



Parc national  
du Mercantour

*Discover the valleys  
of Merveilles and  
Fontanalba*

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#### **Photo credits**

Front cover: rock engravings in the Vallée des Merveilles, P. Richaud. p.1: Alpine ibex, P. Pierini/PNM - Fly orchid, L. Martin-Dhermont/PNM - p.2: The Roya in autumn, E. Le Bouteiller/PNM - p.3: The town of Tende and the Roya valley, F. Chapelut/PNM - p.4: Rock engraving in the Vallée des Merveilles (the Sorcerer), J. Molinier /PNM - p.5: The Cime des Merveilles, J. Molinier/PNM - Rock engraving in the Vallée des Merveilles (horned animals with yoke and plough), J. Molinier/PNM - Mount Bego and one of the twin lakes of Fontanalba, J-M. Cevasco/PNM - p.8: Hikers led by an approved "Merveilles" guide, J. Molinier/PNM - p.10: Hikers before the vitrified wall, MGD - p.11: Hikers, all-terrain vehicle, SLAM, - p.12: Façade and exhibition hall of the Musée des Merveilles, statuette, MDM - Rock engravings, J. Molinier/PNM - p.13: Hikers, MGD, flock of sheep in the Vallée des Merveilles, R. Charmetant/PNM - Back cover: rock engravings, J. Molinier/PNM.



# *Mercantour National Park*

A National Park is an area that is recognised as exceptional for its biodiversity, its landscapes and its cultural heritage. At the same time, it is a classification which guarantees national and international recognition of its wealth, and a tool that ensures their preservation for future generations.

Its role is also to support the sustainable development of the territory and to raise awareness among the public of the need to protect the environment, by spreading out knowledge and inviting people to discover the area.

## *Wildlife to preserve*

Composed of large ungulates (chamois, ibex...), emblematic mammals (wolf, ermine...), rare birds (black grouse, golden eagle, bearded vulture...), diverse reptiles and insects, the fauna of the Mercantour is very varied. It includes several hundred species, with a significant number of rare species.

Thanks to the joint actions of the Mercantour and Alpi Marittime National Parks, some of these ani-



mals, which had been threatened with extinction, once again frequent this cross-border mountain. Hikers who move quietly will undoubtedly have the chance to observe them.



## *A flora unique in Europe*

The multiple climatic, geological and geographical influences impacting on a wide range of environments at altitudes ranging from 150 m to over 3,000 m mean that the Mercantour enjoys a rare wealth of plant species. More than 2,000 species of plants may be observed here, nearly half of all those known in France.

Many species are specific to the Southern Alps and six of them are only present in the Argentera-Mercantour cross-border mountain chain.

# *The valleys of Roya and Bévéra*

## *From the Alps to the Mediterranean*

This historical route connecting the Mediterranean and Piedmont has preserved many treasures, which are sometimes well hidden.

There is a strongly Mediterranean atmosphere in the Bévéra valley, the southernmost part of the Park. Holm oak grows in the gorges of Piao while in the Sospel basin olive trees rub shoulders with cypresses, rockrose and citrus trees. After crossing the famous medieval bridge of Sospel and passing through the village of Moulinet, visitors can reach the site of Authion, with its military fortifications, which offers both a superb panorama over the summits of the Mercantour and views towards the French Riviera.

At the beginning of the valley you cross the village of Breil, with its Genoese gate. Further away, the villages of Saorge, Fontan and La Brigue harbour a very interesting built heritage, including religious monuments.

At the heart of the Roya valley, the medieval town of Tende bears witness to a cross-border cultural legacy. Situated between Piedmont and the Mediterranean, this former merchant city located on the salt road, became French in 1947.

Finally, above the small valley of Castérino, in the commune of Tende, the famous valleys of Merveilles, Fontanalba and Valmasque take centre stage.









# *The valleys of Merveilles and Fontanalba*



## *An open-air museum*

Mount Bego dominates this vast territory dotted with thousands of rock engravings. Two high and broad valleys frame this mountain: Merveilles and Fontanalba. They were shaped by glaciers that disappeared 10,000 years ago, leaving behind them finely polished rocky slabs and numerous lakes.

Classified as a Historical Monument in 1989, these valleys are home to an exceptional archaeological heritage. More than 50,000 rock engravings were produced between 3,000 B.C. and last century.

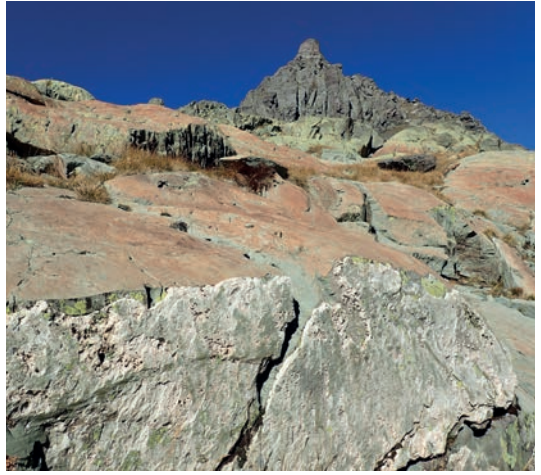
From the end of the Neolithic, through the Bronze and Iron Ages and the Roman period up to the medieval and modern eras, these motifs engraved on the stone reflect the day-to-day practices and religious beliefs of humankind through the ages. The engravings of bovine figures, yokes, weapons, and geometric figures belong to the prehistoric period, while motifs of coats of arms, firearms, texts, and pastoral and folk images date from a more recent historical period.



## *The “Vallée des Merveilles”*

Located to the west of Mount Bego and perched at an altitude of more than 2,000 meters, it presents the austere beauty of a stony and chaotic landscape, beneath towering summits reflected in numerous lakes with evocative names.

Here, especially emblematic engravings are to be found, reflecting themes combining daily life and religious beliefs.

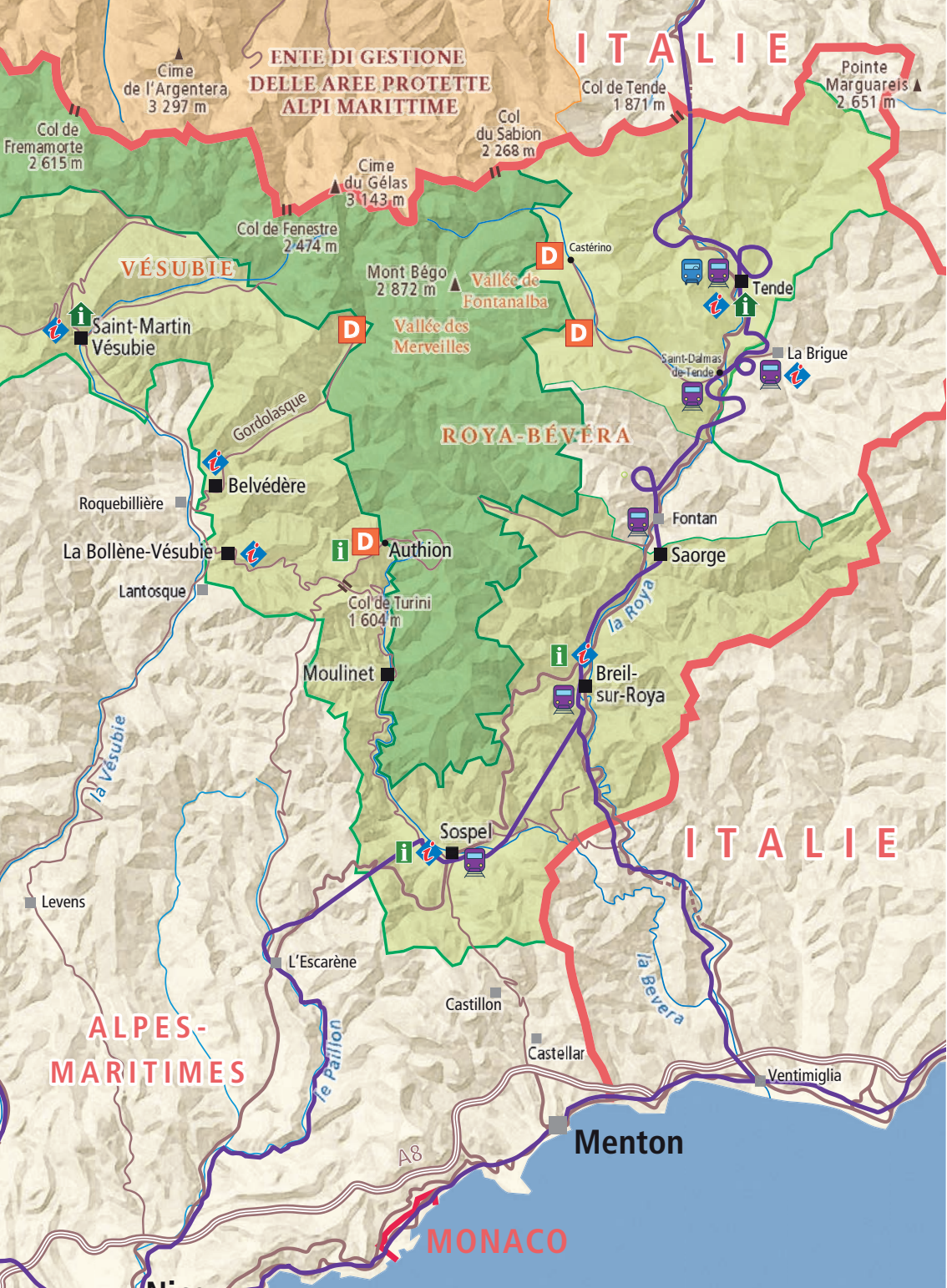


## *The “Vallée de Fontanalba”*

On the eastern slope of Mount Bego, the engraved rocks in this valley lie in an open and welcoming environment where the local flora reveals itself in all its richness. The engravings illustrate the pastoral life of the first shepherds of the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods, as evidenced by the renowned “Sacred Way”.







ENTE DI GESTIONE  
DELLE AREE PROTETTE  
ALPI MARITIME

VÉSUBIE

ROYA-BÉVERA

ITALIE

ITALIE

ALPES-  
MARITIMES

MONACO

- Cœur du parc
- Aire d'adhésion à la Charte de Parc
- Route
- Voie ferrée
- Gares principales du train des Merveilles
- Navette vers Castérino

- Maison du Parc
- Point info du Parc
- Office du tourisme
- Départ de randonnée vers les vallées des Merveilles et de Fontanalba







## Walking times

### To the Vallée des Merveilles

Lac de Mesches car park > Refuge des Merveilles:  
3 hours (+700m) (starting point for guided tours).

Refuge de Valmasque > Baisse de Valmasque:  
2 hours (+350m).

Refuge des Merveilles > Baisse de Valmasque:  
2 hours (+450m).

### To the Vallée de Fontanalba

Castérino car park > Refuge de Fontanalba:  
1.5 hours (+500m).

Valmasque car park > Refuge de Fontanalba:  
2 hours (+300m).

Refuge de Fontanalba > Lacs Jumeaux (starting point for guided tours): 45 minutes (+200m).

Refuge de Fontanalba > Baisse de Fontanalba:  
2.5 hours (+550m).

Baisse de Fontanalba > Baisse de Valmasque:  
45 minutes (+200m).

Valmasque car park > Refuge de Valmasque:  
2.5 hours (+500m).

### Other routes to the Vallée des Merveilles

From the Vésubie valley, take the direction of Belvédère (Gordolasque valley) up to the Countet car park, the road terminus. Allow 4 hours from the Pont du Countet to the Refuge des Merveilles via the Arpette pass (+820m / -400m).

