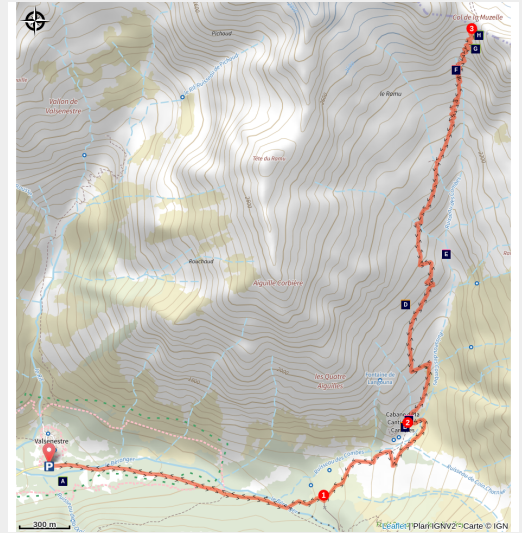


# La Muzelle pass

Parc national des Ecrins - Valjouffrey



Col de la Muzelle au lever du jour (Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Ecrins)



*One of the most prestigious legs of the GR54 is the mineral environment characteristic of the high alpine valleys.*

*"A few years ago, before serious restoration work, this pass was known, rightly so, as a black spot of the GR54 route. In wet weather, without a pickaxe it was difficult to drag yourself to the top of the slippery slope, where you would reach the pass with blackened fingernails. Today it is still a demanding high mountain route and needs an early start and a good physical condition".*

*Daniel Fougeray, head of the Valbonnais area*

## Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 7 h

Length : 12.5 km

Trek ascent : 1269 m

Difficulty : Hard

Type : Return trip

Themes : Fauna, Geology,  
Pastoralism

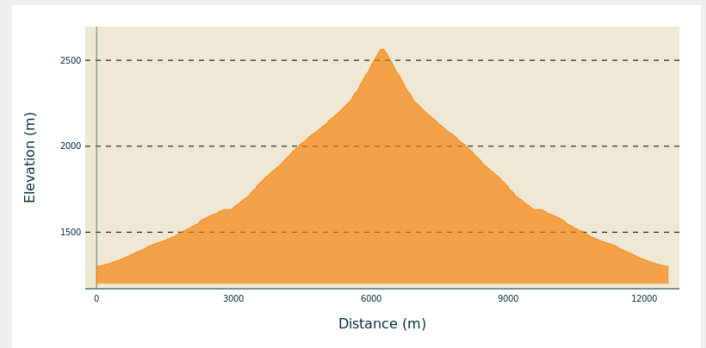
# Trek

**Departure** : Valsenestre

**Arrival** : Valsenestre

**Cities** : 1. Valjouffrey

## Altimetric profile











Min elevation 1301 m Max elevation 2568 m

From the Valsenestre car park, walk up the forestry track that heads east. Two footbridges enable you to cross the stream in the forest, made up essentially of conifers (pine, spruce, larch) that encloses a few odd meadows that are still mowed. Higher up, at an altitude of 1492 m, turn left to reach the edge of the forest that will give a view of a vast rock fall zone that is partially vegetated. Once you have arrived at Les Cantines mountain hut, the footpath climbs significantly on the steep slope that is grazed by sheep in the summer. On the opposite slope, you will be able to see the old footpath that climbs in tight bends to reach the hut that is cut out of the marble. You can see the entrance. Half-way, you will see the pastoral hut of Ralu on the left. The last stretch, towards 2350 m, is very steep and you will walk around many bends to cross the shale. From afar, it looks like an insurmountable wall, but in fact the footpath, which is well-maintained, makes it possible to reach the pass at 2613 m in altitude. Follow the same route in the opposite direction for the return trip.

# On your path...



-  Natural Hayfields (A)
-  Cipollino Marble quarry (C)
-  Glacier polished rocks (E)
-  Wallcreeper (G)

-  Cantine cabin (B)
-  Pastoral management (D)
-  Maintenance of the footpath (F)
-  Altitude flora (H)

# All useful information

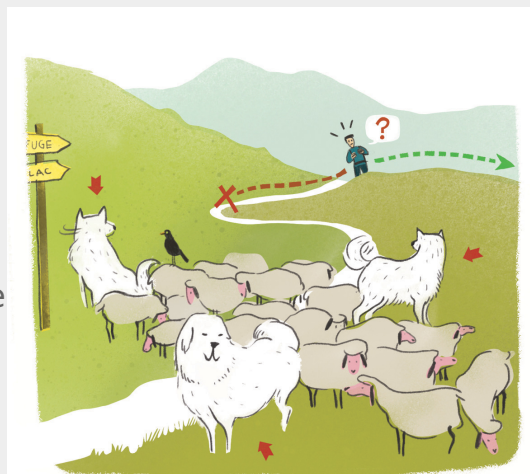
## Herd protection dogs

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

Caution: névé possible on the last parts in the spring that mean you may need crampons and ice axes.

## How to come ?

### Access

D26 from La Mure D526 from Pont du Prêtre D117 from Entraigues to La Chapelle and Valsenestre.

### Advised parking

Valsenestre village car park.

# 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>

## Information desks

**Maison du Parc du Valbonnais**  
Place du Docteur Eyraud, 38740  
Entraigues  
valbonnais@ecrins-parcnational.fr  
Tel : 04 76 30 20 61  
<http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/>



## Source



Parc national des Ecrins  
<https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr>

# On your path...

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## Natural Hayfields (A)

Agricultural specialists consider a meadow as natural if it has not been ploughed or fertilised over the last ten years. This is the case for those that you will see, surrounded by hedges, at the start of the hike. The meadows have an important variety of plant life and consequently attract multitudes of pollinating insects, including domesticated bees of course.

Attribution : Marc Corail - PNE

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## Cantine cabin (B)

The dry stone (mortar) huts are an example of architecture without an architect they are the work, not of architects (unlike the religious, military and civilian buildings of the past), but of farmers and workers or masons whose names are now forgotten. These huts have many and varied names, which are mainly derived from regional languages, and which have been adapted into French. The Cantine (“Canteen” in English) huts were used as shelters for shepherds during the summer months, and probably owe their name to the meals eaten in the mountains.

Attribution : Manuel Meester - PNE

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## Cipollino Marble quarry (C)

From the 19th century, a cipollino marble quarry operated here. This marble had a white-green base colour with wavy green veins and a thick layer of mica. Les Cantines (canteen) hut is so-called because it was where the workers would have their meals. It was recently renovated and is used by the shepherd at the beginning and the end of the season.

Attribution : Maurice Séchier



## Pastoral management (D)

From July to September, a flock of sheep occupy this steep valley. A shepherd watches over them and tends to them if necessary. Pastures are divided into sectors that are grazed upon according to a timeframe that takes the exposition and grass resources into consideration. For example, specific agro-environmental measures are in place to preserve the areas where black grouse nest. When the chicks are able to fly, usually after the 15th August, the sheep can head back to the area.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - PNE



## Glacier polished rocks (E)

Around 15 000 years ago, the last glaciation ended. As it receded, the glacier left traces of its passage. Indeed, the withdrawal of such huge masses of ice polished the rocks and gave them a rounded shape, which is very apparent from the left bank of the valley. These rocks are known as 'moutonnées'.

Attribution : Maurice Séchier



## Maintenance of the footpath (F)

After many complaints from hikers, the decision was made in 2010 to employ the necessary means to improve security on the route. It took a mechanical 'spider' digger a day and a half to climb all the way up to the pass. It then dug out the footpath as it went down the black shale on a 40° degree slope. Each year, serious manual work is undertaken to ensure that hikers have safe access.

Attribution : Pierre Masclaux



## Wallcreeper (G)

As you get to the last leg before the pass, you may well hear high-pitched whistles. If you are lucky, you will catch sight of the composer of this melody: the wallcreeper, which is a beautiful red, black and white bird. Defying verticality, the wallcreeper uses its long-clawed feet to latch onto the rock faces in search of insects and spiders. Its long beak then enables it to draw them out of the cracks in the rock.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - PNE





## ✿ Altitude flora (H)

Near to the pass, you will admire small grey-green cushions scattered with white flowers: this is the *androsace helvetica*, a rare protected species. This altitude plant is perfectly acclimatised to the hostile environment. This is also the case for the mountain saixifrage. Both like limestone, which is not the case of moss campion, small green cushion with pink flowers, or the Arctic alpine forget me not, a small blue-flowered plant that prefer the crystalline rocks here and there across the pass.

Attribution : Olivier Warluzelle - PNE