



Yann Jondot and Kilimanjaro

Yann It was very important for us to revisit the 2005 French law, which ruled that all buildings receiving the public should have access for all. The law was never implemented because it was underfunded, and too weak to enforce. So we instigated the Agenda for Accessibility. Disabled people, me included, were worried that we would find ourselves in the same position as in 2005, and the law would never be implemented. So I decided, once I became mayor, to suggest alternatives to the government and to do so I had to do something spectacular. So I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro!

Rob What was the trip like?

Yann Well, it was a difficult experience, the mountain after all is 5,900 meters high, it's the roof of Africa. The weather conditions were extreme, but we had a really good team spirit, and we were motivated by the encouragement of people from central Brittany, French and English alike. There's a cultural solidarity which really helped us, both financially and in terms of getting a team together. Without this local support, we could never have got to the top.

Rob In what form did this support take?

Yann As I mentioned earlier, it took the form of financing us, very generously, to the tune of 60,000€. Twenty thousand euros went towards making a couple of films, one of which is being shown in cinemas locally, and the other will be on TV, in France and maybe abroad. About 25 thousand euros went to finance the trip proper, on organising a team over there There's about 5000€ which will go to Tanzania to help handicapped people there. We are also sending a container full of paramedical supplies collected here in France, beds, chairs and so on; we're also working with schools to send books and other school equipment. All that is important for us. With the money remaining, we are funding visits to Paris and to the heads of government to lobby on behalf of access ramps for each mairie in France. There will also be panels at the entrances to communes showing what the local council is doing for disabled people, which should work as motivation for the locals. MPs and senators have agreed to help, so in Morbihan we are carrying out an experiment, over a year or so, starting in September, to test effectiveness, and if successful, it will have an impact all over the country, and maybe also in Europe. This is very important, because we want to show that disability knows no frontier. We suffer as much from the same handicap in Africa as in any European country, though of course the way in which disability is treated will differ, depending on the richness of the country. So it's really important for us to support fellow sufferers. I have to tell you that in poor countries like Tanzania, there are not many resources, but a lot of humanity. So we can all offer something positive with regard to disability. We don't want to make empty gestures; no, disability is rich because it's a difference. To help people to continue their lives, independent, living in little communities is really important, because it's a positive action.

Rob I'm curious to know how you managed to reach the top of the mountain.

Yann I did part of the climb and the descent in my wheelchair, and the rest of the time I was in a special trolley, called a joëlette, with a wheel and a sort of stretcher. The support team pushed me and pulled me;



it was very difficult at times, as you will see if you get to see the film. We had to overcome the cold, the natural obstacles on the mountain; all this with a very strong sense of teamwork. The trolley was important, but more important was the human element.

Rob And not satisfied with this adventure in Africa, I understand that you are planning another trip.

Yann The Amazon. This is a scientific expedition, with a great French explorer. It's not my expedition, he is the one who came to find me to ask me to accompany him to the Amazon, to talk out about deforestation there. We know that the Amazon forest acts like the lungs of our planet. We will investigate the effects of deforestation on the people who live there, and also to realise how their societies deal with disability, how they cope with someone like me. The thing is, if I go, I go without my wheelchair; that's to say I go naked. I go like the refugees we hear about these days, without a thing, helpless and dependent on others. We want to show how societies, which some regard as primitive, though I see them simply as different, confront disability, and to find out if we have lessons to learn.

Rob It's a big adventure; it's a very risky operation.

Yann There are certainly many risks; I still haven't fully recovered from an injury from the Kilimanjaro trip. But I have to say in all honesty, there are huge risks in crossing a sea with your children, with 50 other people in a boat meant for three. There is a risk also in not doing anything for those people. Anyhow, if I can go, I will go. I should also add that none of the expeditions that I have undertaken have had any public money; we haven't been funded by the taxpayer, apart from three communes who have helped us. And as for the Amazon trip, one which I fully support, I am not sure that I will be able to go, but it doesn't have the same objectives as the present disability campaign anyway.