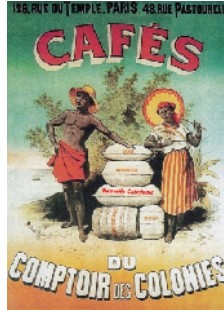


## *At the fork in the Plum / Yaté road*



### **New Caledonia: The demise of Leroy – the Coffee of Kings by ‘Springbok’**

I spend a fair bit of time in New Caledonia and as I am always on the look out for local coffees wherever I go I had heard of an exclusive estate on the east side of the island - **Domaine du Kouandji Coffee**.

Coffee was first introduced to New Caledonia by the Monks of the Marist Brothers order in 1860. Today there is a lot of Robusta grown in New Caledonia but *this* was *Coffe a laurina*, *Leroy coffee* a varietal of a Bourbon Arabica Bean which originated in the Island of Reunion previously known as Bourbon Island.

The Leroy is a unique kind of coffee, the shrub has more the appearance of a tea bush, with the beans being almost half the size of an average coffee bean. The elongated shape of the bean gives it the name of a sharp bourbon. *Au plan organoleptique, le Leroy est un café doux à l'arome délicat comportant une exceptionnelle longueur en bouche.*

*It is a mild coffee with a delicate aroma and apparently an exceptionally long finish. It's low caffeine content (0.62% against 1.2 to 1.5% for all other arabica) makes it a very popular coffee for insomniacs.*

Abandoned once for its low productivity, Leroy was revived some years ago by Messr Pierre Cochard of **Domaine du Kouandji** and became once again much sought after by the connoisseurs of Coffees.

Only 1,000 kg of this coffee were produced every year by **Domaine du Kouandji** and the entire production was the special reserve of Sea Island Coffees and the Elysee Palace, as New Caledonia is a “department” of France.

Finding the plantation was half the fun – I had an address but in New Caledonia this doesn't mean much in the country so the best advice we had was *you will find it at the fork in the Plum/Yaté road* near Mont Dore.

Several wrong turns and a lot of enthusiastic advice from the locals all who knew Messr Pierre Cochard, the navigation of a rickety bridge over a creek and we found the plantation - **Domaine du Kouandji**.

My dismay was that Pierre has recently retired from the rigours of this business and the new owners, given for what remains a highly labour-intensive industry and that New Caledonia is a Department of France with the high cost structure and minimum wages of the developed world to contend with, seem to have decided that the little coffee produced wasn't economically viable.

After his initial surprise at our unannounced visit he began to open up and although Pierre spoke only French I had Tony my interpreter with me and we had an enthusiastic 3 way conversation, I thought I saw a glimmer of respect in his eyes at my knowledge of coffee but then again perhaps he was just being kind... Unfortunately we did not get to see the plantation nor taste the coffee of which I am sure he still has – we did get the impression that some of the shrubs had been let grow wild - enough to keep Messr Cochard drinking the Coffee of Kings for some time to come.

We did get to see his file of letters of acknowledgement and appreciation for his product from Important people from around the world including Japan, Brazil and most important of all a signed letter of appreciation from Jacques Chirac himself.



***Coffe a laurina*** was the coffee preferred by Sir Winston Churchill, Jacques Chirac at the Elysee Palace, and Honore de Balzac – a writer who drank 7 litres of this coffee a day!

De Balzac also wrote an essay “**The Pleasures and Pains of Coffee**”

*Coffee sets the blood in motion and stimulates the muscles; it accelerates the digestive processes, chases away sleep, and gives us the capacity to engage a little longer in the exercise of our intellects.*

<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Pierre Cochard</b>
<b>Region:</b>	<b>New Caledonia</b>
<b>Micro-region:</b>	<b>Mont Doré</b>
<b>Altitude:</b>	<b>25 metres above sea level. This is one of the southernmost grown coffees in the world, its geographical location is very close to the Tropic of Capricorn and its altitude is equivalent to an altitude of 900-1,000 metres in the Equator region</b>
<b>Use of Shade Trees:</b>	<b>Ingas and diverse fruit trees</b>
<b>Total Rain per Year:</b>	<b>1000 mm</b>
<b>Processing Method:</b>	<b>Fully Washed</b>
<b>Variety:</b>	<b>Laurina, this is a very rare variety characterized by its high cup quality and its naturally low caffeine content of just 0.6% (most Arabica varieties have 1.2% caffeine content)</b>
<b>Drying Method:</b>	<b>Sun-dried</b>
<b>Flowering Period:</b>	<b>August-October</b>
<b>Harvesting Period:</b>	<b>May-August</b>
<b>Other interesting information :</b>	<p><b>One of the southernmost grown coffees in the world</b></p> <p><b>This variety is also known as Bourbon Pointu because the shape of the beans is unique, it is pointed in the extremes.</b></p> <p><b>As far as we know this is the only commercial plantation in the world producing this rare variety</b></p>

Information from *Sea Island Coffees website* – thanks.