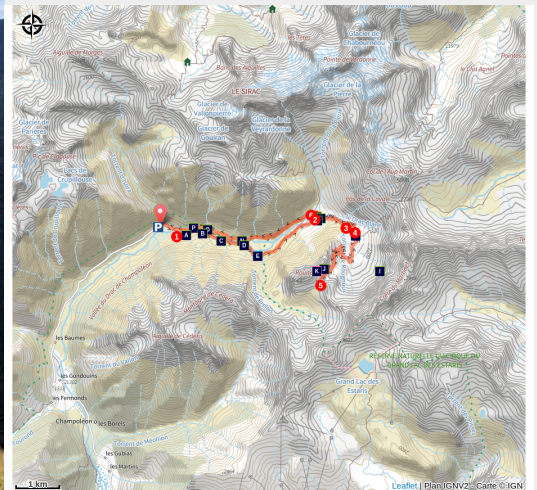


# Col du Cheval de Bois

Parc national des Ecrins - Champoléon



Montée au col du Cheval de bois (Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Écrins)



*After making its way to the foot of the Sirac, the trail leads up to a col providing a magnificent view over the rare Champsaur glaciers.*

"Col du Cheval de Bois is the meeting point of some major geological phenomena in the history of the Alps. I feel moved when I walk across what is actually the result of volcanic eruptions. Then, a little plant catches my attention, a plant that can only be found here at the summit of Mont Viso! What has happened? Nature is really very mysterious..."

*Rodolphe Papet, Champsaur park keeper and guide*

## Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 6 h 30

Length : 18.3 km

Trek ascent : 1024 m

Difficulty : Hard

Type : Loop

Themes : Fauna, Geology, Pastoralism

# Trek

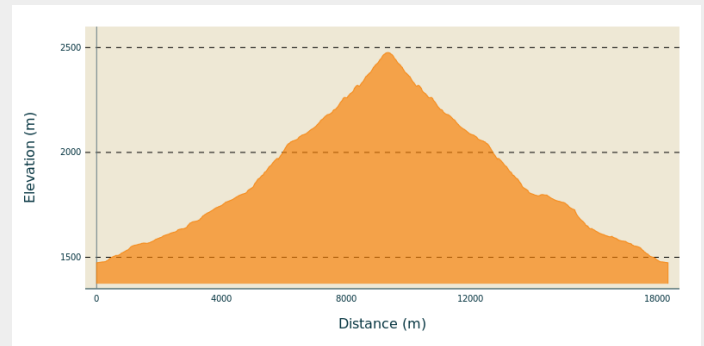
**Departure** : Les Auberts, Champoléon

**Arrival** : Les Auberts

**Markings** :  GRP

**Cities** : 1. Champoléon

## Altimetric profile

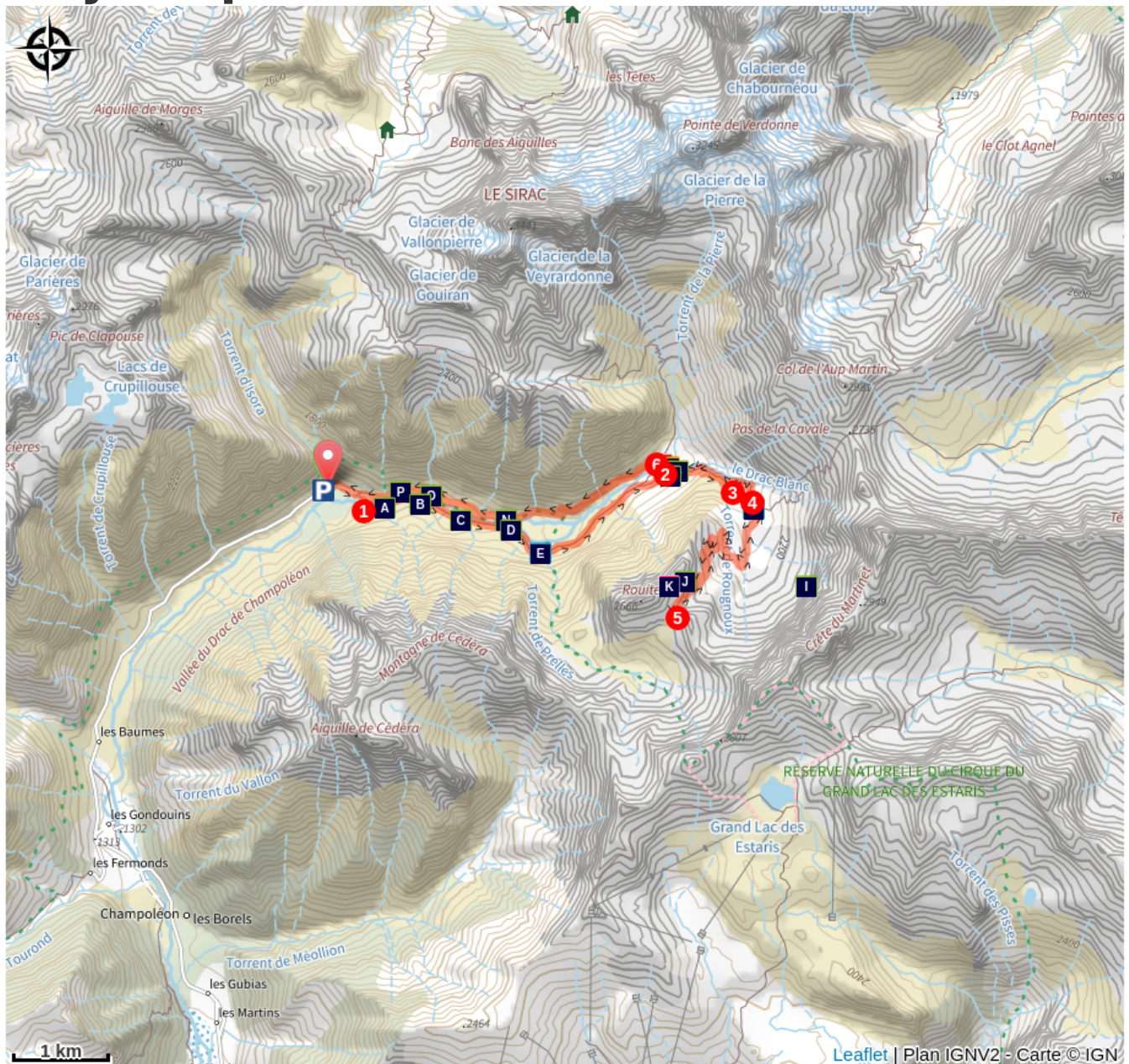


Min elevation 1475 m Max elevation 2477 m

From the Auberts car park, walk up 200 m to the crossroads. Turn right to cross the Drac Blanc and go over to the left bank. The Pré de la Chaumette trail is signposted with arrows. On the path above the Prelles waterfall, three information panels mark the entrance of the protected centre of the National Park. Cross the footbridge over the Prelles torrent and continue on to the Pré de la Chaumette refuge. After crossing the Rougnoux torrent, make for Pas de la Cavale. Once you have crossed the footbridge, you arrive at a small plateau. At the fork, turn right and again cross the Rougnoux (this time across a ford). You then continue the path up to the col, where a wooden horse awaits you. For the return, follow the same route as far as the Pré de la Chaumette refuge, then take the path along the right bank of the torrent, around the south-facing slope and then follow the route you took on the way out all the way to the car park.



# On your path...



- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Royal Eagle (A)                |  Black Grouse (B)                       |
|  Short-toed Snake Eagle (C)     |  Alpine Ibex (D)                        |
|  Prelles Waterfall (E)          |  Red Billed Chough (F)                  |
|  Bearded vulture (G)            |  Veyrardonne and La Pierre glaciers (H) |
|  Rock ptarmigan (I)             |  Oreochloa seslerioides (J)             |
|  La Rouite (K)                  |  Chaumette Meadow (L)                   |
|  Refuge at Chaumette Meadow (M) |  White Throated Dipper (N)              |
|  Chamois (O)                    |  Eurasian Crag Martin (P)               |

# All useful information

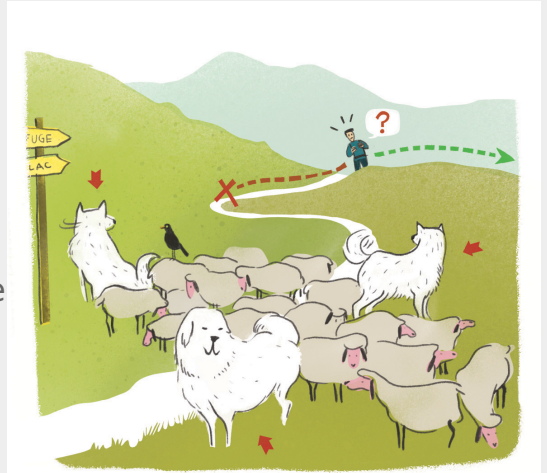
## **Herd protection dogs**

In mountain pastures, protection dogs are there to protect the herds from predators (wolves, etc.).

