

Piolets d'Or 2025

An International Celebration of Outstanding Alpinism

The Piolets d'Or is proud to announce that Alexander Odintsov will receive the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award for a career that redefined post-Soviet alpinism. He took Russian big wall climbing to new continents and inspired a generation of climbers throughout former Soviet countries.

Born in Saint Petersburg in 1957, Alexander Odintsov began climbing in 1975 with the mountaineering club of the Leningrad Mining Institute (now Saint Petersburg Mining University), one of the most respected training grounds of Soviet alpinism.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of his climbing career.



Throughout the 1980s he won multiple national championships and became a leading figure of the Soviet technical school, known for its rigorous focus on high standard rock and mixed routes.

By the end of that decade, he had completed more than 30 new routes in the Pamir-Alai and the Caucasus, ranging from Russian Grade 5B to 6B. These included first ascents on Zamin-Karor, Asan, Bodkhona, and the great granite walls of Karavshin.

In 1988, his team climbed a new route on the east face of Peak 4810 in the Karavshin, earning first place in the USSR Championship. It proved a turning point in his career, bringing him recognition, support, and the germ of an idea that would later grow into his project to climb big walls around the world.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the structure that had supported generations of climbers disappeared. Odintsov found a new way forward. In 1994 he launched an ambitious experiment entitled The Russian Way - Big Walls of the World. His vision was both idealistic and daring: to climb new routes on the most iconic big walls on Earth, with limited resources, in alpine or capsule style, and as autonomous teams continuing, while reinterpreting, the legacy of the Soviet climbing school.

Under his leadership, nine of the ten targeted walls were completed between 1995 and 2011. The project became a bridge between two eras of climbing, and a landmark in modern post-Soviet alpinism.

- ▶ Peak 4,810m, Pamir-Alai, new route on the east face, alpine style, 1995.
- ▶ Ak-Su, Turkestan Range, new route on the north face, alpine style, 1996.



PRESS CONTACTS

- ▶ Troll Wall, Norway, first ascent of Baltika, capsule style, 1997.
- ▶ Bhagirathi III, Indian Himalaya, new route on the west face, capsule style, 1998.
- ▶ Great Trango Tower, Pakistan Karakoram, first ascent of the west face, Russian Route, capsule style, 1999.
- ▶ Great Sail Peak, Baffin Island, new route on the northwest face, Rubicon, capsule style, 2002.
- ▶ Jannu, Nepal Himalaya, first ascent of the north face, 2003–2004 (awarded the 2005 Piolet d'Or).
- ▶ Kyzyl-Asker, Kokshaal-Too, new route on the southeast face, alpine style, 2007.
- ▶ Latok III, Pakistan Karakoram, first ascent of the west face, capsule style, completed with a younger generation of climbers, 2011.

With the single exception of Jannu, a long and complex line climbed siege style, every route of The Russian Way was completed in alpine or capsule style. These climbs showed how the discipline, teamwork, and endurance, fostered by the Soviet school, could evolve into a modern, lightweight, and internationally connected form of alpinism.

Odintsov's legacy extends far beyond the climbs themselves. He began coaching in 1982 and over the following decades trained several hundred climbers. He devoted his energy to mentoring younger teams in Kyrgyzstan, the Tian Shan, the Himalaya, and the Karakoram. He shared his experience of big wall logistics and the principles of teamwork, patience and mutual trust in extreme conditions. Among those who learned from him were Dmitry Golovchenko and Sergey Nilov, both two-time recipients of the Piolets d'Or. They described Odintsov as their mentor and guide.

Over four decades in the mountains, Alexander Odintsov turned walls into classrooms and expeditions into generations. His story is one of endurance, faith and creative leadership, showing how the fall of one system gave rise to a new chapter in the history of post-Soviet alpinism.

With one wall still unclimbed, Odintsov sees the future of The Russian Way - Big Walls of the World in the hands of his students. For him, its completion would mark a symbolic passing of knowledge and spirit to a new generation.

About the Lifetime Achievement Award

The Lifetime Achievement Award honours alpinists whose careers embody long-term commitment, creativity, and influence on the international climbing community. By recognising Alexander Odintsov, the Piolets d'Or celebrates a climber who not only opened some of the most demanding walls on Earth but also gave post-Soviet alpinism a renewed voice and vision.



PRESS CONTACTS

Selected Significant Ascents or attempts by Alexander Odintsov, not already listed above.

1981 ▶ Zamin-Karor, Kapitanov Route, Pamir-Alai.

1982 ▶ Zamin-Karor, Efimov Route; Zamin-Karor, Samoded Route; winter ascent of the Kadamtsev Brothers Peak.

1983 ▶ Dalar, Warburton Route, Caucasus; first ascent on Mamison and the Gubanov Route on East Dombay, Caucasus. Second place in the USSR Championship.

1984 ▶ Bodkhona, Shramko Route; Zamin-Karor and the Crown, winter ascent.

1985 ▶ Zamin-Karor, Domodedovo Route; Route 40 Years of Victory. Second place in the USSR Championship.

1986 ▶ Zamin-Karor, Vinokurov Route.

1987 ▶ Khoja-Lokan, Igolkin Route; Zamok, Mashkov Route.

1988 ▶ Shkhelda, Kentsitsky Route, winter ascent; Asan, Pogorelov Route; Asan, new route; Peak 4,810m, new route. First place in the USSR Championship.

1989 ▶ Peaks Shchurovsky, Dzhaylyk, Tyutyu-Bashi, and Donguz-Orun; Shkhelda, Ushba, Chatyn, and Chegem, Russian Grade 6A. Third place in the USSR Championship.

1991 ▶ Peak Slesova, Moroz Route and Asan, Odessa Route. Third place in the USSR Championship.

1992 ▶ Peak Blok, Efimov Route and Peak 4,600m, Bashkirov Route.

1994 ▶ Peak 3,850m, Lambada Route; Asan, Timofeev Route; Peak 4,240m, Spanish Route. Second place in the National Championship.

1995 ▶ Peak 3,850m, 1991 French Route.

2006 ▶ Attempt on the northeast face of Masherbrum (7,821m), Karakoram; the wall remains unclimbed.

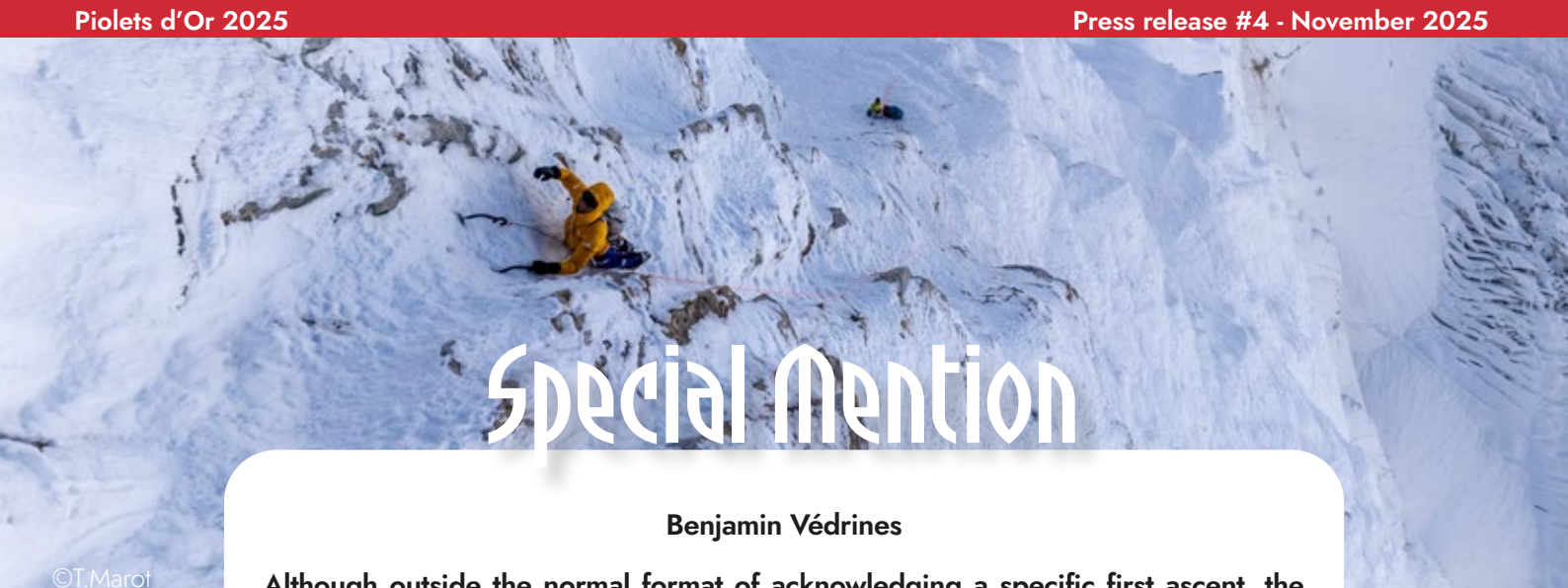
2007 ▶ Participation in a BASE-climb expedition to the Central Tower of Paine (Bonington-Whillans Route) with Valery Rozov.

2008 ▶ Mount Autana, Venezuela, attempt that ended with the team's brief detention by the local indigenous community.



PRESS CONTACTS

presse@pioletsdor.net | press@sanmartino.com



Special Mention

Benjamin Védrières

Although outside the normal format of acknowledging a specific first ascent, the Piolets d'Or recognizes the array of innovative, multi-discipline achievements over the last few years by French alpinist Benjamin Védrières. In the context of what he has accomplished in the Alps alone, these are ground-breaking, very high performance, and strong pointers towards the future of modern alpinism. They include the following.

2022

With Léo Billon and Seb Ratel, he completed the first trilogy of the three great north faces of the Alps via direct routes: *Harlin Route* on the Eiger, *Directe de l'Amitié* on the Grandes Jorasses, and the *Gogna Route* on the Matterhorn; a speed record for an ascent of Broad Peak (8.051m), Karakoram, climbing the normal route from base to summit in 7h 28min, then made the first descent by paraglider from the top.

2023

With Nicolas Jean and Julien Cruvellier De Luze, the first ascent of *De l'Or en Barre* on the south face of the Barre des Écrins (1,000 m, 6a+ A1 M7 WI5+); with Léo Billon, the *Serge Gousseault Route* on the north face of the Grandes Jorasses in 15 hours from Chamonix to summit; with Samuel Equy, a new record of 14h 54min for the classic ski traverse of the Chamonix - Zermatt Haute Route, shaving around 1h 40min off the previous fastest time; a solo ascent of the *Peuterey Integral* in 6h 51min; from the car park in Les Etages, he reached the summit of the Aiguille Dibona via the *Madier Route* in 1h 24min; with Nicolas Jean and Julien Cruvellier De Luze, the first ascent of *Pulsations* (650m, 7c+ 7a obl) on the south face of the Meije.

2024

With Léo Billon, he climbed three big north faces in the Mont Blanc Range over three consecutive days - the north face of the Dru via the *Guides Route* (at M8+) in around 10 h, the Sermon-Slavik/RhemVimal route on the north face of the Droites (at M7+) in 7h 14min, and *No Siesta* on the north face of the Grandes Jorasses (at M8 WI6) in 12h. This is likely the first time the *Guides Route* and *No Siesta* have each been climbed in a day; with Nicolas Jean, second ski descents of Hervé Degonon lines on the north faces of Ailefroide and Pic Sans Nom; again with Nicolas Jean, two remarkable first ski descents in the Écrins - the *Voie des Plaques* on the northwest face of the Ailefroide, and the northnorthwest face of Ailefroide Orientale; with Nicolas Jean, ski descents of the *Voie du Z*, *Couloir Gravelotte*, and *Les Corridors*, all on La Meije, and the north face of Meije Orientale, in a total of just 16 hours; a new speed record on K2, climbing without supplemental oxygen from advanced base (5,350m) to the summit in 10h 59min, followed by the first paragliding descent from the top.



PRESS CONTACTS



www.sanmartino.com

@visitsanmartino

About our host - San Martino di Castrozza

"If you don't know San Martino di Castrozza, you don't know the Dolomites" claimed the well-travelled alpinist and author Gunther Langes. He was probably the best climber in the Pale di San Martino during the years between the two world wars. Among his many important climbs in the 'Pale' the two most famous are Spigolo del Velo on Cima della Madonna (the well-known Schleierkante in German), which means the ridge of the veil, and the Gran Pilastro (Great Pillar) on the Pala di San Martino.

San Martino di Castrozza is situated in the heart of what is perhaps the wildest part of the Dolomites, at 1,450m. The Pala Group (in Italian, Pale di San Martino), which is the broadest group of the Dolomites, fascinates visitors with its unique skyline. This is recognized all over the world as a symbol of the Dolomites. The most important peak is the Cimon della Pala (3,184m), also known as *"the Matterhorn of the Dolomites"* because of the similar shape when observed from the Passo Rolle. The Cimon della Pala, first climbed by English alpinists, Francis Fox Tuckett and Edward Robson Whitwell, is not the highest peak of the Pale, which is Vezzana (3,192m).

It was thanks to the travellers (at first, mainly English geologists and botanists, then later alpinists from Britain, the Netherlands and Germany), who came to the Dolomites in the second half of the 19th Century with the aim of discovering new peaks, that San Martino di Castrozza was born as a tourist destination, with shepherds and hunters working as alpine guides. At the time, these were the only people who could take visitors into the mountains, knowing them better than anyone else. The first alpine guide in this area was Michele Bettega, followed by Giuseppe Zecchini, Antonio Tavernaro, and Bortolo Zagonel. They became recognized as the *'Eagles of San Martino'*, almost celebrities for wealthy climbing tourists. Michele Bettega, for example, climbed the Cimon della Pala more than 250 times. San Martino di Castrozza also was appreciated by famous visitors, such as Sigmund Freud, Arthur Schnitzler, who wrote a novel *'Die Fraulein Else'* located precisely in San Martino, the King of Belgium, and Dino Buzzati.

San Martino di Castrozza is an ideal basecamp in all seasons for mountain activities such as hiking, biking, climbing, running, orienteering and canyoning. Here, the spirit is authentic and the hospitality unique.

[Visit the website](http://www.sanmartino.com)

©Enrica Pallaver



PRESS CONTACTS

