

BIKEITALIA



THE MEDITERRANEAN ALPS

by bike





St-Dalmas-le-Selvage

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Introduction

The Alpine passes are part of cycling history and have turned mere mortals into demi-gods who have been idolised over the decades.

This e-book is a humble attempt to create a collection of the most iconic destinations and routes in the Mediterranean Alps, and is for anybody who does not fear exertion, the wild and discovering places where man is still very much a guest.

The routes in this book are designed for lovers of road biking, mountain biking and gravel riding and for those who want to get out on their own bikes to explore the world around them.

When putting together this small guide, we were mindful of the needs of the cyclist and especially of the fact that they might give up on a route and go home at any moment. For this reason, the routes we have created are as near as possible to train stations.

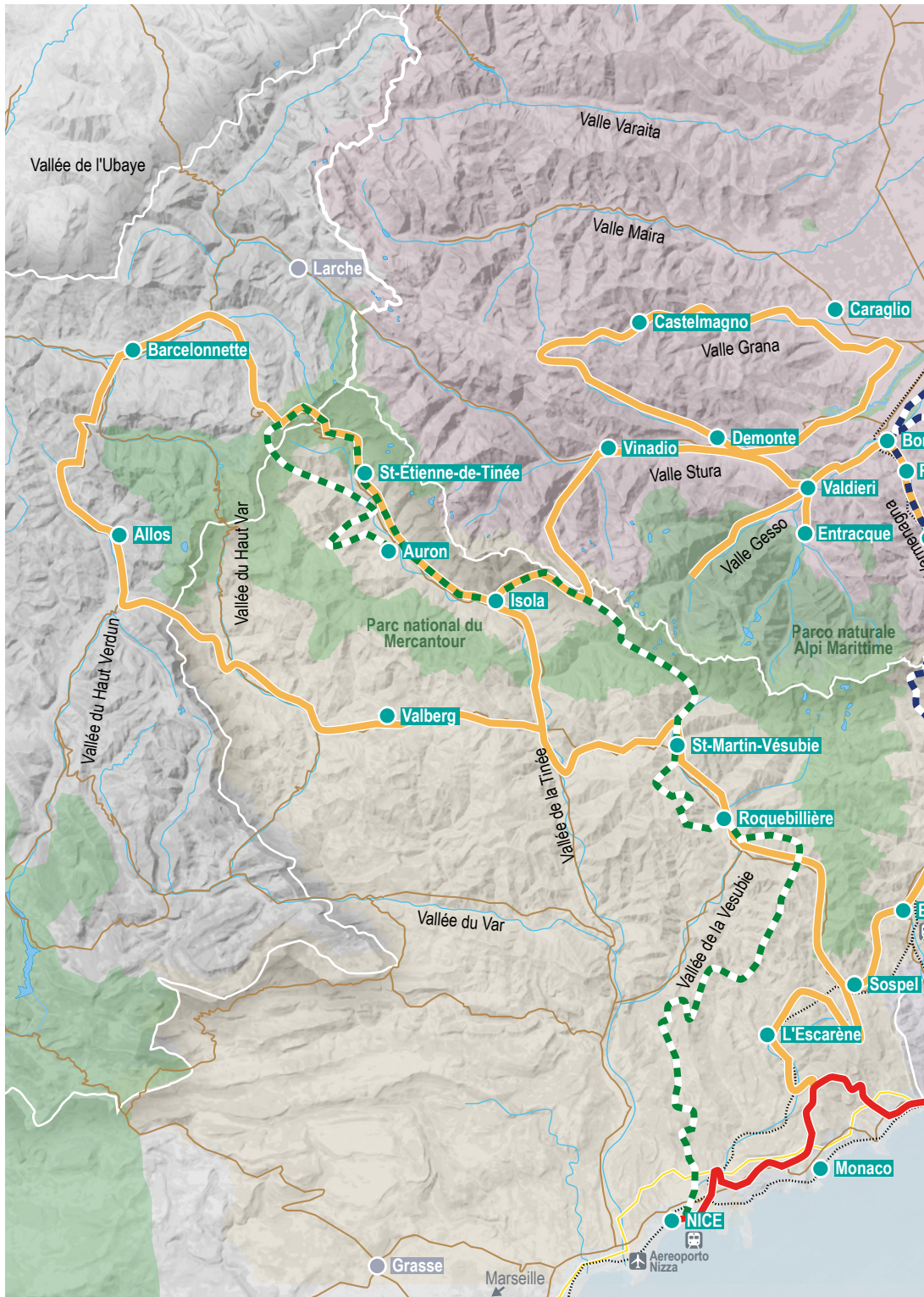
This e-book was created with co-funding from the European Union as part of the programme Interreg V-A Italy-France Alcotra 2014-2020 and the **ALPIMED Territorial Integrated Plan - PATRIM project**. The PATRIM project aims to encourage development of the Mediterranean Alps as an eco-tourist micro-destination, promoting sustainable activities for exploring the area's cultural and environmental heritage.

