



The Wolf Trail - Argentera & Mercantour

Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime - Entracque



Randonnée au lac de Trécolpas en été, (2150 m). (Guigo Franck - PNM)



The presence of this emblematic mountain predator is betrayed by the pawprints which you may find as you head along the hike. Maybe you will even be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of this shy animal.

This themed trek is a fun encounter with wolves, thanks to the Alpha centre and the Uomini e Lupi centre, two museum facilities which are dedicated to this fascinating creature.

Useful information

Practice : Hiking

Duration : 7 days

Length : 102.2 km

Trek ascent : 5887 m

Difficulty : Medium

Type : Walking breaks

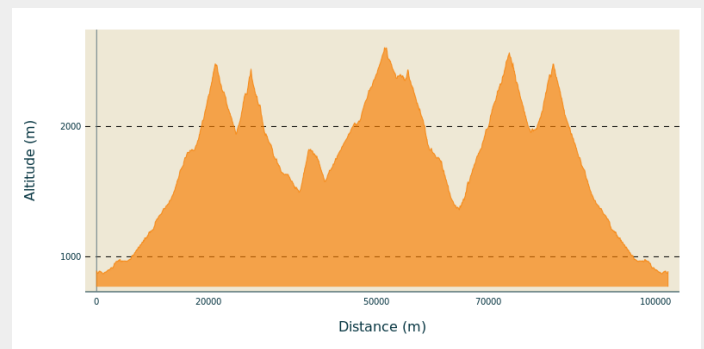
Trek

Departure : Centre Uomini e Lupi

Arrival : San Giacomo d'Entracque

Cities : 1. Entracque
2. Saint-Martin-Vésubie
3. Valdeblore
4. Valdieri

Altimetric profile

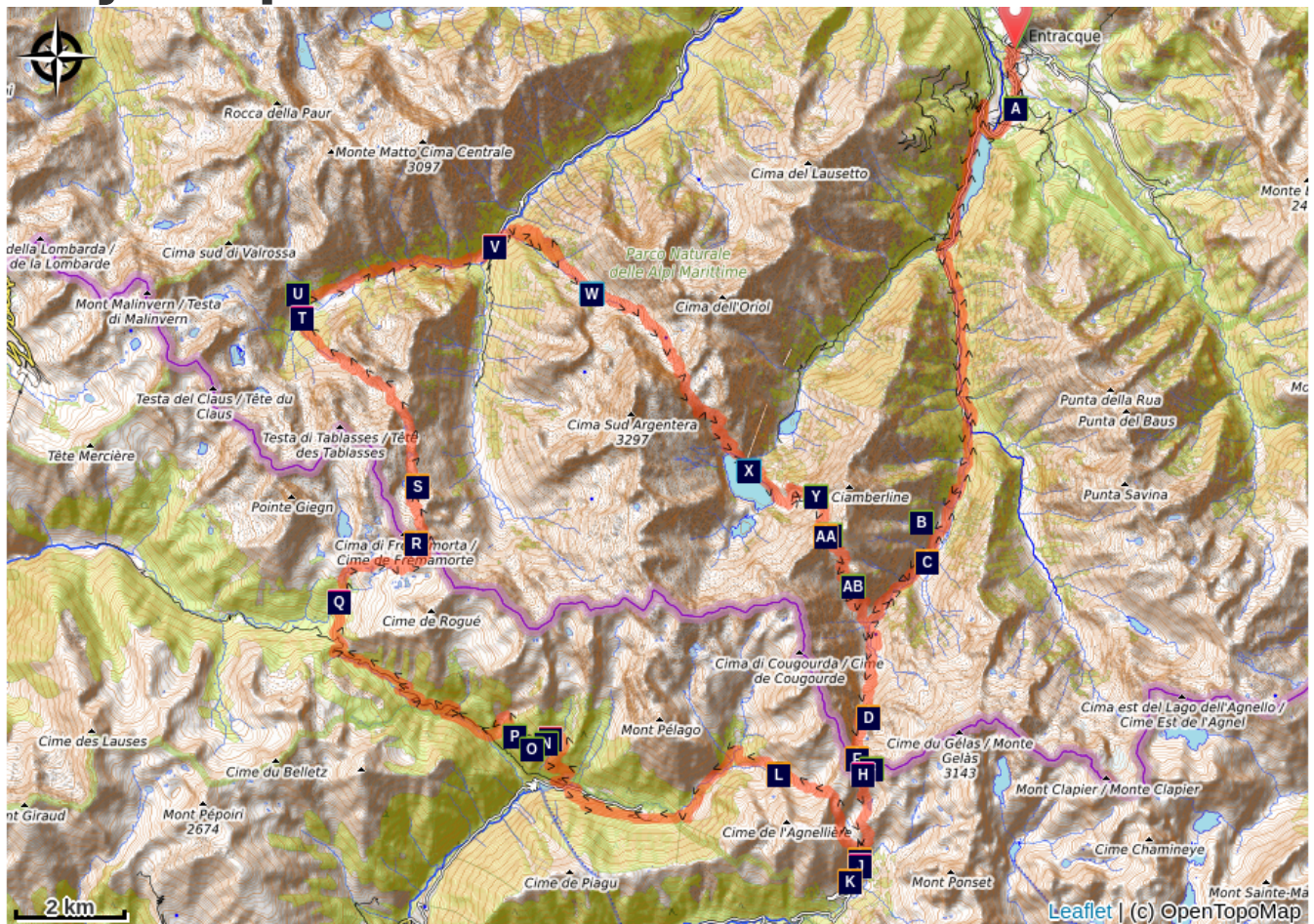
















Min elevation 870 m Max elevation 2606 m

Stages :

1. The Wolf Trail - Argentera & Mercantour - Stage 1
17.2 km / 1052 m D+ / 4 h 30
2. The Wolf Trail - Argentera & Mercantour - Stage 2
8.1 km / 681 m D+ / 4 h
3. The Wolf Trail - Argentera & Mercantour - Stage 3
11.4 km / 575 m D+ / 5 h
4. The Wolf Trail - Argentera & Mercantour - Stage 4
24.8 km / 1601 m D+ / 8 h
5. The Wolf Trail - Argentera & Mercantour - Stage 5
12.0 km / 1034 m D+ / 5 h 30
6. The Wolf Trail - Argentera & Mercantour - Stage 6
19.8 km / 857 m D+ / 6 h 30

On your path...



- | | |
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|  The grasslands of the valley floor (A) |  The bearded vulture (B) |
|  The Piazzale dei Cannoni (C) |  The Military Barracks at Colle delle Finestre and the other works of the Vallo Alpino (D) |
|  Trails of Freedom (E) |  The Alpine Ibex (F) |
|  Il Colle di Finestra (G) |  Col de Fenestre (H) |
|  Terre de cour (I) |  The scars of erosion (J) |
|  Col de Fenestre mule track (K) |  Mountain climbing in the Mercantour (L) |
|  Cow barns (M) |  Conifers (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.

How to come ?

Access

Go to Vintimille on the A8, then take the N204 (towards Tende), follow directions for Roccavione, then Valdieri and Entracque.

Advised parking

Stationnement à San Giacomo d'Entracque

On your path...



✿ The grasslands of the valley floor (A)

Despite what one might think, the grasslands that occupy the valley floor are not very stable environments. Their presence and appearance strictly depend on the intensity of the cultivation treatments carried out: grazing and mowing, irrigation and fertilization interventions clearly influence their floristic composition. Mowing in particular has the function of counteracting the return of the forest, which advances, slowly but inexorably, whenever human intervention is lacking.

Attribution : Cati Caballo



🦅 The bearded vulture (B)

The bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), also known as the lamb vulture, has a wingspan that can reach 285cm and can weigh more than 6 kilos. An accomplished glider, it can exploit even the mildest ascending thermals. It is a carrion eater, feeding exclusively on carcasses of dead animals, ungulates for the most part, both wild and domestic. It consumes bones, cartilage and ligaments, and is known to drop bones from great heights in order to break them into manageable pieces. Monogamous and long-lived, the bearded vulture nests on rocky cliff faces at altitudes between 1,000 and 3,000 meters.

Attribution : Michelangelo Giordano



🕒 The Piazzale dei Cannoni (C)

The name Piazzale dei Cannoni, or better still, Piana dei Cannoni, is due to the presence there of the 181st Artillery Battery, armed with 210/8 mortars, during the Second World War. The mortar emplacements are just south of the dirt road, along the slope, but they are not easy to spot. On the opposite side of the valley, across the torrent, there are the remains of probable logistical outposts and even an open-air kitchen.

Attribution : Roberto Pockaj

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

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.

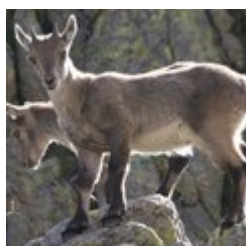
In addition to the barracks, other fortifications also defended the pass during the Second World War. On what is now the French side the remains of a nineteenth century shelter named for Lieutenant Mario Amedeo are clearly visible, as are two bunkers of the Vallo Alpino defensive fortifications; 126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



🕒 Trails of Freedom (E)

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 Ciriegia, 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 Ciriegia commemorates these events.

Attribution : Archivio EAM



🇮🇹 The Alpine Ibex (F)

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 (G)

The pass is a direct link between Valle Gesso and Vésubie, and has been crossed since time immemorial - and immortalized in legend and historical annals - by saints, emperors and invading armies. Before the Savoyards 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 (H)

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



Terre de cour (I)

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



The scars of erosion (J)

When they converge, runoff streams of water leave the ground bare, breaking a fragile equilibrium. In addition, footfall due to tourism damages the ground and raises the question of preservation of natural environments. Plant cover has to be maintained as it protects the ground from erosion and guarantees its stability. Restoration work has been carried out to guide and direct the hundreds of hikers who love these wild areas.

Attribution : GUIGO Franck



Col de Fenestre mule track (K)

This track has been used for a thousand years and was regularly maintained to allow mules transporting salt to pass with ease. The technique used to make and maintain these tracks involved self-locking stones. Identically sized slabs were arranged vertically in close lines. Fine materials were then used to hold it all in place. Gutters provided a run-off area for rainwater.

Attribution : LOMBART Guy



Mountain climbing in the Mercantour (L)

At the start of the 20th century, for the first mountain climbers, the Mercantour was a taste of adventure. Little by little, the summits of the chain were conquered, initially via the normal routes and then, with the arrival of modern mountain climbing, along the most difficult routes. From Victor de Cessole to Patrick Bérhault, the greatest names have been involved in climbing in the Mercantour. Today, whether they are snowy, icy or rocky, the reputation of certain routes is well established.

Attribution : GUIGO Franck



Cow barns (M)

This element of the community system allowed the inhabitants of the valley to place their cows into the charge of a guardian who would be responsible for them as they enjoyed the high-altitude pastures in summer. Mountain dwellers were thereby free to participate in the hay cutting and other agricultural activities close to the villages.

The cow barns which you can see on the Erps and Le Cavalet circuit were temporarily used during the summer, which explains why they are small. Today, only two farmers still work on the site of Boréon, owning or hosting thirty or so cows each.

Attribution : RIFFLET François



Conifers (N)

These resinous trees, with leaves shaped like needles or scales, produce conical fruits, hence the name given to this group. The larch is the only conifer which loses its needles in the winter. They are grouped together in clumps of 15 to 20. This species is only present in the Alps. It can also be found at the upper limit of the forest as it needs light to develop.

Attribution : F. Guigo