



# MOUNTAINEERING IN THE VANOISE

## In search of a myth: Mont Iseran

From ancient times up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the rural mountain landscape has been shaped by agro-pastoral civilization exploiting the full potential of the environment. Incursions in the heart of the massif were varied: seasonal migration of livestock, collection of medicinal plants, hunting, mining, business and communication over the passes. The mountain people never ventured further than the upper limits of the mountain pasture through fear or indifference of these unknown summits.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the desire to understand divine creation and the lure of science brought many French and foreign scholars to the Alps, pioneers of scientific mountaineering. The Vanoise massif was not exempt from this enthusiasm; geologists, botanists, physicists and cartographers all made progress in their research. Weighed down by their research equipment, these pioneers hired local hunters as guides and porters. At that time, water was boiled to determine the height of a summit: the boiling point depends on atmospheric pressure, and therefore altitude.

Towards the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sporting aspect of the mountains overtook scientific research. The Alps became a playground where the "4,000 m" were conquered, often by British or American climbers.

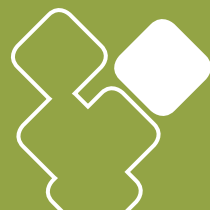
In Vanoise, a map by staff captain Sarde, published in 1958, mentioned a Mont Iseran at 4,045 m. In August 1860, Englishman Matthews decided to scale Grande Sassièrè (3,747 m) "to see if, from the top, I could find Mont Iseran", he wrote. But there was no "4,000" in sight, there had been a miscalculation.

Shortly afterwards, accompanied by Michel Croz, from Pralognan, on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1860 Mathews made the first ascent of the Grande Casse, the highest summit in the Vanoise at 3,855 m. To reach their goal, up a slope with a 45° incline, they had to cut 1,100 steps into the ice, of which 800 were made with axes and the rest with boots with iron spikes in the soles.

It may seem like by the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was nothing else to discover or achieve. But over the last 200 years, mountaineering has continued to evolve and provoke different reactions, approaches, equipment and styles.

The history of mountaineering includes many well-known individuals who have reached the high summits, but also those who love mountains.

*Text: Dominique Juin*



Walk 9

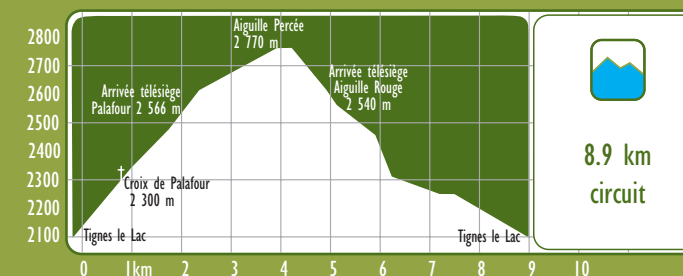
## L'AIGUILLE PERCÉE

(EYE OF THE NEEDLE) (2,778 m)



### HIGHLIGHTS:

A unique geological phenomenon in Haute Tarentaise due to its size, l'Aiguille Percée has greatly contributed to the popularity of Tignes. It is a popular image on postcards and in tourist brochures. This walk is a real classic and the panoramic viewpoint is not to be missed.



Starting point  
Tignes le Lac: 2,100 m

Climb: ± 705 m

Duration:  
3hrs 20mins