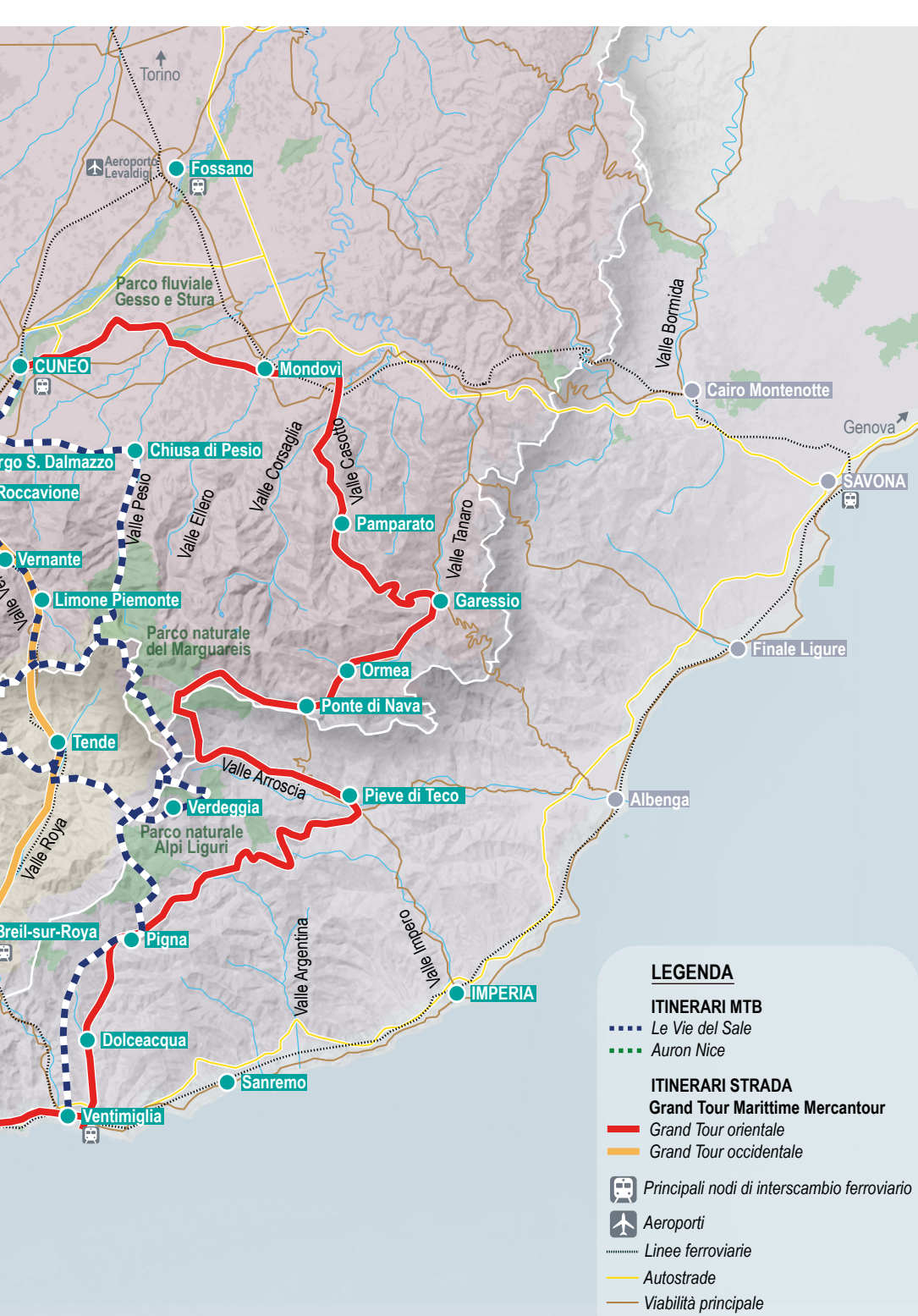
NB:

In October 2020 the entire area was badly hit by Storm Alex and suffered widespread damage as a result of this.

At the moment of writing, work being currently done to repair and alter certain routes might mean there are some differences with the trails in this book.







History, geology and geography of the Mediterranean Alps

The Mediterranean Alps

The Mediterranean Alps comprise the two Italian provinces of Cuneo and Imperia, and the French region of Alpes-Maritimes. Stretching from the Ligurian Alps and the Maritime Alps to the Ligurian Sea, they take in large towns and small municipalities. The cross-border area is subject to the effects of both Alpine and Mediterranean climates and, with altitudes ranging from 100 to more than 3,000 metres above sea level, it is a veritable treasure chest of biodiversity and an exceptionally valuable heritage of nature and landscape.

History of the Mediterranean Alps

Humans have been present in the Mediterranean Alps since prehistoric times. The climactic conditions and the



abundance of rivers and rocky shelters made this area perfect for building settlements and it was an important route for livestock migration and for the exchange of goods between the Po Valley and the sea. Often demanding and dangerous to cross, the steep slopes have always acted as a natural barrier and protected the Alps from easy take over, even from ruthless invaders like the Romans. The shape of the area forced the Romans to create two mountain passes, Colle di Tenda and Colle della Maddalena, and these provided key sites where they could stop and establish military fortifications. With the fall of the Roman Empire in the West and the subsequent period of political and social instability, the ancient Roman and commercial roads were abandoned.



Caravans of travellers, plus wayfarers and merchants once again crossed the Alpine paths starting from the 11th to the 12th century, helping villages to prosper and bringing new life to these places with the development of agriculture, animal farming and trade.

Mountain passes in the Maritime Alps played little part in the military operations of the second world war and, as a result, they were an excellent place for contraband activity. Many young mountain dwellers, often as part of

a group, attempted to “pass the Colla”, i.e. illegally cross the pass carrying backpacks loaded with goods that went undetected by customs officers there.



Nature

Due to the extremity of the Alpine chain and particularly the mitigating effect of the marine climate, many plant species managed to survive the Ice Age and remain unchanged to this day.

The mountains of the Mediterranean Alps often have a wildness and a harshness to them and feature an abundance of wild fauna such as chamois, Alpine ibex, and marmots. In the late 1990s the wolf also returned to these valleys.

The area has some important protected natural parks that play a huge role in protecting local fauna and flora. These include the [Mercantour National Park](#), [the Protected Areas of the Maritime Alps](#), the [Gesso and Stura River Park](#), and the [Ligurian Alps Natural Park](#).



The 10 climbs that shape cycling history

On both the Italian and the French sides, the Maritime Alps have made cycling history on more than one occasion and staged epic challenges, incredible getaways and legendary defeats. So for all racing cyclists who like to challenge themselves and take on the mountains, here are the 10 climbs to have under your belt.

Col de Tende



1. Colle Fauniera

At 2,481 metres above sea level, with a climb of 21 km and a difference in level of 1,660 metres, the legendary Colle Fauniera has an average gradient of 7.9% but for some long stretches can almost double that and even get to 14%. The steep climb leads up to some stunning alpine scenery at high altitude. This gargantuan Cunean mountain has witnessed epic ascents by some of the greatest cyclists, including a highly memorable 1999 race between Pantani and Savoldelli, who gave an amazing performance on both the uphill and the downhill. For anybody who wants to try it for themselves, the Granfondo Fausto Coppi is held each year at the end of June.

2. Colle della Lombarda

The most breathtaking climbs for lovers of road biking include Colle della Lombarda, which is situated at 2,351 metres on the border between Italy and France. The climb from Pratolungo is around 22 kilometres with an average gradient of 6.8% and a difference in altitude of 1,450 metres. A detour to the Sanctuary of Sant'Anna in Vinadio, where Vincenzo Nibali won the 2016 Giro d'Italia, is highly recommended.



3. Col d'Allos

Col d'Allos (2,240 metres) is the source of the Verdon River and down in the valley this forms one of Europe's most impressive canyons, the Verdon Gorge.

The climb from Barcelonnette is around 20 kilometres with an average gradient of 5.7% and a difference in level of 1,100 metres. On the Colmars side the climb is longer but not as steep (4% gradient).



4. Col de la Bonette

Follow the Ubaye Valley road and we get to the village of Jausiers This is the start of the long 24-kilometre climb to Col de la Bonette (2,802 metres), which has been part of the Tour de France several times.

Leaving Jausiers, the difference in level to get to Col de la Bonette is approximately 1,600 metres, with an average gradient of over 6%. The long descent that leads to the Tinée Valley crosses some incredible wild scenery that really makes all the hard work worth it



5. Col de Turini

There are four possible routes up to Col de Turini, which climbs to an altitude of 1,607 metres. On the La Bollène - Vésubie side, the climb is 15 kilometres long with an average gradient of 7.4% and a difference in level of 1,000 metres. Starting from Sospel, two hundred metres lower, it is 24 kilometres with a 5.2% gradient. For would-be record breakers, the climb was completed by Quintana and Bernal, who went up together in 2019 in 40 mins 36. The most famous ride though was that by Louison Bobet in the 1948 Grande Bucle, won by Gino Bartali.



6. Col de la Couillole

Col de la Couillole is an alpine pass in the Alpes Maritime region with an altitude of 1,678 metres. The climb up from Pont de Cians does not vary much and is around 30 km long, with an elevation gain of 1,200 metres and around a 4.5% gradient. It was a finish point in one stage of Paris-Nice 2017.



7. Pra Loup

Pra Loup is one of the most famous climbs in the French region of Ubaye. A 10-kilometre climb up from Barcelonette (average gradient of 5.3%) takes you to 1,630 metres. It is famous for being a finishing point in one of the stages of the 1975 Tour de France, in which French cyclist Bernard Thévenet took the win from Eddy Merckx and claimed the legendary Belgian cyclist's yellow jersey for the first time in his long career.

8. Col de la Cayolle

At 2,326 metres, Col de la Cayolle is the crowning glory of the Route des Grandes Alpes. The climb up from Barcelonnette is around 30 kilometres (average 4% gradient) on a narrow, paved road that is quite exposed in places.

9. Prato Nevoso Ascent (Colle del Prel)

The ascent to Prato Nevoso (at an altitude of 1,600 metres) starts from the lower Monregalese valley, a few kilometres from Mondovì. The 14-kilometre climb comprises a 959-metre elevation gain with an average gradient of 6.9%.

This was one of the 2008 Tour de France finish points and has also been a finish point in a Giro d'Italia stage several times.

In 2021 a stage of the Women's Giro d'Italia finished here.

10. Colle Maddalena - Col de Larche

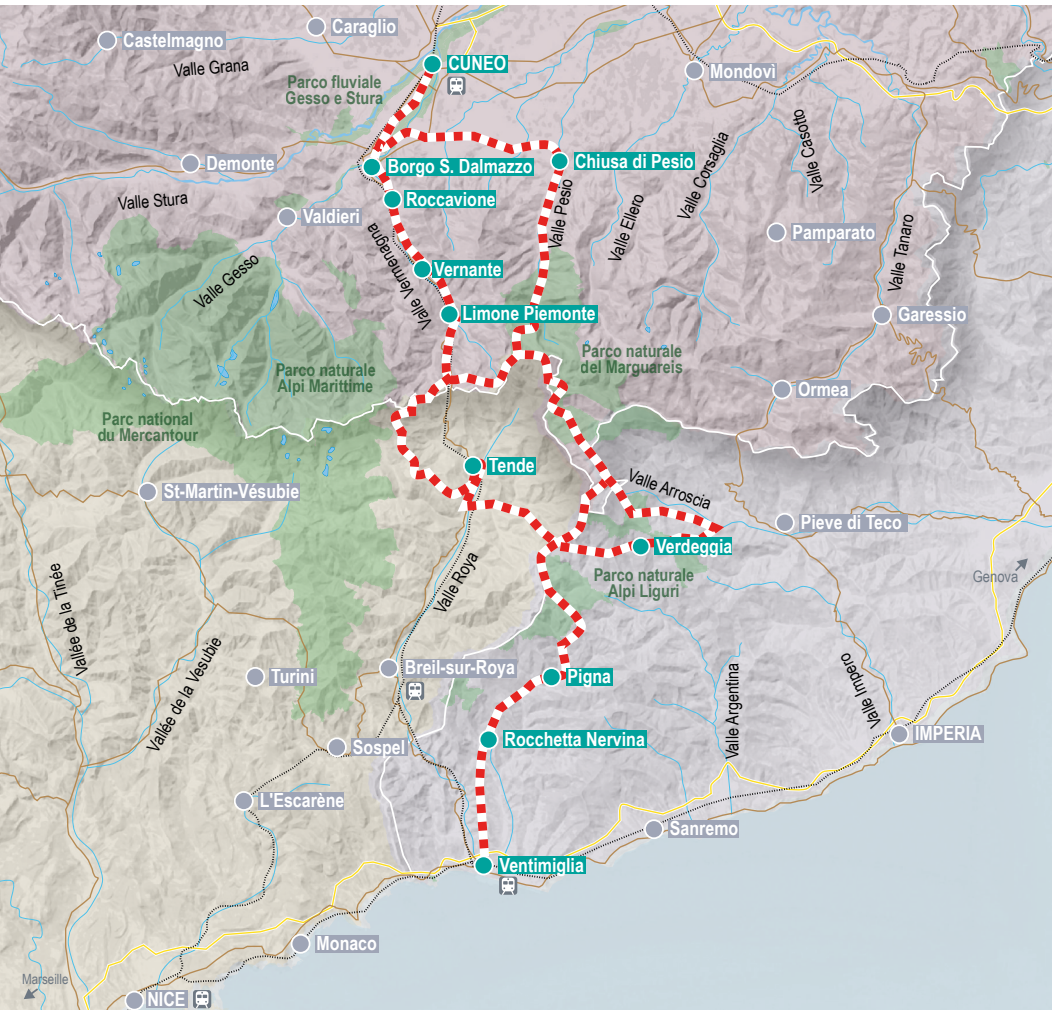
Colle Maddalena (known as Col de Larche on the French side) separates the Maritime and the Cottian Alps and marks the border between Italy and France. The climb is a good 18.3 kilometres and is not too challenging (4% average), with a series of amazing hairpin bends taking you to an altitude of 1,996.

The ascent to Colle Maddalena is like a pilgrimage to the very origins of heroic cycling.

There is a memorial stone here to "sole commander" Fausto Coppi and his legendary Cuneo-Pinerolo leg of the 1949 Giro d'Italia.

The Salt Roads

The Salt Roads were ancient routes that merchants would use to transport sea salt. Before the invention of fridges, salt was crucial for food and preservation, and for centuries it was considered even more valuable than gold.



Consequently, the roads used to transport and trade salt are seen as the great commercial routes of ancient times in Europe and in Asia and Africa.

These ancient Salt Roads are now being rediscovered by cyclists and fans of outdoor tourism.

A large part of the Salt Roads can be covered on mountain bike, starting from Limone Piemonte and crossing the Marguareis Natural Park and the stunning Navette forest before heading down to the sea.

The construction of forts and barracks was made possible thanks to ambitious high-altitude roads.



Salt Road from Limone Piemonte to Ventimiglia

From Limone Piemonte to Ventimiglia the Salt Road is a linear 115 km track that is mostly unpaved and single track/mule track.

↔ 115 km
↗ 3600 m

The first stretch covers the “Upper Salt Road”, which goes from 1,800 to 2,221 metres in altitude, encompassing alpine passes and hairpin turns and joining Limone Piemonte with Monesi di Triora. The track is not open to motor vehicles on Tuesdays and Thursdays.



From Colle di Tenda, the route continues on the Italian side and a little below the ridge, where you will find **19th-century forts** and a mule track leading to Colletto del Campanin. The road from here looks mostly to be flat and leads us to Colle della Boaria. Stunning views can be enjoyed from here and on clear days you can even see the magnificent Monviso mountain.

A downward stretch takes us to the **Conca delle Carsene** plateau, with unique geology that characterises the whole **Marguareis range**, and with one last push we reach Colle dei Signori, with the Don Barbera mountain refuge nearby at 2,070 metres. Heading up from the refuge to Colle di Selle Vecchie, we enjoy a very panoramic stretch and then a long path leads down through the **Navette forest**.

*Pont du Coq,
La Brigue*



A fork in the road at Monesi leads us up to Passo del Tanarello. From here onwards a series of ups and downs takes us to 1,600 metres at Baisse de Sanson and then with a final push we reach the Monte Grai Refuge, where the descent begins to the Allavena Refuge. Skirting around lake Tenarda, the descent begins and we pass through the medieval villages of Buggio and Pigna, where our route also includes some tricky uphill stretches as we pass Rocchetta Nervina and end up in Ventimiglia. Alternatively, once you get to Pigna, you can reach Ventimiglia by continuing

along the bottom of the valley and passing the pretty village of Dolceacqua. On the way back there is a train from Ventimiglia to Limone Piemonte, with connecting trains from Sanremo. Alternatively, inter-regional trains to Turin go via Savona and Ceva, changing in Fossano if you are heading to Cuneo or Limone Piemonte. An interesting



route can also be taken by taking a left on the road to Passo Tanarello and heading to Monte Saccarello, where a wonderful panoramic viewpoint offers views of Corsica on very clear days. as well as the La Terza Refuge nearby.

Crossing a stone bridge on the salt road

From here we continue along the Alta Via dei Monti Liguri route (OCA), then go around Monte Frontè and head down on a single track to Colle del Garezzo. Once past the tunnel, the route goes down to Passo della Guardia and the villages of Verdeggia and Realdo and then comes back to the original route.

The Ciclovía del Duca loop

↔ **120 km**
↗ **2500 m**

The Ciclovía del Duca loop is an MTB trail that starts and ends in Cuneo (we recommend taking your bike on the train from Cuneo to Limone Piemonte) and covers 105 km, with an altitude difference of over 2,500 metres.

The route has a range of track types, including stretches of tarmac road with downhill sections on dirt-track and single-track paths that are rather technical and for expert cyclists. As a result, we recommend using a front-suspension or full-suspension MTB.



The route starts in the centre of Cuneo and from there it is 30 km to Limone Piemonte, which you can also get to by train. From Limone a tarmac road and a series of bends take us to Colle di Tenda. This is where the Limone - Monesi dirt-track road begins, closed to motor vehicles on Tuesdays and Thursdays. An initial moderate climb takes us to Colletto del Campanino and then the road

seems to level out towards Colle della Boaria. From here the route heads down to the karst area of Conca delle Carsene, where we leave the military road, head up to the left towards Capanna Morgantini and then continue on in the direction of Passo del Duca.

The path down to the Saut Waterfall is very technical and demanding. It should be approached with a great deal of care and you should also keep an eye out for any hikers.



At Pian delle Gorre we come to the Pian delle Gorre Refuge. A long downhill path then begins and we pass by the Certosa di Pesio monastery, where the tarmac road begins again.

Colle della Boaria

A gentle descent takes us to Chiusa di Pesio. The return to Cuneo then passes through Peveragno, Boves and Borgo San Dalmazzo.

Colle di Tenda loop

↔ 107 km

↗ 3860 m

The Colle di Tenda loop is a good solution for those who want a challenging circular route that takes two days. Cycling clockwise, the start and end point is upper Colle di Tenda.

Leaving from Limone Piemonte (Chalet Le Marmotte), the route takes you first through Colle di Tenda and then along an unpaved track and the impressive former military road. We then cycle at altitude beneath the ridge that marks the border between Italy and France until we get to Colletto del Campanino, where the path seems to level out and we head to Colle della Boaria.

From here we get to the Don Barbera Refuge, passing through the moon-like karst plateau of **Conca delle Carsene**, a few metres after Colle dei Signori.

We head gently up on a road halfway up the hill and then cycle downhill for 14 kilometres through the thick forest of conifers of the **Navette Forest**. Once out of this forest, we are faced with a series of bends that bring us to Passo



del Tanarello. From there we move over to the French side over La Brigue and head towards Passo di Collardente and Baisse de Sanson. Heading downhill on a path through the trees, we get to Notre Dame des Fontaines, one of the great beauties of the Ligurian Alps and also known as the Sistine Chapel of the Alps.

The road continues on to the centre of La Brigue and then in Saint Dalmas de Tende we meet the River Roya and from there head towards Tende. Though the valley shows signs of Storm Alex, which destroyed the area in October 2020, outdoor tourism now offers new opportunities. From the village of Tende we head up, first on tarmac then on dirt track, to Baisse d'Ourne (2,040 m). The road then looks almost level for a while before we reach Baisse de Peirefique and then head back to the starting point of Colle di Tenda (Chalet delle Marmotte).

Notre Dame des Fontaines



ALBERGO - ITALIA

BAR



The Grand Tour of the Mercantour and Maritime Alps

GT Bike is a loop for cyclists who want to take on the most impressive passes in the western Alps.

To make it easier, and to make the most of the railway connections, we have decided to split the Grand Tour into two halves. For those who are not too keen on climbing and prefer to stop off at the beach every so often for a cooling dip, we particularly suggest the stretch from Ventimiglia to Nice. Gravel lovers on the other hand will really enjoy the route from Sospel to Valdieri.

The track of the Grand Tour of the Mercantour and Maritime Alps is not too difficult and is therefore accessible to those with less training. There are also charging points for e-bikes along the route.

St Agnes



Grand Tour of the Eastern Maritime Alps

The Grand Tour of the Eastern Maritime Alps offers the chance to cycle in new places and discover unexpected aspects of the area. Here are our 10 most interesting places on the route:

Cuneo

The town of Cuneo is situated where the Gesso and Stura rivers join and has a strong military and commercial heritage. Via Roma in the very centre is worth a visit, as is the ancient Contrada Mondovì quarter, where the town's oldest buildings can be found.

Crava Morozzo Nature Reserve

This haven for migratory birds offers a complete immersion in a natural dimension that has now been forgotten, particularly in flatland places.

Mendatica



Mondovi

This peaceful baroque town features stunning architecture by architect Francesco Gallo. It looks out onto the surrounding plain and has wonderful views of the Langa and the Alps.

Vicoforte

Vicoforte has the largest elliptical dome in the world. This was built in the shrine that was intended to be the mausoleum for the House of Savoy. It is impossible not to be overwhelmed by the magnificent vault.

Garessio

Garessio is listed as one of Italy's most beautiful little towns. It is a real treat in terms of things to see but also things to eat, including unmissable buckwheat polenta with a leek sauce and panissa (chickpea polenta).

Arroschia Waterfalls

Situated at the entrance to the tiny town of Mendatica, the waterfalls are 30 metres tall and 15 metres wide and have an impressive flow of water. A truly roaring experience.

Pieve di Tecò

This medieval village with its porticoes takes us right back in time. The village has an important antiques and modern art market.

Dregho

The only remarkable things to see here are the lush vegetation and the breath-taking scenery along the route. And that's nothing to be laughed at.

Dolceacqua

The village has an ancient castle (Castle Doria) plus an old bridge that creates a picture-perfect scene.

Ventimiglia

The town is mainly known for being a border town and as such there are lots of interesting things there, in addition to the beach. The old town is an absolute must-see.

Grand Tour of the Eastern Maritime Alps

↔ 307 km

↗ 6930 m

DOWNLOAD
THE ROUTE



GT: From Cuneo to Ventimiglia

Starting from Piazza Galimberti in the centre of Cuneo, the route goes down Corso Marconi before leaving the town and crossing over the River Gesso. A series of quiet country roads takes us to the [Crava - Morozzo Nature Reserve](#).

↔ 247 km
↗ 5610 m

Level with San Biagio, we pass the Pesio river and heads towards Mondovì. Over the next few kilometres a series of climbs and descents takes us through peaceful countryside until we reach Mondovì, where it's time for a rest. Travelling through the countryside, we head up to Briaglia and from there go on to the village of Vicoforte and down to the sanctuary. It's worth stopping off here and paying a visit to the [Magnificat](#). The route then takes to the forests of the Ligurian Alps, Roburent and Pamparato (where we suggest stopping off to try paste di meliga biscuits) and from there heads back up through the Casotto Valley and on to Garessio 2000.

*Vineyards near
Mondovì*





*The Valcasotto
royal castle*

The route then goes down to Garessio and follows the Tanaro and the Negrone back up to approach to the stunning Piancavallo in the Ligurian Alps Natural Park. The numerous animal species (including chamois) and the impressive woodland, with a huge number of larches, various pines, and beech trees, make this one of Liguria's most important nature areas.



With Bric Scravaglion behind us, a steep 20-kilometre descent takes us to Pieve di Teco and then the route follows the direction of the Giara di Rezzo. In Rezzo we find the thrilling climbs and descents typical of the Ligurian Alps. The tough climb begins up to another stunning mountain spot and in just 14 kilometres we get from Rezzo (at 542 metres) to an altitude of 1,330 metres, before then heading back down to Molini di Triora at 460 metres.

From Molini di Triora we head up again for around ten kilometres and then relax and enjoy a gorgeous downhill stretch to the sea. From Molini di Triora the route takes in the old Salt Road and this leads us past Pigna, Isolabona and quaint Dolceacqua, and then on to Ventimiglia.

From Ventimiglia to Nice

To go from Ventimiglia to Nice you can either follow the coast and visit the area's well-known coastal towns (43 km with 520 metres elevation gain) or you can travel

*Ponti, in the
municipality of
Pornassio*





along the coast and then head inland to explore less well-known areas with much more magnificent views.

In this case the route from Ventimiglia to Nice is entirely paved and covers 61 km with an elevation gain of 1,400 metres. The road stays the same until Menton, where the alternative route heads up inland.

↔ **60 km**
↗ **1320 m**

There are quite a few tunnels here so front and back lights are required.

The road is not very wide and in the summer months it can get very busy, so it is a good idea to take the train from Ventimiglia to Menton. Trains run every 20 minutes. Once out of the station at Ventimiglia, we cross the bridge over

Menton



the Roya, which flows from Colle di Tenda and comes out at the sea here. By the tourist port the route takes us under the walls of Ventimiglia old town.

From here we come out on the Aurelia road and pass the hamlet of Latte. The route then starts to climb, go up Corso Mentone and pass the lush promontory of Capo Mortola, the first real ascent with up to a 10% gradient.



After about 15 kilometres from the start, the route starts to rise and for another 15 kilometres goes along the narrow and quite quiet D22 road towards St-Agnès. The ascent starts off gently and a series of bends takes us to the mountains of Monaco and Nice, surrounded by the lush perfumed woods of the Côte d'Azur.

Heading uphill on Route de l'Armée des Alpes, the route starts to take on more of a serious incline and the panorama changes, revealing rocks and conifer woods until the D22 takes us to the little village of St-Agnès. We recommend

stopping here to refuel and get water. At 800 metres in altitude, St-Agnès is listed as the highest coastal village in Europe and one of the most beautiful in France, and is a gateway to the stunning Maritime Alps.

Thirty kilometres after our departure, we reach 930 metres, the highest point on the route, and then start to head down towards the sea, with some initial sharp bends and tunnels in the rock.

The odd house and hamlet start to appear at 32 kilometres. Once past Saint-Martin de Peille, we get to the prestigious Monte Carlo Golf Club and Testai d'Agel on the left, a panoramic spot where you'll definitely want to stop for a photo. The inland route connecting Monaco and Nice is broken up with a number of villages in the hills, such as La Turbie, which was once part of the Via Julia Augusta road.

La Turbie





Port of Nice

The route then falls and climbs repeatedly and takes us to the Grande Corniche Natural Park, which spans Eze, La Trinité, La Turbie and Villefranche-sur-Mer.

The cyclist is surrounded by greenery here, which continues on to the astronomical observatory in Nice. Heading down, we come to Vinaigrier Natural Park, with its terraces of olive trees much loved by the locals. We then continue on and pass Nizza Requier railway station. On Rue Arson we arrive at Nice port.





Great Tour of the Western Maritime Alps

Just like its eastern sister, the Grand Tour of the Western Maritime Alps has an array of wonderful places worth discovering by bike.

The top 10 must-sees:



Nice

Like all places on the Côte d'Azur, Nice is another fascinating town with lots of history. A walk along Promenade des Anglais is a must. This is one of the world's most beautiful promenades and the Quai de Rauba-Capeu provides a great opportunity for an "I love Nice" photo.

Sospel

The majestic presence of the Maritime Alps towers over this village. In 1924, its old bridge (the Ponte Vecchio) was listed as one of France's historic monuments.



Col de Turini

A thrilling sequence of bends, this pass has seen many an important cycle race. Col de Turini forest, thick with conifers, awaits those who get to the top.

Vesubia Mountain Park

Situated in Saint-Martin-Vésubie, this is a good place for some safe climbing, canyoning or an amazing adventure course.

Allos and the Upper Verdon Valley

If you want to switch things up and do some mountain biking, this area has 33 routes and a total of 250 km of paths and single tracks for all levels.

Colmars

This perfectly preserved medieval village is also home to the Fort of Savoy, an impressive structure that looks out over the valley below.

Barcelonnette

This is the starting point for a range of sporting activities, including climbs up to Col de la Cayolle and Pra Loup, hiking or rafting.

Col de la Bonette

Situated between Saint-Etienne de Tinée and Jausiers, Col de la Bonette, at a height of 2,715 m, is reached via Europe's highest road and offers fabulous views across the Mediterranean Alps.

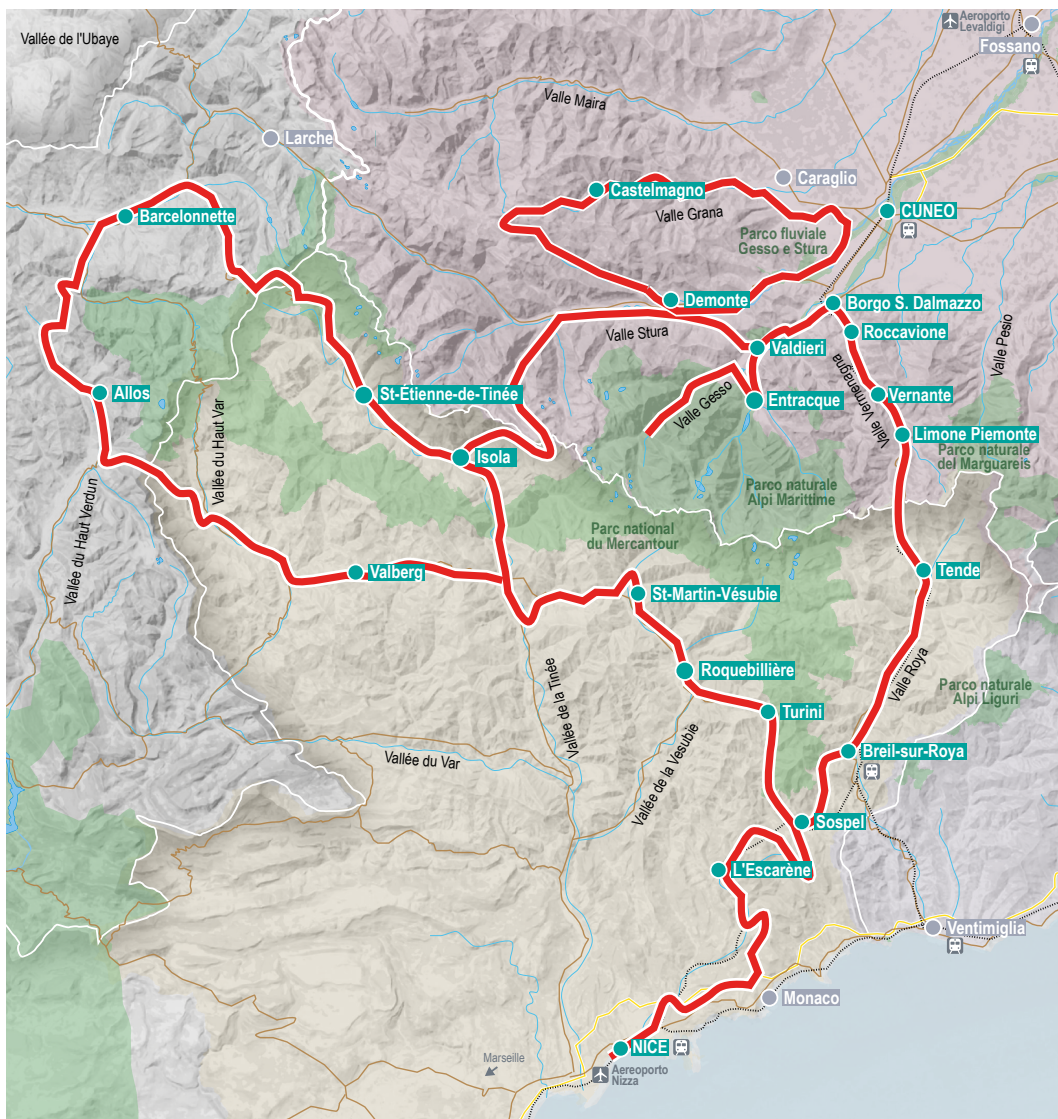
Vinadio

This little medieval village has an ancient castle (Forte Albertino) that provides a magnificent example of a defensive military infrastructure.

Entracque

Along with Valdieri (a pretty alpine village in the Maritime Alps Park), this was where the Savoy family would holiday. Make sure you visit the wolf centre (Centro Uomini e Lupi) and enjoy the relaxing thermal waters of Terme Reali.

Grand Tour of the Western Maritime Alps



Nice - Cuneo

The Grand Tour of the Western Maritime Alps mainly covers the France region, taking in its mountain passes and alpine lakes as well as little mountain villages, impressive forts and military roads.

↔ **268 km**
↗ **7800 m**

Starting in Nice, the route follows the Grande Corniche road and heads off inland alongside the River Paillon and on to the little town of L'Escarène. We then carry on past Sospel, which marks the south entrance to the Mercantour National Park. Cycling in the direction of Moulinet, the road rises up towards Col de Turini and then a long descent takes us to La Bollène-Vésubie.



Heading north, we pass Roquebillière and then follow the River Vésubie until we get to the quaint little village of Saint Martin Vésubie at the foot of the Mercantour mountains.

At 1,550 metres we come to Col de St Martin, also known as La Colmiane, home to the popular La Colmiane ski resort. This mountain pass joins Saint-Martin-Vésubie (960 m) with Saint-Sauveur-sur-Tinée (497 m). The village of Saint-Sauveur-sur-Tinée is only 64 kilometres from Nice and a number of roads meet here. From here you can follow the River Tinée and head towards the sea or go in the other direction towards Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée and up towards Isola and Col de La Bonette before going on to Jausiers. At 2,802 metres, this col is the highest in Europe and offers amazing mountain views from Monviso right across to the upper Val Tinée. An alternative route starts here and leaves the Val Tinée to



head towards the village of Guillaumes at the start of the Val d'Entraunes. The route takes in Col de la Couillole at 1,678 metres and then comes to Saint-Martin-d'Entraunes. From Saint-Martin-d'Entraunes we head towards Col des Champs and then go down to Colmars. From here it is possible to get to Barcelonette via Col d'Allos, which reaches 2,240 metres (no motor vehicles allowed on Friday mornings in summer). From Barcelonette we head on, continuing to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the

Ubaye Valley. We then get to the village of Jausiers and here we leave the road for Colle di Larche and Colle del Vars and begin the long climb that leads us to Colle de La Bonette, which at 2,802 metres is one of the highest completely paved climbs in Europe. From the top, a long descent brings us back to Isola and here we return to our main route that goes from Tinée to the popular French ski resort of Isola 2000 and Colle della Lombarda.

From Colle della Lombarda the long descent begins to Pratolungo. There is an interesting diversion (around 2 km) to the Sanctuary of Sant'Anna di Vinadio here, where pilgrims flock from all over Europe. The military road takes us to Festiona, where the second variant of the route starts.

The route continues on to Piano Quinto along the military road and then crosses the SS 21 state road and reaches Roccasparvera (where we recommend stopping off at La Fame for a bite to eat). Passing Vignolo, Cervasca and Bernezzo, we get to the Valle Grana and from here we start to go up Colle Fauniera. This is one of the toughest climbs in Italy and offers incredible views over the Grana,

Cuneo



Maira and Stura valleys. In order to be better prepared for the climb and the subsequent descent, we recommend stopping off in some of the refuges along the way, such as the Maraman near the Sanctuary of San Magno, the Fauniera near Col di Eische and the Carbonetto heading downhill in the San Giacomo di Demonte Valley. As well as being great places to take a break and refuel, you can also stay overnight and enjoy stargazing and some of Europe's darkest skies.

On the long descent down to Demonte, watch out for marmots on the first few kilometres; they often stop and warm themselves on the side of the road in the first few hours of sunlight. The route here first goes through alpine meadows and then gradually moves into coppice woods.

After a stop-off in the centre of Demonte, we return to the military road and then in Festiona we start to climb Madonna del Colletto. 5 km later we come to the watershed of the Valle Gesso and from here we get to Valdieri. From Valdieri you can either explore the upper Valle Gesso (Entracque and Terme di Valdieri) or head down towards Cuneo where the route ends.

Gravel Ride: from Sospel to Valdieri

For those who are looking for something other than tarmac, this 109-km, partially paved route provides a gravel alternative to the Grand Tour of the Western Maritime Alps.

↔ 109 km
↗ 3810 m

DOWNLOAD THE ROUTE



We start from the centre of Sospel and head towards Breil sur Roya, which is reached by passing Colle del Brouis. Breil sur Roya was one of the places that was most badly affected by Storm Alex in 2020.

From Breil sur Roya we follow the River Roya until we get to Fontan, a village in the bottom of the valley that was built to provide services to those who would travel from Col di Tenda across the narrow valley to the sea. Look up from here and enjoy the view of the little hilltop town of Saorge.

We pass two amazing gorges (Gola di Bergue and Gola del Paganin) and then get to Saint Dalmas de Tende, which is at an intersection with the Valley of Wonders (with its collection of rock carvings), La Brigue and the regions bordering Italy.

Less than 5 kilometres later and we get from Saint Dalmas de Tende to Tende, with its castle and stunning cathedral. From here we head towards Vievola, where the final 16-km leg begins to take us to Colle di Tenda (at 1,870 metres) and its 19th-century fortifications.



The damage caused by Storm Alex can still be seen today unfortunately. Together with Tinée, Vesubie and Valle Vermenagna, this strip of land reveals the effect that climate change and extreme weather can have on a region and the people who live there.

From Colle di Tenda a narrow paved road takes us down towards Limone Piemonte.



A continuous gentle pedal downhill takes us from Limone Piemonte to Vernante, which is well-known for its Pinocchio wall murals. Once we get to Roccavione, there is the choice of either heading towards Borgo San Dalmazzo and then Cuneo (on the Gesso and Stura River Park route) or alternatively you can go past Roccavione station and then turn left along Via Provinciale Roaschia in the direction of Valdieri.

The road is level as it follows the Gesso to Valdieri, where it becomes more narrow and starts to climb, coming out in the mountains and Sant'Anna di Valdieri.



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PRINCIPALE

16
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PRINCIPALE

The Grand Traverse from Auron to Nice by mountain bike

The Grand Traverse from Auron to Nice is a 7-stage route that covers 260 km (with an altitude difference of 8 thousand metres) and an area from the Mercantour mountains to the Côte d'Azur sea.

The route takes us through the high altitude landscapes of the Mercantour National Park to the hills of Nice, providing views of the sea and revealing the ancient history of the Nice area and its colourful hill-top villages.

The trail can be done on a traditional mountain bike or an electric mountain bike. Beginners do need to be aware though that MTB difficulty is not so much about going uphill as about going downhill, and you need to be really able to control your bike when a descent is particularly technical or demanding.



Col Mercière





The best period to mountain bike the Grand Traverse from Auron to Nice is from June to September. Less expert cyclists might like to go with specific tour operators such as ALLIBERT, who suggests splitting the stages up as follows:

- 1: Auron-Saint Dalmas le Selvage 32 km | 1,090 m+
- 2: Saint Dalmas-Saint Etienne 45 km | 1,350 m+
- 3: Saint Etienne de Tinée-Isola 2000 29 km | 1,150 m+
- 4: Isola 2000-Saint-Martin Vésubie 38 km | 890 m+
- 5: Saint-Martin Vésubie-Roquebillière 34 km | 815 m+
- 6: Roquebillière - Turini 39 km | 1,630 m+
- 7: Turini - Nice 73 km | 1,150 m+

There are a number of useful information boards that tell you about the altitude and geography of the different stages along the route.

