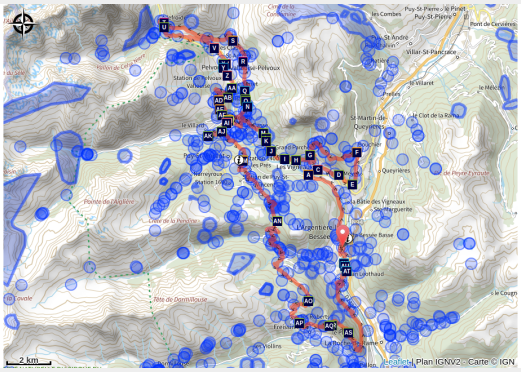
Tour of the Pays des Ecrins in 6 days

Vallouise

Vue sur le vallon du Fournel depuis le col de la Pousterle (© OT Pays des Ecrins - Rogier van Rijn)



From hamlets to villages, mountain passes to valleys, alpine pastures to mountain streams, this tour of the Pays des Écrins takes you not only to the iconic places and peaks of Les Écrins but also along more secret and less trodden pathways.

To embark on the tour of the Pays des Écrins is to discover a land of water, water that shapes the landscape and sustains plant life, "white coal" as it is known, white gold! A land of history and mountain culture, a land offering refuge and a warm welcome! As they roam the many valleys amidst imposing and unspoilt nature, hikers absorb the epic tale of this territory.

Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 6 days

Length : 76.5 km

Trek ascent : 3861 m

Difficulty : Medium

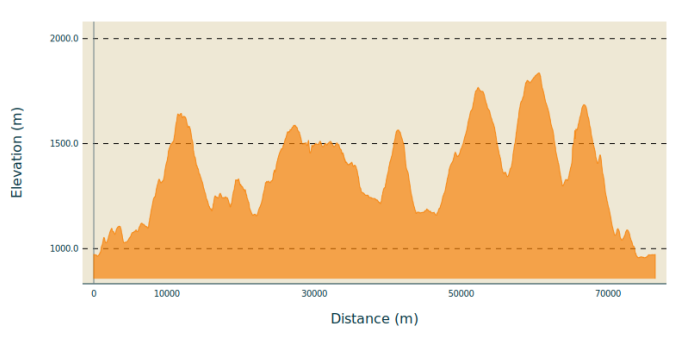
Type : Multi-day trekking

Themes : History and architecture, Panorama, Pass

Trek

Departure : L'Argentière - La Bessée
Arrival : L'Argentière - La Bessée
Markings : PR GR
Cities : 1. L'Argentière-la-Bessée
2. Les Vigneaux
3. Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières
4. Vallouise-Pelvoux
5. Puy-Saint-Vincent
6. Freissinières

Altimetric profile



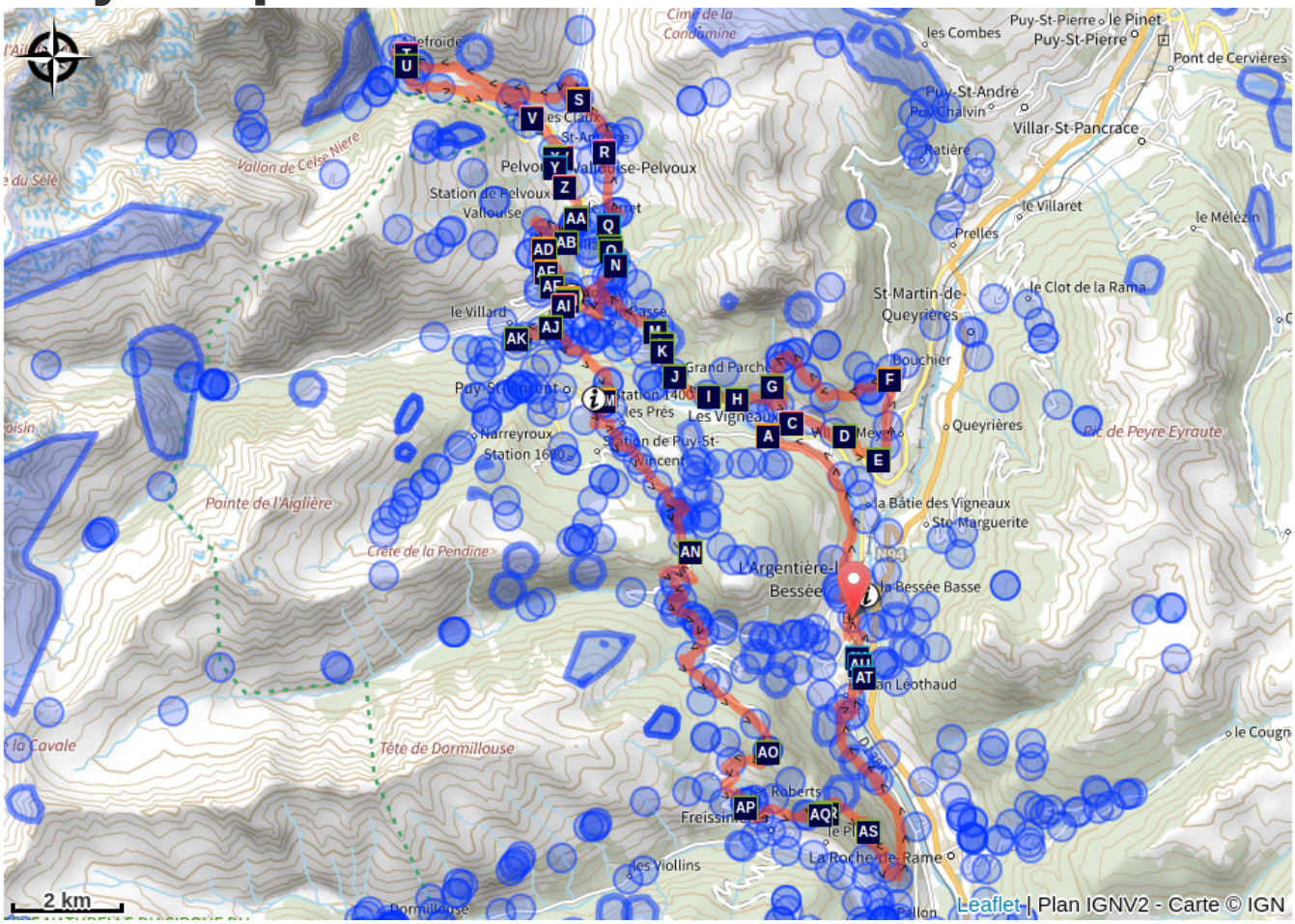
Min elevation 957 m Max elevation 1836 m

L'Argentière, the starting point of this tour, is a dynamic town which has successfully combined industrial development and the touristic promotion of its rich cultural and natural heritage. You can take advantage of its shops for your final preparations.The first stage leads to the alpine pasture hamlet of Bouchier. After following the Gyronde mountain stream and passing through the village of Les Vigneaux, the path climbs uphill offering superb views over the Queyras valley and the Briançon area. This slope faces south and it can be very hot here.The next day's stage leads to Vallouise, along the Montbrison massif. After Les Vigneaux, the view opens out over the glacial valleys of Ailefroide and the Glacier Blanc. Make the most of your stopover to visit the Park Centre ("Maison du Parc").On the route to Ailefroide from Vallouise, hikers will encounter an environment of rock and ice overlooked by legendary peaks, including the omnipresent Pelvoux.On the fourth day of your trip, you will discover hamlets which have developed tourist activity in keeping with their unique geographical situation, each in its own distinctive way.The following day, crossing over the Col de la Pousterle takes you back in a wild valley, the Fournel Valley. Then, crossing over the Col de la Lauze takes you to Freissinières with its characteristic and unspoilt landscapes.On the more technical stage 6, the path climbs up between the cliffs to the Crêtes de La Rortie and weaves between the needles of rock before starting the descent to L'Argentière.The variant will constitute a more cultural stage - its length making it challenging nevertheless - to discover the unique history of these villages perched dizzily over the Durance, and the abandoned village of Rame.

Stages :

1. From L'Argentière - La Bessée to Bouchier
   10.8 km / 728 m D+ / 4 h
2. From Bouchier to Vallouise
   11.6 km / 413 m D+ / 4 h
3. From Vallouise to Ailefroide
   9.9 km / 579 m D+ / 3 h 30
4. From Ailefroide to Puy-Saint-Vincent 1400
   16.5 km / 662 m D+ / 6 h
5. From Puy-Saint-Vincent 1400 to Freissinières
   16.0 km / 900 m D+ / 7 h
6. De Freissinières to L'Argentière-La Bessée
   13.7 km / 686 m D+ / 4 h 30

On your path...



The village of Les Vigneaux (AA)
The church in Les Vigneaux (AB)
The sundial (AC)
The western green lizard (AD)
The short-toed snake eagle (AE)
The hamlet of Bouchier (AF)
The eagles of the Tête d'Aval (AG)
Etruscan honeysuckle (AH)
On the south-facing slope, pine forest (AI)
The northern wryneck (AJ)
The Scots pine (AK)
The violet bird's-nest orchid (AL)
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The Montpellier thistle (AO)
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The role of the canals (AQ)
L'Adret (AR)
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Ailefroide (AT)
The golden eagle (AU)
The penstock pipe (AV)
The minor heritage of Pelvoux (AW)
The grey alder (AX)
The Gyr (AY)
The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (AZ)
Silver spike grass (BA)
The shrubby milkwort (BB)
The rock sparrow (BC)
The hamlet of Puy Aillaud (BD)
The chapel of Saint-Jean (BE)
The downy oak (BF)
The church in Vallouise (BG)
The lesser horseshoe bat (BH)

Vallouise (BI)
The great goldenrod (BK)
The Sentier du Facteur - the postman's path (BM)
The four-spotted chaser (BO)
The fire lily (BQ)
The bearberry (BS)
The Fournel (BU)
The northern wryneck (BJ)
The clouded Apollo (BL)
The Eurasian pygmy owl (BN)
The common redstart (BP)
The crag martin (BR)
The white water stadium (BT)
The Durance (BV)

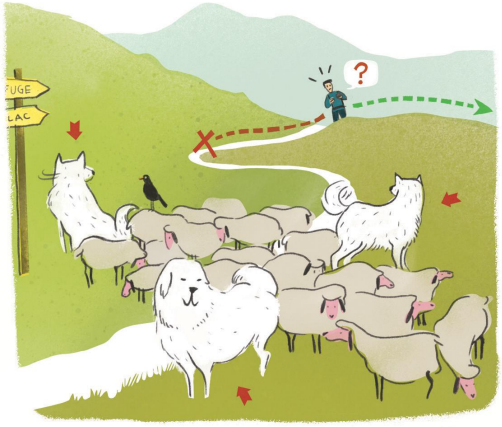
All useful information

Herd protection dogs

In mountain pastures, protection dogs are there to protect the herds from predators (wolves, etc.).

When I hike I adapt my behavior by going around the herd and pausing for the dog to identify me.

Find out more about the actions to adopt with the article "Protection dogs: a context and actions to adopt".
Tell us about your meeting by answering this survey.



Advices

Difficulty level: easy to medium, essentially due to the length of some stages.
Difficult sections on stage 6. It is possible to avoid these.
Enquire at the tourist offices about snow conditions on the Ailefroide stage and the mountain pass crossings before setting out.
There are some ford crossings which could present problems in heavy rain storms.

How to come ?

Transports

Gare SCNF de l'Argentière-La Bessée : L'Argentière-les-Écrins
Réseau de transport régional Sud : https://zou.maregionsud.fr/
Possibilités de navettes estivales sur le parcours (plus d'informations sur le site de l'office de tourisme https://www.paysdesecrins.com/)

Access

N94 road from Gap or Briançon

Advised parking

Train station carpark

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 !

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

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 300m sol quand vous la survolez soit 1650m d'altitude pour cette zone.

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

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

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 1945m d’altitude à une distance de 300m sol.

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 1790m d'altitude !

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

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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 !

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

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Merci d’essayer d’éviter la zone ou de rester à un distance minimale de 300m sol quand vous la survolez soit 1525m 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/

Bureau d'Information Touristique de Puy Saint Vincent 1400

110 route des Alberts - Station 1400, 05290 Puy Saint Vincent 1400 m
Tel : +33(0)4 92 23 35 80
https://www.puysaintvincent.com/office-tourisme

Bureau d'Information Touristique de Vallouise

Place de l'Eglise, 05340 Vallouise

contact@paysdesecrins.com
Tel : +33(0)4 92 23 36 12
https://www.paysdesecrins.com/

Source

Parc national des Ecrins

https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr

On your path...

The village of Les Vigneaux (AA)

In spite of the altitude, the region's dry climate and the local growing conditions of limestone and sediments facing due south made the planting of grapevines possible as far back as the tenth century. The municipality owes its name to the presence of these vineyard operations, which were very significant in the late nineteenth century. The almost simultaneous appearance of the phylloxera aphid and the Briançon train, bringing wine from Provence, spelled the end of this activity here.

Attribution : Blandine Reynaud - PDE

The church in Les Vigneaux (AB)

The church of Saint-Laurent with its elegant porch dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. On its south wall there are frescoes depicting the vices, dragged towards hell by a demon, and their punishments. Enough to make you shudder! Its Lombard Romanesque bell tower has a very rare one-handed clock dating from the eighteenth century. It is one of the oldest working clocks of its type.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The sundial (AC)

The sundial is an eighteenth-century tradition widespread across the Southern Alps where the sun is ever-present. Artisan sundial makers produced these sundials, which were added as a decoration to house fronts, religious buildings or, as here, a tower. The sayings inscribed on them make some of these artistic works philosophical as well as decorative.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The western green lizard (AD)

Very shy, this large lizard quickly takes refuge beneath a bush or stone, or among the tangled branches of a hedge when it senses danger. It is on average 30 cm in length and it is bright green slightly speckled with black. During the mating season, the male presents a bright blue colouring on his throat and on the sides of his head. It lives on sunny south-facing slopes, in uncultivated areas and forest edges, where it feeds primarily on insects.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The short-toed snake eagle (AE)

In March, this large brown bird of prey, brown on its upperside, white speckled with black on its underside and a dark head, returns from Sub-Saharan Africa where it has spent the winter. It feeds primarily on reptiles which its hunts in steppe or barren areas, derelict sites or stony terrain. It builds its nest in a pine tree where it will rear a single chick. It can often be seen hovering in the air, thirty or so metres above the ground, and then swooping down on its prey.

Attribution : Marc Corail - Parc national des Écrins

The hamlet of Bouchier (AF)

Bouchier is a small hamlet in the municipality of Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières, which has a few permanent inhabitants in spite of its relatively inaccessible location. Standing a little apart from the hamlet, on a promontory overlooking the Durance valley, the chapel of Saint-Hippolyte dates from the early sixteenth century. It was built against what used to be a hermit's cell, and contains frescoes some of which relate the miraculous cures performed by the saint. It drew ailing people who flocked here to seek his intercession.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The eagles of the Tête d'Aval (AG)

Eagles can be seen gliding around the Tête d'Aval. In the hottest part of the day, they circle on the thermals rising above the limestone cliffs. Having gained height in this way, they can reach their hunting territory without having to flap their wings.

Attribution : Pascal Saulay - Parc national des Écrins

Etruscan honeysuckle (AH)

Etruria was the territory of the Etruscans, in the area of present-day Tuscany. Although this honeysuckle does not grow only in Tuscany, it is Mediterranean, however, and only grows naturally in the wild in the southern half of France. Being a plant that needs warmth, it does not grow at altitude, except here where the south-facing slopes are particularly dry and warm. Its large pink and yellow flowers are highly perfumed.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

On the south-facing slope, pine forest (AI)

The track passes through a forest of Scots pines, mixed with some downy oak trees. It is a forest typical of those found in the lower south-facing slopes (those exposed to the sun) in the intra-alpine valleys.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

The northern wryneck (AJ)

In the spring, an odd song can be heard among the old trees in the orchard, a loud song similar to that of the green woodpecker, only slower. It is that of the northern wryneck. This bird owes its name to the extreme way it extends and twists its neck when it feels threatened. Its French name torcol fourmilier is a reference to the fact that it feeds on ants (fourmils in French). Difficult to spot because its plumage merges into the colour of the tree trunks, it gives its presence away by its song when it returns from its migration.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The Scots pine (AK)

A long trunk that is reddish-brown towards the top, sparse foliage, grey-green needles grouped in pairs... It has to be the Scots pine. Happy in poor soil, this softwood tree can withstand below-zero temperatures as well as summer droughts, and so it is very common in intra-alpine valleys with a continental climate, like the Vallouise.

Attribution : Christian Baïsset - Parc national des Écrins

The violet bird's-nest orchid (AL)

In the pine forest undergrowth stands a large, completely purple orchid. It has no leaves, just a few whitish scales on the stem. Lacking chlorophyll (the green plant pigment which plays a role in photosynthesis, the process that allows the production of organic matter), it lives as a parasite on tree roots.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The black woodpecker (AM)

Sporting a black cap, the black woodpecker is the biggest of the woodpecker family. Wary and solitary, it is difficult to spot, but its strident calls give its presence away. It feeds mainly on ants and insects living in dead trees, which it extracts by hammering into the wood. It hollows out a nest hole in trees. Once the young have left the nest, it may be taken over by owls or forest-dwelling bats.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - Parc national des Écrins

Mountain land rehabilitation projects (AN)

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 (AO)

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 (AP)

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 (AQ)

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 (AR)

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 (AS)

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 (AT)

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

The golden eagle (AU)

A pair of eagles lives in the Ailefroide valley. Every pair has a very large hunting territory, which means there can be no more than one pair in a small valley of this size. This pair has built several eyries in the cliff walls around Ailefroide: just one is occupied every year, after a few refurbishments. The eyries are located at the lower altitudes of the hunting territory, so that the eagles can easily bring heavy prey back to the eaglet.

Attribution : Pascal Saulay - Parc national des Écrins

The penstock pipe (AV)

This penstock pipe carries water to the Le Claux hydroelectric power plant, located just below here, which exploits the water from the Les Écrins massif. The power plant was inaugurated in 1932. At the time, the electricity generated was primarily used to power the aluminium factory located in L'Argentière-La Bessée.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The minor heritage of Pelvoux (AW)

Every hamlet has its own chapel. In the territory of Pelvoux**,** Les Claux has the chapel of Sainte-Barbe with a restored sun dial dating from 1792. The seventeenth-century chapel of Saint-Pancrace is in Le Poët. In Le Sarret, you can admire the chapel of Saint-Joseph and the chapel of Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs stands in Le Fangeas. Every hamlet has its own communal oven and water fountains as well. Finally, the church of Saint-Antoine is located in the hamlet of Saint-Antoine. It has a sun dial dating from 1810.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The grey alder (AX)

In the valleys of the Alps and the Jura, the grey alder often grows in place of the black alder, present in many parts of France. Like its cousin, it grows on riversides and plays an important role in stabilising the banks. If it is cut down, its wood is bright orange in colour. But why cut it down?

Attribution : Nicollet Bernard - Parc national des Ecrins

The Gyr (AY)

Humans are decidedly bizarre animals: they build, knock down and start again. To protect the new infrastructures of Pelvoux, the Gyr was dammed. But, not able to flow as it did before, it deepened its bed, thus placing the foundations in danger of damage. And so works were carried out to widen its bed, allowing it to flow more naturally. This is also more favourable for biodiversity, as well as protecting the developed urban areas.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (AZ)

The route first leads through the small ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise, built in 1982. Very family-focused, in winter it's the ideal place for young children to learn to ski, with small lifts lower down, while their big brothers and sisters can ski higher up.

