



# Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée des Merveilles

Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime - Valdieri



Randonnée Argentera. Le refuge de Soria en Italie, dans le "Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime", début du printemps. (Guigo Franck - PNM)

## *A Franco-Italian itinerary in the central zone of the European Maritime-Mercantour Park.*

These wide open and wild spaces provide hikers with a wide variety of fauna, from ungulates to marmots, magnificent landscapes and also cultural discoveries with the forts of the Maginot Line and the rock engravings of Vallée des Merveilles, which are 5000 years old.

### Useful information

Practice : Hiking

Duration : 7 days

Length : 89.0 km

Trek ascent : 7090 m

Difficulty : Hard

Type : Walking breaks

# Trek

**Departure** : Valdieri thermal baths

**Arrival** : Valdieri thermal baths

**Cities** : 1. Valdieri

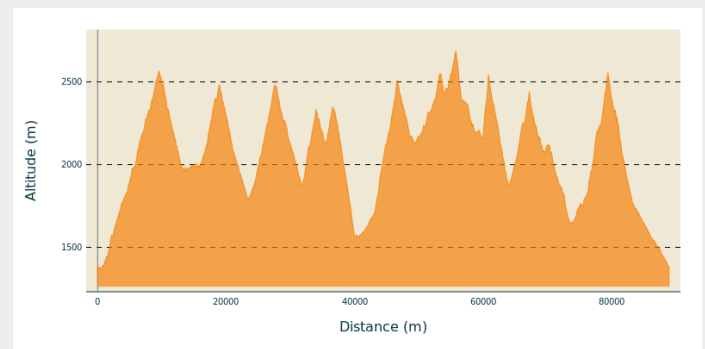
2. Entracque

3. Saint-Martin-Vésubie

4. Belvédère

5. Tende

## Altimetric profile



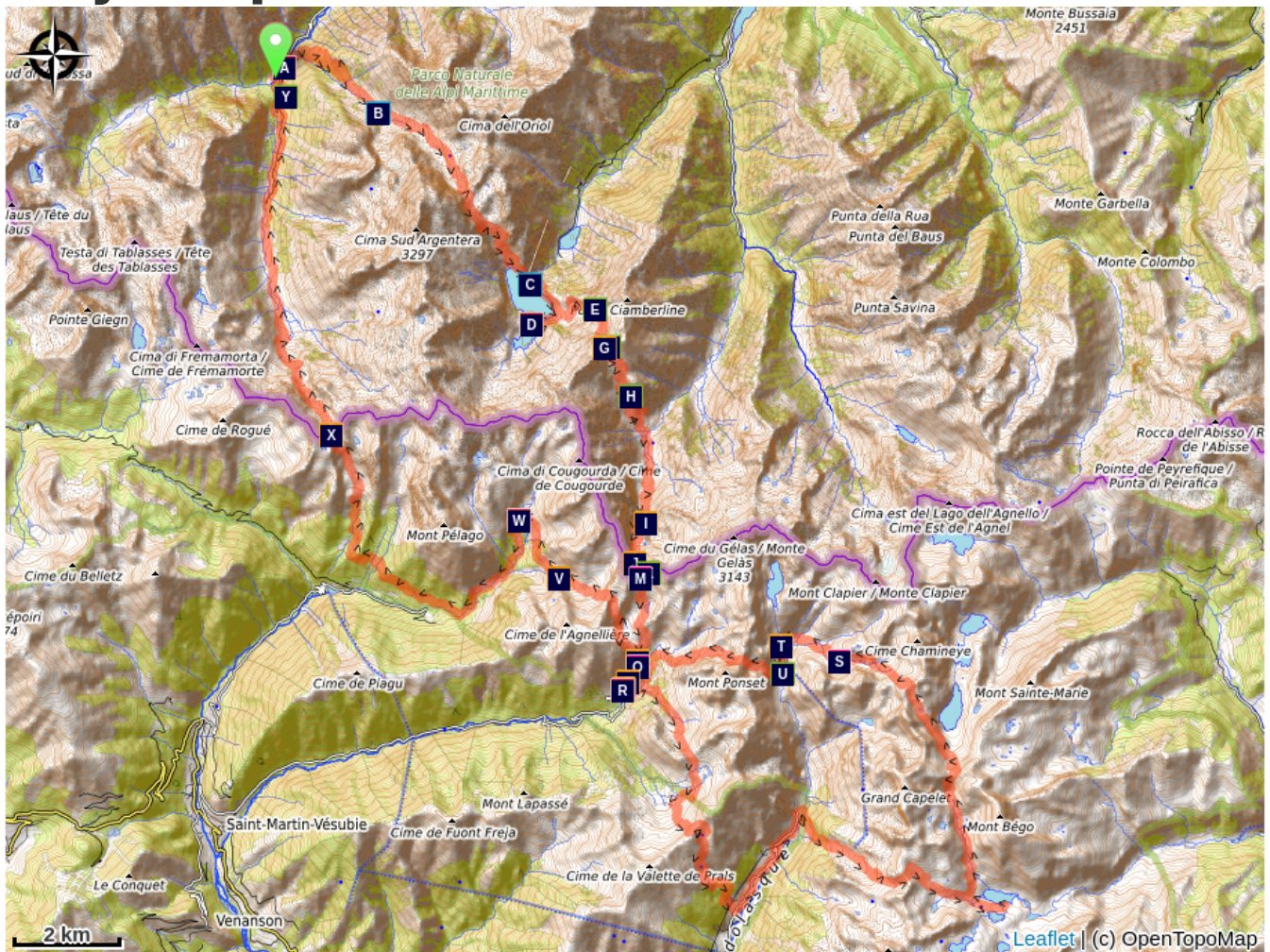
Min elevation 1362 m Max elevation 2686 m















## Stages :

1. Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée des Merveilles - Stage 1  
15.3 km / 1363 m D+ / 6 h
2. Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée des Merveilles - Stage 2  
16.2 km / 1229 m D+ / 6 h 30
3. Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée des Merveilles - Stage 3  
8.8 km / 702 m D+ / 5 h 30
4. Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée des Merveilles - Stage 4  
9.1 km / 969 m D+ / 5 h 30
5. Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée Merveilles - Stage 5  
9.2 km / 731 m D+ / 5 h 30
6. Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée Merveilles - Stage 6  
11.8 km / 1053 m D+ / 5 h 30
7. Grand Tour of Argentera and Vallée des Merveilles - Stage 7  
21.5 km / 1167 m D+ / 6 h 30



# On your path...



- |   |  |
|---|--|
|  The Valdieri Royal Hot Springs (A)  |  The Lagarot di Lourousa (B)  |
|  The Chiotas Reservoir, the Della Piastra dam and the Lake della Rovina (C)                |  The Genova Figari Refuge (D) |
|  The cleared meadows (E)   |  Le bouquetin des Alpes (F)   |
|  The Fenestrelle shelter (G)   |  The Ibex of the Alps (H)     |
|  The Military Barracks at Colle delle Finestre and the other works of the Vallo Alpino (I) |  Trails of Freedom (J)        |
|  The Alpine Ibex (K)   |  Il Colle di Finestra (L)     |
|  Col de Fenestre (M)   |  Terre de cour (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.

## **Advices**

This itinerary takes place along high-valley Alpine paths. The accommodation sites listed are the only ones which are available along this route. Before heading off on a hike, ensure that you have studied the safety advice. If you are setting off on this hike in the early part of the season, you will need to take particular care as patches of snow can still be present in higher areas.

Specific regulations apply when you cross Vallée des Merveilles. Signs on site.

- Do not leave the marked paths
- Do not touch or damage the rock carvings
- Do not use hiking poles without placing rubber tips on the ends.

## **How to come ?**

### Access

From Borgo San Dalmazzo (province of Cuneo), go to Valle Gesso. Go through Valdieri and continue to Terme.

### Advised parking

Terme di Valdieri. Pay-and-display carpark in summer.

# On your path...

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## The Valdieri Royal Hot Springs (A)

First cited in the mid sixteenth century. When King Carlo Emanuele III decided to valorize the Valdieri hot springs, in 1755, a building and other appurtenances were quickly built in order to create a spa around the sulfurous waters. Cavour called Valdieri "the richest in health-preserving waters in all the nation, and perhaps in all of Europe as well". Vittorio Emanuele II, who first visited Val Gesso in 1855, became a frequent guest at the spa, and it was at his behest that, on 10 July 1857, the first stone was laid for the structure that was to become the Hotel Royal.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj

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## The Lagarot di Lourousa (B)

Springwater, welling up among meadows and larches, forms numerous limpid pools and streams; the water is at times turquoise, at times milky and at others perfectly transparent, making this a particularly striking location, perfect for a contemplative rest. The Canalone di Lourousa, bordered by Monte Stella and the Corno Stella and scoured by the Gelas di Lourousa, lies beyond the plateau of the same name, and a look over one's shoulder yields a view of the imposing outline of Monte Matto.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj

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## The Chiotas Reservoir, the Della Piastra dam and the Lake della Rovina (C)

The Chiotas Reservoir is closed off by two dams: the Chiotas dam and the Colle di Laura dam. The Chiotas dam, an arch-gravity structure, is 130 meters high and stretches for a length of 230 meters. Its thickness varies from 37.5 meters at its base to 5 meters at the top. The mass gravity Colle di Laura dam is smaller, rectilinear and only 30 meters at its maximum height. Its length is 70 meters. The Chiotas Reservoir has a carrying capacity of 27.3 million cubic meters of water.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj





## The Genova Figari Refuge (D)

To valorize the hiking trails along the Argentera Massif, in the last years of the nineteenth century the Liguria chapter of CAI decided to build a refuge near the upper Gias del Monighet, in the Vallone della Rovina. The Genova Refuge, as it was named, was inaugurated on 15 August 1898.

But the fate of the first refuge in the Maritime Alps was definitively sealed in 1968: the reservoir of the new Chiotas dam would submerge it permanently. ENEL assumed the task of building another refuge, which was inaugurated in 1981. The refuge is named for Bartolomeo Figari, who as Secretary General of CAI saw both the successful conquest of K2 and the birth of the National Alpine Rescue Corps, to which he bequeathed all his worldly goods.

Attribution : Archivio EAM



## The cleared meadows (E)

At the highest altitudes there are cleared meadows, the typical alpine pastures; they are composed of herbaceous species capable of covering soils normally closed to woody species, which, due to the very short vegetative period, cannot find suitable conditions for their development. Grazing by wild ungulates and, sometimes, by domestic sheep affects their composition, even if the most severe factor for species selection is represented by the climate.

Attribution : Cati Caballo



## Le bouquetin des Alpes (F)

Colle di Fenestrelle, as well as the surrounding area, is very popular with the ibex.

The Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*), frequents alpine meadows and rock faces even above 3000 m, reaching the valley floor (provided it is not wooded) only in early spring, to be able to refresh itself after the long winter. Both sexes have annual growth horns, but much larger in males. The coat, light beige in summer, darkens to dark brown in winter.

Sedentary, grazing, it essentially feeds on grass, integrated with mosses, lichens and leaves of mountain shrubs, especially in winter.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj



### The Fenestrelle shelter (G)

The ruins near the pass mark the site of the Fenestrelle shelter, named for Lieutenant Angelo Bertolotti. Built in 1888 and in use until the Second World War, it could house a garrison of 10 on straw pallets. In their guidebook, entitled "La Valle Gesso", the Boggias indicate the shelter as being instead dedicated "to the memory of Angelo Bortolo, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reg. of the Alpine Corps, who was killed on the Ortigara during the First World War".

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj

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### The Ibex of the Alps (H)

Colle di Fenestrelle, as well as the surrounding area, is very popular with the ibex.

The Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*), frequents alpine meadows and rock faces even above 3000 m, reaching the valley floor (provided it is not wooded) only in early spring, to be able to refresh itself after the long winter. Both sexes have annual growth horns, but much larger in males. The coat, light beige in summer, darkens to dark brown in winter.

Sedentary, grazing, it essentially feeds on grass, integrated with mosses, lichens and leaves of mountain shrubs, especially in winter.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj

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### The Military Barracks at Colle delle Finestre and the other works of the Vallo Alpino (I)

The barracks is a large building in stone and cement, still in decent condition, which was built to garrison the contingent tasked with defending the pass; its 16 rooms could house 50 men.

In addition to the barracks, other fortifications also defended the pass during the Second World War. On what is now the French side the remains of a nineteenth century shelter named for Lieutenant Mario Amedeo are clearly visible, as are two bunkers of the Vallo Alpino defensive fortifications; 126 to the left of the pass and 127 to the right.



## 🕒 Trails of Freedom (J)

Between the 8th and 13th of September, 1943, just days after Italy's surrender, about twelve hundred Jewish civilians of all ages and walks of life, originating from Saint-Martin VÈsubie, crossed the Alps together with the Italian troops of the IV Army Corps. On foot, following two different routes, over the Colle di Finestra and the Colle di Ciriègia, the refugees arrived, respectively, in Entracque and Valdieri, where they were housed in the barracks and wherever else possible. A plaque affixed to the wall of the barracks at Colle di Ciriègia commemorates these events.

Attribution : Archivio EAM



## 🐐 The Alpine Ibex (K)

Alpine ibex are a common sight at Colle di Fenestrelle and in the surrounding area. The Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*), a mountain goat, lives in Alpine meadows and rocky terrain, even over 3,000 meters, descending to the valley floors (if they are not wooded) only in the early spring, when the long winter's hardships make the new sprouts irresistible. Both sexes have horns that grow each year, but the males' horns are decidedly bigger. Their coats, a light beige in the summer, turn dark brown in the winter months.

A permanent resident, this grazing mountain goat subsists mostly on grass, in addition to some mosses, lichens and leaves of mountain shrubs, especially during the winter.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj



## 🏔️ Il Colle di Finestra (L)

The pass is a direct link between Valle Gesso and VÈsubie, and has been crossed since time immemorial - and immortalized in legend and historical annals - by saints, emperors and invading armies. Before the Savoy's gained direct access to the sea, the Colle di Finestra pass was also an important supply route for the salt trade.

Its name, which first appears in the written records in 1041, has remained unchanged up to the present day: Colle di Finestra or, as written on the military maps of the early 1900s, Colle delle Finestre. The first version is the right one, though, because it refers to a single natural window (Finestra) that splits the northwest crest of the Cayre de la Madone.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj





## 📍 Col de Fenestre (M)

A communication route within the House of Savoy, the col became part of Italian territory in 1860 and a border col in 1947, the date at which the border was moved to the watershed. When the weather is clear, the view extends beyond the plain of Pô to 200km to the north: Cervin (4478m) and Mont Rose (4634m) are visible in these conditions.

Attribution : Guigo Franck

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## 🕒 Terre de cour (N)

The black rock marks one of the borders of the Terre de Cour, formerly a domain of the Count of Provence, before it was returned to the House of Savoy in the 14th century. Two inscriptions on the black rock provide a reminder of the past: "B" for Belvédère, "SM" for Saint-Martin-Vésubie. Terre de Cour was located exclusively in these two communes but they have to share the ancient rights to pasture and wood with Lantosque and Roquebillière.

Attribution : RICHAUD Philippe