

A musician at the summit

Rémy Schroeter has fulfilled a dream. A native of Fribourg, this music enthusiast has played his favourite instrument at the summit of the Kilimanjaro, at an altitude of nearly 6000 metres.

It is an idea that was running through his head for a while: to take his Alphorn, climb a mountain and play a few notes at the summit. Three times has he tackled the Mont-Blanc: so many aborted attempts due to the unfavourable meteorological conditions. However Rémy Schroeter is not the sort of man to abandon easily. And when one day he comes across a TV programme devoted to the Kilimanjaro, he sees it as a new challenge. After having taught the branches of general knowledge during almost twenty years, he is taking advantage of his early retirement to take up this challenge.

When he talks to them about his project, two of his friends decide to follow close on his heels. One of them is a saxophonist and also chooses to take his instrument with him. A few rehearsals take place before the departure in order for this unusual duo to tune.

A collection of 300 instruments

The thing is, music is a long-standing passion for Rémy Schroeter. At home, in Les Cullayes (VD), a room holds a collection of some 300 instruments, most of which have been brought back from his numerous travels. Capable of mastering 75 of them, this multi-instrumentalist appears regularly during events, in Switzerland as in foreign countries.

But then why his choice has fallen on the Alphorn? "This instrument represents the Swiss folklore, it is an important symbol", he explains. It is also one of his specialities, since he competes each

year with professional musicians during Alphorn contests.

A sole dilemma, the instrument is rather bulky. For the ascent, it is impossible to take a traditional instrument whose size varies between two and four metres. It is therefore a telescopic Alphorn out of carbon fibre that he slips in his backpack. A state-of-the-art material manufactured in Yverdon that only weighs 1,5 kilo.

And to put the chances on his side, Rémy Schroeter follows a specific training. Judo, that he practices diligently – black belt 2nd Dan, honestly! – allows him to stay in good physical condition, but that does not seem to be enough for him. On foot, with snowshoes or with sealskin he will, then, make a dozen of races throughout the Swiss mountains to prepare for the ascent of the African summit.

The departure time comes rapidly. Mid-January, the three Swiss take off for Tanzania. During their journey, they are accompanied by a guide, an interpreter, as well as about ten carriers for the tents and the food.

Four stages line the ascent. At each stop, Rémy Schroeter does not hesitate to draw his Alphorn and to improvise small concerts to the biggest delight of the inhabitants of the region and the other tourists. The atmosphere is lively and the jaunt eats up the miles in a good mood. "Hakuna matata" – "no soucy" in Swahili – they say to themselves. But after three days of a steady walk things are getting complicated. The organisms start to be obviously shaken and the rarefaction of the oxygen increases tenfold the intensity of the effort.

The last camp is erected at an

altitude of 4600 metres. The men sleep until midnight, then equip themselves with frontal lamp and muster their last strengths. The 1300 metres difference in level that separate them from the summit are by far the most arduous.

A rather inhospitable summit

The sun has just risen when they reach the summit. But a wind of nearly 100km/h and a sensation of cold neighbouring minus 25 degrees give them hardly the opportunity to make the most of the show. "And when I blew my Alphorn, no sound came out!" Rémy Schroeter recalls. The gusts of wind that come head-on prevent the two musicians from playing. They turn over and, their back against the wind, finally manage to produce a few notes. Their chapped lips and numbed fingers allows them only just to play a piece before starting, already, the descent. On the way down, several Tanzanians assert that, within living memory, they are the first musicians to have played on the Roof of Africa.

Soon on the ice floe?

"It is probably the most difficult experience I have lived, Rémy Schroeter notes. If I had realized the harshness of the expedition, I would have never embarked on this adventure". For all that, the man does not seem close to forego new expeditions. Hardly returned, he is sure to mention another of his dreams: still playing Alphorn, but this time in the middle of penguins, in Antarctica.

Alexandre Haederli

www.remymusique.ch



Rémy Schroeter le jour de son exploit en janvier dernier au sommet du Kilimanjaro.