

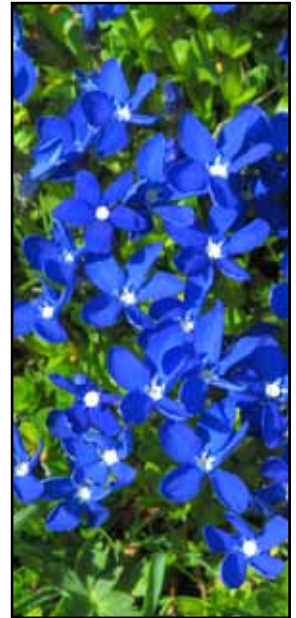
# The Vanoise



Field Gentian, *Gentianella Campestris*, is common in the meadows of the Vanoise in late summer



Apline Aster, *Aster alpinus*, is a common plant throughout the Vanoise, and all the Alps, in the drier meadows where it thrives in silty gravel. It flowers in the late summer



Bavarian Gentian, *Gentiana bavarica*, is like the Spring Gentian, but the basal leaves are not in rosettes

This Vanoise Trek is a shortened version of the 10 day "Tour de la Vanoise" which almost does a figure of 8 in the spectacular Vanoise National Park, which is rich in flora and fauna. This shortened version just does the SW half of this figure of 8, as the NE half is frequently interrupted by piste developments at Val d'Isere and Tignes.

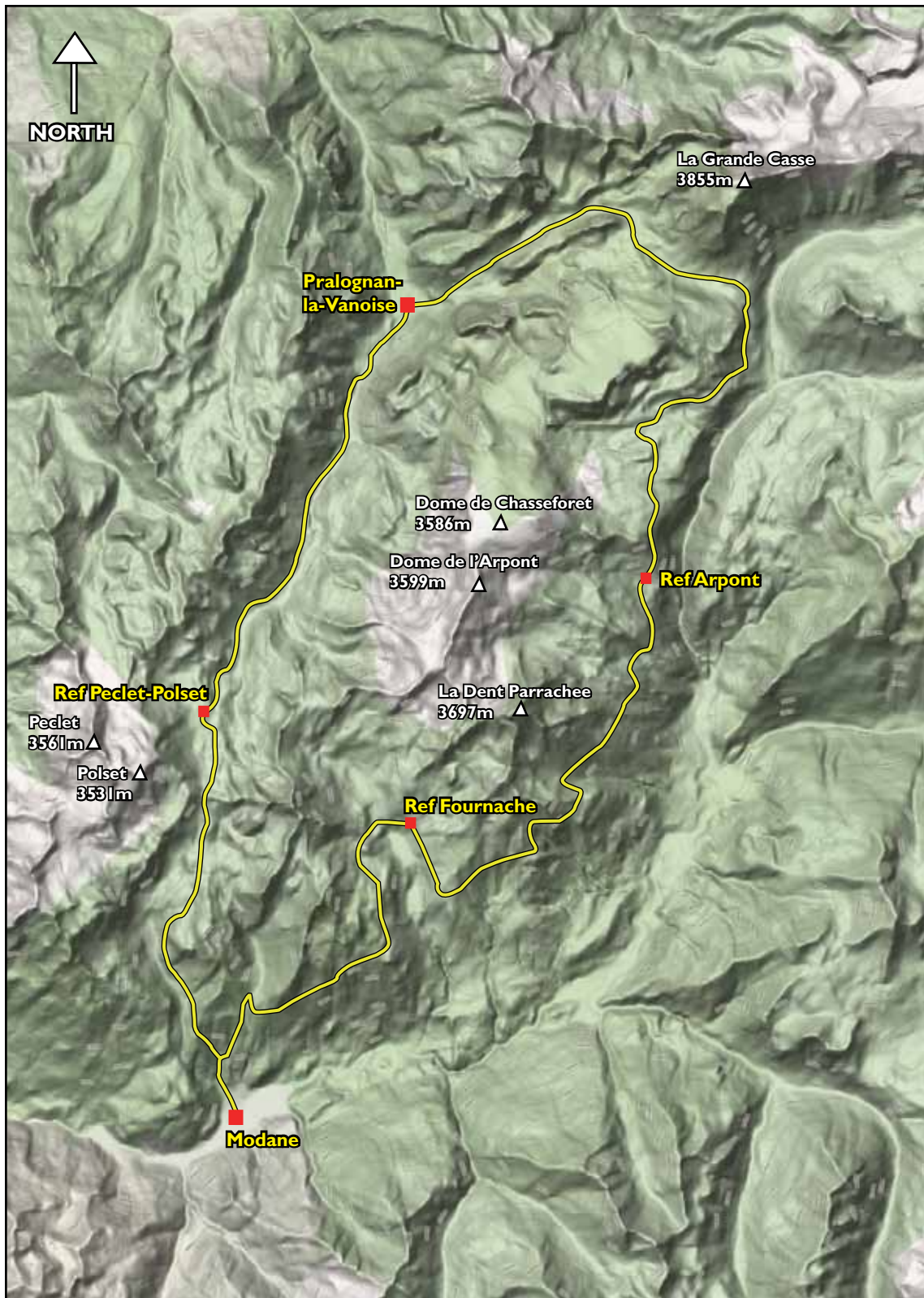
The tour starts in the transport hub of Modane town and immediately climbs out of the valley, up through the larch trees, to gain open meadows. It stays above the trees for 3 days before retuning to the forest and lower valleys again at the town of Pralognan-la-Vanoise. It then slowly climbs south up the valley out of the forest for a day before crossing a pass and descending down into the larch forests and Modane again of the final day.

Accommodation in Modane and Pralognan can be in gites, hotels or even in a tent on the campsites. While at the 3 refuges it will be in dormitories. These, especially at Ref Arpont, can be large

with 20 beds. The food at the refuges is usually outstanding and provides everything a trekker needs, including a picnic for the following day. The accommodation should be booked, especially if going in July or August.

Perhaps the best time to go is late August to early September when the crowds are back at work, but the weather is still stable. The refuges close at the end of the summer but each one then opens a self service winter room providing shelter but no food. It is also possible to go from early June and enjoy quiet refuges well before the main season, but there is likely to be much snow on the passes.

There are many maps of the area but perhaps the best is the 1:50,000 "Carte de Randonnees" series number A3 which has the entire area on a sheet. There are also many guidebooks, but the Cicerone guide book "Tour of the Vanoise" by Kev Reynolds is a superb guide to this easy comfortable trek. ISBN:9781852845902



Map of the south west half of the Vanoise Massif. The trek starts in Modane and goes anticlockwise over the course of 5 days with mountains sections all the way except for Pralognan-la Vanoise where the route descends into the valley for the third night.



Day 3. After Ref Arpont the path climbs over the shallow east ridge of the Dome de Chasseforet to gain a high fertile valley riven by numerous glacial streams which flow across the fertile meadows here. In the distance is the high ridge with La Grande Casse at the west end and La Grande Motte at the east end



Day 3. On the north side of this same valley are numerous small lakes and tarns which the recently retreated glaciers have left behind. Here is another one of the Lacs des Lozeries, with the Dome de Chasseforet, 3586m and its glaciers and snowfields which drain across the meadows shown above.



Day 1. The solitary stone chalet of Pierre Brune marks the end of the 3 hour climb up from Modane and is just by a water trough. Just after the path forks with Ref de l'Orgere north and Ref De l'Aiguille Doran to the east



Day 1. At the shepherds huts near Col du Barbier there often herds of sheep. These are guarded by the large "Pastou" dogs which live with the flocks. They are similar to Pyrenean Mountain Dogs and are capable of defending flocks against wolves



Day 1. The upper of the two lakes, Plan d'Amont, between Col du Barbier and Ref Fournache. The refuge is just above the treeline on the opposite side of the lake under La Dent Parrachee, 3697m



Day 2. The final approach to Ref d'Arpont goes across a hanging valley above the Doron gorge. 5 glacial streams tumble down across this valley from the glaciers above and to the west



Day 2. Alpine Marmot, *Marmota marmota*, are found throughout the Vanoise trek. Their shrill warning cries alert the the rest of the colony that trekkers or worse are about. They live in burrows



Day 3. The valley Vallon de la Leisse curves round to the NE from the hanging valley which leads to Ref Col de la Vanoise. Well beyond the end of this valley are the ski towns of Val d'Isere and Tignes



Day 3. Yellow Mountain Saxifrage, *Saxifraga aizoides*, is found throughout the Vanoise in higher damp areas, like beside glacial streams and in wet meadows. It can be soaked often and still thrive



Day 3. Moss Campion, *Silene acaulis*, is a low lying cushion plant with pink flows and tiny fleshy leaves. It is common, often in isolation, on damp rocks and screes up to 3500m in the Vanoise.



Day 3. On the descent to Pralognan-la-Vanoise from Ref Col de la Vanoise the route passes under the towering glaciated peak of La Grande Casse, 3855m, and under the sharp Aiguille de la Vanoise, 2797m, the base of which is just showing beyond Lac des Vaches. The lake is shallow and is crossed on a series of stepping stones placed across the lake, which here is fringed in Cottongrass, *Eriophorum angustifolium*



Day 3. In the hanging valley to the east of Ref du Col de la Vanoise are a couple of invigorating lakes. This one, Lac Rond, is at 2500m and despite being fed by glacial streams is not always freezing cold towards the end of summer.



Day 4. After an inevitably comfortable night in Pralognan-la-Vanoise the route heads south up the heavily forested Chaviere Valley for 13 km to the Ref de Pecllet Polset. The larch trees only remain for half the day's walk.



Day 5. After Ref de Pecllet Polset the route climbs up across moraine and snowfields to the Col de Chaviere, 2796m. In the background is the valley which leads back down to Pralognan-la-Vanoise



Day 5. The descent down the north side of Col de Chaviere is through ibex meadows to the grassy bowl where Lac de la Partie lies. Beyond is the slightly glaciated Pointe de l'Echelle, 3422m



Day 5. From Lac de la Partie the route goes to the west of the hill Tete Noir, 2673m, and descends steeply until it reaches the larch forest. It then contours across the tranquil forested hillside.



Day 5. The final long descent to Modane is broken by the charming alpine hamlet of Polset. It was once just summer farms, but many have been converted to holiday chalets and still retain charm



Day 4. The craggy Pointe de l'Echelle, 3422m, rises on the other side of the Chaviere Valley from the Ref de Peclat-Polset which has a good view of it. The Col de Chaviere, 2796m, is just beyond the right of the picture and the Ref Fournache at the end of Day 1 is on the other side of this mountain.



Day 5. From Ref de Peclat Polset which can just be seen on the very mid-left of the picture the route climbs across large moraine fields which are debris from recent glaciers, now retreated. The snowfields here linger long into the summer on the north side of this col which is shaded by the surrounding mountains. On each side of this col, especially the south side, ibex are frequently sighted.

# The Vanoise

Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
1	Modane	Ref de la Fournache	15	1670	440	9	Cross the river in Modane and walk through Loutraz to find the start of the forest track up to Ref de l'Orgere. Soon the track narrows to a good path and climbs through conifer for a relentless 840m without respite. After 3 hours you come to a junction by a water trough and meadow with Ref de l'Orgere one way and Ref de l'Aiguille Duran. Take the path to the former and in ½ hour, reach the refuge. Descend across the meadow into the forest again. After ½ hour meet the path from Ref de l'Aiguille Duran. It will save an hour and a few hundred metres height if you go via this refuge and skip Ref de l'Orgere. It is now a 2½ climb up through conifers to the treeline at about 2300m. Cross a meadow with a few shepherds huts. After the huts reach Col du Barbier at 2290m. The path now turns north and traverses the mountainside of the side valley of Aussois for a good hour, climbing slightly, and passing high above the 2 dammed lakes, with Mt Dent Parrachee soaring above them. At the end of the upper lake the path drops down to cross the glacial stream and then climbs up to the charming Ref la Fournache, at 2390m, which overlooks the Aussois Valley.
2	Ref de la Fournache	Ref de l'Arpont	19	760	790	7.5	Head down the track following it past Ref de Plan Sec ½ hour later. Here the path passes under a chairlift and veers NE across some large sloping meadows. Traverse the meadows high above Aussois town to a craggy spur. Climb the spur, secured by chains at exposed sections, to Col de la Tura. The path now climbs to the day's highpoint of 2490m to avoid a gully, before bearing north for the rest of the day. Traverse a meadow to reach shepherd's huts at La Loza. Afterwards the path contours into another side valley full of stones. Gain the ridge at the end of this side valley above the town of Termignon. Traverse across another meadow and descend to a stream before climbing up to the another spur at Montalia. Now contour around yet another side valley before traversing down to many ruined huts at Le Mont. At the path junction here traverse round the spur and then climb gently into another side valley. This last valley is idyllic with many clean glacial streams tumbling down over waterfalls and flower meadows. On the north side of this valley sits the larger Ref de l'Arpont overlooking the idyllic valley and the glaciers on the mountains above.
3	Ref de l'Apont	Pralognan la Vanoise	21	630	1450	9.5	Start an hour's rising traverse north across meadow and rocks to reach a side valley with a clear stream. Climb a grassy spur to view a new pastoral valley strewn with glacial moraine. To the west are great views of glaciers on the main Vanoise ridge. Cross this valley, ford the streams and pass some tarns before reaching a balcony above the main valley and its confluence with another above Ref d'Entre Deux Eaux. Soon after the path forks with one going down to this refuge and another traversing north across the rocky hillside for a hour to reach the hanging side valley leading up to Col de la Vanoise. This 4km valley is a delight with small lakes and flat meadows beneath the lofty peak of La Grande Casse. At Ref du Col de la Vanoise start the 3 hour descent down to Lac Long and then round the north side of the impressive Aiguille de la Vanoise, a 500m blade of rock, where the path crosses a causeway across the Lac des Vaches. Then start the easy descent on a track to Ref les Barmettes. Enter forest soon after for the long 600m descent down beside piste and then older chalets to the lovely comfortable town of Pralognan la Vanoise.
4	Pralognan la Vanoise	Ref de Peclet Polset	13	1030	40	6.5	Head to the south end of town and pass through two campsites to reach the river Doron de Chavere. The route now follows a forest track to the east of the tumbling river. Follow the track for 3km to reach a small tarmac road and a bridge. Cross the bridge and follow the track on the west side of the river for 2km to the pastoral hamlet of Les Prioux. Soon after the path crosses the river again and follows a tarmac road up to a carpark a km away. The forest now gives way to open meadows and the route crosses the river to the west and starts to climb up the side of the mountain for ½ hour to reach the old bergerie and now refuge at Roc de la Peche, and the days halfway point. Across the valley the high glaciers of the Vanoise are starting to show above the foothills and ahead to the south the Aiguille de Polset mountain appears behind ridges. From Roc de la Peche the route follows a track up the west flank of the valley passing dairy cows and marmot areas. It climbs for 500m over 6km as it leave the valley for a mountain environment. After 3 hours the Ref de Peclet Polset appears on a rocky meadow with great views over to the Vanoise Massif.
5	Ref de Peclet Polset	Modane	14	340	1710	6.5	Walk south up a moraine landscape between the lofty Aiguille de Polset and Pointe de l'Echelle, both over 3000m and covered in glaciers. Soon the path climbs steeply to Col de Chaviere, 2796m, the highest point on the tour. Descend the north side to lovely grassy meadows, keeping an eye for the bouquetin, or ibex. Pass a small lake on the meadow, Lac de la Partie, which nestles under enormous cliffs. By this lake the path forks with a branch going to Modane via Ref. de l'Orgere as per Day 1 in reverse and the other preferable way going via Polset hamlet. Take the latter fork (west branch) and start to descend steeply down an alp to the edge of the larch forest at 2200m. Across this valley are great waterfalls. Once in the forest the idyllic path slowly contours through the larch forest with lush glades before descending more steeply to the quaint chalets and meadows of Polset where there is a small cafe. From Polset the path drops without respite through mixed conifers to the suburb of Loutraz on the outskirts of Modane. Pass through Loutraz, cross the bridge over the main river and head west to the railway station and hotels to complete the tour.
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