When I hike I adapt my behavior by going around the herd and pausing for the dog to identify me.

Find out more about the actions to adopt with the article ["Protection dogs: a context and actions to adopt"](#).

Tell us about your meeting by answering this [survey](#).



## **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**

In bad weather, take the same route back to the Pré de la Chaumette refuge along the left bank.

## How to come ?

### Transports

Coach stop: Les Auberts

### Access

On the N85, head for Pont de Fossé. After the village, continue on the D944, turn left onto the D944A, cross Les Borels/D472, Les Baumes and Les Clots before arriving at the Auberts car park.

### Advised parking

In Les Auberts, before the bridge across the torrent



# Environmental sensitive areas

Along your trek, you will go through sensitive areas related to the presence of a specific species or environment. In these areas, an appropriate behaviour allows to contribute to their preservation. For detailed information, specific forms are accessible for each area.

## Golden eagle

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August

Contact: Parc National des Écrins  
Julien Charron  
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification de l'Aigle royal

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec l'Aigle royal en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone !

Attention en zone cœur du Parc National des Écrins une réglementation spécifique aux sports de nature s'applique : <https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/thematique/sports-de-nature>

## Golden eagle

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August

Contact: Parc National des Écrins  
Julien Charron  
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification de l'Aigle royal

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec l'Aigle royal en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone !

Attention en zone cœur du Parc National des Écrins une réglementation spécifique aux sports de nature s'applique : <https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/thematique/sports-de-nature>

## Information desks

### House of Champsaur

champsaur@ecrins-parcnational.fr  
Tel : 04 92 55 95 44  
<http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/>



## Source



Parc national des Ecrins

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

## On your path...

---



### Royal Eagle (A)

The Royal Eagle is one of the most rare and protected species in Europe. Its large size, its dark colouring, its rectangular wings and its frequent movements in the open air enable it to be easily recognized. In the hottest hours of the day, it turns about regularly benefiting from the rising wind in order to gain altitude. Thanks to its excellent sight the Royal Eagle scans its surroundings in search of an imprudent marmot or a young chamois. In winter it regularly feeds off the cadavers of animals...

Attribution : PNE - Couloumy Christian

---



### Black Grouse (B)

To observe Black Grouse in summer, you must get up early. In France, Black Grouse or the 'Heather Cock' is only found in the Alps. In Spring, the male with black feathers, a lyre shaped tail and white feathers under its tail puts on a display to impress the hens. In winter, it spends most of its time taking refuge in igloos dug in to the snow to protect itself from the cold. This is a time when it is particularly sensitive because it cannot compensate for the energy that it uses when it leaves its igloo too hastily disturbed by off-piste skier or a hiker with snowshoes.

Attribution : PNE - Papet Rodolphe



## Short-toed Snake Eagle (C)

Spring has only just returned when you can hear cries as loud as the church bells. You have to lift your head up to admire two large birds flying together, alternating aerobatics and hovering in the sky like two silver coloured kites playing with the wind.. Their light stocky silhouette and their darker head enable you to identify the Short-toed Snake Eagle. It mainly feeds on reptiles (lizards and snakes) which it captures by the head, which it can then regurgitate in order to feed its young.

Attribution : PNE - Corail Marc



## Alpine Ibex (D)

The Alpine Ibex, also known as the « rock goat », is solid and covered with a coat that is chocolate coloured or beige depending on the season and its sex... Males and females both have ringed horns which grow throughout their life. The Alpine Ibex lives in groups, males on one side, etagnes (females) and the young on the other. In the winter, the females mix with the males during the mating period and give birth at the beginning of Summer. In order to observe it, look over on to the facing slope, the Alpine Ibex is sometimes visible in Spring.

Attribution : PNE - Chevalier Robert



## Prelles Waterfall (E)

The waterfall feeds in to the Drac blanc. The minor bed of the torrent is very large giving an idea of its violence and its capacity to wash away stone boulders.

Attribution : PNE



## Red Billed Chough (F)

The Red Billed Chough is a surprising bird in many ways. It lives near to the cliffs and plays in the clouds, breaking the silence with its brief, strident and almost metallic cry. Alerted by the echo coming from the mountain wall, its companions reply to it. Its confident gait with a rhythmic step, the Red Billed Chough strides meticulously across the prairie in little groups to find small worm and crickets in the pasture... Except for occasional seasonal escapes linked to the availability of food, the Chough is sedentary.

Attribution : PNE - Combrisson Damien





## Bearded vulture (G)

During a worldwide count organised in October each year, an observation post is set up in Le Pré de la Chaumette. The bearded vulture has already been spotted, but alas not each time! Falsely accused of carrying off lambs and children, this large bird with a wingspan of 2.80 m has been persecuted by man. Shooting, capture, poison, together with the scarcity of its food sources led to the bird's extinction in the Alps in 1930. A European programme to reintroduce it was launched in 1986. Since then, the bearded vulture has been regaining ground.

Attribution : Jean-Philippe Telmon - PNE



## Veyrardonne and La Pierre glaciers (H)

From the small plateau, the Veyrardonne and La Pierre glaciers can be seen. As reserves of snow, névé and ice, bolstered in winter primarily by precipitations of snow and diminished in summer by melting, glaciers are highly sensitive natural indicators of climate change.

Attribution : Marc Corail - PNE



## Rock ptarmigan (I)

Sometimes seen at the foot of the slope of the Crête du Martinet, here in the mountains the rock ptarmigan finds the conditions essential to its survival. Capable of withstanding extreme environments, this hardy bird is covered in plumage which is inflated with air and this insulates it in very cold temperatures. Its legs, which are feathered right down to the tips of its toes, act as snowshoes in powdery snow, leaving tracks rather like those of the hare. This is where its Latin name comes from, lagopus meaning « hare's foot ».

Attribution : Christophe Albert - PNE

## Oreochloa seslerioides (J)

A protected species (red list of vascular plants in Metropolitan France), the Oreochloa seslerioides is regarded as native to the Le Viso massif (Queyras). La Rouite is home to the national park's only colony of this species which is threatened by global warming, due to its high-altitude growing area.



## La Rouite (K)

A small mountain formed by a particular volcanic episode, La Rouite rises to 2,680 metres above sea level and offers a beautiful vantage point over the surrounding peaks and small valleys. The various geological movements have produced an abrupt western slope and a gentle and regularly inclined eastern slope. The ensemble stands out in the landscape, between the crystalline geology of the Le Sirac slope and the flysch deposits of the thrust sheet to the south. The clear outcrop conditions expose to view the ancient flow deposit formations in particular.

Attribution : Marc Corail - PNE



## Chaumette Meadow (L)

The refuge is situated in a vast meadow formed by alpine grasslands that benefit from deep soil, on gentle slopes that are covered with snow on an average of eight months a year.

Attribution : Marc Corail - PNE



## Refuge at Chaumette Meadow (M)

The pastoral cabin at Champoléon was built by stockbreeders in 1921. It was in 1972 that the cabin was restored for the first time... Two years later, the French Alpine Club (CAF) took over its management in order to insure shelter for the increasing number of hikers of the GR54. Having become too cramped, the refuge was rebuilt in 1979 on the ruins of the hamlet and became the Chaumette Meadow. The decorative stones were cut on site at Champoléon. The imposing Lauzes stones used to cover the roof underline the effort made to integrate with the landscape. Today flocks of sheep are brought up to the mountains at the end of June and are visited once a week.

Attribution : Marc Corail - PNE



## White Throated Dipper (N)

The White Throated Dipper is easy to observe as long as you are discreet. It lives beside mountain rivers and torrents. A little red and white bird with a short tail, it has a fine beak, and a white mark on the chin and the chest. . This astonishing sparrow has the particular skill of being able to walk on the bottom of the water against the current in search of food. It flattens itself down and clings on to the bottom with its claws, opens its eyes, which are protected from the flow by a fine membrane and spots: worms, larvae, little crustaceans and fish.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - PNE



## Chamois (O)

An emblematic animal in the Alps, the chamois or « rock goat » has short curled horns. Like the Ibex, it is easy to observe through binoculars. The goats and esterlons (young males aged one year) like to live in big herds ; in contrast, the billy goats stay quite isolated only rejoining the females during the mating season.. In the winter, the chamois need a lot of tranquility in order to conserve their reserve of fat which they need in order to survive...

Attribution : Albert Christophe - PNE



## Eurasian Crag Martin (P)

The Eurasian Crag Martin is dressed in beige tones. It is capable of real flying prowess, an indispensable quality for capturing the multitude of insects that it feeds on. In Spring, as soon as it has found a safe rocky ridge, the Eurasian Crag Martin tirelessly transports, mud and pieces of plants with its beak. With the help of this unique tool, it solidly fixes each element on to the rock thanks to a clever mixture of saliva and water.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - PNE