

# The Ecrins National Park



## What is a national park ?

It is usually a large area in which the wealth of biological resources, the nature of the landscapes, the cultural value and continuation of past traditions require protection and management in order to preserve a unique heritage.

The French law of the 14 April 2006 stipulates that parks are made up of a core and partnership zone. The core zone is a protected and unspoiled area which is subject to special rules, whilst the partnership zone is governed by a charter adopted by the relevant communes.

The park's status is reviewed every 15 years, and each park represents an ecological partnership between the core zone and surrounding areas whereby the economic value of the natural resources is promoted in tandem with sustainable development in the communes.

Each national park is managed by a public body affiliated to the Ministry for Ecology and Sustainable Development.

## The Ecrins: history, land and aims

The Park's history goes back a long way. It emerged briefly as the Bérarde National Park in 1913, but only in 1973 was the Ecrins National Park officially established in response to pressure from mountaineers, nature organisations and the French Alpine Club.

The Park is divided into sectors, each of which is managed by a team of field workers who are responsible for organising the day-to-day work within the huge area.

The permanent visitor centres are places where the public can obtain information and meet local stakeholders.

The sectors are located within two départements – the Hautes Alpes and Isère – and two regions: Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Rhône-Alpes.

The sectoral teams work closely with the management and the head office in Gap (scientific, land management, visitors & communication, and administration services). The Ecrins National Park is one of ten French national parks ; the others are La Vanoise, Port-Cros, the Pyrennes, the Cevennes, the Calanques, Mercantour, Guadeloupe, La Réunion and French Guiana.



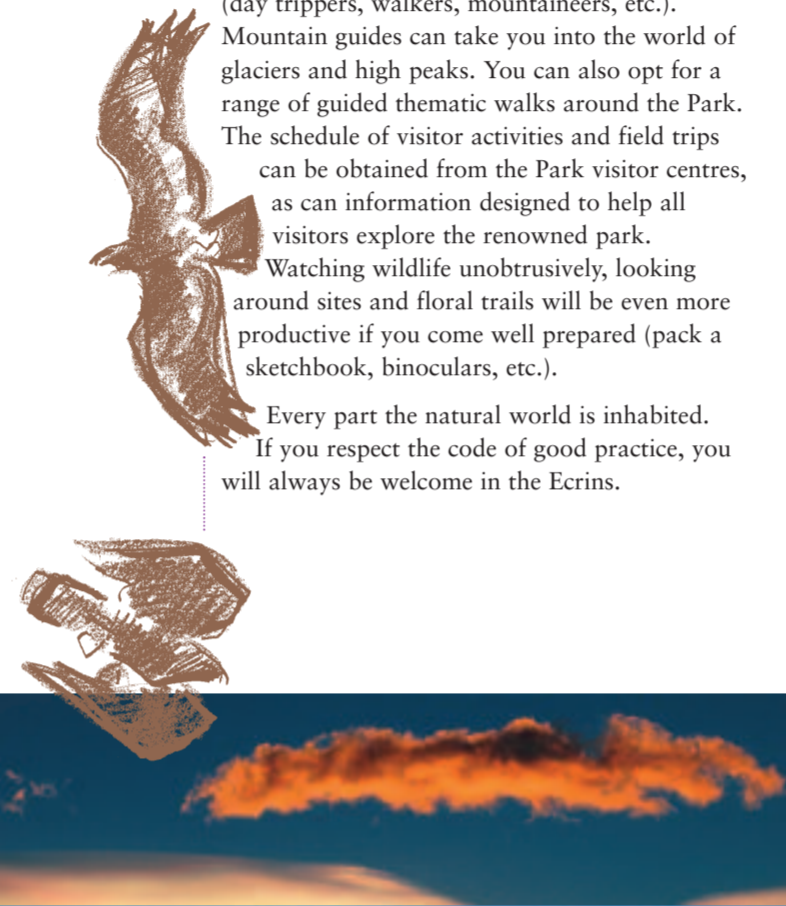
## Exploring the high-altitude Park

Situated between Gap, Grenoble and Briançon, the Ecrins National Park is bounded by the watersheds of the Romanche to the north, the Guisane and Durance to the east and south, and the Drac to the west. The high mountain area is structured around the chain of major peaks, and the complex massif culminates in the Barre des Ecrins at 4,102 m. More than 150 peaks are over 3,000 m high, and the valley floors are at around 1,000 m above sea level. The Park's core zone can only be explored on foot.

The network of 700 km of paths is maintained regularly to satisfy the demands of professionals (shepherds, guides, hut wardens) and the public (day trippers, walkers, mountaineers, etc.). Mountain guides can take you into the world of glaciers and high peaks. You can also opt for a range of guided thematic walks around the Park. The schedule of visitor activities and field trips can be obtained from the Park visitor centres, as an information designed to help all visitors explore the renowned park.

Watching wildlife unobtrusively, looking around sites and floral trails will be even more productive if you come well prepared (pack a sketchbook, binoculars, etc.).

Every part the natural world is inhabited. If you respect the code of good practice, you will always be welcome in the Ecrins.

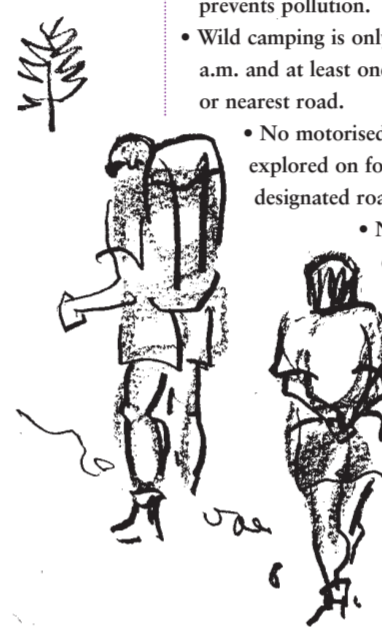


## Park core zone rules

The core zone is an unspoiled area that is open to everyone and is governed by a code of good practice.



- No dogs, not even on a lead, so as not to disturb the wildlife and livestock.
- No picking flowers or taking samples: animals, plants, minerals and fossils are all part of the scenery.
- No firearms: all animals in the core zone are protected.
- Do not leave litter. Keep the natural world unspoiled.
- No fires: they can cause forest fires and damage the soil.
- Avoid making too much noise. Let everyone enjoy the zone in peace.
- No camping: this preserves the beautiful scenery and prevents pollution.
- Wild camping is only permitted between 7 p.m. and 9 a.m. and at least one hour's walk from the park limits or nearest road.
- No motorised vehicles: the area can only be explored on foot; cars are only permitted on designated roads.
- No mountain bikes: the area can only be explored on foot, and the paths are only designed for use by walkers.
- Flying at less than 1,000 m above the ground is forbidden.



## A few key figures

Created	27 March 1973
Core zone	91 800 ha
Optimum partnership perimeter	180 000 ha
Number of communes	46, 35 in the Hautes-Alpes, and 11 in Isère
Altitude range	710 - 4,102 m (Barre des Ecrins)
Paths	700 km of maintained paths, 146 footbridges and bridges
Flora	1,800 plant species, including 168 plants important in our heritage
Fauna	75 mammals, 235 birds, 16 reptiles, 10 amphibians and 21 fish identified
Glaciers	7 120 ha
(Summer) alpine meadows	68 800 ha
Forest	41 422 ha

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## The Lauvitel Nature Reserve

The only strict reserve in France was created in 1995 and is managed by the Ecrins National Park. All human activities are banned. The strict nature reserve is used to study nature in its natural state. The only activities that are permitted are scientific cataloguing, taking measurements, surveys, reports and monitoring.

The aim is to create a reference site for comparison with similar locations where farming, forestry and tourist activities are present.



## Wildlife



The wealth of animal life in the Ecrins (over 350 species of vertebrates) is the result of the extremely varied environmental conditions: the Mediterranean pine vole and ocellated lizard, both species from southern climes, live alongside the snow vole and ptarmigan, which are survivors from the last Ice Age. Only a fraction of the invertebrate population has been discovered. When the Park was created, there were only 3,000 chamois in the area.

There are now nearly 15,000 of the iconic animals. Reintroduction programmes have brought the ibex back, and almost 600 animals can now be seen on the rocky mountainsides. Although some species are only present in summer, others have successfully adapted to cope with the harsh winter climate. The marmot settles into a long deep sleep, the mountain hare and ptarmigan adopt white camouflage, and the black grouse builds protective snow burrows. The animals are sensitive to disturbances, and conservation is largely dependant on keeping control of various winter sports (skiing, snowshoe walkers, etc.).

The golden eagle which symbolises the Park has been the subject of regular censuses since 1985. Larger birds can also be seen overhead: bearded vultures, griffon vultures and black vultures. The Park's location and the diversity of environments has prompted large predators such as the wolf and lynx have chosen to return of their own accord.

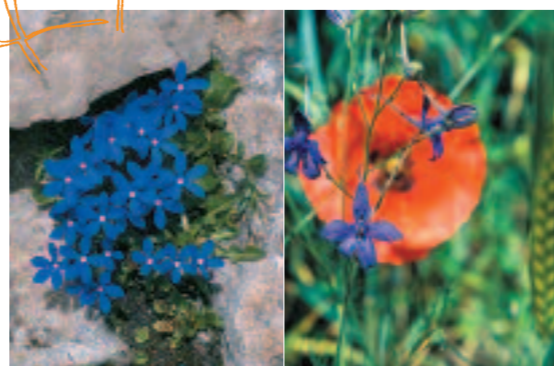


## Flowers and plant life

Over 1,800 different plants have been identified in the National Park. The diversity is the result of the different vegetation levels (710 to 4,102 m). Around 400 species have shaped the scenery. Larches have made their mark in the east of the park. Above the tree line, Alpine juniper dominates the southern slopes, whilst rhododendrons populate the north-facing hillsides. Around 168 plant species are of particular value, from protected species (potentilla delphinensis, Alpine sea holly) to species classified in the French red list of rare and endangered species (cotoneaster atlanticus, Briançon apricot). Lichens are found everywhere, and are often the last outposts of the plant world, tinting the screes and giving every site its own personalised colour scheme. The plant life is evolving as the climate changes. We are seeing a dramatic decline in species dating back to the Ice Ages (downy birch, two-colour sedge) whilst the aspen, which traditionally grows on the plains, is taking over the heaths and rocky ground.



The Ecrins National Park therefore needs proactive conservation policies, and relies on flower registers and a map of the natural environments.



## Architectural heritage

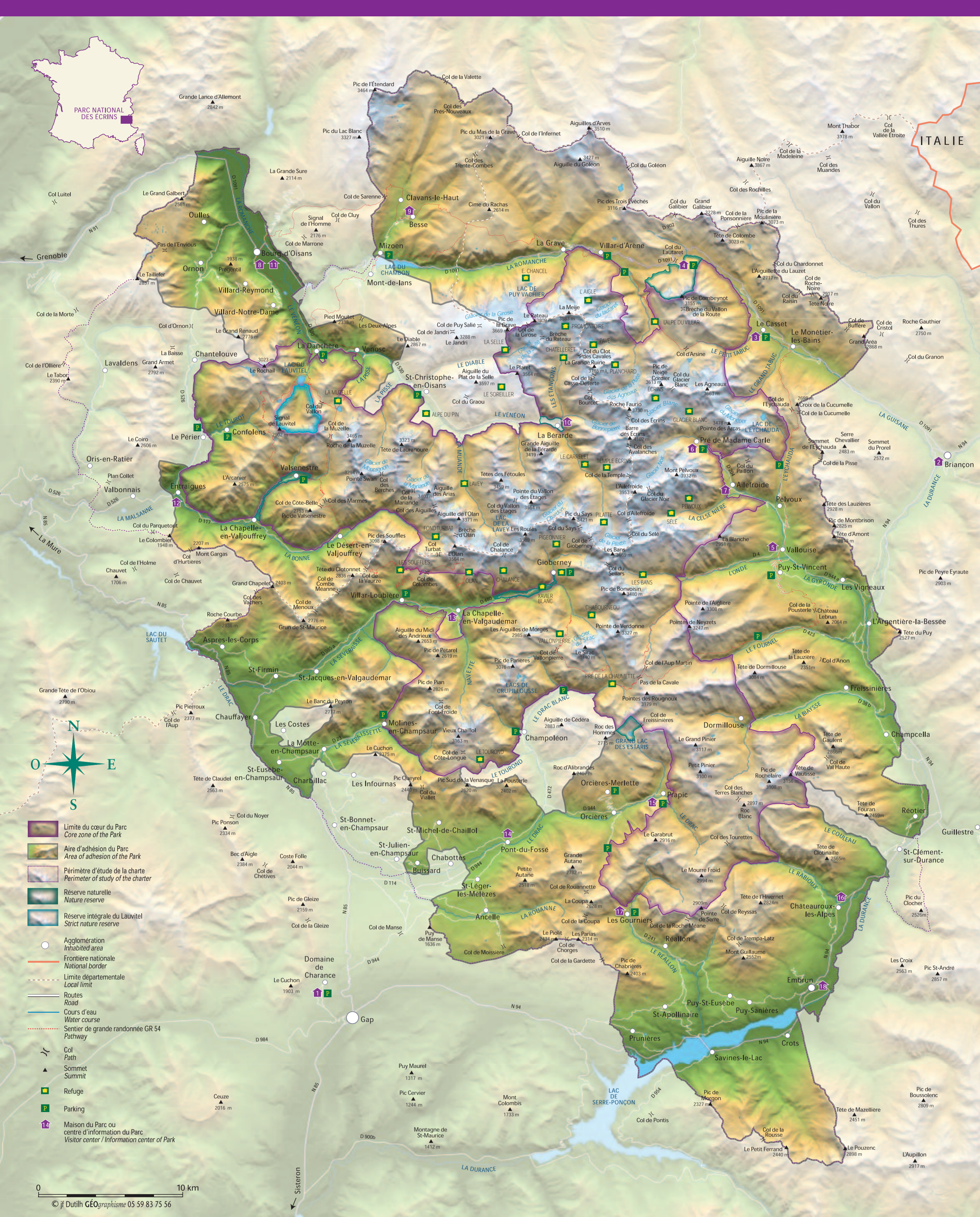
The valleys of the Ecrins are remarkable for the range of natural resources, but the cultural heritage of architecture and farmed landscapes are equally diverse. Despite this variety, all architecture in the region applies the same basic principles: living in the mountains entails building on a slope using materials found nearby. The use of local resources makes for originality and strength. The approach supplies added value in the form of the traditional skills and techniques required to construct buildings. Although the architecture applies the same basic principles, the results in each valley are unique and individual, being even more strongly influenced by the traditional local culture and the particularities of geography and geology. In some parts, tuff is used in the design and construction of windows and quoins; in other places, blue limestone features mark out the places where humans dwell in large multipurpose buildings. All of this practical architecture is part of our history, the legacy of a pastoral way of life that has endured to the present day, and forms a backdrop as visitors explore and learn about the Park.



## Different landscapes

Within the Ecrins, humans are increasingly trying to blend in, leaving the scale and wild nature of the features and sites untouched. The Park is structured around a network of central high peaks which are the foundation of its history and reputation. The large glaciers have carved deep and distinctive valleys in the huge rocky massif, which in turn provide access to the high peaks. Coils, landscapes and the position of the hillsides influence the distribution of different species, wildlife movements, where humans settle and farm, and tourist activities within the mountain community. From each point of entry to the Ecrins, visitors travel through man-made farmed, forested and grazing land to reach the untamed high mountains. Each valley is unique in terms of geography, culture and human presence. From Vallouise, Embrunais, Champsaur and Valgaudemar to Valbonnais, the Oisans and the Haut-Briançonnais, merely reciting the names gives a sense of the varied landscapes and atmospheres that combine to form the imposing Ecrins massif.





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