

The secret ravine of Champernal

Vallées cévenoles - Saint-Privat-de-Vallongue



Sur la voie verte (Olivier Prohin)



Leave behind the agitation of the main road to plunge into the quiet of this refreshing ravine. As you come out of the maze of terraces, let the former railroad (now left to evolve naturally) guide you.

In this steep-sided ravine overlooked by an impressive rail bridge, human activities have long worked together with the whims of the Mediterranean climate to create an astonishing ecosystem. This walk will guide your first steps as a naturalist, between the proliferation of nature in constant evolution and the tranquil remains of the past.

Useful information

Practice : Discovery trails

Duration : 1 h

Length : 1.9 km

Trek ascent : 81 m

Difficulty : Very easy

Type : Loop

Themes : Fauna and flora

Trek

Departure : Champernal bridge

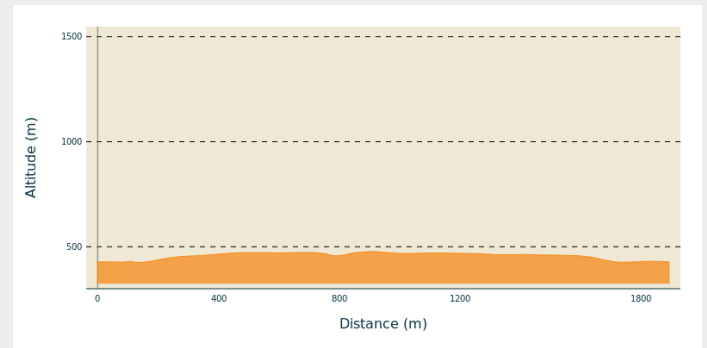
Arrival : Champernal bridge

Markings : 🌀 découverte PNC

Cities : 1. Saint-Privat-de-Vallongue

2. Ventalon en Cévennes

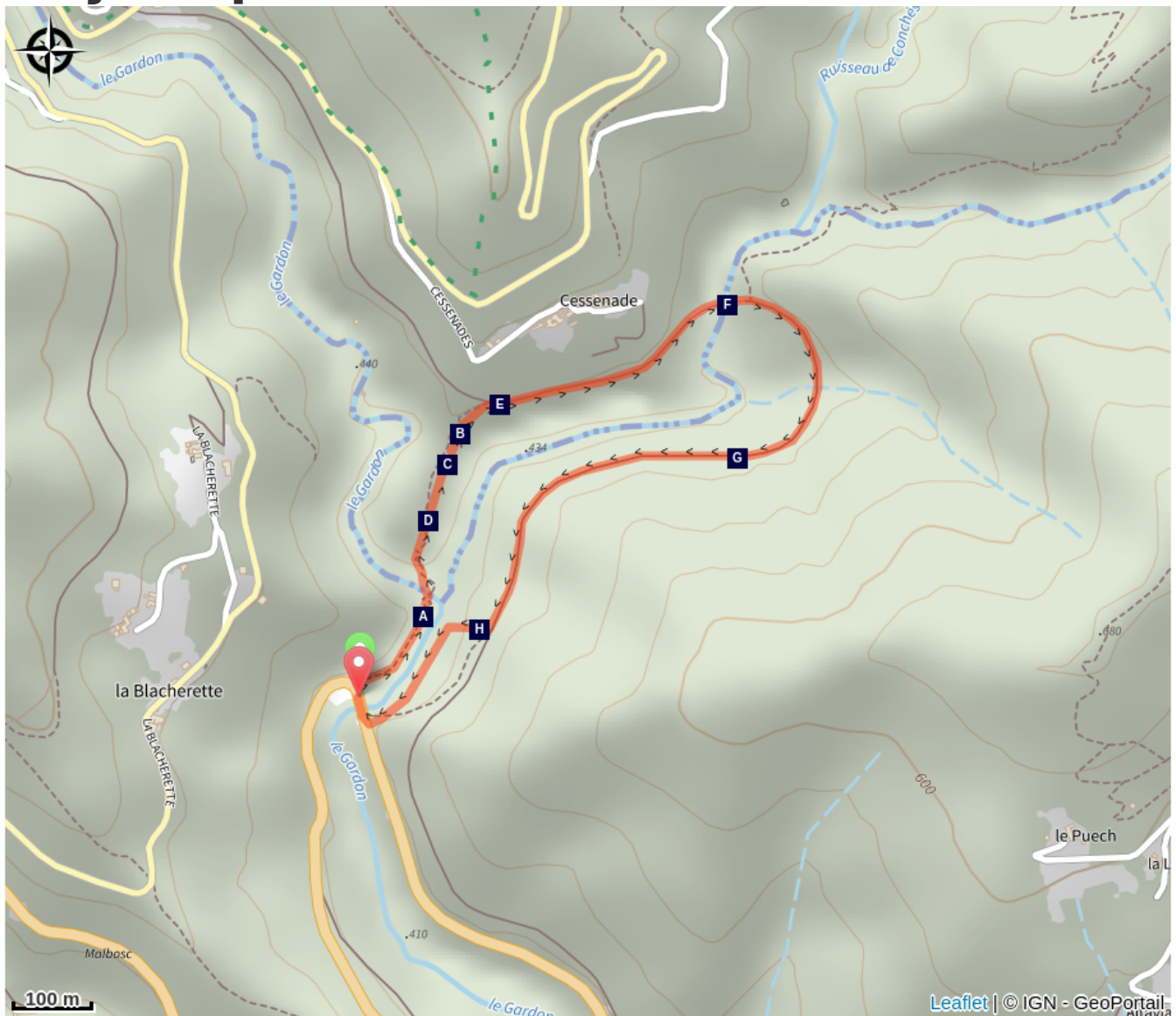
Altimetric profile



Min elevation 424 m Max elevation 477 m

The path goes downhill to a brook before crossing it on a footbridge. The way back up is among old terraced cropland and joins up with the former departmental railway (CFD). You continue along the CFD and cross the disused railway bridge. After the last interpretative point, you fork onto a narrower path which goes back downhill to Champernal bridge.

On your path...



-  Brook fauna (A)
-  A welcoming place to stay (C)
-  Cultivated chestnut trees (E)
-  A wild ravine (G)
-  Bancels (crop terraces) (B)
-  The béal (irrigation channel) (D)
-  The departmental railway (CFD) (F)
-  The hidden side of the ravine (H)

All useful information

Advices

This path has rocky sections and overhangs the river. For your own safety, you must stay on the marked path.

How to come ?

Access

N106. Champernal bridge is in a very pronounced hairpin bend between Saint-Privat de Vallongue and Le Collet de Dèze

Advised parking

Parking spaces close to Champernal bridge

Information desks

Tourism'house and national Parc at Florac

Place de l'ancienne gare, N106, 48400 Florac-trois-rivières

info@cevennes-parcnational.fr

Tel : 04 66 45 01 14

<https://www.cevennes-gorges-du-tarn.com>



Tourism office Des Cévennes au mont-Lozère, Le Collet-de-Dèze

RN 106, 48160 Le Collet-de-Dèze

info@cevennes-montlozere.com

Tel : 04 66 45 81 94

<https://www.cevennes-montlozere.com/>



Source



Parc national des Cévennes

<http://www.cevennes-parcnational.fr/>

On your path...



Brook fauna (A)

The otter was once much coveted and hunted for its pelt. Over 30 years passed before it settled in the waterways of the Cévennes again. Since then, its presence in the National Park has been well-known through monitoring of its tracks and other indicators. The population of white-clawed crayfish, on the other hand, is shrinking; it is very sensitive to environmental variations. To preserve it, habitat diversity and especially water quality are key.

Attribution : © Régis Descamps



Bancels (crop terraces) (B)

"They used to have their gardens over there, in Cessenade, they planted tomatoes, beans... because the village wasn't hooked up to the water mains yet. The bancels were walled in to keep back the soil, with an opening just large enough for one man and his load of manure, they carried everything on their backs, even a mule couldn't get there... Back then, there was so much to do that on evenings when the moon was full, they would repair the low walls, and there were people, this is really long ago, who took on a labourer to help them and they paid him with two or three basketfuls of soil that he would take back to his own bancels."

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



A welcoming place to stay (C)

This chestnut tree and the ruined clède (chestnut-drying building) are the relics of a chestnut grove that was abandoned long ago.

The tree is dead... but full of life. National Park rangers take part in the national inventory of saproxylic beetles (which eat dead wood). Trapping, observing and identifying the species are the key stages of this work. The known reproductive and overwintering sites of bats, which are victims to habitat loss and light pollution in particular, are also counted.

Attribution : Olivier Prohin



The béal (irrigation channel) (D)

On large slabs of stone, the path straddles the béal which irrigates the crop terraces, and whose starting-point is 1.5km upstream.

"I know that several people had a right to the béal, and they each had their day to use the water. Where I lived there were at least 3 kilometres of béal, and to maintain them, we'd work in March and autumn. Nowadays you can water the parcels with a hose but it doesn't distribute the water like a béal. When there were channels everywhere, everything was green, now it's all dry".

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



Cultivated chestnut trees (E)

These can be spotted by their bulge, which is the scar left by grafting. Here, you can see the chestnut tree in various forms: as a stand that is wasting away, in a maintained orchard (in front of you) or mixed with pine or holm oak (behind you).

The *comballe* variety predominates in this area but many other varieties are grown in the Cévennes, thus guaranteeing a long harvest period and better resistance to diseases, insects and climate whims.

Attribution : Olivier Prohin



🌲 The departmental railway (CFD) (F)

Inaugurated in 1909, the departmental railway (CFD) linking Florac with Sainte-Cécile d'Andorge required 15 tunnels and 53 road and rail bridges. It was closed down in 1968 for lack of profitability. The line is being progressively turned into a walking and cycling path, which offers picturesque views over the meanders of the rivers Mimente and Gardon d'Alès (Vallée Longue).

Attribution : Olivier Prohin



🌿 A wild ravine (G)

The spectacular Cessenade railway bridge reveals the depth of this natural ravine, which is difficult to access. Its configuration and microclimate have encouraged a varied wildlife and the preservation of a very particular association of lichens, ferns, mushrooms and mosses. The steep sides of the ravine have helped to preserve a previous afforestation. Other forests in the National Park are deliberately left to evolve naturally. Long-term studies of these help us to better understand the natural phenomena that transform forests.

Attribution : Olivier Prohin



🌿 The hidden side of the ravine (H)

Alongside the former railroad, the forest is spontaneously evolving towards more diversity and maturity. After broom and heather come pine and birch. These stands enrich the soil with organic matter and prepare the arrival of true forest: holm oak, chestnut and then downy oak, all species that grow slowly and are ecologically demanding.

Attribution : Olivier Prohin