Vallon de Bessans

A hike open to all up to the prestigious glacial cirque of the valley where culture and nature come together for curious souls.

If I like to roam through the valley of Bessans, it is first and foremost because this place knows how to satisfy an insatiable love for nature. It is the delicate whistling of the wind in the feathers of the bearded vulture, the powerful scent of the plants on the adrets that accompany you as you climb, and the touching sight of the young ibex, the future of a species at one time almost extinct, that rewards you when you reach the valley. But much richer still is the path which recounts the long history of those bygone men who lived on the mountain, and the more recent account of those who try to preserve it... A valley nestled between culture and nature, well known as home to the Haute-Maurienne. Benoit Deffrennes, Vanoise National Park ranger

Useful information

Practice : Walking hike

Duration : 4 h

Length : 9.1 km

Trek ascent : 610 m

Difficulty : Very easy

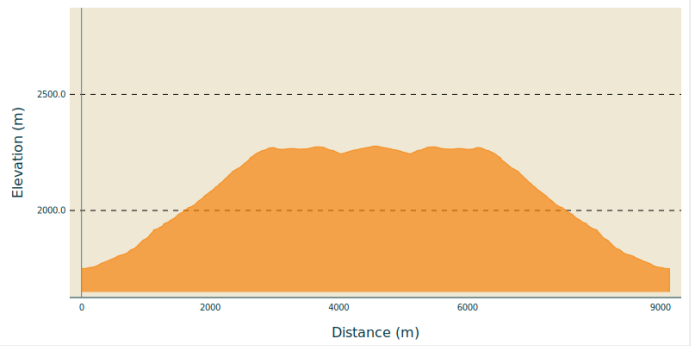
Type : Return

Themes : Fauna , History , Pastoralism

Trek

Departure : Car park, Le Villaron, Bessans
Arrival : Car park, Le Villaron, Bessans
Markings : GR
Cities : 1. BESSANS

Altimetric profile



Min elevation 1749 m Max elevation 2277 m

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From the car park, cross the Arc river over the bridge and take the road leading to the hamlet. At the wash house, follow the lane on the right which leads to a dirt track. Follow this track over three bends, then take the trail on the left. Towards an altitude of 1,950 m at the locality of ""Le Cloton"" the trail joins the GR5. Continue on the trail that crosses the bends of the agricultural track. Towards an altitude of 2,200 m, the trail joins the track again at the level of a single mountain pasture chalet. From this point, follow the track which forms two small bends before levelling out, until descending slightly to the level of the valley. Pass the torrent by the bridge and then go back down into the valley on the left, still on the agricultural track, until the last mountain chalet. The return journey follows the same path.

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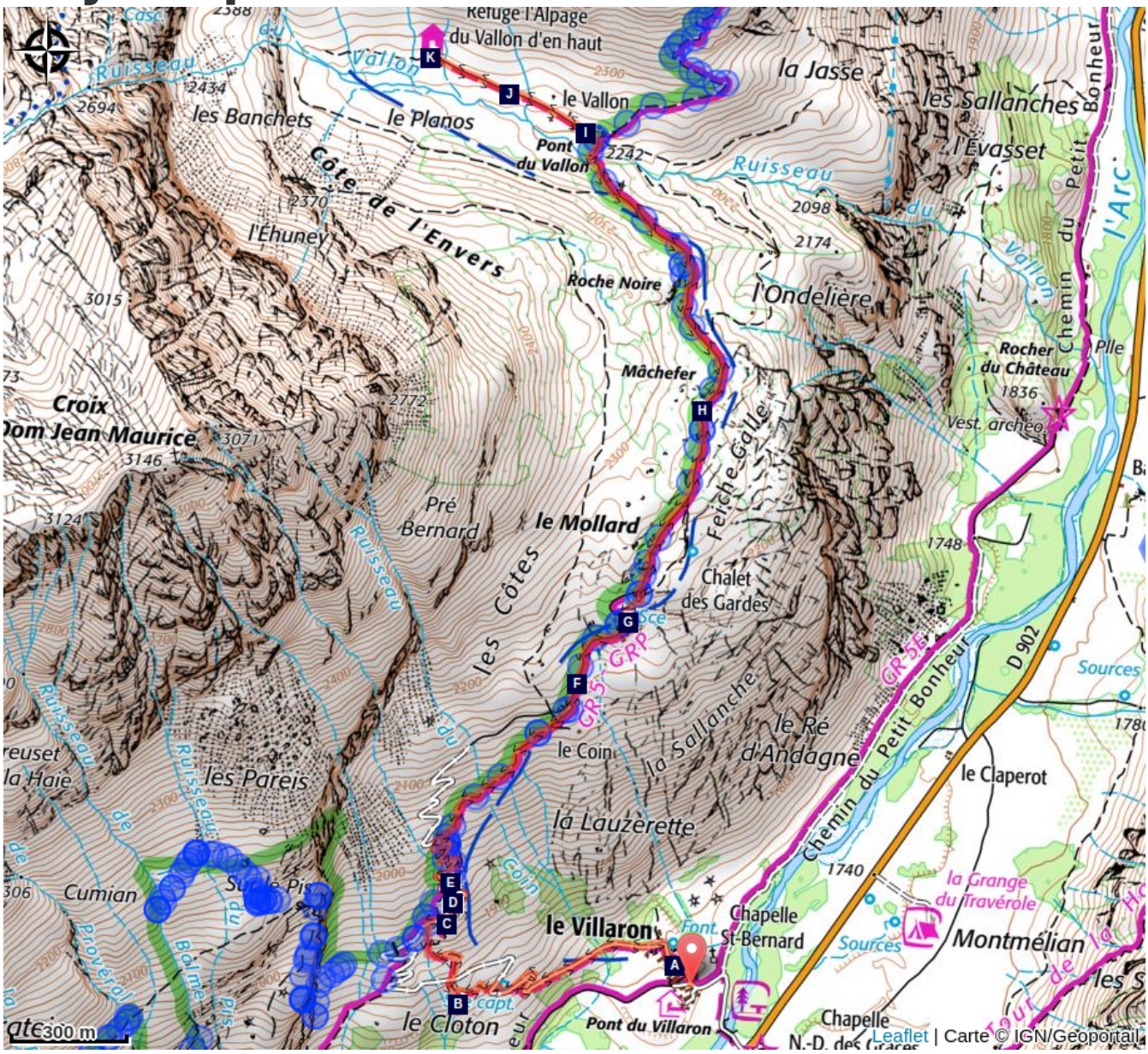
On your path...



- The hay meadows (A)
- The adrets (B)
- Saxifraga valdensis (C)
- Engraved stones (D)
- Thunderstorms: Water versus the trails (E)
- Birds of prey (F)
- The hay cable (G)
- The Mâchefer mine (H)
- The alpine chalets (I)
- The ibex nursery (J)
- The Alpage du Vallon d'en Haut (K)

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

Standard recommendations for the mountain.

How to come ?

Transports

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Rail connection to Modane. Information: www.voyages-sncf.com
Then transport by coach to Bessans. Information: www.transavoie.com
Suggested hitchhiking organised in the Haute-Maurienne valley. Information: www.rezopouce.fr
Additional information: http://www.haute-maurienne-vanoise.com/pratique/se-deplacer-sans-voiture
"

Access

"
Pass by the village of Bessans by the D 902 towards Bonneval-sur-Arc.
After the bridge and the ""La Bessanaise" holiday centre, stop in the car park on the left.
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Advised parking

Villaron car park

Accessibility

No

Information desks

Office de tourisme de Bessans
Rue Maison Morte, 73480 Bessans

info@hautemaurienne.com
Tel : 04 79 05 99 06
https://www.bessans.com/

On your path...

The hay meadows (A)

Bistort, common sage, sainfoin, rhinanthus, geranium are some of the names and colours among the fifty species of plants that may be present in mountain hay meadows. Look at this floral carpet submerging the hamlet of Villaron under a colourful sea. The meadows, harvested once a year, serve primarily as larders for livestock in the winter, but also as a postcard image for the hiker and as a garden of Eden for the naturalist. Some of the more adventurous flowers carry on along the first few steps of the trail.

Attribution : PNV - STORCK Frantz

The adrets (B)

The effort has begun, and you gradually climb the sloping mountain. These southern slopes, the adrets, receive the full force of the sun’s rays: a small tip of the Mediterranean in the frozen mountain. This is the habitat of plants that thrive in dry and sunny environments, such as wormwood and European feather grass, and a protected butterfly, the Apollo, recognisable by the red eyespots on its white wings. Ÿou will also see that it is the favourite place of bygone sheep or cattle farmers. In the absence of grazing, these habitats are threatened with being covered with junipers.

Attribution : PNV - AUGÉ Vincent

Saxifraga valdensis (C)

"Try to find this rare flower under the shelter of a large rock. This well-named plant, which ""breaks up rock,"" is lodged in the rock crevices. And not just any! This very rare protected plant can only be found in France in some localities of the Hautes-Alpes, and only in Bessans in the department of Savoy. So come and admire the rarity of these grey-blue lanceolate leaves grouped into flattened pads. If you are here in July, a panicle of beautiful and immaculate delicate flowers will spring up for you."

Attribution : PNV - DEFFRENNES Benoît

Engraved stones (D)

"Ÿou are now midway through your endeavour. Stop for a breather - have you noticed the engravings made by the farmers on the rock face to your left? Here on the adrets, the rocky slope and dry flora offer but few opportunities for greedy dairy cows. By contrast, it is well suited to sheep and goats, which is why the young shepherds and shepherdesses spent their days here watching over their flocks. The summer days are long, so they sometimes became bored. Deprived of the sacrosanct ""smartphone"", they used their imagination to mark the rock with names, dates and small drawings. As you descend, you can stop in front of the first bend in the track after the barrier of Cloton. This was the moor of the shepherds, a meeting place, and you will see beautiful drawings of cows, hunters and of mountains..."