A variety of bike services can also be found in the villages on this route, such as bike wash and tyre inflation stops and charging points for electric MTBs. In addition, there are bike storage facilities at all accommodation that welcomes cycle tourists. The stretch that passes through the Vésubie valley was badly hit by Storm Alex in October



2020 and as a result there may be some changes and alterations to the route due to repair work.

Auron

The route starts from Auron and a series of minor roads takes us up to 2,000 metres and breathtaking mountain scenery. After passing the ski lift, we start the descent and follow the Route de Demandols, which runs alongside the Ardon and takes us to Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée at 1,200 metres.

We then head towards Saint Dalmas le Sauvage where we can take a break and prepare to climb Colle della

Bonette. From Saint Dalmas le Selvage we then head immediately up. After travelling 20 kilometres we get to the lunar landscape of Colle della Bonette. At 2,802 metres, this alpine pass is one of the highest in Europe. With our windproof jackets on, we now head off on the long descent down to Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée, beaming from ear to ear.

From Saint-Étienne-de-Tinée we go downhill keeping beside the river until we reach Isola and from here we



St-Dalmas-le-Selvage

go up to the Isola 2000 ski station. Then, on more dirt tracks, we reach 2,300 metres and start to head down to Boréon. From the Boréon lake we continue to cycle gently downhill along Route de Boréon, where we can enjoy some amazing waterfalls, and then travel alongside the river towards Saint-Martin Vésubie. The little town is ten kilometres away and situated at 960 metres.

We carry on downhill to Roquebillière and here our route crosses three different zones: first the cool Ubac forest, then a panoramic open stretch and finally a long downhill stretch of dappled conifer woods. From the hill-top village of Venanson (1,160m) we start a lovely even stretch through

woods and onto an altitude of 1,700 m beneath the Tête de Siruol. Finally, we take a wide path overlooking the valley and, after a long (and at times technical) descent, we reach the delightful village of Roquebillière (600m). From Roquebillière we start to climb, covering 15 kilometres before we get to Col de Turini. Situated at 1,607 metres, on clear days it is possible to see the Côte d'Azur sea from here.



From Col del Turini we first get to Peïra-Cava and, after a long downhill stretch, we start to climb up to Col Saint-Michel (963 m). After reaching the foot of Mont Férier (1,276 m), we begin our long ride down towards Levens.

St-Dalmas-le-Selvage

A combination of narrow roads and paths (both uphill and downhill) takes us through woods and clearings to the Gairaut canal and we follow this into the city of Nice and then on finally to the sea.



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Place St Martin Vesubie

BIKE EVENTS

ALPSEPIC

A mountain bike marathon for solo riders or pairs. Individual stages are from around 50 to 70 km per day on the Grande Traversée des Hautes-Alpes trail. June.

www.alpsepic.com

CUNEO BIKE FESTIVAL

A week of events devoted to bikes, sustainable mobility, tourism, and a promotion of “Cuneo Pedala”. A huge celebration of cycling. September.

www.comune.cuneo.it/CuneoBikeFestival

FAUSTO COPPI GRANFONDO

The magic of cycling along Giro d'Italia and Tour de France roads in the heart of the Maritime Alps. One of Italy and Europe's longest-running granfondo races, this involves two routes: A longer route of 177 km (with over more than 4,000 metres of altitude difference) and a medium route of 111 km with over 2,500 metres of altitude difference. This hugely important race for cyclists from across the globe is held in June/July and registration opens in February.

www.faustocoppi.net

MERCANTOUR AND MARITIME ALPS GRANFONDO

A site for cyclist fans with all racing competitions held in the Maritime Alps and Mercantour areas. Legendary climbs in a stunning location. From May to August.

granfondo-alpesmaritimes.com

granfondomercantour.com



LE DÉFI DES FONDUS DE L'UBAYE

For highly trained cyclists. Starting and finishing in Barcelonnette, this race covers at least 4 of the 7 mountain passes in under 24 hours. There are routes from 66 to 220 km and from 1,680 to 6,400 m. Held in June.

www.fondubaye.free.fr

LE RALLYE DE LA BONETTE

This bike excursion starts from Jausiers on the Colle della Bonette - Restefond road at 2,802 metres.

The Jausiers - La Bonette route is 48 km (there and back) while to Saint-Etienne de Tinée it is 104 km (there and back). July

www.locationbarcelonnette.fr



SERVICES

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www.cuneoholiday.com | info@cuneoholiday.com

CÔNITOURS

The Cuneo Tourist Operators Consortium - bike rental also www.cuneoalps.it | info@cuneoalps.it

GESSO AND STURA RIVER PARK

Infopoint, Piazzale Walther Cavallera 13, Cuneo, Tel. 0171 444501 www.parcoufluvialegessostura.it, parcoufluviale@comune.cuneo.it

MARITIME ALPS PROTECTED AREAS AUTHORITY

Info point: Piazza Regina Elena 30 12010 Valdieri (CN), Tel. +39 0171 976800, www.parcoalpinarittime.it | info@areeprotettealpinarittime.it

MERCANTOUR NATIONAL PARK

www.mercantour-parcnational.fr/fr

LIGURIAN ALPS NATURAL PARK

Via Roma 11 - 18026 Rezzo (IM) Tel. 0183 753384

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Info point: parconaturalealpiliguri.it

Bike hire and guides: parconaturalealpiliguri.it

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For any issues with routes, notify:

sentinelles.sportsdenature.fr

HOTEL





HOW TO GET HERE

BY TRAIN

Turin - Cuneo - Ventimiglia - Nice train. After Storm Alex damaged the railway line in 2020, repair work to it is currently causing some disruption. Before setting off we recommend checking the websites to see which routes are operating

You can also take an inter-regional train to Turin via Savona and Ceva, changing at Fossano for those passengers heading to Cuneo or Limone.

The Train des Pignes (Nice - Digne-les-Bains) covers the lower Var and Verdon valleys www.trainprovence.com

BY CAR

Turin-Savona (A6) and Asti-Cuneo (A33)

From Ventimiglia follow the Valle Roya and Colle di Tenda, SS20 and D6204 heading to France.

From Savona, take the A6 to Turin and the E717/A33 Cuneo.

Motorway from Nice to Mentone/Genoa, Ventimiglia exit.

BY PLANE

Turin-Caselle Airport www.aeroportoditorino.it

Cuneo Levaldigi Airport www.aeroporto.cuneo.it

Nice Côte d'Azur International Airport
www.nice.aeroport.fr

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