



ABOUT THE TRAIL

- **DISTANCE** 82 km (51 mi)
- **DURATION** 3 to 5 days
- **TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN** 2,873 m (9,426 ft)
- **LEVEL** Moderate

The main chain of the Alps may get all the accolades and harbor plenty of the best hikes, but many of the ranges of foothills—or Prealps—are just as good. Of these, one of the most celebrated is the Vercors Massif. Known as the Fortress or the Limestone Citadel, and sometimes as the French Dolomites, the Vercors is a north-south ridge with a steep escarpment to the east, a system of plateaus to the west, and a great deal of top-quality hiking in between.

Grenoble lies just to the north, in the Isère Valley, which separates the Vercors Massif from Chartreuse, and the city makes a convenient base for exploring both ranges. Although there are many possible multiday walks extending through the Vercors, one of the most worthwhile—some might say inevitable—is a north-south traverse of the main line of ridges, taking advantage of good high-level paths and countless hiking shelters and cabins along the way. Unusually for France, the rules for bivouacking in the Vercors Regional Natural Park are quite liberal, too, making this a good choice if you are looking to sleep out under the stars. Thanks to the modest elevation of these mountains (the highest is Grand Veymont at 2,341 m/7,680 ft), and the fact that the route connects long plateaus rather than climbing up and down from col to col like many Alpine hikes, it can feel surprisingly leisurely at times. The trail largely sticks to the gentler western flanks of the ridge. This is still a walk in the big hills, though—and it has the views to match.

The hike begins at Saint-Nizier-du-Moucherotte, a small village just uphill from Grenoble at the extreme northern end of the main Vercors ridge. Paths zigzag up through a ski area to the peak of Le Moucherotte (1,901 m/6,237 ft)—a splendid viewpoint looking directly down on the River Isère and Grenoble in the valley below and across to the foothills of Chartreuse. Looking south, the dramatic escarpment of the French Dolomites can already be prominently seen: a craggy white spine of mountains, steep to the left, gentle to the right, clothed in forest at lower elevations. The eagle-eyed may be able to spot the surprising tower-like shape of Mont Aiguille (2,085 m/6,841 ft) just left of the main ridge in the distance. This is one of the most distinctive summits of the Vercors, and one that you will be getting a closer view of in the days to come.

After Le Moucherotte, the trail diverts west from the main crest of the ridge and does not revisit it until the final stage. Descending slightly through meadows and wooded areas, the trail passes across ski slopes to the Auberge des Allières, a restaurant and hostel at about the 13 km (8.1 mi) mark, making it a good place for an overnight stay if you started the day’s hike late. Otherwise, the trail continues with a short climb before traversing wooded hillsides and descending to the Cascade de



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← One of the many caves that dot the landscapes of the Vercors.
↑ Mont Aiguille frequently pops up in views along the traverse of the Vercors.