Track No. 3: The Plain

Parc national des Ecrins

La Plaine de Vallouise (Rogier Van Rijn)

Distance: 2km loop from the Chalet Nordique - approx. 11 m ascent.

An easy and pleasant way to enjoy the sunshine of the Vallouise plain, on your own or with your family!

This loop takes you right through the heart of the Vallouise plain, not far from the heart of Vallouise village. Ideal in the morning, the circuit is in the sun from the very first hours of the day.

The circuit is available in skating or classic technique.

1. Once you've arrived at the Chalet Nordique with your Pass in your pocket, set off to discover the practice on circuit n°3 La Plaine.
2. After crossing the bridge to reach the left bank of the Onde, the circuit skirts the river, until forking off 500 meters further to the right

Useful information

Practice : Cross-country skiing

Level : Beginners track

for a loop that takes you back to the starting point.

Geographical location

- Saint-Étienne de Vallouise Church (A)
- The northern wryneck (C)
- The church in Vallouise (E)
- The Vallouise Park Centre (G)
- The sun bird (I)
- The gerris (K)
- Vallouise (M)
- Wood cranesbill (B)
- The trout (D)
- The lesser horseshoe bat (F)
- The Alpine copse snail (H)
- The ash tree (J)
- The wood nuthatch (L)
- The long-tailed tit (N)

All useful information

⚠ Advice

A few rules:

→ Cross-country ski trails are groomed, marked and safe. Access is subject to a charge and reserved for Nordic skiers.

→ You use these trails under your own responsibility: find out about weather conditions and trail closures, and don't overestimate your possibilities.

→ Respect the signs: trail directions, dangers, prohibitions, avalanche closures, etc.

→ Dogs are forbidden on cross-country ski trails.

→ Night-time activities and biathlon shooting in the Nordic area must be supervised by a professional.

→ Skiing outside opening hours is dangerous and prohibited (presence of grooming equipment).

→ Take your garbage with you

Tours are available in skating or classic technique.

Winter conditions are very pleasant all day long. However, from March onwards, it's best to practice in the morning, as some of the trails are quickly exposed to the sun.

Don't hesitate to ask for a piste map at the Chalet Nordique in Vallouise or at the Pelvoux lift information point!

Please note: This information is for guidance only. It is your responsibility to check the weather report and conditions before you set off. The Tourist Office and Écrins National Park cannot be held responsible in the event of an accident. In case of doubt, contact professionals: instructors or equipment hire companies.

Emergency contact details: Secours Montagne: 04 92 22 22 22 or 112

On your path...

Saint-Étienne de Vallouise Church (A)

Listed and protected as an historic monument since 22 October 1913, the church dedicated to Saint Stephen is one of the most beautiful religious edifices in Hautes-Alpes. It is typical of the Romanesque churches in the Briançon region built in the second half of the 15th century, although its exact construction date is still uncertain.

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - PNE

Wood cranesbill (B)

The path is edged with large clumps of a plant with purple flowers, the wood cranesbill. The leaves are palmate and divided into 5 to 7 incised and indented lobes, This common plant grows in meadows and cool woods. The «geraniums» we see on balconies are in fact pelargoniums, distant cousins originally from South Africa and cultivated for ornamental purposes.

Attribution : Marc Corail - Parc national des Écrins

The northern wryneck (C)

The old trees in the orchard are home to the northern wryneck. It has a loud song, rather like that of the green woodpecker, only slower. This bird owes its name to the extreme way it extends and twists its neck when it feels threatened. Its French name torcol fourmilier is a reference to the fact that it feeds on ants (fourmils in French). Difficult to spot because its plumage merges into the colour of the tree trunks, it gives its presence away by its song when it returns from its migration.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The trout (D)

But what's the angler angling for? The brown trout of course! This is the mountain fish par excellence, with a streamlined body to withstand the current more efficiently and light brown skin speckled with black and red. It lives in cold, oxygen-rich waters.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

The church in Vallouise (E)

The church of Saint-Étienne dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Inside is an altarpiece and a tabernacle in gilded wood dating from the eighteenth century, together with come mural paintings. Not far from the church stands the late sixteenth-century Chapel of the Penitents with a nineteenth-century painted facade.

Attribution : Thibaut Blais

The lesser horseshoe bat (F)

In summer, bats take up residence in the church roof. The species living here is the lesser horseshoe bat, which has been in serious decline over recent decades. Every year, the mothers return after hibernating in caves and each one gives birth to one bat pup. Bats are insectivore mammals threatened by the insecticides used on farmland and on wooden structures and the loss of their hunting habitats and roosts, among other things. They are all protected.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The Vallouise Park Centre (G)

Vallouise Pelvoux is a municipality within the Parc National des Écrins. Renovated in 2014, the Park Centre ("Maison du Parc") houses the offices of the local Park staff and has a spacious visitor reception area. It offers a permanent interactive exhibition inviting discovery of the territory and its heritage features, a temporary exhibition space on the upper floor and an audiovisual room (screenings and talks). It is currently in the process of applying for the "Tourisme et Handicap" tourism and disability label. Admission is free and so, too, are most of the activities in offer.

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Écrins

The Alpine copse snail (H)

On the damp banks of the stream, hidden in the grass, is a snail with a beautiful golden brown shell speckled with brown, decorated with a dark spiral stripe. It has a black body. The alpine copse snail is relatively rare and, as its name suggests, it is found in the Alps. It is a sub-species of the ordinary copse snail, which is present across Europe.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The sun bird (I)

So what is the identity of this sun bird? It's the royal, or golden, eagle of course. Although it is telling the time here, in the surrounding natural landscape it hunts marmots. But what becomes of it in winter when the marmots hibernate deep in their burrows? It's a lean time. It has to make do with a hare or ptarmigan, and in particular the carcasses of chamois which have not survived the winter or have been killed in an avalanche.

Attribution : Cyril Coursier - Parc national des Écrins

The ash tree (J)

Even in winter, the ash can be recognised from its large black leaf buds. The leaves are compound. A pioneer species that grows easily, the ash has long been used by man for everyday needs: its foliage was used to feed cattle and its hard, flexible wood was used to make a variety of objects such as tool handles. Its French name frêne often appears in local place names too: Freissinières (frêne noir - black ash), Le Freney etc. Evidence of its historical importance to human communities..

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - Parc national des Écrins

The gerris (K)

Some strange creatures are moving jerkily over the surface of the water: Gerrises, insects related to bedbugs. Like a true insect, they have six legs and they «skate» across the water using their intermediate and hind legs which are covered in hairs to make them water-resistant. They are carnivorous and anything on the water surface, dead or alive, is good to eat! They catch their prey with the forelegs, sucking up the juices with their strong proboscis!

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The wood nuthatch (L)

With its strident calls, this little acrobat gets itself noticed. With a blue-grey back and a black stripe over its eyes, it works its way down the tree trunks upside down in search of insects. It nests in old woodpecker nests but if the diameter of the entrance is too large it reduces it with mud, to protect its young from predators. Hence its French name torchepot (a reference to edging the rim of a vessel).

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

Vallouise (M)

Multi-storey houses - typical of the architecture in the valley in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries - stand on the old village street. The ground floor was reserved for animals, the first floor for habitation and the upper floors for grain storage. People moved from one floor to another by means of balconies interconnected by a staircase. Many of these balconies are arcaded with stone columns. This type of arcaded balcony is found throughout the valley.

Attribution : Pierre Nossereau

The long-tailed tit (N)

Some birds are causing a stir in a tree, constantly coming and going and uttering little calls. They are round and black and pinkish beige in colour with a long tails, hence their name, the long-tailed tit. They are resident birds and always live in small groups. They inhabit forests, undergrowth and even gardens. They weave a ball-shaped nest out of lichen, moss and dry grass.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - Parc national des Écrins