Attribution : Pelvoux Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

Silver spike grass (BA)

A grass grows in large clumps on the embankment: silver spike grass. It is adapted to stony, dry and sunny ground. Its inflorescences reflecting silvery-gold glints create a beautiful effect, but they are particularly noticeable in the late summer, when it forms large shimmering bouquets in the evening sunlight.

Attribution : Nicolas Marie-Geneviève - Parc national des Écrins

The shrubby milkwort (BB)

The shrubby milkwort grows in the undergrowth. This creeping sub-shrub has glossy oval leaves, similar to box leaves. The flowers are white and orangey yellow. Common in the Alps, it grows in open woods and dry forests.

Attribution : Jean-Pierre Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The rock sparrow (BC)

A little flock of rock sparrows can often be spotted around Puy Aillaud. This large sparrow earned its French name moineau soulcie, (sourcil meaning eyebrow) because it has a large white eye-stripe. It also has a dark head, a brown back with white stripes, and a white breast and underside striped with light brown. It has a small yellow throat spot, often not visible. It is a year-round resident.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The hamlet of Puy Aillaud (BD)

Puy Aillaud is a permanently inhabited hamlet and the highest in Vallouise (1,580 m). This hamlet has preserved some beautiful traditional houses.

Attribution : Jean-Philippe Telmon - Parc national des Écrins

The chapel of Saint-Jean (BE)

Surrounded by a cemetery and with a bench installed to the front of its façade, this pretty little seventeenth century chapel has an air of peaceful tranquillity. Maybe to sit and watch the trail runners?

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The downy oak (BF)

The route leads down a warm slope, where the downy oak reigns supreme. It is a small oak tree with a twisted growth habit and with marescent leaves, that is to say, they dry out in the autumn but remain on the tree all winter. It is called "downy" because the young branches, buds and sometimes the undersides of its leaves are covered in a fine down. It is a tree that grows happily on the warm dry slopes.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

The church in Vallouise (BG)

The church of Saint-Étienne dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Inside is an altarpiece and a tabernacle in gilded wood dating from the eighteenth century, together with come mural paintings. Not far from the church stands the late sixteenth-century Chapel of the Penitents with a nineteenth-century painted facade.

Attribution : Thibaut Blais

The lesser horseshoe bat (BH)

In summer, bats take up residence in the church roof. The species living here is the lesser horseshoe bat, which has been in serious decline over recent decades. Every year, the mothers return after hibernating in caves and each one gives birth to one bat pup. Bats are insectivore mammals threatened by the insecticides used on farmland and on wooden structures and the loss of their hunting habitats and roosts, among other things. They are all protected.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

Vallouise (BI)

Multi-storey houses - typical of the architecture in the valley in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries - stand on the old village street. The ground floor was reserved for animals, the first floor for habitation and the upper floors for grain storage. People moved from one floor to another by means of balconies interconnected by a staircase. Many of these balconies are arcaded with stone columns. This type of arcaded balcony is found throughout the valley.

Attribution : Pierre Nossereau

The northern wryneck (BJ)

The old trees in the orchard are home to the northern wryneck. It has a loud song, rather like that of the green woodpecker, only slower. This bird owes its name to the extreme way it extends and twists its neck when it feels threatened. Its French name torcol fourmilier is a reference to the fact that it feeds on ants (fourmils in French). Difficult to spot because its plumage merges into the colour of the tree trunks, it gives its presence away by its song when it returns from its migration.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The great goldenrod (BK)

In damp spots on the edge of the track, swathes of tall plants grow. It forms great plumes of tiny yellow plants. The great goldenrod, still known as the tête d'or or "head of gold" is a plant native to North America and introduced into Europe in the eighteenth century as an ornamental. Since then, it has colonised a large are of Europe and in some places it even competes with the local flora.

Attribution : Cédric Dentan - Parc national des Écrins

The clouded Apollo (BL)

This butterfly with hyaline (glass-like) translucent white wings, marked with two black spots, flutters around the clearing or the edges of the forest, where the host plants of its caterpillars grow: the corydalis. Although abundant locally, it is nevertheless a species in sharp decline and is protected.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The Sentier du Facteur - the postman's path (BM)

In former times, the postman would take this path every day: He would set out from Vallouise, deliver letters in Puy-Saint-Vincent and drop back down to Vallouise, stopping at the hamlets of Parcher on the way. In the winter, when the snow was too deep, the Traversouires (the inhabitants of Puy-Saint-Vincent) donned their snowshoes and wielded their shovels to clear the postman's path down to Vallouise.

Attribution : Christophe Albert - Parc national des Écrins

The Eurasian pygmy owl (BN)

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 in which it builds its nest.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The four-spotted chaser (BO)

Dragonflies can be seen gliding around the lake One of them is relatively easy to identify: the four-spotted chaser. It is called this because there is a spot on each of its four wings. The female lays her eggs on floating vegetation and the larvae are aquatic. The dragonfly feeds primarily on mosquitoes and midges which it catches in mid-air. The male and female also mate while in flight... A real acrobat!

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The common redstart (BP)

The common redstart can be told apart from its cousin, the black redstart by its white eyebrow (hence its French name which is translated as "white-browed redstart") and its orange breast. At least for the male, since the female of both birds is duller and brownish, but the female common redstart also has an orangey tail. It returns from Africa in early April and searches the areas to find a hollow in a tree or in an old wall where it builds its nest.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The fire lily (BQ)

In June and early July, the rocks are brightened up here and there by large orange flowers: the fire lily is a splendid plant which grows in the mountains of Europe. It grows in rocky or bush-covered terrain and even - why not? - right on the cliff faces, in dry areas. It is a protected species.

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - Parc national des Écrins

The crag martin (BR)

The birds that are constantly swooping around the cliff are crag martins. They are brown with a beige underside. They have built their nests under small overhangs. This species is very common in the Alps. Partially migratory, crag martins return to the Mediterranean coast in winter, where they join resident populations. So it is the first bird to reappear in the valleys of the Pays des Écrins in late February and the last to leave in October!

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The bearberry (BS)

The floor of the pine forest is carpeted by a creeping sub-shrub with glossy oval evergreen leaves. In spring, the bearberry produces small bell-shaped flowers which are white and edged with pink. They will turn into red berries, edible but floury. Bears love them, hence their name. It is a drought-tolerant plant.

Attribution : Cédric Dentan - Parc national des Écrins

The white water stadium (BT)

As part of its restructuring after the closure of the industrial site, the town of L'Argentière-la-Bessée opted for sports tourism, exploiting the natural elements present on the site, that is to say, water. Standing at the beginning of the longest navigable section of the Durance river, in 1993 the municipality decided to establish itself as a major white water centre by creating this stadium which covers a 400-metre stretch. So thanks to its reputation and its ideal situation, every year this stadium hosts several elite competitions at national and international level.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The Fournel (BU)

The source of the Fournel rises in the Fournel valley, in the heart of the Parc National des Écrins, and flows into the Durance near the white water stadium. It is known as a high alpine canyon offering lots of sport and leisure possibilities, and is the most popular in the Haut Val Durance. It is ideal for an introduction to vertical activities, in particular thanks to the presence of several jumps, toboggan runs and rappel sites. Access is authorised from April to October and is regulated because it is located upstream from an EDF water intake, which presents a real hazard.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The Durance (BV)

The Durance is the biggest river in Provence. Its source rises in the municipality of Montgenèvre at an altitude of 2,390 metres, and it flows down to meet the Rhône to the south of Avignon. This is a "pluvio-nival" river, that is to say, its flow depends on the natural addition of water due to snowmelt and rainfall. It thus constitutes a real playground for kayakers from across Europe.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins