



# Grande Traversée du Mercantour

Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime - Argentera



Aiguilles d'Isola, coucher de soleil en Tinée. (Philippe Pierini - PNM)



## Useful information

Practice : Hiking

Duration : 17 days

Length : 220.0 km

Difficulty : Hard

Type : Longer treks

*Comment décrire la Grande Traversée du Mercantour sans évoquer Victor de Cessole et ses expéditions du début du 20e siècle qui ont largement contribué à la conquête des sommets des Alpes-Maritimes et au développement du tourisme alpin ?*

*La GTM vous propose d'allier performance physique et découverte des paysages exceptionnels en cheminant sur un itinéraire d'envergure qui offrira au prix d'un effort soutenu de somptueux panoramas sur le massif alpin et sur la mer.*

*Depuis Entraunes, point de départ de*

*l'itinéraire dans le haut Var, la Grande Traversée du Mercantour (GR® GTM) vous conduira dans les hautes vallées de la Tinée, de la Vésubie, de la Roya et de la Bévéra pour une arrivée grandiose à Menton, au bord de la Méditerranée.*

The great nature trek through the Maritime Alps! At the foot of the peaks which reach 3000m in height, an exceptional adventure in the Mercantour National Park: the sunny side of the wild Alps and a delightful view over the Mediterranean to finish up!

With the Grande Traversée du Mercantour, hikers and nature lovers have 17 days to enjoy some of the finest landscapes in the Mediterranean Alps.

## Trek

**Departure** : Entraunes

**Arrival** : Menton

**Cities** : 1. Argentera

2. Belvédère

3. Breil-sur-Roya

4. Entraunes

5. Isola

6. La Bollène-Vésubie

7. Menton

8. Moulinet

9. Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage

10. Saint-Martin-Vésubie

11. Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée

12. Saorge

13. Sospel

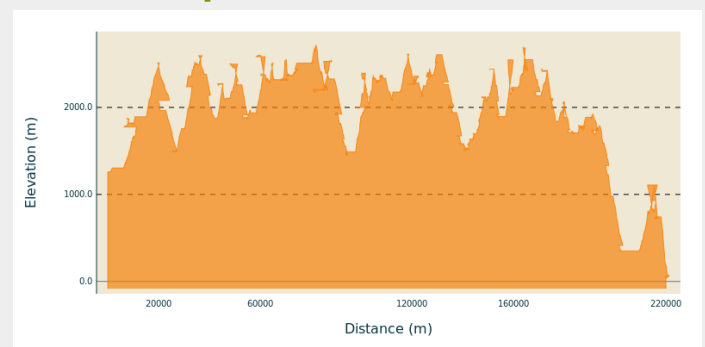
14. Tende

15. Valdeblore

16. Valdieri

17. Vinadio

### Altimetric profile

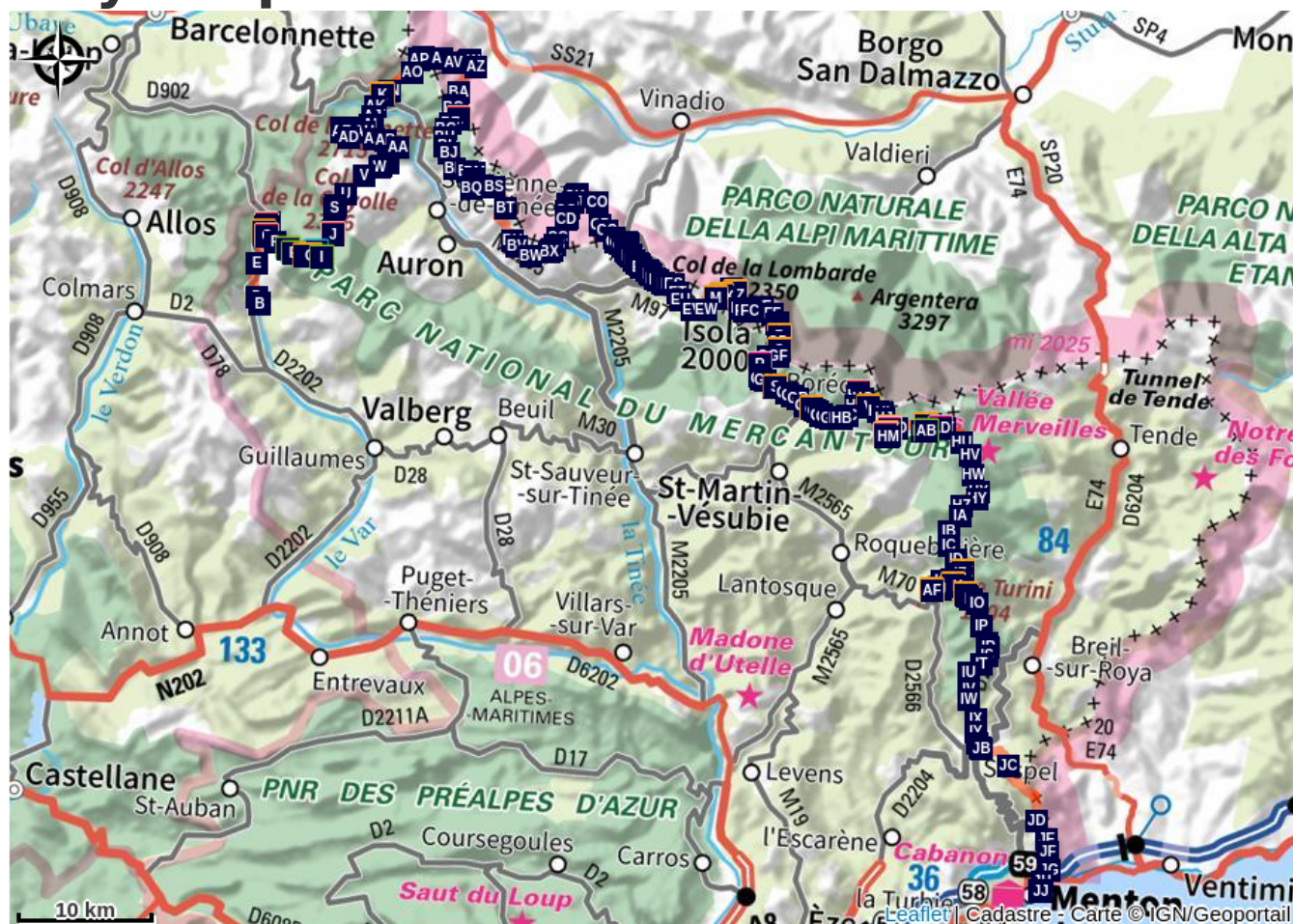
















Min elevation 0 m    Max elevation 0 m

## Stages :

- 1.** GTM - Stage 01 : Entraunes - Estenc  
7.2 km / 634 m D+ / 3 h
- 2.** GTM - Stage 02 : Estenc - Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage  
18.2 km / 787 m D+ / 6 h
- 3.** GTM - Stage 3 : Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage - Hamlet of Bousieyas  
17.7 km / 1286 m D+ / 5 h
- 4.** GTM - Stage 04 : Bousiéyas - Ferrière  
12.1 km / 830 m D+ / 5 h 30
- 5.** GTM - Stage 05 : Ferrière - Refuge de Vens  
7.4 km / 768 m D+ / 5 h
- 6.** GTM - Stage 06 : Refuge de Vens - Refuge de Rabuons  
13.4 km / 817 m D+ / 6 h 30
- 7.** GTM - Stage 07 : Refuge de Rabuons - Refuge Laus Alexandri Foches  
16.2 km / 706 m D+ / 6 h
- 8.** GTM - Stage 08 : Refuge Laus Alexandri Foches - Sant'Anna di Vinadio  
13.8 km / 984 m D+ / 6 h
- 9.** GTM - Stage 09 : Sant'Anna di Vinadio - Isola 2000  
8.9 km / 500 m D+ / 3 h 30
- 10.** GTM - Stage 10 : Isola 2000 - Refuge Questa  
10.1 km / 746 m D+ / 5 h
- 11.** GTM - Stage 11 : Refuge Questa - Le Boréon  
20.6 km / 0 m D+ / 7 h
- 12.** GTM - Stage 12 : Le Boréon - Refuge Madone de Fenestre  
13.1 km / 1051 m D+ / 6 h
- 13.** GTM - Stage 13 : Refuge de la Madone de Fenestre - Refuge de Nice  
5.9 km / 762 m D+ / 5 h
- 14.** GTM - Stage 14 : Refuge de Nice - Refuge des Merveilles  
9.2 km / 630 m D+ / 6 h
- 15.** GTM - Stage 15 : Refuge des Merveilles - Camp d'Argent  
12.9 km / 610 m D+ / 6 h
- 16.** GTM - Stage 16 : Camp d'Argent - Sospel  
20.8 km / 0 m D+ / 7 h 30
- 17.** GTM - Stage 17 : Sospel - Menton  
18.1 km / 1197 m D+ / 6 h
- 18.** GTM - Stage 01 : Allos - Estenc  
24.1 km / 1417 m D+ / 7 h 30
- 19.** Variation GTM Barcelonnette - Stage 1 : Barcelonnette - Bayasse  
20.0 km / 1624 m D+ / 6 h 30
- 20.** Variation GTM Barcelonnette - Stage 2 : Bayasse - Saint-Dalmas-le-Selvage  
17.4 km / 917 m D+ / 5 h 30

