



10 Minutes for the Planet **Endangered Mountain Adventures ©**

by Valentine Rinner

Hello everyone and welcome to this week's episode of 10 minutes for the Planet. Today I write this episode with a profound thankfulness for the Planet and the amazing experiences it offers us. This week is an ode to mountain adventures.

Over the weekend I headed to the French Pyrenees with a group of friends with the intention of climbing to the highest summit. It took two days of climbing to reach the 3,300-meter-high point at the Massif du Vignemale, passing through the 2nd largest - and one of the last - glaciers. The trek started mid-day on Saturday and we embarked with our climbing equipment on our backs - under pouring cold rain - with the recent heat wave as a distant memory. Our goal was to spend the night at the mountain refuge at around 2,700 meters before going for the summit. The heavy clouds and rain were unfortunately hiding most of the scenery but a few sights did brighten our ascent: fields of purple irises, magnificent waterfalls, families of beavers and patches of snow getting larger and larger.

After an hour or so everyone was soaked from head to toe despite double raincoats for most of us, as we got higher the rain started to freeze and slowly become tiny ice spikes. After a few hours of painful hiking, the refuge appeared out of nowhere. What a relief for our freezing hands and tired bodies.

The refuge welcomed a mix of French, Italian and Spanish hikers with mulled wine, 'saucisson' and a fireplace very much enjoyed by our wet socks and other garments. The evening was short though as the first departures from the dorms set out at 4am to climb with the sunrise.

We began our journey at 7am each supplied with our climbing harnesses, helmets and ice axe and cleats at the ready, and our pockets full of nourishing snacks. A short hike under a clear sky led us to the bottom of the glacier. We roped ourselves and started to make our way across the large glacier. Blasting wind made it a bit uneasy but the fresh snow was perfect and the view was breathtaking as you can imagine.

At some point the glacier hits a final rocky wall and the summit can be seen about 100 meters above us. Now it was time to start the actual climbing. The fresh snow this time made it more difficult, requiring extra care and effort to stay stable. After a few slippery scares, we finally reached the summit discovering a startling panoramic view of the occidental Pyrenees. After a quick sip of water, a snack and a group selfie the cold winds forced us to turn around. We carefully climbed down the rock wall to reach the glacier

again. After crossing the better part of it we decided to un-rope and roll down the last snowy hill sleighing on our backs like a group of kids.

At last we hit solid ground again and after an extra half hour hike we reached a perfect picnic spot with the view on the glacier behind us and the valley in front. Our bitterly cold bodies from the glacier quickly warmed up from the now 30-degree sun and a sandwich has never tasted that delicious.

Unfortunately, because of climate change, glaciers are melting at accelerating rates and the Vignemale will most likely not survive my lifetime... So please care for the Planet! And enjoy what it gives us before it disappears.

See you next week for another episode of 10 Minutes For The Planet.