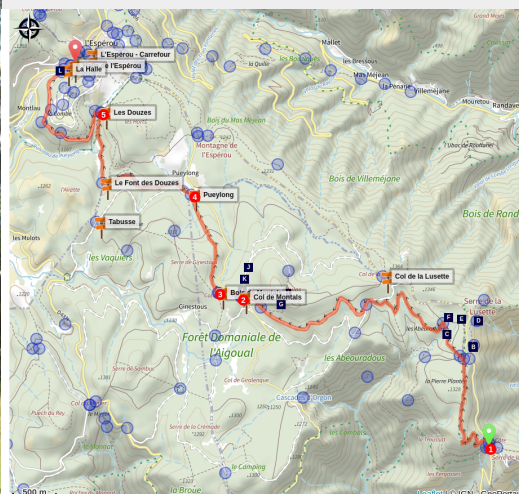


From Le Vigan to Mont Aigoual - Day 2

Gard



Gîte cap de coste



A lovely walk in a state forest with its mixed tree species: beech and pine.

The village of L'Espérrou, altitude 1230m, is close to the summit of Mont Aigoual, the highest point in the Gard department.

Useful information

Practice : Pédestre

Duration : 2 h 30

Length : 11.6 km

Trek ascent : 342 m

Difficulty : Medium

Themes : Milieu naturel, Faune et flore, Agriculture et élevage

Trek

Departure : Cap de Côte

Arrival : L'Espérou

Markings : — Balisage jaune et mobilier signalétique  GR®

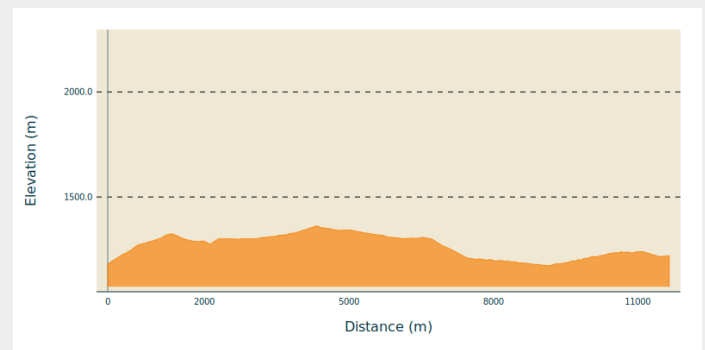
Cities : 1. Arphy

2. Val-d'Aigoual

3. Bréau-Mars

4. Dourbies

Altimetric profile

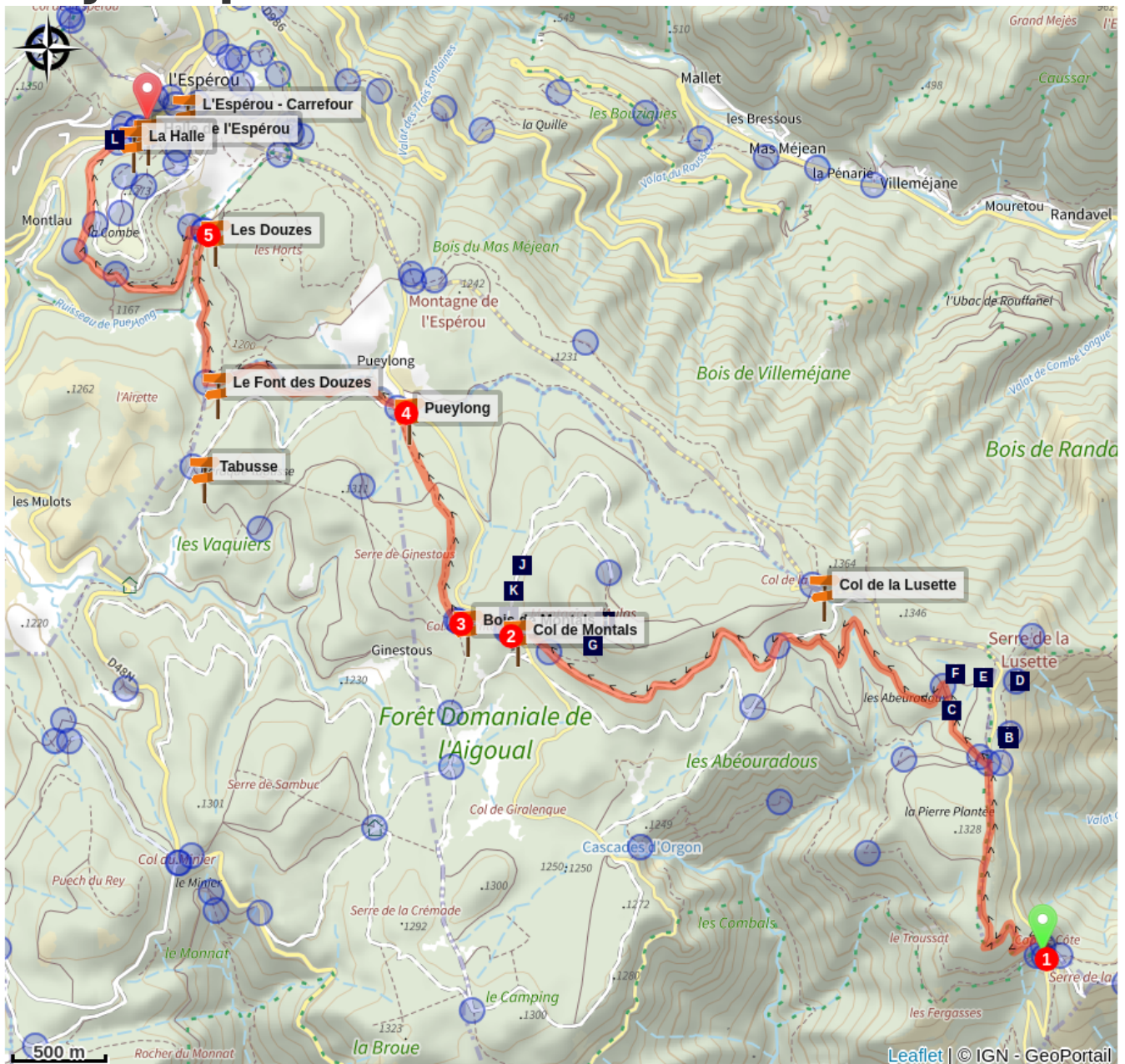


Min elevation 1177 m Max elevation 1364 m

Signposts will guide you all along this route. In the description below, the signposted place names and/or directions are given in **bold italics** between quotation marks :

1. Starting from "**CAP DE COTE**", walk to "**COL DE MONTALS**" via "**La Draille**", "**Abri des Abéouradous**", "**Sous la Luzette**" and "**Montagne d'Aulas**" (GR®60 long-distance hiking path).
2. At "**COL DE MONTALS**" continue to "**LA HETRAIE**" and "**Bois de Montals**".
3. At "**Bois de Montals**" take the fork towards "**PUEYLONG**" (GR®7).
4. At "**PUEYLONG**" continue on the GR®7 to "**Le Font des Douzes**", "**LES DOUZES**" (GR®7, GR®60).
5. At "**LES DOUZES**" walk to "**LA HALLE DE L'ESPEROU**" via "**La Halle**" (yellow waymarks).

On your path...



- | | |
|---|---|
| André Chamson (1900-1983) (A) |  What is a mouflon? (B) |
| The origins of the mouflon (C) |  The saga of the mouflon (D) |
| Managing the species (E) | Head counts (F) |
|  The south-facing slope (G) |  An ancient forest (H) |