# On your path...



- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Estenc plateau hay meadows (A)             |  La Cantonnière refuge (B)      |
|  Estenc (C)                                 |  Alpine ibex (Capra ibex) (D)   |
|  Siberian cricket (Aeropus sibericus) (E)   |  Pastoralism (F)                |
|  Military remains (G)                       |  The Estrop lakes (H)           |
|  White-tailed ptarmigan (Lagopus mutus) (I) |  Gialorgues refuge (J)          |
|  Removal zones (K)                          |  Lac de Vens and refuge (L)     |
|  The Druos Artillery Battery (M)            |  The Massimo Longà Barracks (N) |



# All useful information

## **Is in the midst of the park**

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

## **How to come ?**

### Access

#### **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).

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

#### **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 the website [www.randoxygene.org](http://www.randoxygene.org)

#### **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)

# On your path...

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## Estenc plateau hay meadows (A)

The term “hay meadows” means areas of production of fodder which was not deliberately planted and which are rich in variety of species. The hay is harvested to feed animals. These meadows are part of the non-intensive and environmentally friendly practices and they encourage a wide variety of plants to grow.

Mercantour National Park has 1000ha of hay meadows, included in a pastoral and grassland domain covering around 120000ha. Within this, 90 professional farms are based in the Park’s communes and 268 transhumant farmers are present in summer.

Attribution : Marc EVENOT

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## La Cantonnière refuge (B)

The history of the refuge is closely linked with the Route des Grandes Alpes connecting Lac Léman with the Mediterranean. It was built in the early 20th century by the French Touring Club with the very rudimentary means of the period by Italian workers, for whom the imposing Cantonnière house was built.

Accessible in summer 1913 to the few automobiles which were around at the time, the road was to be inaugurated by President Poincaré in August 1914. But the declaration of war deprived the people of Entraunes of this visit.

The building today serves as a refuge and has been fully renovated by Mercantour National Park.

Capacity: 36 in dormitories of 2, 4, 5 and 18.

Prices and opening periods: <http://lacantonniere.wixsite.com/refugelacantonniere>

Tel: 04.93.05.51.36

E-Mail: [lacantonniere@gmail.com](mailto:lacantonniere@gmail.com)

Attribution : Refuge de la Cantonnière



## Estenc (C)

In the 1930s, 15 families lived in Estenc, mainly as sheep and arable farmers (barley, rye). Life, virtually cut off from the rest of the world, was marked by poverty and rough. All the resources nature provided were made use of, but balance was maintained and a certain harmony existed between the people and the natural world. Currently, with rural desertification, the forest and fallow land are taking over; just a single farming family today remains in Estenc.

Attribution : Marion BENSA



## Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*) (D)

A symbol of the high mountains and their giddy peaks, this ungulate disappeared from this region more than 150 years ago.

Since 1987, reintroduction operations have been jointly undertaken by the Mercantour National Park and the Parco naturale Alpi Marittime.

A group of fifty or so have settled at Roche Grande.

To allow them to be identified, the animals are given coloured ear tags. The park staff regularly monitor the development of the species.

Attribution : Philippe PIERINI



## Siberian cricket (*Aeropus sibericus*) (E)

During the great glacial periods, this orthoptera lived on the plains. As the climate has warmed back up, it has moved to the high mountains, above 2000m. The male can be recognised thanks to its bulging back legs, hence its surname of "Popeye". This herbivore, whose predators include birds, marmots and foxes, is part of the food chain in high-altitude pastures.

Attribution : MALAFOSSE Jean-Pierre



## Pastoralism (F)

This grassy valley called Estrop (stropia: flock) has been used for pastoral purposes for many a long year: 1500 sheep graze it from August to September. The hut serves as a shelter for the shepherd. The flock rests on the knoll as the abundance of nettles and wild spinach attest. The Alpine grass is a fragile environment where the National Park helps ensure that a biological balance is maintained, while trying to improve the working conditions of shepherds.

Attribution : COSSA Jean-Louis



## Military remains (G)

Just before the Second World War, the French army decided to build fortifications (bunkers) on Col de Gialorgues with a few to stopping a possible Italian invasion. Military authorities aimed to open a sufficiently wide track to allow all-terrain vehicles to reach Col de Gialorgues. Materials were transported by mules from the camp which was set up at the foot of the Estenc woods, but the soldiers had to rapidly give up due to the stony nature of the ground.

Attribution : Marion BENSA



## The Estrop lakes (H)

Around 10000 years ago, the glacier occupied the whole valley before it gradually shrank as the climate warmed up, leaving a body of water behind each glacial rock bar. Slowly, erosion overcame this stock of water. As you head up the valley, you are also heading back in time: grasses towards the bottom, peat bogs in the middle, lakes towards the top. Around the wetland areas, Arcto-Alpine species flourish such as the cane and Zweifarbiges Seggen which are protected at both a national and a European level.

Attribution : Marion BENSA





## White-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*) (I)

Also known as the snow quail (or “jalabre” in the local dialect), this bird of the Tetraoninae family is a familiar sight in the high mountains. It is perfectly adapted to the cold and lives all year round at 2500 - 3000m. Three to four times per year, it changes its feathers according to its surrounding environment. In the autumn, the ptarmigans can join together in groups of 20 to 25 individuals. Their main predators are stoats and golden eagles.

Attribution : Jacques BLANC



## Gialorgues refuge (J)

Capacity: 12 in refuge

Warden: No

Opening period: All year

Obligatory reservation

Pick up and drop off point for keys:

Hôtel Regalivou

04.93.02.49.00

St Etienne de Tinée

M. FERRAN 04.93.05.54.22

Estenc

In case of problems:

contact Nice CAF

[michelle@cafnice.org](mailto:michelle@cafnice.org)

04 93 62 59 99

Useful numbers:

Park House: 04 93 02 42 27

St-Etienne de Tinée Tourism Office: 04 93 02 41 96

St-Dalmas Lodge: 04 93 02 44 61

Attribution : PNM/DR



## Removal zones (K)

The depression on your right was one of the zones from where material was removed from to build Camp des Fourches at the start of the last century. The former military dry-stone track allows you to reach Cime de Pelousette.

Attribution : Anthony TURPAUD



## Lac de Vens and refuge (L)

The Vens refuge only has a warden during the summer months. In winter, only one room is open to allow hikers to shelter. The Vens refuge overlooks a series of lakes of the same name. These lakes are of glacial origin, they are the result of a long erosion process by glaciers. The lake below the refuge (the biggest) is 31 metres deep. Ibex, chamois, mouflons and golden eagles can often be seen at the site. Very close to the refuge, you can see the endemic plant which was for a long time the symbol of the Mercantour National Park: *Saxifraga florulenta*.

Club Alpin Français: Capacity: 45 in summer and 30 in winter (no warden)

Reservations only by e-mail in summer: <http://refugedevens.ffcam.fr/reservation.html>

No shower, meal included

Attribution : CAF / DR



## The Druos Artillery Battery (M)

Near the Bassa del Druos there are the ruins of a shelter and the Druos Battery, a defensive military gun emplacement in a cave of the Vallo Alpino. The artillery battery, realized with minimum investment in the mid-thirties, consisted of 4 100/17 howitzers captured from the Austrians in WWI. The guns were positioned in the cave without any shielding whatsoever: there wasn't even a command room inside. Two of the 4 galleries where the cannons were placed can still be seen clearly, but the entrances to the other two have been obstructed by landslides.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj



## The Massimo Longà Barracks (N)

The barracks are named for Massimo Longà, Captain of the Alpine Corps, who died on Monte Ortigara on 10 June 1917 (to be precise, on an Army Corps of Engineers map, the Rifugio's name is indicated as Massimo Mongà, differently from the inscription on the plaque over the main entrance). The barracks building is an imposing structure, built, according to documents of the Engineering Corps, in 1903. Other sources give the date of its construction as between 1916 and 1917, thanks to the forced labor of Austrian prisoners captured on the Eastern front, but if the Engineering Corps documents can be believed, it is more probable that the barracks were only restructured during the WWI years.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj