

# Petit Mont-Blanc and the Merlets Lakes



A 2 day hike in high-altitude mineral landscapes with a view of the Vanoise glaciers and the high-altitude grasslands.

The Petit Mont Blanc was called the “Salt Mountain” by the old Pralognanais. Its salt, actually gypsum, was used for the manufacture of plaster to seal the dry stone walls. To upstage Chamonix, the capital of mountaineering, Pralognan-la-Vanoise, the capital of hiking renamed its Salt Mountain to Petit Mont-Blanc. Incidentally, the view of Europe from the summit of this mountain is stunning. The surreal lunar atmosphere at the summit of the Petit Mont-Blanc offers a 360° view of the Vanoise glaciers, Mont Blanc, the Gébroulaz glacier or the valley of the Avals valley. Clarisse Pellet, Vanoise National Park Ranger.

## Useful information

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Practice : Walking hike

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Duration : 2 days

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Length : 24.7 km

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Trek ascent : 1682 m

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Difficulty : Easy

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Type : Loop

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Themes : Fauna , Summit ,  
Viewpoint

# Trek

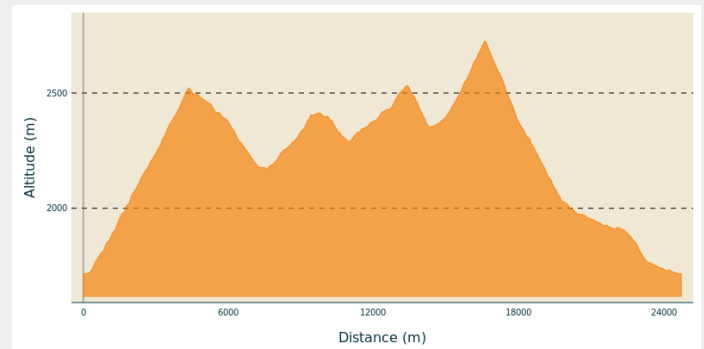
**Departure** : Car park, les Prioux, Pralognan-la-Vanoise

**Arrival** : Car park, les Prioux, Pralognan-la-Vanoise

**Markings** :  GR

**Cities** : 1. PRALOGNAN-LA-VANOISE  
2. SAINT-BON-TARENTEISE  
3. LES ALLUES

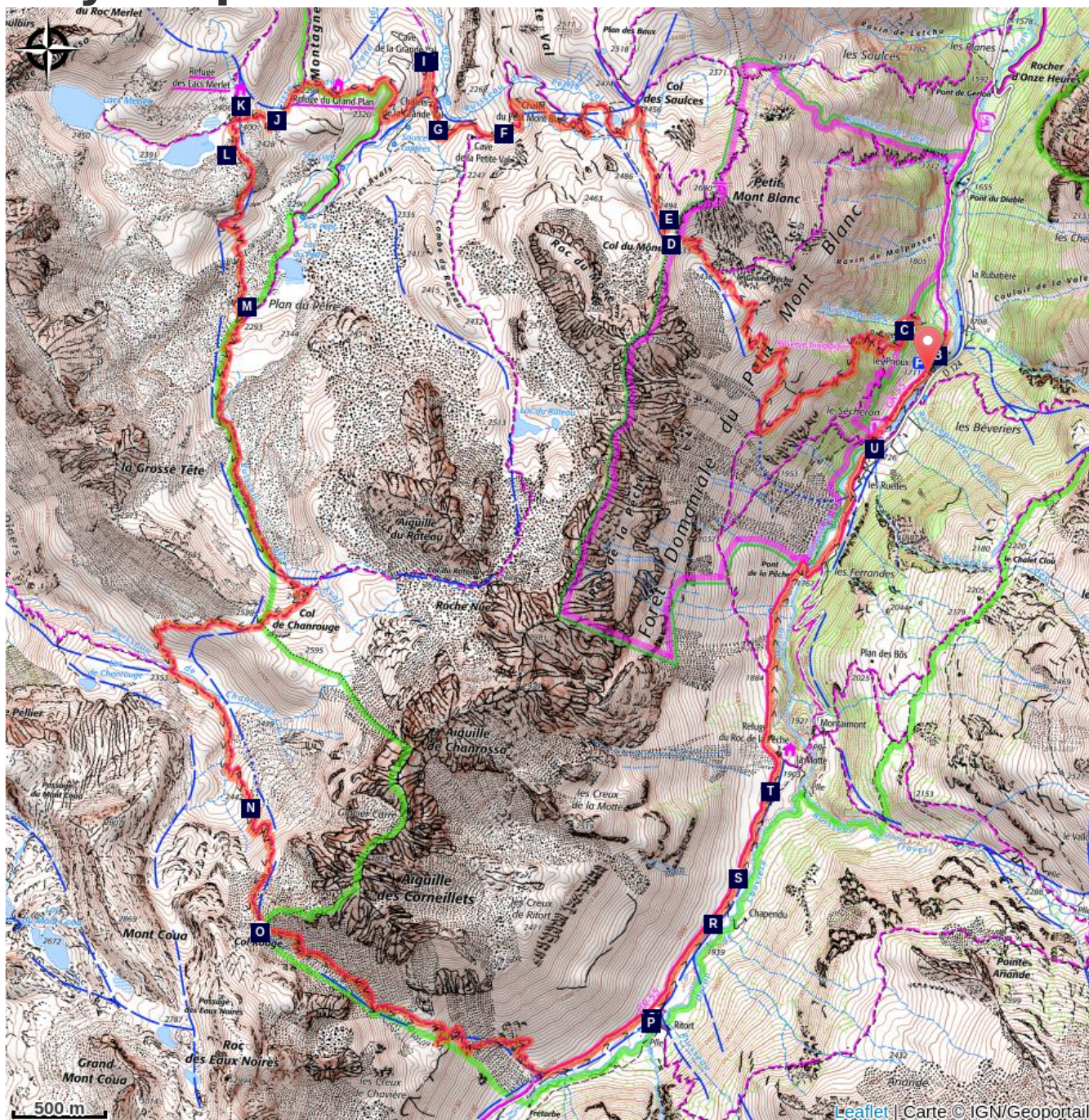
## Altimetric profile














Min elevation 1715 m Max elevation 2724 m

"From the car park at Les Prioux, cross the hamlet and walk for 150 m. Take the trail in the direction of "Petit Mont-Blanc". At the 2 following forks in the road, stay on the right trail. At the Col du Mône, follow the "Col des Saulces". At the junction of the Col des Saulces, follow the "Refuge du Grand Plan". At the fork in the trail 300 m after this refuge, take the trail on the left and follow "Lacs Merlets". Once at the crossroads, take the path on the right towards ""Refuge des lacs Merlets"". The next day, upon leaving the refuge, retrace your steps at the crossroads. Take the trail in the direction of "Col de Chanrouge". Walk past the pass, then the stream below. At the intersection turn right in the direction of "Col Rouge". Go past the pass. After 690 m of downhill ascent, follow the vehicle track to the car park of Pont de la Pêche. Follow the paved road for about 850 m, take the footbridge over the Doron on the left of the road. Follow the trail along the Doron, until the hamlet of Les Prioux."

# On your path...



-  Les Prioux (A)
-  The Ecological Land Reserve of Petit Mont-Blanc (C)
-  The etymology of Courchevel (E)
-  The Alpage des Avals: Beaufort cheese (G)
-  Biol cellar (I)
-  Les Prioux hamlet (B)
-  Col du Mône (D)
-  Alpage des Avals: the secret of an earthworm (F)
-  Alternative round trip towards Col des Saulces (H)
-  Dents de la Portetta, Petit Mont-Blanc and the Aiguille du Fruit (J)

 The Lacs Merlets: “Chaloin” type  
refuge (K)

 Lac du Pêtre: wetland (M)

 Lacs Merlets (L)

 Chamois and ibex (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**

Remember to bring water for the day (no water sources are available)

## **How to come ?**

### Transports

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Rail connection to Moûtiers. Information: [www.voyages-sncf.com](http://www.voyages-sncf.com)

Then transport by coach to Pralognan-village. Information: [www.transavoie.com](http://www.transavoie.com)

In July-August, a shuttle bus runs between Pralognan-centre and the hamlet of Les Prioux.

Information: [www.pralognan.com](http://www.pralognan.com)

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### Access

RD915 until Pralognan-la-Vanoise, then the municipal path.

### Advised parking

Car park, les Prioux, Pralognan-la-Vanoise

## **Accessibility**

No

 **Information desks**

**Maison du Parc national de la  
Vanoise - Pralognan**

Maison de la Vanoise, Avenue  
Chasseforêt, 73710 Pralognan-la-Vanoise

[info.pralognan@vanoise-parcnational.fr](mailto:info.pralognan@vanoise-parcnational.fr)

Tel : 04 79 08 71 49

<https://www.vanoise-parcnational.fr>

# On your path...

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## Les Prioux (A)

"Stop at the hamlet of Les Prioux, to witness (depending on the time) the making of Beaufort at Rolland. This cow's cheese, cooked, pressed and smear-ripened (salted and rubbed) has been labelled PDO (formerly CDO) since 1968. It is known as the "prince of gruyères". Only the tarentaise and abondance breed can claim to give their milk. The appellation ""Beaufort d'Alpage"" is attributed only to cheeses made in summer, with the milk of a single herd, as is the case with your hosts."

Attribution : PNV - BASSARGETTE Denis

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## Les Prioux hamlet (B)

At the edge of Vanoise National Park, Chavière Valley unveils its natural wonders along a refreshingly varied path: the Savoyard discovery tour around Les Prioux.

Life in this hamlet, perched at an altitude of 1,700m, is still very much in step with nature and the winter and summer seasons, and residents have had to adapt accordingly. As they are cut off from the world through the long winter months, they have so much to share with you about life in the past: the mountain pastures, making Beaufort cheese, the growth of tourism and mountain crafts and trades...

This refreshingly varied path unveils the wonders of Chavière Valley to you, with its awe-inspiring peaks and more relaxing hamlets.

The route is accessible to everyone, including families with pushchairs, the elderly and wheelchair users with helpers.

- Round trip takes: 40 minutes
- Elevation gain: 10 metres
- Distance: 1km 100

People with reduced mobility can reach Les Prioux via an adapted shuttle bus.

Open from 15 May to 30 September, except if snow closes the road to Les Prioux.

On-site you'll find a cheese dairy, restaurants and accommodation options, to make a proper holiday out of your trip!

Attribution : Gilles Lansard



## ✿ The Ecological Land Reserve of Petit Mont-Blanc (C)

The Ecological Land Reserve of Petit Mont-Blanc was established in 1999 because of the site's high heritage value. It is managed by the National Forestry Commission which is responsible for maintaining the richness of this area over the long-term. Indeed, there are remarkable habitats to be found here with a substantial floristic diversity (319 listed plant species, of which 11 are protected at national level) A Natura 2000 area, the "Vanoise Massif" stands supreme over this reserve. This area is comprised of arctic-alpine riverside grasslands hosting specular blue thistles and giant scabiosa.

Attribution : PNV - GARNIER Alexandre



## 🌐 Col du Mône (D)

The Col du Mône is located on a fault line that separates two different geological formations: the Mône rock which is a formation of limestones and dolomitic stones from the Jurassic whose stratigraphic series is reversed, and the Petit Mont-Blanc which is formed of gypsum, a very white rock. On the Mône rock, the rocks are rather grey, formed in layers with a reddish layer of bauxite, a rock rich in aluminium and iron oxide. The Petit Mont-Blanc looks like a lunar landscape with its white, globe-shaped rocks.

Attribution : PNV - STORCK Frantz



## 📖 The etymology of Courchevel (E)

"The origin of the name Courchevel comes from the local terroir and agropastoral practices. Thus in the spring, when the herds of tarentaise cows were moved at altitude to the montagnettes, between 1,500 and 1,800 metres in altitude, the herdsmen were prohibited from stationing their herds on the strips of land where the green grass grew profusely, as although appetising it was capable of cutting the cows' tongues, enough to "skin it". This explains the origin of the town's name, "écortzevé" in saint-bonnais patois, which over the centuries and oral transmission, became "cortzevé", then "corchevé" and finally "courchevel". In the 19th century, the maps mention the place known as ""Les chalets de Corchevel"", today ""Courchevel 1550"". The name Courchevel became permanent at the beginning of the 20th century."

Attribution : PNV - STORCK Frantz



## 🐛 Alpage des Avals: the secret of an earthworm (F)

"I am the redworm, the earthworm compost: I digest the whey produced from cheese making by ""vermicomposting"". I need a dark, damp and well-ventilated place to live. This is why the compost here is protected by opaque tarpaulin that allow air to flow through. The farmer regularly sprays it with the whey. In order to move and feed myself, I dig tunnels. This facilitates the circulation of liquid and contributes to the mixing and aeration of the earth. The oxygen available allows the bacteria to break down the organic matter that make up the whey."

Attribution : PNV - AUGÉ Vincent



## 🐄 The Alpage des Avals: Beaufort cheese (G)

"The Alpage des Avals is managed by a pastoral consortium whose cattle herd totals approximately 150 cattle. These cows graze around the villages until June and then climb up into the mountain pastures. Their presence in the municipality lasts 8 months. Saint-Bon-Courchevel is located in the Beaufort protected designation of origin area. In the alpine grazing season, the cheese, made on site, can use the ""Beaufort d'Alpage"" label. Almost all farmers are engaged in a dual activity relating to tourism. In winter, they work as ski instructors, shopkeepers, piste service or ski lift operators."

Attribution : PNV - AUGÉ Vincent



## 🌄 Alternative round trip towards Col des Saulces (H)

For those who fancy it, there's an alternative round trip up to the Col des Saulces pass, at an altitude of 2,456m. From there you'll be rewarded with lovely panoramic views over Pralognan-la-Vanoise valley. To the left of the pass is the Petit Mont Blanc (2,677m) and to the right, the Rocher de Plassa (2,867m). You'll also be able to glimpse the Aiguille du Fruit peak (3,051m) and the Avals Valley.

Attribution : Hervé Franchino



## Biol cellar (I)

An old cheese cellar to start the maturing of the Beaufort cheese wheels during the summer period, which were then taken down into the valley to finish their maturing. The building dates from the 19th century and was renovated in the 2000s.

Nearby is the cellar and the chalet de la Grande Val, still used nowadays to make the beaufort "chalet d'alpage"; with a tool renovated in the years 2010

Attribution : D. Dereani



## Dents de la Portetta, Petit Mont-Blanc and the Aiguille du Fruit (J)

At the secondary level, Saint-Bon-Courchevel is located under a shallow sea where phenomenal amounts of sand and crustaceans are deposited and which has undergone episodes of retreat and advance. The accumulation of crustaceans is the source of the limestone rocks. The Dents de la Portetta are the most representative. Then, under a tropical climate, the sea receded by evaporation. This phenomenon is the cause of a particular rock, gypsum. This rock constitutes the Petit Mont Blanc massif, the crests of Mount Charvet and the Dent du Villard. Later, the sea covered the town again, which is what caused the formation of the limestone rocks. The Aiguille du Fruit was formed during this period and contains an astonishing variety of fossils, such as shark teeth.

Attribution : PNV - GARNIER Alexandre



## The Lacs Merlets: "Chaloin" type refuge (K)

The Refuge des lacs Merlets is located in the heart of the Vanoise National Park at 2,417 m in altitude. It is a Chaloin type refuge, rustic and warm and made from wood. Built in the 1970s, it can accommodate 14 people per night.

Attribution : PNV - IMBERDIS Ludovic



## Lacs Merlets (L)

"The Lacs Merlets belong to the category of "cold" lakes: with harsh climatic conditions, the water temperature does not exceed 9 ° C in the summer and the ice cover persists for a little more than 8 months. These lakes are called oligotrophs (from the Greek oligo-little and trophe-food). The presence of fish is almost always due to human intervention. The cold lakes are the domain of salmonids whose species are subdivided into char of the *Salvelinus* and *Salmo trutta* genus. Also of note is the presence of a small cyprinide fish, the minnow (*phoxinus phoxinus*). Piscicultural management requires the organisation of quality sport-fishing."

Attribution : PNV - GARNIER Alexandre

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## Lac du Pêtre: wetland (M)

An alkaline marsh can also be found to the north of Lac du Pêtre. Pioneer plant communities, called *Caricion bicoloris-atrofuscae*, flourish there along the edges of the alpine streams. Cotton grass, *carex bicolor*, *tofieldia pusilla* and alpine butterwort enjoy these humid peaty environments. Along the shores of Lac du Pêtre, creeping buttercup carpet the ground.

Attribution : PNV - IMBERDIS Ludovic

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## Chamois and ibex (N)

Stay observant, as the chamois and ibex, some of which are ear-ringed and with VHF collars, may cross your path. They spend the summer in the towns of Pralognan, Méribel and Courchevel. A part of the population returns to the valley of Maurienne in the town of Modane, where the sunny slopes provide them with better winters. Modane is the site where they are captured for marking.