

11-Along the River Doron in the Belleville Valley

Parc national de la Vanoise - LES BELLEVILLE

(APTIV)



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As you follow the River Doron you'll notice just how much the Belleville Valley has changed over time, with picturesque hamlets now sharing the landscape with the biggest ski resorts. Setting off from Saint-Martin-de-Belleville in the Belleville Valley, you'll cycle past gurgling streams, hamlets, water mills, resorts and mountain lakes. For fans of gentle walks, Les Bruyères lake is a perfect spot for tucking into a picnic with children.

The more adventurous among you could tackle the climb up to Le Lou lake at an altitude of 2,005m, and get a bite to eat at the refuge (3.5km and elevation gain of 280m).

Useful information

Practice : Mountain bike (electric)

Duration : 3 h

Length : 25.9 km

Trek ascent : 778 m

Difficulty : Easy

Type : Loop

Themes : Architecture, Flora , History , Lake and glacier

Accessibility : Chien autorisé

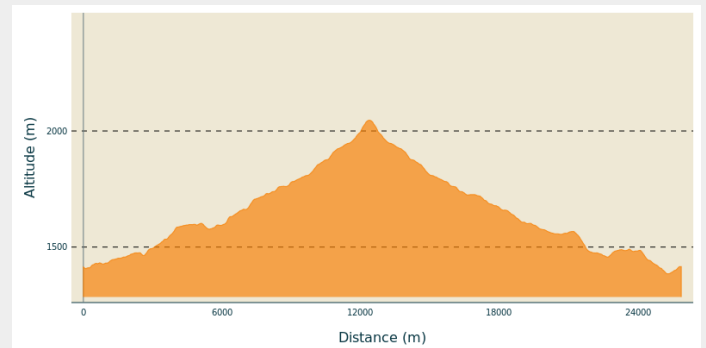
Trek

Departure : Le Cochet car park, 73440 Saint-Martin-de-Belleville

Arrival : Le Cochet car park, 73440 Saint-Martin-de-Belleville

Cities : 1. LES BELLEVILLE

Altimetric profile



Min elevation 1385 m Max elevation 2046 m

Setting off from Saint-Martin-de-Belleville, this trail runs along the Doron riverbanks to Les Bruyères lake, via a good-quality track which is also suitable for vehicles. From the lake, you can carry on up to Le Lou lake (steep climb uphill) and enjoy a relaxing meal at the Refuge. Head back through hamlets (Praranger, Saint Marcel) and past Notre-Dame-de-la Vie sanctuary.

Follow the blue waymarks: Les Belleville.

E-bike rental shop:

Skiset Léo Lacroix la Croisette

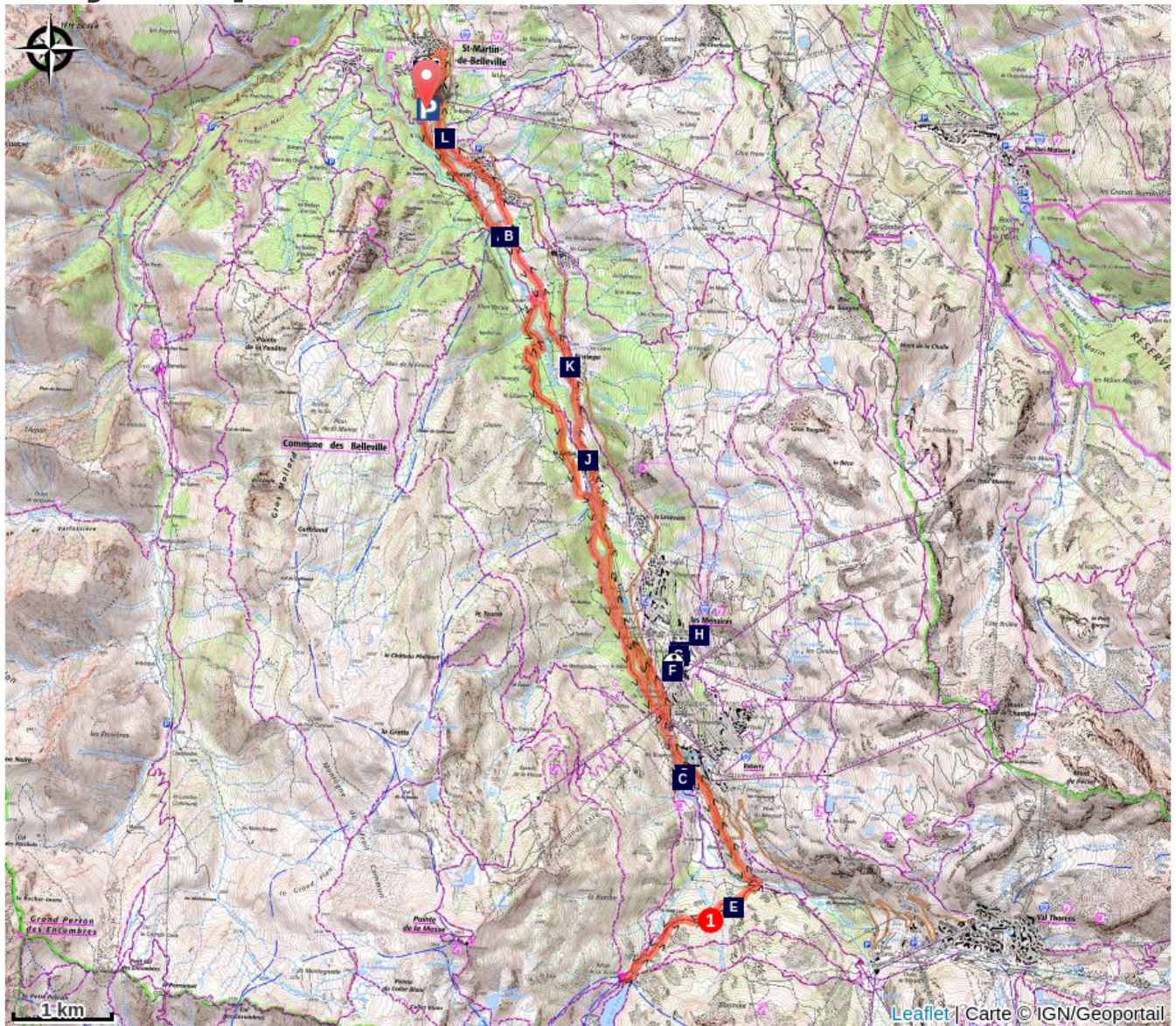
Résidence Lac du Lou

73440 Les Ménuires

Secteur : La Croisette

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On your path...



 Saint Marcel Dam (A)

 Les Bruyères lake (C)


 View over Val Thorens (E)

 The resort of Les Menuires (G)

 E-bike rental shop: Skiset Léo Lacroix la Croisette (I)

 Pranger (K)

 Heritage trail (M)


 The roles and functions of the wetlands (B)


 Maison de l'Abeille Noire (D)

 Les Menuires Bell Tower (F)

 "Le Brelin" apartment block (H)

 Betaix hamlet (J)

 Notre Dame de la Vie Sanctuary and Pilgrim's Path (L)

 Saint-Martin de Belleville Museum (N)

All useful information

Advices

Rando Vanoise has been designed to help you pick and choose your outings, but cannot be held liable where they are concerned. The mountain offers up a wide range of routes and trails for cyclists of all levels, but remember, it is a living, unpredictable environment and it is important that you head out suitably equipped. Ask advice from cycle rental operators.

If in doubt, you can take an introductory lesson in how to ride an electric bike with an instructor.

If you see a herd ahead, slow down and go round it. If there is a patou, a guard dog, climb down from your bike and walk, pushing it alongside you. Avoid making any sudden or aggressive gestures towards the dog and move away from the herd slowly and calmly. The dog will only be checking that you do not pose a threat to its herd. Respect the parkland and close gates behind you after you've gone through them.

The mountain is living, please respect it by staying on the paths and tracks.

How to come ?

Transports

Train services run as far as Moûtiers. Find out more at: www.voyages-sncf.com. You can then get a coach to Saint-Martin-de-Belleville, find out more at: www.transavoie.com Free shuttle buses run between Val Thorens and Saint-Martin-de-Belleville, find out more at: Transdev Savoie. Have you also thought about car-sharing?

Access

From Moutiers, take the D117 road towards the Belleville Valley. Go past Saint-Jean-de-Belleville and continue as far as the municipality of Saint-Martin-de-Belleville.

Advised parking

Le Cochet car park, 73440 Saint-Martin-de-Belleville

Accessibility



Chien autorisé

Information desks

Maison du Tourisme de Saint Martin de Belleville

Place de l'Eglise, 73440 Saint-Martin-de-Belleville

contact@st-martin-belleville.com

Tel : 04 79 00 20 00

<https://st-martin-belleville.com/fr/>

Office de Tourisme des Menuires - La Croisette

1269, Avenue de la Croisette, 73440 Les Menuires

contact@lesmenuires.com

Tel : 04 79 00 73 00

<https://lesmenuires.com>

On your path...



Saint Marcel Dam (A)

The St Marcel dam on the Doron de Belleville was built in 2008. It constitutes a water intake for the network of artificial snow of Ménuires. A fishway was integrated into the structure to allow fish circulation particularly brown trout and rainbow trout in the Doron.

Attribution : Frantz Storck



The roles and functions of the wetlands (B)

Marshes, swamps, bogs...names that remind us of enigmatic and often unrecognised places. Their typical vegetation is formed of plants adapted to the cold and humid climate of our mountains. These wetlands are beneficial as they regulate the flow of water, trap sediment and filter pollutants. The water discharged is therefore of better quality. The willows (*Salix*) or the Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), two species inhabiting these wetlands, have interesting medicinal properties. Man extracts their active substances which are used as components in aspirin.

Attribution : BANTIN Louis



Les Bruyères lake (C)

La Bruyère and the wetlands around the lake are exceptional nature spots home to species of all kinds, including newts, common frogs and brown trout.

15 protected species at national level and 5 natural environments with European Union recognition can be found there. Since 2003 this nature spot has enjoyed Département-level protection through a biotope protection order. There is a very easy interpretation trail running around the lake, complete with educational information, to enable you to explore this remarkable ecosystem.

Intriguing heritage feature: as you head up towards Le Lou lake, you'll see the Cross of the Blessed Paul; a Spanish pilgrim who tried to cross the Alps and whose tomb can be found at Saint-Martin-de-Belleville Church.

Attribution : Vincent_LOTTENBERG

Maison de l'Abeille Noire (D)

Housed in a former mountain pasture chalet, the Maison de l'Abeille Noire was inaugurated in December 2019. Through interactive tools and short films, come and learn about the history of the European dark bee and its daily life in its natural environment. From its journey in the Alps to the production of honey, follow *Apis Mellifera Mellifera* as it is known in Latin through its own adventures and those of our local beekeepers. This centre is associated with the European dark bee conservatory in the Encombres Valley, just a few miles away.

View over Val Thorens (E)

A wonderful view can be enjoyed from here over the resort of Val Thorens with, in the distance, the Aiguilles de Péclet (3,561m) and Polset (3,531m) peaks.

The herculean task of building Val Thorens - the highest resort in Europe - began in 1971. Technical or commercial innovations, bold choices and human challenges: the resort's history spans a series of landmark dates and milestones that all helped turn it into an outstanding resort: construction of the largest cableway in the world back in 1982, to climb up to an altitude of 3,200m, the first resort to have a central booking platform, invention of the Funitel concept (a gondola lift with two parallel haul ropes, giving it unbeatable stability in high winds) and a double-loading chairlift.



Les Menuires Bell Tower (F)

To celebrate the turn of the new millennium, Les Menuires had this bell tower built, which has now become a landmark of the resort. The architect Yves de Preval designed a beautifully elegant and dainty structure, and architect Jacques Facy ensured it was set within its surroundings in the best possible position to be visible from all angles. A year later, at the foot of this bell tower, a multipurpose hall was built for hosting concerts, meetings, shows and religious services, named “Espace Maurice Romanet”, in tribute to the man who served as vicar of Saint-Martin for 30 years.

In 2016, a fresco was painted by André Chaffardon across the whole back wall of the hall. The mountains are strongly interwoven into this wall painting which depicts themes of great relevance to the Belleville valley: the mountain itself, Le Cochet, Péclet, livestock rearing in the pastures, Notre Dame de la Vie, or the mountain pasture hamlet of Les Bruyères.

Attribution : CCCT

The resort of Les Menuires (G)

Up until 1965, life in Saint-Martin-de-Belleville was still guided by traditions of the past. Isolated at the bottom of a valley, the population's only resource was rearing livestock and barely had enough to get by. To save the valley, Nicolas Jay, Mayor of Saint-Martin-de-Belleville, had the idea of launching a study into the development of his village for tourism purposes and put forward a development plan. In 1964, work began on equipping the Les Menuires resort with its first facilities for skiers and its first residences opened in 1967. Alongside the steady development of the skiing area around Les Menuires, building work began in 1973 on a new resort at an altitude of 2,300m: Val Thorens. After a period of considerable expansion through the 1980s, Saint-Martin-de-Belleville outlined a new, more limited development plan for the valley, broadly factoring in protection of the environment. In addition to the completion of the Les Menuires and Val Thorens resorts, this plan included the creation of a small tourist destination in Saint-Martin-de-Belleville, a picturesque village resort. The three resorts are connected to the wider 3 Vallées ski area.

The development plan is now complete: the village, which had lost two-thirds of its population in the 1950s, now has 3,574 permanent residents and some 55,000 tourist beds.



🏠 "Le Brelin" apartment block (H)

Clearly visible from the cycle route, the 'Le Brelin' apartment block overlooking the neighbourhood of La Croisette was built in 1972 according to the designs of architects Douillet & Maneval. Its elegant, clean lines give it an air of a vessel anchored on the slope, like a "passenger liner in the snow". The monumental building (640 co-owners) fits seamlessly into the cutting-edge neighbourhood and the façades have been designed with particular care, incorporating the original use of slate from the valley. This unprecedented architectural achievement earned recognition under the "remarkable 20th century Heritage" label, awarded by the Ministry of Culture in 2010. Launched in 1999, this label is aimed at identifying and showcasing urban complexes and buildings, which may or may not be protected Historical Monuments or protected spaces, whose architectural and urban interest justifies passing it down to future generations as features of 20th century heritage in their own right.

Attribution : Vincent_LOTTENBERG

🚲 E-bike rental shop: Skiset Léo Lacroix la Croisette (I)

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Bettaix hamlet (J)

The name of the hamlet can also be written "Le Bettex". It would designate a wet, damp place (pronounced "blè" in Savoyard patois). The hamlet is built near the Doron des Belleville, but it is not the only one. The hamlet of Villarenger (1100 m) is even closer to the river and to the river Les Encombres, which has been destroyed by floods several times over the centuries. The Bettaix chapel is dedicated to Our Lady of Compassion.

Like all the other hamlets, the Bettaix has a bread oven. It was in this hamlet that Blessed Paul accepted the care of a family in the 18th century before beginning his ascent to Lake Lou and his pilgrimage route to Rome across the Alps. Le Bettaix is also the hamlet of the coal mines which supplied the families of the valley. Under the Teurre (a rock that dominates the Doron des Belleville), coal seams were once exploited, as well as on the site of Les Menuires, originally called "Mineria".

Attribution : Frantz STORCK



Praranger (K)

The hamlet's name derives from "pra" (natural high mountain grassland in Savoyard) and "Rangerius", the landowners' name in the 5th century. Its chapel is dedicated to Saint Sebastian and Saint Fabien. The hamlet used to include a cheesemaking company, a grain mill whose use it shared with the inhabitants of the hamlets of Le Lavassaix and Le Bettex, and a bread oven. It had 187 inhabitants in 1901 and 181 in 1999. "Le Bosse" (Henri Julien Hudry), a Napoleonic soldier, was born here. His house in the centre of the hamlet was purchased in order to build the school, which was later turned into an activity centre for the inhabitants. These days, there are two school groups complexes (nursery and primary) taking in children from Les Menuires, Le Lavassaix, Le Bettex, Praranger and Les Granges. The first was built in 1965 and the second in the 1980s.

Attribution : D.Dereani-Facim



Notre Dame de la Vie Sanctuary and Pilgrim's Path (L)

This secluded Marian sanctuary, nestling on a small projecting ledge at the gateway of the upper valley, is one of Tarentaise's Baroque gems. It has been a renowned pilgrimage site for centuries. On 15 August, pilgrims used to congregate here from far and wide from the Maurienne Valley, via the Col des Encombres mountain pass. The tradition has endured to this day, with a large crowd following Mass there.

Built in the shape of a Greek cross (a central dome and three polygonal chapels on the wings), the sanctuary has three altarpieces, one of which was sculpted in 1636 and is considered to be the oldest Baroque altarpiece in the Tarentaise area. It boasts striking decorative elements inside: the altarpiece of the high altar, completely covered in gold, features a host of sculpted motifs, not least an array of angel heads. The ex-votos are exquisite: more than fifty of them have been listed as Historical Monuments.

Open all year round. Weekly tours organised by an experienced guide with the FACIM (Foundation for International Cultural Action in the Mountains) during the winter and summer seasons.

From the sanctuary you can also head off for a 4.3km walk along the Pilgrim's path. This lovely route meanders between grasslands and hamlets past other sanctuaries, chapels and wayside shrines, which all attest to the faith of our mountains.

Attribution : Vincent_LOTTENBERG



Heritage trail (M)

In Saint Martin de Belleville, the heritage trail is an ideal way to explore the old village of Saint Martin, its monuments and sites central to community life in the past. Setting off from the parish church, there are a dozen or so stages for delving into the history of Saint Martin.

Enjoy an interactive sightseeing experience with the QR-codes to scan and view photos and commentary on the sites you pass. If you don't have a smartphone or tablet, you can get a free map with a summary of the main points from the Maison du Tourisme.

5km circular route, with elevation gain of 40m.

Attribution : CCCT



Saint-Martin de Belleville Museum (N)

Housed in an old farmstead in the village centre, Saint-Martin-de-Belleville Museum goes back over 150 years of Belleville valley history. An astonishing history which led this almost self-sufficient highland village towards a tourism-oriented destiny. Through recreated scenes of traditional dwellings, videos and archive images, experience the captivating highlights of this picturesque village perched at an altitude of 1,450m. From farming life in the 19th century to the construction of Les Menuires and Val Thorens in the 1960s and '70s, watch as the valley has gradually become more industrialised. The museum naturally charts the pinnacle of this development - the opening of the village resort of Saint Martin and its affiliation to the 3 Vallées ski area, which brought a fresh wave of development to the municipality. There is a section dedicated to the 1992 Albertville Olympics. Les Menuires would host the Slalom races, which would further raise the valley's profile.

st-martin-belleville.com / 04 79 00 70 75

Open in the winter and summer season, daily except on Saturdays. Between seasons, open by request, enquire at the Maison du Tourisme

Adults €3 / Free for under 16s / Guided tour and storytelling for children depending on the activity programmes, available at the Tourist Office

Audioguides available in English.

Attribution : Matthieu_CELLARD