

ENGLISH VERSION OF THE 20 CARD INCLUDED IN THE BOOKLET “CHEMINS D’AVANT” edition 2015 (*itineraries description only*)

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CARD 1: Le Clos Raffin

This short family hike will allow you to discover the first pastures and the charming hamlet called “Clos Raffin” which is today entirely restored. It will also be possible, for the bravest walkers, to carry on the small trail starting at the water fountain of the hamlet up to the Plateau of Emparis.

From the departure point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go downward toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead, take a sharp turn to the right to the departure of the chairlift. At the second intersection, stay on the hillside (do not walk down to the torrent. Continue toward the wide track, at the next junction, go on the left, pass through the bridge called “pont de la Mine” (old silver-lead mine). Walk up the wide winding trail to reach the “Butte du Querellé” (Querelle’s mound). Go on your left to pass in front of the alpine meadow house of Querellé, then reach hillside the hamlet of Clos Raffin (1830m), (Gorgeous view on the village of Le Chazelet). When you exit the hamlet, take the trail which runs down to the bridge nearby the departure of the chairlift, then you reach Le Chazelet on a wide trail.

CARD 2: Les Plagnes

This varied course allows discovering the tiny ski resort of Le Chazelet and will offer a gorgeous panoramic view of the Northern face of La Meije and the other hamlets of the canton. Beside the fact it is equipped with a safety cable, the crossing of the slate stones portion will require a little bit of attention.

From the departure point of “le Chazelet” (1770m), go up the paved road that overlooks the village for about 200 meters. Take a sharp left turn before the first houses to go on the trail of “Les Plagnes”. After about 200 meters, take a single trail on your right that will lead to a Christian cross. Follow that trail upward that will path through the hayfields until the second sharp turn. From there, continue on a small trail (locality “Founcato”) that will reach the ski lift then follows the cable up to the wooden Christian cross (locality “Jacques Mathonet”). Follow the trail that will cross the ski lift of Les Plagnes and reaches (2005 m) a trail going toward the valley of Martignare, make a right turn and by following the signs you will reach the “Col des Plagnes” (2106m) on the edge of the pine forest of Le Chazelet from where you will enjoy a magnificent panorama over the mountain of La Meije and the hamlets and villages of the canton (La Grave and Villar d’Arène). Go down the single trail that will reach the hamlet “Les Clots” (1916m), you do not want to take the trail left that goes to la “Celle des Juges”, but instead go through the upper part of the hamlet and on your right take a balcony trail westward. Go through the slate stones portion (can be slippery, but there is a safety cable), and reach the wide trail passing below the forest. Go down toward the Oratorical by passing to the orientation table. Then reach the tarred road on which you walk about 300 meters northbound to reach Le Chazelet and your departure point.

CARD 3: Le sentier des Mules¹

This emblematic route that belongs to those « Old Paths » was used by farmers who were mowing meadows on the plateau of Emparis. The mules heavily loaded with their hay bags were going down this path with their precious cargo. Overly used by backpackers of GR 54 (GR stands for “Sentiers de Grande Randonnée” or long-distance trails) the trail has been degraded over the time. So strictly following its newly redrawn pin turns means protecting this beautiful route.

From the departure point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. Cross the bridge over the Gâ torrent, then at the departure of the chair lift, follow the wide pin turns going upward on the eastern slopes of the plateau of Emparis. You will reach a bench (2060m), at this point go on your left toward the edge of the plateau of Emparis where you will enjoy a magnificent view on the valley of Malaval (Combe de Malaval) located 1000 meters lower at the bottom of the ridge.

You will pass along ruins of « Maison Rouge » and « Pré Veyraud» (2132m). Then take a right toward a small path (2164m). At this point, join the GR54 that you will follow down until you reach benches. At the benches, take the trail on your left that will pass under the cable of the ski lift and walk down to the hamlet of Clos Raffin. At the hamlet go on the trail that takes you down to the departure of the chairlift and then you reach Le Chazelet on a wide trail.

¹ The trail of the Mules

CARD 4: Le Vallon de Martignare ²

This nice loop path will allow you to discover the hamlets of “Les Rivets” then to reach hillside the torrent of Martignare. The torrent’s pretty basins of fresh and clear water will make up the ideal setup for a family picnic. The return leg by “les Plagnes” will allow you to discover the ski area of Le Chazelet.

From the departure point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. At the second intersection, stay on the hillside (do not walk down to the torrent. Continue toward the wide track, at the next junction, go on the right toward the hamlets of “Les Rivets”. Pass through the “Rivet du Pied”, - watch the Saint Antoine Chapel- and when you reach the Rivet du Milieu take a sharp turn on the right. Continue hillside, and then follow the wide trail that goes to the slate stones. When you reach the altitude of 1992m, proceed horizontally. Walk through several gullies and easily reach the torrent of Martignare (locality “Coin de la Ruite”).

Cross the torrent then reach a trail on the other side. Take a sharp turn on your right. Pass nearby the pen and the salt shed (locality “Clos des Selettes”). Just after having crossed the fence, (large boulders), go on your right and follow the edge that overlooks the valley of Martignare (locality “Clos Malatous”). Then you descend by a stony ridge to the sheepfold of Les Plagnes which is located at the bottom of the ski lift. Take a large trail on your right that will lead you to the restaurant of Les Plagnes. Then on the tarred road on 500 meters, you reach the departure point of the itinerary.

² The Valley of Martignare

CARD 5 : Le Vallon de La Buffe³

This nice itinerary will allow you to discover the valley of La Buffe, which is dominated by the majestic peak called Mas de La Grave (see itinerary 10). At the foot of his peak, the torrent “Gâ” rises and has dug its furrow, to flow into La Romanche river at “le Saut de la Pucelle”. The pastures are prized by transhumant who take their flocks of sheep from the South of France. Wolves were re-introduced in the region, so you might meet the big sheepdog called “Patou” who is looking after the herd.

From the starting point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. At the second intersection, stay on the hillside (do not walk down to the torrent). Continue toward the wide track, at the next junction, go on the right toward the hamlets of “Les Rivets”. Pass through the three hamlets to reach the “Croix du Tuf” (1901 m). At the stone cross, take the trail on your right to reach the alpine chalet of Les Orliers. Continue on this wide trail, cross the torrent of “Chabanerie” and pass along the chalet that bears the same name. Continue hillside, then reach the ruins on the edge of the torrent of la Courbeille (new refuge under construction).

Go down toward a wide track that you take on your left over 200 meters, then you cross torrent over a small timber foot-bridge. Proceed uphill on the other side of the torrent on a steep trail, and reach the wide track of Les Combettes. Take this track on your left and follow this path to the Querellé. At this point, do not take the path on your right that goes to the hamlet of Clos Raffin, but instead, carry on the path that goes down to the Pont de la Mine (Bridge of the Mine). Cross the bridge and walk up toward le Chazelet to reach the starting point of your itinerary.

³ The valley of “La Buffe”

CARD 6: La boucle de l'Aiguillon⁴

The summit of the Aiguillon offers a spectacular 360° view of the whole area. This loop starting at the village of Villar d'Arène will make you discover the delicious lake of Pontet. You will overhang the Maurian valley and the hamlets of Valfroide to finally descend through the pine trees toward Villard d'Arène. If you are lucky, you may surprise chamois nearby the trail.

From the parking lot at Villar d'Arène, proceeds upward along the church, take the street in front of the church and cross the village up to the main road. Cross this road and about 100 meters higher, take a trail on your left going upward. Proceed until you reach the Saint Antoine Chapel, and continue up to the hamlet of Les Cours. At the entrance of the hamlet, do not continue on the paved road going on the left, but instead cross the entire hamlet. At the water fountain, go on your left, then after 20 meters, on your right. At the end of the hamlet, take on your left the trail going upward to small groves. Cut the wide path used by cars coming from the parking lot of the lake, and take the trail in front of you. You will reach the lake of Pontet (1985 meters) and walk around the left hand side of the lake. Pass nearby a water spring and follow the single track trail that will guide you side hill to the pass of the Aiguillon, then toward the summit (2095 meters, and 360 views over the area). You will start descending on a trail going westbound, and reaching a bump overlooking the village of les Hyères. Continue descending the windy trail and you easily reach the hay meadows overlooking the main road. Follow the main road for a few meters and then take a trail to the starting point of the itinerary.

⁴ The loop of the mountain of "Aiguillon"

CARD 7: Le bois des Fréaux⁵

The township of La Grave is spread over two sides. Southbound, meadows with sunny alpine terrain, northbound, larch trees, pics and glaciers. This route will stay entirely at the heart of the larch tree forest and will go through the side whereby, in the winters, skiers and free riders enjoy the snow. The bravest will carry on to the lake of Puy Vachier close to the refuge Evariste Chancel.

From the tourist information desk at La Grave (1470 m), follow the main road for a few meters, then after the water fountain, descend on your left toward the Romanche torrent. Cross the bridge then take on your right the small paved road (D233) over 2 kilometers.

When you reach the village of Les Fréaux, do not cross again the torrent, but instead, take on your left a trail that will become narrower. Go up on this winding trail (steep), going upward in the woods, you will cross a small water fall and continue upward in the larch tree forest until you reach "la Pierre Farabo" (2073 meters).

Take a good trail going down on your left until you reach the Chalet of "Puy Vachier". Pass along the intermediate station of the cable car and proceed downward to the torrent of "l'Abéous". Cross the torrent (Timber Bridge) and reach La Grave on a wide trail which overlooks the meadows of "La Lauzette". Cross the bridge on the torrent of La Romanche to finally reach the starting point of the itinerary.

As an option, those who feel brave can extend the loop to the lake of "Puy Vachier". At the "Pierre Farabo" a good trail on your right will take you to the lake surrounded by its stones setting (2382 meters). From the lake, it is also possible to reach the cable car station (2400 meters) on a good trail hill side the mountain in 45 minutes.

⁵ The woods of "les Fréaux"

CARD 8: Serre Bernard

The climb to the Berche (Called Brèche on the IGN 1/25000 scale map) is a very nice alternative to the more classic trail to the Plateau of Emparis. This itinerary is wilder, and will pass around several ruins that were used in the summer by the inhabitants of the canton. This loop will make you discover the variety of the wildlife (chamois, grouse, vulture, and eagle) and a rich flora.

From the departure point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. At the second intersection, stay on the hillside (do not walk down to the torrent. Continue toward the wide track, at the next junction, go on the left, pass through the bridge called “pont de la Mine” (old silver-lead mine). Walk up the wide winding trail to reach the “Butte du Querellé” (Querelle’s mound). Proceed on the good trail, then after about 2 kilometers, go on your left toward the ruins of “Plaquejoue” (1985 meters). From that point take a tractor trail on your left, and then steeper going slightly left hill side to reach ruins (locality “La Selle”). From that point you can spot the breach (“la Berche”) located in the middle of a big wall of schist. Continue by following the marks and the cairns toward the pass (2386 meters).

The descent will go through wide meadows, it will pass nearby the bump of “Serre Bernard” then, will go to “Chicot” and the pass (2164) overlooking the village of le Chazelet. From that point, you reach the GR 54 (GR stands for “Sentiers de Grande Randonnée” or long-distance trails). Descend on the GR until you reach benches (locality “La Pouillate”). At the benches, take the trail on your left that will pass under the cable of the ski lift and walk down to the hamlet of Clos Raffin. In the hamlet go on the trail that takes you down to the departure of the chairlift and then you reach Le Chazelet on a wide trail.

Option: From “la Berche”, it is possible to reach the summit called “le Gros Têt”, the highest point on the plateau of Emparis (see itinerary 9). It is also possible from a hill side trail to reach the pass of Le Souchet (45 minutes), and from this point the lake Noir and the lake Lérié.

CARD 9: Le Gros Têt

Le Gros Têt is the highest point of the Plateau of Emparis. With an elevation of 2613 meters, this big bump also named “Cime de Rachas” offers a 360° view of the Alps. You will discover the massif of Les Grandes Rousses, the Goléon, and of course the Northern side of the National park of Les Ecrins. In the winter, this summit is also a classic ski tour.

From the starting point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. At the second intersection, stay on the hillside (do not walk down to the torrent. Continue toward the wide track, at the next junction, go on the left, pass through the bridge called “Pont de la Mine” (old silver-lead mine). Proceed upward on the wide winding trail to reach the “Butte du Querellé” (Querelle’s mound). Continue on the good trail, then after about 2 kilometers, go on your left toward the ruins of “Plaquejoue” (1985 meters). From that point take a tractor trail on your left, and then steeper going slightly left hill side to reach ruins (locality “La Selle”). From that point you can spot the breach (“la Berche”) in the big wall of schist. Continue by following the marks and the cairns toward the pass (2386 meters). Follow on your right the slope that follows the wall of schist, leave the “Petit Têt” on your left before you reach the summit.

The descent will be on the other side (Northbound) following the ridge going down to the creek of Rachas. From that point you reach the itinerary of the loop of the Plateau of Emparis (itinerary number 15). Cross the creek, pass nearby a small white sheepfold (called Cabanote in French), then passing through the meadows you will reach a trail (Cairns) going down to the Baraque de la Buffe (Sheepfold of La Buffe) located at the bottom of the Pic du Mas de la Grave. From that point follow the valley of La Buffe Southbound on a good wide trail. You will pass the Croix du Tuffe, the three hamlets of Les Rivets. Cross the bridge of Pertus and walk up to the village of le Chazelet on a good track to reach the starting point of the itinerary.

CARD 10 : Le Pic du mas de la Grave

Facing the mountain of La Meije the Pic du Mas de la Grave imposes its presence in the landscape. Its haughty look and its elevation of 3020 meters are barring the long valley of La Buffe from the Savoy region. On its left, the pass of les “Trente Combes” opens the doors to Savoy. This mountain is particularly beautiful at sunset time. It is a mandatory objective to experienced trekkers who are staying in the canton.

From the starting point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. At the second intersection, stay on the hillside (do not walk down to the torrent. Continue toward the wide track, at the next junction, go on the right toward the hamlets of “Les Rivets”. Go through the three hamlets and reach the Croix du Tuf (1901 meters). Continue on a good track that follows the valley to reach at the end the Baraque de la Buffe (Sheepfold of La Buffe) (2005 meters) located at the bottom of the Pic du mas de la Grave.

Cross on your left a small creek, and then proceed upward on the trail. Pass along a small rocky wall, and just after the rocky wall, do not go on your left, but instead proceed Northbound on this trail that will reach a huge cairn (2351 meters). From that point, the trail get narrower, it will follow a ravine of schist and will traverse clean meadows until you reach a stony terrain. Go through some small rocky ledges to reach the ridge (2979 meters). Follow the ridge (committed) until the summit (3020 meters).

The return follows the same itinerary.

CARD 11: Les lacs par le bord Sud du plateau⁶

The Lake Noir and Lake Lérié are real beauties they are one of the must-see when you stay in La Grave. With an elevation of 2400 meters, facing the glacier of La Girose, the mountains of La Meije and Le Rateau, these lakes are offering an exceptional setting, a breathtaking looking down to the valley of Malaval: This itinerary allows you to discover the Plateau of Emparis outside the most frequented trails such as the GR 54 (GR stands for “Sentiers de Grande Randonnée” or long-distance trails).

From the starting point of “le Chazelet” (1770m) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. Cross the bridge over the Gâ torrent, then at the departure of the chair lift, follow the wide pin turns going upward on the eastern slopes of the plateau of Emparis. You will reach a bench (2060m), at this point go on your left toward the edge of the plateau of Emparis where you will enjoy a magnificent view on the valley of Malaval (Combe de Malaval) located 1000 meters lower at the bottom of the ridge.

You will pass along ruins of « Maison Rouge » and « Pré Veyraud» (2132m) when going on your left. Continue on the single track that will guide you to high altitude sheepfolds called Galan and Massarelles. In passing you will cross a couple of creeks, the second creek being called Caturgeas . Proceed upward, Northbound on a narrow trail to ruins also called Caturgeas. The trail will pass around a rocky bump to reach by the left hand side the Lake Lérié. Pass around the lake and follow the trail that overlooks the valley of Malaval located 1200 meters below your feet, and reach the lake Noir in about fifteen minutes. Follow the banks of the lake on the southern side, pass nearby a rain gauge and after 200 meters, facing a small lake which is sometimes dry, go on your right. The trail will guide you in about half an hour to the pass of Le Suchet (2365 meters). At this point, do not take the wide trail on your right, used by GR54, but instead, proceed on a hill side trail to reach a point called “la Berche”. Proceed downward on the Northface of this ridge on the trail also used by itineraries 8 and 9, pass nearby ruins to reach the locality called “Plaque Joue” on the wide trail coming from “les Combettes”. Take this trail on your right until you reach le Querellé. Then do not go on your right on the trail going to “Clos Raffin”, but instead, continue downward on the trail descending to the Bridge of La Mine. Cross the torrent and continue on the way up toward the village of Le Chazelet, the starting point of the itinerary.

⁶ The lakes by the southern ridge of the Plateau of Emparis

CARD 12 : Le Signal de La Grave

The Signal de La Grave provides a 1000 meters overlook of the valley of La Romanche. This summit delivers a complete panorama on the whole canton, and an exceptional view of the Northern face of the mountain La Meije. This itinerary will allow you to discover the Pic of Goléon and the valley of Martignare opening to the doors to Savoy region. The climb from La Grave is a bit steep and is facing south: We recommend that you start this itinerary early in the morning; on the way, you will be able to refill your bottles at different water fountains in the villages of Ventelon, Les Clots and Les Terrasses.

From the tourism office at La Grave, walk up toward the church, leave it on your left, then proceed upward, pass the last houses, and turn right toward the village of Ventelon that you will reach in about one hour. Continue upward in the village, and take a good trail that will guide you to the hamlet of Les Clots (1916 meters), pass in front of the water fountain and after 100 meters, turn right on the single track trail going upward. At the next intersection, take on your right the trail going to “la Selle des Juges”, you will give up this hillside trail after about 200 meters, to walk toward the summit on a steep slope called “Cote Belle”. Follow the trail (sometimes the trail is less obvious) that will guide you to a small pass (2252 meters) on the ridge of Le Signal. Follow the ridge up to the summit (2446 meters), marked by a cairn.

You will descend by the same itinerary down to the small pass, but then instead of turning left, continue on the ridge of “Cote Rouge” to reach the top of the ski lift of le Chazelet. Then continue descending on your right toward les Plagnes. Then you will reach a wide trail that you take on your left to pass just below the small forest until you reach the Oratorical (orientation table). Cross the small paved road and take the GR 54 (GR stands for “Sentiers de Grande Randonnée” or long-distance trails) that will guide you to the village of Les Terrasses then through the fields to La Grave.

CARD 13 : Le Lac du Goléon par le Cruq des Aiguilles

The Lake of Goléon awaits the hiker after a rough climb from the hamlet of Valfroide; but when you reach the lake, what a reward! A comfortable refuge will welcome you for a night or for a snack. The proposed itinerary passing by the beautiful pass named “Cruq des Aiguilles” provides a varied alternative with a greater alpine atmosphere than the traditional way from Valfroide that you will rather use for the descent.

From the village of Les Hières, take a good vehicle track (NorthWest) that follows the valley toward the hamlet of Valfroide, and about 500 meters before the parking lot of Entraigues, take a trail on your left toward the hamlet of La Saulce. Cross the hamlet then proceed eastbound toward the bump called Serre Coupa. Spot the trail that climbs with sharp turns reaching the “Côte Lombarde”, and at about 2200 meters elevation, you will reach flatter fields that will lead you to the ruins of “Puy Garnier” (2346 meters). From that point, proceed Northbound, cross a small creek and continue slightly upward to pass along the water collector (collecting drinkable water for the villages of the canton of La Grave). You will then easily spot the nice U-shaped pass of Le Cruq des Aiguilles, located about 300 meters higher. Climb a first steep slope that will lead you to the ridge overlooking the valley (ruinous rocks), then after a short flat section at the bottom of the pass, you reach the pass on a rocky steep slope (2707 meters). The descent toward the refuge and the lake is done on the other side (eastbound) on grassy slopes interrupted with rocky ledges. After a well-deserved break at the lake or at the refuge, take the trail that winds down (steep and stony), it will lead you through the hayfields of the hamlet of Valfroide, then on a wider track you reach the village of Les Hières.

PS: From the village of les Hières, it is possible to drive your car to the parking lot of Entraigues (just after Valfroide) but crossing a car going opposite way can be difficult.

CARD 14 : Le Col de Martignare et la crête de la Buffe

This long alpine hike will take you to the doors of Savoy; from the pass of Martignare, in a lunar scenery, you will admire the proud silhouette of “les Aiguilles d’Arves”; but the enchantment does not stop there: the hike between heaven and earth on the long ridge of La Buffe will offer a unique panorama on both valleys La Buffe and Martignare. This itinerary should be used by trained and experienced hikers.

From the departure point of “le Chazelet” (1770m), go up the paved road that overlooks the village for about 200 meters. Take a sharp left turn before the first houses to go on the trail of “Les Plagnes”. After about 200 meters, take a single track trail on your right that will lead to a Christian cross. Follow that trail upward that will path through the hayfields until the second sharp turn. From there, continue on a small trail that will reach the ski lift then follows the cable up to the wooden Christian cross. Follow the trail that will cross the ski lift of Les Plagnes and reaches (2005 m) a trail going toward the valley of Martignare, make a right turn and by following the signs you will reach the “Col des Plagnes” (2106m) on the edge of the pine forest of Le Chazelet.

Follow the ridge entirely toward the Signal de La Grave, and then when you reach a small saddle (2252 meters), take a horizontal trail toward the bottom of the valley. Follow that trail until a berm (2352 meters) overlooking the creeks descending from the Goléon mountain (be aware of the presence of herds). Still going hillside, cross those creeks (locality Coin du Loup), pass beside a salt shed (locality Clos de Bonnefin, then follow the torrent of Martignare, that you will cross at 2360 meters elevation. Climb on the other side (steep) and continue on a wide grassy knoll (locality Coin Belle). Cross several thalwegs, then proceed northbound toward the pass (2763 meters) that you will reach by crossing the shoulder on your right.

From the pass, climb westbound the wide stony slope toward the southern point of La Buffe (2878 meters) that you will reach in about 30 minutes.

The return will pass southbound, through the wide ridge (erected rocks). You will reach the Petite (small) Buffe (also called P’tite Huberte) (2683 meters). Descend on its southern side (about 100 meters on large unstable stones) to reach the grassy ridge. At the 2420 meters elevation, take a secondary ridge descending South-West toward the valley of La Buffe. When you reach a salt shed, descend on the slope left hand side. The trail (sometimes difficult to spot) will lead to the ruins of “Trois Maisons” then will reach “Les Orliers”. From there a wider trail will take you to “La Croix du Tuf”, then take on your left the wide trail, cross the three hamlets of Les Rivets and reach Le Chazelet the starting point of your itinerary.

CARD 15: Le tour du plateau d'Emparis⁷

The Loop around the Plateau of Emparis is without a doubt one of the itineraries you should consider if you are staying in the canton; the route is fairly long but will not be technically challenging. Since almost twenty years, this route is the 21 kilometers running trail (half marathon) of a race. The race best time of is 1h33min, keep that in mind when after this beautiful hike, you will be dog-tired getting back to Le Chazelet.

From the starting point of "le Chazelet" (1770 meters) go down toward the village along the parking lot. At the first junction, do not return up to the village, but instead take a sharp turn to the right to the bottom of the chair lift. At the second intersection, stay on the hillside (do not walk down to the torrent. Continue toward the wide track, at the next junction, go on the right toward the hamlets of "Les Rivets". Pass through the three hamlets to reach the "Croix du Tuf" (1901 meters). Continue on the good trail following the valley until you reach at the end the "Baraque de la Buffe" (sheepfold of La Buffe) (2005 meters) located at the bottom of the mountain called "Le Pic du Mas de La Grave". Cross on your left a small creek, and then proceed upward on the trail. Pass along a small rocky wall, and just after the rocky wall go frankly on your left traversing upward wide grassy slopes (at this point you are leaving the itinerary number 10 that goes to Le Pic du Mas de la Grave). On the top of this slope, you will pass nearby a small shieling (in French called Cabanotte). Cross the small creek and take on your left the gorgeous single track trail that will lead you to the Chalet of RifTor. Pass nearby a sheepfold and then reach the GR 54 at the torrent of RifTor that you will follow until the pass of Le Souchet (GR stands for "Sentiers de Grande Randonnée" or long-distance trails). From the pass, follow the good trail also used by GR54 (Loop of Oisans). Reach the top of the ski lift and when you arrive at the bench, take the trail on your left to go to the hamlet of Clos Raffin. From this hamlet, it will take you a few minutes to reach Le Chazelet, the starting point of your itinerary.

