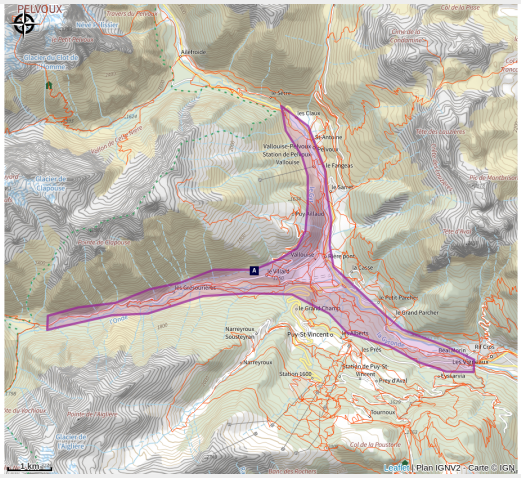
Vallouise nordic ski area

Parc national des Ecrins

L'Onde



*The Vallouise nordic area can be divided into four sectors: **La Vallouise**, **L'Onde**, **Pelvoux** and **Les Vigneaux**.*

The La Vallouise nordic area offers a wide range of possibilities to suit your level and desires: 35 kms of trails are at your disposal, allowing you to discover the surroundings of Vallouise, the Vallée de l'Onde, the Gyr, towards Pelvoux and the Gyronde towards Les Vigneaux. This area is perfect for discovering classic or skating cross-country skiing, as well as for more intensive training, with long, regular runs with a slight altitude difference.

Useful information

Practice : Cross-country skiing

Rating scale :

Level : Beginners track, Good level skiers track, Experienced skiers track, Very hard track

Description

Access: From the N94 Gap-Briançon, turn off at l'Argentière-la-Bessée towards Puy-Saint-Vincent - Vallouise (D994E).

Just before the village of Vallouise, turn left towards Puy-Saint-Vincent Station (opposite the pharmacy). Just after crossing the bridge, park in the parking lot in front of the Maison du Parc and the Chalet Nordique.

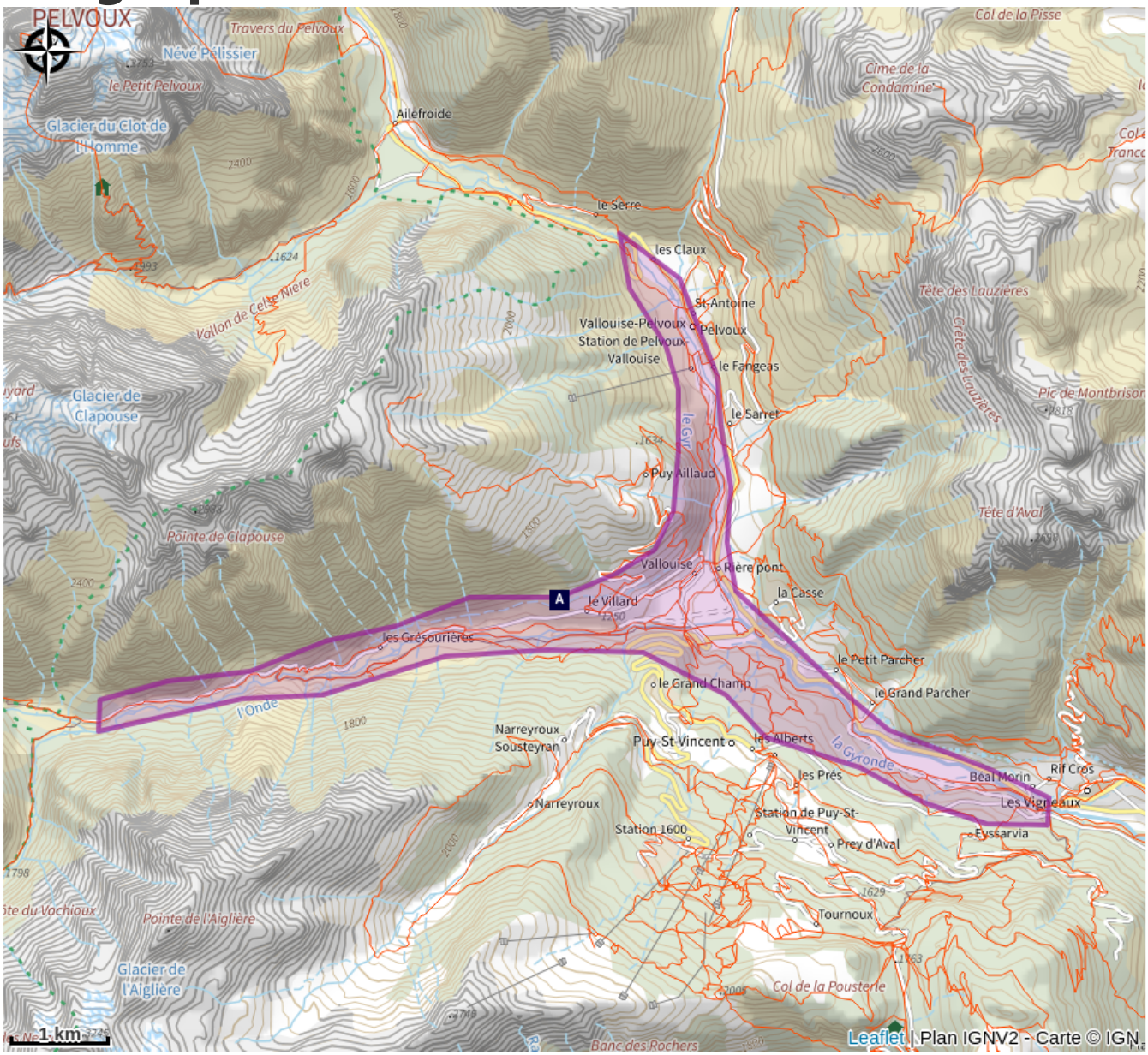
Information on access and transport is available in the practical info section of our website: https://www.paysdesecrins.com

Parking: We advise you to park at the Maison du Parc and Chalet Nordique when purchasing your Pass at the chalet. Vallouise's cross-country ski trails all start from here.

If you already have your Pass, you can also leave from the parking lot at Pont Gérendoine. From here, a large number of loops are also possible.

A departure is also possible from the Pelvoux resort. From here, four circuits are available. And you can also start from Les Vigneaux, for two circuits.

Geographical location



- The "bua" (AA)
- Bread oven (AC)
- The White Penitents (AE)
- Hemp production (AG)
- The church of Sainte-Marthe (AI)
- Protective shelter (AK)
- The village of Les Vigneaux (AM)
- The northern wryneck (AO)
- The northern wryneck (AQ)
- The hamlet of Parcher (AS)
- The acanthus-leaved thistle (AU)
- Forest on the water's edge (AW)
- The "coulage" laundry day (AB)
- Le Poët chapel (AD)
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- The commons (AH)
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- On the south-facing slope, pine forest (AR)
- Etruscan honeysuckle (AT)
- The trout (AV)
- The white-throated dipper (AX)

The aspen (AY)
The Montbrison massif (BA)
The shrubby milkwort (BC)
The rock sparrow (BE)
The downy oak (BG)
The lesser horseshoe bat (BI)
The bird cherry (BK)
The martagon lily (BM)
The Scots pine (BO)
The roe deer (BQ)

The sun bird (BS)
The gerris (BU)
The sessile-leaved cytisus (BW)
The aspen (BY)
The martagon lily (CA)
The penstock pipe (CC)
Le Villard in Vallouise (CE)
The rosebay willowherb (CG)
The robin (CI)
Riparian forest (CK)
The long-tailed tit (CM)
The smooth snake (CO)
The aspen (CQ)
The ash tree (CS)
The chapel of Saint-Romain (CU)

The wild mint (CW)
Pelvoux (CY)
The Zygaena transalpina (DA)
Giovanni Francesco Zarbula (DC)
The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (DE)
Silver spike grass (DG)
The grey alder (DI)
The "ubac" (DK)

The house with arcades (DM)

Les Eyssarts (DO)

Forest of pine and oak (AZ)
The narrow-leaved lavender (BB)
The hamlet of Puy Aillaud (BD)
The chapel of Saint-Jean (BF)
The church in Vallouise (BH)
The great goldenrod (BJ)
The black-veined white (BL)
The Vallouise Park Centre (BN)
The Alpine copse snail (BP)
The Sentier du Facteur - the postman's path (BR)
The ash tree (BT)
The wood nuthatch (BV)
Minute snails (BX)
Mosses (BZ)
Thrushes (CB)
Vallouise (CD)
The morio (CF)
The Eurasian wren (CH)
The sycamore (CJ)
The laserwort (CL)
The great globe thistle (CN)
The Montpellier thistle (CP)
The Eurasian blackcap (CR)
The clouded Apollo (CT)
The church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine-des-Prés and its two sun dials (CV)
The communal oven (CX)
The minor heritage of Pelvoux (CZ)
The church of Saint-Sébastien (DB)
The sun dials (DD)
The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (DF)
The Gyr (DH)
Cool meadow (DJ)
Les Prés, hamlet of Puy-Saint-Vincent (DL)
The history of the resort of Puy-Saint-Vincent (DN)

All useful information

⚠ Advices

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

Information desks

Vallouise Park house

vallouise@ecrins-parcnational.fr
Tel : 04 92 23 58 08
http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/

Bureau d'Information Touristique de Puy Saint Vincent 1400

Les Alberts, 05290 Puy Saint Vincent
1400 m

contact@paysdesecrins.com
Tel : +33(0)4 92 23 35 80
https://www.paysdesecrins.com/

Bureau d'Information Touristique de Vallouise

Place de l'Eglise, 05340 Vallouise

contact@paysdesecrins.com
Tel : +33(0)4 92 23 36 12
https://www.paysdesecrins.com/

Bureau d'Information Touristique de L'Argentière-La Bessée

23 Avenue de la République, 05120
L'Argentière-La Bessée

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https://www.paysdesecrins.com/

Source

Pays des Ecrins

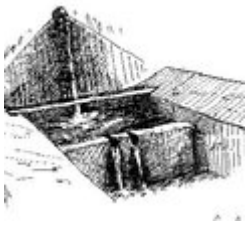
https://www.paysdesecrins.com

On your path...

The "bua" (AA)

Before the year's work began in the fields, the women would spend a special day washing the winter's linen. This was called the "bua". A second was organised in the autumn. The bed linen brought outside to be washed with soap, in cold water. A brief rinse and second wash in soap completed this pre-wash step, called *«essangeage»*. The laundry was then *«poured»* nto a wooden vat, lined with a coarse canvas.

Attribution : PNE



The "coulage" laundry day (AB)

The dirtiest linen at the bottom and a large sheet last, which collected the wood ash. The *«used»* water was collected and reheated several times until the *«washing powder»* (potash from the ash) had achieved the required standard of cleanliness. Often, a few stems and roots of soapwort were added to give the water a soapy quality. The *«coulage»* sometimes took up the entire day and the house was filled with a pleasant smell! Finally, the laundry was wheeled on a barrow to the pond for rinsing. Small items were spread out on the blanched grass in the meadow.

Attribution : PNE

Bread oven (AC)

It is already there on the Napoleonic land register, and was renovated by the town less than 10 years ago with original stone and fire-resistant brick for the vault. Each village had a communal oven saving wood and social ties explain the importance of shared bread baking. Almost a whole month, day and night, between November and December, was devoted to baking bread. The ritual is now carried on in summer baking during religious feast days or other local events.

Attribution : PNE

Le Poët chapel (AD)

A portrait of St-Pancras, the patron saint of the Poët chapel, was once painted on the façade, dressed as a crusader. On his feast day, 12 May, *there was a morning mass and we made rice pudding* to share with inhabitants from other towns who had journeyed there. Almost two months earlier, the feast of Saint-Joseph was celebrated with a mass in Le Sarret, with families from neighbouring villages invited to eat stew and the traditional rice pudding.

Attribution : PNE

The White Penitents (AE)

In the 19th century, the White Penitents took part in the religious life of the villages of Le Poët and Le Sarret. All the male villagers were members, and they played a special role during funerals. They first sang the *misere* in front of the deceased’s house and then accompanied the funeral procession, dressed in hooded habits, with a banner, bell, staves and lanterns. A macabre confraternity whose symbol was a skull and crossbones...

Attribution : Robert Balestra (collection) ©

Le Sarret chapel (AF)

Before 1930, the main road passed in front of Le Sarret chapel. Burials took place in Le Poët until the 1940s, when the cemetery was moved to make way for the new road to Pelvoux.

Attribution : PNE

Hemp production (AG)

At one time, almost every winter evening would be taken up by stripping the fibre from the hemp straw. The strands had to be broken one by one, to remove the long, flexible filaments. Once washed and combed, these «balls» of hemp were taken to the rope and yarn spinners to be turned into rope, blankets and cloth for garments. When a family ordered cloth from the weaver, the entire family would go to the loom to attach the threads onto the warper.

Attribution : PNE

The commons (AH)

As «crosswise» as it might be, from end to end the main street of Puy-Saint-Vincent has every building the community needs. The mill is still here, complete with its intake and outlet mill races. The communal oven is lit on 14 July every year. It has just been restored and shares the little paved square with a lovely water fountain, made from wood and ringed with iron.

Attribution : PNE

The church of Sainte-Marthe (AI)

The church of Sainte-Marthe was built in the nineteenth century, in 1817 to be precise, as indicated at the top of the pediment. Only the main facade has a painted decoration. On two superimposed levels and on the gables, pilasters or false pillars frame either bay windows illuminating the nave, or panels painted with a false marble decoration. A few steles remind us of the present of the former cemetery. Included on the Supplementary Inventory of Historical Monuments, this church also contains a commemorative plaque honouring those who fell in the First World War.

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - PNE

Solid architecture (AJ)

Originally, the environment of the high valleys of the Pays des Écrins offered little space, in which men and animals cohabited. Unlike in Vallouise, where the architecture is a harmonious blend of arcades and decorative elements, the houses in Le Puy retain the rusticity of completely stone-built single block construction with half-hipped roofsprotruding over a drying balcony. This roof extension protects the main facade from bad weather, snow in particular. People can move about under shelter and the firewood store stays dry all winter. This barrel vaulted porch, which shelters the entrance to the main building and the stable, mirrors the Champsaur-Valguademar, «toune» (ground level arcade).

Attribution : PNE

Protective shelter (AK)

Separate from the main building and at a distance from the barn, some property owners also have a small building providing safety from the much feared home fires. Here, in the coolness of this outside cellar, they stored ham, cheeses, flour, salt and other foodstuffs, but also whatever the family owned by way of valuables.

Saint-Étienne de Vallouise Church (AL)

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

The village of Les Vigneaux (AM)

In spite of the altitude, the region's dry climate and the local growing conditions of limestone and sediments facing due south made the planting of grapevines possible as far back as the tenth century. The municipality owes its name to the presence of these vineyard operations, which were very significant in the late nineteenth century. The almost simultaneous appearance of the phylloxera aphid and the Briançon train, bringing wine from Provence, spelled the end of this activity here.

Attribution : Blandine Reynaud - PDE

Wood cranesbill (AN)

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 (AO)

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

Thne Gyronde (AP)

No, we're not in south-west France where the Gironde flows! The Gyronde (spelt with a «y»!) is the river that flows between Vallouise and L'Argentière-La Bessée, where it flows into the Durance. It originates from the Gyr and Onde mountain streams which merge in Vallouise.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The northern wryneck (AQ)

In the spring, an odd song can be heard among the old trees in the orchard, a loud song similar to that of the green woodpecker, only slower. It is that of the northern wryneck. 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

On the south-facing slope, pine forest (AR)

The track passes through a forest of Scots pines, mixed with some downy oak trees. It is a forest typical of those found in the lower south-facing slopes (those exposed to the sun) in the intra-alpine valleys.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

The hamlet of Parcher (AS)

The hamlet of Grand Parcher stands on the alluvial cone formed by the Grand Parcher mountain stream, and on either side of it. It is made up of several old houses and the seventeenth-century chapel of Saint-André. It has two sun dials painted onto its walls. One of them bears the saying HORA INCERTA CUNTIS, ULTIMA MULTIS (This hour is uncertain for all, it is the last hour for many). Food for thought!

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Etruscan honeysuckle (AT)

Etruria was the territory of the Etruscans, in the area of present-day Tuscany. Although this honeysuckle does not grow only in Tuscany, it is Mediterranean, however, and only grows naturally in the wild in the southern half of France. Being a plant that needs warmth, it does not grow at altitude, except here where the south-facing slopes are particularly dry and warm. Its large pink and yellow flowers are highly perfumed.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The acanthus-leaved thistle (AU)

This is a hot, west-exposed slope with rocky ground. The plant life reflects this situation: the narrow-leaved lavender and acanthus-leaved thistle grow here. The latter looks like a large sun with its very big flower head which quickly turns golden and its leaves radiating out around it. It often used to be hung on house doors... but much better to leave it lighting up the stony meadows!

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The trout (AV)

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

Forest on the water's edge (AW)

This small wood is a fragment of the riparian forest: natural forest growing adjacent to a body of water. Reduced everywhere due to urbanisation, this type of forest is made up of alder, willow and oak, and also poplar, birch and aspen, among others

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The white-throated dipper (AX)

Perched on a rock in the middle of the river, a squat bird with a short tail, brown with a large white bib, bobs up and down with his tail in the air. He then dives and only reappears a few moments later. This is how this bird hunts, diving into the water and then walking against the current along the river bed searching for aquatic insect larvae, small crustaceans or small fish, lifting pebbles with its beak to dislodge them.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Ecrins

The aspen (AY)

On the right, a stand of aspens with smooth, greenish trunks and rounded, crenelated leaves take on magnificent colours in autumn. The stem, or petiole, of aspen leaves is flat and twisted, so it can be caught by the slightest breeze making the foliage «quake» hence its common name, the quaking aspen.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

Forest of pine and oak (AZ)

The path now alternates between cleared areas and forested areas. This forest contains Scots pine (recognisable by its orangey coloured trunk, especially at the top), downy oak (its young branches and leaf undersides covered with a fine down), and larch. The Scots pine and downy oak are very drought-tolerant (it is very limey soil here) and can also withstand low temperatures, and they are typical of the montane zone in this part of the Alps.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

The Montbrison massif (BA)

The path offers a beautiful overall view of the limestone massif of Montbrison, overlooking the hamlets of Pelvoux with the peaks of the Cime de la Condamine, the Tête des Lauzières, the Pic de Montbrison and the Tête d'Amont.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The narrow-leaved lavender (BB)

The path crosses some limestone screes. It is a dry environment. The narrow-leaved lavender grows in sunny areas, a reminder that the Pays de Écrins is in the Southern Alps after all! Not to be confused with the lavandin, this plant naturally grows on rocky slopes in the mountains of the Midi.

Attribution : Jean-Pierre Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The shrubby milkwort (BC)

The shrubby milkwort grows in the undergrowth. This creeping sub-shrub has glossy oval leaves, similar to box leaves. The flowers are white and orangey yellow. Common in the Alps, it grows in open woods and dry forests.

Attribution : Jean-Pierre Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The hamlet of Puy Aillaud (BD)

Puy Aillaud is a permanently inhabited hamlet and the highest in Vallouise (1,580 m). This hamlet has preserved some beautiful traditional houses.

Attribution : Jean-Philippe Telmon - Parc national des Écrins

The rock sparrow (BE)

A little flock of rock sparrows can often be spotted around Puy Aillaud. This large sparrow earned its French name moineau soulcie, (sourcil meaning eyebrow) because it has a large white eye-stripe. It also has a dark head, a brown back with white stripes, and a white breast and underside striped with light brown. It has a small yellow throat spot, often not visible. It is a year-round resident.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The chapel of Saint-Jean (BF)

Surrounded by a cemetery and with a bench installed to the front of its façade, this pretty little seventeenth century chapel has an air of peaceful tranquillity. Maybe to sit and watch the trail runners?

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The downy oak (BG)

The route leads down a warm slope, where the downy oak reigns supreme. It is a small oak tree with a twisted growth habit and with marescent leaves, that is to say, they dry out in the autumn but remain on the tree all winter. It is called "downy" because the young branches, buds and sometimes the undersides of its leaves are covered in a fine down. It is a tree that grows happily on the warm dry slopes.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

The church in Vallouise (BH)

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 (BI)

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 great goldenrod (BJ)

In damp spots on the edge of the track, swathes of tall plants grow. It forms great plumes of tiny yellow plants. The great goldenrod, still known as the tête d'or or "head of gold" is a plant native to North America and introduced into Europe in the eighteenth century as an ornamental. Since then, it has colonised a large are of Europe and in some places it even competes with the local flora.

Attribution : Cédric Dentan - Parc national des Écrins

The bird cherry (BK)

Here where the soil is sufficiently cool, a small tree with oval, pointed leaves grows on the side of the track. In May, when it starts to come into leaf, the bird cherry, a cousin of the familiar ordinary cherry tree, produces numerous clusters of highly scented white flowers. These later develop into in loose bunches of small dark cherries which are only just edible. It was called the "putiet" or stinking wood, not because of its scented flowers of course, but its bark.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The black-veined white (BL)

What could be better than a great pile of manure, its nutrient-rich liquid seeping onto the road? This windfall attracts clouds of butterflies which settle in their dozens on the road, risking their lives. It is the ideal spot (well, sort of!) for admiring them because they are so preoccupied with sipping this nectar. One of them is easy to identify: the black-veined white with very distinctive black veining. This butterfly is very common, so it can be spotted very frequently, not only near piles of manure!

Attribution : Jean-Marie Gourreau - Parc national des Écrins

The martagon lily (BM)

In the forest, the martagon lily is a common sight. This superb plant has large hanging flowers with curved-back petals, which are pink speckled with purple and exposed orangey stamens. Its leaves are elongated and whorled. It grows in meadows and cool woods. Although common here, it is rare in many French regions. In fact, picking it is prohibited or regulated.

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Écrins

The Vallouise Park Centre (BN)

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 Scots pine (BO)

A long trunk that is reddish-brown towards the top, sparse foliage, grey-green needles grouped in pairs... It has to be the Scots pine. Happy in poor soil, this softwood tree can withstand below-zero temperatures as well as summer droughts, and so it is very common in intra-alpine valleys with a continental climate, like the Vallouise.

Attribution : Christian Baïsset - Parc national des Écrins

The Alpine copse snail (BP)

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 roe deer (BQ)

The forest is home to roe deer, which can often be seen. This ungulate (hoofed mammal) is rather unusual because the rut does not take place in autumn, for births in May and June as is the case with other mountain-dwelling ungulates, but in summer. After fertilisation, however, egg development is suspended for 6 months (this is called embryonic diapause). Gestation then resumes so that the fawn (or twin fawns) can be born in spring, a period more favourable for its survival.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - Parc national des Écrins

The Sentier du Facteur - the postman's path (BR)

In former times, the postman would take this path every day: He would set out from Vallouise, deliver letters in Puy-Saint-Vincent and drop back down to Vallouise, stopping at the hamlets of Parcher on the way. In the winter, when the snow was too deep, the Traversouires (the inhabitants of Puy-Saint-Vincent) donned their snowshoes and wielded their shovels to clear the postman's path down to Vallouise.

Attribution : Christophe Albert - Parc national des Écrins

The sun bird (BS)

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 (BT)

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 (BU)

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 (BV)

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

The sessile-leaved cytisus (BW)

This small shrub which grows to 1 to 2 metres in light woods is characterised by three-lobed leaves on the flowering shoots which are sessile, that is to say without a stalk. It is easy to confuse with the scorpion senna, which has the same leaves but they are divided into 7 or 9 lobes. Both produce very beautiful yellow flowers in May to June.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

Minute snails (BX)

If you take the trouble to examine the large boulder, you might discover minute snails just a few millimetres in diameter, clinging to the stone walls. The elongated snails are Chondrina avenacea and the others, which are round and conical, are Pyramidula pusilla. They are common but too seldom observed. Nature is rich; you just have to take the time to observe it with curiosity!

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The aspen (BY)

Near the ruined mill, you can see a stand of tall trees with smooth, greenish trunks and rounded, crenelated leaves which take on magnificent colours in autumn. The stem, or petiole, of aspen leaves is flat and twisted, so it can be caught by the slightest breeze making the foliage «quake» hence its common name, the quaking aspen. It needs dampish soils and plenty of light and so it grows in clearings.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

Mosses (BZ)

There are mosses growing on the old wall. Mosses are plants which appeared long before flowering plants, 440 million years ago. They live in damp environments but can withstand long periods of drought. They have very few requirements and can colonise virgin areas. They then contribute to the slow formation of humus, thus allowing more demanding plants to establish in their turn. There are 800 species of moss in France, all of them beautiful!

Attribution : Dominique Vincent - Parc national des Écrins

The martagon lily (CA)

Many martagon lilies grow at the side of the path. This superb plant has large hanging flowers with curved-back petals, which are pink speckled with purple and exposed orangey stamens. Its leaves are elongated and whorled. It grows in meadows and cool woods. Although common here, it is rare in many French regions. In fact, picking it is prohibited or regulated.

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - Parc national des Écrins

Thrushes (CB)

In the springtime, the woods echo with the song of birds seeking a mate and defending their territory. Among them is the song of the mistle thrush, similar to that of the blackbird, melodious and piping. As for the song thrush, it has a wide and varied repertoire: its song is a succession of powerful varied notes, each repeated numerous times. In summer, the birds are more inconspicuous: when raising young, there's no point in singing for a mate, better not to attract attention!

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The penstock pipe (CC)

This penstock pipe carries water to the Le Claux hydroelectric power plant, located just below here, which exploits the water from the Les Écrins massif. The power plant was inaugurated in 1932. At the time, the electricity generated was primarily used to power the aluminium factory located in L'Argentière-La Bessée.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Vallouise (CD)

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

Le Villard in Vallouise (CE)

Lying in the valley of the Onde, the hamlet of Le Villard is justifiably proud of its beautiful houses with arcaded balconies, of the same type as those of Vallouise. It is a pretty, flower-filled hamlet. It still receives a few hours of sunshine in the winter, which is not the case further along the Onde valley. It stands in a position sheltered from avalanches which are severe in this valley.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The morio (CF)

With wings edged with creamy white and sporting a string of little blue dots, a large butterfly takes flight from the path as the walker approaches. This is the morio. Its common French name is manteau royal, or royal cloak (although her cloak is not edged with ermine!) It lives near willow and beech trees because it loves the sap that flows from wounds in these trees. It is one of the few butterflies to hibernate as an adult.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The rosebay willowherb (CG)

The rosebay willowherb is a tall, upright plant with elongated leaves. Its numerous purple-pink flowers are arranged in loose spikes at the top of the stem. It forms large clumps, which produce a beautiful display when in bloom. It is a pioneer plant and favours road embankments and disturbed ground. In late summer, its very numerous seeds, each with a little plume, float away en masse glowing in the advancing twilight...

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Écrins

The Eurasian wren (CH)

A piercing song, long and flowing with numerous trills, bursts from the forest. What a pair of lungs! This powerful song is that of a tiny bird with a plump body and a short tail, which is often raised: the Eurasian wren. It lives in cool forests with dense undergrowth or in bushes on the water's edge. It builds a spherical nest, often against a rock or old wall, hence its French name troglodyte.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The robin (CI)

The robin is a common sight around bird feeders in winter. But he is primarily a forest bird, building his nest close to the ground in a cavity in a rock or tree. His song is a gentle chatter, rising to high notes. The robin "redbreast" is a relatively solitary and territorial bird, and he defends his territory by displaying his red (actually, orange!) breast as he sings.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The sycamore (CJ)

The sycamore is a beautiful tree. Its leaves have five rather pointed lobes, similar to those of the plane tree. It cannot tolerate drought, so it grows in this region in relatively cool deciduous forests. Its twin fruits, equipped with wings, twist as they fal: the «helicopters» that children love. In autumn, its leaves turn golden yellow creating a delightful sight.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

Riparian forest (CK)

The track runs through a wood of alder, beech, aspen and oak, the remnant of the natural forest growing at the water's edge, called riparian forest. This type of forest is in decline everywhere, destroyed by urbanisation and by containment of the mountain streams. Yet it is an essential zone for the fixation of river banks and for purifying the water. Since it offers specific natural habitats, it also plays a major role in maintaining biodiversity.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The laserwort (CL)

After the bridge, a large plant with flowers arranged in umbels (in other words, an umbellifer) clings to a small rock bar to the right of the track, the laserwort. This plant belongs to the family Apiaceae, which used to be called umbellifers, and grows in dry areas. It has a distinctive feature: in autumn, the basal part of the stem breaks of its own accord and the entire plant, now dry, sets off rolling down the hillside like a large ball, or is blown by the wind.

Attribution : Cédric Dentan - Parc national des Écrins

The long-tailed tit (CM)

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

The great globe thistle (CN)

On the edge of the path grows a tall plant with quite wide and smooth leaves, and completely round whitish or very pale blue flower clusters. This is the great globe thistle, a relatively rare plant. It is a cousin of the southern globe thistle which can be seen everywhere in dry places. This one is smaller and has clusters of bluish flowers and spiny leaves.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The smooth snake (CO)

The smooth snake is a non-venomous colubrid snake, which adopted the bad idea of resembling the venomous vipera aspis, which has led to it being killed indiscriminately. We must remember, however, that both the vipera aspis and the smooth snake are protected species. It can be recognised in particular by the black stripe over its eye and on its round pupil (which helps to distinguish colubrids from vipers, which have a slit pupil).

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The Montpellier thistle (CP)

A large plant grows along the canal side; a sort of thistle although it is not spiky: the Montpellier thistle. Its oval, pointed leaves are edged with large, stiff but non-spiky cilia. Its flowers are pink. In France, it is only found in the Alps and the Pyrenees and a few departments in the south. Associated with wet areas, this species has become rare in many regions because of damage to its habitat.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The aspen (CQ)

A sizeable aspen grows on the roadside, on the edge of a small wood of fellow-aspens. This tree has a smooth, greenish trunk and rounded, crenelated leaves which take on magnificent colours in autumn. The stem, or petiole, of aspen leaves is flat and twisted, so it can be caught by the slightest breeze making the foliage «quake» hence its common name, the quaking aspen. It grows in places where the soil is quite damp.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The Eurasian blackcap (CR)

Hidden in the tree foliage, the Eurasian blackcap announces its presence with its loud and piping song. Its head is adorned with a cap which is black in the male and russet in the female. The rest of its plumage is greyish, its underside lighter than its back. It is a migratory bird which travels to the Maghreb to overwinter. However, increasing numbers of birds make only a partial migration, flying to the south of France to spend the winter.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The ash tree (CS)

This is one of the most common trees, provided the ground is relatively cool. It is characterised by its pinnate leaves, that is to say, made up of several segments, and in winter is can be recognised by its large black leaf buds. The ash was extremely important in times past: its foliage was used to feed cattle and its hard, flexible wood was used to make a variety of objects such as tool handles.

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - Parc national des Écrins

The clouded Apollo (CT)

This butterfly with hyaline (glass-like) translucent white wings, marked with two black spots, flutters around the clearing or the edges of the forest, where the host plants of its caterpillars grow: the corydalis. Although abundant locally, it is nevertheless a species in sharp decline and is protected.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

🕒 The chapel of Saint-Romain (CU)

Included on the Supplementary Inventory of Historical Monuments in 1931, the chapel of Saint-Romain has been converted into an eco museum. It was the first chapel to be built in Puy-Saint-Vincent and is thought to date from the twelfth century. Up to the mid-fifteenth century, the village bore the name of its patron saint: Puy-Saint-Romain. Then, in honour of the arrival of the Dominican monk Vincent Ferrier, the village took the name Puy-Saint-Vincent. It stands on a rocky promontory outside the village, and offers a panoramic view over the Les Écrins massif and the Gyronde Valley, over Vallouise in particular.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

🕒 The church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine-des-Prés and its two sun dials (CV)

The charming little church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine-des-Prés, which dates from the sixteenth century, stands in the hamlet of Les Prés. It is surrounded by a wall and a cemetery. On the walls of the church, two sun dials can be seen, both engraved and painted on plaster in 1718. The first is above the door, telling the time in the afternoon, bearing the saying « *for a moment of delights, an eternity of torments* » which alludes to the life of Saint Mary Magdalene, the well-known sinner who is venerated as a model of penitence. The second, telling the time in the morning, bears the Latin phrase Ars longa, vita brevis which translates as« learning is long, life is short ».

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

🍀 The wild mint (CW)

Mints (there are several species) often live on the water's edge. The wild mint found here is very common. If you rub its leaves gentlythey give off a pleasant and recognisable scent. The small purple flowers gathered into a dense spike are very attractive to insects.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The communal oven (CX)

Legend has it that the Lord caused a communal oven to be built and kept it maintained. The local people could use this oven in exchange for the payment of a levy. Families would prepare and knead their own dough at home and then bring it to the oven for baking. Names were drawn by lot to establish their turns.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Pelvoux (CY)

Pelvoux is made up of a succession of small hamlets: Le Poët, Le Sarret, Le Fangéas, Saint-Antoine, Les Claux, Chambran and Ailefroide. Until 1893, Pelvoux was actually called La Pisse, after the name of the L'Eychauda waterfall. Since this name attracted wide mockery, it was changed to Pelvoux. “Peuvo” and “pelva” mean very high mountain, a nod to Mont Pelvoux, one of the highest peaks within the municipality’s territory.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The minor heritage of Pelvoux (CZ)

Every hamlet has its own chapel. In the territory of Pelvoux**,** Les Claux has the chapel of Sainte-Barbe with a restored sun dial dating from 1792. The seventeenth-century chapel of Saint-Pancrace is in Le Poët. In Le Sarret, you can admire the chapel of Saint-Joseph and the chapel of Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs stands in Le Fangeas. Every hamlet has its own communal oven and water fountains as well. Finally, the church of Saint-Antoine is located in the hamlet of Saint-Antoine. It has a sun dial dating from 1810.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The Zygaena transalpina (DA)

A nocturnal moth but also active during the day, the Zygaena transalpina, the transalpine burnet, has thick antennae and red spots on its black to bluish wings. They extract chemical compounds similar to cyanide (a potent poison) from the plants, which they can secrete from their mouthparts and joints when they feel threatened.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The church of Saint-Sébastien (DB)

A listed Historical Monument, this church has two frescoes on its facade depicting the Virgin Mary and Saint Sebastian. The church is also known for its two sun dials dating from 1718, made by Giovanni Francesco Zarbula.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Giovanni Francesco Zarbula (DC)

Between 1833 and 1870, Giovanni Francesco Zarbula made some forty sundials in the Hautes-Alpes. Here, one of the sundials depicts a cockerel, large vases of flowers, curtains and masonry tools. On the other sundial, we see crows dropping flowers and a rare bird. Both sundials show a motto.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The sun dials (DD)

The sun dial is an eighteenth century tradition that is widespread in the Southern Alps, where the sun is constantly present. Artisan dial makers were responsible for these dials, which adorn and embellish the fronts of houses, religious buildings and monuments. They are works of art, but can also be inscribed with philosophical sayings.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (DE)

In the winter, Pelvoux-Vallouise is a ski resort that is close to nature, with very good sun exposure and high quality snow. With 35 kilometres of marked pistes, off-piste skiing, cross-country skiing, a toboggan run, a children's snow club, snowshoe hiking, paragliding and more, Pelvoux is a family-oriented resort suitable for all levels of ability.
In the summer, a number of trails start from the various hamlets. You can also take part in mountain biking, enjoy a very fine via ferrata, go swimming...

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (DF)

The route first leads through the small ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise, built in 1982. Very family-focused, in winter it's the ideal place for young children to learn to ski, with small lifts lower down, while their big brothers and sisters can ski higher up.

Attribution : Pelvoux Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

Silver spike grass (DG)

A grass grows in large clumps on the embankment: silver spike grass. It is adapted to stony, dry and sunny ground. Its inflorescences reflecting silvery-gold glints create a beautiful effect, but they are particularly noticeable in the late summer, when it forms large shimmering bouquets in the evening sunlight.

Attribution : Nicolas Marie-Geneviève - Parc national des Écrins

The Gyr (DH)

Humans are decidedly bizarre animals: they build, knock down and start again. To protect the new infrastructures of Pelvoux, the Gyr was dammed. But, not able to flow as it did before, it deepened its bed, thus placing the foundations in danger of damage. And so works were carried out to widen its bed, allowing it to flow more naturally. This is also more favourable for biodiversity, as well as protecting the developed urban areas.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The grey alder (DI)

In the valleys of the Alps and the Jura, the grey alder often grows in place of the black alder, present in many parts of France. Like its cousin, it grows on riversides and plays an important role in stabilising the banks. If it is cut down, its wood is bright orange in colour. But why cut it down?

Attribution : Nicollet Bernard - Parc national des Ecrins

Cool meadow (DJ)

The track passes through a meadow area, which is categorised as "cool" because of the ground water content there. A botanist quickly recognises this type of meadow through its range of plant life and, in particular, the presence of bistort, a bottle brush-shaped plant bearing a dense spike of tiny pink flowers at the top of its stem. It is also called langue de boeuf ("ox tongue" in English) because of the shape of its leaves.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

The "ubac" (DK)

The track rises gently up the right-hand bank of the Gyronde, on the "ubac" side. The "ubac" is the slope that is exposed to the north, so it is in shadow in winter when the sun is low in the sky.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

Les Prés, hamlet of Puy-Saint-Vincent (DL)

Le Prés is one of the main hamlets of Puy-Saint-Vincent. Like Le Puy and Les Alberts, it stands on a flat plateau which is a glacial escarpment left by the now-retreated Gyronde glacier. Like Prey d'Aval, Prey du Milieu and Prey d'Amant, its name is a reminder that prior to the development of the ski resort, the land here used to be shared by meadows and crops.

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - Parc national des Écrins

The house with arcades (DM)

In the municipality of Puy-Saint-Vincent, there are a number of houses typical of the rural architecture of Vallouise, in particular houses with arcades, in the hamlets of Les Alberts and Les Prés. This type of construction can be recognised by the presence of large arches made from stone from the Montbrison massif and supporting walking galleries. Introduced in the eighteenth century by Piedmontese master masons who settled in the valley, this style with arcaded galleries has become characteristic of the architecture of the Vallouise valley. Elegant and monumental, they replaced modest wooden balconies. They facilitated mobility from one level of the house to the other (the houses did not have interior stairs), and at the same time signalled the wealth of the owner.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The history of the resort of Puy-Saint-Vincent (DN)

Puy-Saint-Vincent is the benchmark resort in the Vallouise. Located on the north-facing side of the valley, it is constructed on three levels, each corresponding to a different period of construction: 1400, developed in the late 1970s, 1600, developed from 1973 onwards and 1800, developed from 2005 onwards. Each level is served by a chairlift to reach the skiing area. It now has 35 pistes covering 75.4 kilometres.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

Les Eyssarts (DO)

The track runs through a place called Les Eyssarts, which gave this circuit its name. This name comes from the word essart which refers to «a place that has been cleared, most often to create agricultural land». A few meadows, but above all former canals and low walls hidden under the advancing forest, bear witness to this past use of the land.

Attribution : Dominique Vincent - Parc national des Écrins