



DÉPARTEMENT  
DES ALPES-MARITIMES

06

LONG-DISTANCE ROUTE  
LA GRANDE TRAVERSÉE  
DU MERCANTOUR

LES GUIDES

Randoxygène



.....

# 1979 2019

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Thanks to the long-distance walking route La Grande Traversée du Mercantour, the mountains of the Côte d'Azur region now have a hiking route that lives up to its beauty, the wealth of its natural environment, its history and the great names that made it famous around the world, for example Chevalier Victor de Cessole and Hervé Gourdel, not forgetting Patrick Berhault, Franck Ruggeri, Didier Ughetto, Jean Grinda and so many others.

So, all walking enthusiasts now have the opportunity to enjoy a unique experience, from the highest summits of the Southern Alps down to the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, along a continuous, athletic and demanding route.

This physical challenge provides constant marvels for the senses along each of its 16 stages, each one involving around 5 to 7 hours of walking, and passing through some of the most beautiful countryside in the Alpes-Maritimes.

The other accomplishment of the Grande Traversée du Mercantour, to which I personally attach great importance, is its reduced environmental impact, demonstrated by the fact that it follows existing paths almost in its entirety. Moreover, The project has been approved by the Mercantour National Park, this management and development instance partner who will celebrate its 40th anniversary on summer 2019..

Thus, by means of this showcase example of long-distance walking in the Côte d'Azur region, both on a national and international scale, we create harmony through the combination of environmental conservation, the pleasure of walking, and an economic boost for the region, in particular for the Haut-Pays area.



**CHARLES ANGE GINESY**

President of the Alpes-Maritimes Département



# LA GRANDE TRAVERSÉE DU MERCANTOUR



Even today, how would it be possible to describe the Grande Traversée du Mercantour without mentioning Victor de Cessole and his expeditions at the beginning of the 20th century, that made great contributions to the conquest of the mountain summits in the Alpes-Maritimes region, and to developing alpine tourism?

Humbly taking inspiration from this approach, the Département offers you the opportunity to combine a physical accomplishment with discovery of the exceptional countryside in the Alpes-Maritimes by making your way along an exceptional itinerary that will provide sumptuous views over the Alpine massif and the sea, at the price of a sustained effort.

From Estenc, the route's starting point in the Haut-Var, la Grande Traversée du Mercantour will lead you through the high alpine valleys of the Tinée, the Vésubie, the Roya and the Bévéra before its grand finale in Menton, on the shores of the





### Mediterranean Sea.

At the heart of the Argentera-Mercantour crystalline massifs, you will thus discover the most beautiful summits of the Alpes-Maritimes and their Italian neighbours, culminating in natural conservation areas, including the well-known Mercantour National Park (PNM) and the Parco naturale delle Alpi Marittime (PAM).

Especially for nature-lovers, ibex, chamois and marmots add to the rich palette of colours, marked by contrasts between the often strikingly blue sky, the white perennial snow and the varied colours of vegetation adapted to the different altitudes.

After progressing from west to east on an itinerary that requires walkers to have the fitness of active walkers, the route, not far from the Cime du Gélas and Monte Argentera and with its highest point at 2700m altitude, begins to advance to the south.

At Authion, the Mediterranean Sea starts to come into view, as if to reward you for your efforts and as a promise that you will soon arrive at your

destination.

On reaching the Col du Berceau, the route provides a spectacular view over the coast, stretching from the Italian border to the Estérel massif and revealing the exquisite beauty of the Riviera.

La Grande Traversée du Mercantour, in the same way as the entire Alpes-Maritimes region, offers the opportunity to link up the high mountains with the sea, whilst making the most of the unique landscape, both varied and contrasting, that creates the wealth of its natural environment, and for which it is so well-known.

This guide describes the 16 stages of this fabulous 212km trek, which will enthuse even those who already know the area, with more than 12,000m of height gain and more than 13,000m of descent. It also describes variants of the Grande Traversée du Mercantour, for walkers who are not able to walk it in its entirety, with a possible starting point at Allos in the Alpes de Haute-Provence.

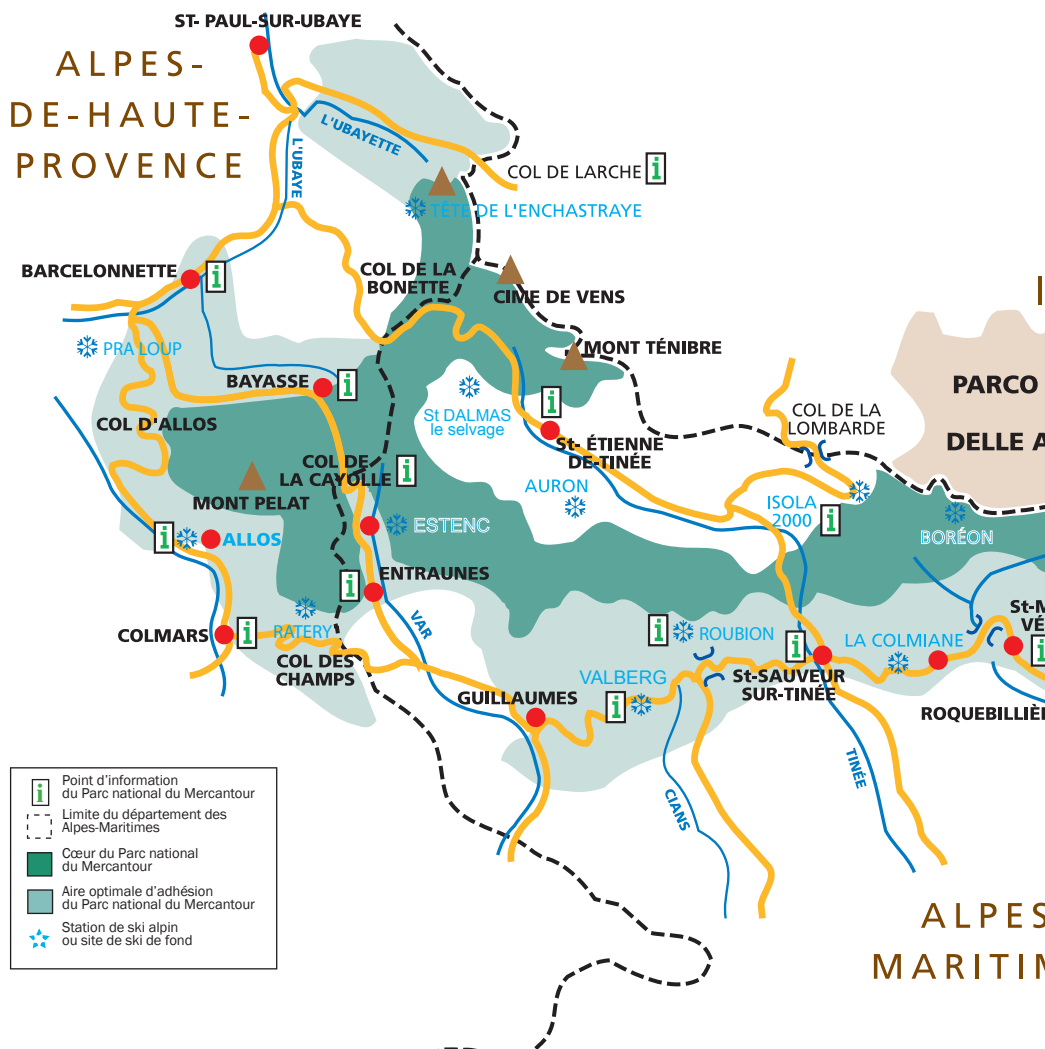


# MERCANTOUR NATIONAL PARK

## A SPECIFIC SYSTEM OF SIGNS

In the same way as for all National Parks, walking routes in the park's interior are indicated by yellow signs. This is the case for many itineraries at altitude, and therefore some of the selection of routes presented in this guide.

The Haut Pays area of the Alpes-Maritimes region falls almost entirely within the Mercantour National Park (MNP); created in 1979, this park covers more than 150km from the Col de Tende in the East to the Ubaye valley in the West, encompassing 68,500 ha. To the north, the Mercantour National Park borders the "Alpi Maritime" Park in Italy, and a charter established in 1998 twins these two organisations together as part of the cross-border expanse of protected natural areas. The Mercantour National Park has exceptional natural and cultural heritage: it is a mountainous area that includes several summits over 3000m in altitude and whose slopes shelter remarkable fauna and flora, as much due to their wealth of variety as to their specific nature.





# AN IMPORTANT SITE FOR BIODIVERSITY

## MANKIND

Evidence of the ancient presence of man, from alpine chalets to military fortifications, from oratories and chapels to forestry works, is present in all areas of the National Park.

Grazing practices, dating back over several thousand years, have been immortalised in the silent stones of the Vallée des Merveilles.

## THE LANDSCAPE

Diversity would be a euphemism to describe landscapes made from geological horizons interwoven from geological periods going back to the Primary Era.

Ice melt, occurring only in the last 10,000 years, has carved out marked valleys, whose sides still suggest this presence, and with valley sills made from moraines, and erratics in polished rock. Conifer forests and pastures alternate with the south-facing and north-facing slopes, scattered across the landscape in a checkerboard of shades of green.

## FAUNA

The Mercantour National Park is the ideal place to see large mountain wildlife.

You will suddenly come across chamois, ibex, mouflons at the turn of a bend, not forgetting the small mammals (marmots, mountain hares, stoats...).

In the skies, look out for golden eagles, bearded vultures, or even ptarmigans, black grouse, rock partridges...

Since 1992, wolves have returned naturally to this region before spreading beyond the Mercantour.

## FLORA

With 2,269 species of flowers, including 105 rare and 105 endemic, that have come from all kinds of sources, in the space of a few kilometres we go from Mediterranean flora to Arctic flora; the months of June and July, in particular, offer an unforgettable sight of alpine slopes ablaze with a multitude of colours.

## MORE INFORMATION:

[www.mercantour.eu](http://www.mercantour.eu)

## REGULATIONS

applying to the park's Central Zone

- **NO DOGS, EVEN ON A LEAD**

to avoid disturbing wild and farm animals.

- **DO NOT PICK FLOWERS OR TAKE SAMPLES**
- animals, plants, rocks and fossils belong to the landscape.

- **NO FIREARMS**
- here, all animals are protected.

- **NO LITTERING**
- to keep the natural environment clean.

- **NO FIRES**
- to avoid wildfires and damage to the soil.

- **NO CAMPING**
- to maintain the beauty of the sites and avoid polluting the environment.

- **REGULATIONS FOR**

## BIVOUACS

authorised between 19pm and 9am, and more than an hour's walk from the edges of the park or from an access road.

- **NO VEHICLES**
- this natural space should be explored on foot, vehicles are prohibited other than on authorised itineraries.

- **NO NOISE OR DISTURBANCES**
- to maintain peace and quiet for all.

- **PARAGLIDING AND OTHER SPORTS USING FABRIC WINGS**

subject to regulations, take-off and landing subject to individual authorisation.

TALIE

NATURELE

ALPI MARITTIME

CIME DU GÉLAS

MONT BEGO

VALLÉE DES MERVEILLES

MARTIN SUBIE

RE

VESUBIE

COL DE TURINI

COL DE BROUIS

SOSPEL

BÉVÈRA

BREIL-SUR-ROYA

ROYA

TENDE

CASTERINO

TUNNEL DU COL DE TENDE

PARCO NATURALE MARGUAREIS

MES

# PARCO NATURALE DELLE ALPI MARITTIME



Lac de Fremamorte and the Argentera massif

The management group Ente di Gestione delle Aree protette delle Alpi Marittime was set up in January 2016 thanks to the fusion of the Parco naturale delle Alpi Marittime (PAM), set up in 1995, the Parco naturale dell'Argentera (created in 1980) and the Riserva del Bosco and the Laghi di Palanfré (created in 1979). The new protected area covers the valleys of Gesso, Stura, Vermentagna, Pesio and Alta Valle Tanaro and encompasses seven municipalities (Aisone, Entracque, Valdieri, Vernante, Roaschia, Chiusa di Pesio and Briga Alta).

The mountains of the Alpi Marittime, at the southern extremity of the Alpine Arc, separate the plains of the Piedmont region from the coastline around Nice, and are contained between two mountain cols that have been in frequent use since ancient times: the Col de Tende and the Col de Larche / Maddalena.

Therefore the two parks have a common border of 35 kilometres; together, they create a protected area of more than 220,000 hectares that became in 2013 the first European Park "GECT Parc européen/Parco europeo Alpi Marittime Mercantour".

Due to this, the two parks work together on a series of projects and, following the twinning convention signed in 1987, they received in 1993 a Council of Europe Diploma, an important recognition that has injected new energy into the evaluation and establishment of a common policy for territorial protection and economic development.





# A LARGE PROTECTED NATURE RESERVE

## A KING'S PARK

The King of Sardinia Victor Emmanuel II was struck by the beauty of these mountains, rich in chamois and trout, and covered in lush vegetation, during his visit to the Gesso Valley and its thermal waters in 1855. Conscious of the King's love of hunting, and of the advantages that the presence of the royal family would bring to the region, the mayors of the communities in the upper valley decided to give the King the right to hunt and fish over most of the area: thus the Royal Hunting Reserve was created.

## LAKES AND GLACIERS

More than eighty lakes, locked in by rocks or bordered by open grasslands, feature in the park's landscapes at altitude. Each of these water bodies, on whose surfaces the surrounding summits are reflected, has a unique charm, shape, size and colour. Some are very small and hidden away, like the Valcuca and Maledia lakes, and others, like the Sella lake, are deep and full of fish. Others still, like the large Piastra and Chiotas pools, are artificial, created to produce electrical energy at the end of the 1960s.



## FLOWERS

The Alpi-Marittime region is well-known around the world for its botanical riches: with 2600 recorded species, its heritage represents almost half of the national flower heritage. For example, from the orchid family, which contains many of the most spectacular flowers that exist in the natural world, 40 of the 80 species that are present in Italy are found within the Park.

## ANIMALS



The chamois population, numbering around 4500 animals, is one of the highest in the Alps given the land area of the Park. Ibex, which were reintroduced into this region by Victor Emmanuel III during the 1920s, have multiplied in number from around 20 animals brought in from the Grand Paradis National Park, to more than 550. Other mammals, such as roe deer and wild boar, are also present in the Park; you may also have a chance encounter with a bighorn sheep, from the nearby Mercantour Park. Thanks to its characteristic whistling, the marmot is one of the animals that attracts the most attention from visitors, especially from children. Avifauna, extremely rich and varied, include almost all the species typical of the western Alpine Arc, ranging from black grouse to rock ptarmigans, as well as a significant number of migratory birds. Ten couples of golden eagles have made the park their home, along with many other birds of prey, such as the bearded vultures that recently reappeared in the Alpes-Maritimes thanks to a European reintroduction programme. Wolves, on the other hand, came to the park of their own accord.

## MORE INFORMATION :

[www.parcoalpimarittime.it](http://www.parcoalpimarittime.it)



# ACTIONS INITIATED BY THE DÉPARTEMENT



## A HOMOGENEOUS SYSTEM OF SIGNS

To avoid a series of mismatched signs, a single theme has been chosen: present at the start of the routes, at intersections and cols, these signs in engraved larch, easily recognisable, are in place for all the walking itineraries in the mountain area. Each post has a reference number that can be easily identified on the corresponding map. This location process has the triple advantage of being remarkably reliable, perfectly simple, and easily read by all. Take note of the fact that, within the Central Zone of the Mercantour National Park, direction signs on yellow panels are progressively replacing the engraved wooden arrows. The waymarker numbering system, however, remains the same no matter which sign format is used. In addition, a board placed opposite the direction to follow makes navigation easier.

## WAYMARKERS IN PROTECTED ZONES

Discreet painted waymarkers in yellow (short-distance walking route known as a “PR”) or white and red (long-distance walking route known as a “GR”) guide walkers, at short range, starting from the indication posts whose directional arrows make general orientation easier. These small painted rectangles (12cm × 5cm) adorn rocks or trees along the edges of the routes. We point out that no other painted waymarkers are authorized by the Département authorities.





## SPECIFIC MAPS

In addition to the description and the map of each route presented in this guidebook, it is essential to carry on your person the TOP 25 map or maps that correspond to your route. Only the 1:25000 map will allow precise navigation through the terrain and analysis of the main parameters on the route (slope, height gain/descent, shelter, sources of water, sights...). Each direction waymarker figures on the map (black dot), with the relevant number, which reassures the user and provides you with optimal security. In case there is a problem (bad weather, tiredness, injury, accident...), only the map will allow you to find the right path or track to take to reach the closest village. In the event that a GPS navigation tool that you are using stops working, the map will be an essential piece of equipment for the group.

## BEWARE!

Given the predicted timeframe for validity of this guidebook (3 years), routes may be modified in reaction to new events, whether they occur by chance (natural deterioration or vandalism) or planned (revision of Top 25 maps). In all cases, information from the field and made available on the website dedicated to this purpose take precedence over the information provided in this guidebook.

As a first port of call, consult the website **[www.randoxygene.org](http://www.randoxygene.org)**, which is regularly updated, to check that the routes detailed there are open. Given their attractiveness to walkers, some of the proposed routes pass partially outside the Alpes-Maritimes Département (Italy, Alpes de Haute-Provence). You will need to check with the relevant authorities that manage these other routes that they are open to walkers.

## 3D GEOPORTAIL

On its website dedicated to walking, the Conseil Départemental (eqv. county council) for the Alpes-Maritimes provides information about the entire route across the whole of the Département, and allows you to search for a profile of the terrain on a route and edit it...

<https://carto.departement06.fr>



### MAP REFERENCES:

IGN maps at scale 1:25000

- Haute Vallée du Var, n° 3540 ET
- Haute Tinée 1, n° 3639 OT
- Haute Tinée 2, n° 3640 ET
- Moyenne Tinée, n° 3641 ET
- Vallée de la Vésubie, n° 3741 OT
- Vallée de la Roya, n° 3841 OT
- Vallée de la Bévéra, n° 3741 ET
- Nice-Menton, n° 3742 OT



A physically-demanding sports activity, walking or hiking in the mountains requires a minimum level of fitness, suitable personal and group equipment, and a level of experience that will allow you to negotiate and overcome the obstacles that you will come across on a daily basis in the terrain you are crossing.

The Grande Traversée du Mercantour can be considered as a long-distance walking route, following the example of the GR20 in Corsica, or the Tour du Mont-Blanc in the Alpes du Nord. Before starting out, it is important to prepare your route and to train yourself up in order to enjoy the daily cumulation of walking time, the height gain/descent, the length of the stage and the alternance between the various types of terrain.

## SAFE WALKING

All walkers, whether experienced or beginners, who decide to start out on a walk or lead a group on a route, are necessarily held responsible and must follow a series of precautions and safety procedures.

## PREPARATION FOR WALKING

- analyse the technical details and the recommendations given in the guidebook;
- adapt the choice of route to the weather conditions;
- try to walk as a pair or in a group, never alone;
- give someone details of your route and expected arrival time;
- take complete sets of navigation and safety equipment;
- make sure the group participants have the right level of physical fitness, and that the group is relatively homogeneous;
- check your bag and only carry reliable clothes of good quality which will stand you in good stead in difficult conditions;
- carry the TOP 25 map that corresponds to the chosen route, and possibly a G.P.S., or a compass if you know how to use it.

## ANALYSE THE ROUTE

- find out information about the terrain you will cross, the environments and areas (permanent snow...), the ground you are walking on (path...) and the obstacles to overcome;
- analyse the details, look at the IGN map at scale 1:25000, the distance to walk during the day, and compare it to that already walked on previous days;
- evaluate the effort, the technical level of the sections, and the risk (slips...);
- take the altitude and exposure level into account; several different vegetation types exist at different altitudes and localised phenomena can be seen during the walk;
- think of different solutions for turning back or as escape routes by looking at the map, including those that will allow you to reach the nearest valley in the event of a problem;
- comply with the specific regulations by adopting suitable behaviour when you cross protected areas (PNM and PAM).



## CHECK THE WEATHER FORECAST

Before starting out on a walk, it is essential to find out what the weather conditions are going to be like, by calling the Département answering machine:

**Mountain weather 0 899 710 206.**

It is good practice to find out this information several times in the days preceeding the beginning of the trek in order to build up an idea of the changes to the forecasts. In all cases it is essential to:

- take into account any alerts that can, even in summer, be particularly sustained and localised in certain areas;
- be correctly equipped (or carry the correct equipment) for these altitudes, to withstand the large daily variations in temperatures;
- do not hesitate to cancel a stage, or plan to adapt your route by descending to a lower altitude in the valley when this is possible.

A strong wind, a thunderstorm, sustained rainfall, a sudden drop in temperature, or very hot conditions on the lower part of the route can add hinder the advancement of the group and rapidly turn into a critical situation in terms of safety.

Various deteriorations in the weather can occur in the mountains. Two of them are particularly frequent in the summer.

## THUNDERSTORMS

At the end of the afternoon in summer, distinctive clouds develop (cumulonimbus) which produce storms accompanied by lightning, hail storms, and rainfall in large quantities. A few pieces of advice:

- don't take shelter under trees, including isolated ones, even if you are trying to protect yourself from the rain;
- avoid walking on ridges and on ground where the shape of a walker stands out. The basic rule is "never to stick out", by choosing to stop within a dip or a hollow that will potentially be less exposed;
- avoid carrying metal objects on your person;
- turn off your mobile phone and radio, without

making any attempt to use these devices;

- space yourselves out, maintain a distance between each group member;
- when stationary, isolate yourself from the ground by sitting on your rucksack;
- don't cast aside the recommended precautions in order to seek shelter from the rain or due to overwhelming feelings of panic.

## BEWARE!

A storm is often accompanied locally by heavy rain which cause significant surface water flow across the dry terrain.



In this case, when passing cornices, below gullies and on slopes overlooked by rockfaces, the risk of stonefall is always possible; stay alert as you progress in order to avoid exposing yourself unnecessarily by starting out across a technical section.







## MIST

Route conditions and navigation can become tricky if visibility is reduced. It is essential to carry a map, a compass and an altimeter to locate your position and decide on a plan of attack.

The group must stay alert to height changes on the ground, often not taken into account to a sufficient extent; if you are in doubt about a section it is best to stop in a safe place, warm yourselves up and wait for the mist to disperse, if the weather forecast from the day before had indicated this would happen.

Electronic devices (GPS-based) are not always correct in terms of data, in particular concerning the altitude, and can have problems with satellite connections, thus calculating an incorrect location and route.

## FIND OUT ABOUT THE USUAL PRACTICES OF THE WALKERS IN YOUR GROUP

Each walker must know their own physical capacity (health and physical condition) and their aptitude (technical level) when walking in

mountains.

Regular participation in walks, and good general hygiene contribute to a successful Traverse, given the large number of cumulative days.

## GROUP ORGANISATION

A walk or a hike, whether a day outing or spread over several days, must be prepared in advance, to anticipate any problems and to follow the series of recommendations laid out in the previous paragraphs.

Limit the size of the group to make organisation and practical considerations easier (advance bookings...), and to move faster across the terrain and stick to planned time frames.

## DURING THE ROUTE WALKERS, OR GROUP LEADERS, MUST:

- start out sufficiently early in the day and never leave a person to walk alone or in a group that is too large;
- stay alert during the walk: settle to a regular rhythm and take breaks for refreshments at regular intervals;
- adapt to the terrain and to the condition of paths and tracks that may not always correspond to information and forecasts given;
- always remain alert to the mountain environment around you;
- take great care when crossing or passing below slopes that are exposed to rockfall or stonefall;
- if necessary, modify the route you had originally planned;
- keep an eye on changes in weather conditions;
- take the state of tiredness of group members into account;
- do not be reluctant to abandon your route, turn back or find an escape route in the event of an incident or uncertainty;
- stay on the waymarked paths and tracks; some paths in evidence on the ground can lead to a dead end;
- maintain a suitable distance between walkers when crossing exposed ground, and, quite the opposite, keep the group close together when ascending a steep, stony section.

## NAVIGATION

Knowing how to locate where you are and find your way is a fundamental requirement in a mountain environment. Reading a 1:25000 map, navigating with a compass, and using an altimeter must be as natural and obvious as walking itself. The complexity of the terrain higher up, with its deep valleys and rocky slopes, sometimes makes navigation awkward, an inconvenience that the numbered signs put in place by the Département aim to abate.

## MAPPING

Reliable illustrator of the waymarked routes and the numbered signs, the TOP 25 map series at scale 1:25000, co-produced by the National Geographical Institute (IGN) and the Département, are the best tool to use when moving through the mountain environment. The precision of these maps (1cm = 250m on the ground), the amount of information they provide and their personalisation make them an essential tool. Seven of them (Haute Vallée du Var, Haute Tinée 1 and 2, the Vallée de la Vésubie, Vallée de la Roya, and Vallée de la Bévère and Nice-Menton) cover the Grande Traversée du Mercantour.



**BEWARE!** The TOP 25 IGN map of the valley you are in is the only reliable document that will ensure your return to the valley if you change your plans or if there is a problem in your group. You must make sure you have the latest version of the map, knowing that IGN updates the map approximately every 5 years.

## SNOW COVER

This persists in June and even in July, depending on the year, above 2500m, and manifests itself especially as névés which fill north-facing and west-facing small high valleys. Special care must be taken when crossing these névés, because the hard snow is totally unforgiving. Also, crampons, ice axe, or even a rope to install a handrail are useful at the start of the summer.





## HUNTING

The ancient practice of hunting, very important to locals, occurs mainly during the autumn. From mid-August (on the coast) to mid-December, rules based on the most elementary good sense should be complied with: dress in highly-visible colours, do not leave the waymarked paths that are well-known to hunters, make your presence known by calling out if you are in the slightest doubt about a situation. Temporary signs displayed during beats (in particular for wild boar) warn walkers of a specific danger on walking routes.

## PINE PROCESSIONARY CATERPILLARS

If caterpillar nests or processions are present, which is now a particularly persistent phenomenon, avoid walking on routes where they occur. In any case, don't touch the nests or the caterpillars, whose silks can be dangerous, irritating and cause health problems.

## WARNING

The information provided in this guide is given for information purposes, and despite the utmost care that has been taken in putting it together, some errors made have made their way in.

Any walker who undertakes either one of the stages or the entire journey described, does so under their own responsibility and in full knowledge of the dangers present.

The Conseil Départemental (eqv. county council) disclaims all responsibility in the case of an accident or an incident.

On a year-to-year basis, modifications to the description of the stages can occur as a result of chance events or planned changes (landslides, route modification...).

In all cases, the information obtained directly in the field and displayed on the website of the Grande Traversée du Mercantour take precedence over the information provided in this guide.



Livestock grazing is practised extensively in the Alpes-Maritimes: herds graze on large open areas where they take advantage of the natural grassland resources. Herds are regularly moved around in sync with the seasons to find sufficient grass to feed the animals then allow the vegetation enough time to recover.

The livestock farmers are either landowners, or tenants, of the land where their herds graze, and hold relevant exploitation rights. Pastoralism is a traditional activity that is part of the local heritage.

It has an important social and economic function in mountainous areas.

Grazing practices also play a fundamental role in upkeep of the open landscapes, diverse ecosystems and the habitats of protected species, and actively contribute to prevention of forest fires.

## LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN DOGS

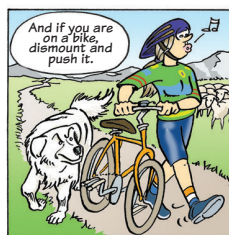
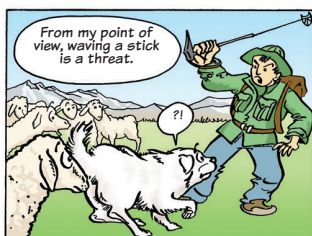
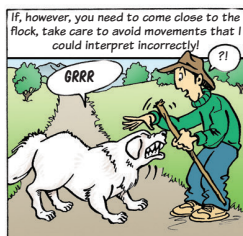
To protect their herds against attacks by predators, livestock farmers and shepherds use livestock guardian dogs, which are there to keep potential dangers away by dissuading all outside intruders from approaching the flock.

During your walking excursions, you may come across a herd or flock accompanied by one or more guardian dogs.

- In all cases: give the flock or herd a wide berth, where possible avoid crossing through it.
- When you come across a guardian dog: pause to allow it to identify you, remain calm, do not threaten it, do not caress it.
- If you are authorised to bring your dog into the area where you are walking, keep it on a lead. In all cases, never carry your dog in your arms.



# ENCOUNTERS WITH LIVESTOCK PROTECTION DOGS HOW TO BEHAVE



**FIND THIS CARTOON IN TOURIST OF CES AND AS A FREE DOWNLOAD ON [WWW.LOUP.DEVELOPPEMENT-DURABLE.GOUV.FR](http://WWW.LOUP.DEVELOPPEMENT-DURABLE.GOUV.FR)**



Other than the very widespread individual practice of walking, there are two types of accompanied outings:

- Outings organised by professional outdoor activity leaders, supervised by a person who holds a certificate or a state-registered diploma, and for which there is a fee.
- Outings organised by clubs or associations, free and supervised by volunteers.

## CONTACT DETAILS

The list of professionals, activities, clubs and associations is available at the link:

[www.randoxygene.org](http://www.randoxygene.org)



## CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS

These must be affiliated to a suitable walkers federation.

Three federations fulfill this criteria:

- the Fédération Française de Randonnée Pédestre,
- the Fédération Française de la Montagne et de l'Escalade,
- the Fédération Française des Clubs Alpins et de Montagne.

Each of these federations trains volunteer federal leaders who can then add quality and improve safety during outings organised by clubs and associations.

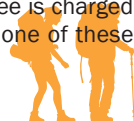
## PROFESSIONALS

Whether self-employed or grouped together as part of various organisations, professionals must have a professional certificate or a state-registered diploma issued by the French government body Ministère de la Ville, de la Jeunesse et des Sports.

Recognised certificates and state-registered diplomas for leaders of this activity, are:

- either a state-registered certificate or a state-registered diploma, for an Accompagnateur en Moyenne Montagne (mountain walking guide),
- or state-registered certificates or state-registered diplomas, for Aspirant Mountain Guides and fully-qualified Mountain Guides.

Any organised outing for which a fee is charged must be led by a person holding one of these professional qualifications.





## ROAD ACCESS

Number of kilometres from the coast with a route description of how to reach the start of the itinerary from the main cities on the Côte d'Azur coastline (Nice, Cannes or Menton).

## ROUTE INFORMATION:

Information for the route is indicated for each circuit, for example:

## HEIGHT GAIN/LOSS:

Change in altitude in terms of ascent and descent.

## DISTANCE:

Total length of the stage measured in kilometres between the starting point and the finish.

## TIME:

Out + return, or total time duration for a loop route.

NB: the time given for the walking routes is an average effective time period to which additional time taken for pauses needs to be added.

## GRADE/DIFFICULTY:

For each stage, the difficulty is classed as one of two categories:

- **athletic hiking:** route at a sustained level of difficulty which generally involves more than 650m of ascent/descent over 4h - 6h walking. Route suitable for fit walkers.
- **alpine walking:** long route at high altitude which can exceed 1000m of ascent/descent, over 5h - 7h walking. Itinerary suitable for fit and experienced walkers.

## SUITABLE SEASON:

Certain stages will be impassable before the end of June, or the beginning of July, above all due to the altitude. For example, in June, it is dangerous to go above 2300m where snow is still present.

## MAPS

Map reference IGN TOP 25.

## BEWARE!



Special regulations within the central zone of the PNM and the PAM.

## SCALE:

Ratio between the distances appearing on the map to the actual distances on the ground. The scale of map extracts in this guide varies from 1:25000 (1cm = 250m) to 1:50000 (1cm = 500m), depending on the length of the stages.

## MAP KEY

- Motorway
- Motorway tunnel
- Main / provincial road
- Road tunnel
- Local road
- Railway line
- Railway tunnel
- Station
- Direction indicator
- Town or Village
- Hamlet
- Church
- Chapel
- Oratory
- Group of buildings
- Isolated building
- Stage finish
- Direction of the route
- Stage route
- Technical section of the route
- Route of stage variant
- Stage waymarker number
- Location of stage signpost
- Overnight stay in refuge/mountain hut
- Multiple accommodation options
- Boundary of the Département (county)
- Summit
- Main watercourse
- Secondary watercourse
- Edge of the Mercantour National Park
- Edge of the Alpi Maritime Natural Park

# SPECIFIC EQUIPMENT



Pas des Ladres

## SUITABLE AND RELIABLE EQUIPMENT

Equipment suitable for mountains and difficult weather conditions is an important factor for comfort and safety. Reliable and checked on a regular basis, it influences the weight of a pack, guarantees effective progression, and is a safety factor in case the party has to stop.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT SHOES

The technical level of equipment has come a long way, in response to the increased popularity of a type of walking with minimalistic kit. Mountain walking is demanding and requires shoes suitable for the objectives set, with rigid soles, which are much more dependable when crossing névés or on hard snow.

## INDIVIDUAL EQUIPMENT

- Isolating ankle boots;
- Walking sticks, especially designed for the purpose;
- Rope, ice-axe, crampons depending on the difficulty of the objective and the season (used above all at the end of spring);
- Rucksack with an average minimum capacity of 40 litres;
- Clothes suitable for summer walking, but also for winter, including gloves, hats and glasses for emergencies;
- Water in sufficient quantity, and energy provisions.

# SPECIFIC EQUIPMENT

## SAFETY EQUIPMENT / COLLECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- Mobile phone, however, the possibility to use this must be put into the context of the mountains (partial or patchy mobile network coverage);
- 3-piece kit: "Compass - alimeter - 1:25000 map", classic tools essential for navigation (with GPS);
- Light rope (15 - 30m of 7 or 8mm), 2 or 3 slings or karabiners are very useful for difficult sections;
- **Medical kit:** essential, similar to all other outdoor sports activities. Also take effective skin protection against the sun's rays and the cold;
- Survival blanket, camping stove, lighter.





# ACCOMMODATION

The Grande Traversée du Mercantour takes several days; it therefore requires detailed organisation and advance booking of accommodation.

Several forms and types of accommodation are possible depending on the route stages. Be aware that not all establishments offer the same services.

Note that in some places, payment cannot be made by credit/debit card.

You can stay in mountain huts ('refuges'), stopover gîtes, bed and breakfasts, holiday villages, hotels and campsites.

**Whatever your choice of accommodation, please plan ahead and make advance bookings.**

**Mountain huts (refuges) at altitude or in high mountains** are reached only on foot. Their isolated locations, originally chosen to provide a stopover before climbing to the summit of a mountain peak, makes them particularly attractive. The mountain huts offer services suitable for walkers on a staged route with dormitory beds (bring your own sleeping bag), evening meals, breakfast and food supplies.

Mountain huts belonging to the French Alpine Club (CAF) have a central booking system ([sud.alpes-refuges.fr](http://sud.alpes-refuges.fr)).

## YOU WILL FIND THE FOLLOWING MOUNTAIN HUTS ON THE GTM ROUTE

REFUGE/MOUNTAIN HUT	WEBSITE	TELEPHONE	EMAIL ADDRESS
R1 Refuge de Ferrière (Italie)	<a href="http://www.rifugiobecchirossi.com">www.rifugiobecchirossi.com</a>	Tel. 39 0171 96 715 39 338 5337459 39 333 8882699	<a href="mailto:rifugiobecchirossi@gmail.com">rifugiobecchirossi@gmail.com</a>
R2 Refuge de Vens	<a href="http://www.cafnice.org">www.cafnice.org</a>	Tel. 04 93 62 59 99	<a href="http://sud.alpes-refuges.fr">sud.alpes-refuges.fr</a>
R3 Refuge de Rabuons	<a href="http://www.cafnice.org">www.cafnice.org</a>	Tel. 04 93 23 04 11 ou 06 03 92 46 58	<a href="mailto:refugederabuons@ffcam.fr">refugederabuons@ffcam.fr</a>
R4 Refuge Foches (Italie)	<a href="http://www.rifugiolaus.it">www.rifugiolaus.it</a>	Tel. 33 88 72 79 84	<a href="mailto:emiliobelmondo@tiscali.it">emiliobelmondo@tiscali.it</a>
R5 Refuge Santa Anna (Italie)	<a href="http://www.santuariosantanna.it">www.santuariosantanna.it</a>	Tel. 00 39 (0)171 95 91 25	<a href="mailto:info@santuariosantanna.eu">info@santuariosantanna.eu</a>
R6 Refuge Questa (Italie)	<a href="http://www.rifugioquesta.it">www.rifugioquesta.it</a>	Tel. 00 39 (0)171 97 338 Mob. +39 347 7959051	<a href="mailto:gestore@rifugioquesta.it">gestore@rifugioquesta.it</a>
R7 Refuge de la Madone de Fenestre	<a href="http://www.cafnice.org">www.cafnice.org</a>	Tel. 04 93 62 59 99	<a href="http://sud.alpes-refuges.fr">sud.alpes-refuges.fr</a>
R8 Refuge de Nice	<a href="http://www.cafnice.org">www.cafnice.org</a>	Tel. 04 93 62 59 99	<a href="mailto:refugedenice@ffcam.fr">refugedenice@ffcam.fr</a>
R9 Refuge des Merveilles	<a href="http://www.cafnice.org">www.cafnice.org</a>	Tel. 06 03 92 46 58	<a href="http://sud.alpes-refuges.fr">sud.alpes-refuges.fr</a>

**For other accommodation**, you can choose according to your own preferences and the different types of accommodation that exist on the list online at the website [www.departement06.fr](http://www.departement06.fr)

For all tourist information, we advise you to contact the tourist offices of the municipalities you cross in order to obtain the practical information required to prepare your staged trip.



## TOURIST OFFICES ALONG THE ROUTE

TOURIST OFFICES	WEBSITE	TELEPHONE	EMAIL ADDRESS
OT1 Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage	<a href="http://www.stationsdumercantour.com">www.stationsdumercantour.com</a>	04 93 02 46 40	<a href="mailto:saint-dalmas@stationsdumercantour.com">saint-dalmas@stationsdumercantour.com</a>
OT2 Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée	<a href="http://www.stationsdumercantour.com">www.stationsdumercantour.com</a>	04 93 02 41 96	<a href="mailto:saint-etienne@stationsdumercantour.com">saint-etienne@stationsdumercantour.com</a>
OT3 Stations du Mercantour	<a href="http://www.stationsdumercantour.com">www.stationsdumercantour.com</a>	04 93 23 23 00	<a href="mailto:contact@stationsdumercantour.com">contact@stationsdumercantour.com</a>
OT4 Isola 2000	<a href="http://www.isola2000.com">www.isola2000.com</a>	04 93 23 15 15	<a href="mailto:isola2000@stationsdumercantour.com">isola2000@stationsdumercantour.com</a>
OT5 Saint-Martin-Vésubie	<a href="http://www.saintmartinvesubie.fr">www.saintmartinvesubie.fr</a>	04 93 03 21 28	<a href="mailto:tourisme@saintmartinvesubie.fr">tourisme@saintmartinvesubie.fr</a>
OT6 Vésubie Mercantour Valdebllore OT Belvédère	<a href="http://www.vesubie-mercantour.com">www.vesubie-mercantour.com</a>	04 93 03 51 66	<a href="mailto:contact@vesubie-mercantour.com">contact@vesubie-mercantour.com</a>
OT7 La Bollène Vésubie Turini Camp d'argent	<a href="http://www.labollenevesubie.com">www.labollenevesubie.com</a>	04 93 03 60 54	<a href="mailto:ot.labollene@orange.fr">ot.labollene@orange.fr</a>
OT8 Sospel	<a href="http://www.sospel-tourisme.com">www.sospel-tourisme.com</a>	04 93 04 15 80	<a href="mailto:infos@sospel-tourisme.com">infos@sospel-tourisme.com</a>
OT9 Menton	<a href="http://www.tourisme-menton.fr">www.tourisme-menton.fr</a>	04 92 41 76 76	<a href="mailto:info@tourisme-menton.fr">info@tourisme-menton.fr</a>

For more information about all tourist activities and stays in the Alpes-Maritimes region:  
[www.cotedazur-tourisme.com](http://www.cotedazur-tourisme.com) and [www.cotedazur-sejours.com](http://www.cotedazur-sejours.com)



Mountain hut/Refuge de la Madone de Fenestre

# TRANSPORT

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

For those who choose to opt for public transport, here are the main connections from Nice, and links to the relevant web-sites to access information online:

- **Estenc: line 790 Nice - Entraunes** (terminates at Entraunes village).
- **Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée: line 740 Nice - Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée - Auron.**
- **Isola 2000: line 740 Nice - Isola** (this terminates in Isola village, no service to Isola 2000 in summer).
- **Le Boréon: line 730 Nice - Saint-Martin-Vésubie** (terminates at Saint-Martin-Vésubie)

All information on [www.lignesdazur.fr](http://www.lignesdazur.fr) or [www.ceparou06.fr](http://www.ceparou06.fr)

To travel back from Menton to Nice, transport possibilities:

- **by bus: line 100 Menton - Nice :**  
all information on [www.departement06.fr](http://www.departement06.fr) or [www.ceparou06.fr](http://www.ceparou06.fr)
- **by train: line SNCF Menton - Nice :**  
all information on [www.ter.sncf.com/paca](http://www.ter.sncf.com/paca) or [www.ceparou06.fr](http://www.ceparou06.fr)

Contact the relevant tourist offices, for information about any transport provided by private companies.

## TRANSPORT ON DEMAND

In order to facilitate the access to Estenc village, the Département set up with the Region transport on demand service, connecting with the regional line Nice / guillaumes / Entraunes. This service (booking requested) operates only on July, august and September. For more informations about schedules and use please connect to our website [www.randoxygene.org](http://www.randoxygene.org)





# OVERALL MAP



# THE GRANDE TRAVERSÉE DU MERCANTOUR

## STAGE 1

ESTENC - ST-DALMAS-LE-SELVAGE

## STAGE 2

ST-DALMAS-LE-SELVAGE - BOUSIEYAS

## STAGE 3

BOUSIEYAS - FERRIÈRE

## STAGE 4

FERRIÈRE - REFUGE DE VENS

## STAGE 5

REFUGE DE VENS - REFUGE DE RABUONS

## STAGE 6

REFUGE DE RABUONS - REFUGE A. FOUCHES

## STAGE 7

REFUGE A. FOUCHES - S. ANNA DI VINADIO

## STAGE 8

S. ANNA DI VINADIO - ISOLA 2000

## STAGE 9

ISOLA 2000 - REFUGE QUESTA

## STAGE 10

REFUGE QUESTA - BORÉON

## STAGE 11

BORÉON - MADONE DE FENESTRE

## STAGE 12

MADONE DE FENESTRE - REFUGE DE NICE

## STAGE 13

REFUGE DE NICE - REFUGE DES MERVEILLES

## STAGE 14

REFUGE DES MERVEILLES - CAMP D'ARGENT

## STAGE 15

CAMP D'ARGENT - SOSPEL

## STAGE 16

SOSPEL - MENTON







**Departure point: Estenc (1780m)**

## STAGE 1 - ESTENC / SAINT-DALMAS-LE-SELVAGE

### ROAD ACCESS

117km from Nice (airport) ascend the Var valley on the main road RM 6202, then the local road RD 6202 until reaching Entrevaux. A little after this, at the place named "Pont de Gueydan", turn right onto the road leading to the Col de la Cayolle (RD 2202) to reach Guillaumes. Still ascending the Var valley, gain Entraunes, then Estenc. Continue in the direction of the Col and gain the upper car park and the gateway to the Mercantour National Park.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 17.8km

**Height gain:** + 710m

**Descent:** ~ 1070m

**Time:** 6h

**Difficulty:**  
athletic hike

**Suitable season:**  
end June to mid-October

**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National Park

**Map:**  
Haute Vallée du Var,  
Haute Tinée I,

**Accommodation:**  
MAIRIE D'ENTRAUNES  
04 93 05 51 26

Estenc, the starting point for the Grande Traversée du Mercantour, is the last little island of green before venturing into the arid landscapes of the high summits that reach altitudes of around 3000m. The route that links Estenc to Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage is a historical link passing over the Col de Gialorgues that has been a communication route between the Haut Var and the Haute Tinée valleys since the beginning of time.

On the Haut Var side, in the Vallon de l'Estrop, the environment is wild and harsh, exacerbated by the surrounding summits which overlook the terrain, surveying the smallest movement likely to disturb this inanimate world: summits like Roche Grande, Rocher du Pigeon, Tête de la Boulière, Pointe du Génépi...

On the contrary, on the Haute Tinée side, the numerous Gialorgues lakes ranging across different levels between 2300m and 2500m, are coloured turquoise blue in good weather, with the jagged edges of the majestic Fort-Carra and Pointe Côte-de-l'Âne reflected in their clear waters. You will arrive at the end of the first stage opposite the impressive Vens-Ténibre-Rabuons massif on the border with Italy, at the centre of the village of Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage, nestled at the confluence of the Sestrière and Gialorgues streams.

### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the upper car park (w.284), gateway to the Mercantour National Park, follow the path to the right, then further down gain a footbridge crossing the Sanguinière stream (w.281). Follow the flat path (former canal) to reach the Vallon de l'Estrop easily by following the waymarkers (282, 283). At waymarker 283, turn left, pass in front of the waymarker 276a to soon cross the Vallon de l'Estrop and ascend the narrow bottleneck to the Pas de l'Estrop by means of a long loop (w.275). Around 2100m, you will reach a first terrace under the cliff faces on the Roche-Grande (south) before entering the intriguing Entonnoir mountain cirque, a depression in the hillside where the Estrop waterfall is swallowed up.

A short steep section leads to the immense and slightly sloping Estrop where a shepherd's hut shelters at the foot of the Pointe du Génépi.

As you draw closer, impressive cairns show you the direction to follow, a very easy progression to the Col de Gialorgues (2519m - w.279), distinctive passage between the Var and the Tinée valleys with a series of disused military bunkers located to your left (shelter possible). From the Col, you will discover a vast panoramic view over the Haute Tinée on the other side, with the south face of the Mont Viso (3841m) at its centre and in the distance. Closer to hand, pastures roll out along the wide Vallon

de Gialorgues between the rocky summit of Bolofré to your right (east) and the Fort Carra to your left.

Descend into the wide Vallon de Gialorgues, where a path across the pleasant pastures leads you to a large flat area where the Refuge de Gialorgues (CAF, unmanned) (2280m - w.73a) and the nearby shepherd's hut are perched.

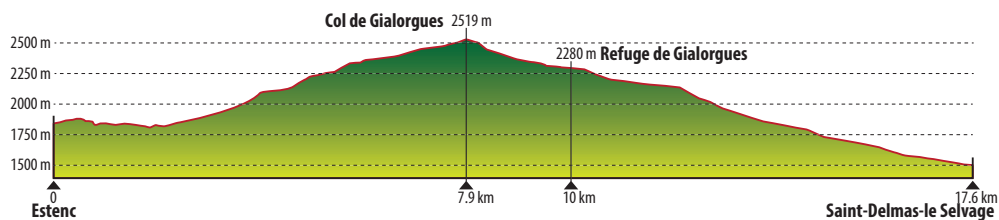
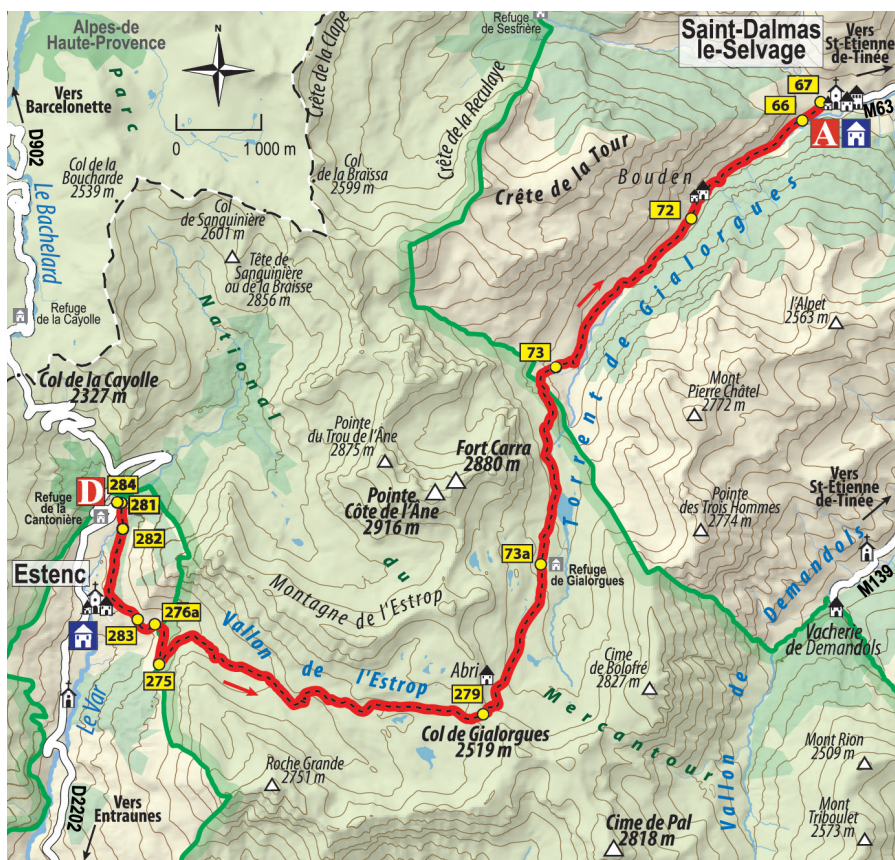
Continue to the north; the route will pass quite close to the Sagnes de Gialorgues, where a stream flows, flanked by cottongrass in the right season.

Follow the path to reach the first larch trees and after a few zig-zags, gain an earth track (Valloar car park) (1950m - w.73). Turn left, ford the Valloar stream then follow the track to the right which descends on the left flank of the Gialorgues stream (around 6km). Follow waymarkers 72 and 66 to reach the village of Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage (1500m - w.67).

**Variant to departure point : possible from Entraunes village ( see p.60)**









**Departure point: Saint-Dalmas le Selvage (1500m)**

## STAGE 2 - SAINT-DALMAS-LE-SELVAGE / BOUSIÉYAS

This stage links the highest municipality in the Alpes-Maritimes (1500m) to the hamlet of Bousiéyas via the famous long-distance GR5 route, and the GR56.

The village of Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage with its tall houses featuring sundials and larch shingle roofs, is clustered distinctively around the village centre. You will then discover the charming hamlet of Bousiéyas (also the highest in the Alpes-Maritimes at 1850m) with architecture that is already reminiscent of the Alpes and which constitutes one of the best moments on this stage.

This is also an exceptional route, offering scenic views all along the Crête de la Blanche ridge, and with a 360° view across the Haute-Tinée valley and beyond.

You will pass through a succession of several different settings during the day, ranging from hayfields and grassy pastures, to ridges of varied rocks (sandstone and limestone), to classic shepherd's huts or herds of sheep guarded by local shepherds, and lastly, into the cool of the larch trees.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Starting out from the tourist office in Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage (1500m - w.68), follow the GR5 that ascends a small street to come out to the north of the village (w.48).

Follow the path (GR5) to the right, that ascends amongst the hayfields, then join the Vallon de la Combe, at the edge of the Mercantour National Park.

Ford the Combe watercourse and gain the Rochepin area with its barns (1900m) by a path with many zig-zags. Continue along the path, and following a long snaking traverse, gain a point directly below the Col de la Colombière. Reach the Col (2237m - w.47) and take the time to admire the hamlet of Bousiéyas to the north.

Turn left onto the GR56 to skirt around the southern side of the Pointe Giassin, to soon come out onto the ridge named Crête de la Blanche. Walk along this, one minute on the Tinée side, the next on the Sestrière side.

Gain the Col de l'Alpe (2600m - w.46) then descend to the north towards the Col de Colombart (2539m - w.45).

Leave the GR56 and turn right (east) onto the path to the Vallon de l'Alpe that runs through the middle of the pastures, then reach the ridge of the same name. Follow the pleasant path to the right, which will take you through the upper part of the Vallon de l'Alpe. Pass close by the shepherd's hut (2277m) and continue on small zig-zags to the Rio stream, under the limestone cliffs of the Are peak (w.44b).

Then follow the horizontal track on the right bank of the stream to come out in a short while onto the Issias plateau with its shepherd's hut (w.44a). Take the track on the left (GR5 route).

Turn left to reach the Bousiéyas hamlet (1883m - w.43) in complete tranquility.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 18km

**Height gain:** + 1190m

**Descent:** - 825m

**Time:** 5h30

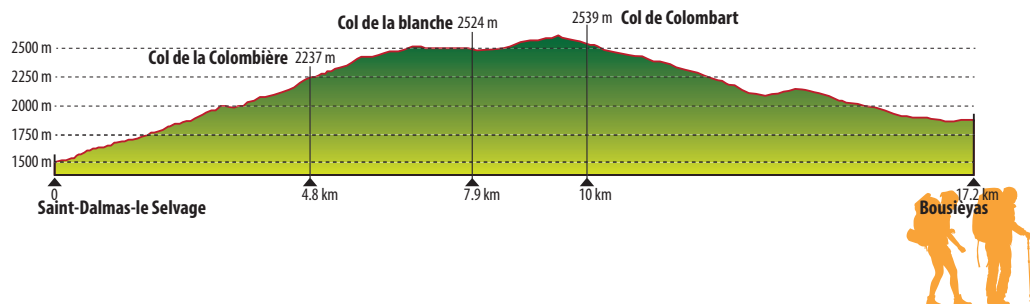
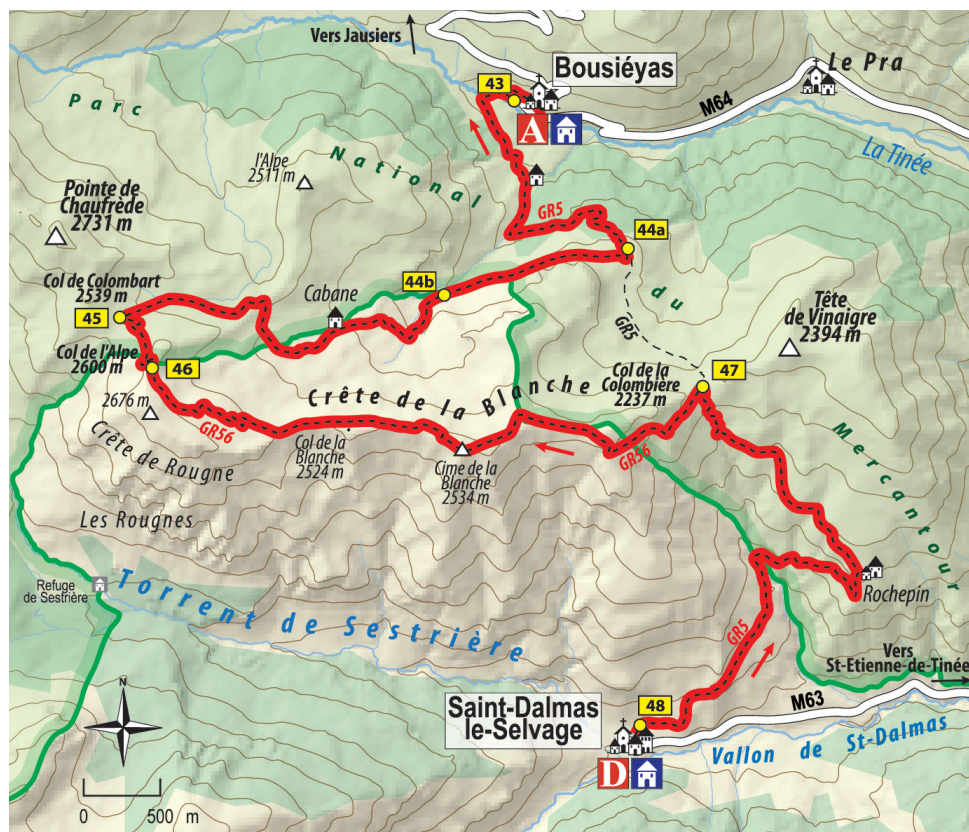
**Difficulty:**  
athletic hiking

**Suitable season:**  
end June to end September

**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National Park

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée I,

**Accommodation:** OT1







**Departure point: Bousiéyas (1883m)**

## STAGE 3 - BOUSIÉYAS / FERRIÈRE

This third stage connects the Bousiéyas hamlet to the Ferrière hamlet, firstly along the famous long-distance GR5, and then on the old route between France and Italy via the Col de Pouriac, part of the major communications network of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. You have the opportunity of walking in the footsteps of French and Italian smugglers who, up until the beginning of the 1960s, traded livestock, salt, tobacco, clothes and agricultural tools, in all weathers.....and sometimes putting their lives at risk during encounters with the highly-vigilant customs officers in this area, that occasionally turned into physical confrontations.

Transhumance of sheep flocks is a major feature in the Vallon de Salso-Morène, which is crossed in summer by several thousand head of livestock from the Plaine de la Crau. On the Italian side, nowadays transhumance of cattle prevails, with magnificent herds of Piedmontese cattle with their white coats.

To round off this stage, you will discover the picturesque hamlet of Ferrière (1880m). In the past, the number of inhabitants was around 100, but today it is populated mainly in the summer season, by shepherds and cowherds who rub shoulders with owners of holiday homes and young people from holiday camps who have come to enjoy the area's beauty and tranquility. Take the opportunity to visit the Musée de la Contrabande (smuggling museum) to immerse yourself completely in the not-so-distant past.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Starting in the hamlet of Bousieyas (1883m), ascend the paved path (GR5) to reach "Café Martin" and turn left to reach the M.64 road. Turn left and follow the road for around 250 metres.

At waymarker 40, turn right onto the path that traverses the Route de la Bonette (M.64 road) several times to reach the Fourches former military camp (2250m - w.41a). Turn right onto the path and after a flat section you will quickly reach the Col des Fourches (2261m - w.41). Descend towards the large Salso-Morène alpine pasture on the GR5 route. At the crossroads waymarked 37 (2100m), take the path to the north that leads to the Col de Pouriac and follow a long diagonal traverse continuing in the same direction (2506m - w.39) to reach it.

Cross over to the Italian side, and follow the small path to reach a crossroads (old post) then turn right to traverse on a narrow path across to the Bassa

di Colombart (2461m) and its pinnacle. Descend to the right on a wide path that leads to the flat area named di Colombart, that you will recognise due to its drinking troughs.

A track coming in from Ferrière ends at this site, make sure you don't follow it but instead follow the original path to the right that will soon go past the Gias di Colombart, (recently renovated shepherd's hut). Continue to the east and descend progressively on the path through old hayfields bounded by low walls and earthbanks. You will quickly get close to the Ferrière hamlet (cross). Turn left on the path that will lead you after a few steps to the centre of the hamlet. The Ferrière mountain hut (Becchi Rossi) is located to the right of the church and the central square.

### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 12.4km

**Height gain:** + 835m

**Descent:** - 820m

**Time:** 5h30

**Difficulty:**  
athletic hiking

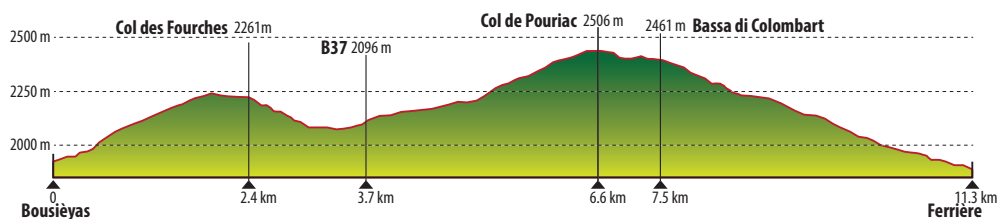
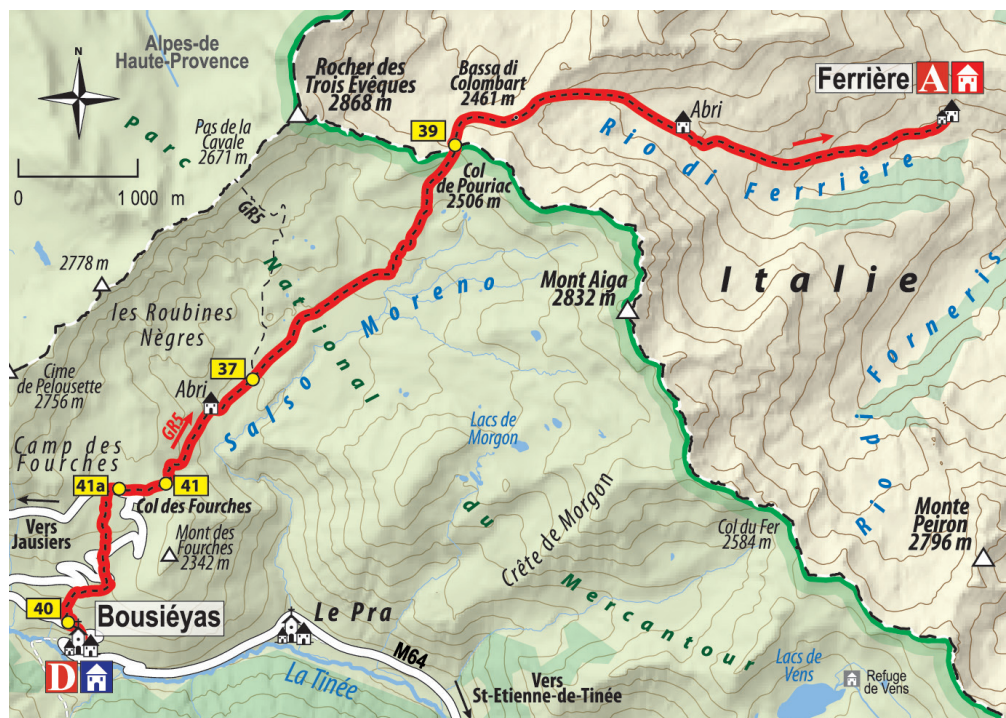
**Suitable season:**  
mid-June to end Sep-  
tember

**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National  
Park

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée I,

**Accommodation:** R1







**Departure point: Ferrière hamlet (1880m)**

## STAGE 4 - FERRIÈRE /REFUGE DE VENS

During this stage, straddling both the Italian and French sides, you will discover the pure waters of the Forneris mountain stream and its meanders, where Piedmontese cows graze in a vast flat pasture. On the long ascent to the Col du Fer, which already evokes an alpine setting, you will perhaps come across one of the mammals that live here as you turn a corner in the path (chamois, bighorn sheep, ibex,...).

Looking across the expanse of the Plateau de Tortisse and its forest huts, you will be reminded of the heritage of the former establishment run by the Eaux et Forêts where forestry workers lodged in the 1930s whilst they worked on restoring the slopes that had been damaged by over-grazing and age-old deforestation.

Due to these works, there is an excellent network of paths crossing the area. The one leading to the Collet de Tortisse will take you to the viewpoint looking out over the series of glacial lakes known as the Lacs de Vens.

The string of the Lacs de Vens, nestled in their green setting, is one of the major points of interest of this stage but also of the Grande Traversée du Mercantour itself. The welcoming Refuge de Vens (CAF) will be the ideal place to finish off an evening facing the sunset witnessed by lakes. Since this stage is relatively short, take advantage of your free time to rest or enjoy other paths in the surroundings.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Traverse the Ferrière hamlet (1880m), along the main street leading to the Riou de Ferrière. Cross this using the footbridge and ascend through old hayfields bounded by larch trees. Following an attractive path that matches snugly with the shape of the slope, you will come to a cross that marks the way.

The path descends slightly to climb up again parallel to the Riou de Forneris which stretches out below in the middle of the wide pasture. Pass by a private hunting chalet named “Gias del Bal” and take the opportunity to collect water from the fountain. Continue the ascent and cross several streams coming from the northern buttresses of the Mont Bal and the Gorgion Lungo lake. Pass by the foot of an impressive rocky massif that you will skirt around to the left (east). Gain a

flat area and cross the upper Vallon de Forneris before following the path to reach the lastcombe directly below the Col du Fer.

The path becomes steeper but leads over easy terrain to the Col du Fer (2584m - w.35). Turn left, and by means of a short ascending traverse, gain the wide Collet de Tortisse (2591m - w.35a), at the foot of the needles that bear the same name. A little after the start of the descent, you will suddenly discover the series of lakes found at the bottom of the Vens glacial cirque, with the CAF mountain hut tucked away on a little rock band to the east of the large upper lake. Descending towards the hut you will pass an interesting geological feature, the “Arche de Tortisse”. Follow wide zig-zags to reach the hut (w.24-25), where this fourth stage ends.

### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 7.5km

**Height gain:** + 825m

**Descent:** - 350m

**Time:** 4h30

**Difficulty:**  
athletic hiking

**Suitable season:**  
mid-June to end September

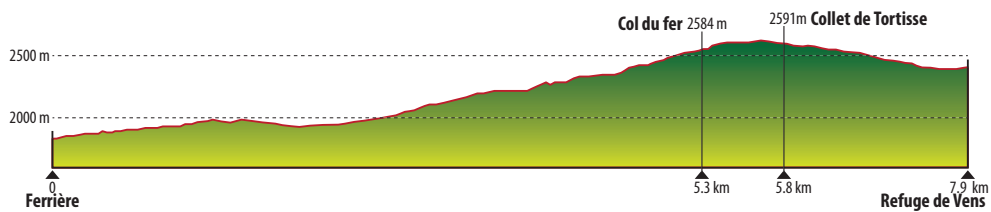
**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National Park

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée I,

**Accommodation:** R2









**Departure point: Refuge de Vens (2380m)**

## STAGE 5 - REFUGE DE VENS / REFUGE DE RABUONS

In addition to the pleasant section near the Lacs de Vens, during this stage you will discover the Chemin de l'Énergie, a magnificent path nearly 8km in length that overlooks the Tinée watercourse 1300m below. This almost perfectly horizontal balcony route negotiates numerous obstacles arising from the difficult terrain, at a cost of a considerable amount of work carried out between the two World Wars by the company "Énergie Électrique du Littoral Méditerranéen". Constructed originally for a planned hydro-electric plant at Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée, it was created in an era when each region of France was responsible for producing its own electricity. The Haute Tinée site was selected due to its numerous lakes at altitude (Vens, Marie, Ténibre, Fer and Rabuons). The Chemin de l'Énergie was used at the time to transport materials, workers, and horses and carts to the various water intakes. Today, it serves a new purpose and a large number of walkers appreciate the originality of this aerial traverse linking the manned Vens and Rabuons mountain huts.

NB: at the date of publication of this guidebook, the Chemin de l'Énergie is partially closed by a local bylaw between waymarkers 111 and 110. A deviation will be put in place for the summer season from waymarker 111, which will ascend to the Lac Fer and descend to the Lac Pétrus (w.110).



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Starting out from the Refuge de Vens hut (2380m - w.25), go on to waymarker 24 and descend the right bank of the upper Vens lake. Pass alongside the mid-level and lower lakes (w.27), always on their right-hand side. Traverse the spillway using the footbridge (2285m - w.26) and ascend opposite towards the Lac des Babarottes along a path marked with cairns. Continue to ascend until you reach the wide ridge named Crête des Babarottes (2506m). Start to descend on the south face on a small zig-zag path to soon reach the beginning of the path named Chemin de l'Énergie (w.113), then walk almost on the level along the wide path offering great views. After the Crête de Balaï (w.112), pass through two tunnels to reach the EDF cabins on the Plan de Ténibre and the stream itself (w.111).

At waymarker 111, leave the Chemin de l'Énergie, ascend to the left on a small path to the spillway coming from the Lac Fer. Leave the main path leading to the Lac Ténibre to head off on a

less obvious path to the right, before ascending quite rapidly up a steep slope that leads to a wide flat area. Continue until you reach the Lac Fer (2541m). Follow a small path to the right of the lake, where you will very quickly reach a downhill slope. Start the descent to the south, firstly on a steep cattle track then on an easier path, to reach the Chemin de l'Énergie (Lac Pétrus - w.110). Continue to the left along the Chemin de l'Énergie. From waymarker 111 at the Lac Pétrus (Chemin de l'Énergie), the route is marked by abundant signs indicating a deviation. Make sure you follow this carefully. Continue on the flat in the direction of the Rabuons mountain hut, and gain the ridge named Crête de Sélasse (w.103). Discover in the distance the narrowing at the Lac de Rabuons and, positioned on its promontory, the small Refuge de Rabuons hut (CAF, 2523m).

Ascend progressively up to the cirque de Rabuons (w.104, 105) across impressively steep inclines punctuated by admirable engineering constructions (walls, tunnels).



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 13km

**Height gain:** + 739m

**Descent:** - 594m

**Time:** 6h30

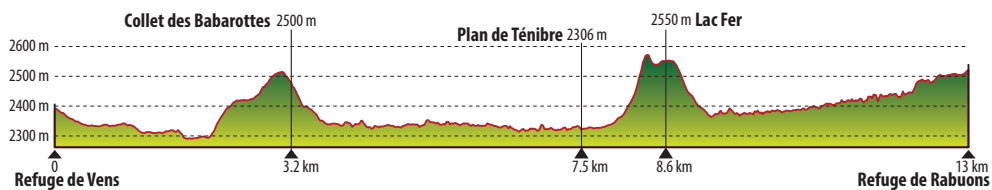
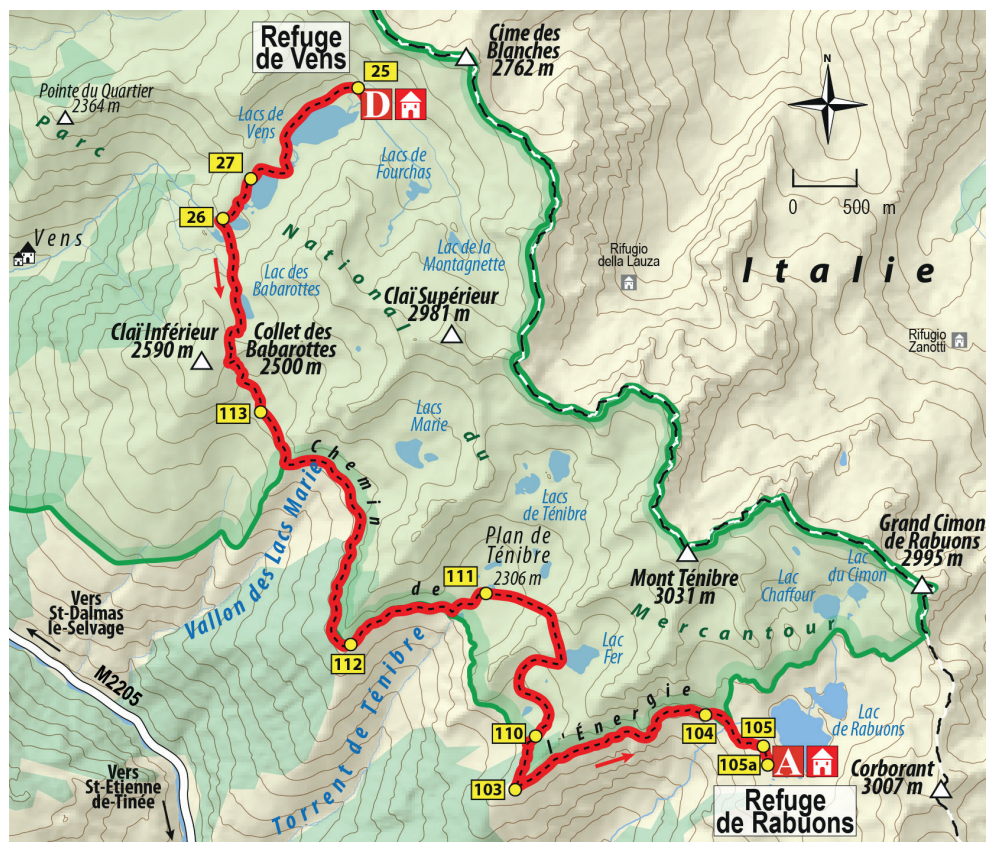
**Difficulty:**  
alpine walking

**Suitable season:**  
mid-July to end September

**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National Park

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée I,

**Accommodation:** R3







**Departure point: Refuge de Rabuons (2523m)**

## STAGE 6 - REFUGE DE RABUONS / REFUGE A. FOUCHES

In times past, this section had a specific alpine character because it did not use paths, and therefore involved difficult progression suitable only for experienced walkers who could follow the waymarkers of the Club Alpin Français (CAF) that were marked out by Kine-Gurékian, the well-known mountain guide from Nice.

Nowadays, an easier route links the Rabuons mountain hut and the Lagarot de Douans, passing by the foot of the dark gneiss rockfaces of the Chalanches and Jassine peaks. It also provides a magnificent view over the Tinée river and its right bank where the majestic Mont Mounier reigns (2817m).

Enriched by its military history that is demonstrated by the bunkers still in evidence, the Colle-Longue site rewards your efforts along this stage, with its secret lakes and sumptuous view of the Tête de l'Autaret and the entire Alpine Arc.

The descent to the Refuge Alexandris Foches, along the old military track on the Italian side that perfectly merges into the surroundings, taking you calmly to the Lac de San-Bernolfo. The mountain hut, recently renovated by the Club Alpin Italien and set to the north of the glacial sill, is ideal for a pause and a well-deserved meal.

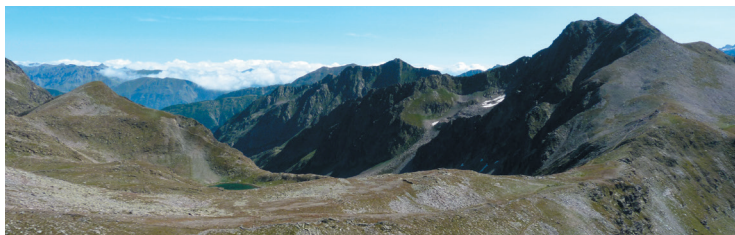


### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Starting out from the Rabuons hut (2523m - w.105a), follow the path to the south-east that joins the edge of the Lac de Rabuons (2500m). Ford the water between the large lake and a smaller one and continue on the path that ascends amongst the northern buttresses of the Cime de la Valette (Cross - 2701m). Then descend slightly on the south flank on a scree slope below the Tête de Jassine. By means of a few steep zig-zags, reach the ridge named Crête de Jassine (2700m).

The path skirts carefully around this to a hanging combe where, in a large sweeping movement, it reaches the Vallon de la Clapière. Traverse a vast scree slope to reach the side of the forest of the Crête de Chabnaire (2400m - w.105b) topped with a magnificent cairn made of cut stones. Continue your descent to the springs in the Vallon du Bourguet (2250m). Contour around on the level, in the line of metal nets installed to retain potential snow avalanches which could descend all the way to the Tinée. Once at the prominent shoulder at the Crosettan with its cairn, locally known as Montjoie, begin a slight

descent to rapidly reach the intersection with the path coming in from Douans, leading to the Pas de Barbacane (2180m - w.105c). Continue to the east and pass over the ridge named Crête de la Tête Cimon, then make your way through the steep slope coming in from the Pointe Costa Plana until you reach the wide flat zone around the lake named Lagarot de Douans (2200m - w.127). Continue on the path leading to the Pas de Colle-Longue (south-east), pass over a succession of two spurs on the southern slope, climb an enormous scree slope and continue at the same level on a pleasant path. Thus you will reach the Pas de Colle-Longue (2533m - w.59), (possibility to shelter in old military huts). Descend on the Italian side on a path going to the spillway of the large Lac de Colle-Longue. Follow the former military track and pass close to military barracks. You will soon come to the Lac di Mezzo de San-Bernolfo from where you can rapidly reach the Lac de San-Bernolfo and its left bank. From the lake, ascend a few metres on the track, pass just at the edge of a hunting cabin, and cross over onto the north side to reach the end of this stage at the Refuge Alexandris Foches hut (1913m).



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 15.7km

**Height gain:** + 665m

**Descent:** - 1250m

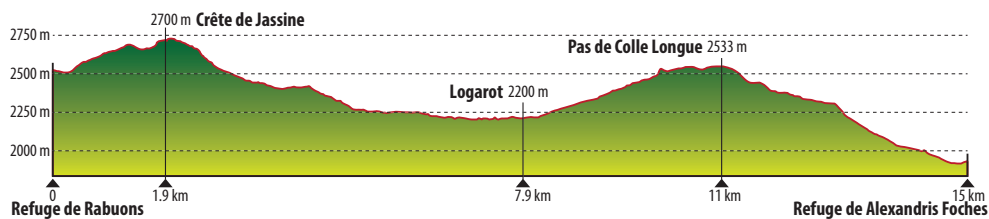
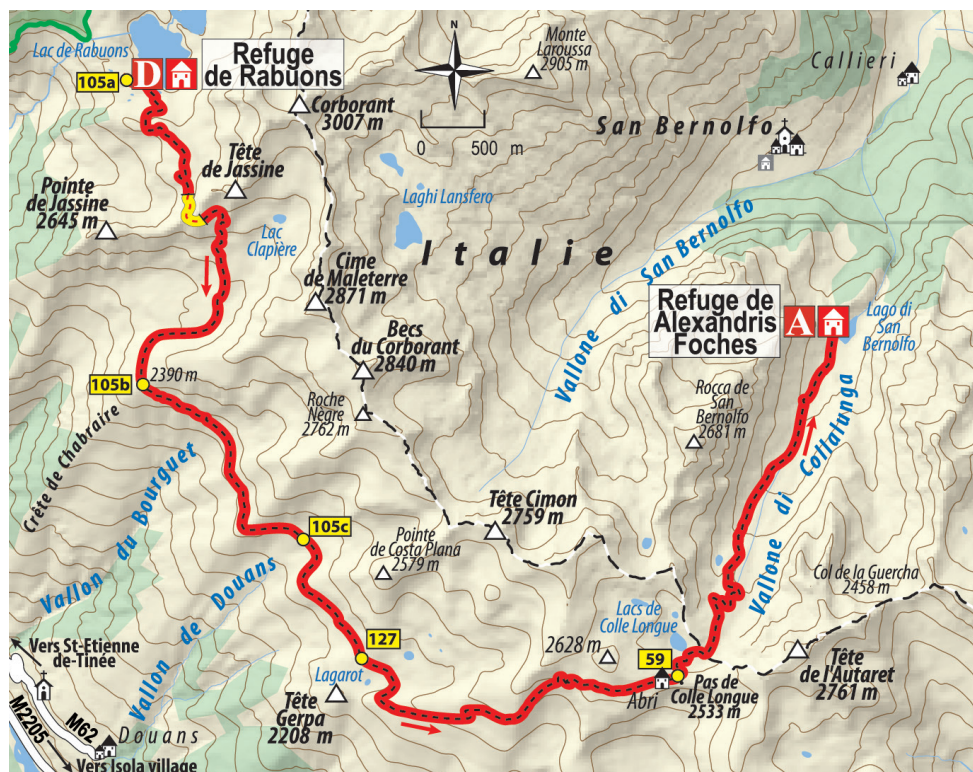
**Time:** 6h30

**Difficulty:**  
alpine walking

**Suitable season:**  
from mid-July to end  
September

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée I and 2,

**Accommodation:** R4





**Departure point: Refuge. A. Foches (1913m)**

## STAGE 7 - REFUGE A. FOCHES / SANT'ANNA DI VINADIO

A superb stage exclusively on Italian soil, between the high valleys named Vallon du San Bernolfo and Vallon de Sant'Anna. All along the route, authentic sights are revealed one by one, especially when passing through San Bernolfo, the highest hamlet in the valley, which was still inhabited year-round until approximately 1960. Lower down, Bagni di Vinadio, already known at the time of the Romans, has thermal baths, thanks to thermal waters heated at depths greater than 3000m, to come to the surface at nearly 60°C, a temperature that can be appreciated in the baths constructed directly below the road. Passing in front of the statue of Sant'Anna, perched on the rock where the apparition took place, rounds off this stage before you arrive at the majestic sanctuary, the highest in Europe (2035m).



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the hut, descend (north) towards San Bernolfo to join a track further down, just before the Vallon du Corborant. The hamlet of San Bernolfo, easily visible on the left bank, can be visited by a short detour (out-and-return, 1km), which is essential in order to truly immerse yourself in the atmosphere of the site. Come back along the same route; at the crossroads, follow the track heading directly east, to traverse a first valley by a footbridge. Go past the start point of the Vallon de la Sauma to your right, and continue your descent through the undergrowth until you reach a new footbridge just before the hamlet of Callieri. Your route continues along a path between the houses and the chapel, still on the right bank, then you will traverse a beautiful forest of beech trees, replaced little by little by spruces, pine trees and larches as the altitude increases. The path leads you up the Vallon de Tésina and reaches the wide flat zone named Capanna du Tesina

(1948m) where a restored house with a distinctive green roof nestles against a boulder. Continue ascending the valley until you reach, on your left, at an intersection with the valley that descends from the Passo del Bue, a basic footbridge; cross it and ascend alongside a characteristic flat rock, keeping this to your left, to the small Col that overlooks a flat area scattered with boulders (2153m). Then climb up to the nearby Passo de Tésina (2400m), before starting the fast and easy descent towards the sanctuary, taking in a few pleasant zig-zags along the way, which travels across pastureland to the Lac de Sant'Anna (2167m). Continue to the left, to reach the Sant'Anna statue and finally the Sanctuaire de Sant'Anna di Vinadio (2010m) that houses the stopover gite (2035m).

NB: waymarkers are in place on the Italian side; referenced neither on the guidebook map, nor on the IGN TOP 25 map, they do appear nevertheless on the posts.

### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 12.1km

**Height gain:** + 960m

**Descent:** - 730m

**Time:** 6h

**Difficulty:**  
athletic hiking

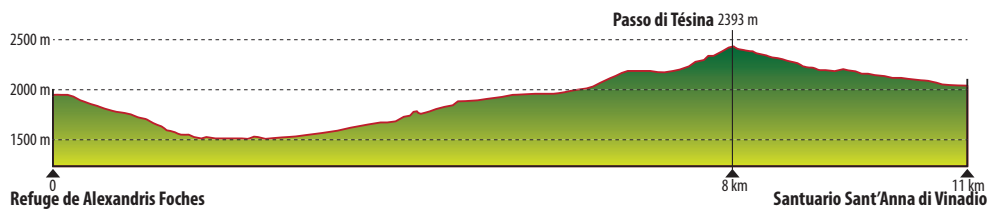
**Suitable season:**  
from mid June to end  
September

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée 2,

**Accommodation:** R5









**Departure point: sanctuary Sainte-Anna (2035m)**

## STAGE 8 - SANT'ANNA DI VINADIO / ISOLA 2000

Superb stage in both France and Italy, crossing over the Col de la Lombarde (2350m), a famous alpine border pass connecting the Vallée de la Tinée to the Vallée de la Stura in the Italian Piedmont region. We come to understand the etymological meaning of the characteristic “lombarde” wind from the north-east, often very strong and frequently accompanied by rain and snow. The descent down to Isola 2000 marks a change from the wild environments crossed during the first stages and the architecture of the ski station, constructed on land conceded by Italy under the Paris Peace Treaties in 1947. Only a few old larches, relics of a past era when the Vallon de Chastillon was inhabited during the summer season, bear witness to the character of the place at a time when walking was not yet considered a leisure activity.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the sanctuary, ascend the same small road that you had taken the day before that leads to the rock sheltering the Sant'Anna statue. Continue on the track, then on the path to the intersection (2108m) with the Pas de Tesina, that you had followed during the previous stage.

Head off to the left to discover the Lago Colle di Sant'Anna that you will skirt around to the left, then ascend some wide zig-zags that traverse large scree slopes, before coming out onto a small grassy Col very close to the Cime de Moravachère.

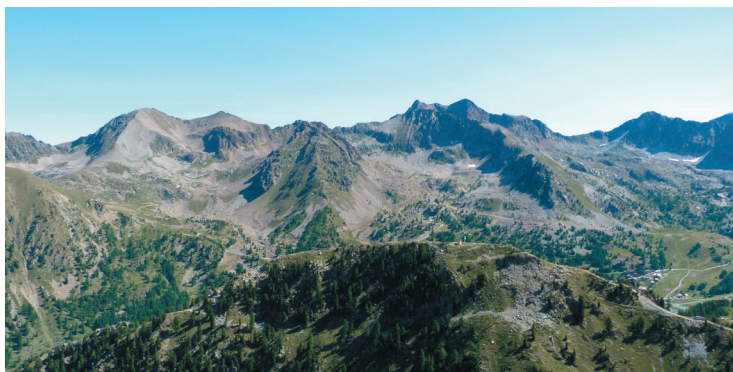
Follow this wide shoulder to the south-east, switching between walking below the crest on the Italian side and walking along the border itself, which is marked out by characteristic markers.

The slight descent to the Col de la Lombarde (2350m) advances along

a track on the Italian side that passes between former restored buildings.

From the Col (w.100) descend the tarmac road for a few hundred metres, to waymarker 99, then follow the path, taking care to stay at the same level, that traverses across boulders and scree, before reaching the high point of the ski station. From there, continue by passing in front of the “Grange” (w.98) and follow the waymarkers between the larch trees until you come across a first track. Turn left to ascend the steep slope, and on the following, wider, track, turn right to reach the intersection further down with the path to the Lacs de Terre Rouge (w.91).

Descend to the right on the path through the forest to reach the top of the Isola 2000 ski station (w.90a) and, still to the right, the small road leading to the RM 97 road.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 8.4km

**Height gain:** + 430m

**Descent:** – 355m

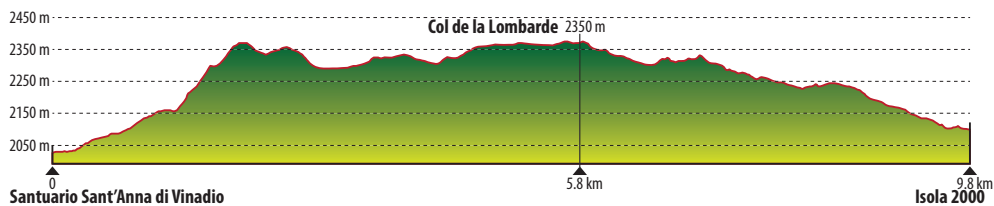
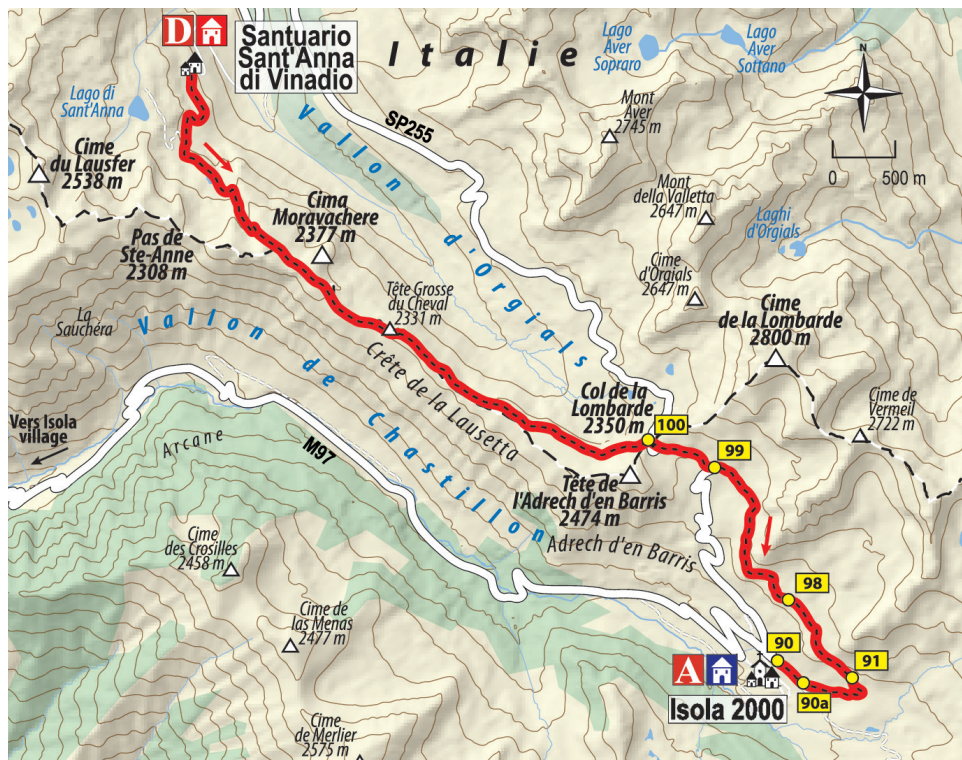
**Time:** 5h

**Difficulty:**  
athletic hiking

**Suitable season:**  
end June to end Sep-  
tember

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée 2,

**Accommodation:**  
OT3 OT4







**Departure point: upper hamlet of Isola 2000 (2070m)**

## STAGE 9 - ISOLA 2000 / REFUGE QUESTA

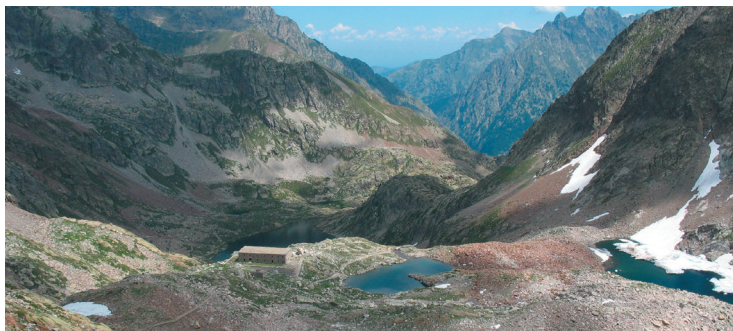
There are few clues that give us an image of the upper Chastillon cirque before the Isola 2000 ski station was created in 1970. Whilst the walking opportunities have been reduced as the ski slopes have increased in number, there are nevertheless small cirques, practically untrodden by man; this is the case for the Lacs de Terre Rouge and the Baisse de Druos (2628m) located to the north of the Cime de Tavels and the Mont Malinvern, the highest point of the massif. With a relatively moderate change in altitude, but with a guarantee of spectacular landscapes, passing across the Baisse marks the border with Italy and the entrance to the Parco naturale delle Alpi Marittime. The descent to the collection of lakes below which are edged with magnificent paved paths, relics of the former hunting grounds of King Victor-Emmanuel II, gives you a true royal arrival at the Questa mountain hut in Italy.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the top of the Isola 2000 ski station (w.90) follow the small road leading to the Hôtel Diva, to find, 300m further on, the path to the Lacs de Terre Rouge (w.90a) heading off to the left. Climb up onto the slope scattered with larch trees to come out onto a track (w.91). Continue opposite to traverse a few boulders and, overlooking the hillside reservoir that is used in winter to make artificial snow for the ski slopes, ford across the Vallon de Terre Rouge. At waymarker 92, you will come across the military path that descends from the Col Mercière; continue along this directly to the north until you reach the glacial sill (w.93) where you will discover the small lakes and the large lake known as Terre Rouge (2452m). Continue to the west in a curve, and climb up the zig-zags to some out at the summit named Baisse de Druos (2628m - w.94). On the Italian side, you will see a magnificent rock cirque with the Lacs de Valscura, and

to the north the summit shoulder of the Malinvern (2938m). Descend towards the former barracks and lakes until you get to the spillway of the last one (2265m), which is the intersection with the path from the Col de Valscura and the Malinvern mountain hut. Turn right (south-east) onto the magnificent paved path that ascends slightly towards the Lago del Claus, alternating between grassy and paved sections. This path was constructed by the military to make the King of Italy's journey easier. You will come to the spillway on the Lac de Claus (2344m) that you will need to skirt around to the east, overlooking Victor Emmanuel II's old hunting lodge further down in the valley, recently restored as a mountain hut. Continue ascending to the foot of the north face of the Tête de Claus before turning off the well-made path to go towards the Questa mountain hut (2388m) which sits amongst boulders on an old moraine.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 9.2km

**Height gain:** + 635m

**Descent:** - 440m

**Time:** 5h

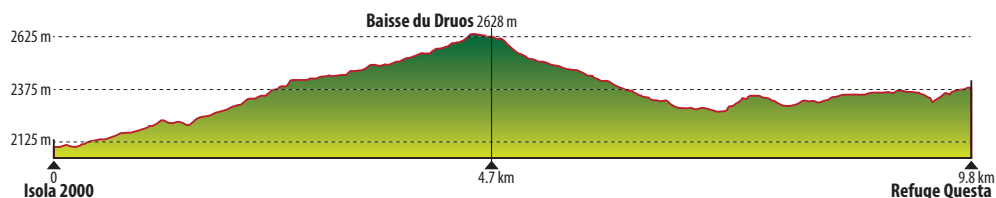
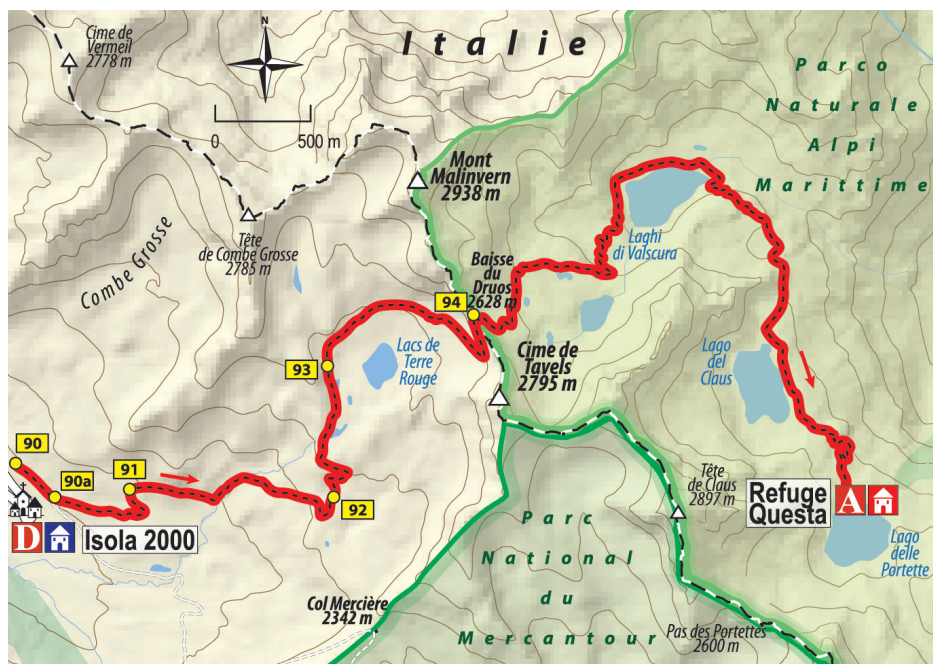
**Difficulty:**  
athletic hiking

**Suitable season:**  
from early July to end  
September

**Regulations:**  
Parco Alpi Marittime

**Map:**  
Haute Tinée 2

**Accommodation:** R6





**Departure point: Refuge de Questa (2388m)**

## STAGE 10 - REFUGE QUESTA / BORÉON

This stage takes place within protected natural areas that are bordered on the French side by the Mercantour National Park, created in 1979, and on the Italian side by the Parco naturale delle Alpi Marittime, created in 1995. These two twinned parks are in the process of requesting UNESCO World Heritage Site status. They constitute an exceptional land area where fauna, flora and landscapes are constant delights for the walkers that visit them.

During this last stage on Italian soil, admire the impressive crystalline Argentera massif with peaks up to 3297m a.s.l. and the Corno Stella, widely known for its climbing routes.

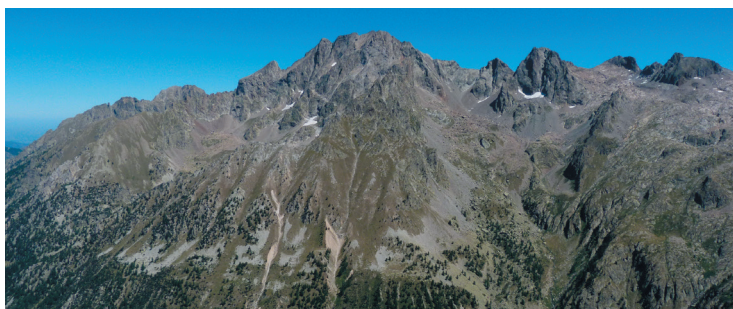
Throughout the day, a multitude of natural lakes decorate the landscape on both the French and Italian sides of the Alps. Enjoy the view from the Col de Fremamorte, which, when the weather is perfect, stretches all the way to the Mont Rose massif, on the other side of the Plaine du Pô.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the mountain hut, descend to the east to join the stony path, going past the way to the Pas du Préfous to your right. After a long traverse, start to climb up towards the Collet de Valasco, firstly through the Vallon de la Morta, then by a series of zig-zags, before reaching it at 2429m. Ignore a very steep path to the west that leads to the Collet des Bresses. Once you have passed the last lake on its left-hand side, the final steep section takes you out onto the Col de Frémamorte (2615m - w.271). Enjoy the fabulous view out over the Argentera massif and the series of lakes on either side of the border. From this point on, a very long descent starts out on a series of zig-zags on the south face of the Col before joining the intersection with the path to Camp Soubran (2270m - w.270). As you walk, admire the Swiss pine trees scattered across the various faces of the Caire Pounchu and traverse the little glacial silt to cross the valley coming from

the spillway on the Lac Nègre which descends towards the Mollières hamlet. The path snakes through the rhododendrons and swathes of bilberry bushes, descending constantly. Go past the Ruine de l'Agnellière (w.269), keeping it on your right, before crossing the Mollières stream using a footbridge in place. Descend along the old track coming from the Lac Nègre to reach the road that leads to the Mollières hamlet (w.268). Go up this road and you will very quickly come to the Col de Salèse (w.436). Follow the road for 500m, along which the GR52 also passes, and at (w.435), turn off it to descend to the bottom of the valley, following the GR52 through a conifer forest. Pass close by the Salèse cowshed to reach (w.434) the road, that you will very quickly leave to traverse the valley (w.397). Continue along the right bank, following the GR52, reach waymarker (w.398), cross the valley again following the GR and ascend along the road (w.399). Continue on the RM 89 road to Boréon.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 19.2km

**Height gain:** + 650m

**Descent:** - 1460m

**Time:** 7h

**Difficulty:**

alpine walking

**Suitable season:**

from early July to end September

**Regulations:**

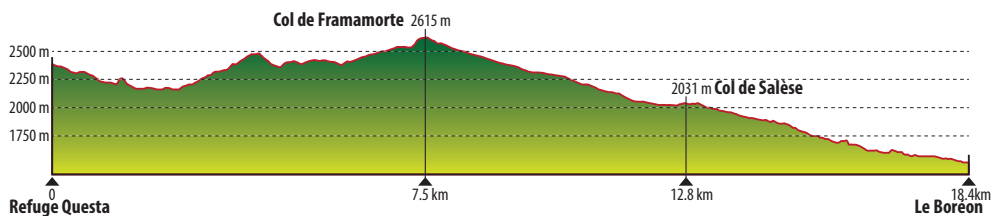
Parc Alpi Marittime and Mercantour National Park

**Map:**

Moyenne Tinée,  
Vallée de la Vésubie

**Accommodation:** OT5 OT6







**Departure point: Le Boréon (1500m)**

## STAGE 11 - BORÉON / MADONE DE FENESTRE

Boréon, a hamlet near Saint-Martin-Vésubie, has many different faces. Well-known for its lake and waterfall, this is also the site of many mountain-based outdoor activities, combining possibilities for winter activities such as ski touring, cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing and ice climbing for beginners.

In the summer, walkers come here to enjoy a range of waymarked routes of a range of difficulties, whilst climbers make the most of the Massif de la Cougourde, well-reputed for its multiple climbing routes.

Numerous fishing enthusiasts come here to indulge their passion in the cristal-clear waters, others prefer the Alpha park for wolf observation and to see the various scenarios related to their presence in the natural environment.

Over and above these leisure activities, the Boréon hamlet was in the past a site for exchanges and communication with Italy, with trade being carried out mostly across the Col de Cerise, the former salt road. It was also a summer grazing area for herds of cattle, as indicated by the cowsheds clearly visible in the area, including some that are still in use. The existing forestry activity has continued, evolving as the years go by with new forest management techniques.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the Boréon stopover gîte, head towards the Plateau du Cavalet on the GR52 (w.371) and continue to the right at waymarker w.377. Ascend progressively through the conifer forest, after a long traverse above the Alpha park, continue on the flat (w.379) then traverse a big avalanche gully and descend towards the Saladin private mountain hut. Ascend the track before losing a few metres in height (w.380) to traverse the Boréon stream (w.421a) and continue up a small steep section to pick up the path to Cougourde (w.421). Leave the Chalet Vidron (w.422) to your left with its magnificent waterfall then cross the Boréon again (w.423). Continue along the GR52, on a slight uphill section, towards Peïrastrèche (narrow stone) to the Gias de Peïrastrèche (w.424 and 425) and continue directly north in the direction of the Cougourde mountain hut. At w.426, turn right, on a globally horizontal path, before you see the lake spillway (w.427). Easily reach the Lac de

Trécolpas with its small characteristic island. Skirt around it to the north and continue on to the east towards the Pas des Ladres on the horizon in the distance. A slightly uphill section then a series of zig-zags leads you to the Pas des Ladres (2448m - w.428). Enjoy the view out over the surrounding summits and over the numerous chamois that colonise the sector and descend to the south-east on the GR52 in the direction of the Madone de Fenestre on multiple zig-zags. Continue on a long traverse overlooking former glacial moraines from the quaternary era. After reaching the Magnin spring that supplies water to the mountain hut, you will quickly come to the intersection with the access path to the Lac de Fenestre (w.368) via the right bank of the valley. Continue the descent along the GR52, where at a turn of the path the Madone de Fenestre comes into view. You will quickly reach this, sometimes accompanied by the piercing calls of marmots which announce your arrival.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 12.3km

**Height gain:** + 1045m

**Descent:** - 680m

**Time:** 6h

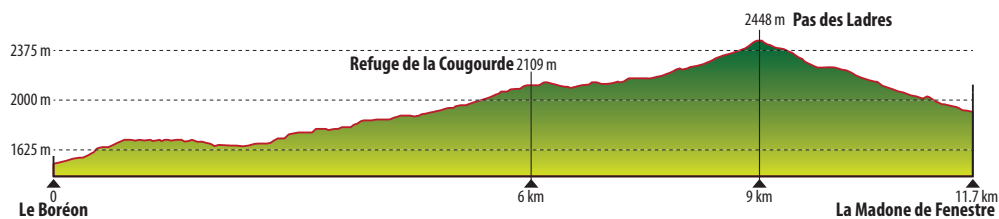
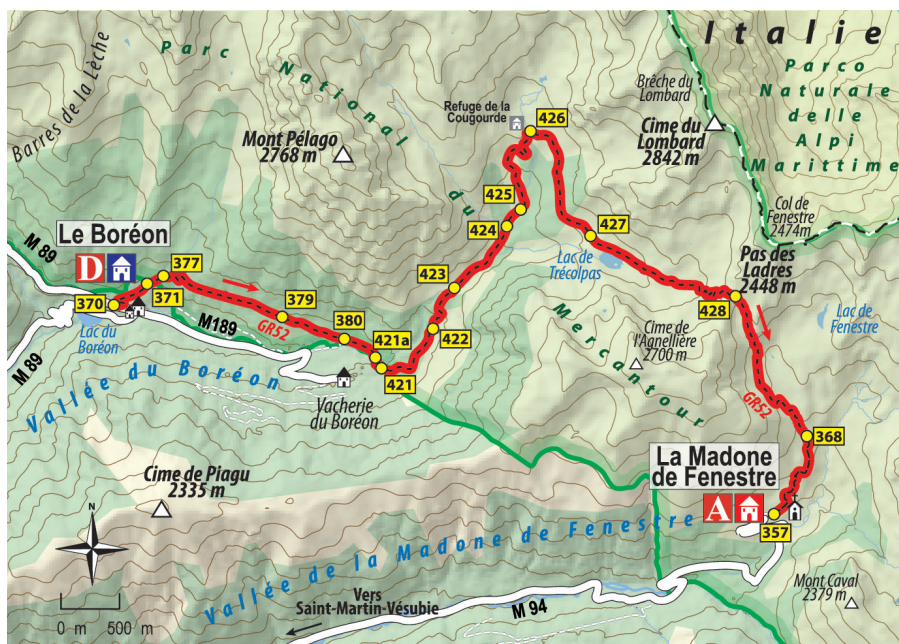
**Difficulty:**  
alpine walking

**Suitable season:**  
end June to end September

**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National Park

**Map:**  
Vallée de la Vésubie

**Accommodation:**  
OT5 OT6







**Departure point: Madone de Fenestre (1820m)**

## STAGE 12 - MADONE DE FENESTRE / REFUGE DE NICE

From the square at the Sanctuaire de la Madone de Fenestre, the route offers a special viewpoint across the Cirque de la Madone and the mountains that surround it. These are very frequently climbed by experienced or beginner mountaineers who make the most of the numerous climbing routes with variable grades. The Cime du Gélas, a summit on the border itself and highest point of the Alpes-Maritimes at 3143m, overlooks all of this rocky area, stretching far and wide, its colours contrasting with those of the permanent snow and alpine plants. Often ascended by seasoned walkers, the Gélas provides a majestic view over the Alpes and the sea.

This stage rubs shoulders with the highest summits in the Mercantour, which can easily be distinguished from the coastline, including the Malédie and the Mont Clapier which reach more than 3000m altitude and seal off the view to the north from the Refuge de Nice. This hut is also known as Victor de Cessole, in homage to this explorer who conquered, both in summer and in winter, many summits of the Alpes-Maritimes and took care to raise their profile in articles and numerous photographs. The entire length of this stage follows the GR52 long-distance route.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the sanctuary, descend on the GR52 (w.357) towards the cowsheds, cross the stream (w.359), then ascend in the left bank and cut across the Vallon du Ponset (w.367). Continue through the pasture where several small springs cut across the path and cross the various rock steps. After the first trees, turn right following the long-distance GR waymarkers, in the direction of the Caïres de la Madone, leaving the grassy plateau named Jas Cabret further down to your left. Continue an ascending traverse across the scree slopes to the mouth of the Vallon du mont Colomb that you will then ascend on grassy sections to reach the lake of the same name.

Ascend on the left bank (depending on the season, a large névé can remain in place across the path) and you will soon reach the Pas du Mont Colomb (2548m - w.400).

After crossing it, descend directly to the east down a narrow, steeply-inclined gully, one of the most technical sections of the route, then cross the scree slopes to finish the descent down several zig-zags on a rather steep grassy slope (w.416). Ascend the Vallon de la Gordolasque at the place named La Barme, continue on the right bank to skirt around the Lac de la Fous (EDF water intake) and finish on a well-made steep section, to arrive at the Refuge de Nice hut (2232m).

### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 6.4km

**Height gain:** + 755m

**Descent:** - 430m

**Time:** 5h

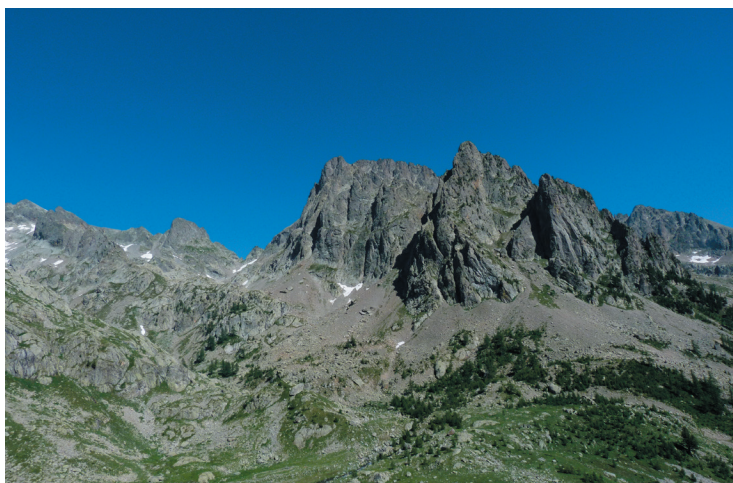
**Difficulty:**  
alpine walking

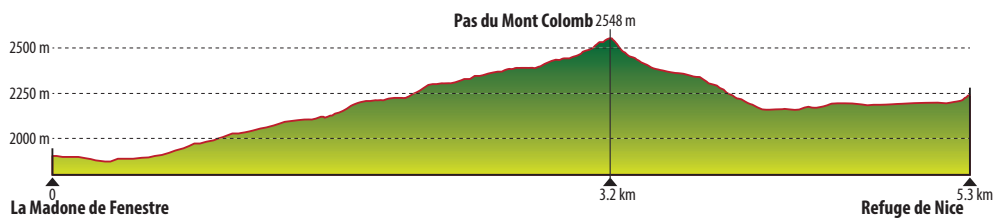
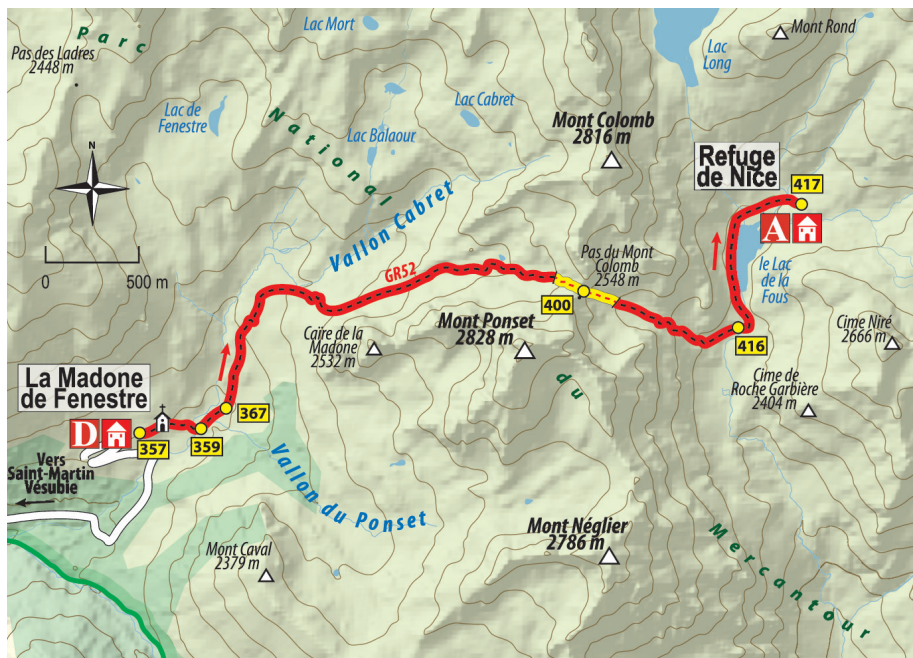
**Suitable season:**  
end June to end September

**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National Park

**Map:**  
Vallée de la Vésubie

**Accommodation:** R8







**Departure point: Refuge de Nice (2232m)**

## STAGE 13 - REFUGE DE NICE / REFUGE DES MERVEILLES

This stage, located entirely in the GR52, crosses the highest col in the Grande Traversée du Mercantour, at the Baisse du Basto (2693m). You will need to take extra care when going over this col depending on the snow conditions. This route also traverses the famous Vallée des Merveilles, known for its many rock paintings dating back 2500 years. More than 40,000 examples of these have made this site well-known as an open-air listed historical monument, which is the subject of specific regulations applied by the Mercantour National Park. In particular, you should not walk on the slabs, touch the engravings, or leave the waymarked paths, and any failure to follow these rules will be reprimanded by law. The site has a special atmosphere, with its landscapes of sedimentary rocks polished by the glaciers of the quaternary era, unique throughout the Alps due to their array of colours, and their famous engravings that bear witness to ancient grazing activities. Numerous lakes, whose colours vary as the weather changes, contribute to emphasize the mysterious and striking atmosphere of the site. The Refuge des Merveilles, mainly accessible from the Vallée de la Roya, a focal point for walking, is one of the most popular in France due to the famous nearby sites.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Go around the northern side of the rocky boulder that overshadows the mountain hut; descend the Vallon de la Fous (w.418), then cross it and ascend on rock polished by glaciers up to the Lac Niré (2353m). Go around the lake on the north side, follow the right flank of the Vallon du Chamineye to start with and pass alongside the 3 small lakes (also known as Lagarots) sitting at the foot of the north face of the Tête du lac Autier. Cross the vallon and wind your way through scree slopes in a south-easterly direction to climb the final slope of the summit named Baisse du Basto (2693m - w.401). This sustained ascent passes up through the small rocky gully worn by passing walkers. At the start of the season, large névés can sometimes persist, stretching from the last lake up to the Baisse, meaning that particular care is necessary on this section. From the Baisse, the mythical summit of Mont Bégo rises up, and the prestigious

Mont Gélas and its neighbour La Malédie are outlined against the sky to the south-east. Continue on the GR52 amongst the hutches towards the east at the foot of the Têtes du Basto, then go past a small lake, leaving it to your left, and continue the descent to join the path that leads to the Lac du Basto (w.95). A few well-worn zig-zags lead to the summit named Baisse de Valmasque (2549m - w.94). From the Col, enjoy the view down over the Vallée des Merveilles and its many lakes and descend on a winding path to pass between two Lagarots (lakes), then traverse the Vallon des Merveilles and continue on the left bank. Pass around the Lac des Merveilles on its eastern side; near to its spillway, the famous Chef de Tribu rock art can be seen from the GR path. Take the time to read the explanatory signs at the edge of the path and go on to waymarker 93 before descending the last downhill section to the nearby mountain hut.

### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 9.7km

**Height gain:** + 670m

**Descent:** - 760m

**Time:** 6h

**Difficulty:**  
alpine walking

**Suitable season:**  
from mid-July to end  
September

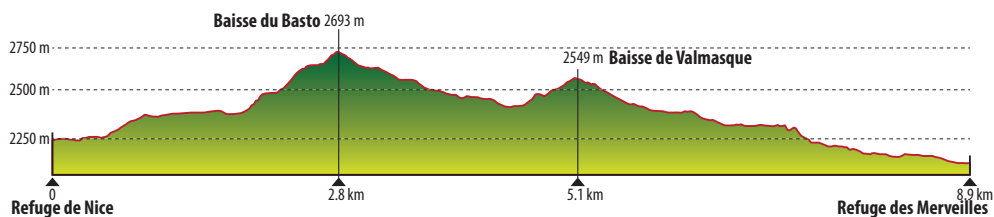
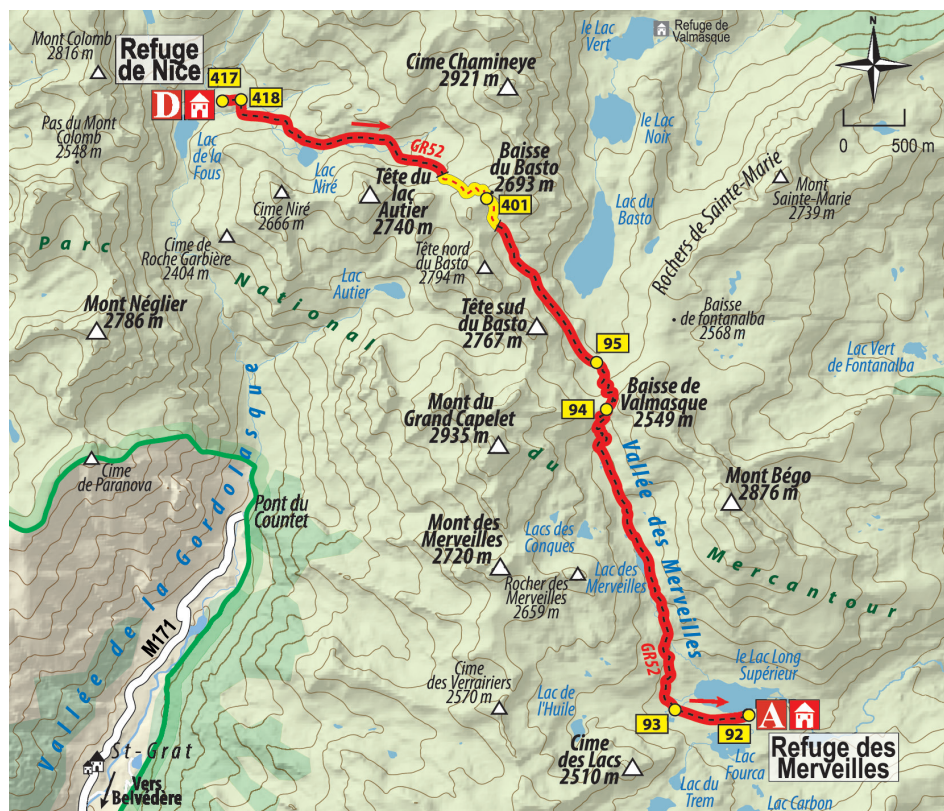
**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National  
Park

**Map:**  
Vallée de la Vésubie  
Vallée de la Roya

**Accommodation:** R9









**Departure point: Refuge des Merveilles (2130m)**

## STAGE 14 - REFUGE DES MERVEILLES / CAMP D'ARGENT

This stage marks the transition between the high mountains at the day's departure point, surrounded by majestic summits (Mont Bégo, Grand Capelet), and the mid-level mountains of Bévéra with softer landscapes that can be reached by walking mainly through alpine pastures. The route passes partly at the foot of the Cime du Diable (2685m), which is separated from the sea only by around thirty kilometres of land, as the crow flies. It leaves the mountain lakes and finishes off the traverse from the west of the Département, starting the progressive descent to the south towards your impending arrival at the coast.

From the ridge named Crête de l'Authion, a magnificent 360° view can be seen, from summits at more than 3000m in the Argentera-Mercantour massif, down to the coastline, taking in the Prealps and the mid-level countryside along the way. From the Pointe des Trois Communes, you can see the Redoute, constructed in 1898, that bears witness to wars fought here dating back to the Napoleonic era. When the weather is good, this viewpoint, straddling the three valleys named Vallée de la Vésubie, Vallée de la Bévéra and Vallée de la Roya, provides a view across the high summits of Corsica that rise up in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From the hut (w.92), climb up along the GR52 path towards the Lac Fourca, then skirt around this on the right bank, and continue on by passing between the Lac du Trem and the left bank of the Lac de la Muta. Continue to the west towards the small Lacs du Diable (w.404), which may dry out in summer. You will go past, on your right, the path leading to the Pas du Trem and the Cime du Diable to reach the Pas du Diable (2340m - w.405) after a short while.

Descend to the south above beautiful moraines before traversing the valley below the upper Capelet to gain the Baisse de Cavaline by traversing across the mountain. Skirt around the Cime de Raus to the west on the side of the Vésubie valley, to join up with the Col de Raus (1999m - w.406), connection point to Belvédère en Vésubie or Fontan in the Roya valley. Continue your descent towards the

summit named Baisse de St-Véran (1836m - w.409) on the east flank of the Cime de Tuor. Ascend the western slope of the ridge named Crête de l'Ortiguier to the Pointe des Trois Communes (w.410), the crowning point of this stage due to the magnificent views it offers. Continue to the west on the horizontal ridge that overlooks old military barracks directly below the Authion road circuit before descending down to the Baisse de Tuis (1888m - w.244), where there is an information point for the Mercantour National Park in summer. Walk along the D68 road for a few hundred metres, then ascend slightly to follow the descending alpine ski slopes, and finish the stage at Camp d'Argent, a small family-centred winter sports station. Depending on the accommodation bookings you have made, the stage can go on further (1.5km, - 100m of height loss) to the Col de Turini by a shortcut below the road (w.31 and w.30).

### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 12.9km

**Height gain:** + 610m

**Descent:** - 985m

**Time:** 6h

**Difficulty:**

athletic hiking

**Suitable season:**

end June to end September

**Regulations:**

Mercantour National Park

**Map:**

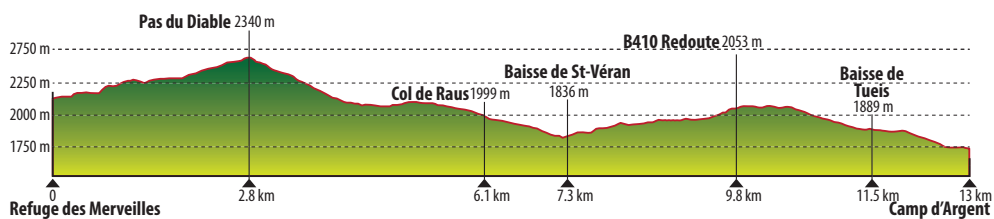
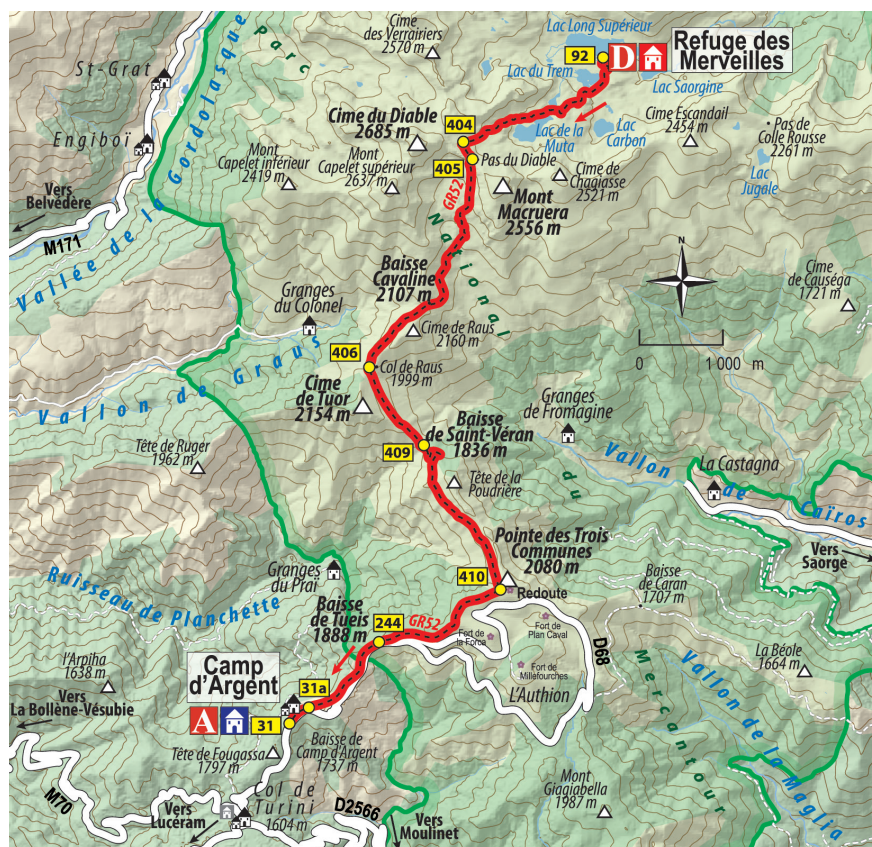
Vallée de la Vésubie  
Vallée de la Roya

**Accommodation:** OT7

MAIRIE DE MOULINET

04 93 04 80 07









**Departure point: Camp d'Argent (1737m)**

## STAGE 15 - CAMP D'ARGENT / SOSPEL

This extraordinary scenic route along the ridge named Crête de Ventabren, follows the GR52. Several settings with highly contrasting landscapes follow on from each other throughout this day along the Vallée de la Bévéra: pin trees and spruces when starting out at Camp d'Argent, larches and grassy pastures between the ridge dips named "Baisses" and lastly Scotch pines and vast olive groves in the Sospel catchment basin. With a descending profile, this long walk that passes by the Baisse de la Linière, where distinctive relics of cannons still lie, crosses the eastern edge of the Central Zone of the Mercantour National Park, just before the Baisse de Figuiéra. The quality of the network of paths and tracks should not at all detract from the sustained descent from the summit of the Mangiabo (1821m) to the village of Sospel, organised around the old toll bridge that dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and which brings a unique touch to the end of this stage.



### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From Camp d'Argent (w.238), follow the track (GR52) until it ends; a long traverse on a sub-horizontal path winds its way across the slope and leads to the little scenic route around L'Authion (w.28b) close to the old Cabanes Vieilles barracks and the US tank wreck. Follow the GR52 to the right, along the cowshed track, before turning off this in the first hairpin bend to follow a pleasant path that descends, crosses the valley, and ascends across the slope to come out onto the track (w.151). Continue directly south on the GR, alternating between sections on the track and on the ridge; in this area there are herds of grazing animals in summer so you will need to stay alert and calm, in particular as you approach the Baisse de Ventabren where you will need to cross over to the eastern flank (left) of the summit of the same name to get to the Baisse de la Déa (w.141). Cross

the track to pick up the path (GR) that crosses over to the other face in front of the fortifications, in the direction of the Cime de Mangiabo, via waymarkers 142 and 143. From this waymarker, stay on the ridge (south) to waymarker 144 and gain the summit (1821m); the GR follows the shoulder (south) for a while before descending down the barren western hillside to reach waymarker 23 below. Continue on the balcony to the summit named Baisse de Linière (w.22), then descend until you reach the edge of the PNM, (w.77) and further down, the Baisse de Figuiéra (w.76). Cross the road to pick up an old military path that intersects it again further down (w.75). Follow the road for 100m or so before heading off down a wide, even path that leads you to a hairpin bend (w.74). The narrow road leads past the school; descend the steps opposite (w.72) to the small Route de Serret, and the old centre of Sospel (350m), with its bridge across the Bévéra, the end of the stage.

### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 19.5km

**Height gain:** + 470m

**Descent:** - 1850m

**Time:** 7h30

**Difficulty:**  
alpine walking

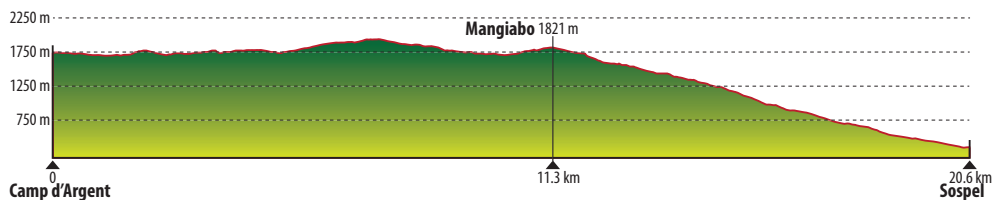
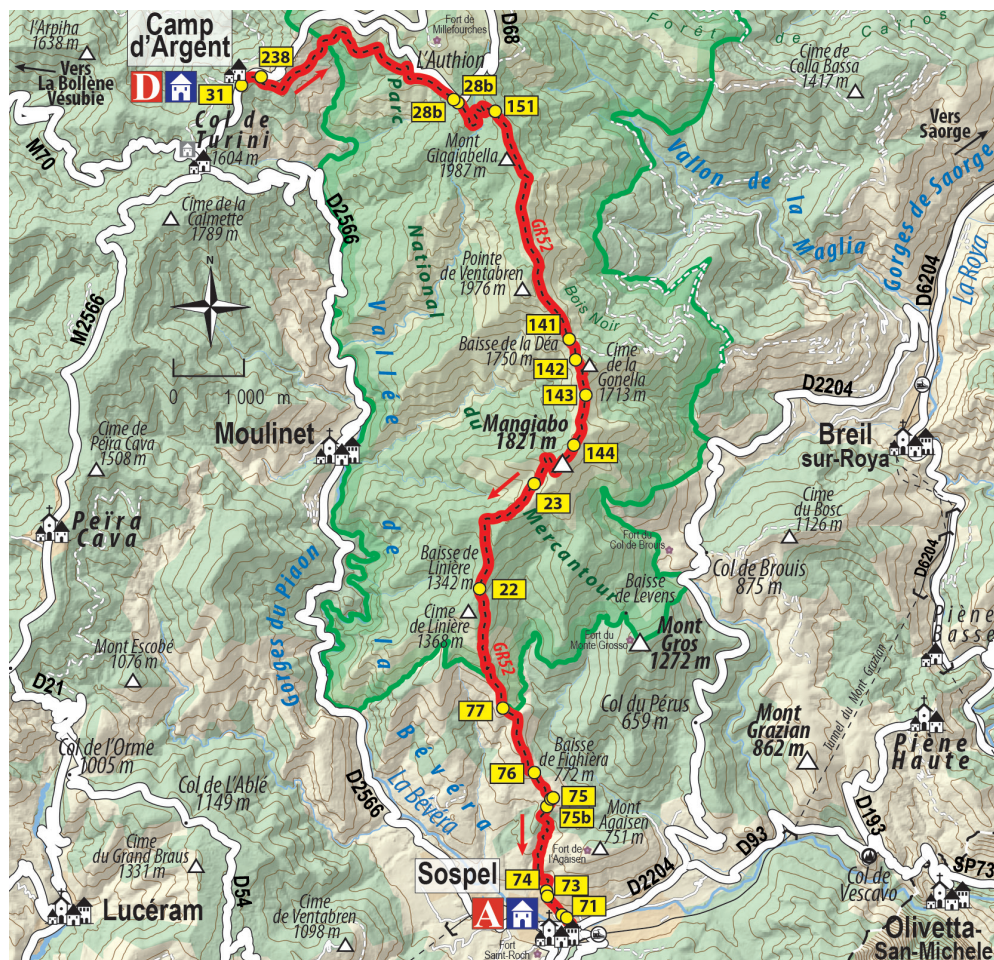
**Suitable season:**  
end June to October

**Regulations:**  
Mercantour National  
Park, in part

**Map:**  
Vallée de la Vésubie  
Vallée de la Bévéra

**Accommodation:** OTS







**Departure point: Sospel (350m)**

## STAGE 16 - SOSPEL / MENTON

### VEHICLE TRANSFER

to return to Estenc:

147km/3h30

Exit Menton to take the A8 towards Nice. Take exit n°52 Saint-Isidore to pick up the RM 6202 road and the route taken to start your multi-stage walk.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 17km

**Height gain:** + 1150m

**Descent:** - 1480m

**Time:** 7h

**Difficulty:**

alpine walking

**Suitable season:**

all year round

**Map:**

Vallée de la Bévéra,  
Nice-Menton

**Accommodation:** OT9

This last stage starts out in the magnificent Sospel basin, an important contact point between the Vallée du Paillon and the Vallée de la Vésubie on the one hand, the area around Menton and the Vallée de la Roya, on the other hand. The first part of the ascent towards the Col du Razet occurs in undergrowth that is entirely surrounded by mountains; subsequently, paths and tracks will offer striking contrasts between limestone cliffs and the blue waters of the Mediterranean. As you go cross the Col du Berceau, Menton and its old town will come into view, as well as the famous cliffs that are spread along the eastern part of the Côte d'Azur. At this point on the route, at nearly 1000m altitude, you will see the Alps literally plunge into the sea, without however forgetting to take a last look back to the north and the far-off summits of the Mercantour that you have just crossed. The last kilometres on the Boulevard de Garavan, whose construction was finished off in 1888, will lead walkers, in a perfect setting, to the old centre of Menton.

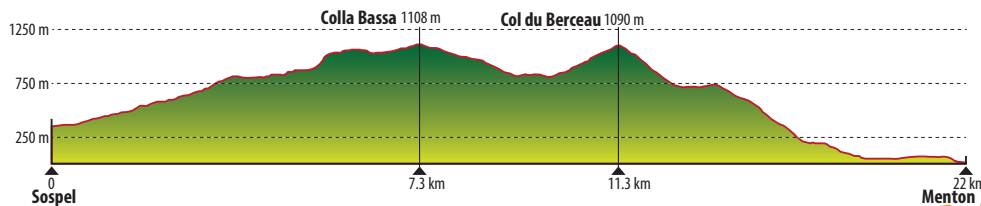
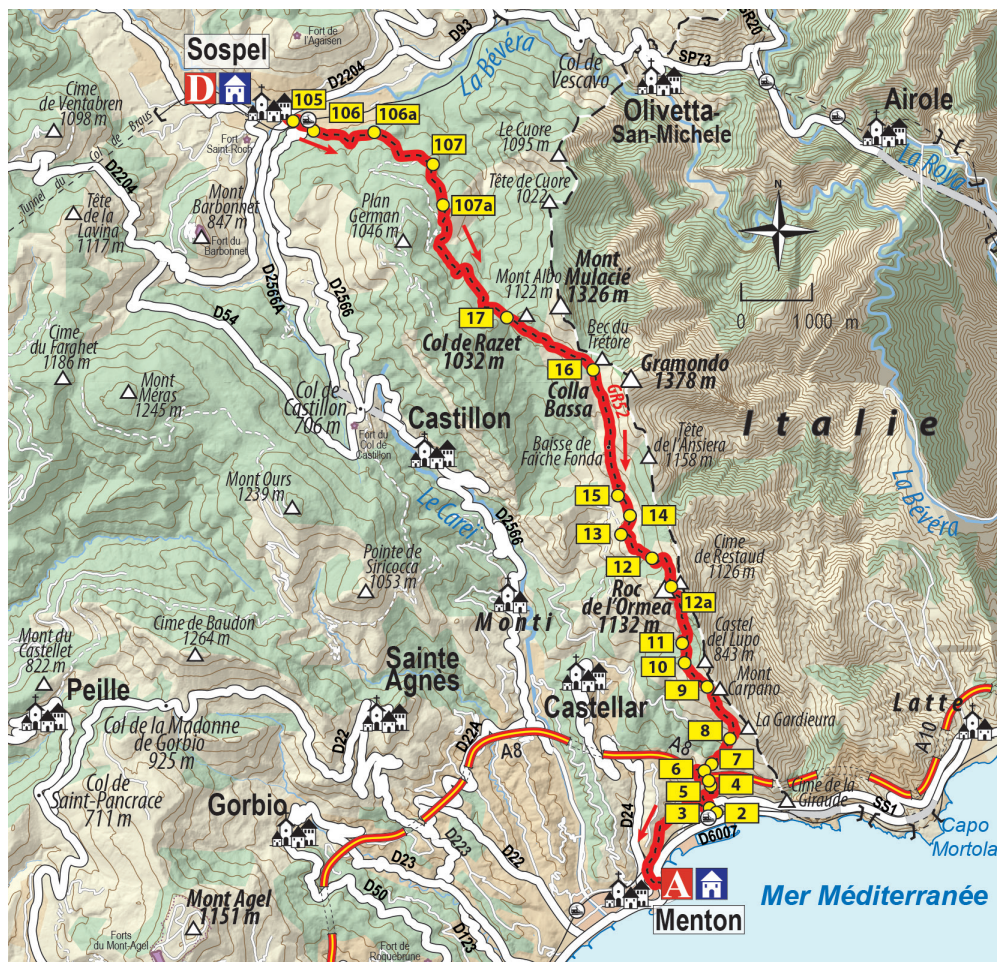
### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From Sospel (350m - w.105), follow the old road to the Col de Castillon (D.2566). Traverse the railway line and just after the first zig-zag, turn off onto the small road to Fontan on your left (w.106). It rapidly turns into a track; follow it before turning right onto the GR path (w.106a) that cuts across it and rejoins it higher up. In a first hairpin bend on the right, follow the start of a track to again pick up the path (GR) that climbs up the hillside (w.107) before coming out onto the shoulder (fountain - w.107a). By ascending through the undergrowth you will reach the Col du Razet (1032m - w.17); continue across the slope (GR52), to reach Colla Bassa (1108m - w.16) and turn right onto the track that descends in a southerly direction. Further down, turn off to the right on a path (GR) to reach the place named Mourga (w.15). Go past the ruin (leaving it on your right) to cross the slope and get to a track (w.14) that you will follow to the right as it descends to pick up the path that heads off to the left (GR52 - w.13). The last ascent then begins (w.12), leading up to the large pine trees below the Col du Berceau (1090m - w.12a) and the Col itself. Make sure you climb up to the airy summit of the Roc d'Orméa (1132m) by a short out-

and-back detour. The descent on the south side is steep, stony, and technical. The slope becomes more gentle when it reaches the forest (716m), point where routes cross each other (w.11) and where you must continue towards the Plan du Lion (w.10) leaving the GR51 path to your right. At the end of the plateau, still bearing the marks of a recent fire (w.9), follow the path (GR52) that descends straight down the slope to get to a track in the vicinity of the St-Paul area (446m - w.8). Continue opposite along the track then on the path to the left (GR) that descends across the slope (waymarkers 7 and 6) to the outskirts of Menton. Pass alongside the motorway on your right, then under it, and continue (w.5) downhill (GR52 - w.4). Join the Boulevard de Garavan (w.2), head towards the old Chateau at its western end and the Sablettes beach along charming narrow streets.











The village of Entraunes in the upper Var valley



# VARIANTS OF THE GRANDE TRAVERSÉE

## VARIANT

START OUT FROM THE VILLAGE OF ENTRAUNES

## IN 8 DAYS

FROM ESTENC TO ISOLA 2000

FROM ISOLA 2000 TO MENTON

## IN 5 DAYS

FROM ESTENC TO ST-ÉTIENNE-DE-TINÉE

FROM ST-ÉTIENNE-DE-TINÉE TO BORÉON

FROM BORÉON TO MENTON







**Departure point: Entraunes (1250m)**

## VARIANT STARTING OUT FROM THE VILLAGE OF ENTRAUNES

### ROAD ACCESS

109km  
From Nice (airport), ascend the Vallée du Var along the RM 6202 road, then the RD 6202 road until you reach Entrevaux. A little after this, at the place named "Pont de Gueydan", turn right onto the road to the Col de la Cayolle (RD 2202 road) to reach Guillaumes. Continue ascending the Vallée du Var to reach Entraunes.



### STAGE DETAILS

**Distance:** 7.2km

**Height gain:** + 570m

**Descent:** néant

**Time:** 3h

**Difficulty:**  
athletic hiking

**Suitable season:**  
from July to October

**Map:**  
Haute Vallée du Var, Top  
25 n°3540ET

**Accommodation:** 0T9

The municipality of Entraunes, capital of the Val d'Entraunes and nestled at the confluence between the Var and the Bourdous rivers, is a cosy village with well-restored houses, surrounded by green pastures and black marls that have been carried down from the summit of the Roche Grande (2742m). You will ascend towards the Plateau d'Estenc (1800m) and the source of the Var along the old road leading to the hamlet of Estenc, isolated for months in times past due to the winter snow.

The route wends its way along a wild and harsh section in the hollow of a gorge. Superb waterfalls cascade down from the abrupt hillsides of the Tours du lac d'Allos (Garreton and Aiglière) which offer fabulous landscapes. Further on, the pastures claimed from the stony ground, the abandoned or still-exploited farms, chapels and oratories remind us that this place was once tamed by man.

Higher up, the Saut du Var at the Saint-Roch bridge, then the admirable Pont du Diable that straddles the point where the torrent breaks through the glacial sill, precede the tranquil Plateau d'Estenc. This is the arrival point at the entrance to the Mercantour National Park, the point of departure for the first stage of the GTM.

### ROUTE DESCRIPTION

From Entraunes, cross the bridge over the Var (w.33), just opposite the Chapelle Saint-Sébastien, and follow the road that passes close to the road maintenance services premises. Go past the small road to Oustamura (w.34), leaving it to your left, and continue along the Var up to a little oratory (w.35). Follow the earth track that leads to a dam installed in the stream bed near the confluence with the Vallon de Garreton. Gain 100m in height to cross the vallon using a footbridge and turn off onto the path that passes below the rock bands of the Baumette up to the Aiglière waterfall (1450m).

Leave the right bank of the Var (footbridges), catching some spray from the waterfall as you go, then continue along the ascending path and you will soon return to the right bank, where the valley widens.

Cut across the road above the Saint-Roch bridge (w.36) and ascend a rough track that leads to the water reservoir. A comfortable path follows on from this, passing alongside a large field and reaching the Chapelle Saint-Sauveur (w.37).

The landscape softens and the easy walking will take you, through the

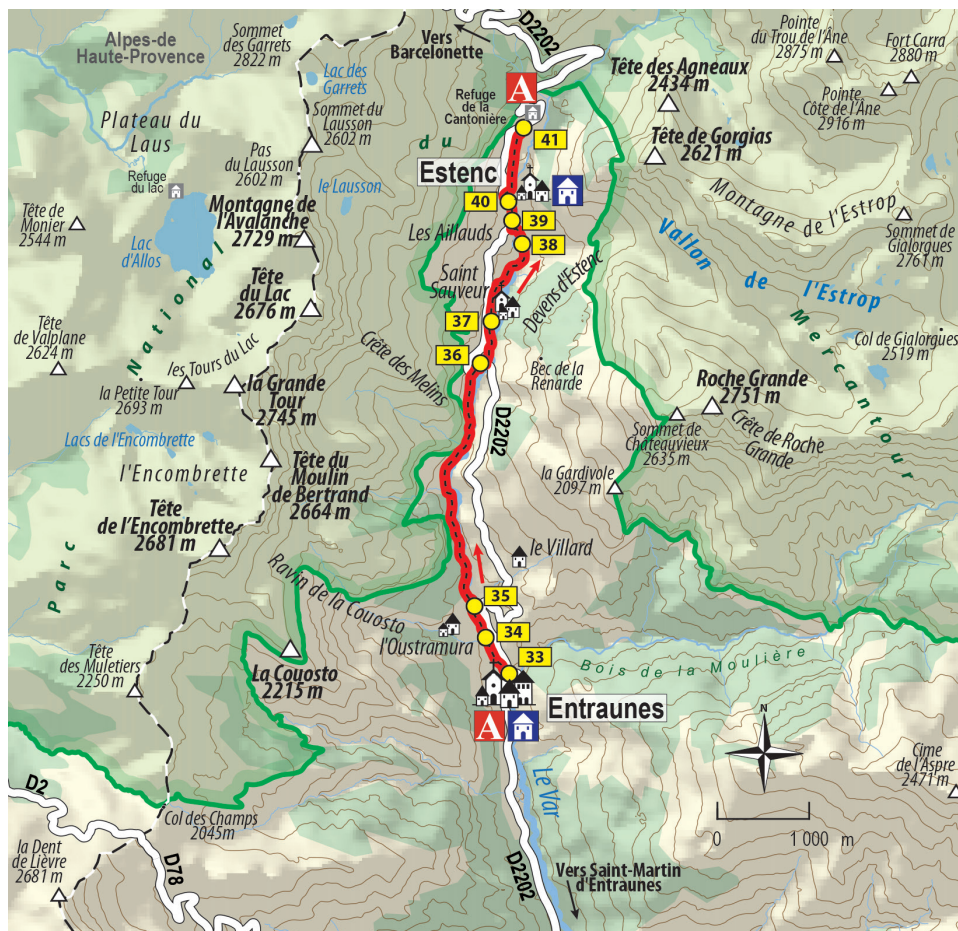
undergrowth or at the edge of fields, to an intersection (w.39b). Turn right to get to the group of houses named L'Avalanche, from which you can nostalgically admire a large farm and a small church with its adjoining cemetery.

After crossing the Var, the path passes near some farmhouse stopover gites (w.38), and from the drinking trough, ascends directly towards an oratory.

Cross the torrent in the narrow gorge for a last time by means of the Pont du Diable, and ascend up to the road (w.39a - 39), just before the Auberge de la Cayolle and the Lac d'Estenc (w.40).

Follow the path beside the lake to the left, then head for the Cantonnière hostel-hut and the edge of the Mercantour National Park by taking a direct path (w.41) across the hayfields.







**Departure point: Estenc (1780m)**

# TRAVERSE FROM ESTENC TO ISOLA 2000

## ROAD ACCESS

117km from Nice (airport), ascend the Vallée du Var on the RM 6202 road until reaching the Vallée du Var, then on the RD 6202 road to Entrevaux. A little after this, at the place named "Pont de Gueydan", turn right onto the road to the Col de la Cayolle (RD 2202) to go to Guillaumes. Still ascending the Vallée du Var, gain Entraunes, then Estenc. Continue towards the col and gain the gateway to the Mercantour National Park.

## VEHICLE TRANSFER

75km/2h from Isola 2000. Go to the village of Isola. Take the road to Saint-Étienne de Tinée (RM 2205). Traverse through the village and take the road to the Col de la Bonette (RM 63) towards Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage, then the little Col de la Moutière until you reach Bayasse. Turn left onto the D 902 then the D 2202 to pass over the Col de la Cayolle and descend down to Estenc.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Number of days: 8

Total distance:  
104.9km

Cumulated height gain/  
descent:  
+ 6110m and - 5750m

Accommodation at the  
departure point:  
Estenc - Contact:  
MAIRIE D'ENTRAUNES  
04 93 05 51 26

An ancient link between the Val d'Entraunes and the Haute Tinée valley, passing over the Col de Gialorgues, marks the beginning to this 8-day traverse. Contained mainly within the central zone of the Mercantour National Park, the route takes you on a journey through a wide variety of landscapes: high-altitude hamlets, wooded slopes, grazing lands, glacial lakes and barren summits. The consistently good quality of the network of paths and tracks, as much on the French side as on the Italian side, lend this classic route, with its distinctive alpine characteristics, an exceptional status.

## STAGE BY STAGE ROUTE DESCRIPTION

### S1: Estenc / St-Dalmas-le-Selvage

Distance: 17.8km  
Height gain: + 710m  
Descent: - 1070m  
Time: 6h  
Difficulty: athletic hiking  
Suitable season:  
end June to mid-October  
Regulations: PNM  
Map: Haute Vallée du Var, Haute Tinée 1

Accommodation: OT1

### S2: St-Dalmas-le-Selvage / Bousièyas

Distance: 18 km  
Height gain: + 1190m  
Descent: - 825m  
Time: 5h30  
Difficulty: athletic hiking  
Suitable season:  
end June to end September  
Regulations: PNM  
Map: Haute Tinée 1  
Accommodation: OT1

### S3: Bousièyas / Ferrière (Italy)

Distance: 12.4km  
Height gain: + 835m  
Descent: - 820m  
Time: 5h30  
Difficulty: athletic hiking  
Suitable season:  
mid-June to end September  
Regulations: PNM  
Map: Haute Tinée 1  
Accommodation: R1

### S4: Ferrière / Ref. de Vens

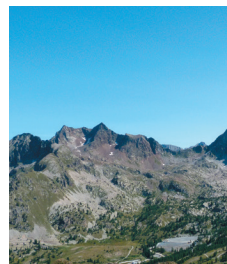
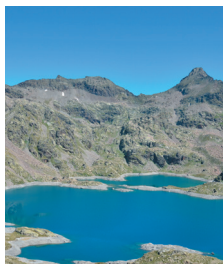
Distance: 7.5km  
Height gain: + 825m  
Descent: - 350m  
Time: 5h  
Difficulty: athletic hiking  
Suitable season:  
mid-June to end September  
Regulations: PNM  
Map: Haute Tinée 1  
Accommodation: R2

### S5: Ref. de Vens / Ref. de Rabuons

Distance: 13km  
Height gain: + 495m  
Descent: - 350m  
Time: 6h30  
Difficulty: alpine walking  
Suitable season:  
mid-July to end September  
Regulations: PNM  
Map: Haute Tinée 1  
Accommodation: R3







S6: Ref. de Rabuons / Ref. A.Foches (Italy)

Distance: 15.7km

Height gain: + 665m

Descent: - 1250m

Time: 6h30

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season: mid-July to end September

Map: Haute Tinée 1

Accommodation: R4

S7: Ref. A. Foches / S. Anna-di-Vinadio (Italy)

Distance: 12.1km

Height gain: + 960m

Descent: - 730m

Time: 6h

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season: mid-June to end September

Map: Haute Tinée 2

Accommodation: R5

S8: S. Anna-di-Vinadio / Isola 2000

Distance: 8.4km

Height gain: + 430m

Descent: - 355m

Time: 5h

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season: end June to end September

Map: Haute Tinée 2

Accommodation: OT3 OT4





**Departure point: Isola 2000, upper hamlet (2070m)**

## TRAVERSE FROM ISOLA 2000 TO MENTON

### ROAD ACCESS

Road access: 86km from Nice (airport), ascend the Vallée du Var on the RM 6202 to La Mescla. Turn right into the Vallée de la Tinée (RM 2205) and follow this to the village of Isola. Turn right (RM 97) to reach the upper hamlet of the Isola 2000 ski station along a winding road for 18km, where you will the departure point for the route.

### VEHICULE TRANSFER:

116km/2h30. Come out of Menton by taking the A8 towards Nice. Exit at St-Isidore (n°52) to pick up the RM 6202 and the itinerary taken to get to the start.

### PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Number of days: 8

Total distance:  
108.2km

Cumulated height gain/  
descent:  
+ 5985m and - 8085m

Accommodation at the  
departure point: OT3  
OT4

This second section of the GTM links the Vallée de la Tinée to the area around Menton by passing largely through the upper Vésubie, Roya and Bévéra valleys. This time, you will arrive in Menton, in 8 stages, starting out from Isola 2000; the route traverses the French and Italian parks at the foot of the last 3000m peaks in the Alpine Arc, with, as the crowing glory, the discovery of the Vallée des Merveilles and a very special destination point on the Plage des Sablettes. The accommodation also alternates between stopover gîtes and mountain huts; the train journey between Menton and Nice, will offer a last view of the imposing limestone summits that literally plunge down into the sea.

### STAGE BY STAGE ROUTE DESCRIPTION

**S1: Isola 2000 / Ref. Questa (Italy)**

Distance: 9.2km

Height gain: + 635m

Descent: - 440m

Time: 5h

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

early July to end September

Regulations: Parco Alpi Marittime

Map: Haute Tinée 2

Accommodation: R6

**S2: Ref. Questa / Boréon**

Distance: 19.2km

Height gain: + 650m

Descent: - 1460m

Time: 7h

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season:

early July to end September

Regulations: PNM, Parc Alpi Marittime

Map: Moyenne Tinée, Vallée de la Vésubie

Accommodation: OT5 OT6

**S3: Boréon / Madone de Fenestre**

Distance: 12.3km

Height gain: + 1045m

Descent: - 680m

Time: 6h

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season:

end June to end September

Regulations: PNM

Map: Vallée de la Vésubie

Accommodation: OT5 OT6

**S4: Madone de Fenestre / Ref. de Nice**

Distance: 6.4km

Height gain: + 755m

Descent: - 430m

Time: 5h

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season:

mid-July to end September

Regulations: PNM

Map: Vallée de la Vésubie

Accommodation: R8

**S5: Ref. de Nice / Ref. des Merveilles**

Distance: 9.7km

Height gain: + 670m

Descent: - 760m

Time: 6h

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season:

mid-July to end September

Regulations: PNM

Map: Vallée de la Vésubie, Vallée de la Roya

Accommodation: R9

**S6: Ref. des Merveilles / Camp d'Argent**

Distance: 12.9km

Height gain: + 610m

Descent: - 985m

Time: 6h

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

July to September

Regulations: PNM

Map: Vallée de la Vésubie, Vallée de la Roya

Accommodation: OT7

Mairie de Moulinet

04 93 04 80 07

**S7: Camp d'Argent / Sospel**

Distance: 19.5km

Height gain: + 470m

Descent: - 1850m

Time: 7h30

Difficulty:

alpine walking

Suitable season:

June to October

Regulations:

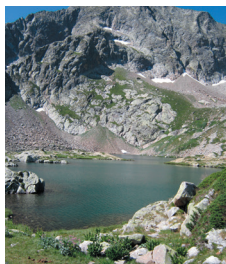
partly within the PNM

Map:

Vallée Bévéra, Nice-Menton







Accommodation: OT8

S8: Sospel / Menton

Distance: 17km

Height gain: + 1150m

Descent: - 1480m

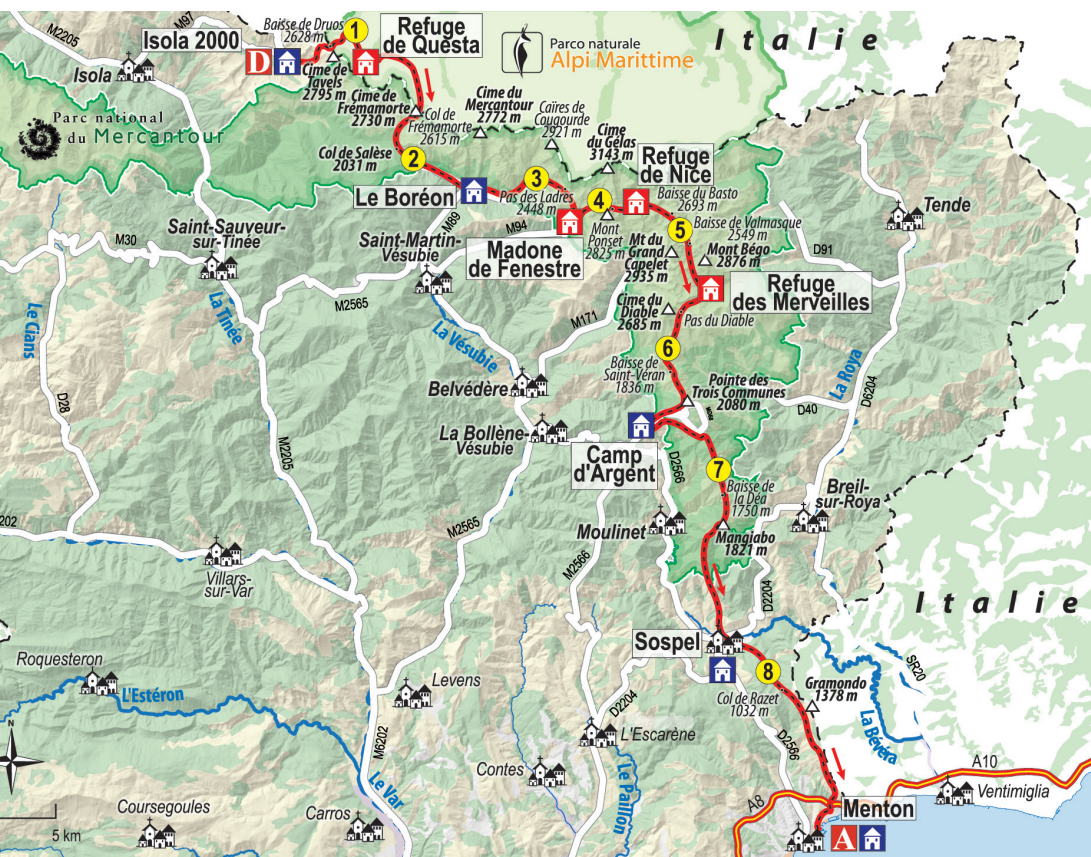
Time: 7h

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season: all year round

Map: Vallée Bévère, Nice-Menton

Accommodation: OT9







**Departure point: Estenc (1780m)**

# TRAVERSE FROM ESTENC TO SAINT-ÉTIENNE-DE-TINÉE

## ROAD ACCESS

Road access: 117km from Nice (airport), ascend the Vallée du Var along the RM 6202 road, then the RD 6202 until you reach Entrevaux. A short distance after the place named "Pont de Geydan", turn right on to the road leading to the Col de la Cayolle (RD 2202) to reach Guillaumes. Continue ascending the Vallée du Var, to reach Entraunes, then Estenc. The route starts here.

## VEHICLE TRANSFER:

45km/1h30

Follow the road to the Col de la Bonette (RM 2205); at the bridge "Pont Haut" turn left towards St-Dalmas-le-Selve then the little Col de la Mouillère until you reach Bayasse. Turn left onto the D 902 then the D 2202 to pass over the Col de la Cayolle and descend down to Estenc.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Number of days: 5

Total distance:  
66.5km

Cumulated height gain/  
descent:  
+ 3810m and - 4418m

Accommodation at the  
departure point:  
Estenc - Contact:

MAIRIE D'ENTRAUNES  
04 93 05 51 26

5 logical and evenly-distributed stages, between two parallel and very close valleys. Height gain, distance and isolation will be on the cards during this French-Italian staged route, with the grand finale of discovering the Vens lakes from the Collet de Tortisse (2581m), these being one of the most significant sites in the Mercantour National Park. The Aiguilles de Tortisse and their natural arch, the hamlets of Bousièyas and Ferrière where the vast pastures of Salso Moréno round off this exceptional circuit.

## STAGE BY STAGE ROUTE DESCRIPTION

### S1: Estenc / St-Dalmas-le-Selve

Distance: 17.8km  
Height gain: + 710m

Descent: - 1070m

Time: 6h

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

end June to mid-October

Regulations: PNM

Map: Haute Vallée du Var, Haute Tinée 1

Accommodation: OT1

### S2: St-Dalmas-le-Selve / Bousièyas

Distance: 18km  
Height gain: + 1190m

Descent: - 825m

Time: 5h30

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

end June to end September PNM

Map: Haute Tinée 1

Accommodation: OT1

### S3: Bousièyas / Ferrière (Italie)

Distance: 12.4km  
Height gain: + 835m

Descent: - 820m

Time: 5h30

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

mid-June to end September

Regulations: PNM

Map: Haute Tinée 1

Accommodation: R1

### S4: Ferrière / Ref. de Vens

Distance: 7.5km  
Height gain: + 825m

Descent: - 350m

Time: 5h

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

mid-June to end September

Regulations: PNM

Map: Haute Tinée 1

Accommodation: R2

### S5: Ref. de Vens / St-Étienne-de-Tinée

From the Vens mountain hut (CAF)

(2380m - w.25) descend the

right bank of the upper Vens

lake, then pass alongside

the mid-level lakes (w.27)

and the lower lake keeping

to the right. Cross the

spillway using a footbridge

(2285m - w.26) and ascend

up to the Baisse des

Babarottes (2506m) to the

south, from which the start

of the path named Chemin

de l'Énergie can be seen to

the south. Descend towards

the Chemin de l'Énergie

(w.113) then walk almost

on the horizontal along

the wide scenic path. Gain

the ridge named Crête de

Balaï (w.112), recognisable

by its old cable car gantry

that was used to bring up

materials and vehicles from

Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée

during works on the Chemin

de l'Énergie. Turn right onto

the path that descends in

zig-zags down the Crête de

Fournels. When you reach

the Granges de Fournels

(1742m - w.109), pass to

the right below the Granges

and come out onto a

viewpoint (1620m) with a

view out over the village

of Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée.

Continue, on the paved path





leading to the Chaussavillans neighbourhood, made up of fields scattered with many barns. The last part of the descent passes along the edge of the Vallon de Ténibre to come out onto the RM 2205 road at waymarker 108 and the village wash house, still used today. Turn left onto the road leading to the village.

**Distance:** 10. km

**Height gain:** + 250m

**Descent:** - 1353m

**Time:** 5h00

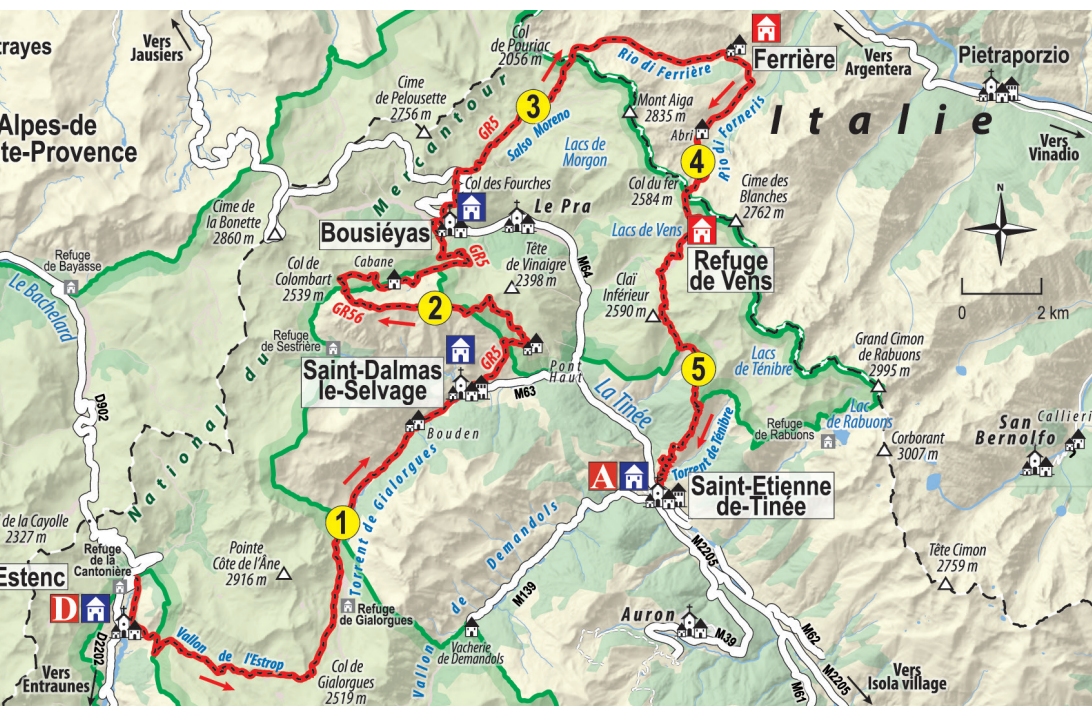
**Difficulty:** alpine walking

**Suitable season:** mid June to end September

**Regulations:** PNM in part

**Map:** Haute-Tinée 1

**Accommodation:** OT2 OT3





**Departure point: Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée (1140m)**

# TRAVERSE FROM SAINT-ÉTIENNE-DE-TINÉE TO BORÉON

## ROAD ACCESS

Road access: 91km from Nice (airport), ascend the Vallée du Var along the RM 6202 road until you reach the Mescla. Turn right into the Vallée de la Tinée (RM 2205) and follow this road until you reach St-Étienne-de-Tinée, start point of the route.

## VEHICLE TRANSFER:

61km/1h45

Descend to St-Martin-Vésubie (RM 89 road), turn right (RM 2565) towards La Colmiane to pass over the Col de St-Martin and continue to the Vallée de la Tinée. Turn right to pick up the route you started out on (RM 2205).

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Number of days: 5

Total distance:

72.7km

Cumulated height gain/  
descent:

+ 4720m and - 4235m

Accommodation at the  
departure point:

St-Etienne de -Tinée

Contact:

OT2 OT3

The route described here provides a week's walking that is packed full of interesting features, between St-Étienne-de-Tinée and the Boréon, a little hamlet above the village of St-Martin-Vésubie. Completed entirely within 5 days, it will take you to some houses at altitude that are of historical importance in the massif: Rabuons, Foches, Ste-Anna and Questa. Right from the start, you will find yourself in a high mountain setting with highly contrasting landscapes; balcony paths, larches in the upper Vallon de Chastillon above Isola 2000, and lake environments all rub shoulders during this traverse.

## STAGE BY STAGE ROUTE DESCRIPTION

### S1: St-Étienne-de-Tinée / Ref. de Rabuons

From the St-Antoine bridge (1147m - w.100), follow the paved path to Sélassé, passing through the Dailoutre district. Climb up under a roof of hazelnut trees, to come out shortly onto the Duminière fields. Enter the Forêt de Sélassé (1710m - w.101, cross), then turn right to pass through a thick grassy carpet studded with numerous larch trees. At w.102, turn right amongst raspberry bushes and fireweed, the path becoming steeper as you approach the water trough (1996m). Around one hour of walking remains before you reach the Chemin de l'Energie (2382m - w.103). Turn right onto the path cut into the rockface, created with several feats of engineering (walls, tunnels) w.104, then the artificial spillway and its recently-renovated EDF huts. Make your way up the steep section above you to discover the Lac de Rabuons (2500m - w.105) and the CAF mountain hut. Cross the lake's natural spillway on a footbridge and rapidly ascend up to the Rabuons mountain hut (2523m).

Distance: 8.1km

Height gain: + 1380m

Descent: none

Time: 3h30

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

end June to end September

Map: Haute Tinée 1

Accommodation: R3

### S2: Ref. de Rabuons / Ref. A.Foches (Italy)

Distance: 15.7km

Height gain: + 665m

Descent: - 1250m

Time: 6h30

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season: mid July to end

September

Map: Haute Tinée 1, Haute Tinée 2

Accommodation: R4

### S3: Ref. A.Foches / S.Anna-di-Vinadio (Italy)

Distance: 12.1km

Height gain: + 960m

Descent: - 730m

Time: 6h

Difficulty: athletic hiking

Suitable season:

mid June to end September

Map: Haute Tinée 1,  
Haute Tinée 2

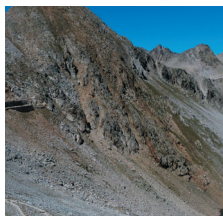
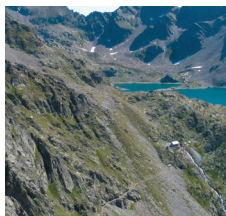
Accommodation: R5

### S4: S.Anna-di-Vinadio / Ref. de Questa (Italy)

From the sanctuary, ascend a small road leading to the rock that shelters the statue of Sainte-Anna, then a track and lastly a path that ascends to a wide ridge named Crête de Moravachère. Follow







this to the south-east to the Col de la Lombarde (2350m). Descend 800m on the road on the French side to come across, on your left, the start of the path leading up above the Isola 2000 ski station. After the 'barn' building, the route uses a series of tracks to descend again to w.91. Turn left onto the path to the Lacs de Terre Rouge (2452m), follow this to pass over the Baisse de Druos (2628m) above the lakes. Descend to the old barracks and the Lacs de Valscura on the Italian side. At the spillway of the last lake (2265m), turn right (south-east) onto the magnificent path that ascends slightly to lead you to the Questa mountain hut managed by the CAI (Italian Alpine Club) (2388m).

**Distance:** 17.6km

**Height gain:** + 1065m

**Descent:** - 795m

**Time:** 8h30

**Difficulty:** alpine walking

**Suitable season:** end June to end September

**Réglementation :** PAM in part

**Map:** Haute Tinée 2

**Accommodation:** R6

**S5: Ref. de Questa / Boréon**

**Distance:** 19.2km

**Height gain:** + 650m

**Descent:** - 1460m

**Time:** 7h

**Difficulty:** alpine walking

**Suitable season:** early July to end September

**Réglementation :** PAM and PNM

**Map:** Moyenne Tinée, Vallée de la Vésubie

**Accommodation:** OT5 OT6





**Departure point: Boréon (1500m)**

# TRAVERSE FROM BORÉON TO MENTON

## ROAD ACCESS

Road access: 69km from Nice (airport), ascend the Vallée du Var along the RM 6202 road up to the Plan du Var. On exiting the village, turn right onto the road in the Vallée de la Vésubie (RM 2565) until you reach St-Martin-Vésubie. Continue to the Lac du Boréon on the RM 89 and park on the car park opposite the entrance cabin to the Boréon.

## VEHICLE TRANSFER:

80km/2h30.  
Come out of Menton to pick up the A8 going towards Nice. Take exit n°52 Saint-Isidore to pick up the RM 6202 and the route already taken to start the route.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Number of days: 5

Total distance:  
77.8km

Cumulated height gain/  
descent:  
+ 4700m and - 6185m

Accommodation at  
point of departure:  
Boréon Contact: 0T5

Very long alpine traverse, unquestionably one of the most beautiful in the Vésubie Valley with a route that takes you on a complete journey of discovery through the upper valleys of the Boréon, the Madone and the Gordolasque. Further east, you will admire the coloured and carved slabs of the Vallée des Merveilles as you walk, before moving through the southern part of the Mercantour National Park. To finish off, a superb descent on a path across the slope will lead you to the Mediterranean Sea as the grand finale to this demanding route.

## STAGE BY STAGE ROUTE DESCRIPTION

### S1: Boréon / Refuge de Nice hut

From the Boréon, follow the GR52 (w.371) and turn right onto the w.377. Ascend progressively in the conifer forest, continue on the horizontal (w.379) towards the Cougourde. Follow the track (w.380), cross the Boréon mountain stream (w.421a) and continue on the path to the Cougourde (w.421). Keep the Chalet Vidron with its magnificent waterfall (w.422) to your left, before again crossing the Boréon (w.423). Continue on the GR52 to the Gias de Peïastrèche (w.424 and 425) and continue directly north towards the Cougourde mountain hut. At w.426, turn right to reach the lake sill (w.427), then the Lac de Trécolpas. Skirt around this to the north and continue directly east towards the Pas des Ladres outlined against the sky, that you will rapidly reach (2448m - w.428). Descend to the south-east on the GR52 towards the Madone de Fenestre, down multiple zig-zags. Follow the right bank of the valley and you will come across the access path to the Lac de Fenestre (w.368). Continue on the GR52, up to the sanctuary. Descend on the GR52 (w.357) towards the cowsheds, cross the stream (w.359), then ascend on the left bank and cut across the Vallon du Ponset (w.367). Continue on the GR path. After the last trees, turn right, following the red and white waymarkers, towards the Caïres de la Madone and go on past a zone of scree slopes to the Pas du Colomb (2548m - w.400). Descend directly east down a very steep, narrow gully, one of the most technical sections of the route, and continue on to w.416. Ascend the Vallon de la Gordolasque, continue on the right bank to skirt around the Lac de la Fous (EDF water intake) and finish off up a well-made steep section to reach the Nice

mountain hut (2232m).

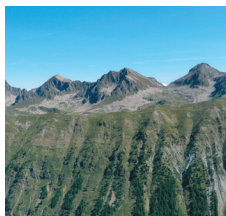
**Distance:** 18.7km  
**Height gain:** + 1800m  
**Descent:** - 1110m  
**Time:** 9h  
**Difficulty:** alpine walking  
**Suitable season:**  
mid-July to end September  
**Regulations:** PNM  
**Map:** Vallée de la Vésubie  
**Accommodation:** R8

**S2: Ref. de Nice/ Ref. des Merveilles**  
**Distance:** 9.7km  
**Height gain:** + 670m  
**Descent:** - 760m  
**Time:** 6h  
**Difficulty:** alpine walking  
**Suitable season:**  
mid-July to end September  
**Map:** Vallée de la Vésubie  
**Accommodation:** R9

**S3: Ref. des Merveilles / Camp d'Argent**  
**Distance:** 12.9km  
**Height gain:** + 610m  
**Descent:** - 985m  
**Time:** 6h  
**Difficulty:** athletic hiking  
**Suitable season:**  
end June to end September  
**Map:** Vallée de la Vésubie  
**Accommodation:** OT7  
Mairie de Moulinet 04 93 04 80 07

**S4: Camp d'Argent / Sospel**  
**Distance:** 19.5km  
**Height gain:** + 470m  
**Descent:** - 1850m  
**Time:** 7h30  
**Difficulty:** alpine walking  
**Suitable season:** June and October  
**Map:** Vallée de la Bévéra  
**Accommodation:** OT8





S5: Sospel / Menton

Distance: 17 km

Height gain: + 1150m

Descent: - 1480m

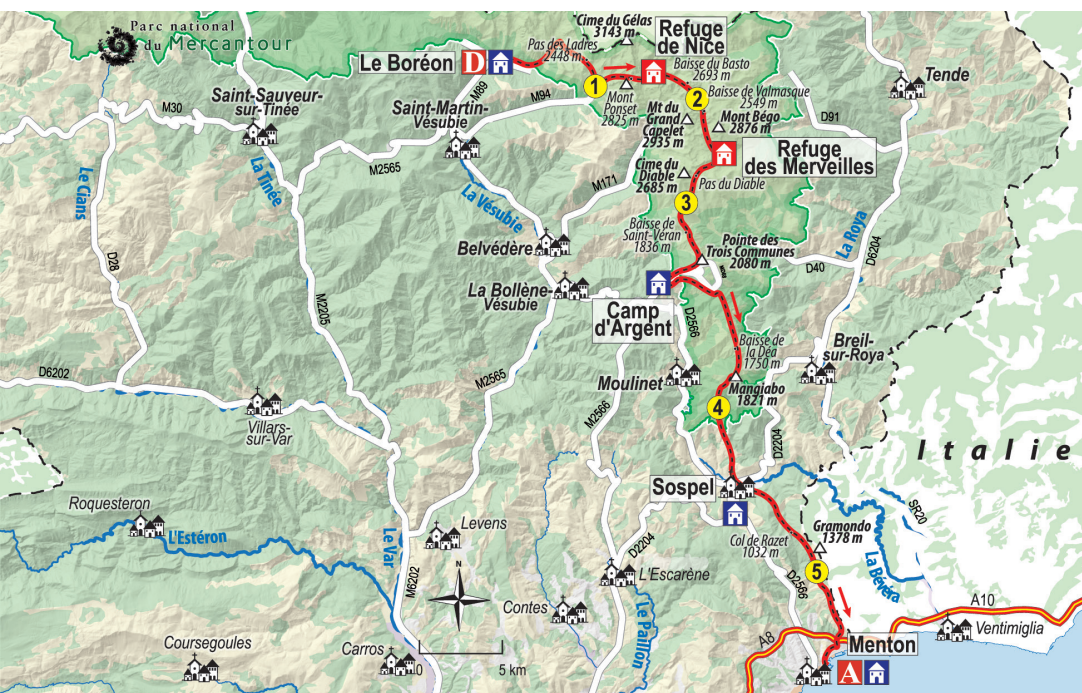
Time: 7h

Difficulty: alpine walking

Suitable season: all year round

Map: Vallée de la Bévère,  
Nice-Menton

Accommodation: OT9





At the end of each stage, validate your arrival at your local host, or, at the final stage Sospel Menton, in the Menton tourist office.

Once all the stages done, if you want to get your GTM diploma, please send a copy of the page to the Département : Conseil départemental des Alpes-Maritimes - Direction de la Communication et de l'événementiel - BP 3007 06201 Nice cedex 3

STAGE	VALIDATION STAMP FROM THE HOST OR TOURIST OFFICE IN MENTON
STAGE 1 : ESTENC - ST DALMAS LE SELVAGE	
STAGE 2 : ST DALMAS LE SELVAGE - BOUSIEYAS	
STAGE 3 : BOUSIEYAS - FERRIERE	
STAGE 4 : FERRIERE - REFUGE DEVENS	
STAGE 5 : REFUGE DEVENS - REFUGE DE RABUONS	
STAGE 6 : REFUGE DE RABUONS - REFUGE A.FOCHES	
STAGE 7 : REFUGE A.FOCHES - S.ANNA DIVINADIO	
STAGE 8 : S.ANNA DIVINADIO - ISOLA 2000	
STAGE 9 : ISOLA 2000 - REFUGE QUESTA	
STAGE 10 : REFUGE QUESTA - BOREON	
STAGE 11 : BOREON - MADONE DE FENESTRE	
STAGE 12 : MADONE DE FENESTRE - REFUGE DE NICE	
STAGE 13 : REFUGE DE NICE - REFUGE DES MERVEILLES	
STAGE 14 : REFUGE DES MERVEILLES - CAMP D'ARGENT	
STAGE 15 : CAMP D'ARGENT - SOSPEL	
STAGE 16 : SOSPEL - MENTON	

# IF AN ACCIDENT OCCURS

## SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS

- avoid leaving the victim alone,
- carry out emergency first aid, keeping the victim warm,
- raise the alarm, giving details of: the victim's condition, the precise location and time of the accident,
- remain available for the rescue services to contact you for any further information they may need,
- set up a visible indicator of the victim's position whilst waiting for specialised help to arrive.

## HOW DO YOU RAISE THE ALARM?

To contact emergency rescue services, dial **112**.

Remember that mobile telephone network in the mid-altitude and upper mountain valleys is patchy, and therefore the use of mobile phones cannot be relied on.

## IF EMERGENCY HELP ARRIVES BY AIR

- as the helicopter arrives, use the sign convention below,
- protect your eyes and the victim from flying objects caused by the helicopter,
- never approach a helicopter before being asked to do so by the crew,
- stay alert as the rescuers descend, as they may dislodge stones and rocks above you by accident.

I NEED HELP  
YES



I DO NOT NEED HELP  
NO



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Alpes-Maritimes Département.

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