



Le Mercantour
Parc National

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Mercantour
national
Park*

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The flora is magnificent, but not in a vase.



Dogs are our friends ... if they stay outside the Park.



Where there's smoke there's fire. Please be careful.



Follow the marked paths unless accompanied by an approved guide.



The Park is a paradise for hunters ... of images only.



The only way you are allowed to get around in the Park is on foot.



Animals produce waste. Humans do not have this privilege here.



Nature is rich in sounds. We do not have to add our own.

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The National Park, a place like no other

A national Park is an area which has been recognised for its exceptional biodiversity, scenic wonder, and heritage. It is a designation which guarantees national and international recognition of its treasures and serves to ensure that the area is preserved to the highest degree possible, so that it can be passed on to future generations. A national Park is a territory that is defined by the communities of which it is made up (the Mercantour consists of 28 of them). Its mission is to understand and protect nature and landscapes, as well as to preserve the heritage which earned it its classification as a national Park.

A national Park also has a responsibility to “share its uniqueness” by making the public aware of the need to protect the environment. It does this by disseminating knowledge and encouraging people to explore. The territories of France’s Parks are managed by public administrative bodies, under the aegis of the Ministry of Ecology.

The core zone: a higher standard

The core zone is the regulated section of the Park. It aims to provide the highest standard of protection for its natural, cultural and scenic heritage. However, it is also an asset shared by lo-

cal interests, visitors, and more generally by anyone who might benefit from it directly or indirectly.

Our objective as the administrators of this space is to preserve the core zone, for the long term, as an area of exceptional biodiversity, with a unique character and way of life.

We are all invited to help fulfil this grand ambition by encouraging exploration imbued with respect.


The partnership zone, a commitment for the future

The ideal partnership zone, covering over 2000 km², includes the entire area of the Park communities (apart from the core zone) which have been invited to subscribe to the charter. For these communities, partnership involves significant responsibilities, involving the acceptance of shared objectives for the area’s sustainable development which strike a balance between nature, culture, human activity, quality of life and scenic beauty. This is a long-term project which must be shared by the Park, its inhabitants and the local authorities, in the form of a charter with a duration of between twelve and fifteen years.

The Mercantour National Park

“My love of nature was born in the Mercantour National Park when I was a child. Today I explore the depths of the Mediterranean, but I often go up to the Park’s summits to seek the balance and energy of nature which enable me to dive even deeper.”

*Guillaume Nery
World free diving champion*



With peaks reaching over 3000 m, many glacial lakes, and six valleys, each with its unique character, Mercantour National Park is a jewel of preserved nature, just one hour away from the sea.

Chronology of the Park : principal dates

Victor-Emmanuel II, then Prince of Piedmont and King of Sardinia, soon to become King of Italy, creates a “royal game reserve” between the Argentera and Vésubie.

1858

The former Italian reserves are again established in France, accompanied by the simultaneous creation of the “reserve de chasse du Boréon” (Boréon game reserve).

The same year in which the first law on National Parks was issued, the Conseil Général of Alpes-Maritimes votes to create a National Park in the Mercantour.

1947

1960

The “reserve de chasse du Boréon” is expanded and becomes a national game reserve.

Creation of mainland France’s sixth and last National Park. Its birth was delayed, despite having first been proposed in 1960.

1974

1979

Twinning with the Parco delle Alpi Marittime (then known as the Parco dell’Argentera).

Wolves return naturally from Italy, without reintroduction.

1987

1993

The Park is included on the lists of candidates for the UNESCO World Heritage List (site of the Mercantour National Park and the Parco delle Alpi Marittime).

2001

A new decree modifies the 1979 founding decree.

2009

The magic of the Alps, sunny crests sweeping down toward the Mediterranean

The Mercantour peaks
seen from Antibes at dawn



*Mediterranean or alpine climate?
A complex mix of climatic influences
contributes to the uniqueness and variety
of landscapes, natural environments, and
the Park's flora and fauna.*

*The Mercantour is the last promontory
of the Alpine range, just before it descends
toward the Mediterranean Sea.*

*Exploring the Mercantour is guaranteed to
give you a permanent sense of wonder: at
each bend in the path you are greeted by
a new amazing spectacle. How can such
a variety of impressions, sensations and
landscapes be possible?*

*To find an answer, we would need to
draw from quite a few sciences: geological
formations of varied types were shaped by
the Alpine upheaval, then hollowed out
and eroded by water into deep, narrow
gorges. Anticlinal valleys were formed by
powerful glaciers, which in turn melted to*



*form strings of sparkling lakes. Climate
changes have left us with a large variety of
species which have found refuge at high
altitudes in environments similar to those
they enjoyed in the ice age.*

*The legacy of several thousand years of
human presence adds to the rich natural
surroundings, and will continue to do so in
the future. The area is seeing the inception
of numerous forward-looking activities,
a sign of its great vitality. The Park's rich
cultural heritage also receives a good deal
of attention. It is our hope that we will
be able to share this heritage with future
generations.*

An abundance of wild fauna

Chamois, ibex and mouflons live together in the craggy terrain of the mountainsides, while red deer, roe deer and wild boars roam in the forest environments at lower altitudes. Birds are also present in remarkable variety. One finds black grouse (also known as black-cock) or the grouse, also called snow partridge, the nutcracker, as well as large birds of prey such as the golden eagle; and now the bearded vulture has been gradually reintroduced with successive releases since 1993.

The fauna of the Mercantour is highly diverse, consisting of large ungulates, small mammals, birds, reptiles and insects. It is home to several hundred species, some of which are survivors of the last ice age who took refuge in the mountains where conditions of life



Apollo moth



Large fork-tail caterpillar

resemble those which were prevalent in that era.

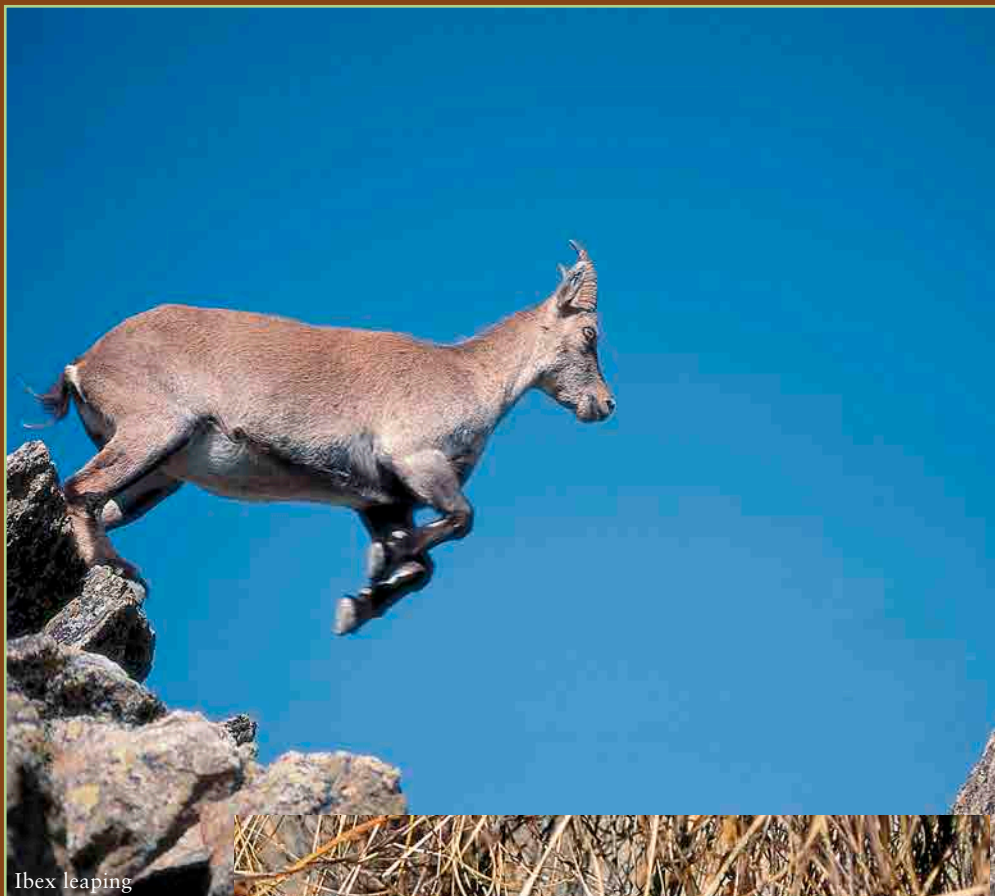
Thanks to actions taken by the Mercantour national Park and the Parco delle Alpi Marittime, these animals, some of which were on the verge of extinction (such as the emblematic ibex), are now roaming the mountains of Mercantour in large numbers. If you walk discreetly through the Park, you are sure to have the pleasure of encountering them. The wolf, which returned from its protected existence in Italy after having disappeared from France for nearly 70 years, remains very difficult to observe because of its fear of man. It began its comeback in the Mercantour massif, and has now spread to several regions of France.



Marmots



Arctic or Mountain Hare



Ibex leaping



Young wild boar



Ermine in winter



Late Spider Orchid



Mountain Cornflower



Koch's Gentians



Mountain Cornflower


Flora unique to Europe

The many climatic, geological and geographical influences create a mosaic of diverse environments with altitudes rising from 100 m to over 3000 m and have endowed the Mercantour with an exceptionally rich plant life consisting of over 2000 plant species, from a total of 4,200 species known in France. Among them, 220 are considered very rare and 40 are even classified as endemic, occurring nowhere else on Earth, such as the multi-blossomed *Saxifraga florulenta*.

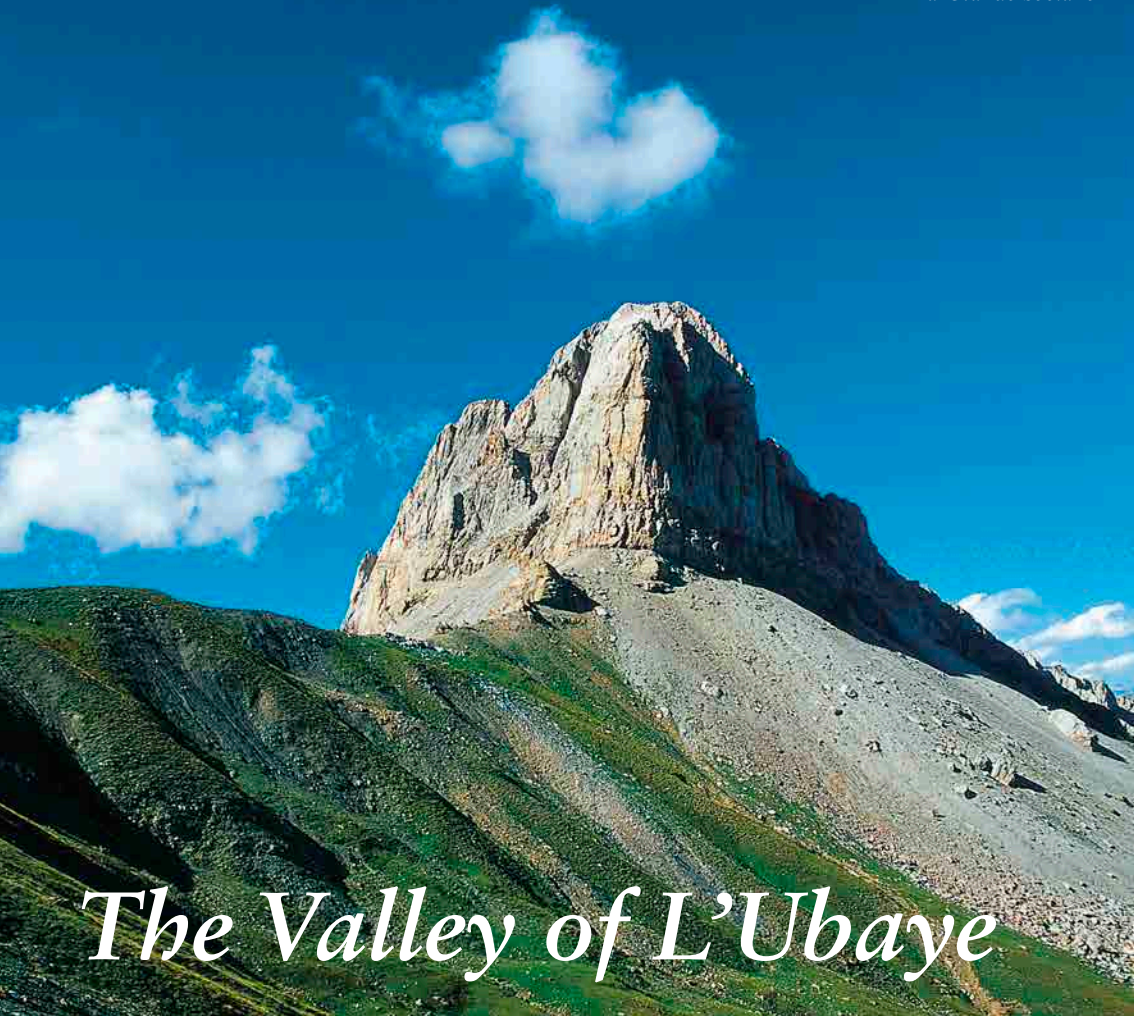
This diversity and the beauty it creates are crowned by the presence of the European Larch, one of Mercantour's true symbols, which merits its nickname "tree of light" more here than in any other place. It is the only deciduous Alpine conifer and allows a good deal of light to filter effortlessly through its foliage to benefit the many plants and flowers in the undergrowth, such as the rhododendron, myrtle and the Turk's cap lily. This tree's varying hues, ranging from a pale green in the springtime to its flamboyant colours of autumn, leave their impression on the landscapes of the Southern Alps.

The valleys

*L'Ubaye, Le Verdon (upper), Le Var (upper) et Le Cians,
La Tinée, La Vésubie and La Roya-La Bévéra.*



In close proximity to the Côte d'Azur, the valleys of the Mercantour massif give off the fragrances of the Mediterranean, Provence, the Alps and Italy. They present an astonishing abundance and diversity, with each valley having a strong character of its own.



The Valley of L'Ubaye

Peaks and dales

Where Italy meets Dauphiné and Provence, a long valley follows the Italian border for 80 km near the Col de Larche to the lac de Serre-Ponçon (Europe's largest man-made lake). Sheltered by mountains from the sea winds, the valley of L'Ubaye belongs to a range known as the "dry" Alps, or Alpes de lumière, with 300 days of sunshine and only 700 mm of annual precipitation. There is striking contrast in its landscapes, between the vast, active and welcoming basin of Barcelonnette-Jausiers and the high-perched

valleys: the upper Ubaye, Ubayette, Bachelard and Laverq, which lead to the region's highest peaks, ascending to altitudes of more than 3000 m. The valley of L'Ubaye has been able to preserve its strong identity and display its rich heritage in the museums that dot the valley. It has been the subject of much historical research into its traditional way of life, hunting and gathering, seasonal migration and the emigration of some of its people to Mexico, as well as its fortresses, frontiers, and landscapes.

The valley in brief...

Bachelard:

With its gorges and waterfalls, its larch forests and grassy slopes, Le Bachelard is an Alpine dale whose beauty can be easily observed from the *Route des Grandes Alpes*. In days gone by, life here was harsh because of the climate, the steep slopes and the isolation, and many people from the area emigrated. The road leads us to the *Col de la Cayolle*.

Alpine Ibex:

First protected in 1821 in the royal game reserve of *Grand Paradis*, the Alpine Ibex was reintroduced a century later into the Valdieri reserve, which was to become the Parco delle Alpi Marittime in 1980. Today, 1200 ibex roam the neighbouring Mercantour massif, including more than 500 in Ubaye.

Summit (2862 m) and Col de la Bonette Restefond (2802 m):

A guide table is provided to help you find your bearings in this immense panorama, which takes in the main peaks of the Southern Alps. The road pass of La Bonette is the highest in Europe. It crosses the watershed between the valleys of La

Tinée and L'Ubaye which separates Alpes-Maritimes from Alpes-de-Haute-Provence. It is also a gateway for numerous migratory birds.

Col de la Cayolle (2326 m):

Without question this is the most beautiful and unspoiled route through the Mercantour, linking the upper Var valley to the valley of L'Ubaye. A trail leading from the pass takes you, after a short walk, to a superb viewing point over the *lac d'Allos*. Descending towards Barcelonnette, you can rest at the *Refuge de la Cayolle*, which in summer serves as an information point for the Park. On the other side, towards Entraunes, you can stop at the *Refuge de la Cantonnière*.



Barcelonnette

Bearded Vulture:

The last Alpine specimen of this bird was killed at the beginning of the 20th century. Since 1962 it has enjoyed protected status and has benefited from an international reintroduction programme. The first hatching in the wild in the Southern Alps took place at Saint Paul sur Ubaye in 2008.



Alpine Sea Holly:

This plant is typically found in the hay meadows and is common to an area of 5 acres in the Lauzanier valley, the only place it is found in the Mercantour. It was saved from near-extinction





Saint Paul en Ubaye

Fortifications:

Fortifications form part of the valley's heritage and bear witness to the many conflicts which preceded today's Europe: the fort at Tournoux, as well as batteries at Mallemort and Viraysse (a veritable eagle's nest situated at 2800 m above sea level). It was the formidable firepower of these defensive emplacements which stopped the Italian offensives of June, 1940.

Helminthoid Flysch:

The Parpaillon nappe, between Jausiers and La Condamine, is made up of numerous layers of flysch (alternating layers of sandstone, limestone and clay). Among these layers, one often finds odd winding figures call helminthoids. These are simply the tracks left by some unknown animal, probably a sea worm.

Jausiers:

This village was originally formed by farming hamlets built on the slopes. Its museum gives this visitor a good understanding of Ubaye's history, way of life, and resources, notably the water used in making silk, an industry which employed several hundred people.

Larche:

This small village, situated between meadows and forests, gives the appearance of being dedicated to local and migratory stockbreeding, but in winter it becomes a small Nordic ski station. The pass of the same name leads to the Italian valley of La Stura, where it is known as the *Col de La Maddalena*.

The Mexicans of Barcelonnette:

In the 18th century, some of the valley's inhabitants emigrated to Mexico, notably to develop the wool and silk industries there. Those who achieved the greatest success returned to Ubaye and built the Barcelonnette we see today. The story of this adventurous migration is retraced and illustrated at La Sapinière, a building which houses both the valley's museum and the national Park centre.

Meyronnes:

At the foot of the "Rocher de Saint-Ours" (Rock of Saint-Ours) (3079 m), Meyronnes and the hamlet of Saint-Ours, on a sunny shelf at 1780 m, occupy a strategic position between France and Italy. This explains, on the one hand, how Saint-Ours became a place of pilgrimage for the diocese of Embrun and the valleys of Piemont, and on the other hand, why Maginot type fortifications were built by the community. The Rock of Saint-Ours, a favoured spot for ibex, chamois and rock partridge, is also equipped with a via ferrata.



Jausiers



Alpine Marmot:

The Alpine Marmot is protected in Mercantour national Park, where it has a strong presence, notably in valley of Le Lauzanier and at the *Col de la Cayolle*. It is a gregarious animal which seeks out the company of its own kind and develops colonies with a strong social life. Marmots hibernate during nearly half the year. It is strictly forbidden to feed them.

Uvernet-Fours:

Today the two communities of Uvernet and Fours have merged and the population is on the rise. Their partnership with Mercantour national Park is a mark of the quality of their environmental heritage. The nearby Pra-Loup ski station, created in 1961, has offered a vast skiable area ever since its merger with Foux d'Allos.

Small valley of Le Lauzanier:

This is a former nature reserve which is influenced by the damp climate of Liguria to the East, making it notably more humid

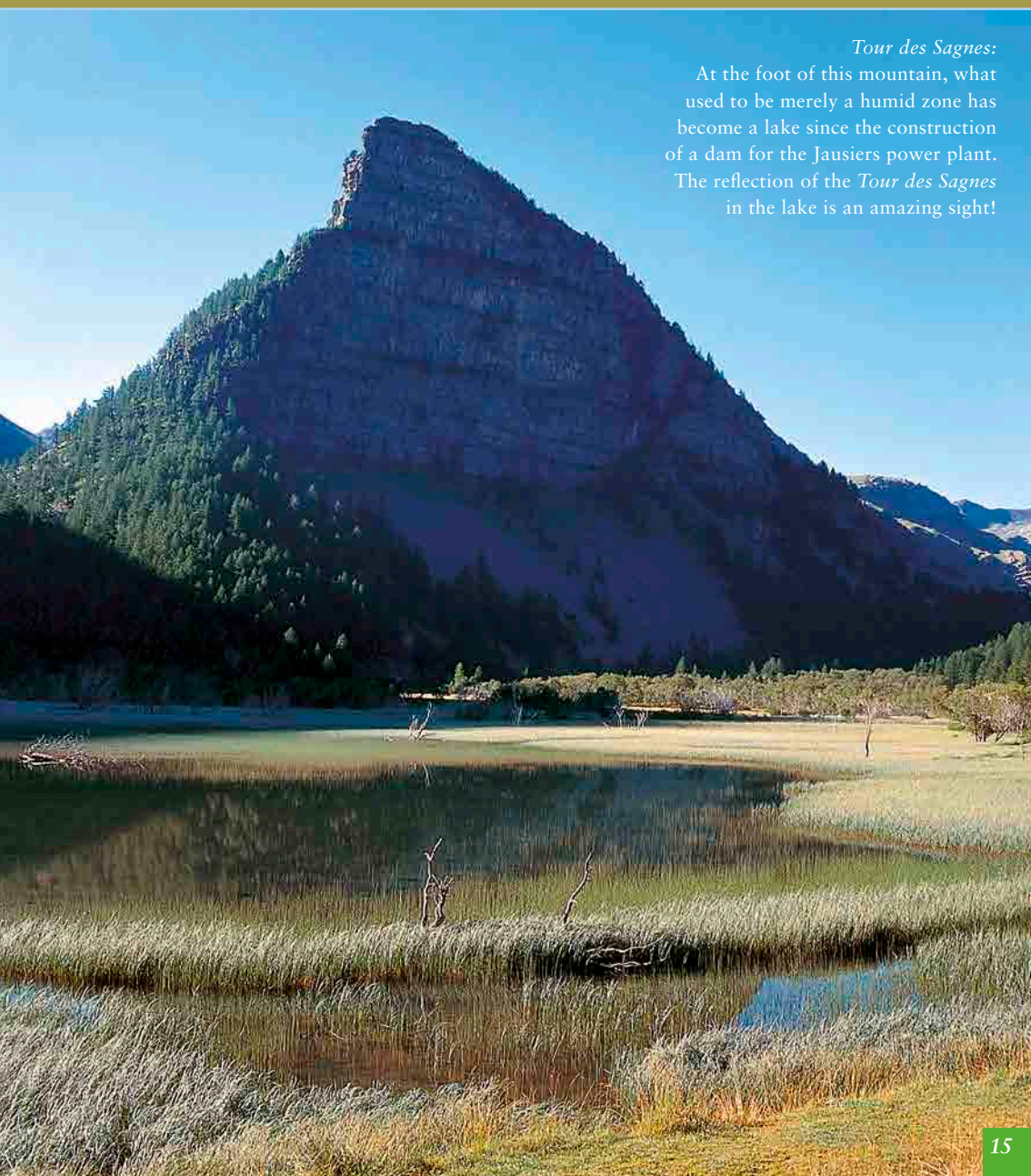
than the rest of the valley, enabling it to host an exceptional richness of plant life: field gentian, Alpine sea holly, edelweiss, fritillaria tubiformis, narcissus-flowered anemone, and grape hyacinth. The fauna is no less rich, with marmots, ibex and golden eagles.

Small valley of Terres-Plaines:

Water is omnipresent; nearly 2000 sheep share the grassy slopes with marmots and chamois. In the sky you can spot the common raven.

Tour des Sagnes:

At the foot of this mountain, what used to be merely a humid zone has become a lake since the construction of a dam for the Jausiers power plant. The reflection of the *Tour des Sagnes* in the lake is an amazing sight!



The ibex

The story of the Alpine ibex.

Ibex roam together in herds. The female ibex live in groups with their newborn offspring and the young from the previous year, separate from the males. They all come together during the rutting season, in early winter. The ibex is particularly fond of rocky areas at medium to high altitudes. Their wide hooves consist of an elastic part and a harder part, providing them with a perfect grip. They are ruminants that can browse on hard, resistant plants discarded by other herbivores.

General appearance.

The adult male, called a ram, has large striated horns which can grow up to 90cm in length. The female can be recognized by her smaller size and relatively short horns, usually around 30 cm long. She gives birth to one or two kids every one or two years.

The colour of the ibex's coat varies with the seasons. In summer, their fur is short and varies in colour from beige to light brown. In autumn, it is slowly shed to give way to a longer, thicker coat.

The moult takes place in May and June. The ibex shed their winter fur by rubbing themselves against rocks and trees, where you can often find wads of fur.

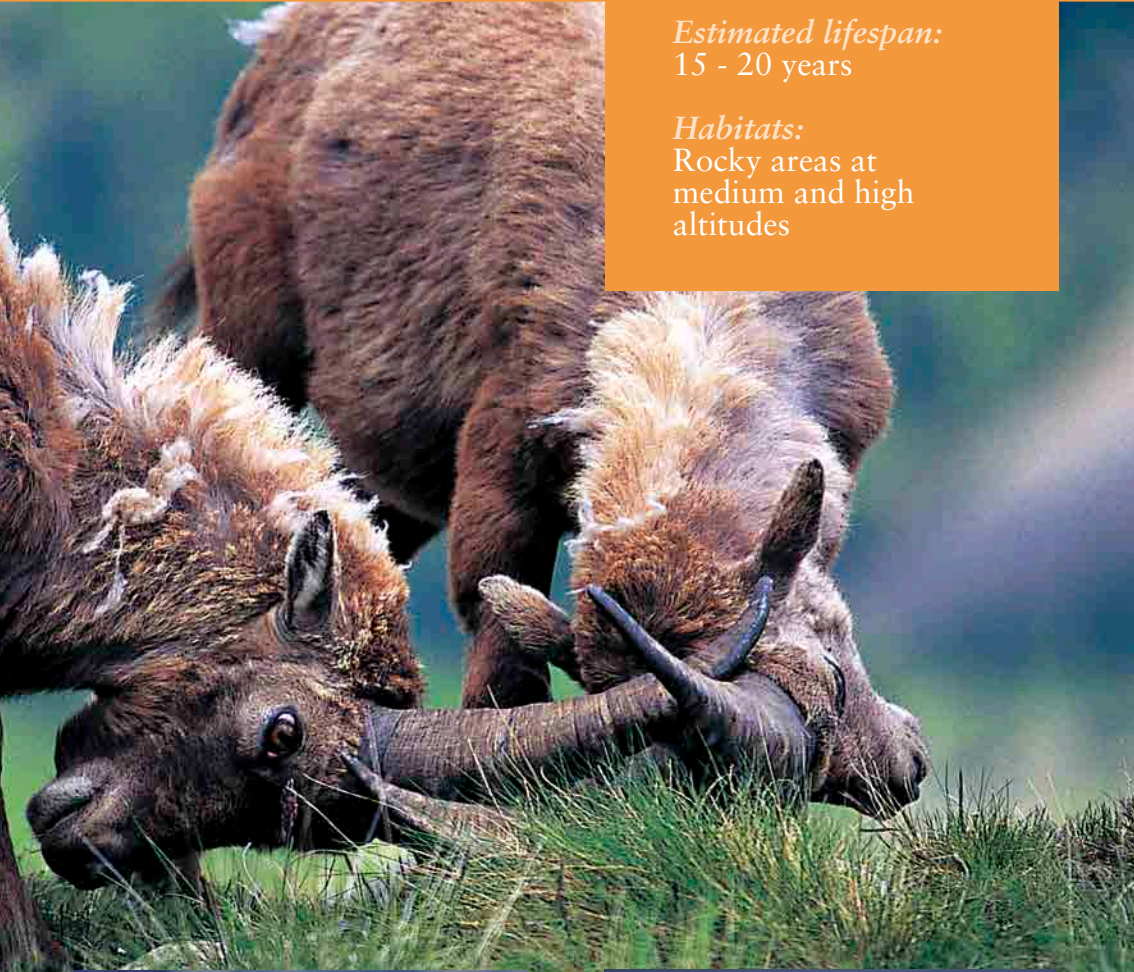


Height at the withers:
80 cm

Weight:
75 - 110 kg

Estimated lifespan:
15 - 20 years

Habitats:
Rocky areas at
medium and high
altitudes





The upper Verdon valley

Broad pastures, coniferous forests and tall peaks

A high altitude terrain with contrasting landscapes fashioned by man, this valley belongs to the Southern Alps and enjoys the influence of the Provençal climate. The fields on the valley's floor are surrounded by broad pastures, coniferous forests and tall peaks.

Colmars-les-Alpes is worth a visit for its fortifications erected by Vauban at the end of the 17th century.

Allos has Europe's largest natural high-altitude lake, set in a magnificent glacial cirque at an elevation of 2226 m.

Paths lead from the lake shore to Mont Pelat, which rises to 3050 m above sea level, as well as to the mountain passes (Petite Cayolle, Lausson and Encombrette) and to numerous lakes. The communities situated on the edge of the national Park make perfect starting points for wonderful hikes, during which you can explore the hamlets and enjoy rich and varied flora such as the Turk's cap lily, the symbol of the valley.

The valley mixes traditional farms and modern winter sports stations.

The valley in brief...

Allos:

Formerly a fortified village, its three-storey houses are grouped around squares with fountains fed by water from the Chadoulin. Notre Dame de Valvert, a masterpiece of mediaeval architecture, stands proud guard over the entrance to the village. Today it has become a pleasant tourist resort connecting two important winter sports stations, the Seignus and La Foux.

Grey wagtail:

Grey wagtail feed mainly on aquatic insects and their larvae, and other small aquatic animals. They are very dependent on water and nest alongside streams and rivers. It can be found on the Laus plateau near the Serpentine.

Col d'Allos, (2247 m):

The road through the pass was built between 1888 and 1892. The refuge on the pass offers a magnificent panorama of the valley of L'Ubaye.

Colmars-les-Alpes:

Located at a crossroads, it is part of a string of fortified Alpine towns designed by Vauban such as Entrevaux, Saint-Vincent-les-Forts and *Mont-Dauphin*.

Ratery Forest:

Hidden in the magnificent larch grove are old cabins and terraced seedbeds dating back to the reforestation of this slope with over 600,000 conifers and thousands of broadleaved trees.

Fortifications:

In 1692, at the request of Louis XIV, Vauban, true to his designs, decided to fortify Colmars so as to shut off the upper Verdon valley and control it militarily.

Sand lizard:

Sand lizards can live at altitudes of up to 2300 m on the south-facing slope of the *Col d'Allos*, due to its Mediterranean climatic influence.



Sand Lizard



Columbine:

Found throughout the foothills of the French and Italian Alps. It is fond of very well-lit slopes, sometimes near scree. It is a nationally protected species.



Allos

Amot sandstone:

These sandstones are made up of grains of quartz, feldspar and rock debris, cemented by calcite. With its warm hues and rough appearance, this rock is recognisable by the alternating light and dark bands which adorn the summits around the *lac d'Allos*, Sanguinière (Haut-Var) and which flank the small valley of L'Lausanier (L'Ubaye).

Black marls:

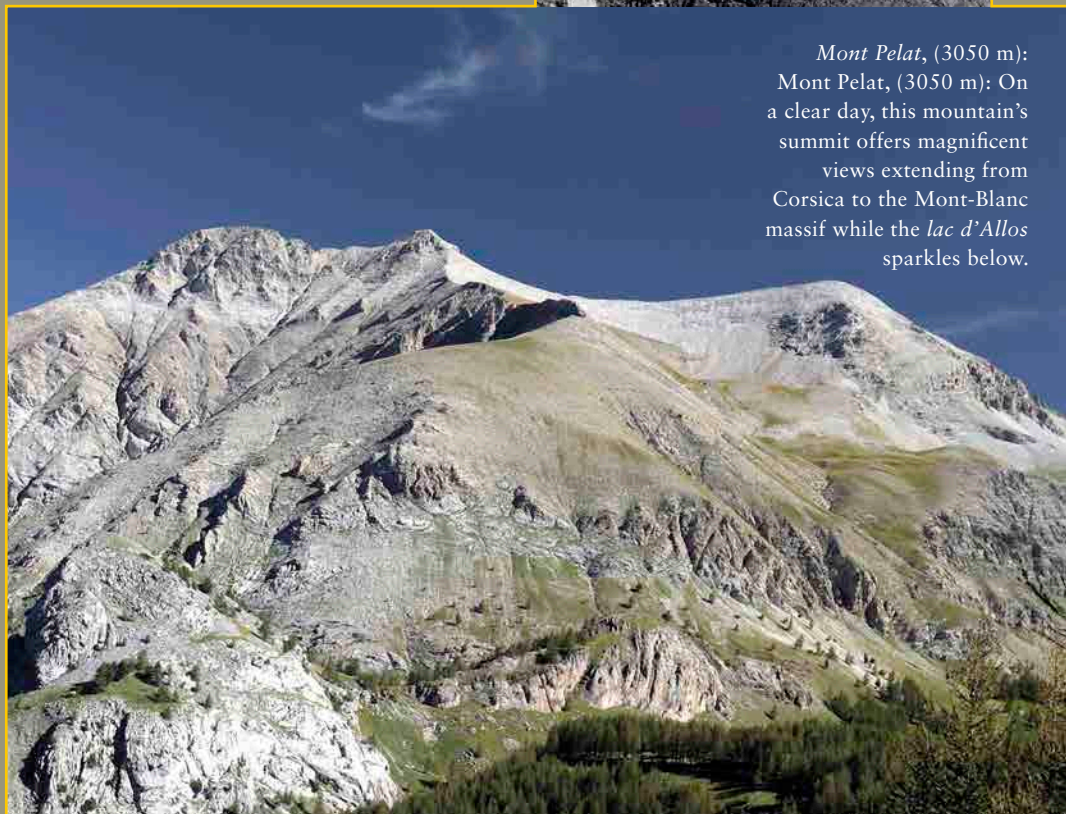
Covering some 200,000 hectares in the southern Alps, these marls form a dominant element of the landscape. They form large ravined slopes (badlands locally known as “roubines noires” (black canals)) on which trees are sometimes planted in an attempt to stabilise them. It is thanks to these geographical features that the valleys were opened.

Pastoralism:

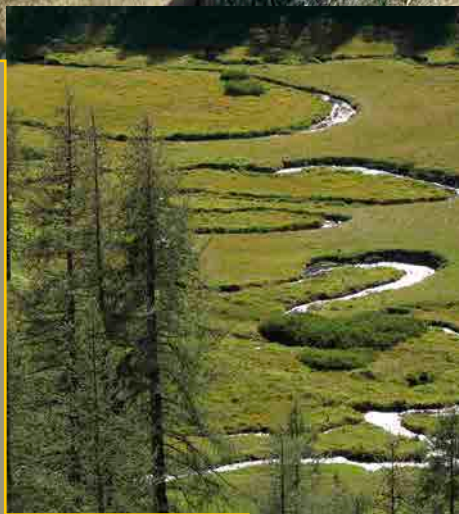
Migratory shepherding has left its mark the landscapes of the upper Verdon valley. Each summer, cattle and flocks of thousands of sheep from Provence take over the valley's broad pastures.

Verdon :

The headwaters of this river are found in the massif of Trois-Evêchés (2819 m). It owes its fame to the large canyon which it has carved out further down in the limestone Plans de Provence.



Mont Pelat, (3050 m):
Mont Pelat, (3050 m): On a clear day, this mountain's summit offers magnificent views extending from Corsica to the Mont-Blanc massif while the *lac d'Allos* sparkles below.



Serpentine:

The Laus plateau marks the location of a former shallow glacial lake which filled up with alluvia from erosion and vegetation. Fed by the waters of the *lac d'Allos*, the Chadoulin river here winds through some magnificent meanders – hence the name: Serpentine.

Val d'Allos:
Scots pines and bog pines mix with willows and birch. At night weasels, badgers and roe deer venture out onto the slopes.



A breathtakingly beautiful site.

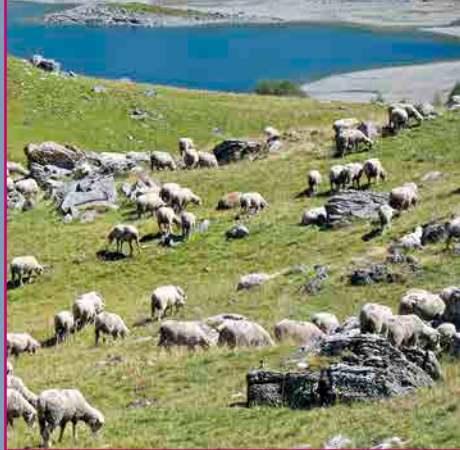
The waters of the lac d'Allos are held back by a barrier of hard rock which the slow-flowing glaciers were unable to wear away. With surface area of 54 hectares and a depth of 48 m, the lac d'Allos is Europe's largest natural high-altitude lake (2226 m).

This magnificent environment was threatened in 1908, when Georges Clémenceau, the then-Chairman of the Conseil, arrived on muleback to survey its suitability for irrigation projects. However, the First World War put an end to such ideas.

The lake remains unspoiled, a feast for the eyes, in its majestic setting bordered by grassy slopes and larch forests between Mont Pelat (3050 m) to the North and the sandstone "tours" (towers) of Annot to the South.

More activity than meets the eye...

Subjected in summer to intense sunlight and evaporation after being frozen for six months of winter, one might think the lake would be devoid of life, and yet during the summer months, it provides pasture for 4500 sheep which are shepherded there from Provence,



while marmots, with their familiar way of standing guard at the entrance of their burrows and sounding their warning whistles, fill the grass verges in the warm season.

Observant hikers will be able to spot chamois around the lake shore, in the pastures above the forest, and ibex on the rocky ridges around the Col de l'Encombrette.

In the lake, brown trout share the water with Arctic char.

Their numbers were sufficiently large to allow commercial fishing until the 19th century. As numbers dwindled conservation measures were taken, but it was the creation of the Mercantour national Park which put a final end to this practice.

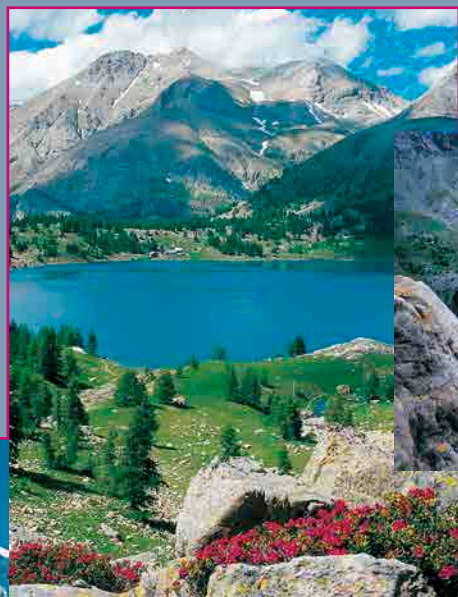
The lac d'Allos

Getting to the Lac d'Allos.

The discovery trail created by the national Park offers the best way to enjoy the scenery. The community of Allos improved access to the Laus car park in 2005 for the convenience and safety of visitors to the Lake. During the winter, the lake is frozen from November to May and can be reached by snow shoes or touring

skis after a three-hour climb of nearly 6.5 km. During the summer, the Laus car park charges a fee. However, if you prefer you can use the free shuttle. Access is limited depending on the number of places available. Funds collected are used exclusively to fund quality improvements to the site.

The site's information point is at the Chalet du Laus (open in season), tel: 06 32 90 80 24 - Allos tourist information office (open in season): 04 92 83 41 92





The upper Var and Cians valleys

From the “Colorado niçois” (Colorado of Nice) to the alpine grasslands

Discover the amazing colours of the sheer cliffs of the gorges du Cians and gorges de Daluis (Cians and Daluis gorges) in landscapes unique in Europe, along winding roads which lead you to the upper Var valley. These spectacular corridors were carved by torrents of water rushing through the red rock. Upstream of the gorges du Cians, the high plateau of Beuil-Valberg opens up to you, dominated by the pyramid-shaped Mont Mounier. The needles of Pelens rise above the Var and, closer to its headwaters, stand the sandstone cliffs of Annot

on the Sanguinière massif. You can feel the cool breeze of the Garreton and Aiglière waterfalls as you pass through Guillaumes and the Val d’Entraunes on your way to the Col de la Cayolle.

There are a number of accessible walks through the woods that lead you through the Alpine meadows and place you among the lilies and gentians in marmot country. It is not uncommon to catch sight of the bearded vulture or the griffon vulture, which have returned to inhabit these lands.

The valley in brief...

Châteauneuf-d'Entraunes:

This village enjoys an expansive view of the valley. An itinerary is provided to explore the community's religious heritage. Also worth seeing: the mill at La Barlatte, restored with help from the Mercantour national Park.

Snails:

The upper Var valley is home to two native species of molluscs (the delightfully named *Urticicola mounierensis* and *Solatopula cianensis*), meaning they are species not to be found anywhere else.

Gorges de Daluis:

The Var tumbles into these gorges downstream from Guillaumes. All along the road which follows its course, the blues of the river and the rust and violet tints of its

rock setting provide breathtaking views. Pause at the Amen waterfall and the Point Sublime trail to take it all in!

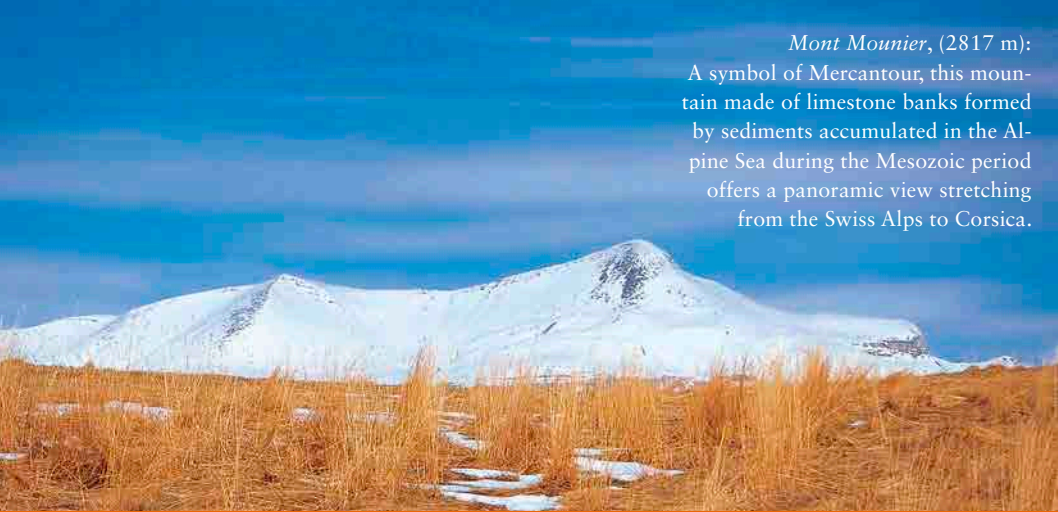


Larch grove:
The sparse foliage of the larch forest lets enough light through to allow numerous plant and animal species to thrive. It is the only conifer which loses its needles in winter, going from a fresh green to bright orange in autumn, earning it the nickname "arbre de lumière" (tree of light).



Beuil:
Overlooked by *Mont Mounier*, the village guards the entrance to the majestic *gorges rouge du Cians*. Its tall houses are typical of the village architecture of the Alps near Nice.





Mont Mounier, (2817 m):

A symbol of Mercantour, this mountain made of limestone banks formed by sediments accumulated in the Alpine Sea during the Mesozoic period offers a panoramic view stretching from the Swiss Alps to Corsica.

Gorges rouges:

The name given to the *gorges du Cians et de Daluis* (gorges of the Cians and the Daluis) which surround the dome of the Barrot. They were carved out in the red tuffs (pélites) by the Cians and the Var, two streams given to violent spates. Their towering walls are sometimes so close they look as though they are joined together! This natural decor is home to rare and precious animal and plant life.

Pine marten:

A small carnivorous mammal which becomes most active towards sunset in its forest sur-

roundings, but which you can sometimes see in daytime when the Pine marten is rearing its litter, during spring and summer. It feeds on other small mammals (notably squirrels), birds and their eggs, insects and fruits.

Guillaumes Folk Traditions Museum:

This museum's rich collection of ancient documents and old tools traces the history of the village's many hamlets. You can see a several-million-year-old fossilised "sea monster" found on the slopes of the hamlet of Barelès.

Péone-Valberg:

Péone is a village of great character on the banks of the Tuébi river, at the foot of *Les Pénitents* - dolomite rocks carved into the shape of ruins by erosion. Its ancient shingle-roofed houses, with their mix of Alpine and Italian influences, seem to huddle together to keep warm.

The Valberg mountain station was created at the *Col du Quartier* (1700 m) shortly before the Second World War. Serving mainly as a ski station, it also organises nature rambles through larch groves and the meadows at the foot of the imposing *Mont Mounier* (2817 m).

Small valley of Sanguinière:

This small valley was stripped bare at the end of the 19th century. Today it boasts a magnificent forest of larches, bog pines and cembros planted by the thousands to lessen the flooding from the Var in spate and its devastating effects. It is also the domain of the chamois, the Arctic hare and the black grouse.

Guillaumes Village:

Since the Middle Ages this village has hosted one of Provence's largest agricultural fairs each autumn. It is an important stopover on the Route des Grandes Alpes.

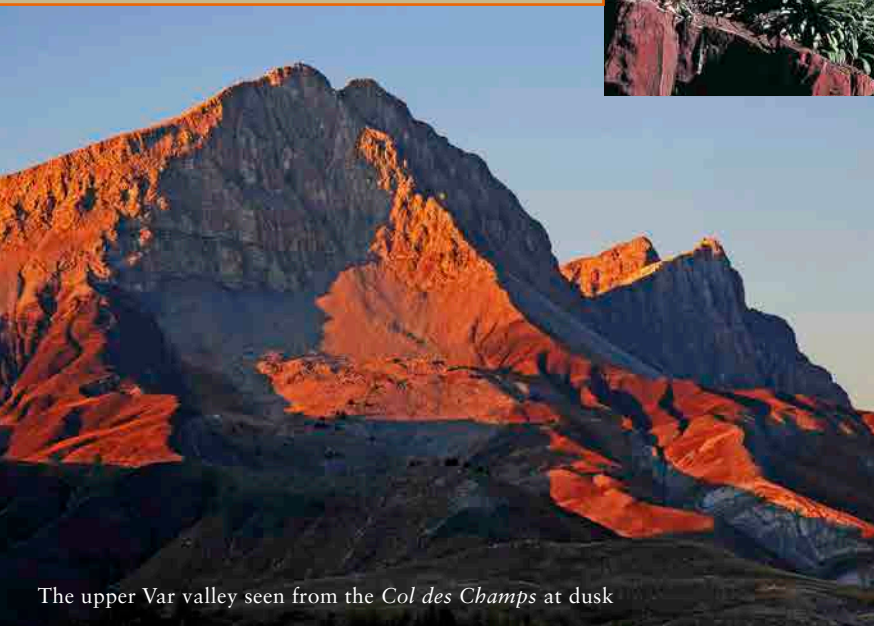
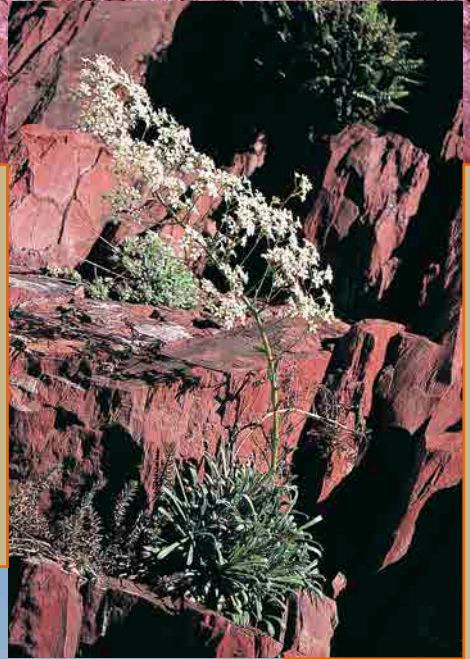


Red Gorges

Tuff (Pélites):
Unique in France, they
are the result of some
thirty million years of
accumulation of muds
during the Primary Era.
These red rocks form
the theatre of the red
gorges de Daluis and
du Cians.



Saxifraga lingulata (Bellardi):
Found only between Provence
and Liguria, this plant flowers
on limestone rocks in shady
slopes, in gorges for example.



The upper Var valley seen from the *Col des Champs* at dusk

The bone breaker.

During its first years of life, this carrion feeder searches for a territory and a mate. At around 6-7 years of age, these birds start living as couples, occupying a vast territory of 200 to 400 km² and nesting in cliffs. Bearded vultures have a specific diet consisting of the carcasses of wild and domestic fauna, which they consume down to the bones thanks to their powerful gastric juices. If the carcass is too large to be swallowed in one piece, the bearded vulture drops it on the rocks in order to break it into fragments, hence its nickname “bonebreaker”. The bearded vulture had vanished from the Alps by the end of the 19th century: it is now a protected species. Since 1986, 160 have been

released in the Alps as part of an international reintroduction programme. Every year since 1993, the Mercantour national Park and the Parco delle Alpi Marittime have released 2 bearded vultures raised in breeding centres. 15 pairs now reproduce naturally throughout the Alps: 7 young birds took flight successfully in 2008.

Aspect général.

The young are distinguished by black plumage on the head and neck. After reaching adulthood, the plumage of the breast, belly and head takes on orange tints, due to the bird's peculiar habit of bathing in iron-rich mud. This may serve to help adults of reproductive age display their dominant status. The sexes can be told apart only by a blood test.

The bearded vulture

Wingspan:
2.85 m

Weight:
5 - 7 kg

Maturity:
6 - 8 years

Estimated lifespan:
30 years

Habitats :
mountainous regions



The Griffon Vulture



Wingspan:
2.70 m - 3 m

Weight:
5 - 7 kg

Maturity:
6 - 8 years

Estimated lifespan:
30 years

Habitats:
mountainous regions

A giant of the skies.

Like the bearded vulture, the griffon vulture had disappeared from the Alps by the end of the 19th century, before being decreed a protected species in 1981. Beginning in 1996, griffon vultures were reintroduced into the gorges du Verdon. The griffon vulture is gregarious and lives in colonies in the cliffs. They feed on the soft tissue of dead animals which they find on their group prospecting expeditions ranging over vast areas, sometimes straying more than 80 km from their breeding site on air currents they make use of with their gliding ability.

One can sometimes see large groups of vultures from the gorges du Verdon (or from farther afield), spending the summer on the alpine pastures of the Mercantour

national Park. Since 2007, they have been regularly spotted near Mont Mounier, where living conditions are perfect for them.

General appearance.

Like most vultures of their genus, the neck and head are bald to allow it to root inside carcasses without soiling its feathers. Its skull is covered in white down leading to a long narrow neck from which sprouts a collar of white downy feathers. The powerful beak is pale ivory in colour and its eyes are yellow. The tawny breast and belly make for a harmonious contrast with the fawn back and rump. The feathers of the short square tail are dark brown to black, and are covered with brown stripes underneath.



The valley of La Tinée

Boxed-in gorges and airy peaks

The Valley of La Tinée rises from olive groves to Alpine pastures. It is an area of gorges, peaks, Alpine grassy slopes and forests.

In an environment full of contrasts, it is no surprise to learn that the history of this valley has been marked through the centuries by two opposing influences: isolation and openness... Often cut off from the rest of the world for six months of the year by snow covered passes, the valley was for a long time at the crossroads of the economic and cultural influences between Provence, Piedmont and the Pays Niçois (Nice region). Today the

contrast is more likely to take the form of a duality between natural wilderness spaces on one hand and ski stations on the other.

It is also a valley of mediaeval church towers, painted chapels and oratories - in the bucolic Val de Blore or in the community of Isola, below the Col de la Lombarde, gateway to the Italian Valle Stura. Lastly, it is the valley of Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage, a village with a rich farming and pastoral history, and of Saint-Etienne-de-Tinée, which was one of the three fortified towns of the department.

The valley in brief...

Sun dials:

Saint-Dalmas-le-Selve contains a fine group of tall houses boasting magnificent sundials on their façades, in spite of the fact that for two months in winter, the sun passes too low overhead to reach them.

Painted chapel:

The murals and frescoes of religious subjects which decorate the chapels are part of the Alpine heritage. The Valley of La Tinée has a particular abundance of these buildings.

Chestnut trees:

These trees are still very present on acid soils, even though their number has decreased. The chestnut harvest is still an occasion for traditional convivial celebrations.

Fort de Rimplas:

Perched on a ridge overlooking the Tinée, Rimplas is one of the oldest villages of the valley; in the 9th and 10th centuries, it was probably the county seat of the Comté de la Tinée. With its cobbled lanes and its covered passages, the present day village dates from the 11th century. The construction of its fort, which was the start of the building of the Maginot line, began in 1928. Completed in 1937, it offers a magnificent panorama stretching from the lush *Val de Blore*, dominated by the *Caïre Gros*



(2087 m), as far as *Mont Mounier* (2817 m).

Juniper:

All six species of this plant are represented in the Mercantour, from the most Mediterranean to the most Alpine - in particular the Spanish juniper in the community of Saint-Sauveur-sur-Tinée. The tree is distinguishable by the globular appearance of its fruits.

Isola Village and Isola 2000:

True to its traditions, Isola has been able to preserve its architectural and religious heritage. An ancestral chestnut grove is carefully tended, and the village's well-known chestnut fair is held in November. In the small valley of Chastillon, Isola 2000, France's most snowed-over ski station, provides infrastructure and a quality skiing area.



Sundials

Orange Lily:
Present all over the valley of La Tinée, this plant flowers from June to July and is fond of the edges of forests, between the grasslands and the bright larch forests of the Mercantour.



Pigeon loft:

Sometimes these are directly attached to the houses. Pigeon breeding provided an extra resource for a long time, as the eggs and the meat were eaten while the droppings were used as fertiliser for the gardens.

Roure and Roubion, perched villages:

Roure is an old village of violet schist farmhouses and flagstone roofs from the 17th and 18th centuries, overlooking the valleys of La Vionène and La Tinée. Longon's Alpine pasture has been recently put back to its original use. In addition to the ewes which spend the summer there, "Tarentaise" cows are once more making the renowned "Tomme de Roure" cheese. Roubion is a spectacular south-facing

village backed onto rocky ridges which protect it from the cold winds. Narrow lanes wind between the old houses with typical mountain architecture, and open into small squares with fountains. Traces of ramparts and gates from the 12th century, and the listed castle ruins date back to conflicts between Savoy and France.

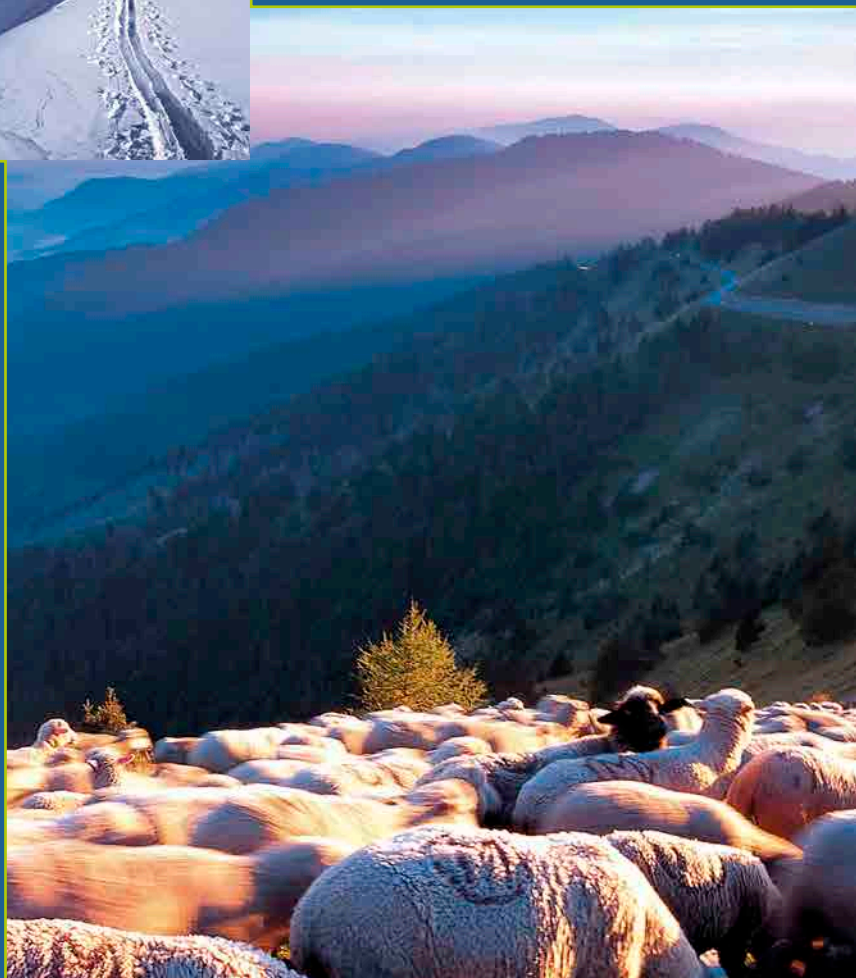
Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage:

The northernmost village of Alpes-Maritimes, Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage has managed to keep its charm and authenticity with its tall shingle-roofed houses huddled together. Around the hamlet of Bousicyas, the Alpine pastures receive large flocks of sheep. They are crossed by the *Route de la Bonette*, one of Europe highest roads (2802 m) between Tinée and Ubaye, which sees over 60,000 vehicles each year.

Saint-Etienne-de-Tinée:

Until the 19th century, while still part of the *Comté de Nice*, this village was the third local power, just behind Sospel. Its economy was

Ski de randonnée



Migratory
shepherding:
This practice has had
a powerful impact
on the history
of the valley, and
even today remains
an important activity
in La Tinée.

based on stockbreeding, giving rise to numerous livestock fairs, such as at Guillaumes in the haut Var. These events drew traders and producers from Provence, Liguria, Piedmont and the Dauphiné. Trade in sheets and blankets woven locally from the wool contributed to the prosperity of the valley. Today, the transhumance festival which takes place in June is accompanied by a fair which carries on this tradition.

Saint-Sauveur-sur-Tinée:

Set in a bend of the Tinée with dykes to protect against flooding, Saint-Sauveur is made up of tall, old houses, some of which have kept their slate roofs; the façades are adorned with fine door lintels (that of the Blanqui family dates from 1610) and the insignia of craftsmen's guilds (with one from 1594). The bread oven and the mill are reminders of a bygone way of life.

Salso Moreno:

Immensity, isolation, silence and tortuous topography characterise this verdant basin enclosed in black marls and gypsum. It is the watershed between Tinée (06) and Ubaye (04), and can be reached via the *Camp des Fourches*, a former military cantonment on the *Route de la Bonette*.

Skiing:

La Tinée has several ski stations: Auron is the oldest, Isola 2000 the highest (and one of those with the highest snowfall in France), Roubion the most recent, and La Colmiane the southernmost.

Valdeblore :

Accessed through the Valley of La Tinée and also through La Vésubie, it is a very early "conurbation", since Valdeblore was created from three villages in 1669: Saint-Dalmas-de-Valdeblore, La Roche and La Bolline, joined in the 1970's by the La Colmiane ski station. The department's oldest murals are to be found in the Romanesque church of L'Invention de la Sainte Croix at Saint-Dalmas. The hamlet of Mollières, situated in the heart of the national Park, also belongs to this community.



Salso Moreno



Golden Eagle:

This bird's wingspan can reach 2.20 m. It occupies a territory of between 100 and 150 km² on which it builds its eyries below its hunting grounds

Once again at home in the Mercantour.

Once present throughout Europe, the wolf was the victim of extermination campaigns. In France, wolves disappeared around 1930. Their very negative image presented them as a danger to both flocks and men. It wasn't until they were close to extinction in Europe that improved knowledge of the species

allowed wolves to be rehabilitated and gain Europe-wide protection in 1979. In 1992, the wolf made a spontaneous return to France, in The Mercantour national Park, from the Abruzzi region in Italy.

Favourable factors for their comeback included the exodus of farmers from the mountains, an abundance of wild fauna

The wolf



and legal protection. Since then, wolves have been re-colonising the Alps, and traces of their presence have also been confirmed in the Pyrenees, the Massif Central and the Jura. In 2009, the wolf population of the Mercantour, Alpi Maritime and Val Pésio has been estimated at some 30 animals divided into 9 packs, part of nearly 150 in all of France.

A wary species.

Very wary and mainly active at night, wolves are afraid of man and are difficult to observe in their wild habitat. They spend an average of ten hours a day hunting, alone or in packs. In the Mercantour, wolves feed mostly on wild herbivores and small mammals, but are also known to attack domesticated flocks (mostly sheep). The wolf's average daily meat requirement is 2.5 kg but a wolf can eat up to 6 kg at one sitting, and then fast for several days. In France, wolves live in packs of between 2 and 10 animals, over a territory of between 200 and 300 km². The pack is structured around a dominant couple, the alpha couple, the only breeding pair.

General appearance.

The wolf found in France looks rather like a German shepherd, but smaller. Its head is wider and has more hair, a thick neck, shorter ears, round and wider apart. It also bears a distinctive black line on its forepaws.

A comeback which creates problems.

With the eradication of the wolf, sheep rearing became widespread: by concentrating on meat production rather than wool, pastoralism has managed to find a way to be profitable. Now that wolves have been reintroduced into France,

Length of body without the tail:
1m - 1.40 m

Length of the tail:
30 - 45 cm

Height at the withers:
60 - 90 cm

Weight:
20 - 38 kg

Maturity:
3 years for the male
2 years for the female

Estimated lifespan:
10 years

Habitats:
The wolf is found in every type of environment



this crafty and opportunistic predator has benefited from this system while at the same time putting it at risk. Today, some generally effective solutions have been found which are acceptable to breeders, such as penning the sheep at night, guard dogs (the "patous"), the use of assistant shepherds and building or renovating shepherds' cabins, etc. On a local level, the Mercantour national Park is involved with breeders and carries out the dual missions of protecting wild species and giving technical assistance to shepherds.



The valley of La Vésubie

An animal kingdom ruled by the forest

Rising from 143 m at its lowest point, to the 3143-meter-high Gélas, the highest point of Alpes-Maritimes, the valley of La Vésubie offers a wide variety of landscapes and exceptional natural riches. Some thirty magnificent high-altitude lakes and countless springs, streams and rivers, make La Vésubie the “water tower” of the Côte d’Azur.

In terms of biological diversity, the 3000 m ascent from the valley is the equivalent of a journey from the Mediterranean to Lapland. Forests cover more than half of the area. The flora includes nearly 40% of France’s listed species, some of which are strictly endemic. The fauna also includes some

extremely rare species.

Victor Emmanuel II, Duke of Savoy, Count of Piémont, King of Sardinia, who went on to become King of Italy, created his game reserve there; it was returned to France in 1947, and it can be stated that the haut-Vésubie region has been continuously protected since the 19th century.

Forestry and tourism represent the valley’s principal resources. Olives, honey, meat and organic products are the basic agricultural products. With its history as a centre of mountaineering and open air activities, the valley is also very rich in villages and their religious architecture.

The valley in brief...

Mountaineering:

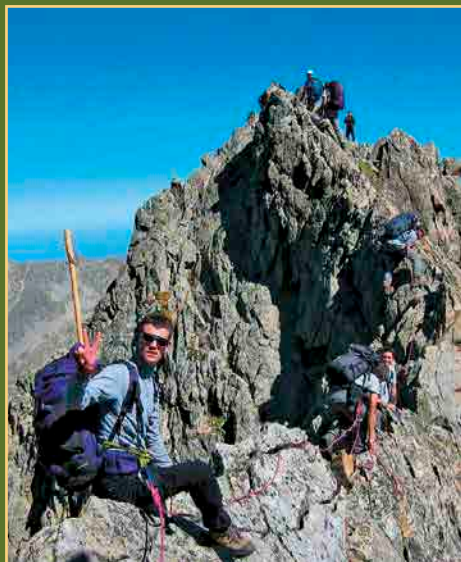
The birth of this discipline contributed to the prosperity and reputation of La Vésubie. From the 18th century onwards, Italians, Englishmen, Germans and Austrians came to explore here.

Belvédère:

A shepherds' festival takes place here every year. The Milk museum, which was created in this village, gives an idea of how important this activity was. It displays a collection of tools and day-to-day objects which evoke bygone eras and techniques.

Bollène-Vésubie:

This is a village with a variety of activities: agriculture and sheep breeding, traditional crops such as wheat, apples, figs, chestnuts, cherries, and forestry. It is also a pleasant holiday resort.



The bellowing of the stag



The Peyrastrèche waterfall in the Boréon

Former royal hunting ground:
Created by King Victor-Emmanuel II in 1857, the fauna was preserved up till the Second World War, before the valley became a 11500 hectare game reserve, between 1947 and the creation of the Park. The passing of the law establishing a framework for national Parks in 1960 seeded the idea of a Park for the Mercantour.



Black grouse:
Among black grouse, the males face off in love jousts. These displays take place in arenas known as “lekking areas”. Also known as blackcock, it is a species in decline in France and Europe because it is very sensitive to being disturbed.



Dairy breeding:

One of Vésubie’s traditional products, milk has long been sold on the coast by the valley cooperative. The modernisation of the cowsheds and cheese factories has enabled the activity to expand. The “Tarentaise”, a hardy dairy cow from Savoy and widely used in Vésubie, also yields high quality meat.

Alpha, the Hour of the Wolf:

It is certainly an animal park, with its vast enclosures and its wolves, all raised in captivity. But it is also a great aid to understanding the species. First, we should hear what shepherds have to say, what scientists think and what the legends say... before going out to encounter them. Alpha provides a better understanding of how the animal lives, and of the impact of its return on human activities and nature.
www.alpha-loup.com

Gorges:

These constitute the main entranceway to Vésubie. The landscapes are grandiose and wild, and very impressive the first time you pass through them, a feeling which will quickly give way to admiration! Here we find the very rare Italian cave salamander *Hydromantes italicus*.

The Madonna de Fenestre:

Legend has it that it was an appearance of the Virgin in a halo of light on a mountaintop close to Gélas, *Fenêtre du Cayre*, which led the Templars to decide to build a sanctuary called Notre-Dame-de-Fenestre, where they placed a statue in cedar brought back from Palestine. Every year, even today, pilgrimages are held on August 15th and September 8th to the Madonna.

Musée des Traditions Vésubiennes (Museum of Traditions of La Vésubie)

This museum occupies the former village communal mills, and contains a large number of reconstructions of typical moments in the life of the high country, in particular in the 19th century. Tools, objects, old documents and models bring bygone centuries back to life.

Petite Suisse niçoise (Nice's Little Switzerland):

The nickname was given to La Vésubie from the beginning of the 20th century, with the arrival of numerous mountaineers, naturalists, hunters and other explorers of the Coast. Its capital, Saint-Martin Vésubie, filled up with comfortable hotels to welcome a well-heeled clientele which came to

escape from the heatwaves of the littoral.

Saint-Martin Vésubie:

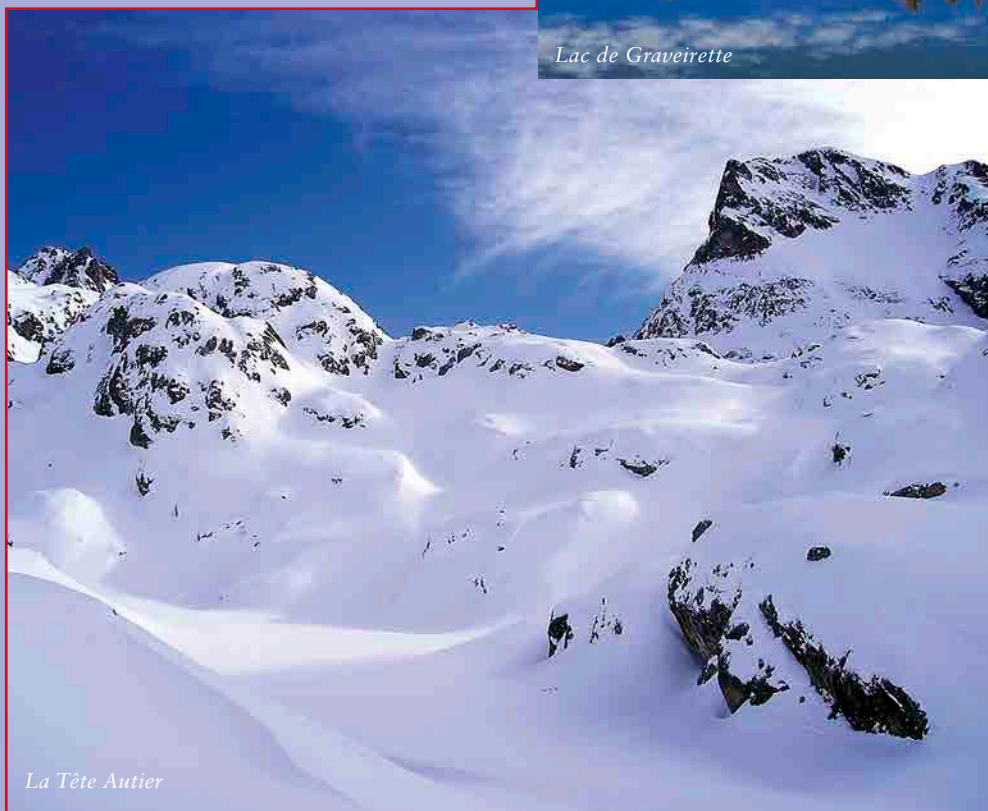
La Vésubie begins at the confluence of the valleys of Le Boréon and La Madone: Saint-Martin brings together its Alpine houses and its sanctuaries, notably the church of the Assumption with panels attributed to L. Bréa. At the beginning of the 20th century, Nice's high society spent the summer season in "Nice's Little Switzerland". For here the Mercantour massif is displayed in all its diversity - in its landscapes, its flora and fauna - all attractions which today make Saint-Martin Vésubie a centre of outdoor activities.



Cavre Agnel in Vésubie



Lac de Graveirette



La Tête Autier



age. The very young eaglet is covered in white down, a colour which it retains over a large area of the wings and tail. With sexual maturity the eagle takes on the dark brown colour of the adult. In flight, some lighter-coloured wing feathers can be observed. Its neck and head are also noticeably lighter, earning it the English name of golden eagle. The eagle's very keen eyesight enables it to spot prey long before the prey can see it. The golden eagle is one of the largest and most powerful birds of prey in the world.

Golden Eagle

A powerful predator.

This large bird of prey, with its impressive 2.50-metre wingspan, builds its eyrie in its hunting territory, which is estimated to encompass between 100 and 150 km². Its diet is made up essentially of marmots, hares and birds (such as grouse), though winter might force it to make do with carrion. The eaglet hatches in spring, but it will be mid-July before it flies. By autumn, the eagle begins a wandering life lasting at least four years in search of a territory, before finding one and settling down.

General appearance.

The golden eagle's beak is hooked and sharp, measuring an average of 6 cm long in an adult, enabling it to take its prey apart easily. Its very powerful talons quickly kill the animals it catches. The eagle's powerful flight allows it to capture prey heavier than itself.

The colour of its plumage can vary with



Wingspan:
2.20 m - 2.50 m

Weight:
3.5 - 7.5 kg

Maturity:
5 - 6 years

Estimated lifespan:
35 years

Habitats :
mountainous regions

A nocturnal bird of prey.

The Eurasian eagle owl is a nocturnal predator, beyond doubt the largest in Europe. Its sobriquet of “bird of ill omen”, and the symbolic lore associated with it made it a victim of superstitions of men who went as far as to nail it to barn doors.

Its ecological usefulness is nowadays recognised and it is protected by law.

The many and varied causes of its diminishing numbers include trapping and shooting, electrocution on high voltage lines, dwindling range, deterioration or fragmentation of its habitats,

Wingspan:
1.60 m à 1.80 m

Weight:
2 kg - 3.3 kg

Maturity:
3 years

Estimated lifespan:
20 years

Habitats :
Rocky areas,
plains, near lakes
and ponds

Eurasian eagle owl

agricultural pesticides and lastly the poisons used against rodents or predators. The eagle owl's eye can see in the dark, but like other owls and all nocturnal animals, it is very sensitive to night lighting.

General appearance.

Its shape is massive. Its head, with its two large yellow eyes, is topped by tufts of some eight centimetres in length, which are horizontal or slightly folded backwards. It raises them to a vertical position if it is excited or disturbed. Its high plumage is a reddish brown, freckled and striped with blackish brown to blend in with the branches. The underside is lighter, tawny with dark brown longitudinal striations and transversal stripes.





The valleys of La Roya and La Bévéra

A shortcut from the Mediterranean to the Alps

This historical route between the Mediterranean and Piémont still harbours many marvellous surprises, some of them tucked away in side valleys leading to verdant peaks.

From the gorges to the Alpine pastures, passing through striking perched villages such as Saorge, you will discover unique flora: Phoenician juniper, Gentiana Ligustica, orchids, saxifrages and many other species, often unique to this area.

The valley of La Bévéra is the Park's southernmost valley, with a very Mediterranean ambiance. Holm oak grows in the gorges de Piao while in the Sospel basin olive trees grow side by side with cypress, rockrose and citrus trees. Crossing Sospel's famous mediaeval bridge, the visitor can reach the site of L'Authion, a French

military lookout post which offers a superb panorama of mountainous shelves with a view of the Côte d'Azur. Following the valley of La Roya, we enter Breil through its Genoese gateway. Further on, near La Brigue, one can visit the painted chapel of Notre-Dame-des-Fontaines, covered in quite exceptional frescoes standing alone in the unspoilt countryside. Finally, above the Val de Castérino, in the community of Tende, you can marvel at the famous vallées des Merveilles, Fontanalbe et La Valmasque. Around Mont Bégo, which towers above these mystic places, between lakes and peaks, over 36,000 bronze age rock engravings form an immense open-air museum, which was listed as a Historical Monument in 1989.

The valley in brief...

Bévéra:

This torrent flows to the bottom of the *gorges de Piaon*, the breeding place of trout and dace. The sky which overlooks them is home to the golden eagle and the peregrine falcon, their place taken at night by the Eurasian eagle owl.

Breil sur Roya:

Situated on the shore of a lake formed by the torrent of La Roya, this village has an interesting architectural heritage and its olive grove is the department's largest.

Casoun:

An unusual form of farm building with vaulted roof typical of La Roya.

Strings of glacial lakes:

The valley of La Roya's main feature is its string of forty-eight lakes, all situated between 2000 m and 2600 m altitude. These lakes help reinforce its image as the *terre des Merveilles* (Land of Wonders).

Col de Tende (1871 m):

Le tunnel qui y fut achevé en 1882 est considéré comme le plus vieux tunnel routier d'Europe. Avant cette date, le col stratégique qui le surplombe était franchi par une piste très sinueuse comprenant plus de cinquante lacets !



Houseleeks:

This plant, from a genus with numerous species, has often been considered to have magical powers. The Greeks and Romans, for example, thought that the houseleeks on the roof kept lightning at bay, while rubbing them on one's hands made one invulnerable! But La Roya is also home to numerous plant species unique to this valley, such as Dame-wort (*Hesperis inodora*), a flower endemic to La Roya.

Breil sur Roya



Festival of Saint-Eloi:

In July, a festival is held to commemorate the important company of muleteers with a procession of mules accompanied by their drivers in traditional costumes.

Fontan:

Between the *gorges de Saorge et de Paganin*, a widening of the valley forms the setting for Fontan. Built beginning in the 17th century, it was a halt on the new salt route from Nice to Turin. Apart from its fine church tower, its houses are covered with flagstones, the first Alpine touch in the mainly Mediterranean landscape.

Turini Forest:

A magnificent forest of immense firs and spruce trees. Towards Peira Cava, one can admire the department's southernmost beechwood.

Ca d'arbinée:

A dry stone enclosure housing rudimentary beehives carved out of chestnut or larch trunks. The great botanical diversity of La Roya is reflected in the incomparable flavour of the valley's honeys.





A lane in Tende

Glacier of La Bévéra:

At one time, water was brought in winter by canal to dry stone wells, where it froze for nights on end. The ice was then covered with leaves and earth to ensure its conservation. In the hot season, it was cut and wrapped in jute cloths and branches to be transported to the coast where it was sold to the big hotels.

Massif of Authion (2080 m):

The massif of Authion is replete with military history, a battlefield where the fate of Alpes-Maritimes was fought over many times. Fierce battles took place there, notably in 1793, 1940 and 1945. Among the numerous military traces left behind we see ruins of forts, barracks, trenches, etc. The plateau nevertheless is home to a surprising diversity of flora. Above all it offers a spectacular view from the Ligurian Alps to the *Cap d'Antibes*. It is also a very important migration corridor, allowing some fabulous birdwatching.

Moulinet:

Thought it suffered a lot in the last war, Moulinet is now a haven of peace, halfway between Sospel and the famous *Col de Turini*. From this place, it is possible to return to Vésubie and join the Authion panoramic route, the theatre of wars from the French Revolution until the Second World War, where bitter fighting took place.

Musée des Merveilles (Museum of Wonders):

This spot is worth visiting on your hike through the *Vallée des Merveilles* (Valley of Wonders).

Mont Bégo (2872 m): forms a barrier standing in the middle of a wide area full of stone engravings. On either side of the massif lie the *Vallée des Merveilles* (Valley of Wonders) and the *Val de Fontanalbe*, listed as historical monuments in 1989.



Glacier near Moulinet

The Organs of La Roya:

These organs allow the player to imitate the different instruments of the orchestra. You can hear them played in the “Baroquiales” festival.

Penitents:

White, red, black or grey penitents, the chapels of these lay associations can be found in all the villages of the valley.

Roya:

The river's headwaters are in France at the foot of the *Col de Tende* and it plunges into the Mediterranean 60 km away at Ventimiglia in Italy.

Saint-Dalmas-de-Tende:

This community is noted for the extravagant Mussolinian architecture of its railway station, the road junction for the *Vallée des Merveilles*.

Sospel :

Situated at a crossroads, this trading city prospered thanks to olive growing during a period when there was much traffic on the salt road linking Nice and Turin, which later became a royal road.



Tende :

This mediaeval community only became French in 1947. Situated between Piémont and the Mediterranean, it was always an important halt on the salt road. Today it is much visited for its *Musée des Merveilles* (Museum of Wonders), its *Maison du miel* (House of Honey) and its via ferrata.

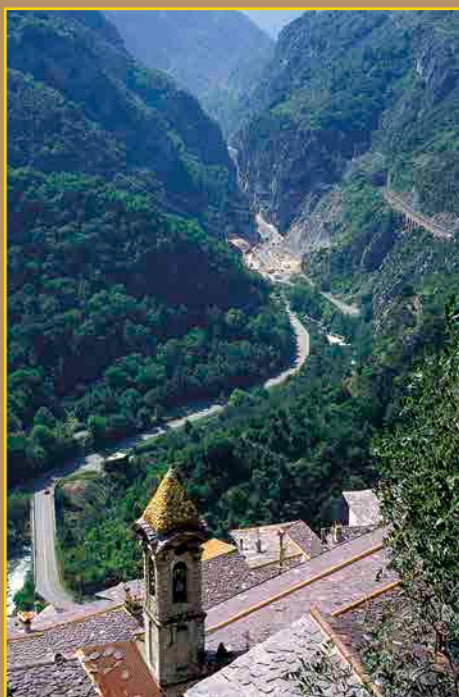
Val de Bieugne leading to Castérino:

The road is at first bordered with hazels and then with larch as far as the *lac des Mesches* at 1390 m altitude, and then continues to the hamlet of Castérino. This is the point of departure for numerous winter and summer rambles, including the hike to the Merveilles.



Ophrys Lutea:

In the 1990's the Park took part in the national cartographic inventory of orchids. The work confirmed a strong presence of this orchid, the Yellow Ophrys, in the Mercantour.



Saorge:

This striking perched village is built like an amphitheatre. Since the first centuries of our era it has occupied a strategic place on the key route through the valley of La Roya.



Vallée des Merveilles

The vallée des Merveilles and the Val de Fontanalbe, an immense Historical Monument in the heart of the Park.

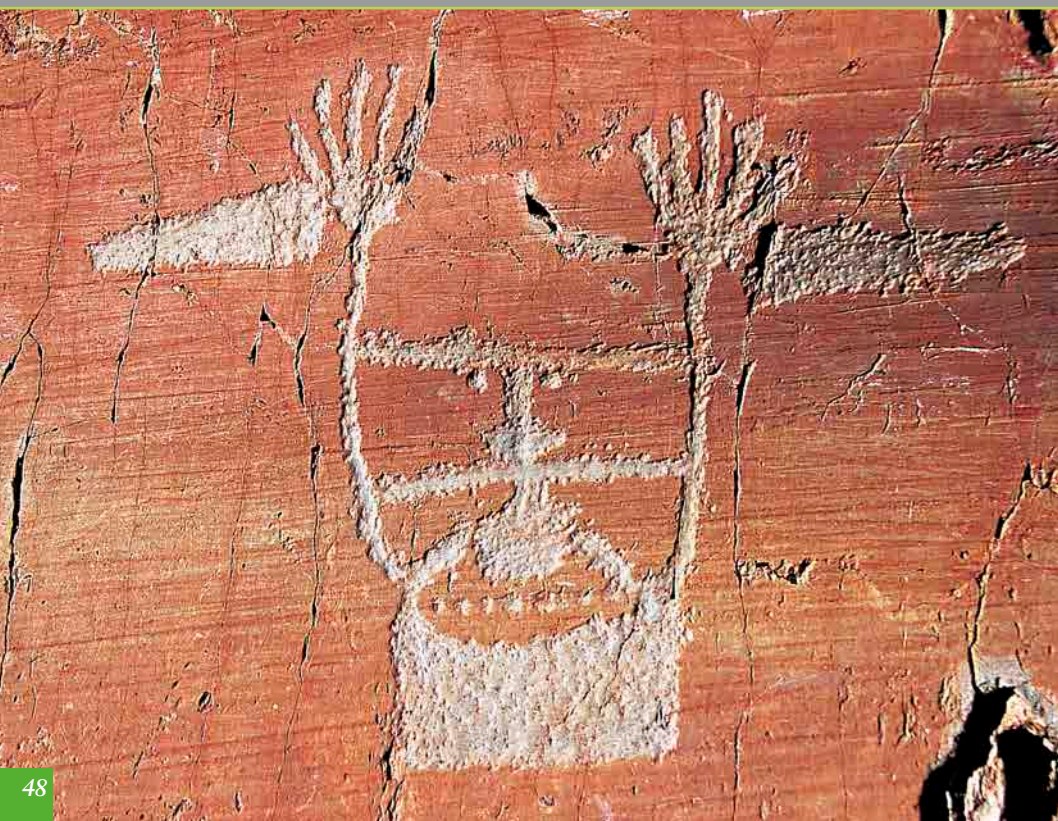
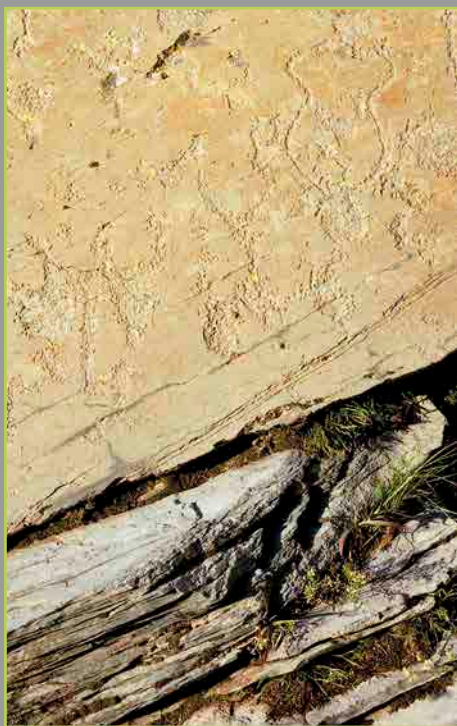
Mont Bégo reigns over this vast area dotted with thousands of rock carvings. Two high, wide valleys spread from each side on this mountain: the Vallée des Merveilles, which extends over some 600 hectares and the Val de Fontanalbe, which covers 400 hectares. These valleys were formed by glaciers which disappeared 10,000 years ago, leaving in their wake finely polished rocky slabs and a chain of numerous lakes. They were listed as Historical Monuments in 1989. In the area with the carvings, carvings situated off the sign-posted track can only be visited in the presence of a mountain guide approved by the Park.

These valleys thus contain an exceptional archaeological heritage: over 36,000 engravings made on rocky slabs some 3,000 years before Christ, telling the life of our distant ancestors, in an enigmatic language whose meaning sometimes remains quite esoteric. Indeed, many of these signs suggest the worship of divinities.



In contrast to the myths of the Mediterranean societies of the fourth millennium B.C., this open air sanctuary seems dedicated to a “primordial divine couple”. The goddess Earth is fertilised by the Bull god, master of the thunders-torm and giver of the life-giving rain.

The vallée des Merveilles holds the most emblematic rock engravings of the Park. The Park’s sign-posted trail, which can be accessed unaccompanied, allows a view of numerous signs carved in six fine rocky slabs: the “dalle surélevée” (raised slab), the “roche de l’Eclat” (chipped rock), the “roche vandalisée” (vandalised rock), the “paroi vitrifiée” (vitrified wall) and the “Christ”. Beside a torrent one can admire a moulded copy of the stele of the “Chef de Tribu” (Tribal Chief), whose original is held in the “Musée des Merveilles” (Museum of Wonders) at Tende.





Visiting the site:

Accompanied: to visit the engravings situated away from the sign-posted trail, with explanations of their origin and meaning, you must enrol for scheduled guided trips organised during the summer season. You will find the list of approved guides in the park centres, information points or the tourist information office in Tende.

Unaccompanied: you are also free to follow the discovery trails of the *Vallée des Merveilles* or *Fontanalbe*, on condition you do not stray from the path. Explanatory signs placed near the engravings at the side of the path provide answers to many of the questions you might ask.

The Departmental “Musée des Merveilles” (Museum of Wonders) at Tende:

this museum is the perfect complement to the tour of the site, offering a scientific approach which does not diminish in the least the emotional, aesthetic and artistic dimensions of the engravings and the *Merveilles* site.

Useful contacts:

- National Park Center:
04 93 04 67 00
- “Musée des Merveilles” (Museum of Wonders) at Tende:
04 93 04 32 50
- Tende tourist information office:
04 93 04 73 71
- National Park information points at Castérino:
04 93 04 89 79
and Sospel: 04 93 04 15 80

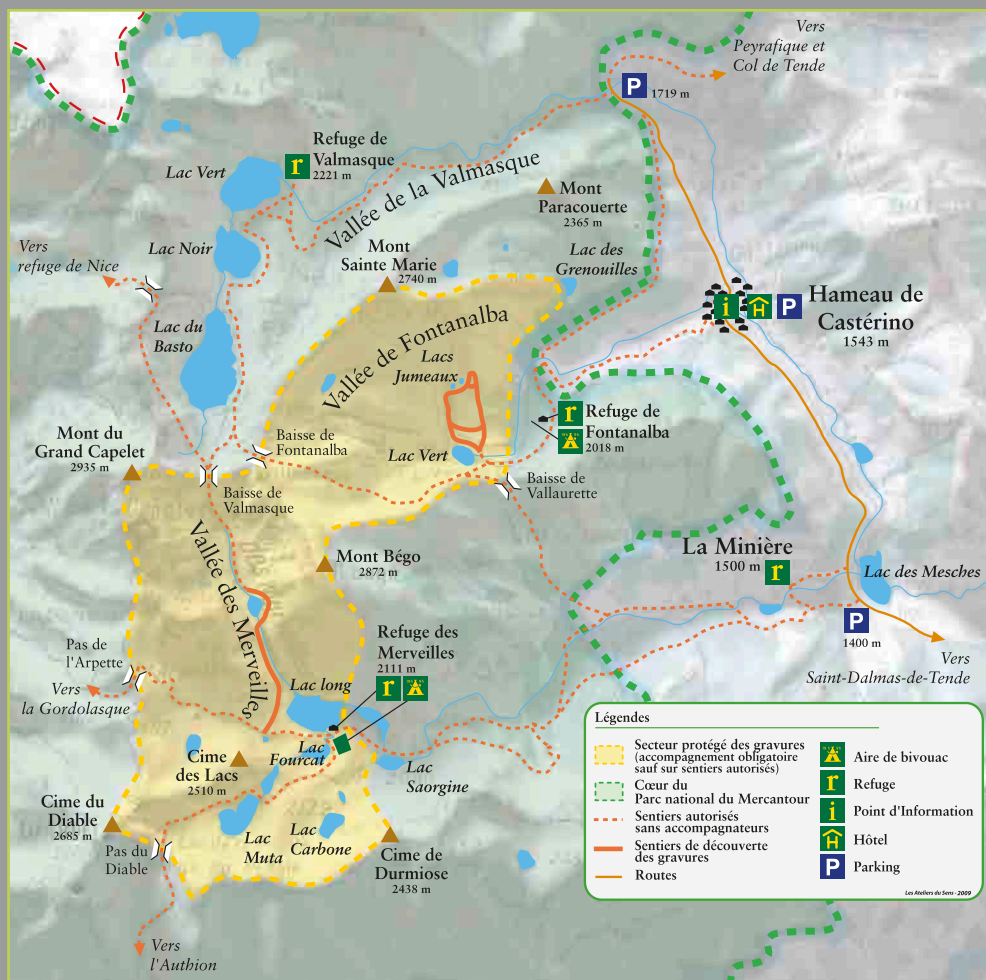
The car park at the lac des Mesches is a good place to start your hike. You will reach the first engravings after a three-hour walk with an ascent of 800 m. Then plan two hours round trip for the sign-posted trail, making a total of around seven hours of hiking. The Val de Fontanalbe is situated on the eastern slope of Mont Bégo. It is a hanging valley, open and sunny. The sign-posted trail takes the “Voie sacrée” (Sacred way) and passes by an orientation table before descending again to the twin lakes near a turf bog. This way is flanked by 280 engravings, the most legible of which represent a yoke of oxen pulling a plough goaded by a peasant.

In the area reserved for guided tours, near the lac Vert, one can visit the “rock of the Hides”, covered with filled geometric figures, engraved in a circle. The “rock of the Warriors” features a unique scene: two armed figures are seen, one of them an archer in the act of loosing an arrow.



You can start your walk from the hamlet of Castérino, or from the car park situated right at the end of the road. From this point you will need two hours to make the 600 m ascent to the engravings. Once there, one and a half hours should suffice to make

the round trip on the discovery trail or with the guided tour service. This walk will take you a total of around five hours.



Special rules for an extraordinary site:



Walking canes and steel-tipped sticks remain inside our backpacks



Without an accredited guide, we remain on the marked paths

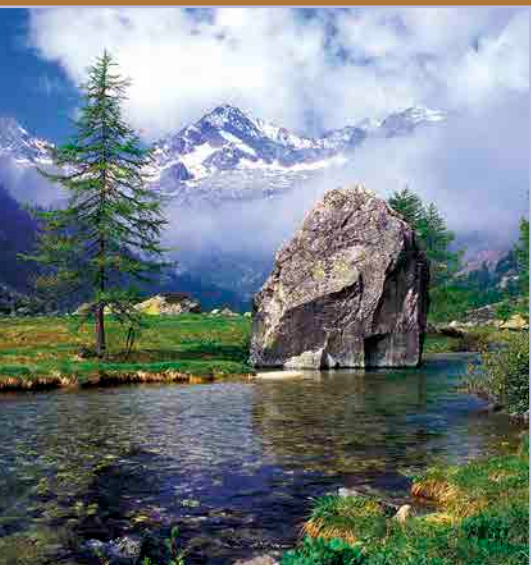


We camp outside the core zone of the park, near the refuges



We touch only with the eyes, and we mind where we walk

Parco delle Alpi Marittime



Born in 1995 from the merger between the Parco dell'Argentera (1980), the Riserva del Bosco and the Laghi di Palanfré reserves (1979), the Parco delle Alpi Marittime combines three valleys (Vermenagna, Gesso and Stura) and four communities.

Linked by history.

At the western extremity of the Alpine range, the Argentera-Mercantour massif constitutes an area of nearly 100,000 hectares of conserved nature. A spectacular meeting place of the Alps and the Mediterranean, it is also a historical crossroads of peoples and cultures. It boasts a sufficiently rich and rare biological profusion so as to be listed among the main centres of biodiversity on the European continent.

The Mercantour national Park and Parco delle Alpi Marittime already have many years of shared history since they were the King of Italy's game reserve. All their efforts are now directed towards creating a shared management structure, with Europe-wide programs, cross-border projects, and the candidature for UNESCO world heritage listing of the two parks. No effort is spared to make sure their future draws from their past.

An identity forged by man and nature.

Despite the proximity of the Mediterranean sea, the massif still consists of 24 peaks rising above 3000 m in altitude! The tallest of them all is the Argentera with a height of 3297 m rising toward the sky less than 50 km from the Côte d'Azur. Chamois, ibex, roe deer, wild boars as well as wolves, foxes, ermine and marmots are some of the 58 mammal species which inhabit the two parks. In addition, there are over 150 species of birds, including numerous birds of prey. The reintroduction of bearded vultures and ibex are examples of successful cooperation between the two parks. This area also shows the traces of intense human exchanges between the two slopes going back in time. Since pre-historic times, man has inhabited these mountains, and left his mark in the thousands of rock engravings found in the vallée des Merveilles and val de Fontanalbe.

More recently in history, the regions of Cuneo and Nice have developed multiple exchanges requiring the creation of a number of pathways of communication such as the “routes du sel” (salt routes). Thus for centuries, ways of life, customs and traditions were shared, forging a deeply shared identity.

A shared future.

Since they were created, the two parks have been developing an ever-closer collaboration for their joint mission of protecting and promoting their cultural, scenic and natural wealth. They work together on biodiversity conservation, for example by monitoring species which know no boundaries, such as the golden eagle and the wolf. They sometimes carry out transfers of ibex, and organise the annual operations for reintroducing the lammergeyer. They exchange know-how and personnel and coordinate

oversight of education and sustainable development, etc.

Partnered since 1987, the two parks signed a cooperation charter in 1998 in order to reinforce their cross-border identity. Their ultimate goal is to create a European Park.



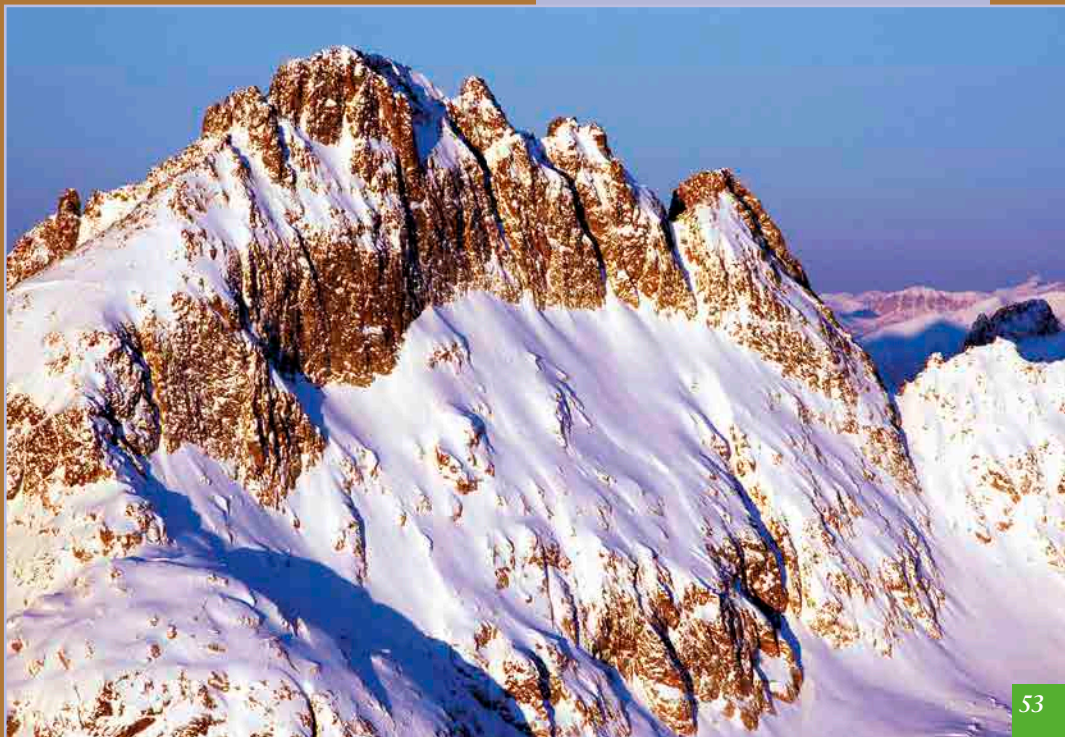
Parco naturale
Alpi Marittime

*Contact information for the
Parco delle Alpi Marittime:*

piazza Regina Elena, 30,
12010 Valdieri (CN) Italia

www.parcoalpimarittime.it
parcalma@tin.it

Tél : (00 39) 0 171 97 397
Fax : (00 39) 0 171 97 542



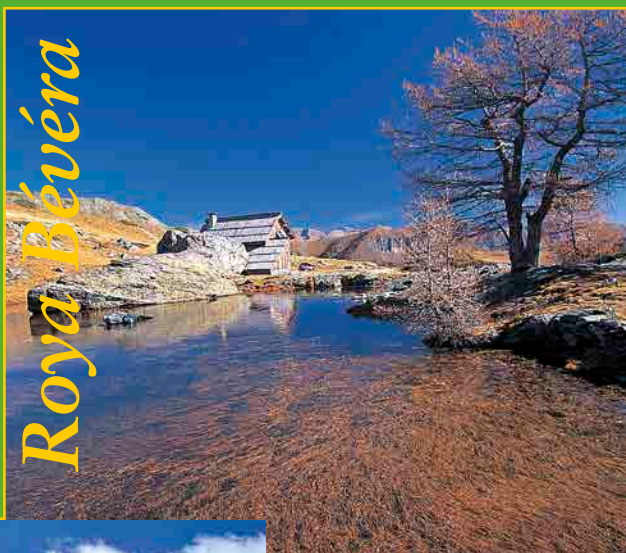
*Maison du Parc
(Park center) /
Office of Tourism
(open year round)*

• Tende - 04 93 04 73 71
royabevera@
mercantour-parcnational.fr

Point of information

• Casterino
04 93 04 89 89

Roya Bévéra



Vésubie

*Maison du Parc
(Park center)*

St-Martin-Vésubie
(open year round)
04 93 03 23 15

vesubie@
mercantour-parcnational.fr

*Maison du Parc (Park center)
(open summers only)*

St-Etienne de Tinée
04 93 02 42 27

moyennetinee@
mercantour-parcnational.fr
hautetinee@
mercantour-parcnational.fr

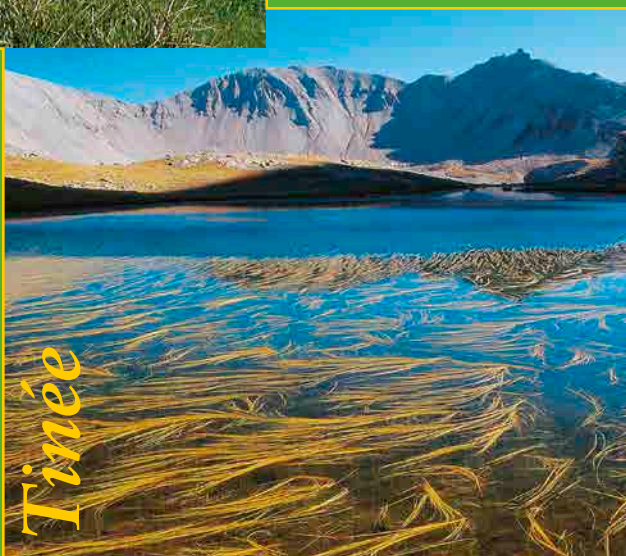
Points of information

• O.T. St-Dalmas le Sauvage
(open year round)

04 93 02 46 40

• O.T. St-Etienne de Tinée
04 93 02 41 96

Tinée





*Upper Var
and Cians*

*Maison du Parc
(Park center)*
 Maison Valbergane
 (open year round)
 04 93 02 58 23
 varcians@
 mercantour-parcnational.fr
Points of information

- Refuge de la Cantonnière
04 93 05 51 36
- Entraunes
04 93 05 51 40

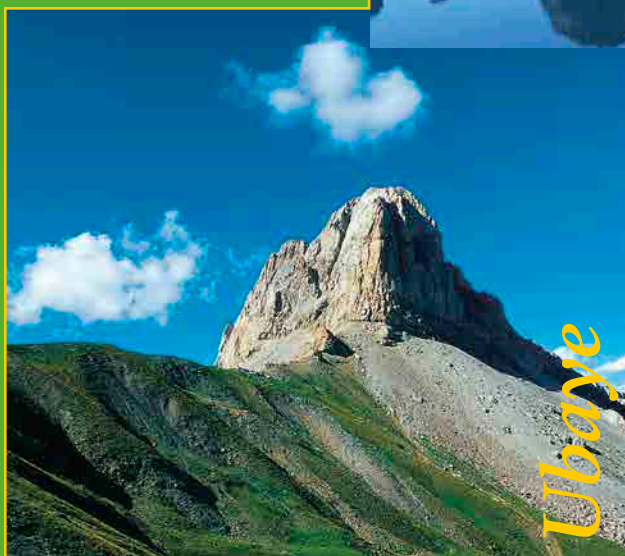
Maison du Parc (Park center)
 verdon@
 mercantour-parcnational.fr

Point of information
 Chalet du Laus
 (open summers only)
 06 32 90 80 24

- Offices of Tourism*
- Val Allos (open during the season)
04 92 83 02 81
 - Colmars - les - Alpes
(open during the season)
04 92 83 41 92



*Verdon
(upper valley)*



Ubaye

Maison du Parc (Park center)
 Barcelonnette
 (open summers only)
 04 92 81 21 31
 ubaye@
 mercantour-parcnational.fr
Points of information

- Refuge de la Cayolle
(open summers only)
04 92 81 24 25
- Larche Information Center
04 92 84 33 58
- Barcelonnette Office of Tourism
(open year round)
04 92 81 04 71

Statistical data

Location: Alpes-Maritimes and Alpes-de-Haute-Provence departments

Created: August 18th 1979

Area: 2147 km²

Park core zone: 68,495 hectares

Partnership zone: 146,270 hectares, 28 communities

Sectors: the area of the park is divided into 7 geographical sectors, each managed by 4 to 8 wardens.

Permanent inhabitants: nearly 20,000 inhabitants in the Park's 28 communities.

Flora: with over 2000 plant species, the Mercantour area holds the country's diversity record.

Fauna: 58 species of mammals including the 6 wild ungulates (ibex, stag, chamois, roe deer, mouflon and wild boar) and the wolf. 153 species of birds with some unique encounters, where Tengmalm's owl, adapted to low temperatures, rubs shoulders with the Scops owl from North Africa.

The Park's wardens and reception personnel



The park wardens, whom you can recognise by their uniforms bearing the Park's logo, have

several missions: ensuring compliance with the regulations of the core zone, understanding and monitoring changes, and raising public awareness.

Reception personnel are present in the Park Centres and Information Points, and in certain Tourist Information Offices to provide useful information to visitors. Since the 2006 law was passed, the Park oversees sustainable social and economic development at a local level.

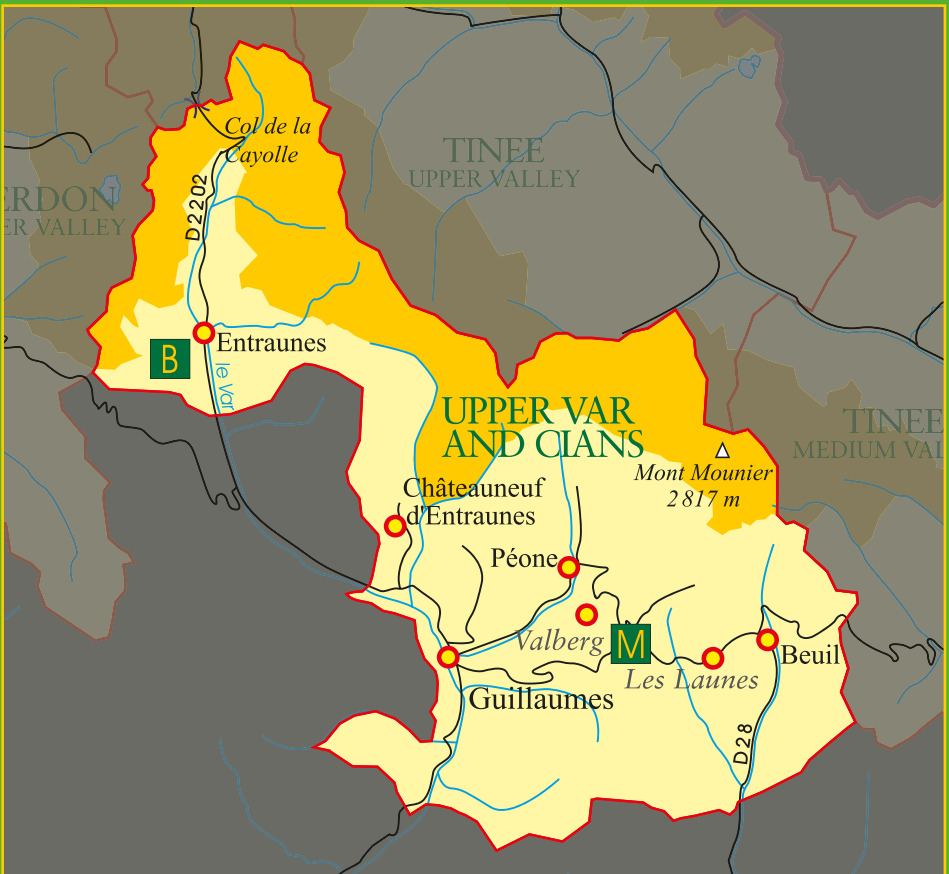
France's other national parks

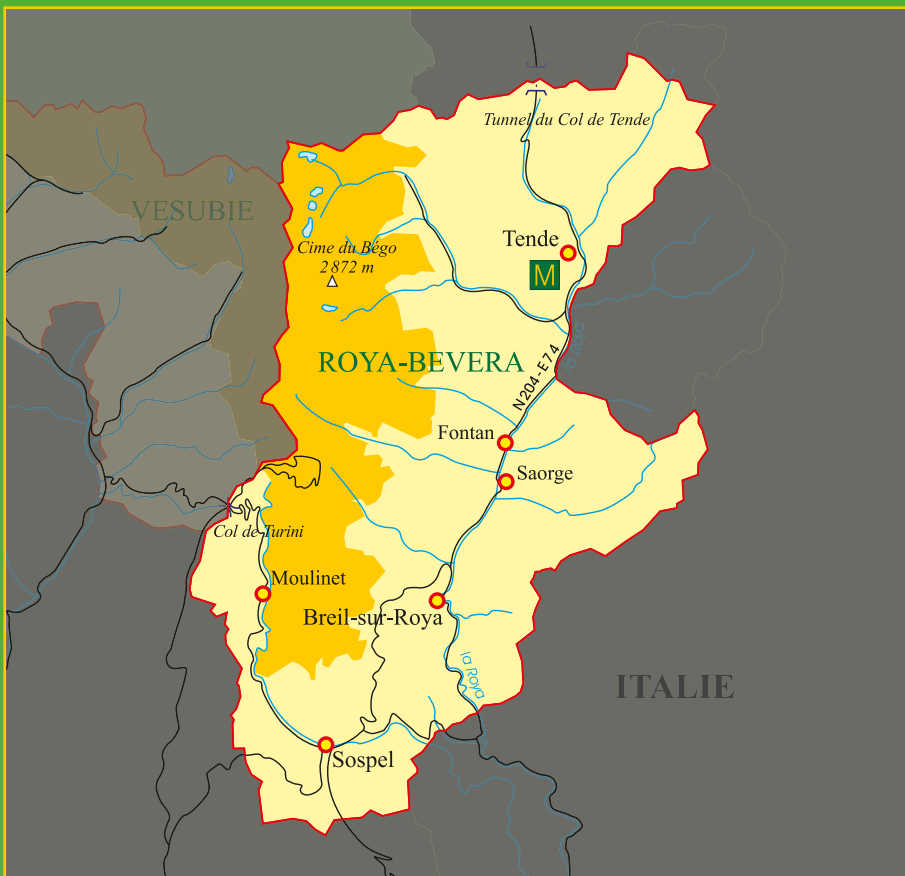
France has nine parks and is at an advanced stage in creating a tenth, planned for 2010: the Calanques de Marseille-Cassis. The dynamism of these institutions, which promote the individual uniqueness of these protected natural spaces, has been boosted since 2007 by the creation of "Parcs nationaux de France" (France's national parks). This public body is charged with coordinating resources and developing the national and international influence of France's national parks. (www.parcnational.fr)

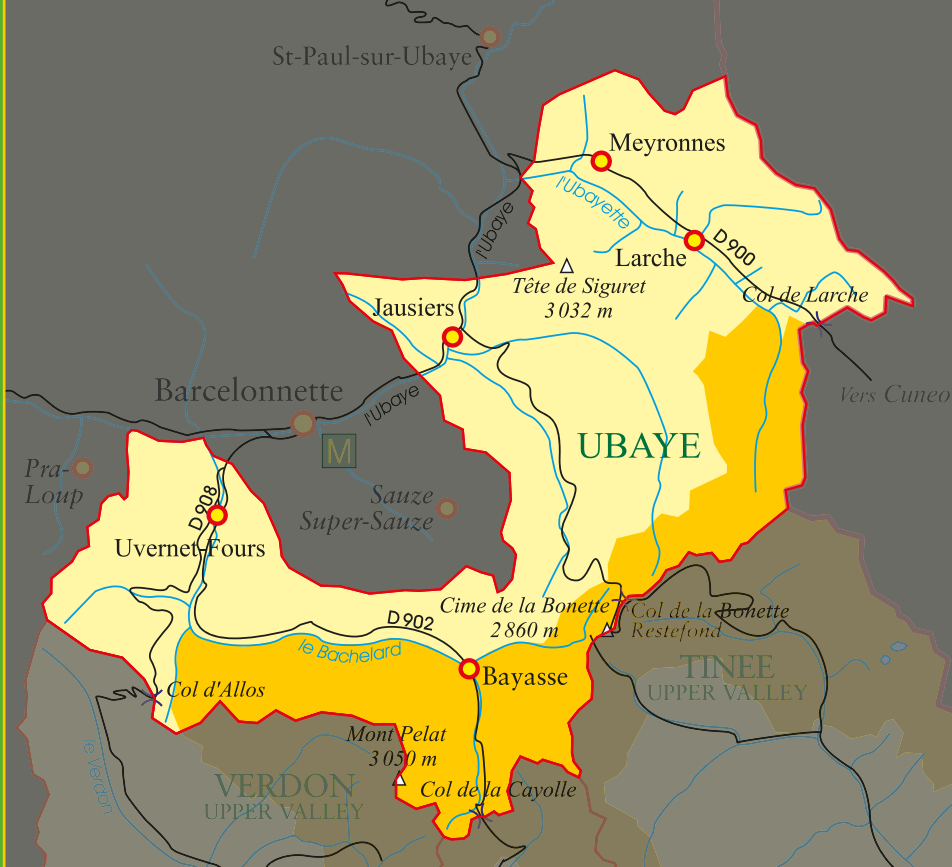
The logo of France's national Parks

This logo represents the diversity, profusion and the universality of life, but also its fragility. Created in 1995, it is still very modern and worth a closer look to see all its details.




















	Parc Center (Maison du Parc)		French-Italian border
	Parc Office		Department boundary
	Peak / Mountaintop / Summit		Valley boundary
	Col / Pass		Major hydrographic network
	Tunnel		Lake
	French township / community		Parco delle Alpi Maritime
	Italian township / community		Core zone
	Main road		Optimal partnership zone
	A8 Motorway		

Alpes-M
FRA





ITALIA

Vers Turin

Cuneo

Sambuco

Aisone

Vinadio

Stura de Demonte

Gesso

Valdieri

Entracque

Vernante

Monte Matto
3094m

Mont Malinvern
2938m

Terme di Valdieri

PARCO DELLE
ALPI MARITIME

Palanfré

Pointe Marguareis
2650m

Monte Carbone
2873m

Tunnel du
Col de Tende

Isola 2000

Mont Saint Sauveur
2711m

Argentera Cima Sud
3297m

Cime du Gélas
3143m

Alpes Maritimes

Alpes Maritimes

Cime du Bégio
2874m

La Roya

Castérino

Tende

La Brigue

Rimplas

Valdeblore

Saint-Martin
Vésubie

Belvédère

La Bollène-Vésubie

Col de Turini
1607m

Cime de l'Authion
2075m

Moulinet

Breil-sur-Roya

Alpes Maritimes

Alpes Maritimes

ITALIA

Le Var

La Bévère

Sospel

Ventimiglia

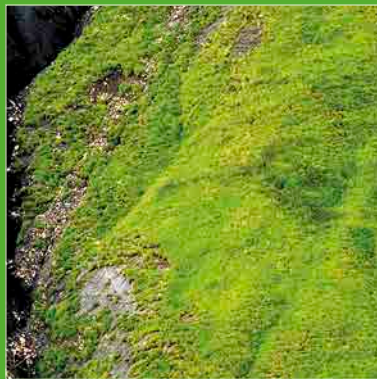
Menton

Monaco

Vers Nice

Mer Méditerranée

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