Remark: From the pass of Le Souchet, it is possible to extend the itinerary by a one hour loop, passing by the lake Noir then the lake Lérié before you reach, underneath the pass of le Souchet, the descent itinerary (Yellow beacons): an option not to be missed!

⁷ The loop of the plateau of Emparis

CARD 16: Le sentier Paul-Louis Rousset⁸

This loop, that will allow you to discover most of the villages and hamlets of the canton, was named as a tribute to the priest Paul Louis Rousset, mountain guide and great alpinist, who also wrote numerous reference books about the region. His book called “Pays de la Meije”, which reads like a novel, tells you the story of the area since prehistoric times. The route is a must for the lovers of the region. We have described it starting from La Grave, but you may decide to start it at any point depending upon where you reside.

From the tourism office of La Grave (1470 meters), take the main road for a few meters, then just after the water fountain, take a descending trail on your left toward the torrent of La Romanche. Cross the torrent and take the trail on your left toward Villar d’Arène; it is going upward, first as winding trail following entirely the GR 54 of the loop of Oisans (GR stands for “Sentiers de Grande Randonnée” or long-distance trails). Follow the trail along the torrent of La Romanche, and cross the bridge called “Pont des Brebis” (Bridge of the sheep) nearby the rock climbing site at the hamlet called Pied du Col. Reach the hamlet then take a good track on your left toward the village of Les Cours. Cross the main road, then at about 20 meters on your right, the trail leading to Les Cours. At the water fountain, turn twice right. At the end of the hamlet, take on your left the trail going upward to small groves. Cut the wide path used by cars coming from the parking lot of the lake, and take the trail in front of you. You will reach the lake of Pontet (1985 meters) and walk around the left hand side of the lake. Pass nearby a water spring and follow the single track trail that will guide you side hill to the pass of the Aiguillon.

Take the trail descending toward the hamlet of Valfroide, cross the torrent of Maurian, then on your left take the good track leading to the village of Les Hières. Just before entering the village, take on your right the small single track trail going upward to the hamlet called “La Celle des Juges”, pass the few houses of the hamlet and proceed on that trail toward an isolated farm. Pass nearby the farm and follow the horizontal trail that will lead you to the hamlet of Les Clots. Turn right toward the slate stones portion (can be slippery, but there is a safety cable), and reach the wide trail passing below the forest. Go down toward the Oratorical by passing to the orientation table. Take the paved road on your right, cross the village of Le Chazelet, and near the bottom of the village, turn left on the street (Rue de Serre) that bypasses the village on its southern side. This way you will reach the bottom part of the village (locality Pralong) and then continuing toward the little chapel called “Notre Dame de Bon Repos” that overlooks the waterfall called “Saut de la Pucelle”. Keep descending the winding trail toward the village of les Fréaux, cross the main road, then cross the village. Cross the torrent of La Romanche and complete the loop by following the small tarred road following the torrent. When you reach a bridge located underneath the village of La Grave, proceed upward to reach your starting point.

⁸ The Paul-Louis Rousset trail

CARD 17: La Brèche ou le col de Pacave

Crossing the Breach (also called Pacave pass) represents an intrusion into high mountains, such as the Northern side of the mountain of La Meije and the mineral or glacier landscapes. The proposed itinerary is reserved for experienced hikers: the elevation is quite significant, you'll get high mountain conditions (firs, rocky terrain) and the route is sometimes committed like the descent on the ridge of the great moraine of the "Clos des Sables". It is moreover possible to bypass the loop by stopping for a nice break at the refuge Evariste-Chancel. The route will provide scenic views on the plateau of Emparis, the mountain of le Goléon, and the Romanche valley.

From the tourist information desk at La Grave (1470 m), follow the main road for a few meters, then after the water fountain, descend on your left toward the Romanche torrent. Cross the torrent and proceed on the trail going upward on the right hand side from the torrent of Le Tabuchet. When you arrive on the top of the Lauzette, at the end of the horizontal trail, turn right, descend a few meters toward the foot-bridge crossing the torrent of "l'Abeous". Proceed upward on the other side, and pass nearby the Cable car pole (P1). When you reach the upper Chalets of Puy Vachier, turn right, go under the cables and proceed on a long crossing of the larch tree forest. At the locality la Pierre-Farabo, reach itinerary number 7 coming upward from Les Fréaux and proceed straightforward until you leave the forest. The trail will lead to the lake of Puy Vachier (2382 meters), surrounded by rocks, then overlooking the lake, the refuge called Evariste-Chancel.

From the refuge, proceed upward southbound and target the breach which is visible as a notch into the ridge of "Pêyrou d'Amont": The trail sometimes difficult to spot, is finding its way among the stone blocks until you reach the altitude of the breach. Cross horizontally on your left and easily reach the pass (Breach of Pacave, 2840 meters).

From the Breach, spot the great moraine below in the valley of la Meije: the descent will pass on its ridge. Descend on the southern side, follow the trail (steep and sometimes difficult to spot) that will reach the ridge of the great moraine; follow the ridge down to the end until you reach a shelf (Clos des sables, 2380 meters). You are back in the green area. Proceed through small larch trees and rhododendrons and when you reach the elevation of 1900 meters, take a sharp turn on your right on a good trail leading to the torrent: Cross the torrent and on the other side, follow the trail toward the chalet of Val Vachère. Continue descending on the right hand side of the torrent of l'Abéous and at the top of La Lauzette reach a good track that will lead to La Grave. You then walk up to the village to reach the starting point of your itinerary.

CARD 18: Le Glacier Lombard

Nearby the lake of Goléon, there is a comfortable welcoming refuge. It is a trek objective and an ideal stop on the itinerary to the summit of the mountain of le Goléon. The route described here will guide you from the refuge to the bottom of the glacier. The well-equipped mountaineers will have the opportunity to reach the summit by crossing the glacier (few crevasses) then climbing the Northern ridge, easy and aerial of the Mountain of Le Goléon.

From the refuge you have reached from Valfroide the day before, or from the itinerary number 13, descend hillside toward the lake of Goléon that you will follow up to its Northern end. Proceed upward on the valley on a gentle slope, pass nearby the old refuge leaning on its rock (refuge Carraud) and follow the trail upward on the left hand side of the valley. Stay always on the left side of the torrent. Early in the season, you will find snow from this place; proceed upward on the snow slopes or stones, depending upon the conditions, to reach a shelf at the bottom of the Lombard glacier which is dominated by the mountain of le Goléon. **From that point, only well-equipped mountaineers** (rope, ice-axe, crampons) will decide to proceed upward on the glacier toward the pass (3236 meters) located south of the Bec du Grenier. They will entirely follow the North-West ridge, sometimes aerial, (a few climbing steps) staying close to the ridge (do not engage on the sides). The return is on the same itinerary.

It is preferable to carry on this climb early in the season when the snow pack is still covering the stony terrain.

CARD 19: Le Lac du Pontet

Here we propose a nice easy promenade. From the village of Villard d'Arène, the way up to the lake du Pontet for a family picnic will even please the toddlers. Facing the mountain of la Meije, the lake du Pontet, in the middle of the alpine fields offers a breath taking view over the Northern face of the mountains. Undoubtedly, it is in the end of the afternoon, when the sunlight becomes sweeter, that you will shoot the nicest photos. Your pictures may then be used as screen savers at the return of your holidays!

From the parking lot at Villar d'Arène, proceeds upward along the church, take the street in front of the church and cross the village up to the main road. Cross this road and about 100 meters higher, take a trail on your left going upward. Proceed until you reach the Saint Antoine Chapel, and continue up to the hamlet of Les Cours. At the entrance of the hamlet, do not continue on the tarred road going on the left, but instead cross the entire hamlet. At the water fountain, go on your left, then after 20 meters, on your right. At the end of the hamlet, take on your left the trail going upward to small groves. Cut the wide path used by cars coming from the parking lot of the lake, and take the trail in front of you. You will then reach the lake of Pontet (1985 meters). Proceed around the lake on the right and descent on a wide track, that you crossed going upward, to reach a parking lot. Follow the descent on the tarred road over 300 meters then turn right on a trail that will lead you through hayfields to Villard d'Arène where you reach the starting point of your itinerary.

CARD 20 Le Tour du pays de la Meije⁹

Within less than a week, this outstanding route will make you discover much of the wealth and beauties of the different landscapes of the canton of La Grave and Villard d'Arène. This wide loop which takes in turns alpine landscape, high alpine mountains, mountain lakes, passes, valleys, plateau, shadows and lights will definitely please demanding hikers. This loop, that trained trail specialists will soon execute in less than 24 hours, is proposed here in 7 days: At this paste, you will enjoy magnificent scenery, great accommodation and you will be pleasantly surprised by this territory.

Day 1:

La Grave – Refuge of l'Alpe de Villard d'Arène (4 to 5 hours)

This fairly short warm up day that ends up in the heart of the “Massif des Ecrins”, at the bottom of the mountain of “les Agneaux”.

From La Grave, take the GR54 section of the loop of Oisans, (GR stands for “Sentiers de Grande Randonnée” or long-distance trails) until you reach the refuge of l'Alpe de Villard d'Arène.

Day2

Refuge of l'Alpe de Villard d'Arène / refuge of the Goléon (7 to 8 hours)

Long stage, varied course with the famous col (pass) du Lautaret, the delicious lake of Pontet that terminates at the lake of Goléon.

From the refuge of l'Alpe de Villard d'Arène, proceed for about 20 minutes on the trail you took the day before, then on your right hand side, follow the beautiful and impressive trail called “sentier des Crevasses” until you reach the pass of Lautaret. Cross the main road to reach the pass. At the bottom of the road going to the Alpine Garden (Jardin Alpin), spot the trail going on your left. Fully follow that trail, then pass nearby the main road on a hairpin turn and descend toward the hamlet called “Pied du Col”. Just before you reach the hamlet, take a good track on the right that will lead you to the hamlet of Les Cours. Cross again the main road and proceed upward to Les Cours. From this hamlet, follow the route number 16 (Sentier Paul-Louis Rousset) up to the hamlet of Valfroide.

After you have crossed the torrent of Maurian, proceed upward on the trail on your right that you will follow (steep) up to the refuge of Goléon.

⁹ Around the « Pays de la Meije » great tour

Remark: A new trail is planned; it will directly reach the Alpine Garden at the pass of Lautaret and lead to the lake du Pontet. This corniche trail will avoid crossing the main road and will reasonably shorten this second stage.

Day3

Round trip to the mountain of Goléon (6 hours from refuge to refuge)

This itinerary should be reserved to experienced and well equipped hikers or mountaineers (see route number 18). It will allow you to reach a summit (elevation 3424 meters) offering one of the most beautiful panorama of the Alps.

Day 4

Refuge of Goléon- Valley of La Buffe buy the pass of Cruq des Aiguilles and the Signal de la Grave (6 to 7 hours depending upon the place of the accommodation:New refuge under construction in the valley of the Buffe , Yurt of the shepherd or lodging in the village of le Chazelet).

This wild and varied route allows you to reach the village of Le Chazelet, and the valley of La Buffe passing by ridges and pastures.

Go upward behind the refuge following route number 13 backward until you reach the pass called “Cru des Aiguilles”, (trail sometimes difficult to spot). Descend on the other side and when you reach the elevation of 2400 meters, continue horizontally; cross the small creeks and at this point quit route number 13 to progressively go upward, side hill up to the Signal de la Grave (2446 meters). Descend the full ridge southwest (route number 12) until you reach a small pass at the top of the ski lift of les Plagnes. Descend on your right along the ski lift and then take the trail going to the bottom of the valley of Martignare. After you have crossed the ski lift, you reach route number 5 that you follow backward. Cross the torrent of Martignare and proceed slightly uphill on the other side. Follow this side hill trail (right hand side) that will lead you to the hamlet of Les Rivets. Then take the wide track on your right that follows the valley until you reach the new refuge under construction or the yurt of the shepherd located at the bottom of la Grande Buffe. Depending upon lodging options, from the top of the ski lift of Les Plagnes, you may also proceed directly to the village of le Chazelet on route number 2.

Day 5

Pic du Mas de la Grave / Chalet du Fay (7 to 9 hours, depending upon lodging (le Chazelet or the Yurt of the shepherd or the new refuge under construction refuge du pic du mas de la Grave).

You will discover the plateau of Emparis after having climbed the iconic mountain called Pic du Mas de la Grave.

From the village of le Chazelet or from the valley of la Buffe, follow route number 10 up to the summit of the Pic du Mas de la Grave. For the descent, follow the same trail on the ridge until you reach a huge cairn, then proceed on your right toward the valley coming from the pass of

“les Trente Combes”. Follow this valley to reach the locality called La Cabanotte which is on route number 15, around of the plateau of Emparis. Follow route 15 to the torrent of Rif Tor, and from that point, take GR 54 Southbound until you reach the Chalet du Fay.

Day 6

Chalet du Fay – Refuge Chancel by the plateau and the lakes (8 to 9 hours)

This route will guide you through the plateau of Emparis and its lakes (Cristallin, Lérié, Noir), down to the village of Les Fréaux located 1000 meters lower in the valley of Malaval. From that point, a long 1100 meters elevation trail, through larch trees, will lead you to the Chancel refuge perched at an elevation of 2450 meters.

From the Chalet du Fay, follow the trail you took the day before, backward until you reach the torrent of Rif Tor. Leave GR54 and take on your right a trail leading to the lakes. Pass along the lake Noir and then reach Lake Lérié; from this lake take route number 11 backward to le Chazelet. Then follow the Paul Louis Rousset trail (route number 16), and when you reach the village of Les Fréaux, cross the Romanche torrent and proceed upward in the larch trees forest on route number 7. When you reach la “Pierre Farabo” mark, follow route number 17 on your right up to the refuge Chancel.

Day 7

Refuge Chancel – La Grave by the Pacave pass

This last stage will close the loop by making you discover the impressive Northern faces of the mountains la Meije and le Râteau and their hanging glaciers. Alpine and mineral atmosphere guaranteed!

From Chancel refuge, follow entirely route number 17 down to la Grave where you reach the starting point of the loop of le Pays de la Meije.