10th edition and it also marked 100 years of conservation in the Gran Paradiso National Park. The annual initiative was dedicated to the celebration of the long history of the oldest national park in Italy and of its future embodied by the group of young participants involved in that edition. Last year's group was accompanied by a teacher and an environmental hiking guide, both native English speakers, who guided the participants in a reflection on the theme "One Hundred Years of Conservation" through activities and games.

The route developed along the slopes of Valsavarenche – the only valley entirely included within the protected area – where participants retraced the paths of King Victor Emmanuel II, observed plants and animals, followed the work of researchers and explored the issues of environmental education and sustainable development. The trek ended at the Gran Paradiso National Park Visitor Center in Valsavarenche with a recounting of the experience, addressed to parents and friends.

What did it mean to you and your organisation to win the 2020-21 edition of the UIAA Mountain Protection Award?

The trek, which has always sold out over the years to the great satisfaction of the participants and the more than 200 families involved, was awarded the prestigious international UIAA Mountain Protection Award 2020-21 *"for its commendable effort in enabling teenagers to immerse themselves in the world of Italy's oldest national park, through various activities and experiences, enhancing not only their personal growth, but providing them with the tools to pursue responsible and sustainable mountain management."*

As the winner of the 2020-2021 UIAA Mountain Protection Award, Fondation Grand Paradis is extremely grateful, honoured and happy to share this success with all the people who contributed to this project. Fondation would like to thank the Gran Paradiso National Park and the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention for their support and all the people whose passion and energy have contributed to the success of this initiative, first and foremost Davide D'Acunto and all the teachers at the English Centre in Aosta, junior mentor Leonardo Imbimbo and the entire team of Fondation Grand Paradis.



How have you benefited from winning the Award that year? Can you see a long-term impact or is it rather short-lived?

Giroparchi Nature Trail is an idea of Fondation Grand Paradis, a regional foundation that operates in the Aosta Valley Region to promote the natural and cultural heritage of the Gran Paradiso territory. The goal of Giroparchi Nature Trail is to allow new generations to acquire full awareness of the exceptional beauty of the natural heritage that characterizes our mountains, to understand the biodiversity of the Alps and to become aware of the importance to build a sustainable tourism approach by respecting the flora and fauna. At the same time, during the trekking, teenagers acquire tools to communicate the potential of the parks, improve their vocabulary, learn English expressions and stimulate curiosity about natural resources.

From both a short and long-term perspective, this award has facilitated the achievement of the initiative's twofold objective: on the one hand, to increase awareness in the younger generations of living in such an extraordinary environment as the Gran Paradiso National Park and the need to preserve it, and on the other, to improve the participants' knowledge of the English language in order to be able to convey the values and beauty of the area beyond the borders of the Aosta Valley. In fact, several teenagers have participated in different editions of the trekking project and some of them have developed their interest in climbing and mountaineering, initiating the process to become a mountain guide.

In the long run, this Award has significantly provided our work with an international dimension, enhancing our project and offering us new perspectives. This important recognition motivates us even more in continuing to strengthen the knowledge of our mountains.

How did you end up spending the prize money and what did it mean to your organisation?

2022 was an important year for the park and for our project. The UIAA Mountain Protection Award prize money helped us improve last year's edition of Giroparchi Nature Trail. Furthermore, two twin projects were created: Giroparchi Culture Trail and Giroparchi Adventure Trail. The former takes place along the cultural paths of four Gran Paradiso municipalities to discover the cultural heritage of our territory. The latter is addressed to the younger generation to help them take steps into alpinism by reach the summit of Mt. Gran Paradiso.

The launch of the Giroparchi Adventure Trail in July 2023 was documented by the up-and-coming mountaineers, and their video was presented on the opening day of the Gran Paradiso Film Festival.

Fondation Grand Paradis would like to thank the UIAA and The Bally Peak Outlook Foundation, with whom it shares a long-term commitment to mountain preservation. In line with the UIAA and The Bally Peak Outlook Foundation's mission to safeguard fragile alpine environments from the adverse effects of global warming and excessive outdoor tourism, through initiatives such as Giroparchi Nature Trail, Fondation Grand Paradis hopes to raise awareness around the issues threatening the future of these extreme landscapes and empowering young people to drive positive and sustainable change.



What are the plans for this summer?

This summer, two groups will be accompanied by a teacher, a native English-speaking environmental hiking guide and an operator from Fondation Grand Paradis, who will guide the children in a reflection on the delicate theme of water, declined according to different meanings: water as a resource, as a heritage to be protected, as a habitat and as a renewable source. The 2023 edition will take place entirely in the Rhêmes Valley.