Attribution : PNV - GROSSET Félix

Thunderstorms: Water versus the trails (E)

"Ÿour path borders a dried-up stream. The least that can be said is that this stream is lifeless, dormant, and without the slightest drop of water to tinkle over the rocks. However, the violent summer thunderstorms in 2013 re-awakened the torrent causing it to burst its banks, taking with it the path you are on, going so far as to barricading the agricultural track with the stones that it transported. The national park’s team of workers and rangers restored the portion of the trail and created a ""dyke"" to curb its stormy fervour. This fight against the ravaging water is the same for all trails of the national park which must be regularly maintained and remodelled at the expense of much elbow grease!"

Attribution : PNV - BASSARGETTE Denis

Birds of prey (F)

Stop awhile to gaze upon the cliffs of the Pis and the face of the Croix de Dom Jean Maurice that stands above you. This is the place to see the magnificent birds of prey cruising through the skies, finding rising air currents to help them soar. The griffon vultures are plentiful here and like you, come to Bessans for their summer holiday, choosing this site as their night-time gîte. The golden eagle is commonly found in search of reckless marmots and the bearded vulture, the great orange-bodied glider, regularly flies past since it nests not far away. It is a great chance to observe the bearded vulture as it is the rarest bird of prey in Europe!

Attribution : PNV - DEFFRENNES Benoît

The hay cable (G)

"In front of you, a metal hoop planted at the top of the slope briefly draws your attention. Félix Grosset, a Bessans native and former ranger of the National park knows how to revive this innocuous frame... Bright-eyed, he tells us how, together with his father, he lowered the bales of hay down to the valley, thanks to the cable which stretches from this hoop to the bottom. Mere child’s play thanks to this technique imported from neighbouring Italy in the 1920s. Prior to this cable, a ""harneis"" was used, a sort of sled that contained the ""bouisson"" or more than 300 kg of hay which had to be held back during its conveyance down the slope on a man’s back. As for the cable, it was towards the end of the fifties on a beautiful autumn day that the familiar whistling of the ""hay zip-line"" last resounded as it came to expressly deliver the winter sustenance of the Bessans cows."

Attribution : PNV - HÉMERAY Damien

The Mâchefer mine (H)

Place names can often tell us about the history of a place. Here at Mâchefer, stop below the track to see an old mine. Although the rock is ferrous here, as the name suggests, it is pyrite that was sought during the Bronze Age and even more so in Roman times. Upstream of the track, a red slab is carved with large circles, solar rings, and Celtic crosses, recognisable by their four equal arms. These engravings made between 500 BC and the Gallo-Roman period are perhaps linked to mining, where the divine bolts of lightning happily came to cross swords...

Attribution : PNV - DEFFRENNES Benoît

The alpine chalets (I)

Even faced with the majestic valley of Bessans, you cannot ignore the little bits of rocks that are the chalets. These rocks date back to the 17th and 18th century, built with the most obvious material in this landscape, stone. Wood, which is rarer still, is reserved for the framework. The large schist slabs of lauze serve as tiles and the outer wall is covered with lime. Today, maintained and restored according to Bessanais tradition, it was once the holiday destination and summer pasture for women, children, cows and chickens, cats and dogs, all of whom came to stay on the 14th of July and to go down to the fair of Bessans on the 21st of September.

Attribution : PNV - JOURDAN Jérémie

The ibex nursery (J)

Take the time to examine in detail the austere and steep rocks that surround the valley like a wall. And for good reason, this dangerous setting is the site of a nursery that few mothers of the animal kingdom would take comfort from! Ÿet this is the place where the female ibexes, the étagnes, choose to give birth to their offspring in June and to raise them throughout the summer. What a splendid sight it is to see the young kids gathered together in small groups frolicking and playing on the treacherous cliffs, under the calm eye of their mothers! Here, these sturdy climbers in the making will have little to fear from predators.

Attribution : PNV - BEURIER Mathieu

The Alpage du Vallon d'en Haut (K)

Here you are at the end of your walk! Here to greet you will be Sébastien, Chantal, Julien or Floriane who will tell you about their passion and their work. This chalet is indeed where the production of Beaufort begins in the summer alpine pasture, so you will actually get to listen to the people who manage the valley’s alpine pasture and watch them making the cheese in the mountains, showcasing the modern heritage of an ancient culture. Every evening and every morning, the tarentaise and abondance cows are milked, the product of which gives the king of the Gruyères its renown! And if the hike has somewhat worked up your appetite, you will have the opportunity here to have a bite to eat...

Attribution : PNV - AUGÉ Vincent