

About the Author



Paddy Dillon is a prolific walker and guidebook writer, with over 90 guidebooks to his name and contributions to 40 other titles. He has written extensively for many different outdoor publications and has appeared on radio and television.

Paddy uses a tablet computer to write his route descriptions while walking. His descriptions are therefore precise, having been written at the very point at which the reader uses them.

Paddy is an indefatigable long-distance walker who has walked all of Britain's National Trails and several major European trails. He lives on the fringes of the Lake District and has

walked, and written about walking, in every county throughout the British Isles. He has led guided walks and walked throughout Europe, as well as in Nepal, Tibet, Korea, Africa and the Rocky Mountains of Canada and the US. Paddy is a member of the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild.

Other Cicerone guides by the author

Glyndwr's Way
Mountain Walking in Mallorca
The Cleveland Way and the Yorkshire Wolds Way
The GR20 Corsica
The Great Glen Way
The Irish Coast to Coast Walk
The Mountains of Ireland
The National Trails
The North York Moors
The Pennine Way
The Reivers Way
The South West Coast Path
The Teesdale Way (Martin Collins; updated by Paddy Dillon)
Trekking in Greenland
Trekking in Mallorca
Trekking in the Alps
(contributing author)

Walking and Trekking in Iceland
Walking in County Durham
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Walking on Madeira
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Walking on Tenerife
Walking the Wales Coast Path

THE GR5 TRAIL

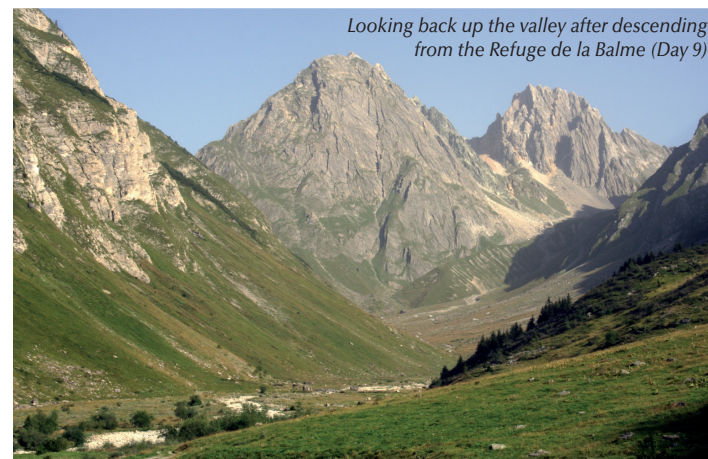
THROUGH THE FRENCH ALPS:
FROM LAKE GENEVA TO NICE

by

Paddy Dillon

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Those who already have a taste for the mountains should consider the variant route from the Col de Voza, over the higher Col de Tricot, to Les Contamines.

Bear in mind that the Col du Bonhomme (Day 8) can carry snow late into the summer, and also note that facilities along the first couple of days of this stage come under pressure, because the popular Tour du Mont Blanc follows the same course as the GR5.

Once across the Col du Bonhomme, the departmental boundary is crossed between Haute-Savoie and Savoie. The crowds following the Tour du Mont Blanc are left behind, and more discerning walkers are encountered on the Tour du Beaufortain instead (towards the end of Day 8). If you haven't sampled Beaufort cheese, then you are now in the heartland of its production. As a consequence, expect many paths across *alpages* to be heavily trodden by dairy cattle.

This is only a short stage, and it can be covered in as little as three or four days. Landry is a sensible place to call a halt because it has a railway station offering easy departure and/or arrival for those who are covering the GR5 in easier stages. Those who continue beyond Landry, intending to finish this stage at Tignes-le-Lac, could take advantage of a transport link between Tignes-le-Lac and the railway station at Bourg St Maurice.

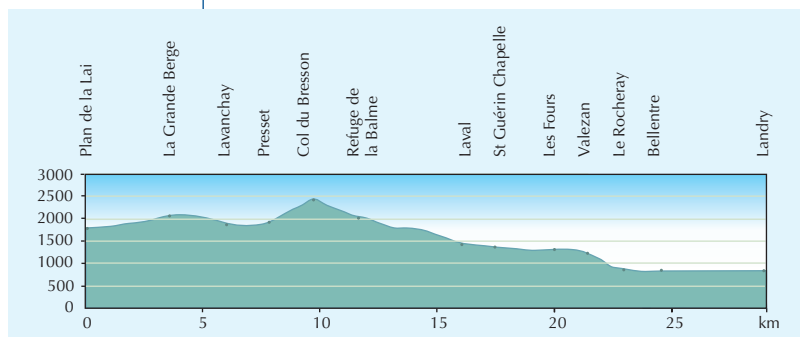
This long day's walk probably ranks as the muddiest on the GR5. The flaky slate bedrock crumbles to slimy mud, trampled by cattle. When limestone appears on either side of the Col de Bresson, it is often in the form of monstrous boulders. However, things speed up beyond the Refuge de la Balme, when good tracks are used on the way down to the Isère valley. There is no need to walk all the way to Landry if a night at Valezan appeals.

Cross the road from the *refuge* and follow a track up past the Gîte d'Alpage de Plan Mya. Slabs of limestone slope down, and a line of sink-holes is visible where another rock type is encountered. The limestone becomes flaky before the Chalet le Mora is reached. Afterwards, the predominant rock is flaky slate. The track climbs in a sweeping zigzag, so short-cut straight uphill along a path. The bedrock is soft and the path runs through a deeply worn groove. Rejoin the track and turn right to follow it to a solitary building.

40min **La Petite Berge 2070m (6790ft)** Shelter; view of Mont Blanc beyond Col de la Sauce

A muddy path continues across grassy, flowery slopes, with one stretch on duckboards. ◀ Look ahead to spot a gentle col, but don't head directly to it. The waymarked path drifts down to the right to avoid a wet and muddy stretch, then climbs to the grassy col. Pass the ruins of **La Grande Berge** at 2060m (6760ft), then descend past another ruin.

There are views down to Lac de Roselend, an artificial lake created for hydroelectric power.



Cross a steep slope covered in alder scrub, where the path is muddy, then cross a grassy slope above a chalet. ▶ Walk down to a track and turn left, then short-cut through a bend as marked. There is one other opportunity to short-cut, otherwise walk round all the bends until the track leads down to a solitary building.

50min **Lavachay 1805m (5922ft)**

Before reaching the building, turn left along a narrow path to cross cattle-grazed slopes studded with boulders. Follow the route across a winding track and climb up a path on a slope of alder scrub, passing bouldery rock-fall. Rejoin the track at a waterfall, crossing the flow to continue uphill. There are a couple of short-cut paths, then a signpost stands to the left of the track.

45min **Presset 2000m (6560ft)**

A path climbs up a grassy slope studded with big boulders (including coarse limestone conglomerate and quartz-rich

From here there is a view of a valley full of dairy farms, with the prominent rock tower of La Pierra Menta beyond.

The Pointe de Presset is a striking feature on the rugged ascent of the Col du Bresson



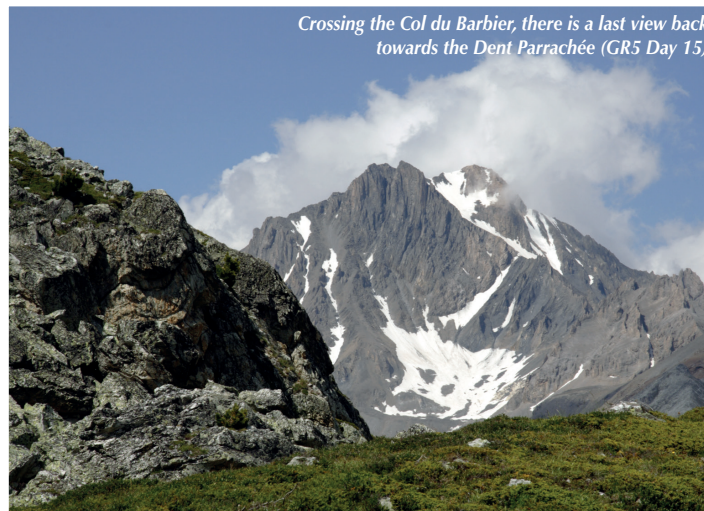


The rock tower of La Pierre Menta dominates the descent from the Col du Bresson

1hr **Landry 777m (2549ft)** Hotel, restaurant, shop, bar and campsite; trains to Bourg St Maurice and occasionally to Lyon or Paris; Belle Savoie Express buses to Bourg St Maurice, for Tignes and Val d'Isère, tel 08 20 20 53 30, www.altibus.com; free bus, or navette gratuite to Peisey, Moulin, Nancroix and Rosuel

STAGE 3

Landry to Modane



Crossing the Col du Barbier, there is a last view back towards the Dent Parrachée (GR5 Day 15)

General Overview Map

IGN 1:100,000 Carte de Promenade 53 Grenoble Mont Blanc.

Alternative Maps

Libris 1:60,000 No 04 Vanoise (covers route from Les Contamines to Valfréjus).

Rando Éditions 1:50,000 A2 Beaufortain (covers route from Les Contamines to Val d'Isère) and Rando Éditions 1:50,000 A3 Vanoise (covers route from Rosuel to Valfréjus).

This is the most complex stage along the whole walk, because there are three widely differing possible routes to choose from, which need careful consideration – see the Stage 3 map on the following page.

The **GR5 route** climbs from Landry to Tignes-le-Lac, then heads for Val d'Isère and crosses the Col de l'Iseran, which is the highest point reached on the main



route. Descending from the col, the trail heads for Bessans. From Bessans, the GR5 very roughly contours round the high southern flanks of the Vanoise, often enjoying wonderful views before dropping down to Modane (Day 15).

The **GR55 high-level route** offers a more exciting, remote and scenic experience. It parts company with the GR5 at Tignes-le-Lac (Day 11), climbing high through the wild heart of the Vanoise to reach Pralognan. From there, the route crosses the Col de Chavière, which is the highest point reached on any route in this guidebook. After crossing the col, the route descends and rejoins the GR5 on its way down through forests to Modane. This is quicker than the other two routes and saves two days; pick up the onward route description at Stage 4, Day 16.

The **GR5E low-level variant** can be joined at Bonneval-sur-Arc (main route, Day 12) and followed down through the Arc valley. This route, known as the Chemin du Petit Bonheur, leads from village to village following clear tracks. Walkers who have over-exerted themselves on the early stages of the GR5 might prefer this route, and it could prove useful if really bad weather rules out following either the GR5 or GR55. When the route reaches Modane, it rejoins the main GR5.

There are further options. Walkers can switch easily between the GR5 and GR5E at Bessans on Day 13. There is also a simple link between the GR5 and GR55 via the Refuge d'Entre Deux Eaux (see map on page 151).

GR5 Route – Landry to Modane

DAY 10

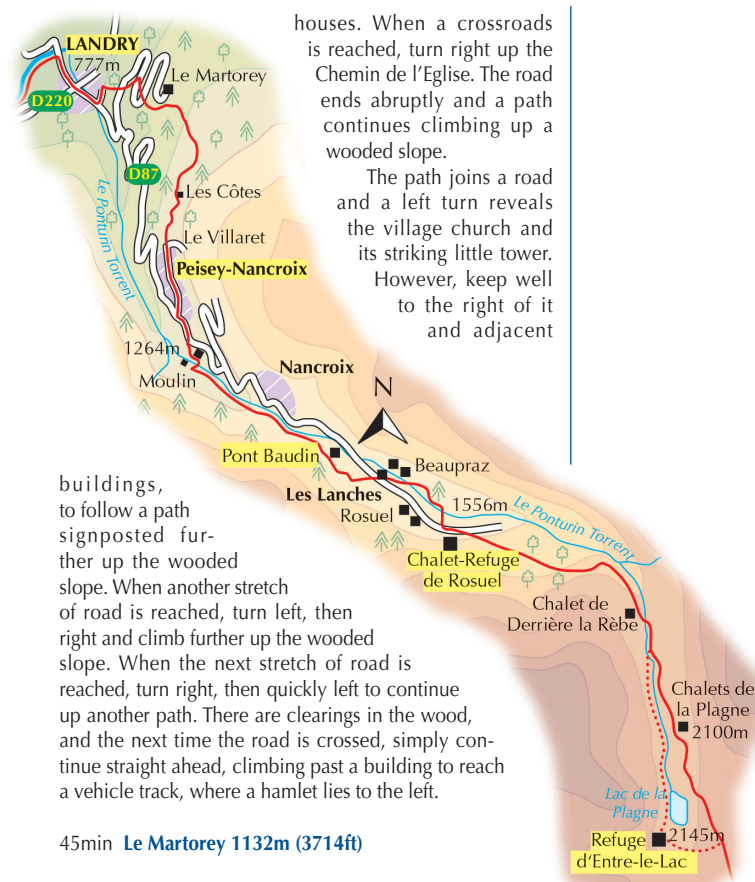
Landry to Refuge d'Entre-le-Lac (GR5)

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Distance | 17 kilometres (10½ miles) |
| Total Ascent | 1750 metres (5740ft) |
| Total Descent | 315 metres (1035ft) |
| Time | 6 hours |
| Map | 3532 ET |
| Nature of Terrain | The main route climbs from Landry. Good tracks are used later. Higher paths might be steep and rugged, or almost level and easy in places. |
| Food and Drink | Restaurants at Peisey, Nancroix, Pont Baudin, Les Lanches (<i>buvette</i>), Chalet-Refuge de Rosuel and Refuge d'Entre-le-Lac. |
| Accommodation | Hotels and <i>chambres d'hôte</i> at Peisey. <i>Gîte</i> and campsite near Pont Baudin. Chalet-refuge de Rosuel and Refuge d'Entre-le-Lac. |

The GR5 used to climb through Montchavin, but in recent years it was diverted through Landry and Peisey. Some walkers might spend time exploring villages and stay at the Chalet-Refuge de Rosuel. Strong walkers might climb to the Refuge du Col du Palet (Day 11). In between, a short detour leads to the Refuge d'Entre-le-Lac.

Leave the crossroads in the centre of **Landry** by following the road uphill as signposted for Peisey-Nancroix. After crossing a bridge over the **Ponturin Torrent**, turn left as signposted and marked along a narrow road, passing between

DAY 10 – LANDRY TO REFUGE D'ENTRE-LE-LAC (GR5)



houses. When a crossroads is reached, turn right up the Chemin de l'Eglise. The road ends abruptly and a path continues climbing up a wooded slope.

The path joins a road and a left turn reveals the village church and its striking little tower.

However, keep well to the right of it and adjacent

buildings, to follow a path signposted further up the wooded slope. When another stretch of road is reached, turn left, then right and climb further up the wooded slope. When the next stretch of road is reached, turn right, then quickly left to continue up another path. There are clearings in the wood, and the next time the road is crossed, simply continue straight ahead, climbing past a building to reach a vehicle track, where a hamlet lies to the left.

45min **Le Martorey 1132m (3714ft)**

Cross over the track, turn right at a junction and continue as marked, following paths that rise across the wooded slope. The track could be followed, but it is a little longer and rather bendy, so it takes more time. The path joins the track at a bend around 1300m (4265ft) and continues through woods to reach buildings at **Les Côtes**. Follow the track through woods and fields, descending gently to join a road at **Le Villaret**.

Look up to see the cables of the Vanoise Express.

Walk down the road, or Route des Côtes, which is very narrow as it squeezes past buildings. Reach a junction near the wayside chapel of St Pierre and walk straight ahead, then keep left along the Route de la Lonzone. ◀ Pass several large chalet-style buildings, then keep left at another junction, along the Rue des Monts d'Argent. Follow this road through the centre of **Peisey-Nancroix**, passing older buildings, eventually reaching a junction with the main D87 road.

1hr **Peisey-Nancroix 1300m (4265ft)** *Hotels, chambres d'hôte, shops, post office, free bus to Landry and Rosuel; Parc National de la Vanoise information, tel 04 79 62 30 54, TIC tel 04 79 07 94 28; www.peisey-vallandry.com.*

Turn left to follow the D87 road, which soon has a fenced-off path alongside it. Turn right at a junction and follow a winding road downhill, passing the chapel of Ste Agathe. Keep left of the Place des Quatre Zoé and follow the Route du Vieux Moulin down to a bridge.

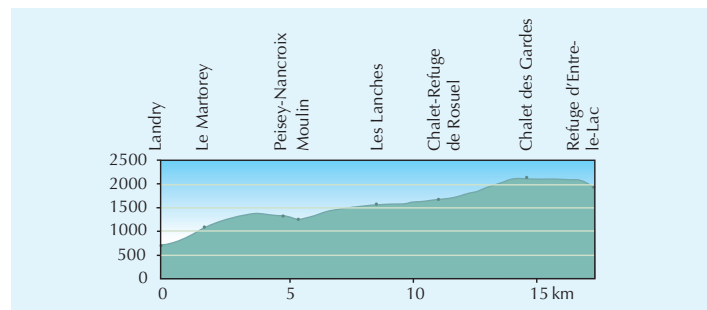
15min **Moulin 1264m (4147ft)**

Continue upstream along the track. This is rough and stony in places, climbing steeply at times. Join another track and turn left to walk down to Le Pont Romane (access to **Nancroix** for restaurant and free bus to Peisey and Rosuel). Continue up the track to reach a campsite and sporting area as tarmac appears (*gîte d'étape* and restaurant at end of road). The GR5 steps up to the right to continue, crossing a stream and following a forest track to a large building.

40min **Palais de la Mine 1500m (4920ft)**

Palais de la Mine

L'École Française des Mines was created in Paris in 1783, to regulate the mining industry and to train workers in all aspects of mining. The Corps des Mines was instituted in 1784, consisting of uniformed mining engineers. The Palais de la Mine, now derelict, was the centre of an 18th–19th century lead- and silver-mining site. The ore veins ran through schist and quartzite beds in the mountains.



The metal was largely destined for military use, and English and German miners were employed where specialist knowledge was needed.

Pass below the building, then turn right up another track, crossing two rivers using bridges close together. Walk down to a road and turn quickly right and left, then right again at **Les Lanches**, at 1520m (4987ft) (*buvette*). Follow a track past lovely little houses, then turn left to cross a bridge, and right to continue upstream. Follow the track towards farm buildings, enjoying a fine view of the higher valley. Turn right to cross the river to reach a car park and road, then turn left to reach a *refuge*.

20min **Chalet-Refuge de Rosuel 1556m (5105ft)** *Refuge and restaurant; Parc National de la Vanoise information; free bus to Peisey and Landry; bearded vultures nest nearby*

Just past the *refuge*, turn right along a track, and right again along a path. Pass larches, then climb gently across a flowery slope and continue through tree scrub. Cross a streambed and traverse another open slope, then follow the path up through more extensive tree scrub. Pass beneath a frowning cliff of schist, then the gradient eases among larches, and views stretch back along the valley and up to nearby peaks, while slender cascades pour down the mountainsides. Climb more steeply, and the gradient eases again near a little chalet. Climb again past ice-smoothed gneiss bedrock, on which masses of limestone boulders lie. Cross a stream and head for a signpost.

Note a choice of routes, with the GR5C turning right down the track, and a variant continuing ahead for the Crête de Peyrolle.

junction. Climb gently towards a col, where the track ends in a turning circle. ◀

30min **Col de Barteaux 2380m (7810ft)**

Turn right to follow the GR5C down a vehicle track, quickly turning left along a path that generally contours across the mountainside to **Croix du Pied**. The path crosses the bed of the Torrent de Ste Élizabeth and descends into forest, becoming more convoluted. Watch for junctions and eventually link with a track in the Bois de l'Ours that leads to a huddle of buildings.

2hr **Serre Lan 1848m (6063ft)** Water

Continue as marked and signposted, following a clear track that rises gradually across a forested slope. Reach a junction with the variant route at a viewpoint.

30min **Croix de Toulouse 1973m (6437ft)** View of forts around Briançon, along the valley and up to the Col des Ayes.

A *via ferrata* drops straight down towards Briançon, but ordinary walkers will follow the path signposted 'Briançon par le Fort des Salettes'. Zigzag downhill, passing the Font de Bon Repos on one bend (water). One minute there are views to the Col de Montgenèvre, then there are views between the pines of Briançon. Eventually the zigzag path lands beside a fort.

45min **Fort des Salettes 1452m (4764ft)** Occasionally open for visits; view of other forts around Briançon

Walk down a track towards a cliff used by rock climbers. Watch for a path down to the left, then continue straight down a track. Walk down a minor road to reach a busy road. Cross over to reach fortified ramparts near the Porte de Pignerol.

15min **Cité Vauban 1330m (4365ft)** All services, being part of Briançon

The GR5C doesn't pass through the ramparts, but turns right and follows them downhill to the **Porte d'Embrun**, where

it rejoins the main GR5. Continue down the Chemin Vieux, then left again after a school, down a stepped path on a well-wooded slope. Watch for red/white markers, or if a wrong turning is made, simply follow the **Durance Rivière** downstream. Enter a dirt car park and turn left to cross a bridge. Turn right through another car park to reach a road junction and roundabout. Turn left to start climbing the Col de l'Izoard road, but after the footway runs out, turn right down another road, which leads to a road junction and roundabout near the railway station.

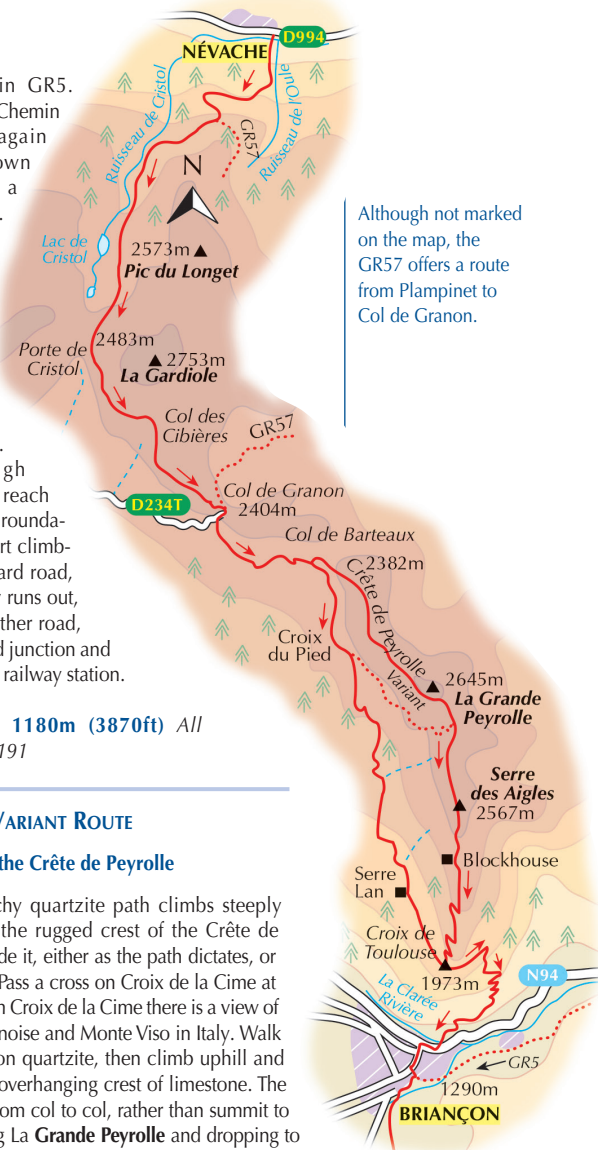
30min **Briançon 1180m (3870ft)** All services – see page 191

VARIANT ROUTE

Along the Crête de Peyrolle

A well-worn, crunchy quartzite path climbs steeply uphill. Walk along the rugged crest of the Crête de Peyrolle – or alongside it, either as the path dictates, or your ability permits. Pass a cross on Croix de la Cime at 2603m (8540ft). From Croix de la Cime there is a view of the Ecrins, distant Vanoise and Monte Viso in Italy. Walk down to a col, still on quartzite, then climb uphill and outflank a dramatic overhanging crest of limestone. The narrow path heads from col to col, rather than summit to summit. After passing La **Grande Peyrolle** and dropping to

Although not marked on the map, the GR57 offers a route from Plampinet to Col de Granon.



a col, note the variant route zigzagging up from a steep-sided combe. Keep close to the rocky crest, or even walk along it, to reach the final summit on the ridge, and the last of the extensive views.

1hr 45min **Serre des Aigles 2567m (8422ft)**

The descent is very steep and rocky, so follow the red/white marked path faithfully. The path surface can be bare rock, or loose stones, so take care throughout. After this initial nasty stretch, a better path zigzags down past a few pines to reach a col and a derelict **blockhouse**. Climb past the building on its left-hand side, then follow a well-engineered path downhill. Sometimes it has been cut into the limestone and sometimes it features a built-up edge. The gradient is gentle, but pines press in on both sides at times. Zigzag downhill to a track near a wooden building and transmitter mast. Follow the track down to some ruined stone buildings, then turn left up to a viewpoint at **Croix de Toulouse**.

DAY 19

Briançon to Brunissard

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Distance | 22 kilometres (13½ miles) |
| Total Ascent | 1425 metres (4675 feet) |
| Total Descent | 860 metres (2820 feet) |
| Time | 6 hours |
| Maps: | 3536 OT and 3537 ET |
| Nature of Terrain | City suburbs give way to fields and forest, with a long and gradual climb to a high col. Good paths and tracks lead downhill. |
| Food and Drink | <i>Buvette</i> at Chalets des Ayes. Restaurants at Brunissard. |
| Accommodation | <i>Côte</i> off-route at Villard St Pancrace. Campsite near Brunissard. <i>Côte</i> in Brunissard. |

The GR5 is anything but direct as it leaves Briançon, striving to avoid busy roads in the suburbs. A forested valley is visited on the way to Villard St Pancrace, then a lengthy dirt road leads through a forested valley to the Chalets des Ayes. A forest path climbs higher, then trees give way to open slopes on the final approach to the Col des Ayes. The GR5 enters the Parc Naturel Régional du Queyras, enjoying remarkable scenery to Brunissard.

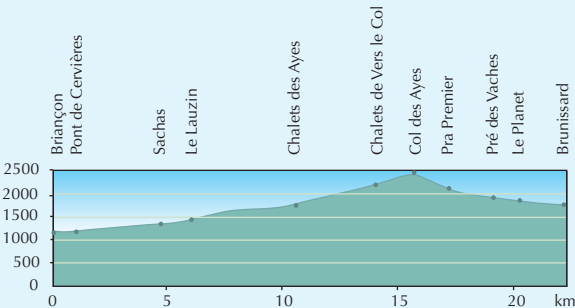
If starting from the railway station at **Briançon**, follow the road signposted for Villard St Pancrace. Take the next turning right from a roundabout, which is the GR5. Follow the road to another roundabout and continue straight ahead past the Hotel St Antoine. The road later crosses a bridge.

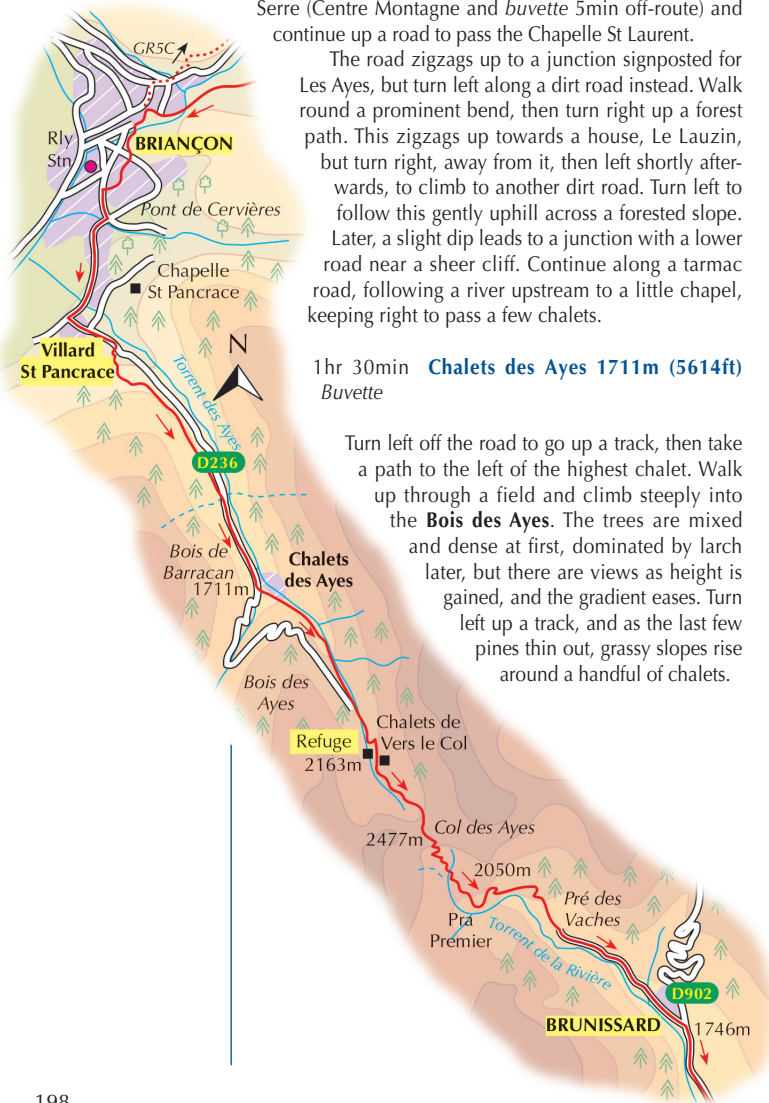
15min **Pont de Cervières 1200m (3940ft)**

Follow the road onwards as marked, passing houses and fields on the way towards **Villard St Pancrace** and its suburb of Sachas.

30min **Sachas 1240m (4070ft)** Villard St Pancrace 10min off-route for gîte d'étape, post office, bar and restaurant

Turn left along Rue des Ayes, then right to cross a bridge over a river. Continue straight up a path, the Chemin du





Serre (Centre Montagne and *buvette* 5min off-route) and continue up a road to pass the Chapelle St Laurent.

The road zigzags up to a junction signposted for Les Ayes, but turn left along a dirt road instead. Walk round a prominent bend, then turn right up a forest path. This zigzags up towards a house, Le Lauzin, but turn right, away from it, then left shortly afterwards, to climb to another dirt road. Turn left to follow this gently uphill across a forested slope. Later, a slight dip leads to a junction with a lower road near a sheer cliff. Continue along a tarmac road, following a river upstream to a little chapel, keeping right to pass a few chalets.

1 hr 30min **Chalets des Ayes 1711m (5614ft)**
Buvette

Turn left off the road to go up a track, then take a path to the left of the highest chalet. Walk up through a field and climb steeply into the **Bois des Ayes**. The trees are mixed and dense at first, dominated by larch later, but there are views as height is gained, and the gradient eases. Turn left up a track, and as the last few pines thin out, grassy slopes rise around a handful of chalets.

1 hr 15min **Chalets de Vers le Col 2163m (7096ft)** *Basic unstaffed refuge*

Just before the end of the track, a path climbs to the left. Follow it up grassy slopes, crossing limestone and quartzite scree, aiming for a high col.

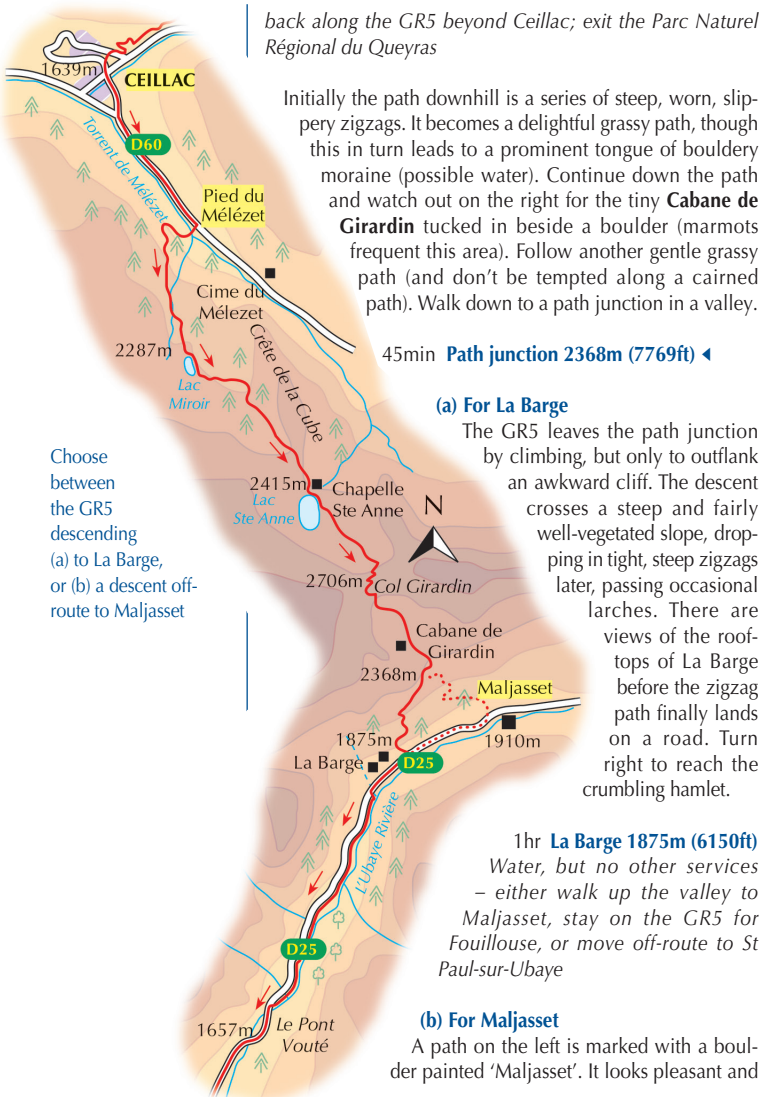
45min **Col des Ayes 2477m (8127ft)** *View back to the suburbs of Briançon and the Ecrins; view ahead as far as Monte Viso, in Italy; enter the Parc Naturel Régional du Queyras*

Zigzag down a path on a slope covered in wiry tufts of grass, noting a transition underfoot from quartzite back to limestone. The path overlooks a lovely grassy valley containing a few chalets overlooked by mountains. Land on a dirt road beside some sheds and turn left downhill. The scene changes dramatically, revealing a looming cliff overlooking a flat grassy area and small lake. The dirt road zigzags down a scree slope, but walkers can short-cut part way down, reaching a car park beside the grass.

45min **Pra Premier 2050m (6725ft)**

Chalets des Ayes, on the way to the Col des Ayes





After passing the Cabane de Girardin, walkers can descend either to La Barge or Maljasset

easy, but gradually steepens on a loose and stony slope that needs care. The first sight of Maljasset is almost an aerial view, revealing a huddle of houses and a chapel standing alone in fields. Pass a few larches before finally landing beside the village.

1hr **Maljasset 1905m (6250ft)** Refuge, gîte d'étape, maison d'hôte, restaurant; Sherpa minibus by arrangement, tel 06 88 68 06 41

DAY 22

La Barge/Maljasset to Larche

Distance
Total Ascent
Total Descent
Time
Maps
Nature of Terrain

27 kilometres (17 miles)
1170 metres (3840 feet)
1395 metres (4575 feet)
8 hours 15 minutes
3537 ET and 3637 OT
A long road-walk, followed by a steep, forested climb and gradual ascent through a valley. Two high cols are linked by a good path and track. A grassy descent leads to Larche.

Food and Drink

Restaurants off-route at St Paul-sur-Ubaye, and at Fouillouse and Larche.

Accommodation

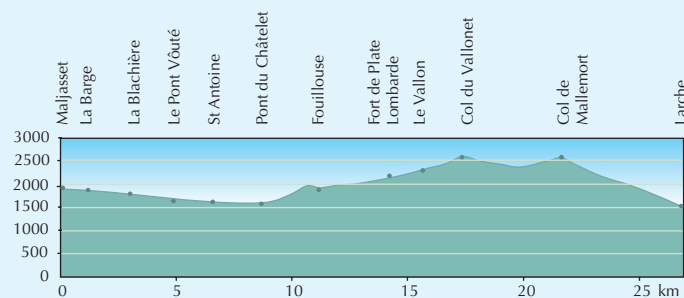
Lodgings off-route at St Paul-sur-Ubaye. *Gîte* at Fouillouse. Hotel, *gîtes* and campsite at Larche.

Lying between the Parc Naturel Régional du Queyras and Parc National du Mercantour, the scenery in these parts is by no means diminished for being excluded from protection. The only drawback is the long road-walk through the Vallon de Maurin, and it takes time for the route to get back into the mountains. Once crossing high cols again, interesting ruined military sites are seen. One fort was built at 2772m (9094ft) on top of the Tête de Virayse.

Leave **Maljasset** and walk down the road through the Vallon de Maurin, passing a point where the GR5 lands on the road. Continue through a crumbling hamlet.

15min **La Barge 1875m (6150ft)** *Water*

Follow the road down through a forested part of the valley, with views of soaring rocky peaks and **L'Ubaye Rivière** from time to time. Cross a road bridge, then follow the route between the road and the river, later passing a hydroelectric plant. Continue between the road and the river, later

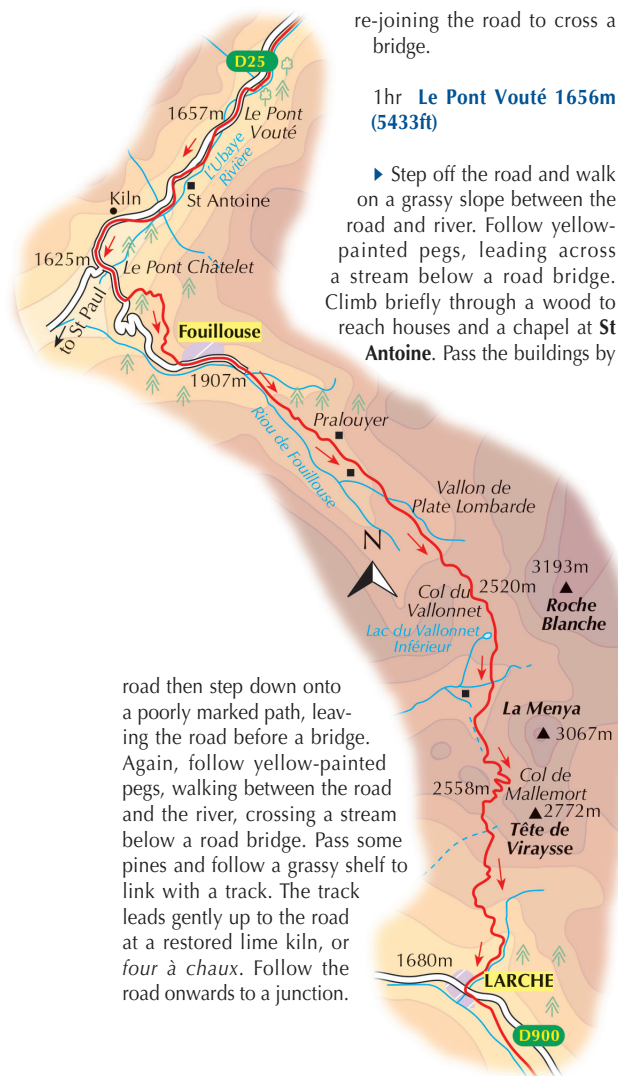


re-joining the road to cross a bridge.

1hr **Le Pont Vouté 1656m (5433ft)**

► Step off the road and walk on a grassy slope between the road and river. Follow yellow-painted pegs, leading across a stream below a road bridge. Climb briefly through a wood to reach houses and a chapel at **St Antoine**. Pass the buildings by

The GR5 is also signed along the road to the 1625m junction. If your feet can stand it, this is a quicker route.



road then step down onto a poorly marked path, leaving the road before a bridge. Again, follow yellow-painted pegs, walking between the road and the river, crossing a stream below a road bridge. Pass some pines and follow a grassy shelf to link with a track. The track leads gently up to the road at a restored lime kiln, or *four à chaux*. Follow the road onwards to a junction.