

And above? The sun...

After the guide break last week, this one is an article about the Piton des Neiges. Piton what? (Neige is snow in French) It's an inactive volcano which is described as the highest point in the Indian Ocean. It has been sleeping for a long time, but it offers a breathtaking view from the top of its 3070 meters of altitude. I have to say (in all transparency) that the side "the highest point" we wonder if it's really true if we count all the Indian Ocean... but it remains the highest point of the island lands for sure. It was an incredible experience.... very hard! I'm not only talking about the 1900 meters of positive elevation gain in one go, but also about the psychological aspect of not sleeping all night and not knowing what will happen!

But...why don't we go hiking?

An overnight hike on a volcano is an adventure! When you arrive on the island one of the first things you think is "will I do it? There are several ways to go on top. One path is longer but less steep, the other is shorter, but you climb dry for the entire hike. It was well to have in mind that this type of hike begins with a climb of at least four hours (for a person in good condition without being a big sportsman, nor decreased).

Some of my roommates at the time had done it. Either on a whim, or by booking the gite on the way. Our little team had time, we wanted to choose the right day (or night). You really don't want to walk all those hours to see nothing at the arrival.

We have postponed several times! Oh yes, I can tell you, we have become seasoned miss and mister weather living here! For my part I use the Windy application which is pretty good. You have to be able to understand the apps, but you can have a pretty good vision of the weather at a specific place. Anyway, after a few reschedules, we were able to say to ourselves "ok guys, tonight is the night". And that's how one night in November, from Friday to Saturday, we decided to climb the Piton des Neiges, with a headlamp!

So of course, I came to this island without really thinking about staying there. I only had a pair of running shoes, my backpack, too big, and no headlamp. So, we had some feedback, and we knew about the time of ascent, and had some advice, like thinking to take some changes, something to cover yourself halfway and especially at the top. To take water of course, to eat for some, and especially to keep in mind that it won't be necessary to hurt itself!

After a day of rest and packing:

10pm: it's time to leave. We left from La Saline les Bains, west coast, and we went to the departure of the block in Cilaos. So, we had an hour and a half to get there. We weren't professionals of the road of the four hundred turns (it's true I promise, 400 curves!) and it was dark, so we were careful.

00H30: arrived at the block. Last pee before the departure, between two bushes, we turn on the headlamps and here we go!

00:45: the real departure. We remain grouped, each one its rhythm, nevertheless. I can tell you that the Block isn't called like that by chance. It only goes up, between steps and small laces. If we had put for certain a small sweater, it was removed!

1h45: While they were in front, I begin to feel flashes in my eye, never to worry when you left to go up a volcano during five hours of night and you realize that you make an ophthalmic headache (migraine). I continue of course it takes a little more to stop me. I continue, drink water regularly. The tingling in my hands and the urge to vomit are slowly coming but I will be stronger!

2:15: I warn the others not to wait for me, I find them afterwards, anyway I'm not going to make it running in this state. I go up at my own pace which is not so slow either.

3h: After two hours and fifteen of climbing we arrive at the level of the lodge, and that, therefore, far too early! The sun rose at 5:23 this day (sorry, always remember the stupid details like that in the life), and at this stage it remained us (for a normal rhythm) between one hour and a half and two hours of rise. So, we decide to take a little break, the wind had risen, and we were slightly cold. It is necessary to have that this lodging is not the best of the world. People aren't necessarily welcoming and especially if you did not take a night there you have access to no infrastructure! Especially with Mister Covid around. Fortunately for us, the door of the common room was broken or unlocked, finally not closing so we could put ourselves inside. It wasn't much warmer but at least no wind! We had to wait a small hour like that.

4h: top departure towards the summit. There we forget the steps and turns in the greenery (imagined since it was night haha), welcome on the moon and a volcanic environment. Advancing at night, with a headwind, after having stopped for an hour... Ouch!

4h45: dawn. The sky starts to lighten up. You see the summit not far away, with all those headlamp lights in the night, there just a little to the left, then your head sweeps to the right, and you start to realize that yes ,the summit is there, within reach, but...no! You don't have it since you have to follow a path on the right to come back to this summit. It starts to be a bit hard, I must admit. The fatigue, the wind, the break that left some marks. But you know that it will be worth it!

5:15: you touch the top! That's it!

5:23: you just sit down with your friends and there, it comes out, yes yes the sun! You have to drink your tea you had prepared before leaving and enjoy the show. It was quite cold (or very cold) and of course even if we had planned, we had not done enough! Two of us didn't stay too long, with my little Flav (one of the two who went with me during my Van's Life to Reunion Island, read the article again if you didn't) we stayed to take some pictures! Not enough I think, but sometimes you have to enjoy without being in the process of immortalizing with cameras, and just do it with your eyes! Philosophical moment! (it's funny to write it because I always take thousands and thousands of pictures)

Fun story, two guys were celebrating with champagne! By the way, I told them it was a great idea! Since we couldn't really share a glass (covid time) they offered me the rest of the bottle! So here I am, drinking champagne at 6am!

Let's go back down! So, if the ascent seems hard to you, for me the descent is the worst! Well, the sun is already here, so it's warmer and it's much nicer we must say. Yes, also the view is much more beautiful (for sure), but then to go down 3 or 4 hours in a row, first slopes with small volcanic stones, then steps which are high... I can tell you that you have to have well hung knees! The quadriceps also took a lot of punishment!

But here we are, 9:45 am: back to the car! The two who had left before had gone ahead and were waiting for us! they had only one desire to go back to sleep and we still had the road back to do including the famous four hundred turns.

So that was it, this famous "highest summit of the Indian Ocean"! 1,900 meters of positive altitude difference! I was so proud!

The advice point:

I think that not everyone can do it for sure, but many people are able to do it! More or less quickly, in one go or by sleeping at the lodge on the way, but it is possible. Of course, I have crazy people around me who slept at the top! Beautiful sunset and sunrise guarantee, but a cold night. There are small cocoons made of stone to put the tent and protect it from the wind! Be w for sure. Well-equipped to spend the night, without taking too much weight (or be with a big guy! hihi). Take water, of course, think of the headlamp too! Unless you do it during the day. Calculate your time well so that you don't have to stop at the lodge for too long or wait in the cold at the top. You can do it alone even at night, but it is not recommended and if you do it, don't take any risk and warn people.

If you have the possibility to choose the day, do it. I know it's not always easy when you're on vacation, but the weather will condition your hike and especially your experience of this unforgettable climb...

I hope you will have enjoyed this little mythical adventure on Reunion Island and that you will go to climb this sleeping volcano more lightly.

And now, I say to you,

Kiss kiss Bang bang