From Authion site (Col de Turini - Peira Cava), take the GR 52 in the direction of the Vallée des Merveilles. Allow 5 hours walk to the Refuge des Merveilles.



## *Excerpt from the Park regulations*



Collecting minerals, fossils, plants or animals is prohibited. Some plants with medicinal or culinary uses can be collected under certain conditions.



Dumping, leaving or discarding waste, regardless of the location, is prohibited. Biodegradable waste should not be thrown away either. Please take your rubbish home with you.



Hunting, or carrying a weapon and ammunition usable for hunting are prohibited.



Making noise and causing disruption that disturbs the peace and quiet of the Park is prohibited.



Dogs, even on a leash or carried, are prohibited. The regulations provide for certain exceptions (guarding livestock, guide and hearing dogs...).



Circulation and parking of motor vehicles (cars, motorcycles, mopeds...) is prohibited except on certain routes provided for in the regulations.



Restricted cycling: allowed only on roads open to public traffic and certain trails.



Fires are not permitted. The use of hiking stoves is authorised, provided they are placed at least 200 m from the edge of woodlands and forests.

**More information and the full park regulations are available at: [www.mercantour.eu](http://www.mercantour.eu)**

**Additional specific regulations apply to the zone of engravings, see next page.**



# Options for exploring the area

## Free hiking on authorised trails

The trails, lined with rock engravings, are equipped with information panels which enable visitors to explore the site freely. In order to preserve its beauty, it is essential to scrupulously observe the specific regulations of the zone.

## Regulations specific to the engravings zone



It is forbidden to leave the marked trails, in order to avoid damage to vegetation and increased soil erosion.



It is forbidden to walk on the engravings.



It is forbidden to touch or otherwise damage the engravings.



It is forbidden to use metal-tipped walking sticks or poles.



Camping is prohibited in the whole engravings zone, with the exception of the designated camping areas alongside the Merveilles and Fontanalba refuges.

More information and the full park regulations are available at: [www.mercantour.eu](http://www.mercantour.eu)

## Discover the engravings with an “approved Merveilles” guide

This approval is mandatory for professionals wishing to guide groups to the site. It is issued by the National Park and the Regional Department of Cultural Affairs following a specific examination which demonstrates the guide’s knowledge of the

site. Guides, who make a particularly important contribution to the enhancement of the site, offer personalised visits and provide a wealth of explanations.

### *Why visit the site with an approved guide?*

The approved “Merveilles” guides offer personalised visits which enable:

- access to engravings located away from the trails,
- explanations of the various possible interpretations of the meaning of the engravings.

### *Visits accessible to all*

The Mercantour National Park has implemented two public service concessions, which allow the rock engravings to be discovered by the broadest possible public, with capped prices. These enable visitors to:

- leave the marked trails while benefitting from the knowledge of the guides from Merveilles Gravures et Découvertes;
- approach the site in an all-terrain motorised vehicle, followed by a guided walking tour of the engravings zone, with the guides from the Syndicat Local des Accompagnateurs 4x4 des Merveilles.

Find all the practical information on these concessions in the following pages.

# Guided walking tours

Merveilles Gravures et Découvertes (MGD) consists of mountain guides, all state-certified and "Merveilles" approved, who benefit from a public service concession in the Park. They offer regular visits from 15<sup>th</sup> June to 30<sup>th</sup> September, leaving from the CAF (French alpine club) Refuge des Merveilles and the Refuge de Service du Parc (near the Lacs Jumeaux of Fontanalba).



**Merveilles Gravures  
et Découvertes**

Daily departures	Vallée des Merveilles	Vallée de Fontanalba
From 15 <sup>th</sup> to 30 <sup>th</sup> June	08:00 and 13:00	11:00 and 14:00
July and August	08:00, 11:00, 13:00 and 15:00	11:00 and 14:00
September	08:00 and 13:00	11:00 and 14:00

## 2017 prices

€14 adults, €7 youth (12-17 years), children free (under 12). Concession and family rates available. More information from MGD.

## Contact

### Merveilles Gravures et Découvertes

06430 Tende

Tel: 0033(0)6.86.03.90.13

Mail : [info@vallee-merveilles.com](mailto:info@vallee-merveilles.com)

[www.vallee-merveilles.com](http://www.vallee-merveilles.com)

### Why a public service concession?

It enables to discover this major cultural site in the best possible conditions in terms of reception of the public and preservation of the site:

- groups limited to 15 persons (above this number, you will be invited to join the next tour),
- preferential rates,
- an online reservation system is currently being set up.







## *Visits with motorised access*

Professional guides organise walking tours with motorised access to the valleys of Merveilles and Fontanalba. Departure points from the Roya valley, from Tende and La Brigue.

Visits may be booked during the summer period, from mid-May to mid-November, depending on the snow and driving conditions.

The guided walking tour then explores one or the other of these glacial valleys.

The tour is done in small groups of 4 to 12 persons.

## *2017 prices*

€90 adults, €55 children (4-12 years), under 4 years free.



## *Contact*

### **Syndicat Local des Accompagnateurs 4x4 des Merveilles**

Complete list and contact information of the guides at: [www.4x4merveilles.com](http://www.4x4merveilles.com)

### *4x4s in the heart of the Park?*

This motorised traffic is duly regulated and licensed to professional guides by Mercantour National Park, making this archaeological mountain site accessible to all.

This activity, which pre-existed the creation of the National Park, aims to evolve towards lower-impact practices. The concession plans a gradual transition to the use of electric all-terrain vehicles.

# The “Musée des Merveilles”

This museum was created as part of the Alpes-Maritimes Department’s cultural policy in order to contribute to the protection of the exceptional heritage of Merveilles and Fontanalba. A repository of the vast amount of archaeological research carried out over more than a century, its scientific approach is the perfect complement to your visit to the Merveilles and Fontanalba sites, while also taking into account the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of the engravings.

## Contact

### Musée départemental des Merveilles

Avenue du 16 septembre 1947

06430 Tende

Tel: 0033.(0).4.93.04.32.50

[www.museedesmerveilles.com](http://www.museedesmerveilles.com)



## Useful information

Free admission. Closed on Tuesdays.







## *Useful contacts to prepare your visit*

### *In Roya-Bévéra*

#### **Tende**

"Maison du Parc" and Tourist Office  
Tel: 04 93 04 73 71  
[www.tendemerveilles.com](http://www.tendemerveilles.com)

Castérino summer information point  
Tel: 04 93 01 55 81

#### **La Brigue**

Tourist Office - Tel: 04 93 79 09 34

#### **Breil-Sur-Roya**

Tourist Office - Tel: 04 93 04 99 76

#### **Sospel**

Tourist Office - Tel: 04 93 04 15 80



### *In Vésubie*

#### **Saint-Martin-Vésubie**

"Maison du Parc" - Tel: 04 93 03 23 15  
Tourist Office - Tel: 04 93 03 21 28

#### **La Bollène-Vésubie**

Tourist Office - Tel: 04 93 03 60 54

#### **Belvédère**

Tourist Office - Tel: 04 93 03 51 66

### *Different partners present in the area*

During your visit to the site, you may come across archaeologists, EDF personnel (Electricité de France) ensuring the proper operation of the dams, or workers carrying out trail maintenance.

You are also very likely to encounter flocks of sheep or herds of cattle. A few things to remember to respect the work of farmers and avoid disturbing the animals: let the flock pass by and keep your distance. Where herding dogs are present, stay calm and avoid approaching them.

*More information at:  
[www.mercantour.eu](http://www.mercantour.eu)*

This brochure costs €1 and is offered to you free of charge. Please make good use of it.

The site of the Mount Bego rock engravings is undergoing a valorisation project funded by the following partners:



Région  
Provence  
Alpes  
Côte d'Azur

