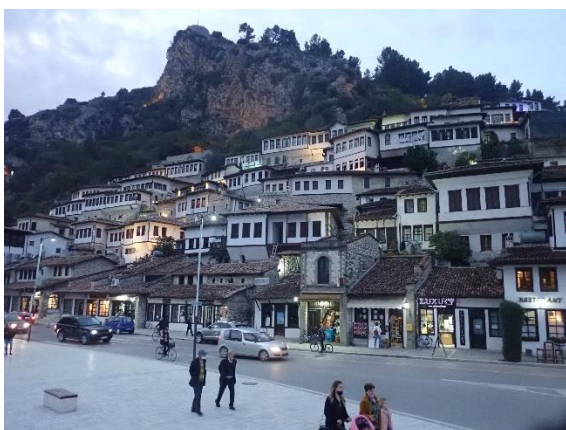


SEJOUR CANYON IN ALBANIA - CLUB ABC LYON

OCTOBER 25 TO NOVEMBER 1st 2020

With Sylvain, François, Régis, Jacqueline, Tibo, Jean, Anna et Komi our young Albanian guide



We've been talking about this for a long time. And even the pandemic situation didn't get our motivation out!

A country with a complicated history, under Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman rule, always coveted by its neighbors, Albania is internationally recognized as an independent country, by the Treaty of Tirana of 1919.

Under fascist and then communist influence, the country chose isolationism from 1978 and did not open to tourism until the 1990s.

Albania is a country of adventure, a land of mountains, lakes and rivers, the population is hospitable, curious and generous.

It's a fantastic playground for our activity. The first openings date back to 2017. We are grateful to Guillaume Coquin for sharing his knowledge by publishing a topo guide and advising us for this trip.

1^{er} jour samedi : Departure from Geneva airport where we meet our Swiss friends, arrival in Tirana at the beginning of the afternoon and we easily pick up the rental cars.

Stop at a typical roadside restaurant, local food (very cheap) and a delicious very fragrant raki offered by the owner.

Arrival at GRAMSH, Devoll-Elbasan sector where our young friend guide KOMI is waiting for us in the company of the charming girl-manager of the hotel.

The day ends up in a typical tavern of the city (taverna Beni) where we enjoy the traditional dishes.

Day 2 : GJERZEZE canyon

We start slowly, looking for a place to have breakfast. Komi finds us an unlikely small restaurant in the locals where we feel warm welcome. Typical dishes and soups....we are full and ready to go!

Gjerzeze is an uninterrupted parade of waterfalls in a beautiful white limestone. Unfortunately the water is brown as it will be more or less the case of all the canyons we have walked through in Albania. The weather is gloomy and we take a thunderstorm in the middle of the canyon just when tibo pulls out the drill. We run in a hurry, the flood wave picks us on the last obstacle (1 hour later) as we take out the drill again, fortunately without dramatic consequences.

It is decided we will not take out the drill until there is an extreme need ;)!

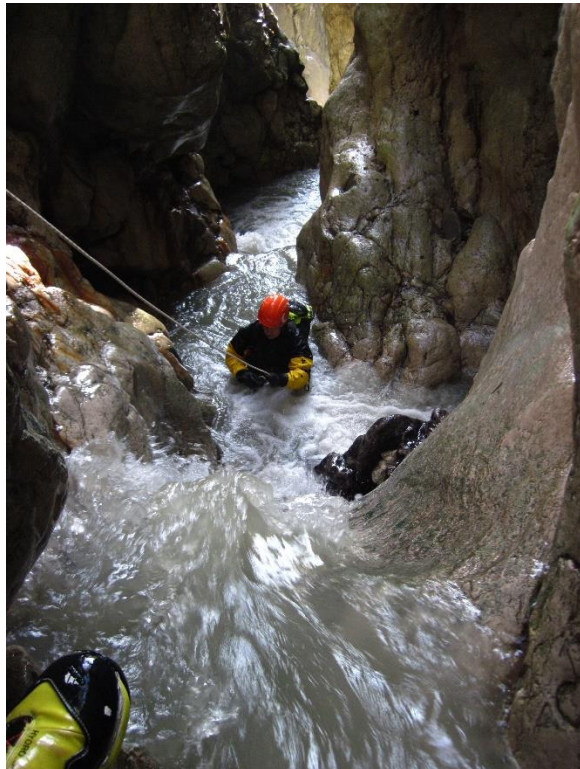


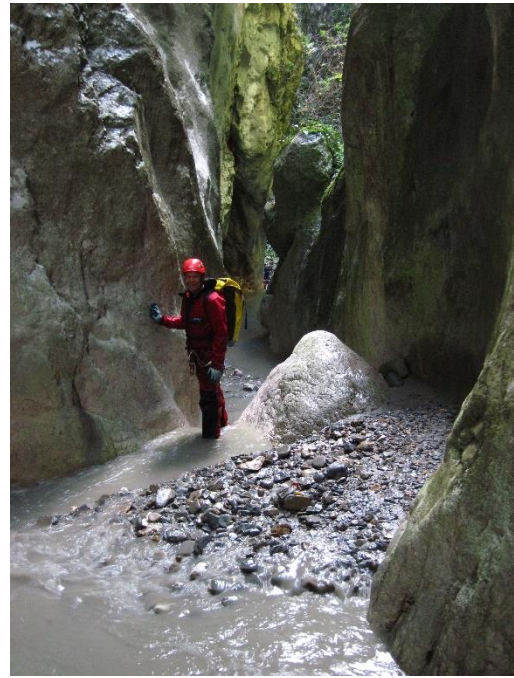


Day 3 : SHUSHICĚ canyon

The access track is long and chaotic.

Beautiful narrowed parts in this canyon and a pleasant walk back through the cultures of a small hamlet lost in the mountain.





The next day announcing the only stable and favorable weather of the week, we decide to go to the South (Corovodë) with the goal of going through the famous canyon of Gradeci, not to be missed according to Guillaume.

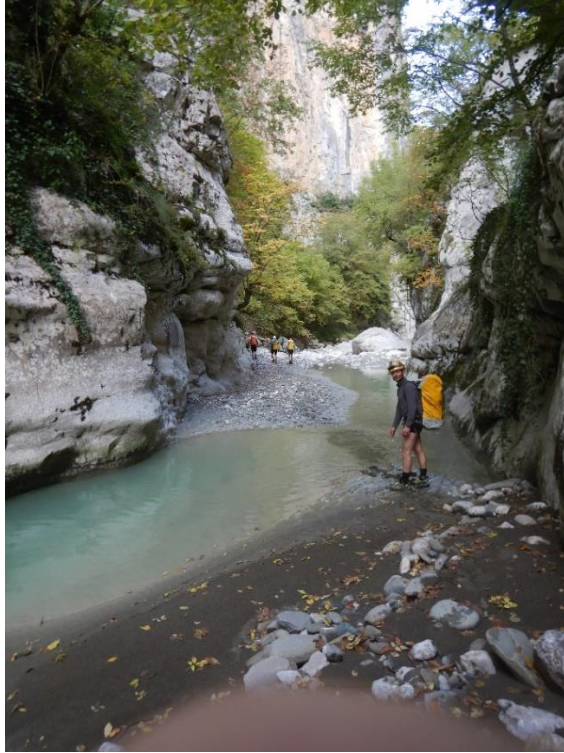
Day 4 : KANIONI I GRADECI

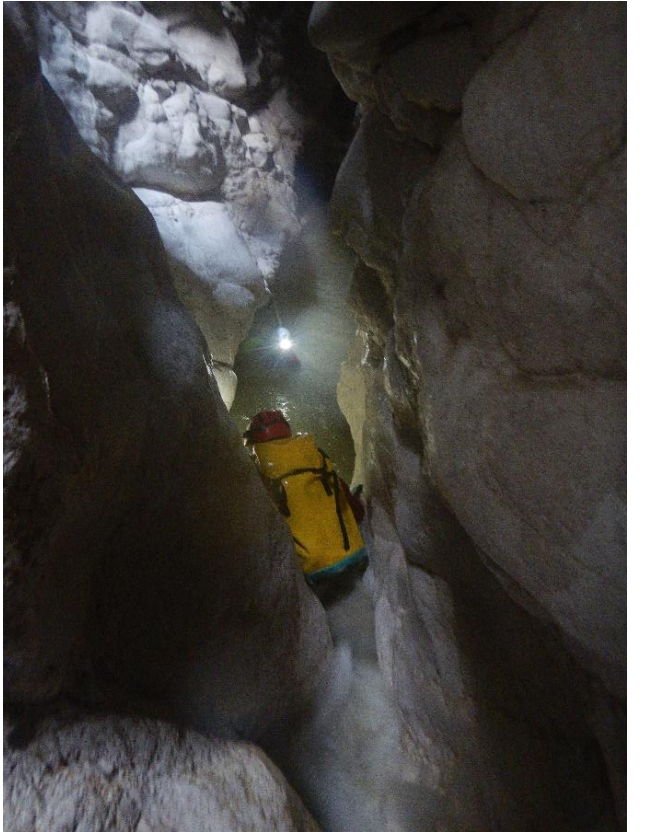
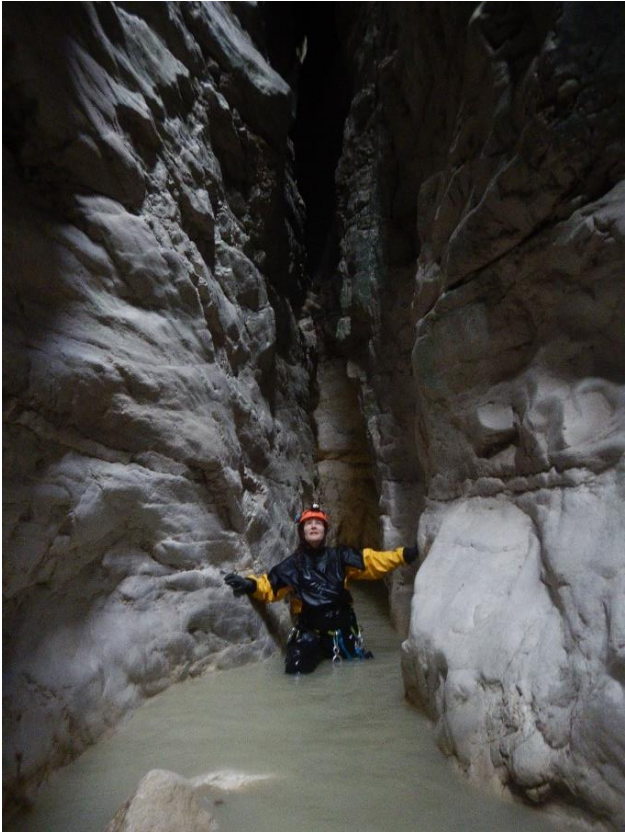
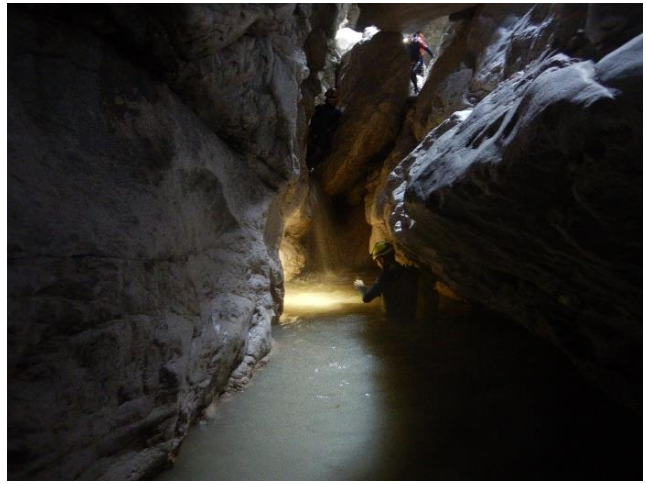
Komi, our guardian angel, finds us two 4x4s to get us up to the start. They drop us off right at the entrance to the canyon. And hop 1 hour saved!

We walk more than an hour in a deep gorge where we will see the trace of the bear and then cross a chaos of rocks with beautiful games of light to finally arrive in an endless and gorgeous obscuros.

Without this grey/brown water, there is no doubt that this is a major course!









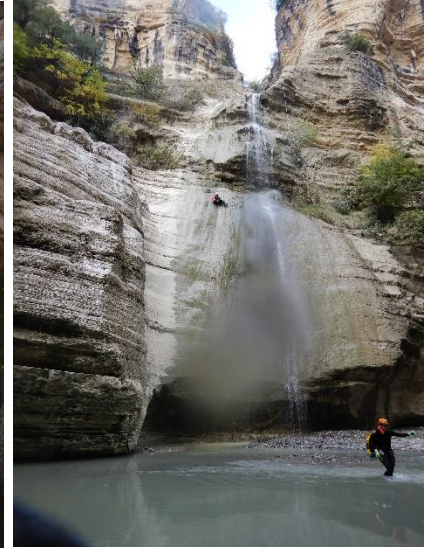
Well-deserved rest and delicious evening meal in a fast food restaurant...

Day 5 : BLEZENCKË et BIGAS

These 2 very short canyons descend into the great canyon of Osumi that looks like our Verdon. Exceptional scenery, outstanding waterfalls, some jumps and slides with the added bonus of walking down and up the gorges of osumi. make this sequence a must of the region.

Blezencke + go down the gorges out and **Bigas** + walking up the gorges to the car





A beautiful day that ends with a visit to the old town of Berat and a return to Gramsh in the evening



Day 6: HOLTA Canyon

Here we are back in familiar territory. Even though we changed hotel to the great despair of the boys ;), we have our marks in our morning bakery or evening tavern.

The Holta Canyon is the major canyon of the area with a 3 km long, deep and dark passage, with unique forms of erosion in a beautiful rock gradient. A contemplative canyon without major obstacles, with bath in a sulfurous hot spring on arrival.

A 4x4 taxi gets us up at the start avoiding the huge shuttle. The canyon starts under the dam that they will not open as promised!





As we finished the canyon, a bogged down semi-trailer blocks our return trail. This is Albania, we must improvise!



The choice was difficult but we decided to leave the area the next day without doing the Arcovë canyon, to discover another area and get closer to Tirana.

Day 7: GARES Canyon

A beautiful canyon that could be very interesting without this 45-minute walk in a poop block of rubbish!

Anyway the rock is beautiful (pink and gray marbled limestone), the water flow is interesting, and the waterfalls we have reequipped are more technical and spectacular. After yesterday's quiet day, it wakes up!



We head to Pellumbas, a quiet little village on the suburbs of Tirana... and well done as we spend an unlikely, surreal evening in a great hotel restaurant.

Indeed, the hotel is empty and a great cook: Arjan Ceka, organizes an internship for his apprentices.

<https://www.facebook.com/Chef.arjan.ceka/>

As a warm-up for his team, he offers us to cook for us the evening meal.

A parade of dishes and drinks follows, each one better than the other, for 2 hours... A culinary orgy! Hard digestion!



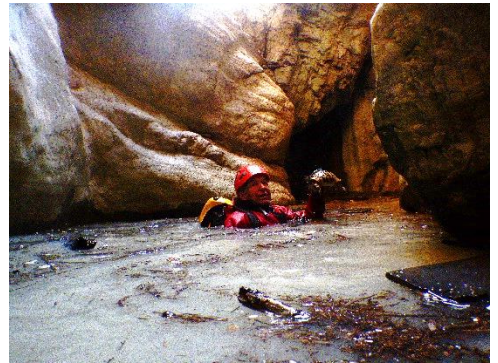
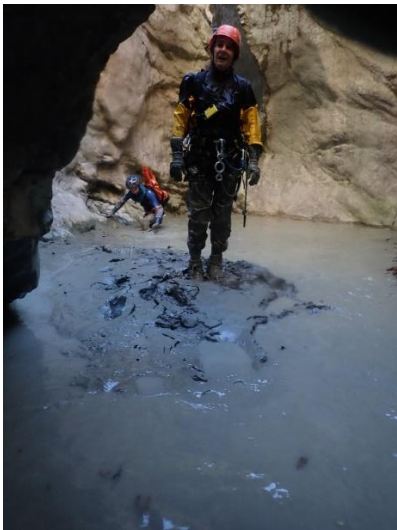
Day 8: GRIKA E MURDHARIT Canyon

The chef takes care again of breakfast... 😊👉 we're leaving with a full stomach!

The Murdharit Canyon is interesting for its beautiful approach walk including the crossing of a rudimentary wooden footbridge over the canyon; there are very nice narrowed parts but the water level was certainly too low for us.

We spent our time wading through the mud or trying to get out of it, and looking after animals trapped in the basins (fox and turtle). A good funny day though, with a beautiful sun to finish this stay!





We crossed Tirana and its traffic jams to reach our last hotel at the airport for a departure the next morning at 6 am. Komi accompanies us for our last meal and night. This could well have closed our Albanian epic not to mention a welcome delay of our flight at 2pm which allowed us to see Anna and Komi again and enjoy a superb hotel 5 stars....



IN CONCLUSION,

- a huge thank to Komi who really made the organization easier for us. Efficient, resourceful, funny and friendly, we are sure that you will be able to realize your professional guide projects.
- Thanks also to Guillaume Coquin for his advices and the release of his super topo guide that is a must have!
- Language is still a barrier in this country but it is possible to be understood in English or Italian
- Life is super cheap (2 to 3x cheaper than in France)
- Albanians are welcoming, curious and friendly
- And finally the canyons (which we did) are surprising, original, fairly easy to access and relatively equipped. However, we have put down about ten points that should complete this equipment. The brown water was a constant on our stay but it must be possible to traverse these canyons with clear water...

Jacqueline Melis

Club ABC LYON

Canyon Instructor FFME