

Gombessa III – Expedition Antarctica!

Blancpain and Laurent Ballesta launch the third Gombessa expedition, in association with Luc Jacquet and his *Wild-Touch Expeditions - Antarctica!* project

Following on from the Gombessa I expedition, which revealed the secrets of the coelacanth, the greatest zoological discovery of the 20th century, and Gombessa II, which studied the spectacular spawn of the camouflage grouper, Laurent Ballesta and Blancpain have travelled to Antarctica for a pioneering exploratory, diving and photographic mission. This expedition is part of a wider meta-project initiated by movie director Luc Jacquet (who won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 2006 with *March of the Penguins*) to measure the impact of global warming in this polar region, and to capture the attention of the general public.

The HQ of the Gombessa III expedition has been set up at the French Dumont d'Urville scientific base in Adélie Land. This is the first time a team of technical divers has been able to go beneath the sea ice in this region. Each of the dives, never previously undertaken, represents an achievement on both human and technical levels, and will deliver the very first naturalist images of Antarctica's deep-sea ecosystems. At the request of several research groups, particularly those at the National Museum of Natural History (MNHN) in Paris and the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Marseille, the Gombessa III team will contribute to an inventory of deep-sea fauna that is being created in relation to the issue of global warming, and will share all of their footage with researchers for use in scientific publications.

Gombessa III corresponds to the underwater element of the *Wild-Touch Expeditions - Antarctica!* project initiated and directed by Luc Jacquet. Ten years after *March of the Penguins*, the director has returned to the Antarctic with a highly talented artistic team, which includes renowned photographers Laurent Ballesta and Vincent Munier, to deliver a touching testament to a territory threatened by global warming. This immersive journey to the other side of the planet has been made possible by the support of many partners, and with the help of the teams and logistics provided by the French Polar Institute and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands.

The expedition, which can be tracked on a daily video-blog on www.blancpain-ocean-commitment.com, will give rise to several documentaries, including those produced by ARTE in the image of "Gombessa I – *The Coelacanth, Dive Towards our Origins*" and "Gombessa II – *The Grouper Mystery*", both of which received prestigious awards. Other plans include an IMAX movie by Luc Jacquet, books, including one for children, exhibitions, including one at the Musée des Confluences in Lyon between April 18 and August 15, 2016, and a vast social media campaign to raise awareness among the general public.