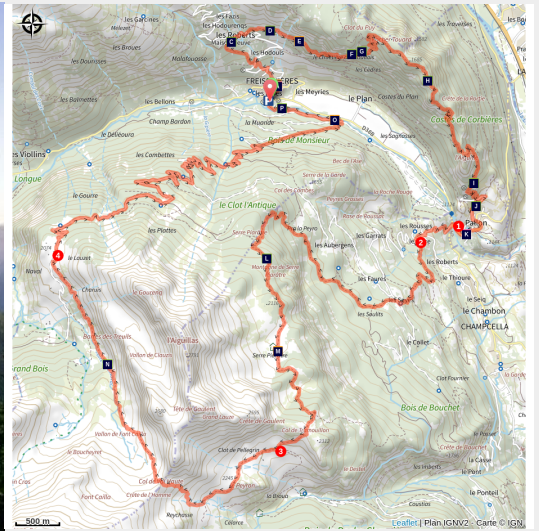


# Maxi Gourenge (trail route no. 14)

Vallouise - Freissinières



La tête de Gaulent vue depuis les abords de la crête de la Selle (Claude Dautrey - Parc national des Écrins)



*A full and wild trail gradually leading to small valleys perched so far from the valley &hellip*

“ Descending from the Col de Val Haute into the secret valley of Font Cailla, under the cliffs of the Tête de Gaulent, is a thrilling moment. Here, you are only likely to meet a shepherd and his flock, depending on the season. ” Marie-Geneviève Nicolas, park ranger at the Parc National des Écrins

## Useful information

Practice : Trail

Duration : 8 h

Length : 32.5 km

Trek ascent : 2226 m

Difficulty : Hard

Type : Loop

Themes : Fauna, Flora, Pastoralism

# Trek

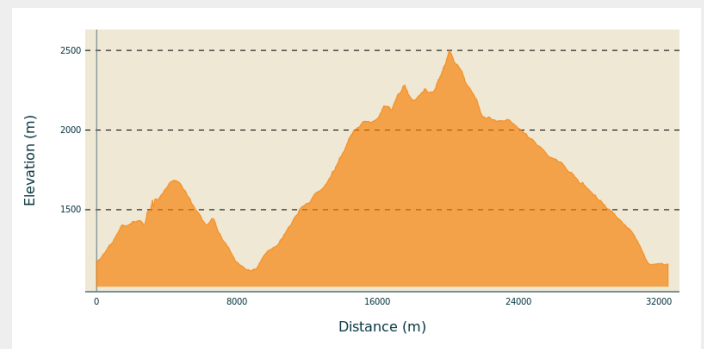
**Departure** : Valley Centre ("Maison de la Vallée"), Freissinières

**Arrival** : Valley Centre ("Maison de la Vallée"), Freissinières

**Markings** :  Trail

**Cities** : 1. Freissinières  
2. Champcella

## Altimetric profile



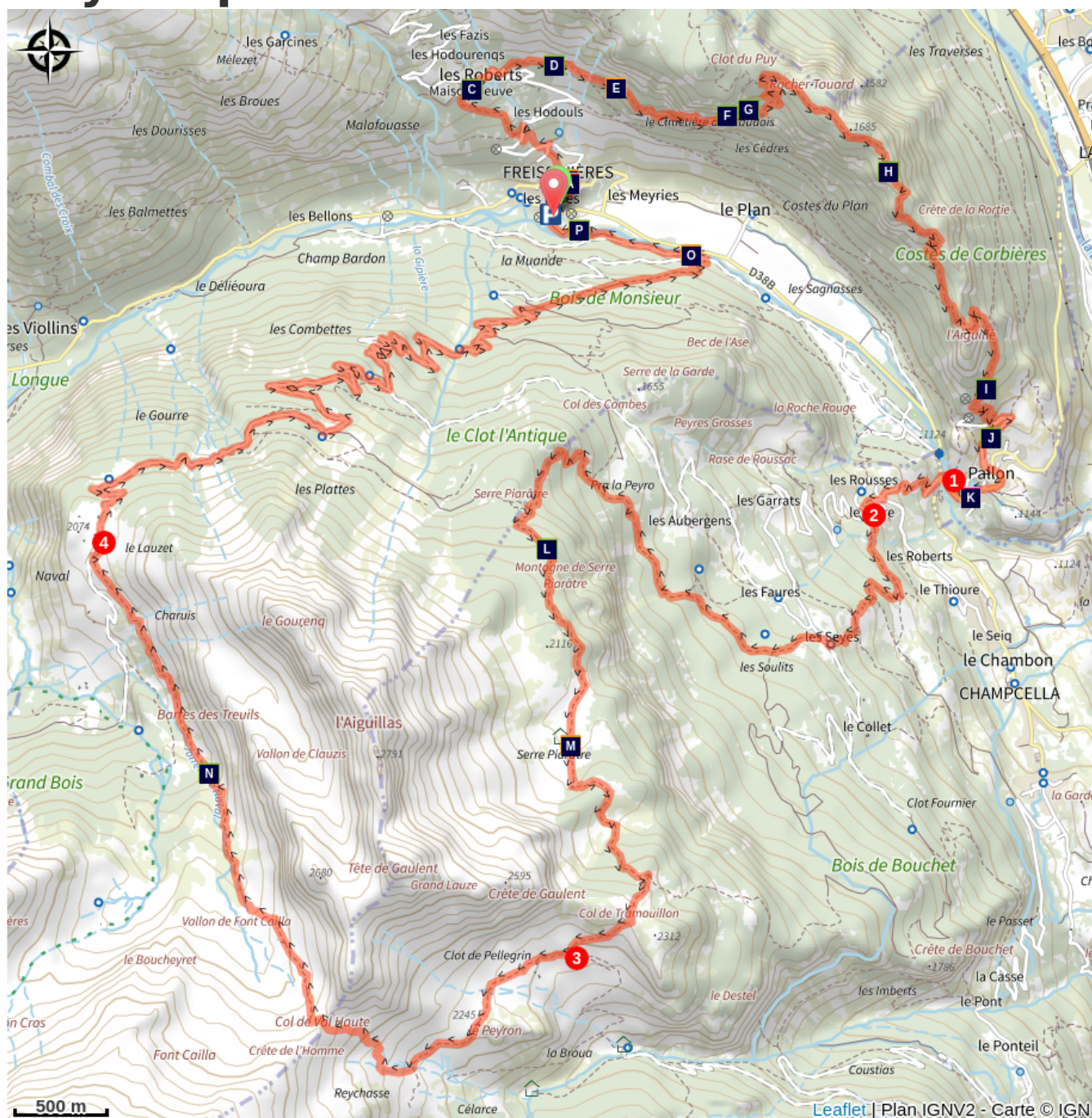
Min elevation 1118 m Max elevation 2500 m

Go up through the village of Freissinières following signs for Les Roberts and Les Aujards. Then continue on the path leading to Le Clot du Puy and the Col de l'Aiguille. A steep descent brings you back to the hamlet of Pallon.

1. Cross the bridge over the Biaysse and go up a lane opposite, which will turn into a track.
2. At the hamlet of Le Serre, turn left between two houses onto the path leading to Les Seyes. From this hamlet, head towards Clot Lafont. The path rises for a long stretch through the forest and, after a steeper section, comes out into the alpine pasture of Clot Lafont. Carry on until you come to the Col de Tramouillon. Head downhill towards the Cabane de Tramouillon.
3. Make a there-and-back detour to visit the cabin.
4. Take a path on the left which passes close to the Cabane de l'Essaumaure. Climb uphill again until you come to the Col de Val Haute. Drop down through the valley of Font Cailla and take a path leading away across the hillside to join the farm track to Le Lauzet. Follow this path along a long traverse and then follow the downhill track to the park cabin ("Cabane du Parc") and Freissinières (paths cutting across the sharp bends) which brings you back to the valley bottom. You reach Freissinières via a track running along the right-hand bank of the Biaysse.



# On your path...



- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  The church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine (A)           |  Félix Neff (B)                   |
|  The common redstart (C)                            |  The scarce swallowtail (D)       |
|  The Grotte des Vaudois - The Waldensians' Cave (E) |  The fire lily (F)                |
|  The crag martin (G)                                |  The bearberry (H)                |
|  The savin juniper (I)                              |  The Aristolochia pistilochia (J) |
|  A Medieval tsunami? (K)                            |  The black grouse (L)             |
|  The alpine pasture at Clot Laffont (M)             |  The spotted nutcracker (N)       |
|  The Freissinières valley (O)                       |  The common barberry (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

11.5 km from L'Argentière-La Bessée, take the N94 and the D38.

### Advised parking

Valley Centre ("Maison de la Vallée") car park, Freissinières

# 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.

## Alpine ibex

Sensitivity period: June, July, August, September

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

Zone de présence du Bouquetin des Alpes

En période de mise bas et d'élevage des jeunes (juin à septembre) les bouquetins peuvent être très sensible au dérangement notamment en cas de survol à basse altitude. Dans leur fuite les risques d'accidents sont multipliés. Merci de rester à bonne distance et d'éviter le survol de la zone à moins de 300m sol soit moins de 3170m d'altitude.

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 et de privilégier un survol de la zone à une distance de survol de 300m sol soit à une altitude minimale de 2300m.

## 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 et de privilégier un survol

de la zone à une distance de survol de 300m sol soit à une altitude minimale de 2400m.

## **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 et de privilégier un survol de la zone à une distance de survol de 300m sol soit à une altitude minimale de 2580m.

## **Peregrine falcon**

Sensitivity period: February, March, April, May, June

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

Nidification du Faucon pèlerin.

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec le Faucon pèlerin 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 !

En cas de survol merci de rester au-dessus de 1945m d'altitude à une distance de 300m sol.

## **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 L'Argentière-La Bessée**

23 Avenue de la République, 05120

L'Argentière-La Bessée

contact@paysdesecrins.com

Tel : +33(0)4 92 23 03 11

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



## **Source**



Pays des Ecrins

<https://www.paysdesecrins.com>



# On your path...

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## The church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine (A)

The church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine was built in the seventeenth century. It is thought to be a former Protestant church which escaped destruction in 1684 when Louis XIV was leading an anti-Protestant drive. The Protestant church is then thought to have undergone works to convert it into a Catholic church.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

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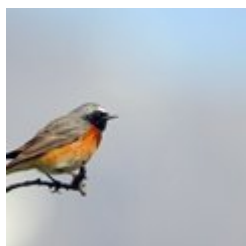


## Félix Neff (B)

Félix Neff was a Swiss Protestant pastor. He was responsible for the Protestant Revival in the Freissinières valley in the seventeenth century. He also set up the first education college for primary school teachers in France, in Dormillouse in 1826. He was also behind new irrigation and house-building techniques, developments which improved the everyday lives of the local people.

Attribution : Manuel Meester - Parc national des Écrins

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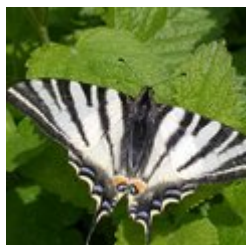


## The common redstart (C)

The common redstart can be told apart from its cousin, the black redstart by its white eyebrow (hence its French name which is translated as "white-browed redstart") and its orange breast. At least for the male, since the female of both birds is duller and brownish, but the female common redstart also has an orangey tail. It returns from Africa in early April and searches the areas to find a hollow in a tree or in an old wall where it builds its nest.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

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## The scarce swallowtail (D)

A large pale yellow butterfly with black stripes flutters from bush to bush. There is a "tail" at the tips of the posterior wings, marked with an orange and blue blotch. The scarce swallowtail lives in hot, dry environments. It favours uncultivated land where blackthorn and hawthorn grow, on which the female lays her eggs and where the caterpillars develop.

Attribution : Blandine Delenatte - Parc national des Écrins

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## The Grotte des Vaudois - The Waldensians' Cave (E)

The history of Freissinières is linked to that of the Waldensians, who found refuge in this valley and in other Alpine valleys in the thirteenth century. The followers of this religious movement - which later embraced the reformation - were deemed to be heretics and therefore persecuted. This cave, in which Waldensians sought refuge after being taken by surprise, witnessed massacres perpetrated by the Inquisition.

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Écrins



## The fire lily (F)

In June and early July, the rocks are brightened up here and there by large orange flowers: the fire lily is a splendid plant which grows in the mountains of Europe. It grows in rocky or bush-covered terrain and even - why not? - right on the cliff faces, in dry areas. It is a protected species.

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - Parc national des Écrins



## The crag martin (G)

The birds that are constantly swooping around the cliff are crag martins. They are brown with a beige underside. They have built their nests under small overhangs. This species is very common in the Alps. Partially migratory, crag martins return to the Mediterranean coast in winter, where they join resident populations. So it is the first bird to reappear in the valleys of the Pays des Écrins in late February and the last to leave in October!

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins



## The bearberry (H)

The floor of the pine forest is carpeted by a creeping sub-shrub with glossy oval evergreen leaves. In spring, the bearberry produces small bell-shaped flowers which are white and edged with pink. They will turn into red berries, edible but floury. Bears love them, hence their name. It is a drought-tolerant plant.

Attribution : Cédric Dentan - Parc national des Écrins



### ✿ The savin juniper (I)

A low spreading shrub, the savin juniper is very common in stony meadows and uncultivated land on warm slopes. Its dark, matte green leaves in the form of small scales, overlap along the branches. So it isn't spiky... but you still need to be cautious as it is very toxic. For seasoning dishes, better to gather the fruits of the common juniper!

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins



### ✿ The Aristolochia pistilochia (J)

The hamlet of Pallon is in a sunny location. Around the village, a curious plant with long brown trumpet-like flowers grows on the edges of the stone piles in the fields and meadows: the aristolochia pistilochia or birthwort. Of Mediterranean affinity, this plant benefits from the hot dry climate here and is virtually at its northern boundary. It is the host plant of the caterpillars of a rare and protected butterfly: the Spanish festoon.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins



### 📍 A Medieval tsunami? (K)

Pallon marks the entrance to the ancient glacial valley of Freissinières, enclosed behind a bar of hard rock. As they melted, the glaciers left behind a lake, trapped by this bar. It is said that this natural dam has been breached on numerous occasions. In the Middle Ages, suddenly released into the Gourfouran gorge, the water is said to have laid ruin to the village of Rame, standing on the plain.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins



### 🐓 The black grouse (L)

The black grouse lives here. It is also called the blackcock, a large bird the size of a hen. The male is black with a lyre-shaped tail. The female is russet-brown. It lives on north-facing slopes, around the forest edge. The female nests on the ground, near the meadows where protein-rich crickets nourish the nestling! In some alpine pasture, the breeding grounds are closed to flocks in order to prevent the eggs and chicks from being trampled.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - Parc national des Écrins



### The alpine pasture at Clot Laffont (M)

The small valley of Clot Laffont is part of the alpine pasture area of Tramouillon, behind the pass that shares its name. As in any alpine pasture, the shepherd drives the flock to different areas according to the time of year. The August area, at a higher altitude and with lower-growing grass that matures later, is grazed in the second half of the summer. The animals will then return to the lower areas. In order to stay close to the animals, the shepherd has three shepherd's huts in this area.

Attribution : Claude Dautrey - Parc national des Écrins



### The spotted nutcracker (N)

A harsh call sounds from the forest. A jay perhaps? No, a nutcracker, its cousin. With dark, white-spotted plumage, this bird's strong beak can break open hazelnuts (although not walnuts as suggested by its name in French, cassenoix (walnut breaker)) and in particular it can dissect Swiss pine cones in order to reach the pine nuts inside. It inhabits high forests. It buries Swiss pine nuts in the ground to store up food for the winter. When winter comes, it will find the pine nuts again even under a thick layer of snow. Those it forgets will germinate.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins



### The Freissinières valley (O)

The valley was created as the result of glacial overdeepening, that is to say, when the glacier came to a halt against the Pallon hard rock bar, it created a depression. When the glaciers retreated, a lake was left behind this rock bar and was gradually filled up by alluvial deposits. From a historical point of view, the Protestant pastor Félix Neff fundamentally altered life in the valley in 1826 by founding a training college for primary school teachers, developing irrigation processes and teaching new crop growing methods, among other things...

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins



## ✿ The common barberry (P)

The common barberry is a bush with long thorns arranged in threes, and with oval serrated leaves. In spring, it produces clusters of yellow flowers, which later develop into red, oval and elongated berries. These tart fruits are edible and can be made into jellies... if you have the patience to gather them! This shrub grows almost everywhere.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins