

Bicentenary of the triangulation of the Pyrenees (1825–1827): where history, geodesy and mountains meet

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Key words: History; bicentenary; geodesy; heritage; adventure

SUMMARY

In 2025, the bicentenary of the Pyrenees geodetic campaign (1825-1827) was celebrated, highlighting the legacy of engineers and geographers Pierre Peytier and Paul-Michel Hossard, pioneers of the ascent of Balaïtous and triangulating the peaks of the Pyrenees. Their mission, carried out in extreme conditions, established a network of 42 geodetic points, 24 of which are still used today by the IGN, with a remarkable relative accuracy of 10 cm on average compared to modern coordinates (RGF93). Two centuries later, the 28th Geographic Group (GG), a specialized French military unit, repeated the ascent of Balaïtous to commemorate this feat, combining historical tribute, scientific precision (GNSS measurements) and solidarity (fundraising for wounded Army personnel). These commemorations highlighted the importance of the sustainability of geodetic networks, rigorous documentation and the conservation of benchmarks, issues that are still relevant today for tectonic studies and modern cartography. This paper also reveals the evolution of techniques, from 19th-century theodolites to GNSS receivers, while perpetuating the spirit of rigor and innovation of the geodesists of yesteryear. A human and scientific adventure, combining memory, mountains and technology.

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FIG Congress 2026
The Future We Want - The SDGs and Beyond
Cape Town, South Africa, 24–29 May 2026