

The White Glacier

Parc national des Ecrins - Vallouise-Pelvoux



Le refuge du glacier Blanc (Bertrand Bodin - Parc national des Ecrins)



A hike to come in to contact with the white glacier and to approach the mythical summits conquered by the mountaineers of the 19th century.

"I started my career as park ranger in Valgaudemar before joining the Vallouise in 1982. I remember my astonishment when, climbing the white glacier, I saw the immense wall of ice that overhung the walkway... In my memories, ten years ago, the glacial front ended upwind. Interested by this progression, I started to take measurements, helped by my colleagues, in order to follow its evolution. From 1986, the glacier has entered a recessive phase."

Joël Faure, park ranger.

Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 3 h 30

Length : 9.0 km

Trek ascent : 716 m

Difficulty : Medium

Type : Return trip

Themes : History and architecture, Hut, Lake and glacier

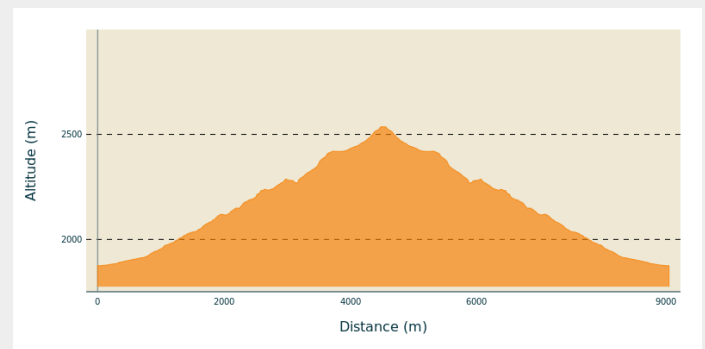
Trek

Departure : Pré de Madame Carle, Pelvoux

Arrival : Pré de Madame Carle, Pelvoux

Cities : 1. Vallouise-Pelvoux

Altimetric profile

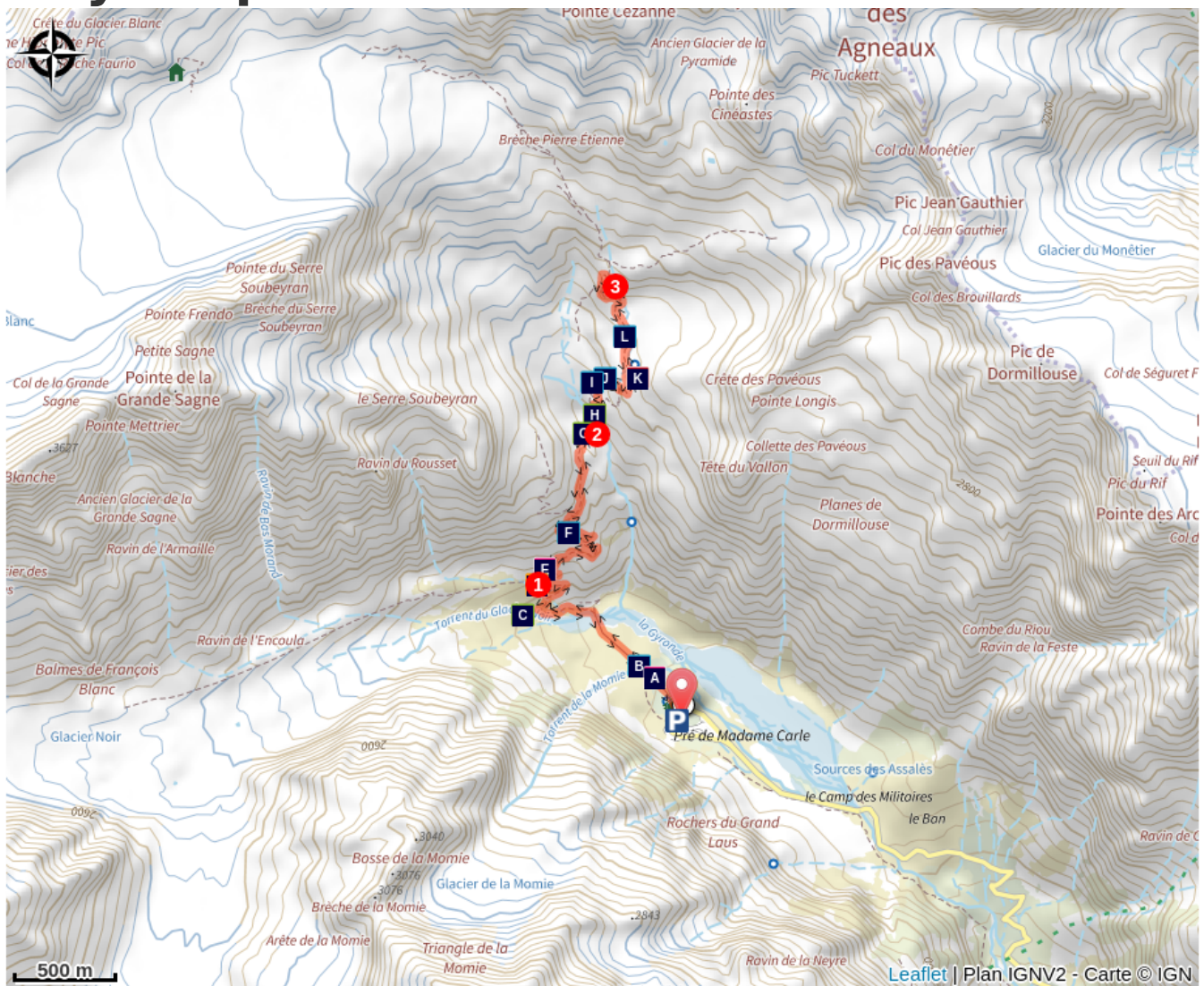


Min elevation 1876 m Max elevation 2538 m

From the chalet-hôtel, go up towards the North-East to cross the walkways across the Momie torrents and the Black Glacier. The path goes up next to join the little mounds of smooth rock, worn and polished.

1. The path crosses the bifurcation of the Black Glacier itinerary (which goes off to the left). Next, follow the bends.
2. Cross the walkway across the White Glacier torrent, the path then follows the left bank of the torrent then goes right up to the ancient Tuckett refuge. Follow the slope to get to the White Glacier refuge and the Ecrins.
3. Retrace your steps to descend to Pré de Madame Carle.

On your path...



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|  Weaving torrents (A) |  The Glacial valley (B) |
|  Rock clover (C) |  The Barre des Ecrins (D) |
|  The highest summit in the Ecrins (E) |  The White Glacier and movement (F) |
|  Yellow billed Chough (G) |  Alpine Accentor (H) |
|  Life on the White Glacier (I) |  Glacier monitoring (J) |
|  Tuckett Refuge (K) |  Evolution of the glaciers (L) |

All useful information



Is in the midst of the park

The national park is an unrestricted natural area but subjected to regulations which must be known by all visitors.



! Advices

Summer itinerary: check that the access road to Pré de Madame Carle is open and that the walkways have been put back in place across the torrents... Payment has been required since 2013 at the communal car park at Pré de Madame Carle.

How to come ?

Transports

Coach stop : Pré Madame Carle

More informations <https://zou.mareregionsud.fr/>

Access

At 23 km from l'Argentière-la-Bessée on the D994E, reach Vallouise. Then cross Pelvoux, Ailefroide and take the D204T until Pré de Madame Carle.

Advised parking

Pré de Madame Carle

Information desks

Information center Pré de Mme Carle (summer only)

Pré de Madame Carle, 05340 Pelvoux

vallouise@ecrins-parcnational.fr

<http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/>

Source



Parc national des Ecrins

<https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr>

On your path...



Weaving torrents (A)

A constantly changing environment, the weaving torrents are formed from the ancient remains of a glacial lake. They are made of interlaced lakes with arms of water that fluctuate depending on level of flood water in a zone where the slope because suddenly very gentle... Materials carried by the torrents over the steep slopes are deposited here creating islets which are eroded and built up again in time. These natural habitats which are rare and fragile shelter unusual plants. The weaving torrents give an unusual character to the landscape at the bottom of the glacial valleys. Their aspect is greatly enhanced when seen from the surrounding summits and glacial cross cliffs.

Attribution : PNE - Maillet Thierry



The Glacial valley (B)

The particularity of this valley is that it shelters both a white glacier which stays covered with ice and a black glacier composed of ice covered with rocks... Their glacial tongues fluctuate depending on climatic conditions, which greatly effects the shape of the landscape. A lithography dating from 1854 shows the two glaciers joined at Pré de Madame Carle, ten years before the first ascent of the Barre des Ecrins. They white glacier lost more than 2 kilometers in length between 1885 and the 2000s.

Attribution : PNE



Rock clover (C)

Tiny clover dominates the alluvions or moraines in continual movement; the rock clover reproduces from seed each year unlike other alpine plants which are generally perennial. This strategy enables it to colonize areas which are always changing. It is a rare species protected nationally.

Attribution : PNE - Nicolas Marie-Geneviève



🕒 The Barre des Ecrins (D)

The Barre des Ecrins (at an altitude of 4 102m , situated in the direction of the Black Glacier) was climbed for the first time in 1864, from the North side, by Edouard Whymper accompanied by Moore, Walker as well as his guides Almer and Michel. The Southern slope, was climbed for the first time by Henri Duhamel in 1880, with his guides Pierre Gaspard father and son from Bérarde. Then then came the time of a search for increasingly more difficult routes, In 1893, Auguste Reynier with his guides Joseph Turc and Maximin Gaspard, opened the way which now carries his name on the South-East face. The Southern column was opened in 1944 by Jeanne and Jean Franco.

Attribution : Thibaut Blais



📍 The highest summit in the Ecrins (E)

On the borders of the Isère and the Hautes-Alpes, little known and once called the "pointe des Arsines", the Barre des Ecrins was once misnamed by the cartographers. So the Pelvoux was considered to be the highest point in the region and also in France at a time when the Savoie was independent. Also when in 1828 Capitaine Durand, a cartographer, made the first ascent of Pelvoux he was convinced that the status of the highest summit should be attributed to the Barre des Ecrins (4 102m).

Attribution : Thierry Mailliet - Parc national des Ecrins



The White Glacier and movement (F)

The White glacier has been monitored for a century. At the end of the 19th century, the White glacier Blanc joined the Black glacier at the Pré de Madame Carle. The path following the right bank and the moraine and crosses under the White glacier refuge. During the 20th century, the two glaciers constantly recede. This glacial decline was interspersed with advances with a spectacular one in the 1980s. Two markers of these impressive movements are the measures of the speed of the flow by posts as well as the scale put in place at the beginning of the 1980s. The debate concerning this operation has started again. should it be continued, should it be preserved ? The scale, which was no longer usable became dangerous, and was finally dismantled in 2008 because the old itinerary has been freed from ice and can now be used... One part has been preserved at the house of the mountains at Ailefroide. While we speak of eternal snows, the glacier fluctuates according to the changes in climate.

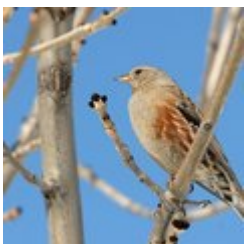
Attribution : PNE - Faure Joël



Yellow billed Chough (G)

A great diver and acrobat in the mountain tops, the yellow billed chough is also very clever at gleaning the remains of hikers' picnics. It mainly moves in groups and brightens its passage with little fluted cries which are easily recognizable. It is as much a companion to experienced mountaineers as those just out for the day.

Attribution : PNE - Chevallier jean



Alpine Accentor (H)

The Alpine Accentor, is more discreet than the Yellow billed Chough, the same size as a sparrow is another inhabitant of these altitudes. It is never far away... On the top a few black stripes decorate its ash coloured feathers. Red flames characteristically mark its flanks. It trots on the short grass in the alpine prairies and crows on the bare stone. It comes to peck the crumbs around the refuge. When winter comes it migrates towards the valleys. This transhumance even extends to the rocks of the littoral. When the snow melts, along the banks of snow, it is an impressive predator catching the small invertebrates numbed by the cold.

Attribution : PNE - Coulon Mireille



Life on the White Glacier (I)

Life nestles everywhere. There is no exception ! Unicellular algae are capable of developing on the surface of the snow giving the snow banks a pink coloration. The animal world is represented by the springtail (collembole), a primitive insect that measures between 1 and 2 mm, and which lives in little pools in the ice. It feeds on little nutritive particles carried by the wind. Its development takes place between 0 and 4°C. As soon as the temperature reaches 12°C, it burrows down in order to satisfy its thermic requirement indispensable for its survival... Sometimes other animals adventure out putting their lives in danger.

Attribution : PNE - Albert Christophe



Glacier monitoring (J)

Each year, the Ecrins National Park makes photographic records, mass balances, monitors the glacial front and takes topographical measurements. In the context of precocious evolution of the climate, it is an important program in the domain of high European mountains.

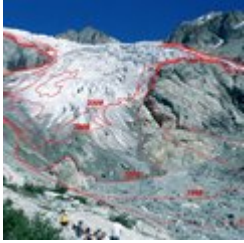
Attribution : PNE - Chevalier Robert



Tuckett Refuge (K)

The refuge is an ancient witness to the pioneering days of mountaineering in Vallouise in the second half of the 19th century... At that time it was situated at the foot of the glacier. It was built in 1886 to provide shelter under the rock for the first mountaineers. With its small dimensions, and materials of stone and wood, it represents a historical reference. Its remains shelter an exhibition retracing its history.

Attribution : PNE - Nicolas Marie-Geneviève



❄ Evolution of the glaciers (L)

The glacier symbolizes the evolution of the climate through the ages: it only seems to be immobile. It is the relative size of the accumulation of snow in winter in the upper part of the glacier and the amount of ice melting in the lower part of the glacier in the summer that determine the progression or the retreat of the glacier. Since the 1990s, under the probable effect of global warming with warmer summers and less snow winters, the glaciers retreat more strongly. Concerning the flow of the glacier, a snowflake that falls at the summit of the dome will take around a century to reach the front of glacier. Transformed into a drop of water, it will join the glacial torrent...

Attribution : PNE