

L'ÉQUIPE

Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Haut-Savoie, France

15-16 October 2017

France From A Different Angle

Climbers and skiers use this hole, cut through the ice, to reach the facilities or begin their journeys atop l'Aiguille du Midi – the Noon Needle – at 12,605 feet on the Mont Blanc Massif in Chamonix, a ski town in France and site of the first Winter Olympics in 1924. Mere mortals – meaning Emily, Gordon and me – get there by riding the world's highest vertical ascent cable car, which climbs 9,210 feet from the valley floor. The first ridge beyond is the France-Italy border.



A lone climber makes his way up the ridge from the Vallée Blanche (white valley) glacier to l'Aiguille du Midi. Another climber is farther down the trail on the left edge of the picture. Take a four-minute YouTube video walk down the ridge at <https://youtu.be/GTv885GvNxo>.



Above Gordon's head, the short jagged Rochefort Ridge is topped on the left end by the Grandes Jorasses, considered one of the three great north-facing rock faces in the Alps to climb, along with the Eiger and Matterhorn in Switzerland. On the right end is the Dent du Géant (giant's tooth). The crevasse to the left behind Emily is the *bergschrund* of a glacier, which is caused by the millions of tons of ice in the glacier pulling away from the ridge from where it begins its downhill slide. It can be hundreds of feet deep. On the left edge of the picture is the Argentière Glacier, which turns gray part of the way down. The color is the rock pulverized as the glacier flows down the mountain valley and falls onto its surface. The rock becomes emeshed in the glacier so that it's like sandpaper and grinds the valley wider as it pushes downhill. This is the way glacial valleys like Yosemite, from which a glacier long ago melted, are carved. It can take centuries for a snowflake that lands at the top of the glacier and hardens into ice to reach the glacier's toe, where it melts back to liquid water.



Nearing the top of the cable car ride to the needle.



L'Aiguille du Midi in a telephoto view from the valley floor in Chamonix.

A man and a woman are standing in front of a building with a sign that reads "CREPERIE DU VAL DES ROSES". The man is wearing a dark blue hoodie and sunglasses, and the woman is wearing a white top, a grey cardigan, and sunglasses. They are both smiling. The building has a large glass window on the right and a glass door on the left. The sign is white with green and red text and a small red rose logo. The background shows a clear blue sky and some buildings in the distance.

CREPERIE

DU VAL DES ROSES

Gordon and Emily at the restaurant in Albertville, France, just an hour's drive from Chamonix, where I had lunch with Kristi Yamaguchi and her parents the day after she won the *medaille d'or patinage artistique feminin* at the 1992 Winter Olympics. You can read the story I wrote about that day on my website at <http://bit.ly/2l8huy3>.