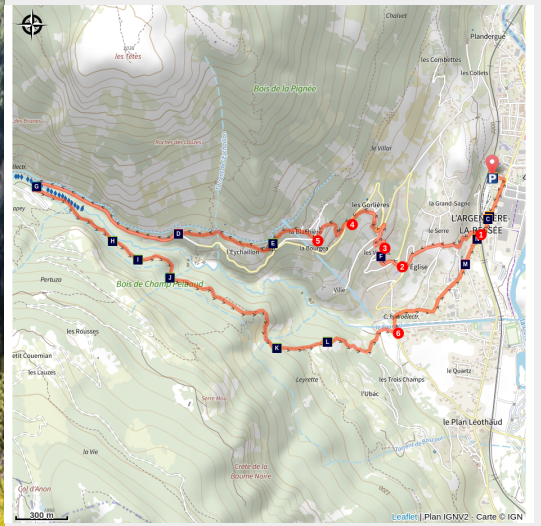


# The Sentier des Mineurs - The Miners' path

Parc national des Ecrins - L'Argentière-la-Bessée



Dans la vallée du Fournel (Jan Novak Photography)



*A pleasant walk rising up through the Fournel valley through old hamlets and cool forest*

Very often, we only think of the newest part of the town of L'Argentière-La Bessée. But roaming the old hamlets of L'Argentière makes for a fascinating exploration, as does the silver mining museum ("Musée des Mines d'Argent"). Dropping back down through a cool, refreshing forest is a pleasant complement to this outing.

## Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 5 h 30

Length : 8.4 km

Trek ascent : 384 m

Difficulty : Medium

Type : Loop

Themes : Fauna, Flora

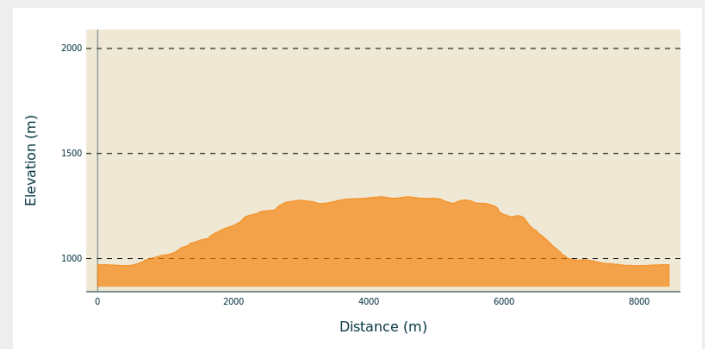
# Trek

**Departure** : SNCF train station,  
L'Argentière-La Bessée

**Arrival** : SNCF train station, L'Argentière-  
La Bessée

**Cities** : 1. L'Argentière-la-Bessée

## Altimetric profile










Min elevation 967 m Max elevation 1296 m


From the train station in L'Argentière-les Écrins, head towards the silver mining museum ("Musée des Mines d'Argent")

1. Just after the tunnel under the railway line, take the narrow road on the right, and then left onto a track which comes to the bottom of a narrow lane, which you climb up via some steps to an intersection. Carry on uphill until you come to the church. Cross the Fournel road when you come to the school.
2. Just to the right of the school, take a narrow road.. After 50 metres, carry straight on along a paved lane which turns into a grassy track running along a canal side.
3. Take the narrow road on the right, going uphill, and go left just after the bend. Further on, continue right towards the Fournel mines ("Mines du Fournel"). Shortly after this, head right again to reach the access road leading to the Fournel. Follow this road left for a short stretch, and then take a path on the left, on a hairpin. Then follow signs for « Les mines ».
4. Cross the Fournel road again to take the path opposite which passes in front of a house, then right.
5. Continue uphill between the houses in the hamlet of La Blachière and, in a farmyard, go left in front of the farm sheds. Carry on towards an oratory and continue along the hillside until you come back to the Fournel road. Follow this upstream to cross the bridge. Immediately after this, take a track on the left which runs back down to L'Argentière along the right-hand bank.
6. At the bottom of the path, cross the bridge on the left and follow the main road down towards the Musée des Mines, which brings you back to the train station.

# On your path...



-  The light rail tractor (A)
-  The Francis turbine (C)
-  The Apollo (E)
-  The Fournel (G)
-  The silver fir (I)
-  The common chiffchaff (K)
-  The chapel of Saint-Jean (M)

-  The mobile compressor (B)
-  The silver mines (D)
-  The hamlets of L'Argentière (F)
-  The wild angelica (H)
-  The sea-buckthorn (J)
-  The lavender (L)
-  The Mines de Fournel rail-cars (N)

# All useful information

## **Advices**

Take care in the hamlet of La Blachière, when going through a farmyard where dogs are often tied up (be vigilant if you have a dog).

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

Transports en commun >> <https://services-zou.maregionsud.fr/fr/>

Pensez au covoiturage >> [www.blablacar.fr](http://www.blablacar.fr)

Pour plus de renseignements, s'adresser au Bureau d'Information Touristique le plus proche du départ de la randonnée.

### Access

16 km from Briançon, take the N94.

### Advised parking

Parking Gare SNCF, 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 1850m d'altitude !

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## 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 light rail tractor (A)

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

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## The mobile compressor (B)

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

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## The Francis turbine (C)

The American James Francis developed the Francis turbine between 1849 and 1855. It is a “à reaction” 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 silver mines (D)

The path passes close to the silver mines which gave L'Argentière its name (argent meaning "silver"). They were first worked in the early Medieval period and later abandoned before exploitation resumed again in the nineteenth century. They were finally closed in 1908. Since 1992, the site has been the subject of archaeological excavations, with major work to clear materials carried by the Fournel when in flood. They can be visited with a guide (by appointment), leaving the visitor in awe: how much ingenuity has been involved in extracting the silver-bearing galena!

Attribution : Thibault Blais Photographie

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## The Apollo (E)

This large white butterfly decorated with black marks and red dots, is common in warm areas where stonecrops and houseleeks grow, as these are host plants for its caterpillars. It remains common in the Alps, but is much rarer elsewhere. In fact, it is a protected species. Its movement to higher altitudes has been observed, in line with climate warming, because its eggs, which it lays on plants in summer, need a certain number of days of freezing temperatures in winter in order to hatch.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

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## The hamlets of L'Argentière (F)

Before it was attached to the municipality of La-Bessée during the revolutionary period, L'Argentière covered this well-exposed slope, with all its hamlets from the church to Eychaillon. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Durance was dammed and industries sprang up here, that the modern town of L'Argentière developed in the plain between the two old localities. The path takes you on a discovery of the old hamlets and their very attractive houses.

Attribution : Jean-Philippe Telmon - Parc national des Écrins

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## The Fournel (G)

The Fournel mountain stream gives generously. Its water makes up a large proportion of the town's drinking water, supplies the irrigation canals, is used for hydropower and offers a recreational area valuable to the local economy in the form of its canyon, located in the gorge connecting it to the Durance. Being a mountain stream, it is impetuous, but sills have been built lower down and it has been dammed to prevent natural disasters. Numerous mountain streams have received the same treatment...

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography

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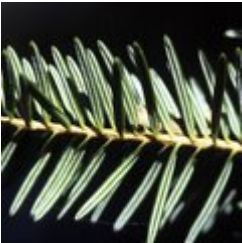


## The wild angelica (H)

On the edges of seepage areas, the wild angelica grows. This is a tall umbellifer (the Apiaceae family) with blush white flowers and a hollow purplish stem. It is a cousin of garden angelica which grows in Northern Europe and is cultivated for its medicinal and culinary properties. The stem, the petiole (the «tail») and the leaf sheath can be candied.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

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## The silver fir (I)

A few coniferous trees, including the fir, are mixed in among the deciduous trees. The fir thrives on this north-exposed slope, called the ubac, because it cannot tolerate drought. Its flat needles are arranged on either side of the boughs rather than all the way around them, which distinguishes it from the spruce. They have two white stripes on their undersides. Its elongated cones stand upright, rather than hanging downwards.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins



## ✿ The sea-buckthorn (J)

Here and there, you come across a bush with narrow leaves which are green on their upper sides and silvery-grey underneath. Take care, the branches are spiky! In autumn, it produces acidic bright orange berries. They are very rich in vitamin C and are best as a syrup or marmalade. It is a pioneer species which colonises alluvial soils in sunny situations. It has also been used by the Mountain Terrain Restoration service to stabilise slopes prone to water runoff.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins



## 🇫🇷 The common chiffchaff (K)

When spring arrives, a relentless «cheep, cheep» echoes around the forest. The singer is a small bird with a greenish grey and yellowish-white back, the common chiffchaff. Like other inconspicuous birds, the male has every incentive to make himself heard if he wants to attract the attention of a female! They are migratory and live almost anywhere where there are trees and bushes.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins



## ✿ The lavender (L)

As you drop back downhill, you are once again in dry, hot meadows. The narrow-leaved lavender is established here, a reminder that the Pays de Écrins is in the Southern Alps after all! Not to be confused with the lavandin, this plant naturally grows on the rocky slopes of the mountains of the Midi.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins



## 🏛️ The chapel of Saint-Jean (M)

Built in the twelfth century and listed as a Historical Monument, the chapel of Saint-Jean is of Romanesque style. Tombs cut into the rock were discovered in recent archaeological excavations.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins



## 🕒 The Mines de Fournel rail-cars (N)

Filled with materials excavated from the mine face, the rail-cars were pushed along the rails by the miners.

They were called “mine dogs”. They were originally made from wood and over time iron pieces were added. They were made entirely from metal by the end of the nineteenth century.

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography