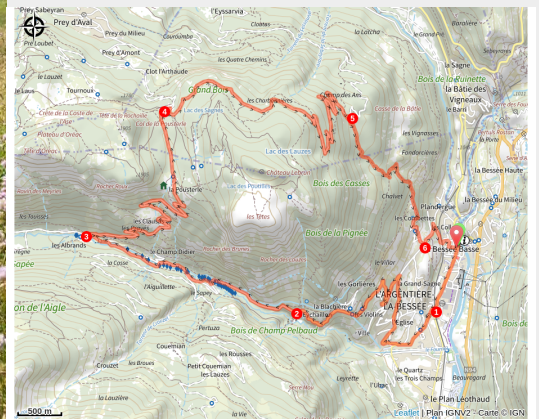


# The Tour des Têtes (no. 16)

Vallouise - L'Argentière-la-Bessée



(Rogier Van Rijn)



*A difficult circuit overlooking the gorges of the Durance, suitable for experienced riders.*

This circuit with major changes in elevation will take you to the Fournel mine and the eponymous glacial valley. Exceptional heritage and a stunning view are in store before you tackle a thrilling technical descent.

## Useful information

Practice : Mountain bike

Duration : 3 h 15

Length : 20.7 km

Trek ascent : 880 m

Difficulty : Hard

Type : Loop

Themes : Fauna, Flora, Pass

# Trek

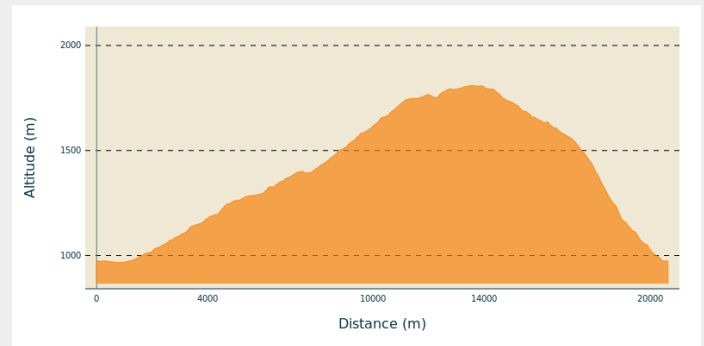
**Departure** : Place du kiosque,  
L'Argentière-La Bessée

**Arrival** : Place du kiosque, L'Argentière-  
La Bessée

**Markings** : ➤ VTT

**Cities** : 1. L'Argentière-la-Bessée  
2. Les Vigneaux

## Altimetric profile

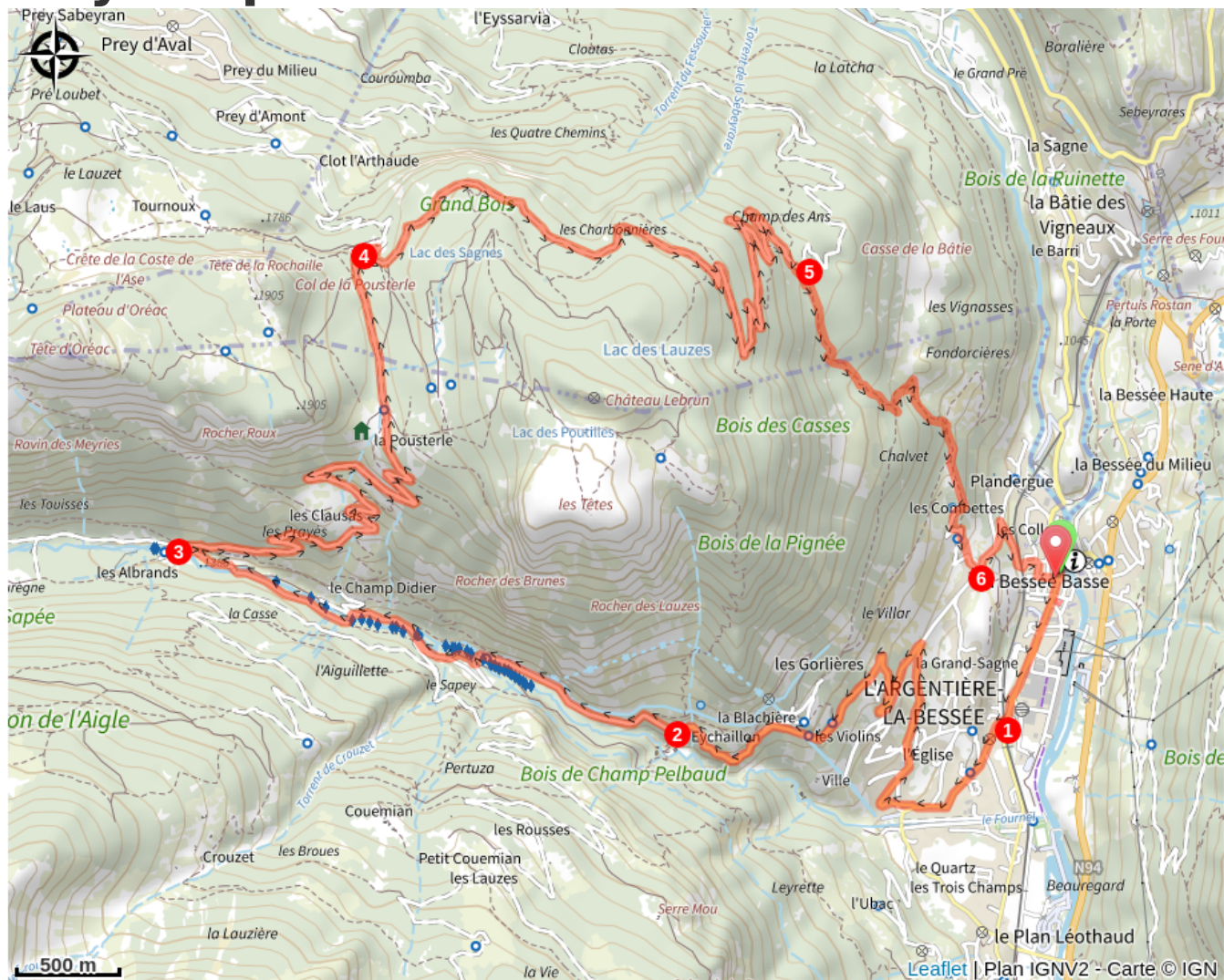







Min elevation 967 m Max elevation 1811 m






The circuit starts right in the centre of town, not far from the bridge spanning the Durance. Head due south towards the train station.

1. After passing the train station on your right and going under the railway bridge, follow the D423 towards the Fournel mines ("Mines du Fournel")
2. At the mine car park, carry on along the narrow road leading into the little valley
3. At the bridge, the Pont des Albrands, take the forest track that leads uphill to the Col de la Pousterle
4. At the car park at the pass, follow the track running due east
5. After the Champ des Ans, at 1,541 m, take the path on the right: the start of a great single-track descent
6. When you come to the first houses in L'Argentière-la-Bessée, take the road on the left and then the road on the right to the next crossroads, which will bring you to the town centre

# On your path...



-  The old workers' housing districts (A)
-  The chapel of Saint-Jean (C)
-  The Fournel (E)
-  The larch (G)
-  The pygmy owl (I)

-  The mobile compressor (B)
-  The silver mines (D)
-  The Col de la Pusterle (F)
-  Forest-dwelling bats (H)
-  The rosebay willowherb (J)

# All useful information

## **Advices**

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

Take your litter home

Do not take shortcuts across pastureland

## **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 >> [www.paysdesecrins.com](http://www.paysdesecrins.com)

### Access

16 km from Briançon, take the N94.

### Advised parking

Car park of the Place du kiosque, 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 une distance minimale 300m sol quand vous survolez la zone ! Soit 1650m d'altitude pour cette zone.

## 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 2140m d'altitude à une distance de 300m sol.

Au site dit de Grand Bois, le couple de faucons a retrouvé son aire de prédilection dans le secteur "flamme de pierre" ; à éviter donc.

[http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/actualite/amis-grimpeurs-attention-aux-pelerins-voies?fbclid=IwAR2Z8hX\\_38vpdW3mS499aRnY08jarhfm-5-eNV8K29k3WB3q3Ik2US\\_Alec](http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/actualite/amis-grimpeurs-attention-aux-pelerins-voies?fbclid=IwAR2Z8hX_38vpdW3mS499aRnY08jarhfm-5-eNV8K29k3WB3q3Ik2US_Alec)

## Short-toed snake eagle

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Merci d'essayer d'éviter la zone ou de rester à une distance minimale de 300m sol quand vous la survolez soit 1650m d'altitude !

### **Short-toed snake eagle**

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

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Julien Charron  
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

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Merci d'essayer d'éviter la zone ou de rester à une distance minimale de 300m sol quand vous la survolez soit 1850m d'altitude !

### **Short-toed snake eagle**

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

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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 1900m 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...

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## The old workers' housing districts (A)

Workers' housing districts were built to house the many workers who were employed at the P echiney 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

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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 chapel of Saint-Jean (C)

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  crins

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## The silver mines (D)

The path passes close to the silver mines which gave L'Argent re 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





## 💧 The Fournel (E)

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 Col de la Pusterle (F)

A pusterle (in the local high-alpine Occitan language) is a small gate, a postern. It comes from the Latin posterula which means back door. This place name is sometimes given to a pass, which could be described as a gateway between two valleys! The glaciers carved out this gateway through which an arm stretched between the glacier occupying the Fournel valley and the glacier flowing down the Vallouise valley.

Attribution : Bertrand Bodin - Parc national des Écrins

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## 🌲 The larch (G)

The symbol of the Southern Alps, this softwood tree loses its leaves in winter, and is swathed with gold and lights up the mountains in autumn. The larch forests are maintained by the grazing of flocks. Without them, other trees like the fir or other pine trees could grow, creating a different kind of forest. A pioneer species, the larch establishes freely in light conditions. Its solid rot-proof wood has always been used in the construction of houses.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - Parc national des Écrins

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## Forest-dwelling bats (H)

Bats don't just live in caves! In summer, some forest-dwelling species shelter in old hollow trees or woodpecker holes during the day. Sometimes, the females also form little colonies here, where their young will be born (one bat pup per female). In this forest, which is still young with very few old trees, artificial roosts have been installed to help the bats and to facilitate their study.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins



## The pygmy owl (I)

The call of this small, nocturnal bird of prey can be heard in the spring, and also in the autumn when it can utter some peculiar sounds. Active during daytime hours and at dusk, the pygmy owl is a predator of passerine birds and small forest rodents. But when they spot it, passerines will come together in large numbers to mob it, so as to prevent any attempted surprise attack. It is restricted to mountain forests where it seeks out trees with woodpecker cavities where it builds its nest.

Attribution : Christophe Albert - Parc national des Écrins



## The rosebay willowherb (J)

The forest tracks are edged with great swathes of a tall plant which has purple flowers arranged in loose spikes. The rosebay willowherb is a pioneer plant and favours road embankments and disturbed ground. In late summer, its very numerous seeds, each with a little plume, float away en masse glowing in the advancing twilight...

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Écrins