



MOUNTAINEERING IN THE VANOISE

In search of a myth: Mont Iseran

From ancient times up to the 18th 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 18th 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 18th century up to the second half of the 19th 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 8th 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 18th 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

Walk 9 L'AIGUILLE PERCÉE



STARTING POINT:

- In Tignes le Lac, between the Millonex drag lift and the Palafour chairlift.
- At the top of the Palafour chairlift (free).

DURATION:

3hrs 20min circuit

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the last part of the walk before l'Aiguille there is a climb up a rock. Do not climb on the peak. To reach the panoramic viewpoint there is a 15-minute detour. Adhere to the Tignes-Champagny nature reserve regulations. Warning! Take extra care in steep areas. Starting the walk from the top of the Palafour chairlift reduces the duration of the walk by: 1hr 15mins.

ROUTE:

Starting Point: Tignes le Lac.

- 1** The path climbs gently from the start. Cross an access road and the old Bec Rouge shepherd's huts used during the summer. Then quite a steep winding climb between the chairlift and the drag lift takes you up to the Croix de Palafour. The path then joins an old 4X4 track and continues on until it divides: Col de la Tourne, Aiguille Percée.
- 2** Continue to climb along the ridge, where screens are situated. In winter these screens divert air currents to prevent avalanches caused by the build-up of snow slabs on the slopes.
- 3** On reaching the flat area at the top of the Palafour chairlift, the view opens out. L'Aiguille Percée is clearly visible. To the east, notice the view over the valley and the Grande Sassièrre Nature Reserve.
- 4** One last effort, on the winding path through the scree, will get you to the foot of l'Aiguille Percée. This mass of Triassic limestone was crushed and pounded when it was formed, making it unusually susceptible to erosion, thus giving it its unique shape. Because of this geological trait it will eventually disappear. However, the hole in the rock may be linked to a more obvious drilling accident in the cavity itself.
- 5** Below L'aiguille take the path which stays on the ridge, heading in the direction of Tignes le Lac via "les Crêtes". The path goes between the rocks and rocky terrain of the Tignes Nature Reserve boundary, the landscape here is spectacular. Here you can choose to take the detour to the viewpoint indicator. Warning! Take extra care in steep areas.
- 6** On arrival near to the top of the l'Aiguille Rouge chairlift, the path forks abruptly to the right and the descent on the mountain pasture path speeds up.
- 7** After rejoining the Condus plateau and passing the avalanche barrier, rejoin the 4X4 track and you will have come full circle.

Tignes lace

In old Tignes it was a family business; a century of lace making at home, the fruit of this labour was sold to pedlars. This lace was known as far away as the markets in Turin.