

They drew near the crest, their hearts throbbing with anxiety, their limbs failing from fatigue. But before gaining the summit of a small plateau where they could rest and refresh themselves, each forgot his sufferings in the sublime spectacle revealed to his eyes upon emerging from the gap. The sun lit up the entire prospect with his beams.

“A lake completely frozen,” writes Ramond, “reflected a sky of cloudless azure, the glaciers sparkled, and the summit of Mont Perdu, all glittering with celestial lustre, seemed no longer a thing of earth. In vain should I attempt to describe the magical appearance of the picture; in colour and in outline it was equally superior to the views on which our glances ordinarily rest. In vain should I attempt to describe what this scene possessed of the unexpected, the astonishing, and the fantastic; at the moment when the curtain falls, when the gate is thrown open, when one stands on the threshold of this gigantic edifice, the world comes to an end; another begins; a world regulated by the laws of a wholly new existence.”

Four or five terraces, piled one upon another, form the first stages of the Mont Perdu properly so called. These steps are rendered practicable by the snows and débris of stones which partly cover them. At the end of an hour they were escaladed, but our adventurers were overwhelmed with fatigue. They found themselves confronting a ridge of rocks, which, gradually enlarging, furnished a convenient access to a kind of valley, where the glaciers that surrounded the peak commenced.

At length the summit of the peak itself was gained. It is so steep on the southern side that the snows incessantly roll off on the lower declivity, and accumulate in a glacier, beneath which the mountain flanks sink with an abrupt incline. To the north the sharp and shattered peaks of other mountains combine in a broad dense belt to shut out the plains of France.

Such is a summary of the difficulties encountered by Ramond in his ascent of Mont Perdu, which produced a great sensation in the scientific world.