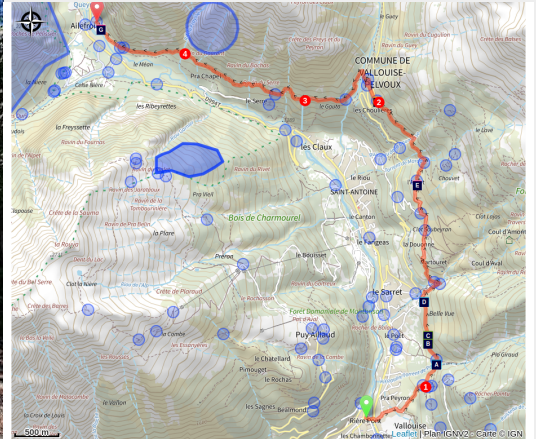


From Vallouise to Ailefroide

Parc national des Ecrins



Hameau d'Ailefroide - Chapelle de Bon Secours (© Parc national des Ecrins - Thierry Maillet)



After running past hamlets in the valley bottom and chalets in the alpine pastures, the balcony path leads into the characteristic granite-bound world of Ailefroide. Loved by climbers the world over, this little hamlet, which nestles among the larches, will only emerge into view at the last minute.

From pastoral surroundings to high mountain landscapes, from greenery to rock, this trail gradually takes you into an extraordinary environment dominated by water, granite and glaciers.

Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 3 h 30

Length : 9.9 km

Trek ascent : 579 m

Difficulty : Medium

Type : Stage

Themes : Geology, History and architecture

Trek

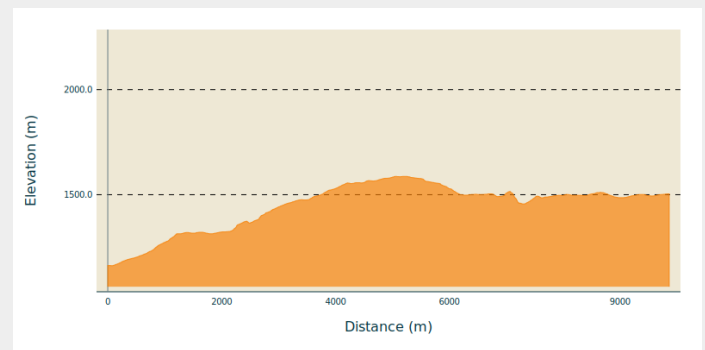
Departure : Vallouise downtown

Arrival : Ailefroide

Markings : — PR

Cities : 1. Vallouise-Pelvoux

Altimetric profile



Min elevation 1162 m Max elevation 1587 m

Cross the bridge over the Gyr and the D994 and take the track opposite ("Chemin du Rière Pont"). A few metres further on, turn left. At the next fork (dustbin shelter), continue straight on (Rocher Pointu). At the next intersection, take the small paved road on the right (Rocher Pointu) and then the track on the left (Pelvoux – Le Poet). Go uphill across fields until you reach a balcony track, which you turn left onto (Pelvoux – Le Poet).

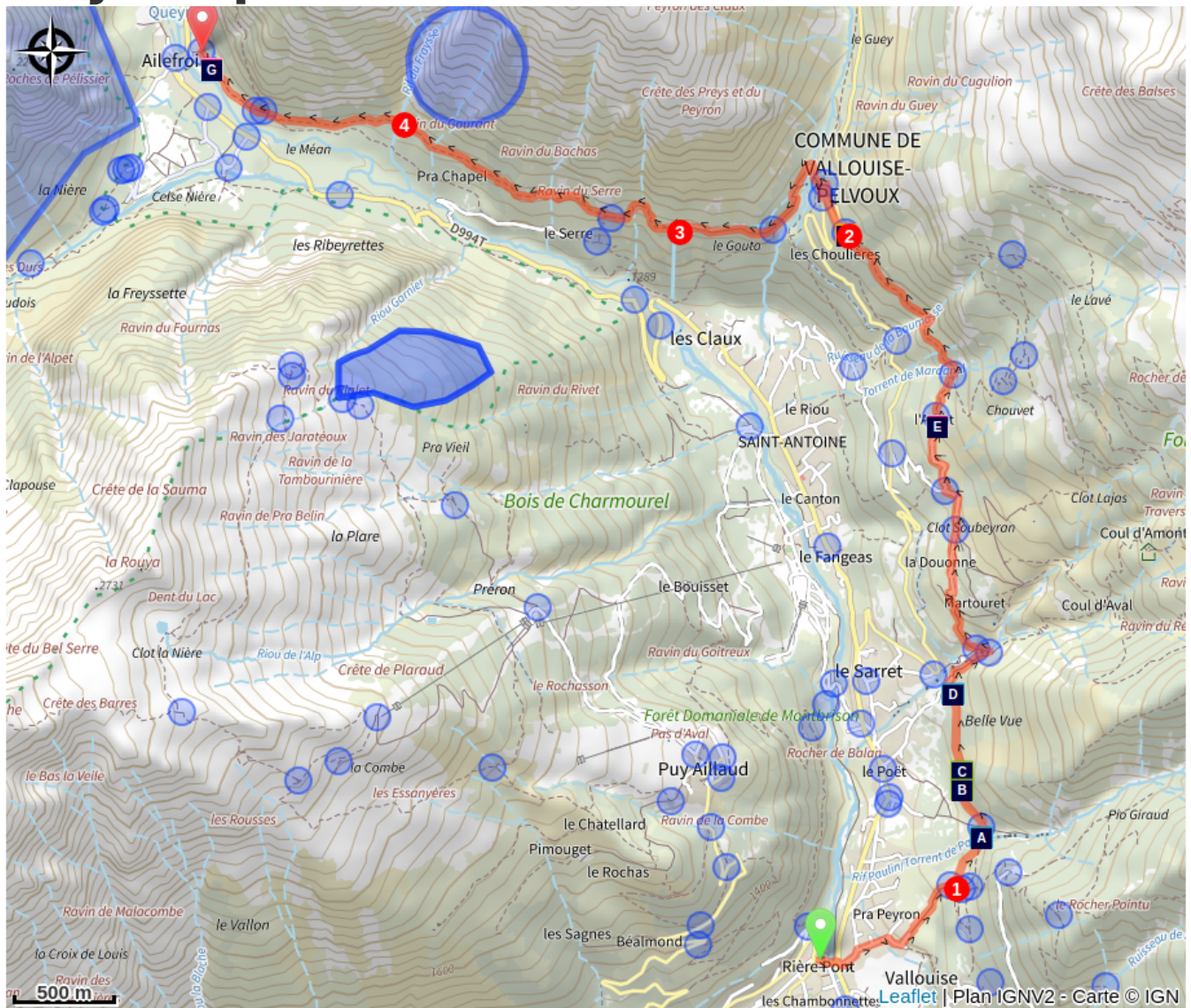
1. From here, the path follows the contour of the mountain side, always heading towards Ailefroid (North). The track turns into a path. Go straight on at the intersection. The path winds along the foot of a small cliff, following an irrigation ditch. Ford the Rif Paulin stream and then head towards Le Sarret. There is a short ascent, then bear left. Do not go towards Le Poet; instead, take the path on the right which runs along the irrigation ditch. At the next intersection, "Bellevue 1,330 m", head towards Le Sarret. Follow the left-hand bank of the mountain stream La Juliane upwards and then ford it. On the hairpin bend, take the track on the right (Chambran). On the next hairpin bend, continue straight on. At subsequent intersections, head for Chambran. The track turns into a path. Continue straight on (leave the path to the Cabane Chouvet on the right).





2. At Les Choulières, turn left onto the paved road to Eychauda. 10 minutes after the next hairpin bend, take the track on the right (Ailefroide). Cross the mountain stream L'Eychauda and carry on towards Ailefroide. The track turns into a steeper path.




3. You cross the penstock pipe. The way becomes trickier: sandy ground, sharply sloping gradient, rather steep descent.

4. When fording across the Rif du Fraysse stream, exercise caution in stormy weather and in the spring when winter snow lingers. Reaching the ford crossing can also be tricky. The path descends through the larch forest and leads past a climbing school. Continue straight on until you reach Ailefroide.

On your path...



-  Mountain land rehabilitation projects (A)
-  The acanthus-leaved thistle (C)
-  L'Adret (E)
-  Ailefroide (G)

-  The Montpellier thistle (B)
-  The role of the canals (D)
-  Les Choulières (F)

All useful information

Advices

There are numerous ford crossings; exercise caution in stormy weather. The last ford crossing, 2 km outside Ailefroide, can still be filled with snow in the event of late-season snowfall.

After the penstock pipe, the path (between Les Choulières and Ailefroide) is narrow, sharply sloping and sandy with a short stretch of steep descent. Enquire about the presence of lying snow on some sections early in the season.

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.

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 2380m.

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>

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Source



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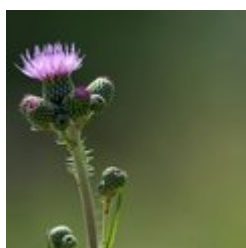
On your path...



Mountain land rehabilitation projects (A)

Stream correction dams have been built by RTM (Mountain Land Rehabilitation), a branch of the National Forestry Agency. The purpose of these structures is to limit erosion and mountain stream flooding. The RTM has been in existence for a long time, set up in the late nineteenth century. At that time, the slopes where much more sparsely wooded than they are today, and erosion was a very significant problem.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins



The Montpellier thistle (B)

A large plant grows along the canal side; a sort of thistle although it is not spiky: the Montpellier thistle. Its oval, pointed leaves are edged with large, stiff but non-spiky cilia. Its flowers are pink. In France, it is only found in the Alps and the Pyrenees and a few departments in the south. Associated with wet areas, this species has become rare in many regions because of damage to its habitat.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins



The acanthus-leaved thistle (C)

This is a hot, west-exposed slope with rocky ground. The plant life reflects this situation: the narrow-leaved lavender and acanthus-leaved thistle grow here. The latter looks like a large sun with its very big flower head which quickly turns golden and its leaves radiating out around it. It often used to be hung on house doors... but much better to leave it lighting up the stony meadows!

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins



The role of the canals (D)

Irrigation of meadows and private gardens; preservation of traditions; the promotion of social contact through collective canal maintenance operations carried out by local people; development of canals to create trails for tourists and locals... The canals have fulfilled a variety of roles, hence the benefit of conserving and maintaining them.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins



L'Adret (E)

This place is called L'Adret. In some regions, the term adret refers to the slope that is exposed to the sun, facing south or west. This is as opposed to the ubac, the north-facing slope. On the adret side, crops start to grow earlier and ripen faster and the houses warm up quicker too! These warmer slopes have therefore largely been cleared of vegetation, and the forest was maintained as a source of wood for fuel or building material.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins



Les Choulières (F)

The French children's song *Savez-vous planter les choux?* (Do you know how to plant cabbage?) is very appropriate here! In any event, the name Choulières is believed to be a reference to a place planted with cabbages and, by extension, a place where vegetables are grown. The phasing out of crop cultivation in the mountains has altered the landscape: the hay meadows and fields are now used as grazing meadows for increasingly large flocks of sheep.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins



Ailefroide (G)

Formerly an alpine pasture hamlet, Ailefroide lies at the foot of Mont Pelvoux, surrounded by larch woods and granite cliffs. It is the last hamlet in the valley, at the confluence of the valleys of Saint-Pierre and Celse Nière. The name Ailefroide is thought to originate from the term *Alpe froide* or “cold Alp”, a reference to the lack of sun here in the winter. It is the starting point of numerous trails and is a paradise for climbers. Ailefroide is a legendary destination for mountaineers: a stele commemorates the conquest of Mont Pelvoux in 1828.

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography