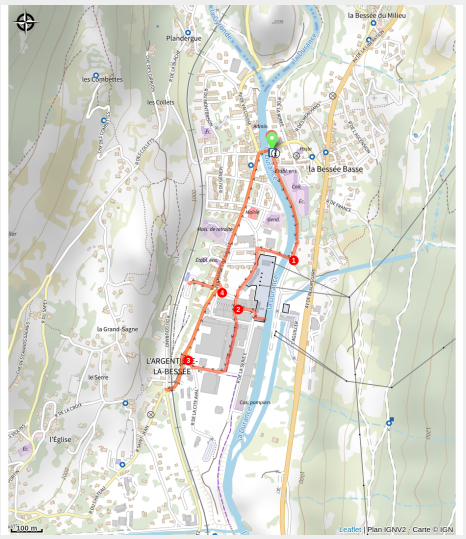
THEMED PATH: Industrial circuit walk

Vallouise - L'Argentière-la-Bessée

Piolet devant la mairie de L'Argentière-La Bessée (Jan Novak Photography)



A tour of L'Argentière-La Bessée on the trail of its industrial heritage&hellipNothing less than an open-air museum!

This trail takes you back in time! The route is punctuated by landmarks offering an insight into the history of hydroelectricity and the town's industrial past: compressors, water turbine, wagon, aluminium bar; the rich past of L'Argentière in a nutshell!

Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 1 h 30

Length : 2.7 km

Trek ascent : 17 m

Difficulty : Very easy

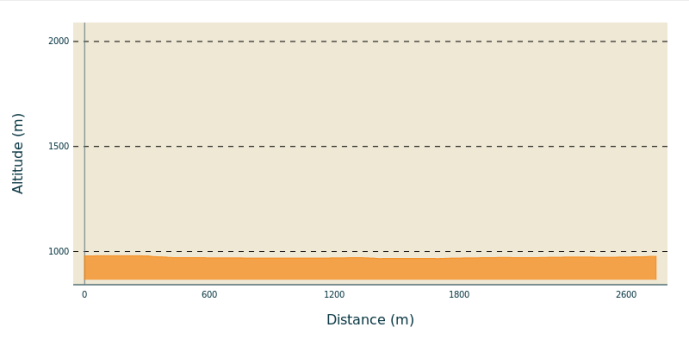
Type : Loop

Themes : History and architecture

Trek

Departure : Tourist information office ("Bureau d’Information Touristique") in L’Argentière-La Bessée
Arrival : Tourist information office ("Bureau d’Information Touristique") in L’Argentière-La Bessée
Markings : Sentier thématique
Cities : 1. L'Argentière-la-Bessée

Altimetric profile

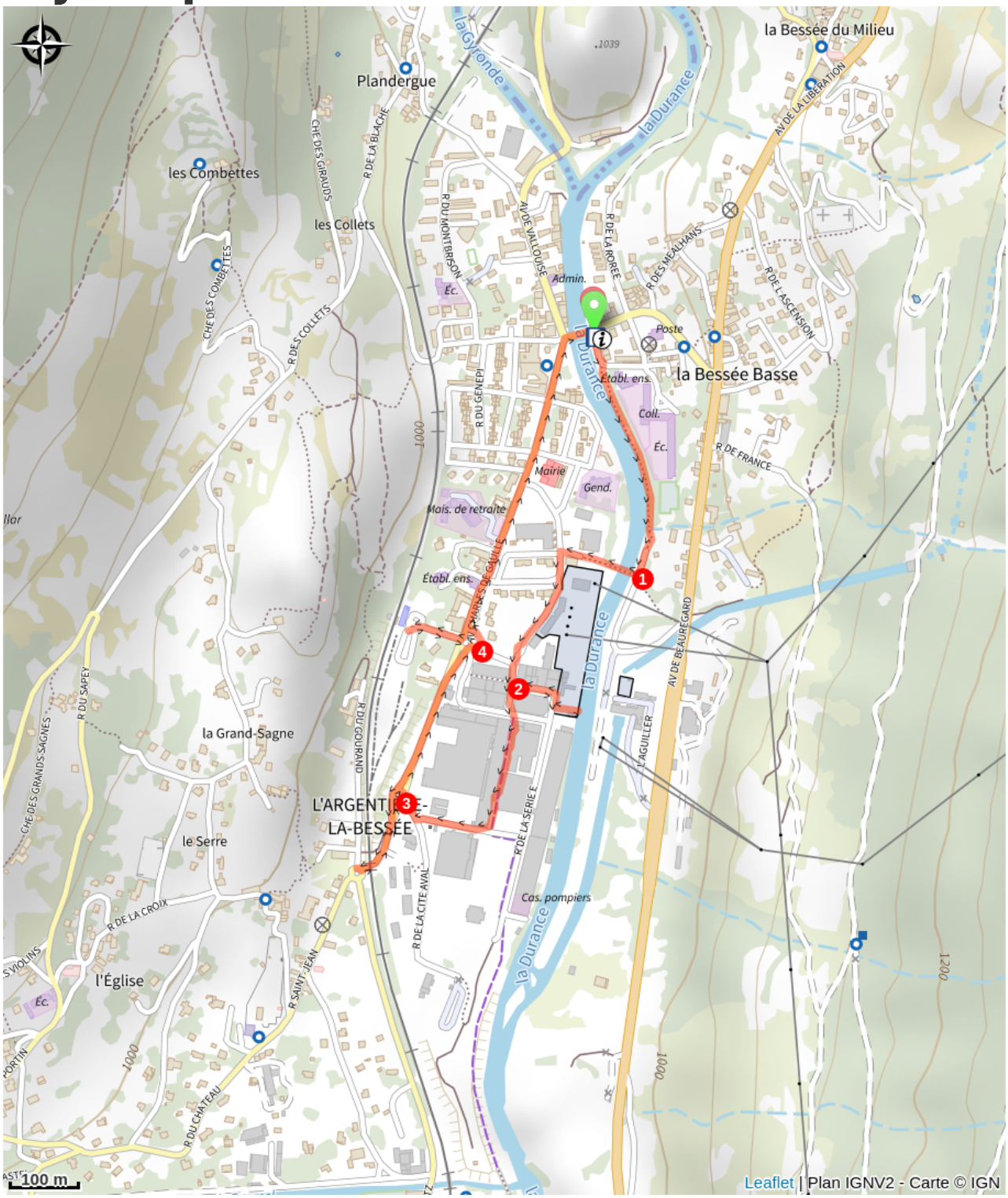


Min elevation 967 m Max elevation 981 m

Setting out from the Tourist Information Office of L'Argentière-La Bessée, follow the banks of the Durance towards the red bridge.

1. When you come to the red bridge, cross it and then take the narrow footpath on the left.
2. Turn left and make a there-and-back detour to see the arch bridge: go past a garage to reach a promontory which takes you close to the bridge, and then retrace your steps. Carry on, passing the former Péchiney factory, and then take the Rue de l'Industrie where there is an exhibition of photographs on the walls.
3. Turn right at the roundabout and cross the road to read the information panel on the Francis water turbine. Carry on towards the railway bridge and go under it through an underpass, to reach the explanatory panel about the Mines du Fournel wagon. Retrace your steps back to the Francis turbine panel and continue straight ahead, past the mobile compressor. At the next roundabout, go right to the impressive aluminium bar.
4. From the aluminium bar, cross the road heading towards the station, to discover the shunting locomotive. Go back to the main road of L'Argentière-La Bessée and carry on towards the town hall ("Mairie"). After admiring the enormous ice-pick in front of the town hall, carry on towards the bridge which takes you across the Durance and back to the Tourist Information Office.

On your path...



- The vertical compressor (A)
- Louis Leprince-Ringuet and L'Argentière (B)
- The Péchiney factory (C)
- Former industrial area of L'Argentière-la-Bessée (D)
- The Francis turbine (E)
- The mobile compressor (F)
- The giant aluminium bar (G)
- The light rail tractor (H)
- The old workers' housing districts (I)

All useful information

⚠ Advices

Information panels are provided all along the route.

Les écrins sentiers thématiques Smartphone app can be downloaded.

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

How to come ?

Transports

Public transport >> www.pacamobilite.fr

Consider car-sharing >> www.blablacar.fr

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

Access

16 km from Briançon, take the N94.

Advised parking

Car park at the tourist information office ("Bureau d’Information Touristique") in L’Argentière-La Bessée

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.

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 un distance minimale de 300m sol quand vous la survolez soit 1650m 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 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...

The vertical compressor (A)

In 1910, a 22-year-old engineer, Gilbert Planche arrived in L'Argentière-La Bessée to take advantage of the water here and open a large aluminium factory.

The vertical compressor is the forerunner of the pneumatic drill. The mine operators needed a large quantity of coal and compressed air helped to accelerate coal output. In 1852, Swiss physicist Jean-Daniel Colladon invented the pneumatic drill. The vertical compressor enabled the production of compressed air which powered a drill and simplified coal excavation. The compressor is placed vertically on its support, hence its name.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Louis Leprince-Ringuet and L'Argentière (B)

Louis Leprince-Ringuet was the director of the Physics Laboratory of X ("X" being a polytechnic school in Villeurbanne) established in L'Argentière. During the summer of 1942, he took in several Jewish students, thus saving them from the Nazis and deportation to Auschwitz. A panel presents the discoveries made by Louis Leprince-Ringuet in this laboratory. A text by Bernard Lévi is also displayed. As a young Jewish student, he took part in research at the laboratory during the summer of 1942. In it he thanks the scientific team for helping him to escape the anti-Semitic barbarism.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The Péchiney factory (C)

This French electro metal company established itself in L'Argentière in 1907. The construction of the aluminium factory started in 1909 and it opened its doors in 1910, powered by the electricity plant built by Gilbert Planche. With it, L'Argentière became an industrial town. The economic crisis of the 1970s and the rise of foreign sources of supply led to the factory's closure in 1985. It was partially demolished in 1988. The workers left the town and in order to prevent the abandonment of L'Argentière, a restructuring project was launched.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Former industrial area of L’Argentière-la-Bessée (D)

On the two walls of these now-disused industrial structures, you can read the history of L’Argentière-la-Bessée. The town is marked by its industrial past, in particular by the presence of a hydroelectric power station built between 1907 and 1909 to harness the power of the mountain waterfalls. At the time, it was the most powerful power station in Europe. Other industries were also established here, like the Société du Quartz Fondu fused quartz works and the aluminium factory which provided livelihoods for a large number of workers.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The Francis turbine (E)

The American James Francis developed the Francis turbine between 1849 and 1855. It is a “àreaction” turbine suitable for medium-sized waterfalls (with a water head of between 15 and 500 metres). The water enters the turbine and then circulates between the turbine blades, which are fixed, while the inner wheel is mobile. The pressure at the wheel intake is greater than the pressure at the outlet.

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography

The mobile compressor (F)

In the mines, compressed air is used to remove dust and to create power for the drills. The mobile compressor holds compressed air in a resistant tank. This is brought to a high pressure via a pump (the compressor). The compressed air is then distributed to the mine machinery through a conduit system.

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography

The giant aluminium bar (G)

A young metal, aluminium is the most abundant metallic element on earth. Today, the aluminium industry is the second biggest after steel.

This enormous ingot was made in L'Argentière-La Bessée.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The light rail tractor (H)

A locomotive? No, its little cousin, the light rail tractor. This replaced manually pushed carts and horse-drawn vehicles. Less powerful than a locomotive, it travelled along narrow-gauge tracks which could be laid on different types of terrain. An information panel also described the role of this vehicle during the Great War.

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography

The old workers' housing districts (I)

Workers' housing districts were built to house the many workers who were employed at the Péchiney factory. These districts have now been demolished. The architecture of the houses varied according to the status of the employee. A town hall, a cinema, a bandstand and churches were also constructed.

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography