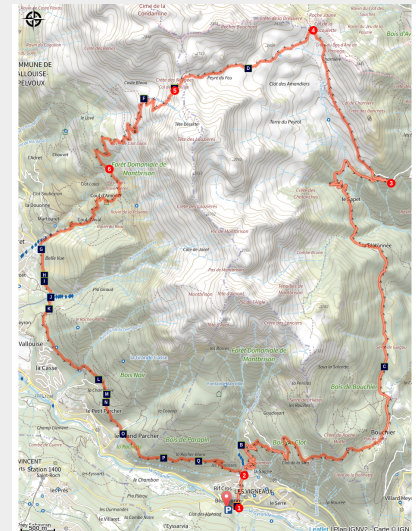


# The Montbrison tour (trail route no. 13)

Parc national des Ecrins - Les Vigneaux



Traileur sur le tour du Montbrison (Thibaut Blais)



*A splendid circuit around the Montbrison massif against a backdrop of pine forests, alpine pastures and cliffs, its high point being a stunning crossing over the Col de Vallouise.*

“This is a mega-itinerary. Of course, the highlight is the crossing over the Col de Vallouise, at the end of a long climb. A splendid descent through alpine pastures awaits us, before entering the forest again.” Marie-Geneviève Nicolas, park ranger at the Parc National des Écrins.

## Useful information

Practice : Trail

Duration : 7 h 45

Length : 31.9 km

Trek ascent : 1913 m

Difficulty : Hard

Type : Loop

Themes : Fauna, Flora, History and architecture

# Trek

**Departure** : Camping le Courounba, Les Vigneaux

**Arrival** : Camping le Courounba, Les Vigneaux

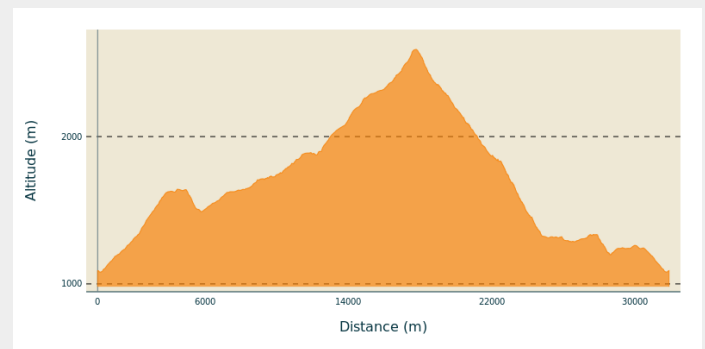
**Markings** :  Trail

**Cities** : 1. Les Vigneaux

2. Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières

3. Vallouise-Pelvoux

## Altimetric profile



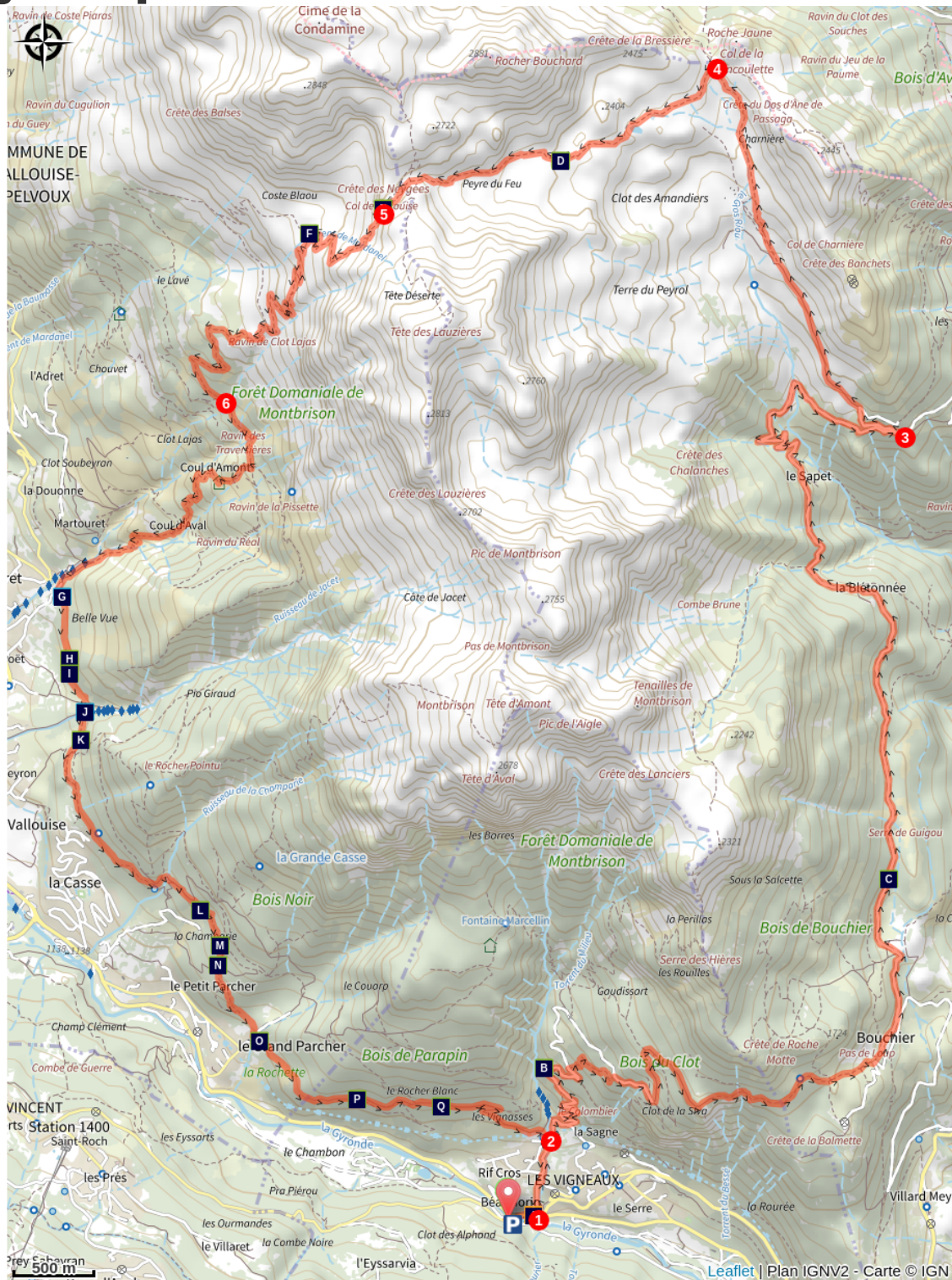
Min elevation 1082 m Max elevation 2593 m







From the Le Courounba campsite, head to the bridge spanning the Gyronde. Turn right as you exit the bridge.







1. Turn left after the restaurants and carry on along the Rif Cros mountain stream.
2. Fork left and cross the mountain stream. Follow the hairpin track and balcony traverse until you come to the hamlet of Le Bouchier. Carry on uphill.
3. Continue on the left-hand track to reach the Col de la Trancoulette.
4. At the Col de la Trancoulette start the descent to the left, taking the marked route on the south-facing side of the valley to return to Les Vigneaux and your starting point.



# On your path...



-  The village of Les Vigneaux (A)
-  Achnatherum calamagrostis or silver spike grass (C)
-  The woolly berardia (E)
-  The role of the canals (G)
-  The Montpellier thistle (I)
-  The owly sulphur (K)


-  The eagles of the Tête d'Aval (B)
-  The marmot (D)
-  The common rock thrush (F)
-  The acanthus-leaved thistle (H)
-  Mountain land rehabilitation projects (J)
-  The black woodpecker (L)

 The violet bird's-nest orchid (M)

 The northern wryneck (O)

 Etruscan honeysuckle (Q)

 The Scots pine (N)

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

# All useful information

## **Advices**

Before setting off, it is very important to check the opening periods for this route on the website: <https://stationdetrail.com/fr/stations/le-pays-des-ecrins/parcours>

Share your photographs on social networks with #stationdetrailecrins

Check weather conditions before setting off.

Rescue services contact details: Secours Montagne (Mountain Rescue): +33 (0)4 92 22 22 22 or 112

Show consideration for the work of farmers, livestock keepers and owners

Close all gates behind you

Take your litter home

Do not take shortcuts across pastureland

The trail routes are also suitable for walking

## **How to come ?**

### Transports

Public transport >> [www.pacamobilite.fr](http://www.pacamobilite.fr)

Consider car-sharing >> [www.blablacar.fr](http://www.blablacar.fr)

For more information, ask at the Tourist Information Office nearest to the trail starting point.

### Access

6 km from L'Argentière-La-Bessée, take the D994E.

### Advised parking

Camping le Courounba car park, Les Vigneaux

# 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.

## RNR Partias

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, Decembre

Contact:

LPO PACA antenne de Briançon  
0492219417  
hautes-alpes@lpo.fr

The Partias Regional Nature Reserve is managed by the LPO PACA and the commune of Puy Saint André. This is a protected and regulated area: dog leash, forbidden harvest, stay on marked trails, climbing prohibited except Meurseult pilami track, etc.

## Black grouse - winter

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, Decembre

Contact: LPO Paca antenne des Hautes-Alpes  
0492219417  
hautes-alpes@lpo.fr  
<http://paca.lpo.fr/partias>

Deux secteurs de zone d'hivernage du Tétrás lyre sont identifiés sur leur partie amont par des cordes et fanions dans le secteur du Jeu de Paume / sous la Croix d'Aquila. La montée se fait par le col de la Trancoulette, puis en contournant le rocher jaune, et la descente ces zones sont évitées en rejoignant les couloirs. Zones mises en place en 2013 par la LPO, gestionnaire de la Réserve Naturelle Régionale Partias, en concertation avec les skieurs locaux + CAF de Briançon, Compagnie des guides Oisan-Ecrins, etc.

## Short-toed snake eagle

Sensitivity period: March, April, May, June, July, August, September

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

Nidification du Circaète-Jean-le-Blanc

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec le Circaète-Jean-le-Blanc en période de nidification sont principalement les pratiques aériennes comme le vol libre ou le vol motorisé.

Merci d'essayer d'éviter la zone ou de rester à une distance minimale de 300m sol quand vous la survolez soit 1790m d'altitude !

## **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 Vallouise**

Place de l'Eglise, 05340 Vallouise

contact@paysdesecrins.com

Tel : +33(0)4 92 23 36 12

<https://www.paysdesecrins.com/>



## **Source**



Pays des Ecrins

<https://www.paysdesecrins.com>



# On your path...

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## The village of Les Vigneaux (A)

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

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## The eagles of the Tête d'Aval (B)

Eagles can be seen gliding around the Tête d'Aval. In the hottest part of the day, they circle on the thermals rising above the limestone cliffs. Having gained height in this way, they can reach their hunting territory without having to flap their wings.

Attribution : Pascal Saulay - Parc national des Écrins

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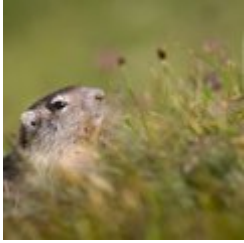
## Achnatherum calamagrostis or silver spike grass (C)

This member of the Gramineae family (now called Poaceae) forms large clumps on stony, dry and sunny ground. It grows in abundance here on the track embankment, taking advantage of the sunlight allowed through by the break in the forest. Its inflorescences reflecting silvery-gold glints are made up of flowerets with long edges. They create a very misty effect in the late summer when the plant is mature, forming large shimmering bouquets in the evening sunlight. .

Attribution : Denis Fiat - Parc national des Écrins

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## The marmot (D)

In the alpine pastures, the iconic marmot utters a loud high-pitched whistle to warn its neighbours of approaching danger: the golden eagle is on the prowl! This medium-sized rodent prefers to live in the high-mountain grasslands in family groups. Their favourite pastimes are gnawing, digging, taking a siesta in the sunshine and performing somersaults. In the winter, the marmot takes refuge in its burrow where it hibernates. It is only seen between the months of April and October. It marks the boundary of its territory by rubbing its cheeks on the rocks or leaving droppings.

Attribution : Thibault Blais Photographie



## The woolly berardia (E)

The woolly berardia is a plant that grows approximately 10 centimetres tall and has a short, almost non-existent stem. This perennial member of the Asteracea family grows in limestone and schist screes. It has veined oval, woolly leaves which are covered in soft hairs. Its 4 to 7 cm compact head with pale yellow flowers stands up from its centre.

Attribution : Cédric Dentan - Parc national des Écrins



## The common rock thrush (F)

In May, a melodious song rings out from the cliff top. It's the song of the common rock thrush, appropriately named and a wonderful bird. Although the female is rather dull (an advantage when egg-sitting) the male sports an orange underside and a blue-grey head. A trans-Saharan migratory bird, every year it returns to the mountains of Southern Europe where it frequents the rocky, sunlit slopes. It is not very common and is in decline, so spotting it is even more special!

Attribution : Pascal Saulay - Parc national des Écrins



## The role of the canals (G)

Irrigation of meadows and private gardens; preservation of traditions; the promotion of social contact through collective canal maintenance operations carried out by local people; development of canals to create trails for tourists and locals... The canals have fulfilled a variety of roles, hence the benefit of conserving and maintaining them.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins



## ✿ The acanthus-leaved thistle (H)

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 Montpellier thistle (I)

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



## 💧 Mountain land rehabilitation projects (J)

Stream correction dams have been built by RTM (Mountain Land Rehabilitation), a branch of the National Forestry Agency. The purpose of these structures is to limit erosion and mountain stream flooding. The RTM has been in existence for a long time, set up in the late nineteenth century. At that time, the slopes where much more sparsely wooded than they are today, and erosion was a very significant problem.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins



## 🦋 The owly sulphur (K)

A strange insect, part butterfly, part dragonfly, with large black antennae, transparent wings tinted with yellow or white and with well-defined veining, flies over the meadow during the hottest part of the day. It is the owly sulphur. Owlflies are members of the Neuroptera (net-winged) order and are cousins of ants and lacewings. They are predators of small insects, flies in particular.

Attribution : Blandine Delenatte - Parc national des Écrins



## The black woodpecker (L)

Sporting a black cap, the black woodpecker is the biggest of the woodpecker family. Wary and solitary, it is difficult to spot, but its strident calls give its presence away. It feeds mainly on ants and insects living in dead trees, which it extracts by hammering into the wood. It hollows out a nest hole in trees. Once the young have left the nest, it may be taken over by owls or forest-dwelling bats.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - Parc national des Écrins



## The violet bird's-nest orchid (M)

In the pine forest undergrowth stands a large, completely purple orchid. It has no leaves, just a few whitish scales on the stem. Lacking chlorophyll (the green plant pigment which plays a role in photosynthesis, the process that allows the production of organic matter), it lives as a parasite on tree roots.

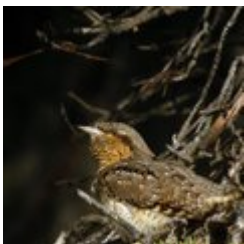
Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins



## The Scots pine (N)

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 Baïssset - Parc national des Écrins



## The northern wryneck (O)

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 (P)

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

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### ❁ Etruscan honeysuckle (Q)

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