

The Mont Aiguille



The Mont Aiguille - first climbed in 1492.

**An account of an ascent of the Normal
Route in August 2003**

by

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Speleo Vercors



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About Speleo Vercors:

Speleo Vercors is a UK based caving club that specialises in Vercors caving. Speleo Vercors was created in 1997 to formalise and document the experience of UK cavers that have been meeting (on an ad-hoc basis) in the Vercors for the best part of two decades. Membership is by invitation and prospective members must demonstrate a long term commitment to Vercors caving as well providing on-going support to the club.

Other SV Publications

- **Trip Reports:** Speleo Vercors has published the following reports:
 - Skiing '99 (paper)
 - Caving '99 (paper)
 - Skiing 2000 (paper)
 - Caving 2000 (including a Speleovision report) (paper)
 - Skiing 2001 (paper)
 - Bigbang Doggiepoopoo (parchment)
 - Skiing 2002 (CD or paper)
 - Caving 2002 (CD only)
 - Skiing 2003 (paper)
 - Skiing 2004 (paper and DVD)

Long Term Projects:

- **Access:** We are developing a data base of all known Vercors caves. The data base will reference caves by name and grid reference and provide links to surveys and other publications.
- **Guide Book:** We are developing an English Language guide to the Vercors for cavers, to augment the two French guide books currently available
- **Speleo Dossier 1:** We are documenting all previous (caving) visits (by SV members) to the Vercors to date, which have been published previously in various journals.

Contact Speleo Vercors: <http://www.speleo-vercors.org>

Introduction: We climbed the Normal Route on the Mont Aiguille in August 2003; The peak is the first large climb that Alice and myself have attempted in France, and is reputed to be the birth of Alpine Climbing.

Location: The Vercors National Park, France

Camping Location/ Parking: There are two car parks that can be used, the first is just beyond the village of Richardiere and is clearly signposted from the gravel track. The second (which we found later) is further up the gravel track, which crosses a concrete ford (dry in the summer). It is possible to camp/bivi in this area to allow for an early start, we chose to sleep in the car at the lower car park.

Map, Grid Reference: IGN 3236OT

Guide Book Used: le guide du Mont Aiguille, ISBN: 2-9100-6008-X

Grade: III+ (PD) **Height:** 250m (825ft)

Equipment Used: As usual we carried far too much equipment, all that is required is two 50m, 9mm ropes, belay device and descender (if you don't like abseiling on your belay plate), 4 extenders, a few slings and a very small selection of nuts and other items of protection. A set of cowstails are very useful and we used a short sling with a large crab for the cable sections. A HELMET IS ESSENTIAL!!

This is a long day out (well it is if you're as unfit as we were!) the large part of the day is spent walking in and out from the car park with an altitude gain of around 750m, we found walking poles useful, a good supply of water and energy food was essential. We wore light walking boots which we also climbed in, a good pair of approach shoes would have been just as good.

Approach: Once at the top car park head into the woods on the marked trail, just as you enter there is a sign pointing right onto a smaller track, then just keep following the track which zig-zags all over the place, the approach from the bottom car park takes about 3 hours at a steady pace.



The approach - Alice on the approach path through the woods, looking rather hot, this a steady climb for 3 hours



The lower scree slope - leading to the saddle above with the Mont Aiguille on the right, the path can be difficult to spot in places.

The Route: Do not expect to be the only climbers on this route in the summer! It's a popular route with many people paying to be guided, as a result the route finding is not difficult the climb starts on the top of the large scree slope to the left of the memorial plaque by a large metal ring, these rings are clearly visible on the route along with a few newer bolts.



Finishing the Scree - Jay looking for the start of the route.



Pitch 1 - Alice completing the first pitch of the route



The Main Traverse - Alice on the cable traverse, the people behind are on top of pitch 2.

The first 2 pitches were lead using traditional lead and second methods, this will lead to a metal ring from where the traverse starts, we lead this again resulting in a belay in the middle of the traverse, it proved more effective to climb this and the next 2 sections alpine style moving together with cows tails on the cable or with at least one runner between you. We shortened the rope to about 25m for these sections. The traverse leads to a steep section (with cable) over a saddle behind a large wall of rock, from here a short decent (easily climbed with a metal ring for assistance) into a loose gully, this gully is climbed first on the right and then on the left before coming back right (follow the bolts/metal rings, this section is more of a scramble) to a narrow level section under a steep wall, follow this to the next cable which is above you from the large ledge.



End of the Traverse - The cable traverse finishes in a saddle, Alice is silhouetted on the right.



Approaching the second traverse - The climb to the second traverse cable is not too hard, one of the many metal rings can be seen by my right hand.



The Second Traverse - Alice completing the same pitch as above.



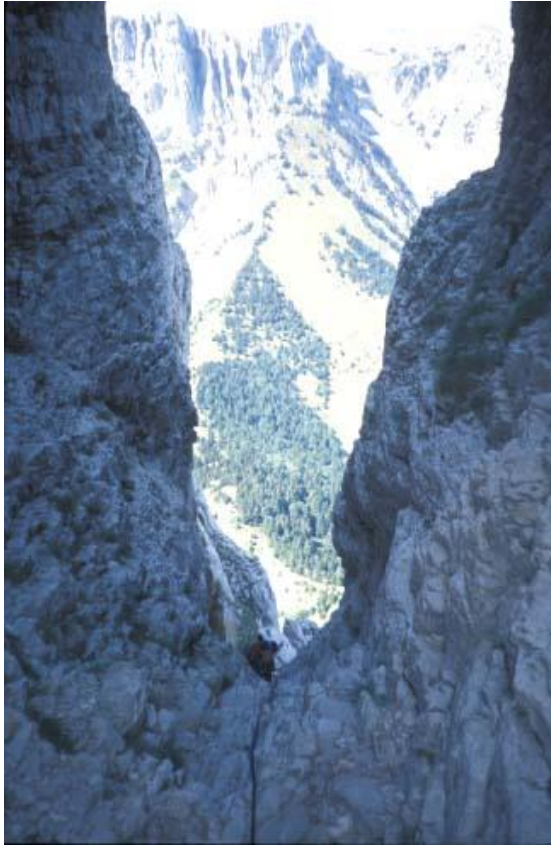
The Second Traverse - Alice climbing through the narrow section of the traverse on a cable. The path in the fore ground leads to the final crux gully.

Climb up to the cable and use this to move left through a narrow gap above the previous steep wall, continue to follow the good ledge to the start of the final gully (bolts).

The final gully has a cable fitted to about 3/4 of it and is about 6ft wide and appears to go on for ever! Personally I found that the cable got in the way and didn't use it with my cowstail. There are about 3 1/2, 50m pitches to climb here and this section is the hardest climbing, with 3 small over hangs to climb over (easy if you're long legged as you can easily bridge) the climbing is no harder than severe but remember that you will be tired. Where the cable ends the gully opens out and there are various ways to the top.



Starting The Final Section - The path from the second traverse leads to the final gully.



The Final Gully - A view down the gully from above the first over hang



Nearing The Top - Alice climbing out of the gully for the final pitch to the top.



The Top! - Alice on the summit plateaux



The Vercors Ridge - The Grand Veymont is on the left with the Grand Moucherolle in the distance



Looking down the descent route (R) and (L) the commemorative plaque - 1492 to 1992, 500 years of climbing, this plaque is above the descent gully.

Descent Route: The gully for the start of the decent route is marked with a round plaque and the first section can be down climbed reasonably easily despite its appearance, from the bottom of this short gully follow the well worn path down into the gully. Be warned this does become steep and very loose! We were last down and therefore did not have to worry about falling rock from above.



The Descent - This section of the descent is steep and loose.



Approaching the first abseil - additional abseil points can be found on the rocks to the right to assist if required.



Approaching the first abseil - this is not the first abseil, we were tired and this was a safe and quick way down the loose gully.

As you descend into the gully there are a few new eye bolts generally on the right hand side which can be used for abseiling if required (we found this easier and possibly a little quicker). When this gully narrows to about 15ft wide there will be a set of abseil bolts on the right, there is also a set just below these on the left hand wall above a scooped ledge (all these bolts appear new) this is the first official abseil, thread one rope and descend the wall into the next gully (25m). This gully is easily descended to the bottom, the gully will turn right where you will see a metal frame built into the rock and a set of abseil bolts on your right.



The 25m Abseil - This is the first Abseil Alice can be seen half way down this part in the middle of the picture.



The 50m Abseil - Taken looking up the descent this abseil takes you deep into a large rift.

This is the big 50m abseil and requires a double rope (although there are bolts on the way down that could allow you to use one 50m rope doubled but I would avoid this if possible). This abseil descends into a chasm and is welcome relief from the sun and moves diagonally onto the obvious ledge/path. It is advisable that the last person down ensures that the rope passes over the previously mentioned frame to ensure that the rope does not jam when pulled through.

Walk through the chasm and abseil down the last 5m drop from bolts on either side (your choice) to exit.



The 5m Abseil - Alice emerging from the rift via the last abseil.

Finally follow the path left (as you are looking into the rock) up a small slope/very easy scramble, and then down into another short corridor/rift until you reach the top of the scree slope.



Finished - after following the path up another slope you exit from the final narrow rift which gives easy access to the scree slope



Looking back - pausing on the final descent to the car, it hard to take in the scale of this lump of rock.



The Route - shown in red and yellow (yellow sections are behind the rock and can't be seen from this position). This shows the ascent (on the left) and the descent (on the right).