

esf

AS THEY
APPROACH THEIR
80TH ANNIVERSARY

THE 'RED SWEATERS'
OF **esf** ARE PREPARING
FOR A YEAR FULL
OF CELEBRATION



“It is with great pride and emotion that I witness the arrival of the 80th year of our French ski schools. As I look back and see what has been accomplished over the years, I also look toward the future with anticipation of what we have been sowing for several years now. The legend of the ‘Red Sweaters’ has been etched in history for nearly 80 years and our profession is the result of a collective history built on strong values, passed down from generation to generation.

Ski instructors have always held a unique and cherished role in our valleys and mountains, with their lives intricately woven around the ski school.

We are essential to the vitality of local life and **serve as strong representatives of our regions.**

Instructors are the ambassadors of their region, often serving as the link between the various stakeholders that make up the mountain community. They live off the land, they embody it: many, for example, are local elected officials, investing in the future of the land where they live all year-round. As sports educators and, most importantly, as transmitters of knowledge, we maintain a constant connection with the entire ecosystem of a ski resort.

Let’s hold fast to this **vision-united, collective, responsible, and clear-sighted. Let us remain confident in the future of our profession, in our strengths, all committed to our mountain valleys for the next 80 years and beyond! Our commitment is to the mountain,** the magnificent, the indomitable, the strong yet fragile; the one we must protect and preserve more than ever in these times when climate change is increasingly visible and impactful.

Let us continue to keep the flame that drives us, to cultivate the love of transmission with technique and safety as the pillars of our profession.

Finally, if I had to sum up these 80 years in just two words, they would be: passion and community. These values have always driven **esf** and SNMSF to keep the torch burning. It is the passionate and deeply human individuals who have written this history and who continue to open new chapters, decade after decade”.



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BY **ÉRIC BRÈCHE**
President of the National Union
of French Ski Instructors

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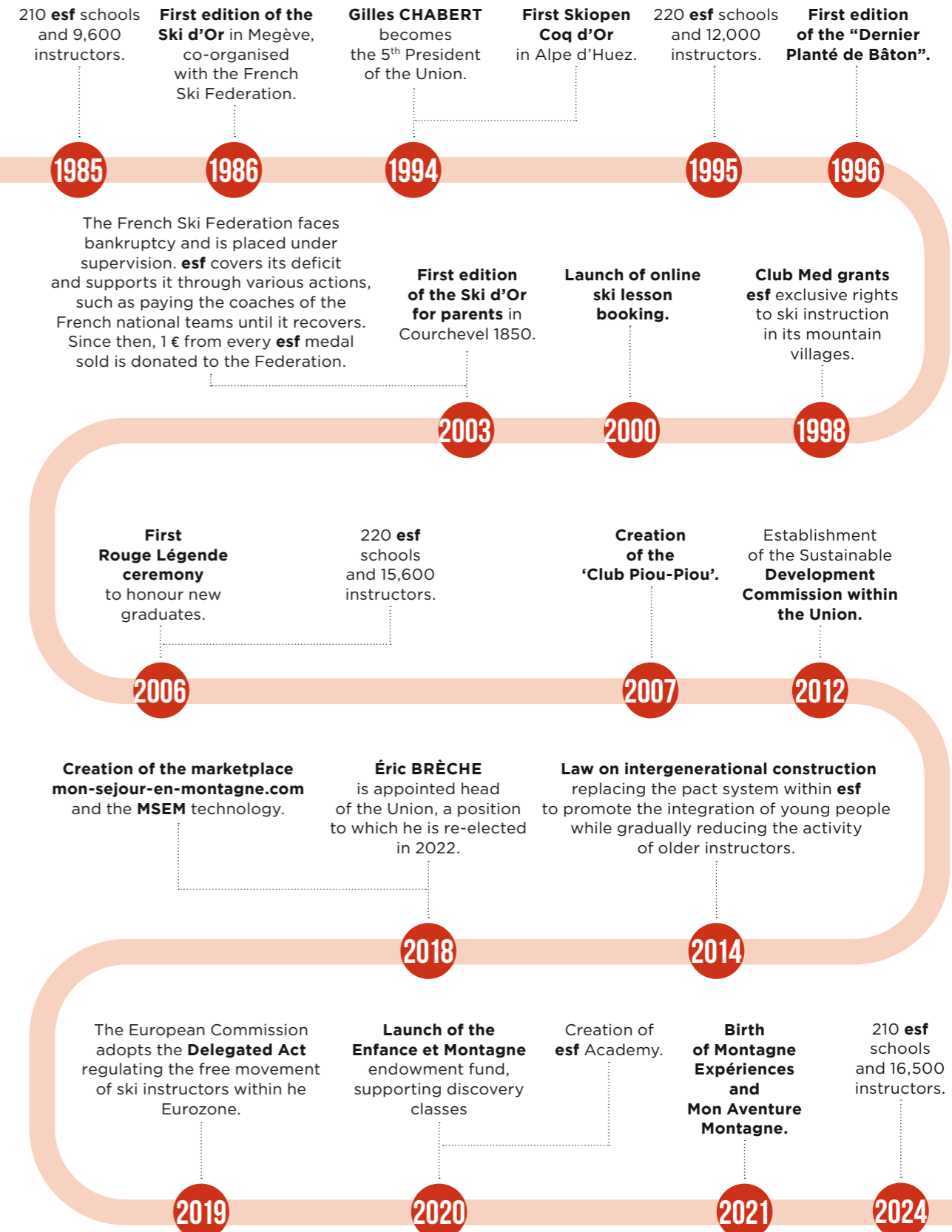
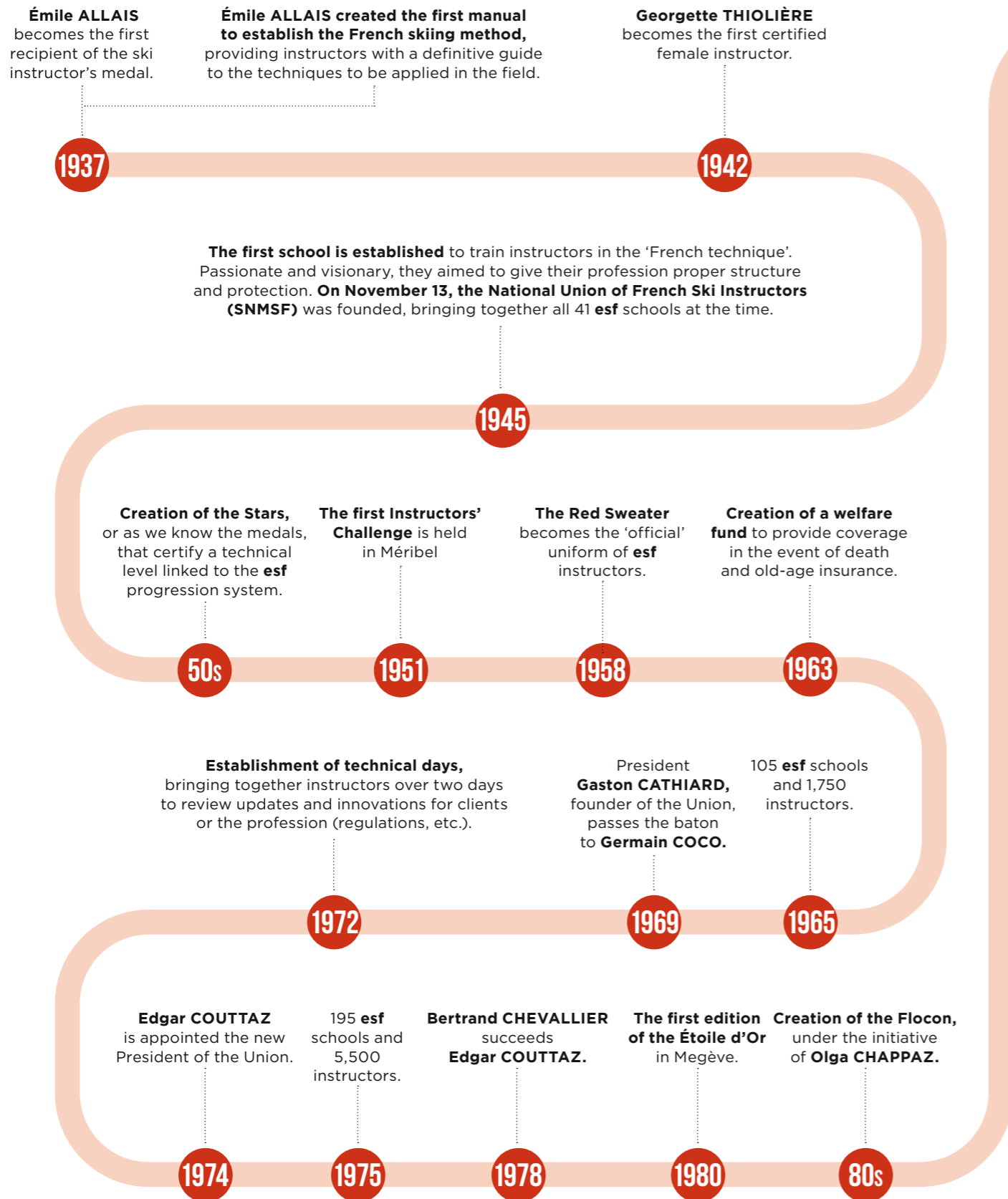
80 YEARS OF HISTORY

The French Ski School (**esf**) was founded in 1945, however, initially, the State wanted to organise the safe development of skiing and therefore entrusted this task to professional instructors. Thus, the instructors first came together locally to form **esf** schools and then nationally with the National Union of French Ski Instructors (SNMSF).

esf, now present in all French mountain ranges, has since become an international benchmark, widely recognised and acclaimed for its expertise. This legitimacy has been made possible thanks to the dedication of men and women who continually question themselves, stay in constant motion, and passionately promote skiing and in a wider sense, the mountain environment.



TIMELINE



The legend of the ski instructors and **esf** has unfolded over the decades, bringing with it many symbols that have become inseparable from the great family of the Red Sweaters. Some of these symbols have even entered everyday language. Whether passionate or novice, French or foreign, countless people recognize the distinctive signs that have shaped, and continue to shape, **esf** into what it is today.

THE STARS

From the very beginning, or nearly so, the Stars - later complemented by the Flocon in the early 1980s - have served as a strong and recognisable symbol of esf in the eyes of the general public. They serve to certify and validate the skills and technical achievements of children learning to ski and then refining their abilities. With the creation of the Club Piou-Piou, the first Stars can be earned as early as 3 years old (although they are not yet qualifying) followed by Blanchot, Sifflole, and Garolou. Starting at 4 years of age, children can earn their first qualifying medals through the tests of Ourson and Flocon, followed by the 1st to 3rd Stars. Finally, the Stars team allows those who have already earned their 3rd Star to progress to the bronze, silver, and gold Stars, which, for those interested, opens the doors to competition.



THE RED SWEATER

It's the ultimate symbol of distinction! Originally navy blue, the red sweater was adopted as the official uniform for instructors in 1958. The story goes that Marius Mora, head instructor at the National Ski School, asked Henri Thiollière (a former member of the French national team, then coach of the women's team, and a teacher at ENSA) to find a special outfit for the filming of a movie on the Christiania turn. Thiollière asked ENSA's supplier, Constant, to produce five red sweaters. While Marius Mora was initially unconvinced, Gaston Cathiard, the president of the SNMSF, saw the red sweaters during the Challenge event shortly afterward and immediately embraced the colour! Now widely recognised, the red sweater symbolises membership in the profession and a commitment to the values and spirit of esf. **Since 2017, the iconic red sweater has been made in France.**

THE CHALLENGE

Created in 1950, the Monitors' Challenge (Challenge of the Instructors) brings together ski instructors at the end of the season to celebrate all disciplines and all generations. It gathers the entire mountain community to celebrate skiing in all its forms. For a week, the instructors will compete in various events with only one crowned the French Ski Instructors' Champion. **This event perfectly illustrates everything that defines and drives the esf (École du Ski Français). The love of competition, commitment, performance, team spirit, and sharing.** It also highlights the high technical level of the instructors, ensuring quality and safe teaching.



THE TORCHLIGHT DESCENT: THE TERRITORY, EUROPE

The Torchlight Descent is a symbol of **the collective strength within all instructors.** As a cult event across the mountains, it harnesses **the attachment each instructor has to their region, to life in general and to the reputation of the resort they work in.** All participation is on a voluntary basis as well. To the public and the many holidaymakers that visit the mountains, the Torchlight Descent is a tradition that leaves a lasting memory and strong impression. Some schools also organise a Torchlight Descent as a passing out parade for children that have achieved a certain level of skiing proficiency. Beyond the connection to the region, Torchlight Descents highlight the importance of **learning through development, builds customer loyalty of esf and highlights the essential aspect of safety.** In fact, since the 2000s, culminating with the delegated act in 2019, the SNMSF (National Union of French Ski Instructors) has been working alongside the French government to ensure there is a process for the qualifications of instructors, extending this oversight to the European level.



THE CHAMOIS MEDAL

The symbol of the mountains by nature alone, the Chamois Medal represents both agility and athleticism. History will tell us that in the 1940s, at the end of a week of student training, the Chamois de France event was organised by the instructor using a slalom course to set a benchmark time for the students to compete against. Subsequently, the students would then ski the course and based on the time difference compared to the benchmark, they were awarded a medal. (Cabri, Chamois de Bronze, d'Argent, de Vermeil and d'Or). **The Chamois Medal is still in use today, highlighting the athletic and competitive spirit that the esf (École du Ski Français) love to impart and share.** It also reflects esf's commitment to preserving wildlife and more broadly, the environment. This mountain culture is ingrained in the DNA of the instructors and has always been passed down to the 2.5 million students each winter.



80 YEARS OF STRONG VALUES

The strength of **esf** lies in its 16,500 instructors, whose actions over the last 80 years have been defined by previous generation after generation.

THE COLLECTIVE

Although all **esf** instructors are independently self-employed, they have organised themselves from the beginning with a strict policy of equal pay for men and women. The distribution of work is also managed locally, based on qualifications, skills, seniority and availability.

esf, structured as a cooperative, has thus built an inclusive social model that serves the profession and more broadly the regions.

Beyond just remuneration, there has long been a commitment—now enshrined in law—to fostering strong intergenerational collaboration, ensuring a gradual transfer of knowledge and responsibilities from seasoned instructors nearing the end of their careers to their younger counterparts. This sense of collective spirit has proven its effectiveness, given its longevity and scale.

The notion of unity and collegiality also takes on a special meaning each year during the **Cérémonie Rouge Légende**. This ceremony highlights newly certified instructors with this year's event sponsored by Antoine Dénériaz, the French Olympic Downhill Champion at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin. Celebrating were **444 new graduates**, a consistently high number that underscores the enduring appeal of the profession and **esf** in general. This year signifies a change in the traditional gift presented to each new graduate, instead, a tree (444 in total) will be planted for each instructor in the Briançon area to mark of **esf's** commitment to the environment. This initiative was carried out in collaboration with the association Tree2forest, founded by Pierre Vaultier (a former **esf** team member) and Florent Astier, both former international athletes in snowboard cross and ski cross.



EDUCATION

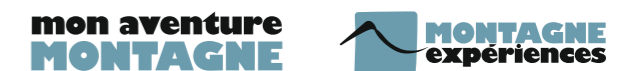
esf's mission is to make the mountains accessible to everyone, to share knowledge, to raise awareness and to educate. To achieve this, **the esf program** offers various options designed as a unique progression path for all schools. It particularly emphasises technique and safety, which are essential aspects covered during the learning process.

In parallel, the carnet de capacité (skills booklet) allows for the validation of levels achieved. It also includes a section on mountaineering in this environment.

Starting from age 3, with no upper age limit, **esf** offers courses tailored to each individual's level and desires. There are programs (both individual and group) designed for learning, improving skills, or even pushing one's limits—all under professional supervision.

To organise and structure outdoor activities year-round and to further explore new areas of learning, **esf** has created a local structure entitled **Montagne Expériences**. This initiative offers complementary services to skiing, both in summer and winter, with a diverse range of activities. This not only meets the needs of clients but also those of the instructors.

In fact, a quarter of instructors already hold additional qualifications in sports, allowing them to teach and share other practices. They can now engage with clients seeking different experiences.



Education and learning start at a very young age. From the beginning, **esf** organised and tailored its programs for children and adults alike. Today, it continues to innovate and refresh these offerings, just as it does for adults, to meet the needs of its youngest clients.

One such innovation is **Mon Aventure Montagne**, a spin-off of **Montagne Expériences**, which is an educational program offering fun and sports activities during the summer. It was created in 2022 by **esf** in collaboration with the National Union of Mountain Guides and the National Union of Mountain Leaders. These camps are led by passionate and qualified professionals and are linked to the discovery of the mountain environment and raising awareness about respecting it. This initiative ensures that learning continues throughout the year.



Enfance et Montagne is a foundation established by the National Union of French Ski Instructors, which allows thousands of children each year to participate in discovery classes. Last year, for the first time, **esf** and the SNMSF (National Union of French Ski Instructors) took part in the "**Les P'tits Flambeaux**" event, organised by France Montagne. More than 80 **esf** schools organised a torchlight descent with its ski instructors, selling over 20,000 torches that raised funds for three associations and/or foundations, including Enfance et Montagne.

COMPETITION

A strong sense of competition and passion for sport is ingrained in the role of a ski instructor, as reflected in the rigorous certification exams they must pass. This drive for challenge and love of sport continues throughout their careers. A prime example is the renowned **Championnat de France des monitrices et moniteurs esf** (The Challenge of the Instructors), which brings together 2,000 instructors at the season's end. This highly anticipated event is a highlight, bringing together many figures from the mountain community who all enjoy watching this impressive high-level competition. The grand finale is a major attraction, where the title of 'the best instructor' is traditionally awarded. A special mention goes to the *Gaston Cathiard race*, known as the 'Race for Veterans', showing that there is no age limit to competition. This race is reserved for those over 60 and occasionally including participants well into their 80s!

Over many years now, through the love of the sport, the SNMSF (National Union of French Ski Instructors) has been supporting **the French Ski Federation (FFS)** through many aspects including financial contributions.

Through high-level instruction and competition, both are striving to achieve the goal of promoting the excellence of French skiing on the international stage.

Another element reflecting this competitive spirit is the creation of **Team esf** two years ago. This team of ambassadors represents the pinnacle of their discipline. After their competitive careers, they embody the **esf** by sharing their journey with others, connecting with young people, offering advice & encouragement and sharing their experiences with the next generation.

To conclude, **esf** officially this year, endorsed the bid of the Auvergne Rhône-Alpes and Sud Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur regions to host the **2030 Winter Olympics**. These regions possess many strengths for hosting an event of such magnitude including the area space, facilities, sporting spirit, solidarity, determination, and a sense of sharing the historic practice of the Olympic disciplines, all accumulating with the people themselves who are deeply connected to their mountainous environment. **esf** is among the key players involved in the mountain ecosystem. **esf** instructors are all sports educators who are well-versed in both their environment and competitive sports, sharing with the Olympic movement the same values of excellence and respect.



HIGH STANDARDS

Technique forms the very foundation of all the instruction provided by **esf** instructors. This proven asset can be judged by each instructor having to complete a defined and structured educational program, culminating in a demanding State Diploma. Mastering the technique is what enables students to acquire the essential basis of safety. No matter where in France one takes lessons with an **esf** instructor, clients can be assured of encountering the same high standards in learning and teaching.

This very high level of rigorous performance is maintained throughout an instructor's career through Journées Techniques (Technical Days). All instructors benefit from mandatory ongoing training, primarily through the **esf Academy**, the training centre that offers tailored modules with qualified instructors.

Each year, several hundred instructors participate in internal pre-season training on a range of topics. This helps them refresh their knowledge, improve their teaching skills, and expand their expertise by exploring different skiing activities.

In practical terms, **esf** has developed an offering that allows the more adventurous skiers to explore off the beaten tracks with both technique and safety in mind. **Neiges et Montagne** provides the opportunity to ski beyond marked ski slopes while learning basic safety principles. Both beginners and experienced skiers can participate, with different packages available for unique experiences.

THE STORY CONTINUES... FOR THE MOUNTAINS OF TOMORROW

Eighty years ago, the passion for skiing and its professionalisation was born. Driven by a love for the mountains, the snow and a remarkable environment. Eighty years later, the men and women of **esf** continue to question themselves and innovate to shape the future of the mountains.

Ski instructors have always worked hard to preserve their magnificent playground of the mountains. They are the ambassadors and defenders of the mountain environment they know so well and love deeply. They protect it passionately and more importantly, constantly raise awareness among their clients about the importance of taking care of it. Instructors are deeply involved in the life of their local communities and spearhead many eco-responsible initiatives launched by **esf** including:

THE LAST POLE PLANT

Since 1996, 'Le Dernier planté de bâton' or 'The Last Pole Plant' has brought together **esf** instructors at the end of the season for a day dedicated to uniting local ecosystem stakeholders (such as ski clubs, town halls, ski lift operators and tourist offices) around a common cause of cleaning up the ski areas of remaining seasonal waste.

This committed and unifying action took a significant step forward in 2022 thanks to the collaboration with the association Mountain Riders and its "Montagne Zéro Déchet" (Zero Waste Mountain) program. This initiative aims to reduce litter in the mountains at its source through awareness, clean-up effort and waste characterisation.

THE "ZERO WILD WASTE MOUNTAIN" CHARTER

The SNMSF (National Union of French Ski Instructors) has signed the "Zero Wild Waste Mountain" charter, aiming for 2030, alongside private and public stakeholders in the mountain regions.



SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN

In 2019, the carbon footprint of **esf** instructors was calculated with the help of Carbone 4, leading to the creation of a roadmap to reduce this carbon footprint, particularly by addressing transportation. The Montagne Durable (Sustainable Mountain) initiative brings together **esf**'s eco-responsible actions, targeting a reduction in the carbon footprint of **esf** instructors by 2026. This includes concrete measures such as eco-driving training, organising carpooling, facilitating shared housing among instructors, encouraging the use of public transportation and acquiring electric vehicles. Following Jean Jouzel's speech at the 2023 congress, climate workshops were organised across all mountain ranges, with all **esf** directors invited to participate.



THE 'ENFANCE ET MONTAGNE ENDOWMENT FUND'

This endowment fund allows thousands of children to attend discovery classes each year. Last year 698 classes (amounting to €620,000) and 23,000 students had the opportunity to experience the mountains in both winter and summer. These students learn to enjoy the great outdoors while understanding the importance of environmental protection. Projects are now submitted starting in September 24 with funds raised amounting to €750,000. Since the creation of the fund three years ago, 46,000 children (1,614 classes) have benefited, with a total budget of €1.5 million. For more information visit enfanceetmontagne.fr

RESPONSIBLE UNIFORMS

The uniforms worn by **esf** instructors adhere to a comprehensive set of guidelines, with a strong emphasis on ensuring that these garments are as recyclable and reusable as possible.



THE 2023/2024 SEASON IN NUMBERS

To make the mountains more accessible, **esf** offers an online tool to its French guests called, **mon-sejour-en-montagne.com**, and has done since 2018. This tool provides a fair and transparent direct sales channel, allowing users to access all their vacation needs (**esf** lessons, ski lifts, accommodations, transportation, etc.) in just a few clicks.

2024 EVENT

On 23rd and 24th May this year **esf** directors and representatives from all locations gathered in Marseille for their annual congress. In addition to reviewing the past season, this important event allowed everyone to share and discuss one of the key challenges of the profession thus being fostering a sense of community within a collective made up of independent individuals. This theme was exemplified by the presence of Jean Viard, a sociologist and research director at CNRS at CEVIPOF, the Political Research Centre of Sciences Po Paris.

THE 2024/2025 SEASON

As the **esf** enter a landmark 80th year anniversary, the conventional and much loved traditional competitions and events that have been etched in the diaries of a skiers calendar will continue to run and will be eagerly anticipated by all. In addition to these traditional competitions this year will also be marked by celebrations for the 80th anniversary of **esf**!



UPCOMING COMPETITIONS

15th Kid Contest by esf Courchevel
150 participants

22nd MARCH

44th Étoile d'Or Val Thorens
900 participants

13th-15th MARCH

19th Nordic Skiercross
200 participants

14th-19th APRIL

28th Skiopen Coq d'Or Alpe d'Huez
1,500 participants

26th-29th MARCH

37th Ski d'Or La Toussuire
800 competitors and 200 competitors for the Ski d'Or for parents

5th-6th APRIL

73rd Challenge des Moniteurs Alpe d'Huez
2,000 participants

THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The official celebration of the 80th anniversary will take place in November 2025 at the Cirque d'Hiver in Paris.

This event will bring together all **esf** stakeholders and members of the Syndicate. Additionally, the Rouge Légende ceremony will be held at this occasion to welcome new graduates into the large family of 'Red Sweaters'.



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