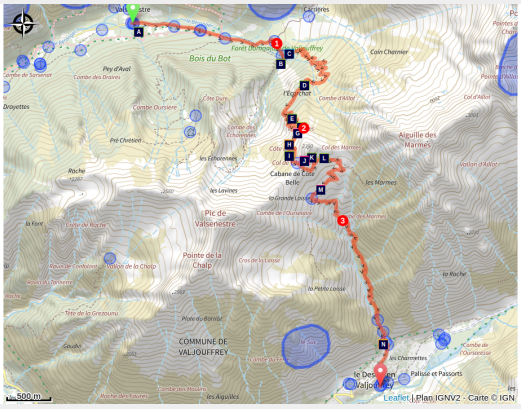
# From Valsenestre to Désert-en-Valjouffray

Valbonnais

Côte-Belle (Christophe Albert - PNE)




*The hight of this stage is definitively the arrival at the limestone columns of Valsenestre, flakes of limestone and a veritable geological curiosity.*

This stage leads to the Côte-Belle pass via a winding path. With plenty of shade and flowers in summer, this ascent is an opportunity to cross different natural environments, revealing the adaptation of vegetation to the ground and altitude. Before descending to the Désert, enjoy the view of Valsenestre limestone columns , which give the impression of arriving on another planet.

