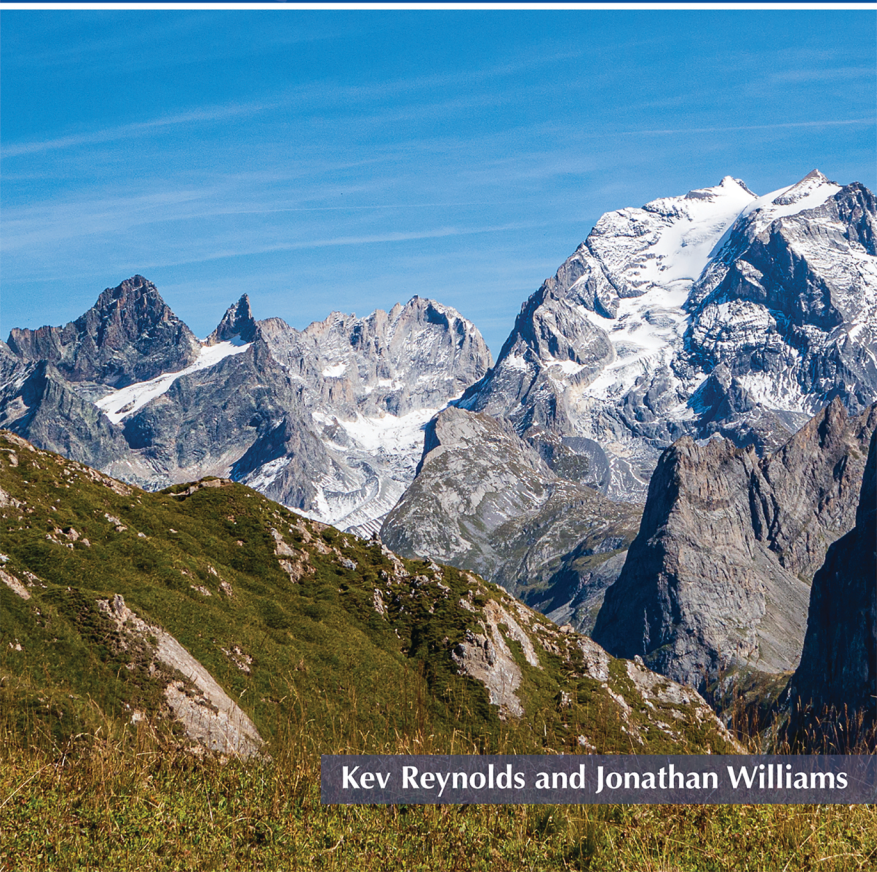


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# TREKKING IN THE VANOISE

Tour of the Vanoise and the Tour des  
Glaciers de la Vanoise



Kev Reynolds and Jonathan Williams

# TREKKING IN THE VANOISE

TOUR OF THE VANOISE AND THE  
TOUR DES GLACIERS DE LA VANOISE

by Kev Reynolds and Jonathan Williams

**CICERONE**

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### Updates to this guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. This guidebook was researched and written before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. While we are not aware of any significant changes to routes or facilities at the time of printing, it is likely that the current situation will give rise to more changes than would usually be expected. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/863/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/863/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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*Front cover:* The Grande Casse dominates the northern sections of the Vanoise National Park

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
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### Map key

	hotel/accommodation
	restaurant
	supermarket/grocery store
	ATM
	rail station
	bus station
	tourist information
	manned hut
	parking
	unmanned hut

### Note on mapping

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such, they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency. However, we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first two editions of this guide concentrated on the Tour of the Vanoise and were published under my name; Jonathan Williams has now added more multi-day routes in order to create this present volume, which we've renamed *Trekking in the Vanoise* to reflect the region's wider appeal. This title, then, is very much a joint effort. My thanks as ever go to Jonathan and all at Cicerone for bringing it together, to my wife Min, and friends John and Janette Robertson for their company on some of the treks, and to the numerous refuge *gardiens* who provide welcome hospitality and advice whenever sought. The Vanoise National Park is a trekker's delight and it deserves to be better known among English-speaking enthusiasts. Hopefully this guide will help you enjoy as many rewarding days of activity there as we did while researching the various routes described.

Once again, I am reminded that the production of a guidebook is a team effort calling on the skills, talents and dedication of many people. It may be the author's name on the cover, but cartographer, designer, editor, printer and binder clothe the bare skeleton of words and give it true value. My sincere thanks to all involved in the production of this guidebook, and to you for buying it.

*Kev Reynolds*



*After ten days' trekking, the Aiguille Doran and peaks above Modane are seen once more on the final stage of the ToV*

## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### **International distress signal** *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

### **Helicopter rescue**

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### **Emergency telephone numbers**

If telephoning from the UK the dialling code for France is 0033

Emergency services: tel 112

PGHM (Peloton de Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne, mountain rescue):

tel 04 79 05 18 04 (Modane)

tel 04 79 07 01 10 (Bourg-St-Maurice)

### **Weather reports**

<https://météofrance.com> tel 3250

Or use your preferred mountain weather app.

**Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.**

## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLES

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
<b>Tour of the Vanoise</b>							
1	Modane	Refuge de l'Orgère	6	890	negligible	3hr	41
2	Refuge de l'Orgère	Refuge de Plan Sec	13	870	490	5hr	46
3	Refuge de Plan Sec	Refuge de l'Arpont	16	750	760	5hr 30min	52
4	Refuge de l'Arpont	Refuge du Plan du Lac	13.5	730	680	4hr 30min	58
5	Refuge du Plan du Lac	Refuge du Vallonbrun	18.5	720	810	6hr 30min	64
6	Refuge du Vallonbrun	Bonneval-sur-Arc	16	180	640	4hr 30min	71
7	Bonneval-sur-Arc	Val d'Isère	14.5	980	980	5hr 30min	79
8	Val d'Isère	Refuge de la Leisse	18.5	1190	500	7hr	94
9	Refuge de la Leisse	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	18	450	1520	6hr	108
10	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	Refuge de Péclet-Polset	14	1080	30	5hr	120
11	Refuge de Péclet-Polset	Modane	15	360	1790	5hr 30min	126
<b>Total</b>			<b>163</b>	<b>8200</b>	<b>8200</b>	<b>11 days (58hr)</b>	

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
<b>Variants and alternatives</b>							
7:	variant via Col des Fours	Bonneval-sur-Arc	Val d'Isère	1200	1200	6hr 30min	86
8:	variant via the Tovière	Val d'Isère	Refuge de la Leisse	1230	550	7hr	101

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
7A	Bonneval-sur-Arc	Refuge de la Femma	20	1610	1070	8hr	89
8A	Val d'Isère	Refuge de la Femma	18	1290	750	7hr	103
9A	Refuge de la Femma	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	23	540	1470	7hr	117

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
<b>Tour des Glaciers de la Vanoise</b>							
1	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	Refuge de la Valette	10	1550	420	5hr	136
2	Refuge de la Valette	Refuge du Fond d'Aussois	20	1230	1450	8hr	140
3	Refuge du Fond d'Aussois	Refuge de l'Arpont	20	860	880	6hr 30min	145
4	Refuge de l'Arpont	Refuge du Col de la Vanoise	14	660	450	5hr	149
5	Refuge du Col de la Vanoise	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	8	negligible	1100	2hr 30min	152
<b>Totals</b>			<b>72</b>	<b>4300</b>	<b>4300</b>	<b>5 days (27hr)</b>	

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
<b>Tour of the Eastern Vanoise</b>							
1	Bonneval-sur-Arc	Refuge du Vallonbrun	16	640	180	5hr	158
2	Refuge du Vallonbrun	Refuge du Plan du Lac	18.5	810	720	6hr	160

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
3	Refuge du Plan du Lac	Refuge du Fond des Fours	18	770	590	6hr	160
4	Refuge du Fond des Fours	Bonneval-sur-Arc	11.5	460	1190	4hr	161
Totals			64	2680	2680	4 days (21hr)	

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
Tour of the Western Vanoise							
1	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	Refuge de Péclet-Polset	14	1080	30	5hr	162
2	Refuge de Péclet-Polset	Refuge des Lacs Merlet	15	950	1030	6hr	162
3	Refuge des Lacs Merlet	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	19	440	1410	6hr	164
Totals			48	2470	2470	3 days (17hr)	

Stage	Start	Finish	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Walking time	Page
Traverse of the Vanoise via the GR5 and GR55							
1	Landry	Refuge d'Entre-le-Lac	18	1580	200	6hr 30min	166
2	Refuge d'Entre-le-Lac	Refuge de la Leisse	21	1170	830	7hr	168
3	Refuge de la Leisse	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	18	450	1520	6hr	169
4	Pralognan-la-Vanoise	Refuge de Péclet-Polset	14	1080	30	5hr	169
5	Refuge de Péclet-Polset	Modane	15	360	1790	5hr 30min	169
Totals			86	4640	4370	5 days (30hr)	

The Refuge de l'Orgère is nearly 1000m above Modane and there are views to the mountains of the south, including the Écrins massif (ToV, Stage 1)







*Climbing towards the Col du Grand Marchet (TdGV, Stage 1)*

## INTRODUCTION

*The trail after the Refuge de l'Arpont (TdGV, Stage 4)*



This book is a guide to trekking in one of the most attractive mountain regions in France. The main route described is the 10–12-day Tour of the Vanoise (ToV), but the popular week-long Tour des Glaciers de la Vanoise (TdGV) is also included, as are three shorter tours in the same area, all of which amount to a summer's worth of activity in a sublime setting.

Located in Savoie, between Mont Blanc and the Massif des Écrins, southeast of Chambéry and close to the Italian border, the Vanoise Alps contain more than 100 summits in excess of 3000m. These are the quintessential Alps, whose major peaks are daubed with shrinking glaciers and

snowfields and whose valleys glisten with lakes, streams and waterfalls. There are towering moraine walls, impossibly steep rock slabs and, in the early summer, meadows extravagant with a riot of Alpine flowers. Almost every district has its old stone ruins, deserted chapels, isolated farms and tiny hamlets that seem to belong to a long-forgotten age. There's a wonderland of marked trails to explore, scenic cols to cross, a variety of mountain huts in which to spend the night and abundant wildlife to enrich each day.

Trekking in the Vanoise is the perfect way to experience some of the finest walking in the Alps without being encumbered by rope or ice axe.

la Lenta and climbs through its upper gorge, hardly aware of the road's existence some way above. The north side of the Iseran is ski country, but after descending an initial scarred slope, the GR5 trail (which was rejoined in the Vallon de la Lenta) makes every effort to avoid ski tows and pistes, and snakes down to Val d'Isère through luxuriant forest.

On the eighth stage, from Val d'Isère to Refuge de la Leisse, the national park is re-entered on the approach to Col de la Leisse; this is a lovely stretch, with La Grande Motte appearing as a massive ice-topped wall above the col and the valley which lies below it. That wall extends to its loftier neighbour, La Grande Casse, and on the ninth day of the tour you wander alongside it all the way to the Col de la Vanoise. You then descend beside monstrous moraines and below the towering Aiguille de la Vanoise to reach the Lac des Vaches. This is an idyllic and picturesque site, the shallow lake being crossed on a stone causeway, below which hillsides are bathed in scarlet alpenrose. The trail plunges down these hillsides, then through forest to Pralognan-la-Vanoise, nestling in an attractive valley.

Refuge de Pécelet-Polset lies near the head of that valley under the twin aiguilles from which it takes its name, and a half day's walk leads to it. Views from the refuge are very fine, with the Pointe de l'Échelle being the main focus of attention. Its west ridge dips to the rocky Col de Chavière, whose crossing is the highlight of the final day of the tour. From the col, a vast array of peaks are on show, including Mont Blanc to the north, and the rugged Écrins massif to the south.

The route then swoops down the steep south side of the col, and continues down, down and down a knee-punishing descent of nearly 1800 metres before reaching Modane, where the trek began 11 days earlier.

Looking down on the attractive Plan d'Aval lake (Stage 2);  
Stage 3 crosses the grassy ridge above the lake



## STAGE 1

### Modane to Refuge de l'Orgère

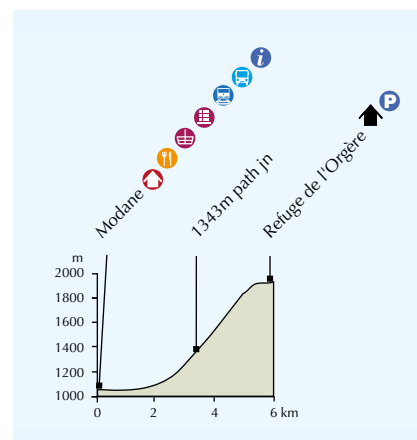
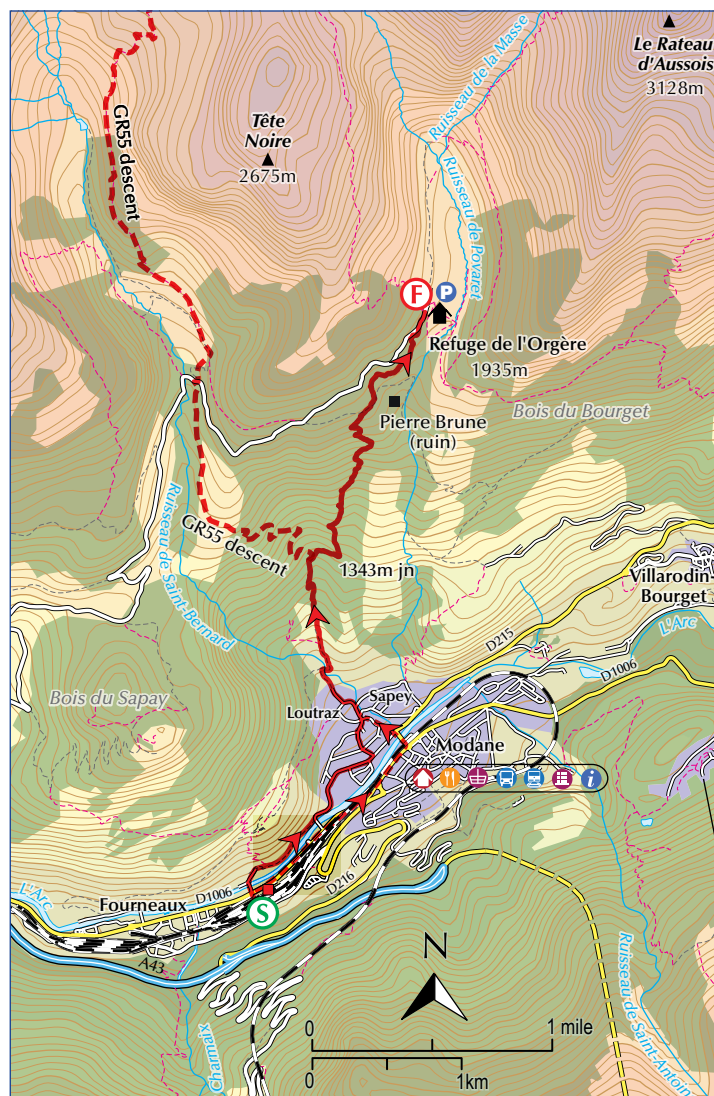
<b>Start</b>	Modane (1050m)
<b>Finish</b>	Refuge de l'Orgère (1935m)
<b>Distance</b>	6km
<b>Ascent</b>	890m
<b>Descent</b>	Negligible
<b>Time</b>	3hr
<b>High point</b>	Refuge de l'Orgère (1935m)
<b>Facilities</b>	Modane – hotels, camping; Refuge de l'Orgère (3hr) – PNV refuge

This initial stage may be a short one, but it will be quite enough for most trekkers who have just completed a day's travel and need to settle into the rhythm of a mountain walk, for the forest trail which climbs out of the valley to Orgère can seem unrelentingly steep. However, it's a very pleasant stage, with light, spacious forest giving shade on a hot summer's day, and occasional open meadows bright with flowers. For much of the ascent, views are of Modane in the valley below, and of the Charmaix combe cutting into the Mont Thabor massif opposite.

If you start early, this stage can be combined with Stage 2, although if you are not fully fit, this would make a long first day.

Modane (1050m) is a small industrial town in two parts: Modane *gare*, which clusters around the railway station in the Fourneaux district, and Modane *ville* (the town), a few minutes' walk upvalley. Situated close to the Italian border, with both road and rail tunnels passing through the south-flanking mountains en route to Turin, the town is of strategic importance, hence the protection given by the historic Fort du Sapey built on the hillside to the northwest. Conveniently reached by rail from Chambéry, it has most services but a limited number of shops, bars and restaurants. There's a post office, several banks with ATMs, and a large supermarket on the main road on the outskirts of Modane *ville*, while the tourist office is situated on Place Sommeiller (tel 04 79 05 26 67).



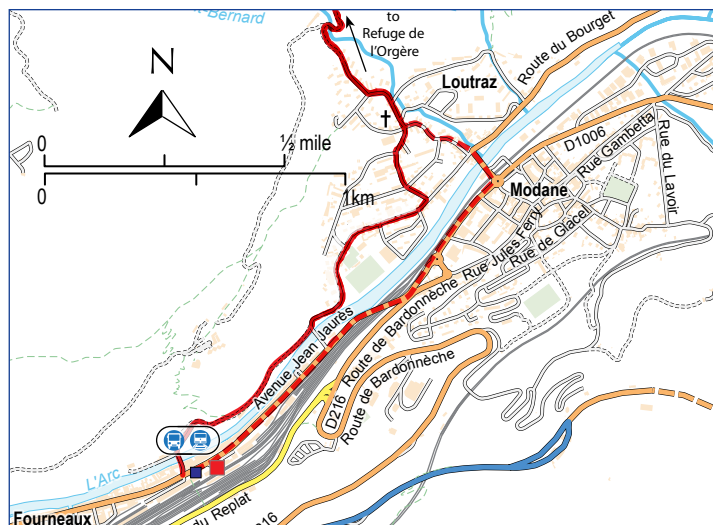


Most of the town's hotels are located opposite the station: **Hôtel de la Gare** (tel 04 79 83 26 19); **Hôtel Les Voyageurs** (tel 04 79 05 01 39); **Hôtel Le Perce-Neige** (tel 04 79 05 00 50); **Hôtel Le Commerce** (tel 04 79 05 20 98). There's also a campsite, **Camping La Vanoise** (tel 04 79 05 21 39). From the bus station (*gare routière*) next to the railway station, buses travel upvalley as far as Bonneval-sur-Arc.

There are two options to begin the walk. If you need to buy supplies for the next six days, it would be preferable to take the alternative route described below. The main route begins opposite the bus station, left of the railway station, where a sign to Refuge de l'Orgère directs the way through a small square and across the Arc river. Follow the road as it curves right, passes a few buildings, then becomes a track. About 500 metres later, join a tarmac road by the Pont Émile Charvoz. This leads through the 'suburb' of **Loutraz** and eventually brings you to a minor crossroads by a small chapel, where you meet the alternative route and turn left.

### Alternative start

On leaving the railway station, bear right and wander along the main road heading upvalley. Pass a road bridge over the Arc river and continue ahead on the south side of the river. Before long, come to a Casino supermarket which gives the last opportunity to stock up with food supplies (apart from refuge packed lunches) before reaching Bessans in six days' time. Shortly after passing the supermarket, turn left on a narrow road (sign to Aussois and Le Bourget) which goes beneath the railway, then over the river to enter **Loutraz**. At a staggered crossroads go ahead, rising uphill between houses along Rue de Chavières. This brings you to another minor crossroads by a small chapel with a water supply next to it. Here, you join the main route and turn right.



Twisting uphill, the tarmac ends by the last house, where a track continues into woodland. When the track forks, bear right across a bridge. Eventually the way

The Arc river runs alongside the railway to Italy, with the first and second stages of the tour rising high above



narrows to a footpath at a four-way crossing. Cross directly ahead, climbing steeply.

Throughout the ensuing forest section, which leads almost all the way to Orgère, there are numerous trail junctions. Each one is either signed or the route is otherwise obvious. The path is clear, well-made, narrow in places and unremittingly steep, but the forest is a delight when the fragrance of pine is drawn out by the sun's warmth. On reaching the **GR55 and GR5 path junction at 1343m (1hr 30min)**, keep right on the GR5.

When the trail emerges from forest into a lovely open meadow near the solitary stone chalet of **Pierre Brune (2hr 30min)**, you gain impressive views eastward through the Maurienne. Across the meadow, come onto a track. Turn right for a few paces, then left at a continuing path where a sign shows 15min to Refuge de l'Orgère.

The path re-enters forest, but contours round the hillside for 5min, then forks. Branch left and you'll soon come onto a minor road. Bear right, and a few paces later arrive at the **Refuge de l'Orgère (3hr)**.

**Refuge de l'Orgère** (1935m, tel 06 51 91 83 71): Owned by the PNV, this large and comfortable refuge has excellent facilities. Overlooking flower meadows on the edge of the national park at the entrance to the Orgère combe, it enjoys fine views across the Maurienne, but being accessible by vehicle it is invariably very busy during July and August. The refuge has 70 dormitory places, full meals service and self-catering facilities. During the summer months, videos devoted to the wildlife of the region are often shown as part of the national park's education programme.

#### AIGUILLE DORAN AND ORGÈRE VALLEY

The sharp-pointed, pear-shaped Aiguille Doran (3041m) dominates the little valley north of the refuge. A nature trail (*sentier natur*) traverses the east flank of the valley, then curves at its head to join a track leading back to the hut, thus providing a pleasant circular walk. A high trail climbing directly above the refuge heads for Col de Chavière and Pralognan-la-Vanoise (see Stage 11 for a description of this in the reverse direction), while another cuts along the eastern side of Aiguille Doran to cross the Col de la Masse (2922m) for a challenging route to Plan Sec. The main GR5 route to Plan Sec on Stage 2 is not as demanding as this crossing but is nonetheless a visually rewarding one. The little Orgère valley is rich in wild flowers in the early summer; near its head, chamois, marmots and *bouquetin* can often be seen.



• 163km Tour of the Vanoise • 72km Tour des Glaciers de la Vanoise • majestic views of Mont Blanc, the Dent Parrachée, Grande Casse and Grande Motte



The Vanoise National Park, France's first and most protected Alpine park, offers magnificent, mostly easy trekking in a pristine high-Alpine landscape dotted with welcoming refuges.

The routes presented here illuminate this beautiful region and showcase its spectacular scenery. The Tour of the Vanoise can easily fit into a two-week holiday with time to explore the area. Also included are four more one-week treks – the

renowned Tour des Glaciers de la Vanoise, tours of the Eastern and Western Vanoise, and a traverse combining sections of the GR5 and GR55 routes.

- the circular Tour of the Vanoise, described in 11 stages plus variants, and four shorter treks
- summer trekking from mid-June to late September
- includes mountain-hut and accommodation listings

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