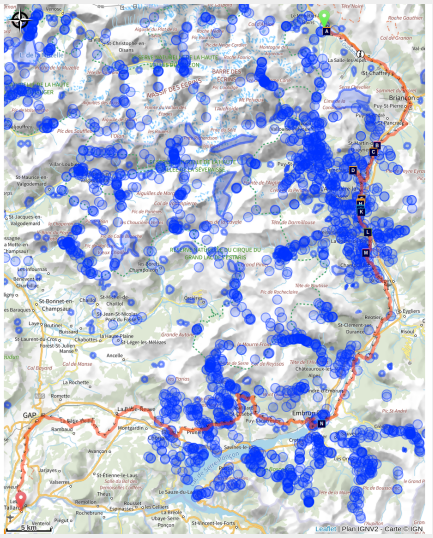
The Durance by bike

Parc national des Ecrins



The Durance by Bike is an invitation to explore the cycling route (V862) along the Durance Valley.

Between Briançon (Hautes-Alpes) and Avignon (Vaucluse), covering a distance of 438 km, the cycling route (V862) crosses 4 départements of the Région Sud over 9 stages. 5 stages cross the Département des Hautes-Alpes. Take the time to discover and savour the magnificent ever-changing landscapes, from high mountain scenery to rolling hillsides, from forests to lavender fields... Welcome to follow the course of the longest river in Provence... You can find all the information presented here on the website La Durance à Vélo.

Useful information

Practice : Cycling

Duration : 4 days

Length : 141.0 km

Trek ascent : 2356 m

Difficulty : Medium

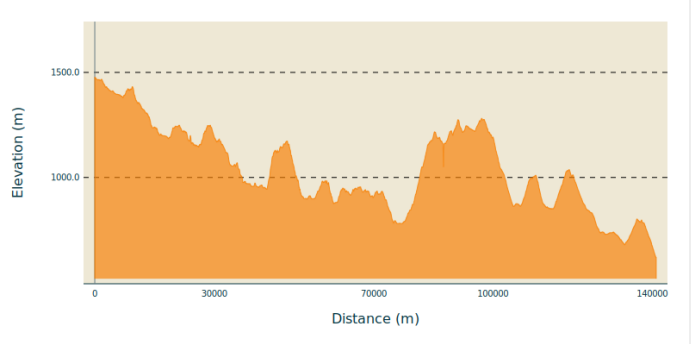
Type : Multi-day trekking

Themes : History and architecture, Lake and glacier, Panorama, Pass

Trek

Departure : Le-Monêtier-Les-Bains
Arrival : Tallard
Cities : 1. Le Monêtier-les-Bains
2. La Salle-les-Alpes
3. Saint-Chaffrey
4. Briançon
5. Villar-Saint-Pancrace
6. Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières
7. Les Vigneaux
8. L'Argentière-la-Bessée
9. Freissinières
10. Champcella
11. Saint-Crépin
12. Réotier
13. Saint-Clément-sur-Durance
14. Saint-André-d'Embrun
15. Saint-Sauveur
16. Embrun
17. Puy-Sanières
18. Puy-Saint-Eusèbe
19. Réallon
20. Savines-le-Lac
21. Saint-Apollinaire
22. Prunières
23. Chorges
24. Montgardin
25. La Bâtie-Neuve
26. Gap

Altimetric profile



Min elevation 618 m Max elevation 1477 m

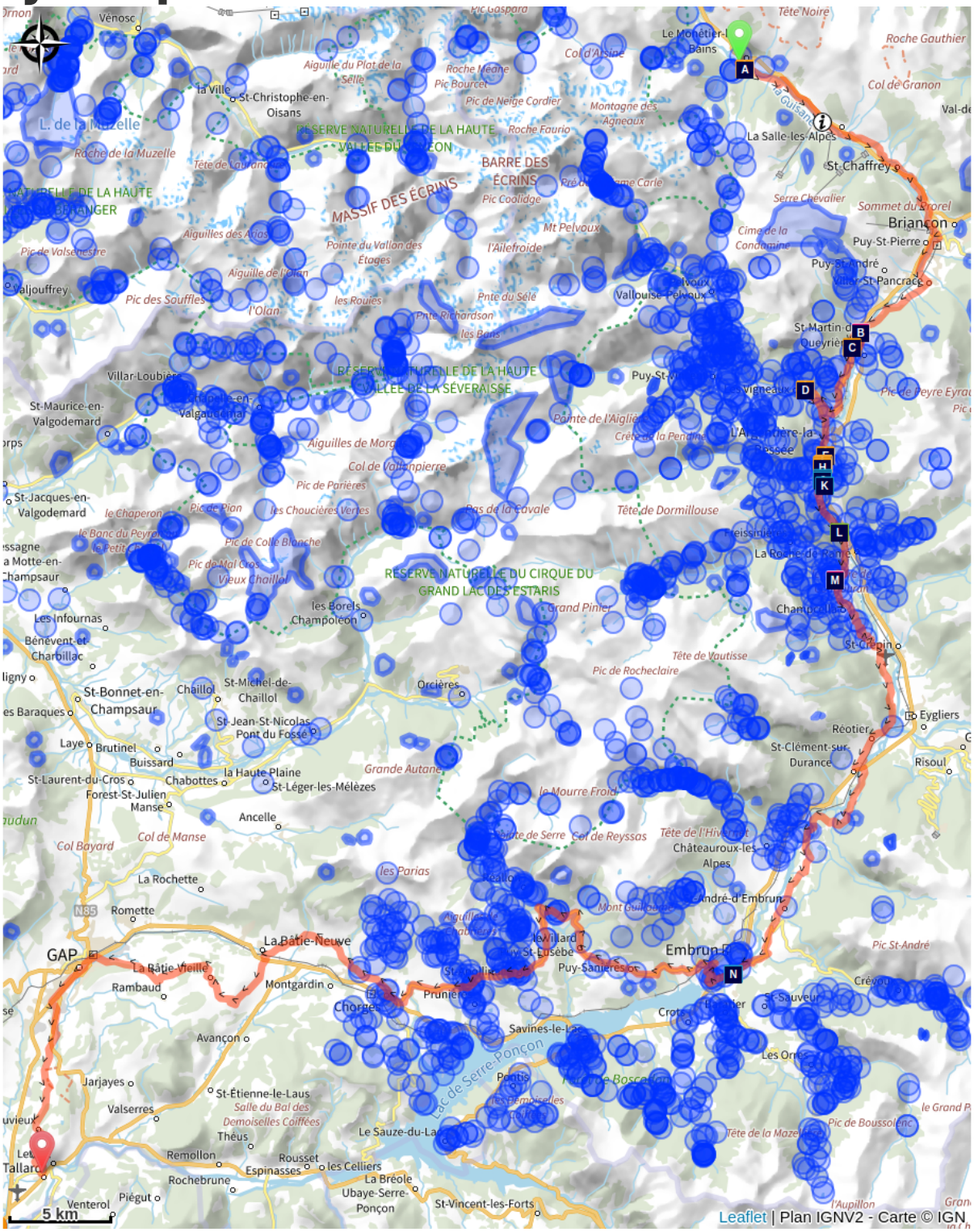
In the Hautes-Alpes, the route descends towards Briançon through the Guisane Valley to meet the course of the Durance, whose source lies upstream of the fortified city (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), on the heights of the Col du Montgenèvre, at an altitude of 2,390 m. The cycling route then follows the Durance through high mountain landscapes as far as Embrun, via the citadel of Mont-Dauphin, then along a balcony overlooking Lac de Serre-Ponçon, before heading towards Gap and then Sisteron.

The mountain scenery gradually gives way to agricultural plains, orchards and lavender fields. A cycling route that passes through remarkable historical sites and unique landscapes offering exceptional biodiversity, as well as several regional towns, making it suitable for daily commuting needs as well. A good number of railway stations are also spread along the route, including several in the upper Durance valley, offering an alternative means of ensuring continuity for all.

Stages :

1. The Durance by Bike Stage 1: Le Monêtier-les-Bains - L'Argentière-la-Bessée
   38.2 km / 395 m D+ / 2 h
2. Durance by bike Stage 2 : L'Argentière-la-Bessée - Embrun
   40.7 km / 681 m D+ / 2 h
3. La Durance by Bike : Embrun – Chorges
   28.3 km / 804 m D+ / 3 h
4. La Durance by Bike: Chorges – Tallard
   38.7 km / 1502 m D+ / 2 h

On your path...



- The Serre Chevalier resort (A)
- The quartzite and the ripple marks (B)
- The Resourcerie (C)
- Images of the grapevine (D)
- The vertical compressor (E)
- Louis Leprince-Ringuet and L'Argentière (F)
- The Péchiney factory (G)
- Former industrial area of L'Argentière-la-Bessée (H)
- The Durance (I)
- The Fournel (J)

The white water stadium (K)
A Medieval tsunami? (M)
The black kite (L)
The Durance (N)

All useful information

Advices

Waymarking : The route is continuously waymarked from Briançon to Sisteron with standard cycling route signage featuring the "Durance à Vélo" logo.

Surface / Safety : The Durance by Bike is a cycling route that follows a network of paved secondary roads. You will be sharing the road with motor vehicles. This is not a dedicated cycle path itinerary.

Gear

To ride comfortably on the road, appropriate equipment is essential. Whether it comes to tyres, mechanical components or clothing, choose according to your level and the ride ahead. From non-superfluous accessories such as saddle bags and components to improve your pedalling, to outfits suited to road cycling, neither the cyclist's gear nor the bike's equipment should be left to chance. Specific road cycling equipment is designed and built for this discipline. Cycling shorts, jerseys, gloves, glasses and helmets specifically designed for road cycling are strongly recommended.

How to come ?

Transports

Train: The TER network in the Hautes-Alpes offers the following stations (from North to South):

Briançon
L'Argentière-La-Bessée
Montdauphin-Guillestre
Embrun
Chorges
Gap
Sisteron
Bus: The LER network of the Région Sud Zou

Access

The Durance by Bike follows the roads below (from North to South):

D1091 (between Le Monêtier-les-Bains and Briançon)
N94 (between Briançon and Gap)
N85 (between Gap and Sisteron)

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 un distance minimale 300m sol quand vous la survolez 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 1710m d’altitude à une distance de 300m sol.

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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 !

Short-toed snake eagle

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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 1410m d'altitude !

Short-toed snake eagle

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

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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 1310m d'altitude !

Information desks

Office de Tourisme serre Chevalier Vallée Briançon
Centre commercial Prélong, 05240 La Salle les Alpes

contact@serre-chevalier.com
Tel : 04 92 24 98 98
https://www.serre-chevalier.com

Source

Pays des Ecrins

https://www.paysdesecrins.com

Serre-Ponçon

https://www.serreponcon.com

On your path...

The Serre Chevalier resort (A)

At the edge of the Ecrins National Park, the Serre Chevalier ski resort extends over several towns and villages on the right bank of the Guisane, from Monêtier-les-Bains to Briançon. Founded in 1941 with the Chantemerle cable car, it has the biggest ski area in the southern Alps with 61 ski lifts on all levels from an altitude of 1,200 m to 2,830 m to Pic de l'Yret (Le Monêtier-les-Bains). The resort’s logo is an eagle, in reference to Baron Borel du Bez, Briançon’s representative in 1792 at the Legislative Assembly, which ruled France between 1792 and 1795, during the French Revolution. Le Bez is a hamlet in Villeneuve that was united with the Chantemerle ski resort in the 1970s.

Attribution : © Parc national des Écrins - Jean-Pierre Nicollet

The quartzite and the ripple marks (B)

The rock through which the tunnel has been cut is a quartzite, a metamorphic, siliceous rock which is very hard and formed by grains of quartz welded together. It originates from sand deposited 230 million years ago in the still-shallow waters of the nascent Alpine ocean, and brought here by the erosion of the surrounding topography. In places, undulations can be seen on the tunnel wall: these are ripple marks, "fossilised" creased created by water flowing over the sand.

Attribution : Jean-Pierre Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The Resourcerie (C)

This former school has acquired a new function: that of giving new life to obsolete furniture and objects. The Resourcerie reclamation and repurposing centre makes new objects out of other, unwanted items. No new raw materials are used in their production, thereby helping to prevent the accumulation of waste. Eco-friendly and sustainable, the reclamation and repurposing centre reduces waste and creates employment.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Images of the grapevine (D)

Les Vigneaux owes its name to the vine cultivation once plied on its hillsides. The grapevine is also depicted on the town's coat of arms, which has a vineplant, and also on the traditional houses with vine trellises. Houses with grape presses are also a reminder of the importance of the grapevine.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The vertical compressor (E)

In 1910, a 22-year-old engineer, Gilbert Planche arrived in L'Argentière-La Bessée to take advantage of the water here and open a large aluminium factory.

The vertical compressor is the forerunner of the pneumatic drill. The mine operators needed a large quantity of coal and compressed air helped to accelerate coal output. In 1852, Swiss physicist Jean-Daniel Colladon invented the pneumatic drill. The vertical compressor enabled the production of compressed air which powered a drill and simplified coal excavation. The compressor is placed vertically on its support, hence its name.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Louis Leprince-Ringuet and L'Argentière (F)

Louis Leprince-Ringuet was the director of the Physics Laboratory of X ("X" being a polytechnic school in Villeurbanne) established in L'Argentière. During the summer of 1942, he took in several Jewish students, thus saving them from the Nazis and deportation to Auschwitz. A panel presents the discoveries made by Louis Leprince-Ringuet in this laboratory. A text by Bernard Lévi is also displayed. As a young Jewish student, he took part in research at the laboratory during the summer of 1942. In it he thanks the scientific team for helping him to escape the anti-Semitic barbarism.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The Péchiney factory (G)

This French electro metal company established itself in L'Argentière in 1907. The construction of the aluminium factory started in 1909 and it opened its doors in 1910, powered by the electricity plant built by Gilbert Planche. With it, L'Argentière became an industrial town. The economic crisis of the 1970s and the rise of foreign sources of supply led to the factory's closure in 1985. It was partially demolished in 1988. The workers left the town and in order to prevent the abandonment of L'Argentière, a restructuring project was launched.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Former industrial area of L’Argentière-la-Bessée (H)

On the two walls of these now-disused industrial structures, you can read the history of L’Argentière-la-Bessée. The town is marked by its industrial past, in particular by the presence of a hydroelectric power station built between 1907 and 1909 to harness the power of the mountain waterfalls. At the time, it was the most powerful power station in Europe. Other industries were also established here, like the Société du Quartz Fondu fused quartz works and the aluminium factory which provided livelihoods for a large number of workers.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The Durance (I)

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

The Fournel (J)

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 white water stadium (K)

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 black kite (L)

A bird of prey circles slowly above the valley. It is dark coloured with a slightly forked tail. A black kite, which returned from Africa in spring. It feeds on carrion or scraps as well as fish. It is easy to confuse with the red kite which is brown, red and white and its tail has a much more pronounced fork. The red kite does not nest here in the massif. It is only seen during the migration period, in the Durance valley.

Attribution : Combrisson Damien - Parc national des Écrins

A Medieval tsunami? (M)

Pallon marks the entrance to the ancient glacial valley of Freissinières, enclosed behind a bar of hard rock. As they melted, the glaciers left behind a lake, trapped by this bar. It is said that this natural dam has been breached on numerous occasions. In the Middle Ages, suddenly released into the Gourfouran gorge, the water is said to have laid ruin to the village of Rame, standing on the plain.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The Durance (N)

The Durance is the most important river in Provence and the third largest tributary of the Rhône, behind the Saône and the Isère. It rises in the Hautes-Alpes in the municipality of Montgenèvre and is soon joined by the Clarée and Guisane rivers, which flow past it despite being longer and having a greater flow at the confluence point. The Durance valley has been a major communication route for centuries, and its capricious nature has been controlled by the artificial lake at Serre-Ponçon and a canal running downstream. The old proverb from the Ancien Régime, which once claimed that "the three scourges of Provence are the Mistral, the Durance and Parliament", has now been forgotten, and the Durance now brings nothing but life to the land it irrigates.

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Attribution : Agence Kros_Rémi Fabrègue