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The lure of the extreme south. From Switzerland to the South Pole, 27,000 km by bike, on foot and on skis. That is the feat achieved by extreme sportswoman Evelyne Binsack, who reached the South Pole on 28 December 2007. An epic journey of 454 days for the first Swiss woman to have climbed Everest. A travel diary. By Alain Wey

"If you take risks, you face the possibility of defeat; if you don't, you've already lost." Evelyne Binsack has based her outlook on life on this maxim. An experienced mountaineer and helicopter pilot, the 40-year-old from the Canton of Berne succeeded in travelling from Switzerland to the South Pole using nothing but muscle power and determination. Crossing sixteen countries, she covered 25,000 km by bicycle and 1,200 km on skis (which is the distance between Berne and Barcelona). She also ascended a total difference in altitude of 120 km and took 2.5 million steps to reach the South Pole.

This is not Evelyne Binsack's first major achievement. She has previously climbed almost 4,000 metres in Europe and became well-known in 1999 after taking part in the ascension of the North Face of the Eiger, which was broadcast live on television. In 2001, she also became the first Swiss woman to reach the summit of Everest. Before setting out on her "Antarctica expedition", the mountain guide undertook three years of preparation, making two trips to the Arctic to acclimatise to the extreme temperatures, which can drop to minus 40°C. Evelyne Binsack also used her journey to raise money for SOS Children's Villages to build a home for orphans in Leon in Nicaragua. On 1 September 2006, she set off from Innertkirchen (Berne) on her bicycle on a sixteen-month journey.

From Europe to the USA

After having reached Grenoble in France, Evelyne Binsack took advantage of a stop to readjust her equipment to climb Mont Blanc (4,810 metres) before continuing her journey. In weather conditions that would soon cause flooding, she headed to Spain and Santiago de Compostela. She arrived in Oporto on 19 October. The terrible weather forced her to bring the European part of her journey to an end and to resume it on the same degree of latitude in North



A WOMAN OF ACTION

- Personal details: Born on 17 May 1967, Evelyne Binsack grew up in Hergiswil (Nidwalden) and today lives in Innertkirchen (Berne).
- Profession: Ski instructor, mountain guide since 1991, helicopter pilot since 1999.
- Extreme climber: As well as climbing the world's highest summits, Evelyne Binsack is also a sport climber. In 1996, she scaled Europe's tallest skyscraper at the time, the Messeturm in Frankfurt, which stands at 257 metres.
- Book: "Antarctica, aus eigener Kraft von Innertkirchen zum Südpol", illustrated by Markus Maeder, autumn 2008.
www.binsack.ch
www.binsack-antarctica.com
www.sos-childrensvillages.org

America. She landed in Salt Lake City at the end of October. At last, weather conditions were favourable and she crossed the great expanses of America, deliberately avoiding the major cities. After Texas and the Grand Canyon, she made it to Los Angeles in December.

In January 2007, Evelyne Binsack left California for Central America. "In Mexico, I experienced a lot of male chauvinism which was offensive and a constant concern. A blond woman travelling alone on a bicycle is very exposed in certain Latin American countries." However, the adventurer managed to stay out of harm's way,

showing great composure. "I learnt to travel carefully. Most of the time, I pitched my tent at nightfall and I did not turn on my torch in the dark to avoid drawing attention to myself. I had to learn to put my Swiss politeness to one side. Here, it's determination alone that takes you to your goal."

She passed through Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua where she visited the SOS Children's Village in Leon for which she was raising funds. Then came Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador and Peru. Evelyne Binsack did not however venture into Colombia as it was too dangerous. "South America is fantastic and extremely varied, but the journey through Peru was also very difficult because of dangers posed by the people. They basically take the law into their own hands there." In the course of her journey, she climbed some of the highest peaks in Latin America – eight above 5,000 metres and three above 6,000 metres. After crossing Bolivia, she spent the whole of June cycling across the Atacama Desert in Chile, which is known as the most arid in the world. She crossed Argentina and then rejoined Chile, arriving at Punta Arenas on 16 September from where she took an aeroplane to Antarctica.

The extreme south

In November 2007, she embarked on the last challenge of the journey – to reach the South Pole by foot and on skis. Before the final stage, Evelyne Binsack put on ten kilos, but she lost twelve in Antarctica. She was accompanied by a multinational team made up of the Canadian Devon McDiarmaid, Max Chaya from Lebanon, the Norwegian Hans Foss and Adrian Hayes from Great Britain. On the evening of 23 December, Evelyne Binsack wrote in her travel diary: "It is as if my spirit left my body to be replaced by another force". She was physically exhausted and racked with doubt in the final days of the expedition. "Each day was a fresh challenge", she recalled. On 28 December, after 47 days, she finally reached the South Pole. The team could not hold back their tears. Climbers often say that there are three poles in the world – the North Pole, the South Pole and Everest, the world's summit. Evelyne Binsack has now conquered her second pole and will definitely not stop there... so when are we off to the North Pole?