## Useful information

Practice : By walk

Duration : 6 h

Length : 11.3 km

Trek ascent : 989 m

Difficulty : Medium

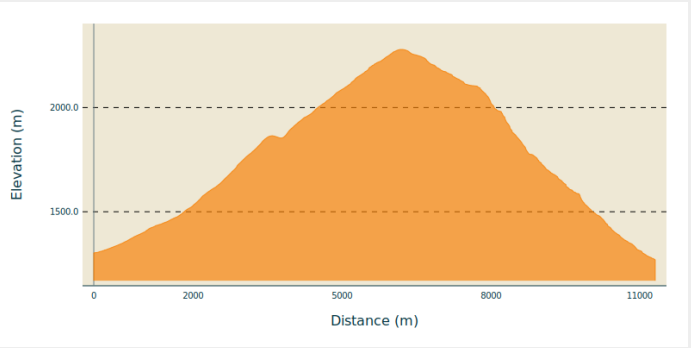
Type : Stage

Themes : Fauna, Flora, Geology

# Trek

**Departure** : Valsenestre
**Arrival** : Le Désert-en-Valjouffray
**Cities** : 1. Valjouffrey

## Altimetric profile

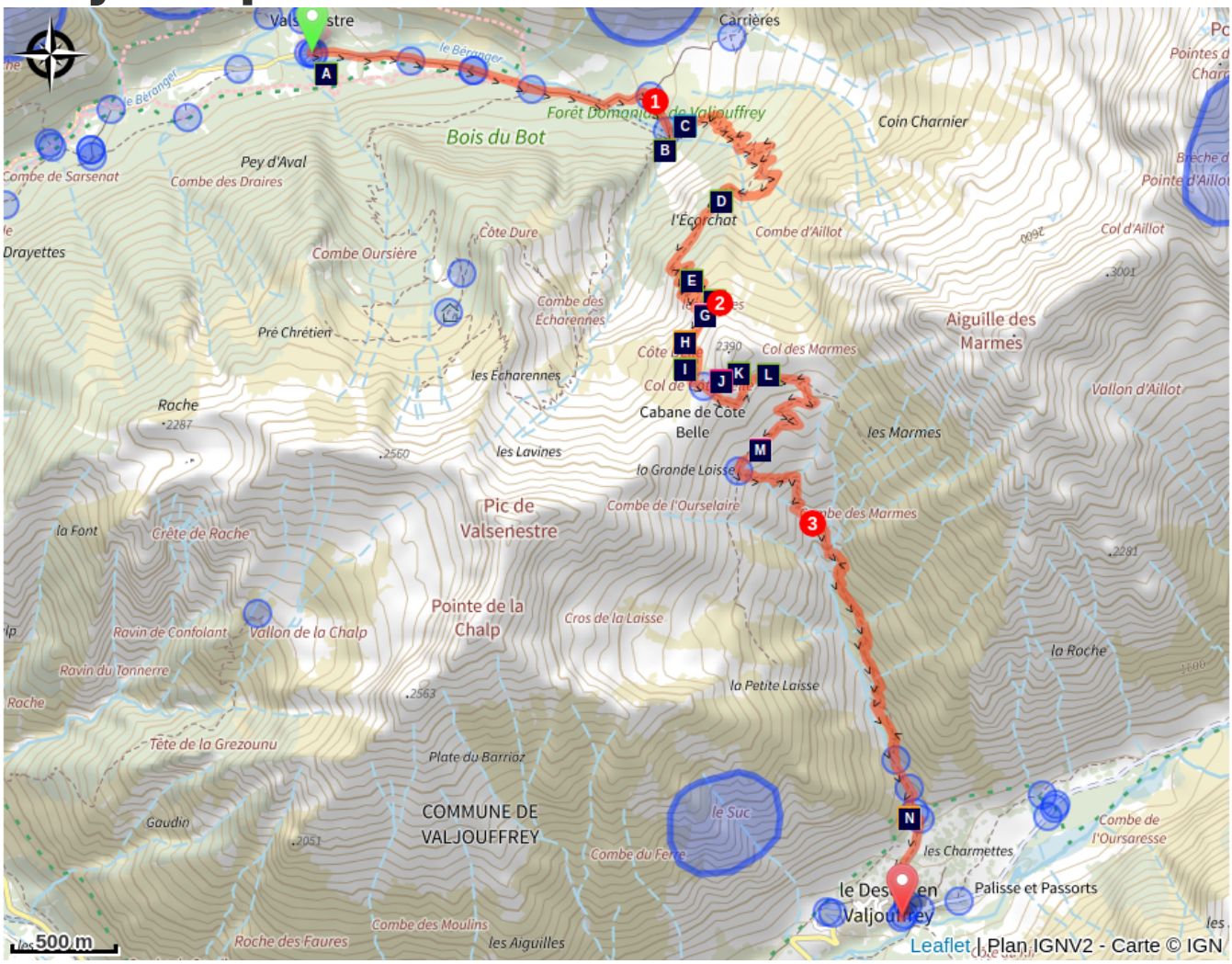



Min elevation 1269 m  Max elevation 2279 m

From Valsenestre, follow the track along the Torrent du Béranger, past the boundary of the National Park and on to the Pont des Touches.

1. Follow the path to a fork in the road and take the right-hand branch. The path enters a small coniferous wood, then runs alongside the stream at the bottom of the gorge, eventually diverging to the left as it gains altitude. Continue into the forest on a winding path up to the limestone columns of Valsenestre.
2. Wide switchbacks take you to the pass and its panoramic views. The descent to Le Désert follows a path through old meadows.
3. A narrow gorge leads to the torrent de la Laisse, past a paravalanche. Continue on to the village of Le Désert-en-Valjouffrey.

# On your path...




- Natural Hayfields (A)
- Timber dams (C)
- Pleurospermum austriacum (E)
- Côte Belle organs (G)
- European violet willow (I)
- Edelweiss (K)
- New path (M)
- Tall herb fringe communities (B)
- Monkshood (D)
- Alpine columbine (F)
- Flock of sheep (H)
- Landscape of the cirque de Valsenestre (J)
- Viviparous Lizard (L)
- Paravalanche (N)

# All useful information

## Is in the midst of the park

The national park is an unrestricted natural area but subjected to regulations which must be known by all visitors.

# 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

## Information desks

**Maison du Parc du Valbonnais**
Place du Docteur Eyraud, 38740
Entraigues

valbonnais@ecrins-parcnational.fr
Tel : 04 76 30 20 61
http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/

## Source

Parc national des Ecrins

https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr

# On your path...

## Natural Hayfields (A)

Agricultural specialists consider a meadow as natural if it has not been ploughed or fertilised over the last ten years. This is the case for those that you will see, surrounded by hedges, at the start of the hike. The meadows have an important variety of plant life and consequently attract multitudes of pollinating insects, including domesticated bees of course.

Attribution : Marc Corail - PNE

## Tall herb fringe communities (B)

Tall herb fringe communities form a landscape linked to very precise conditions in terms of climate (wet summers and snowy winters), topography (long ubac slopes where névé sometimes remains on the ground deep into the summer), altitude (subalpine tier from 1600 to 2100 metres) and soil (unsaturated soils with large water reserves).

Attribution : Pierre-Emmanuel Dequest -PNE

## Timber dams (C)

In the Combe des Echarennes, as you take the path to the left, you can see, in the gorges of the Béranger mountain stream, wooden dams made by the RTM (mountain terrain restoration department of the National Forests Office) to hold back the flow of debris carried down from the mountains during heavy rain and floods.

Attribution : Samy Jendoubi - PNE

## Monkshood (D)

This is a typical plant in tall herb fringe communities, measuring 50 to 100 cm. It has royal blue flowers shaped like helmets and grouped together in loose bunches. Their particularity is that they are highly toxic! Herbivores are aware of this and don’t eat them.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - PNE

## Pleurospermum austriacum (E)

This robust hardy perennial with a thick, hollow and grooved stalk belongs to the parsley and carrot family, and can grow from 60 to 150 cm high. Its large umbels of white flowers bloom from July to September. Very little known, in France it only grows in the Alpine areas and for this reason is worthy of attention.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet

## Alpine columbine (F)

This is an uncommon and protected species, measuring 30 to 60 cm. The flowers are quite large and have a magnificent blue colour, blossoming at the head of the stem, and are the only ones with afive petals in the corolla. They are not to be confused with the common columbine, which has smaller flowers and is more widespread.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - PNE

## Côte Belle organs (G)

A striking geological phenomenon, the big organs , also known as the big library, were formed when the Alps were born. They were formed by thin grey-blue limestone sheets and by more highly eroded soft schistose marl. A series of perpendicular cracks in the layers divide the slabs into remarkable columns.

Attribution : Jonathan Le Roi - PNE

## Flock of sheep (H)

A flock of sheep belonging to local farmers graze at the summit of the mountain pass near the Pic de Valsenestre. In summer these animals with their thick woolly coats can enjoy the shade of the willows that you can see just before arriving at the col (alt. 2220 m).

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - PNE

## European violet willow (I)

This is a shrub in the subalpine tier. It is less than one metre tall and grows in small groups on the ubac. At lower altitude, it may grow taller. You can recognise it from a distance through its characteristic shiny, silvery colour and its growth in circular beds. Adult leaves feel very silky on both sides.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - PNE

## Landscape of the cirque de Valsenestre (J)

From the mountain pass, climb the little summit above to better see the landscape which shows the cirque de Valsenestre : on the left is the Signal du Lauvitel (2901m) and the Clapier du Perron (3169m), the mountain pass at Muzelle (2613m) where the GR54 is. At this level you can really see a geological fault separating the Grandes Rousses which are granite from the Muzelle block in gneiss. On the right, the principal summits are the Roche de la Muzelle (3465 m), and the pointe Swan (3294m). Le col de Côte-Belle separates the Pic de Valsenestre (2752m) on the left from the l'Aiguille des Marmes (3046 m) on the right.

Attribution : Christophe Albert - PNE

## Edelweiss (K)

In Latin léontopodium signifies the foot of the lion which is the general shape of the edelweiss. By looking at it closely, you realize that it is not one flower but a group of 5 to 10 flowers grouped in a flower head. The edelweiss is in the astéracées family like dandelions. It is a white plant, milky and perennial growing in rocky alpine meadows at subalpine level up to 2900 m. It often mixes with the Alpine Aster. The emblem of numerous guides, it symbolizes the high mountains and represents strength in the language of flowers...

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - PNE

## Viviparous Lizard (L)

The viviparous lizard can be distinguished from the wall lizard by its rounded muzzle. It is  capable of living at an altitude of 2500m and you will most often see them in the meadows. It likes to warm itself in the sun, resting on the grass or the dry moss to hunt grasshoppers, crickets or spiders. During the winter, it buries under the ground where in a lethargic state it can survive negative temperatures. The viviparous lizard is named like this because the females keep their eggs in their abdomen up until they hatch. So the young are completely formed when they are born, it is an adaptation to the cold environment.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - PNE

## New path (M)

The last section of the path allows access to the mountain pass has required numerous days of maintenance since its creation. In fact the unstable character of the soil associated with the steepness of the slope have made it necessary for the rangers to create wooden benches to contain the weight of the earth.. In Autumn 2012, it was decided to create a new section of the path by using part of a sheep track further East in the direction of the Marmes mountain pass. The work was carried out by a team creating 50 m per day during 26 days with pick-axes and courage. In total, it is a section measuring 1300 m which has been created, which makes the path less steep and much more stable.

## Paravalanche (N)

In 1961 and 1962 big avalanches descended as far as the riverbed of the Bonne, threatening the houses in the hamlet at Désert en Vajouffrey. In 1982 major works enabled the construction of a paravalanche in order to increase the safety of the hamlet and the prairies, by diverting possible threats coming from the Côte-belle valley.