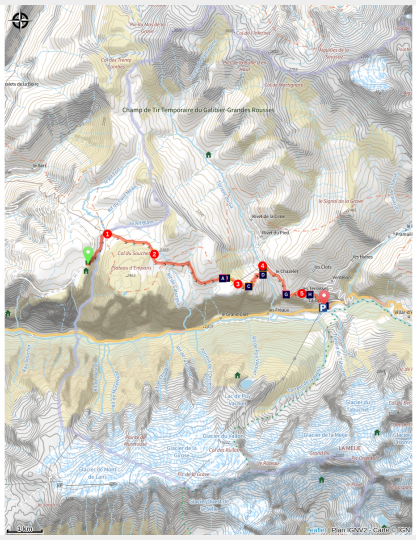
From the refuges of Les Mouterres and Le Fay to La Grave

Oisans

Hameau Les Terrasses (Bernard Nicollet)



After passing through high pastures towards the plateau of Emparis, a long descent back down to La Grave completes the GR®54.

This Stage is the cherry on the cake of this circuit: the final section through the high peaks before returning to civilisation. The plateau of Emparis is recognised as one of the jewels of the GR® offering a combination of lakes and magnificent vantage points over La Meije. The descent brings you back down to earth at the start point. You have come full circle.

Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 4 h

Length : 12.1 km

Trek ascent : 299 m

Difficulty : Medium

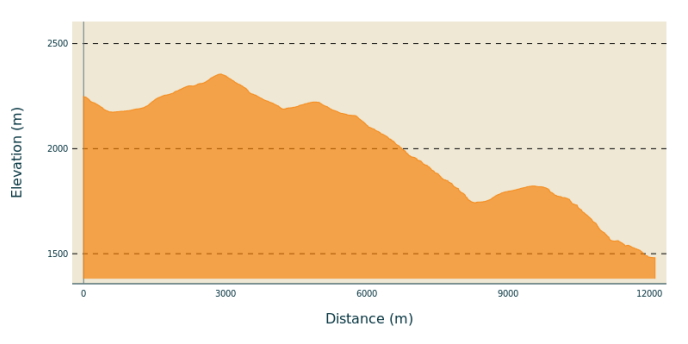
Type : Stage

Themes : Hut, Lake and glacier, Panorama

Trek

Departure : Refuges of Le Fay and Les Mouterres
Arrival : La Grave
Markings : GR
Cities : 1. Mizoën
2. La Grave

Altimetric profile

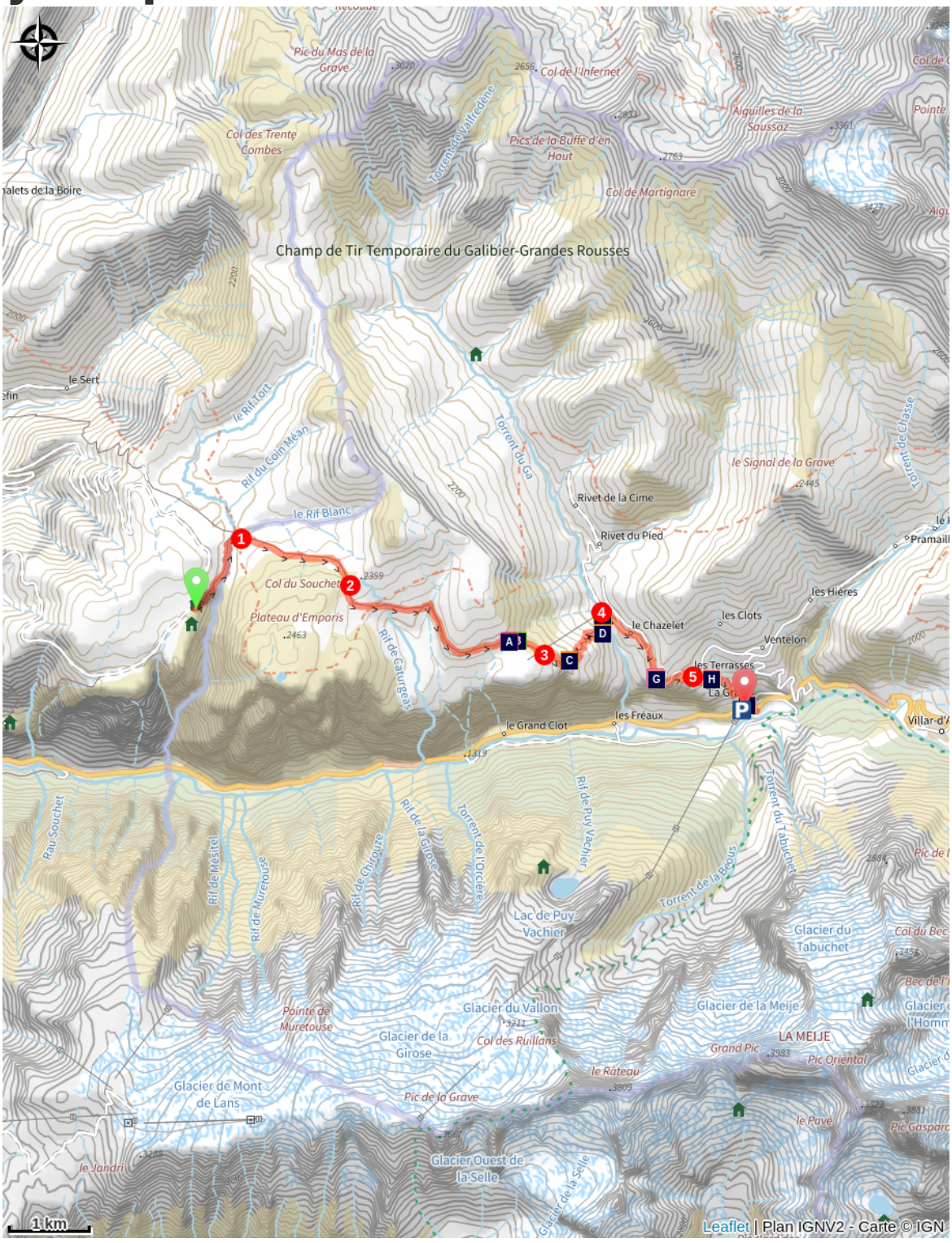


Min elevation 1482 m Max elevation 2356 m

From the refuges, pick up the track and then immediately turn off onto the path leading down towards the Rif Tort river. Follow the Rif until you come to the confluence of the two streams where you will find a number of directional signs.

1. Take the GR® path that leads up a gentle incline to the Le Souchet pass.
2. The first path on the right leads to the Lac Lérié and Lac Noir (not on the GR route) which it would be a shame to miss. A loop circuit brings you back to the GR 54 (add 1 hour). Cross the Rif des Caturages and the Rif de Galon at the foot of the Serre-Bernard and pass above the ruins of Pré Veyraud.
3. Go under the Plateau chair lift and leave the path leading to the Clot Raffin to the left. Continue your descent on the path which winds steeply down to the bridge over the Le Gua mountain stream (1,735 m).
4. The road on the right leads to Le Chazelet. Go through the village and follow the D33. Just after the oratory and the Perchoir, take the path on the right that leads to the Terrasses (1,776 m).
5. At the village church, take the path that leads to La Grave (1,470 m). You arrive in La Grave from the north; carry straight on through the village heading southwards towards the church. Stay on the road until you reach a crossroads. Go straight over and join the D1091. Turn right towards the cablecar car park.

On your path...



The Emparis Plateau (A)
Small Apollo (B)
Agricultural work in Spring and Summer (C)
Agricultural work in Autumn and Winter (D)
White-throated dipper (E)
Chazelet perch (F)
Sainte-Anne du Chazelet oratory (G)
La Grave terraces (H)
Notre-Dame de l’Assomption Church (I)

All useful information

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.

Bearded vulture

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

Contact:

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Aire des trios - Pertuis
Le Gypaète barbu est une espèce très sensible au dérangement tout au long du cycle de reproduction. Dans les Alpes, la population est en installation suite aux réintroductions débutées en 1987. Le nombre de couples présent est encore faible.

Les Zones de Sensibilité Majeure (ZSM) Gypaète barbu sont désignées avec les acteurs locaux.

Vous visualisez les Zones cœur, toutes les activités sont à proscrire pendant la période sensible (du 1/11 au 31/08).

Attention aux réglementations (Parcs nationaux, Réserves naturelles…) qui s’imposent aux zones Gypaètes.

Source

Parc national des Ecrins

https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr

On your path...

The Emparis Plateau (A)

The mule path follows the edge of the Southern border of the plateau which is completely dedicated to pastoralism and tourism. It offers an exceptional view of the Meije whose marked relief contrasts with this gentle landscape. It welcomes 7 refuges and pastoral cabins as well as remarkable fauna, like the Mountain Hare and the Mountain Apollo butterfly. The challenge for this site is to preserve its pastoral character.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - PNE

Small Apollo (B)

The Small Apollo is a rare and protected butterfly. It has finely striped black and white antennae, and a tiny red ocellus (eye) on each of its forewings. With a wingspan of 60 to 80 mm, it is the lord and master of the orangey-yellow beds of mountain saxifrages where it takes care of its eggs and feeds its caterpillars.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - PNE

Agricultural work in Spring and Summer (C)

In Spring the soil had to be moved up the land using crates pulled by mules. Ploughing, sowing, planting followed rye (which stayed in the ground for two years), barley, oats and potatoes. Summer was not finished until the barns were full of hay. Scythes that had been beaten on an anvil, rakes, and nets were used every day. In order to ensure the overwintering of the animals, a certain number of loads (around 80 kg of hay) were necessary: 25 for each dairy cow and 5 for each sheep.

Attribution : Cyril Coursier - PNE

Agricultural work in Autumn and Winter (D)

From September, cereal crops were cut with the scythe and the sickle, dried in “bourles” (small stacks of ten sheafs) on the top of the land (fields). Once beaten, the grains of rye were dried in the sun «soleillaient », they were taken to the mill and then to the oven to be made in to black bread. From the end of November until the beginning of May, the animals had to be tended to in the stables. The manure from the cows was transported to the fields using sledges, while the sheep dung was dried and cut in to, pieces, and burnt to produce heat and energy for cooking. In the dairy, milk was made in to butter and cheese.

Attribution : Denis Clavreul

White-throated dipper (E)

Perched on a large, partly immersed pebble, the dipper sways to and fro with its tail aloft, and then dives down head first into the swirling water. This surprising passerine is unusual in moving underwater against the current in search of food. Thanks to a thin membrane protecting its eyes from the water, it can spot its prey (worms, small shellfish, water insect larva), before lifting its head out of the water and letting the current carry it gently along. It then takes up a new surveillance position and starts the process all over again.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - PNE

Chazelet perch (F)

To test your head for heights, there is nothing like this new, life-size game played facing the Meije a steel walkway suspended over empty space. The first few steps are daunting, but reaching the end of the walkway – or rather, empty space – calls for even more courage! Beneath your feet, all the way down below is the village of Les Fréaux, nestling against the Romanche, and above you, the giants of ice. If you add in the element of air, with gusts of wind blowing all around you, then strong sensations are guaranteed!

Sainte-Anne du Chazelet oratory (G)

Although it stands beside an ordinary road, the Chazelet oratory is famous for one of the most beautiful panoramas of the Alps and the Meije mountains. Built in dry stone, the edifice is at 1 834 m and overlooks the valley and the Ecrins and Meije mountains. It has been sketched, photographed and painted many times, including in the famous Meije by the Japanese painter Foujita.
Recently a new orientation table was placed a few metres above the oratory. In two parts, it shows the northern slope of the Meije and the southern slope in the direction of Chazelet and Savoie.

Attribution : PNE

La Grave terraces (H)

On the south-facing slope of La Grave, terraced farmland and villages are inseparable. This is a European-wide landscape uniting many architectural, archaeological and natural elements. This mountain farming system was shaped mainly by past and present agricultural activity. The steep terrain at the time required terracing for it to be farmed. These former planted terraces are today natural meadowland, which is mowed or used for grazing. It is highly sensitive to this new pastoral usage, and is little by little showing signs of soil erosion.

Attribution : Eric Vannard - PNE

Notre-Dame de l’Assomption Church (I)

Listed as an historic monument, Notre Dame de l'Assomption church towers over La Grave. In First Romanesque style, this remarkable building is thought to date from the 11th century, making it the oldest building in the town. All around the church is a cemetery with graves marked by wooden crosses and decorated with brass hearts, facing the giants of ice.

Attribution : Jenny Selberg - OT Hautes Vallées