| From flower to fruit ... (I) |  Timber from stumps (J) |
| From the seed to the tree (K) | The village of L'Espérou (L) |

All useful information



Is in the midst of the park

The national park is an unrestricted natural area but subjected to regulations which must be known by all visitors.



Advices

Make sure your equipment is appropriate for the day's weather conditions. Remember that the weather changes quickly in the mountains. Take enough water, wear sturdy shoes and put on a hat.



Information desks

Tourism office Cévennes and Navacelles, Le Vigan

Maison de pays, place du Marché, BP 21,
30120 Le Vigan

contact@sudcevennes.com

Tel : 04 67 81 01 72

<https://sudcevennes.com/>



Source



CC du Pays Viganais

<http://www.cc-paysviganais.fr/>

On your path...



André Chamson (1900-1983) (A)

In his works, André Chamson constructed an imaginary Cévennes park. His writings bear witness to his love for the area and his attachment to his Huguenot ancestors. A nationally renowned writer, he was elected to the Académie française in 1956. His final works see time and death become more powerful than work or human faith.



What is a mouflon? (B)

Marker 1

The mouflon is a ruminant mammal related to the domestic sheep. Its staple diet is herbaceous plants, which it finds in open spaces such as heaths. It also feeds on about a hundred other plants (ferns, mosses, mushrooms, etc.). The horns of the male (ram) are spiral-shaped and grow continuously, which makes it possible to estimate its age. The female (ewe) rarely has horns. The mouflon's life expectancy is around 14 years. Being an excellent climber, it can easily escape to steep areas in case of danger. These rocky zones also help limit the growth of its hooves through wear.

Attribution : © Chantal Daquo



The origins of the mouflon (C)

Marker 6

L'Abeuradou is located on a draille, a drovers' road for shepherds and their flocks to move between the plains of Languedoc and summer pastures on the southern Massif Central. The name L'Abeuradou indicates that it is a spot where the flocks drink and rest before continuing their long hike. Today's domestic sheep is descended from the mouflon. Since being introduced to the slopes of Mont Aigoual, the mouflon has thus been rubbing shoulders with its cousin, which grazes here in summer. Their cohabitation does not seem to be a problem for the livestock farmers.

Attribution : © Olivier Prohin



The saga of the mouflon (D)

Marker 2

Twenty-three mouflons were introduced to this mountain range in 1954. They roamed the ridge rimmed by heath that you can see in front and to the right of you. Since introduction, the population has slowly grown on the Cevenol slopes. In 1999, the Gard Departmental Hunters' Federation in tandem with the Office National des Forêts, the Cévennes National Park, farmers and hunters took over the management and monitoring of the species. Since then, the population has grown steadily in the Aigoual area, and has recently started to settle other districts as well.

Attribution : © Gaël Karczewski



Managing the species (E)

Marker 5

The Cévennes National Park is unusual for a national park in that hunting is allowed in its central zone. In the absence of large predators, hunting is considered compatible with maintaining a good natural balance. Local mouflons are subject to a compulsory hunting plan, which estimates the numbers to be culled every year. There is regular monitoring to check population levels. Knowing that a mouflon group grows by about 25% a year, it is possible to calculate the number of animals that can be culled without compromising the future of the herd.

Attribution : © Régis Descamps



Head counts (F)

There are two methods for counting mouflons. “Relative abundance indices” estimate variations in the population. In May, observers position themselves in fixed spots at day's end and record the number of animals they see in 20 minutes. Head counts “by combined observation from a hide and from stalking” are used at the end of winter. Observers move through thickets where mouflons shelter. The groups of animals they disturb escape towards fixed observers, who count them. The mouflon population is currently estimated at around 200. Local actors and inhabitants are very involved in the monitoring and counting operations.

Attribution : © Gaël Karczewski



The south-facing slope (G)

Over the centuries, the south-facing slope of Aulas mountain was cleared for pasture, leaving the bedrock bare in places. In the late 19th century, foresters replanted the slope with spruce. These pioneer trees slowly re-established a forest floor and, in their shade, beechnuts germinated. Foresters are now guiding this stand towards a mixed plantation of beech and fir.

Attribution : © M Nègre (1923)



An ancient forest (H)

Some species, such as the *Lobaria pulmonaria* lichen, which grows very slowly, are good indicators of a forest's age. Likewise, some species of herbaceous flora, for instance woodrush, are noticeably more abundant in old forests than in recent forests.

Attribution : © Bruno Descaves



From flower to fruit ... (I)

The beech is a monoecious tree, meaning that female and male flowers are distinct but occur on the same tree. They flower in April and May; insects carry the male reproductive cells (the pollen) to the female cells.

After pollination, the flower produces seeds enclosed in soft-spined husks: beechnuts. Every three to five years, in autumn, an adult beech disperses thousands of seeds.

Attribution : © Emilien Herault



Timber from stumps (J)

Beech trees regenerate very easily; their regrowth is a number of shoots grouped together on the same stump. In the old days, this method (coppicing) was much used to obtain firewood. On the northern slope of Aulas mountain, foresters turned the former coppices into timber plantations on stumps: the new trees with their straight boles were a steady supply of wood for packaging (crates). Since the closure of these companies, the beeches have only been commercialised as firewood.

Attribution : © Mathieu Baconnet



From the seed to the tree (K)

Because most seeds are rich in oils, they are devoured by famished animals in the winter: squirrels, field mice, wild boar, jays, chaffinches... Any seeds still on the ground the following spring can start germinating.

Attribution : © Philippe Raichaud



The village of L'Espérou (L)

The village of L'Espérou lies on the border of Dourbies and Valleraugue local councils. A draille (track for livestock to migrate to summer pastures with their shepherds) crosses the village. As in many villages in the Gard, the two places of worship – one Catholic, the other Protestant – are opposite each other. The village is located in a varied environment that is suitable for outdoor activities and sports.

Attribution : Béatrice Galzin