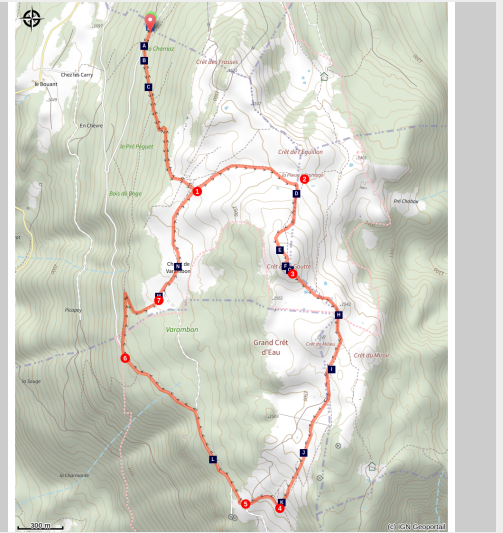


# Varambon and Grand Crêt d'Eau

Terre Valserine - Confort



Point de vue du crêt de la Goutte (Paul Béréziat)



*South of the National Natural Reserve of the High Jura mountain range is the Crêt de la Goutte at an altitude of 1,610 m in the mountains of Grand Crêt d'Eau. Mountain pastures, mountain chalets, and alpine panoramas characterise this circuit with the addition of a discovery trail on the topic of mountain pastures.*

“Naming the southern tip of the Jura mountains is a story of “O”s: Crêt d’Eau falling abundantly, Credo because one needs faith during the ascent, crêt d’Haut with none higher, crêt d’Aulps in reference to the alpine pastures... But the most important thing is the view from the top!” Marc Forestier (“Que faire dans le Parc naturel régional du Haut-Jura”, What to do in the High-Jura Regional Natural Park, Dakota Edition)

## Useful information

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Practice : Hiking

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Duration : 4 h

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Length : 9.4 km

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Trek ascent : 537 m

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Difficulty : Difficult




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Themes : History & heritage, Landscapes, Pastoralism and agriculture

# Trek

Departure : La Charnaz near Menthières

Arrival : La Charnaz near Menthières

Markings :  GR® (Long distance)  GRP® (Long distance through a local area)   
PR® (Walking & hiking trail)

From the parking lot in **La Charnaz**, the trail heads up the stony path to the right (yellow and red waymarking) and opens onto the pasture of Varambon. Arrive at **Below the Ridges** (Marker no. 4 of the discovery trail: Through the alpine pasture).

Head uphill to your left into the alpine pasture, following the cattle trails, before coming to a little ridge at **The Cheese Stone**.

The trail heads along the fence to your right (white and red waymarking) and turns left to reach the **CRET DE LA GOUTTE**.

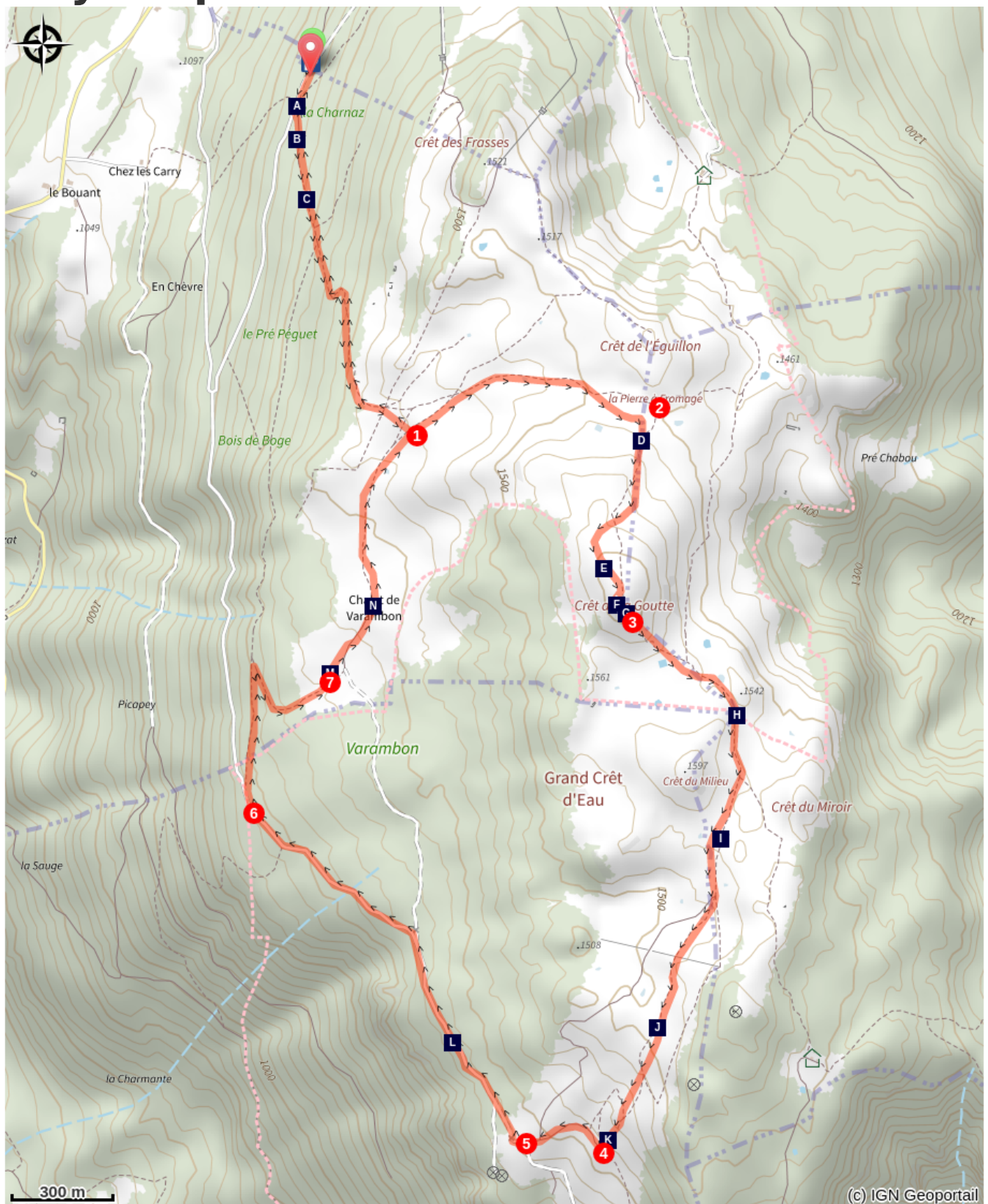
Head along the rocky outcrop and then follow along a fence until you come to a “goya”. Follow directions towards Sorgia d’en Haut which will lead you to an old low stone wall. Continue to your right (stony path), and head along a few goyas until you come to **Between the Ridges**.

Descend through the pasture until you come close to the **Sorgia d’en Haut** ruins (recent goya).

Follow the stony path to your right (yellow waymarking) to reach the **la Charmante** parking lot. The forest path descends to the right towards Menthières. At the **Under Varambon** parking lot, continue your descent on this road for 700 metres until you reach the edge of the Reserve.

The old Varambon path ascends to your right and, after a bend, enters the pasture. You will come to a crossroads. Take the stony path to your left until you come to the **chalet of Varambon**. Continue on your ascent through the alpine pasture until you reach the **Under the Ridges** intersection and return to the parking lot where you started the same way you came (yellow and red waymarking).

# On your path...



“Through the alpine pasture” trail (A)  
Restricted Areas for Wildlife (C)  
The Grand Crêt d'Eau mountain pastures (E)

National Natural Reserve of the High Jura mountain range (B)  
The cheese stone (D)  
The Mont Blanc (F)

Viewpoint from the Crêt de la  
Goutte (G)

The Alpine citril finch (I)

Goyas (K)

The remains of the mountain  
village of Varambon (M)

The low mountain pasture walls (H)

Martagon lily (J)

High forests (L)

The Varambon chalet (N)



# All useful information

## **Advices**

To be avoided during foggy or stormy weather.

This trail passes through one of the National Natural Reserve of the High-Jura's Restricted Areas for Wildlife.

Within the entire Reserve: dogs are not permitted, nor is the picking of flowers or the picking up of any vegetal, animal or geological items. Bivouacking is only allowed near to chalets, such as the Gralet chalet here.

In the La Charnaz-Varambon Restricted Area: between 15 December and 30 June, you are prohibited from leaving the waymarked path.

Furthermore, this trail passes through pastures with livestock and forest paths. To respect the owners and farmers granting you passage, and for the security of livestock and wild fauna, we ask that you remain on the waymarked paths. Use the adapted passageways to get across fencing and be sure to close gateways behind you.

In case of forest works (felling, skidding, etc.), for your safety, know when to stop and turn around.

## **Environmental sensitive areas**

Au cours de votre itinéraire, vous allez traverser des zones sensibles en rapport avec la présence d'une espèce ou d'un environnement spécifique. Dans ces zones, un comportement approprié permet de contribuer à leurs préservations. Pour plus d'information, des fiches sont disponibles pour chaque zone.

### **Western capercaillie**

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, Decembre

Contact: Parc naturel régional du Haut-Jura

29 Le Village

39310 Lajoux

03 84 34 12 30

[www.parc-haut-jura.fr](http://www.parc-haut-jura.fr)

Le Grand Tétras est une espèce emblématique des forêts de montagnes françaises. Son apparence et son comportement font de lui un oiseau très atypique. Pouvoir l'observer relève d'un vrai défi, tant cet oiseau est discret, mais s'avère être un souvenir mémorable.

En hiver, son activité est réduite au minimum. Il passe la quasi-totalité de la journée perché dans un arbre et consomme uniquement des aiguilles de sapin. Une nourriture très peu énergétique. Cette période est critique pour sa survie. Un oiseau subissant

un dérangement régulier va puiser dans ses maigres réserves et finir par en subir les conséquences. Sa sensibilité à la prédation aura augmenté, ou bien il dépérira simplement à cause du manque d'énergie. Une autre période critique prend place du printemps au début de l'été avec la couvaison. Si la poule est surprise plusieurs fois, elle va abandonner le nid et laisser ses poussins seuls, sans protection. La survie des jeunes étant déjà très faible naturellement, ce phénomène accentue, d'autant plus, ce risque de mortalité chez les jeunes oiseaux.

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec le Grand tétras en période de nidification sont principalement les pratiques sportives terrestres comme la randonnée, le ski, le VTT.

## **Réserve naturelle nationale de la Haute-Chaine du Jura**

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, Decembre

Contact: **Réserve naturelle nationale de la Haute Chaîne du Jura**

135, rue de Genève

01170 GEX

Tél : 04 50 41 29 65

E-mail : [contact@rnn-hautechainedujura.fr](mailto:contact@rnn-hautechainedujura.fr)

Site : <https://www.rnn-hautechainedujura.fr>

Accueillant au fil des saisons à la fois promeneurs, professionnels (alpagistes, forestiers, etc.) et naturalistes, cette Réserve est un territoire accessible où de nombreux usages cohabitent. Pour assurer la pérennité de cet espace sensible et des pratiques qui s'y déroulent, il convient de respecter la réglementation en vigueur :

Sont interdits :

- **les chiens même tenus en laisse,**
- **la cueillette des fleurs et la collecte de fossiles ou et de minéraux,**
- **le feu,**
- **l'usage d'instrument sonore,**
- **l'abandon de déchets,**
- **le camping.** Toutefois le bivouac, sans abri (sauf en cas de nécessité absolue : conditions météorologiques et sécurité de la personne notamment), pendant les créneaux horaires de 19h00 le soir à 9h00 le matin, pour une seule et unique nuitée par site, à une distance maximale de vingt mètres des sentiers balisés autorisés, en dehors des alpages occupés par le bétail, est toléré.

L'ensemble de la réglementation est consultable ici :

<https://www.rnn-hautechainedujura.fr/reglementation/>

Par ailleurs, sept Zones de quiétude de la faune sauvage, actives du 15 décembre au 30 juin (exception faite de la ZQFS des Platières, active du 15 décembre au 15 mai), interdisent de sortir des sentiers de randonnée balisés spécifiquement pour cette période de l'année.

## Zone de quiétude de la faune sauvage Varambon

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, Decembre

Contact: **Réserve naturelle nationale de la Haute Chaîne du Jura**  
135, rue de Genève  
01170 GEX

Tél : 04 50 41 29 65

E-mail : [contact@rnn-hautechainedujura.fr](mailto:contact@rnn-hautechainedujura.fr)

Site : <https://www.rnn-hautechainedujura.fr/reglementation/>

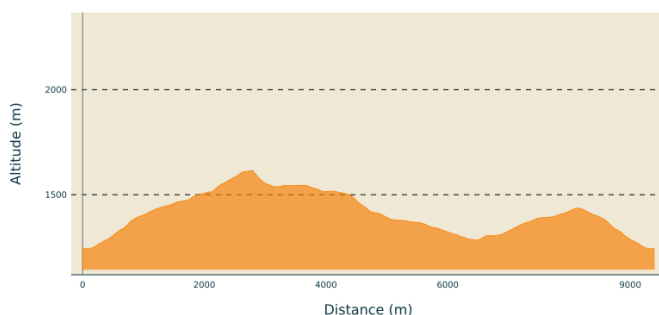
**Zone de quiétude de la faune sauvage** dans la Réserve naturelle nationale de la Haute Chaîne du Jura.

**Du 15 décembre au 30 juin**, il est interdit de sortir des sentiers de randonnée spécifiquement balisés pour cette période, et quelque soit la pratique de la randonnée : à pied, en raquettes à neige ou à ski.  
Vous pouvez télécharger l'arrêté préfectoral en cliquant [ici](#).

Ensemble contribuons à la protection de la nature.

*(Le non-respect de cette réglementation est soumis à des peines judiciaires pouvant aller jusqu'à 450€.)*

### Altimetric profile



Min elevation 1243 m  
Max elevation 1615 m

### Access

10 km northeast of Confort via the D 16 (towards Menthieres), then take the forest path of Sorgia from the Castle and finally, take the forest path left towards La Charnaz.

### Advised parking

Roadside at La Charnaz

# On your path...

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## “Through the alpine pasture” trail (A)

South of the National Natural Reserve of the High Jura mountain range, this discovery trail provides an understanding of low-walls and goyas, explains the disappearance of old altitude villages, makes a pit stop at the Varambon chalet and allows hikers to visit the exhibit on the chalet (booklet available at the Bellegarde-sur-Valserine tourist office).

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## National Natural Reserve of the High Jura mountain range (B)

At the far south-east of the Jura massif is the long Jura mountain range. From the Rhône water gap to the south, to the Swiss border to the North, and overlooking the Lake Geneva basin, the high Jura mountain range separates the Pays de Gex from the valley of the Valserine.

Created in 1993, the National Natural Reserve ensures the preservation of mountainous environments that could be altered by development and potentially high tourist numbers. The reserve aims to ensure a balance between farming and forest exploitation and preserving the wealth of natural heritage in this area. The diversity of vegetation groups, in various colours and environments, are part of the originality of these high mountain range landscapes.

Attribution : PNRHJ/Samia Imloul

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## Restricted Areas for Wildlife (C)

In winter, extreme climate conditions weaken wildlife. It survives by preserving its energy. In the spring, out come the parades, the chants, the mating rituals and the “raising” of young. These two periods are both ones in which animal species are particularly vulnerable. In order to ensure their much-needed tranquillity during these seasons, and to improve the success rate during mating season, the Reserve has set up Restricted Areas for Wildlife, where visitors are prohibited from leaving the waymarked paths from 15 December to 30 June.

Attribution : PNRHJ / Léo Poudré

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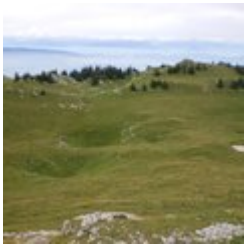


## The cheese stone (D)

This stone is all that remains of the low wall that once protected an old goya, and which prevented cattle from polluting the water. Several stories claim to explain the name given to this strange stone. While some say that this was where the surrounding lords used to pay their taxes, part of which included a portion of their summer cheese production, others say that this stone served as a resting place when men used to transport cheese on their backs (excerpt from the booklet: "Au fil de l'alpage" or "Through the alpine pasture").

Attribution : PNRHJ / Samia Imloul

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## The Grand Crêt d'Eau mountain pastures (E)

The mountain pasture's naked landscape is the result of the secular actions of men and herds. They cleared all the forests that once almost-entirely covered the Jura mountains. Only the highest summits escaped the forest after the melting of glaciers (excerpt from the booklet: "Au fil de l'alpage" or "Through the alpine pasture").

Attribution : PNRHJ / Gilles Prost

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## The Mont Blanc (F)

In the middle of the Alps mountain range, directly opposite you, is the Mont Blanc. Culminating at 4,810 meters, this is the highest summit in western Europe. Its white shape, which extends to the north (left) towards the Aiguille du Midi and the Aiguilles de Chamonix, makes it easy to recognise.

Attribution : Paul Béréziat

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## Viewpoint from the Crêt de la Goutte (G)

The Crêt de la Goutte, at 1621 metres in altitude, is the highest point of the Grand Crêt d'Eau. During good weather, it offers a superb panorama. The Jura ranges are replaced by the plateaux of Bugey and the Alps mountain range with its snowy summits (excerpt from the booklet: "Au fil de l'alpage" or "Through the alpine pasture").

Attribution : Paul Béréziat



## The low mountain pasture walls (H)

These low walls were built during the 19th century to set the borders for the mountain pastures purchased by well-off owners from Collonges or as dividers between the forest and the mountain pastures (at the time, herds were not allowed to wander into the woods). Today, these walls are home to a particular variety of fauna. Reptiles, birds and mustelids alike are attracted to these structures (excerpt from the booklet: “Au fil de l’alpage” or “Through the alpine pasture”).

Attribution : PNRHJ / Léo Poudré

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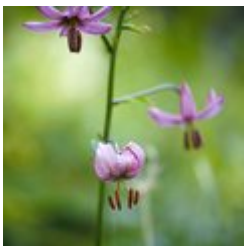


## The Alpine citril finch (I)

As states in its name, the citril finch is a true mountain-dweller. In France, it can be found in the Vosges, the Jura, the Massif Central, the Alpes and the Pyrenees. It usually settles on the upper boundaries of coniferous forests, in wooded meadows or in alpine lawns. Very sociable, it likes to live in a community; and it can often be identified from its very characteristic chirps when moving in small groups. This bird is gradually disappearing in the lower altitudes of the High-Jura Park and is now almost exclusively concentrated in the high mountain range. One of the results of climate change ?

Attribution : Fabrice Croset

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## Martagon lily (J)

You may see the martagon lily in bloom in the summer, with its high stems that can reach up to 1.5 metres in height! But be careful, picking and pulling out these plants is forbidden as they are protected by law. We also remind you that in the Natural reserve, you are prohibited from picking up any animal, floral or geological items (excerpt from the booklet: “Au fil de l’alpage” or “Through the alpine pasture”).

Attribution : PNRHJ / Léo Poudré



## Goyas (K)

“Goyas” - natural-looking artificial ponds - are scattered across the Grand Crêt d’Eau mountain pastures. In spring, when the snow melts, these goyas fill with water. A myriad of alpine newt tadpoles can be seen wriggling here in the morning sun.

The quick absorption of water by the karstic sub-soil and the lack of sources on summits led men to create these watertight reserves for livestock (excerpt from the booklet: “Au fil de l’alpage” or “Through the alpine pasture”).

Attribution : PNRHJ / Anne-Sophie Vincent

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## High forests (L)

Varambon forest is very old. It is primarily comprised of firs trees, spruces, beech trees, maple trees and rowan trees, and was partly used for livestock. Managed according to the selection system by foresters during the 19th and 20th centuries, this forest is still of major biological interest. As a part of the National Natural Reserve created in 1993, it must remain a calm and tranquil area to encourage the western capercaillie, the hazel grouse and many other birds to continue to come (excerpt of the booklet: “Au fil de l’alpage” or “Through the alpine pasture”).

Attribution : PNRHJ/Samia Imloul

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## The remains of the mountain village of Varambon (M)

In a small depression, on the edge of the woods, many nettles have now grown. Nettles are nitrophilous plants (meaning they love nitrate) and they grow in the ruins of old mountain cabins, feeding several centuries later on the remnants of animal’s bedding (excerpt from the booklet: “Au fil de l’alpage” or “Through the alpine pasture”).

Attribution : PNRHJ / Samia Imloul

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## The Varambon chalet (N)

The sizeable roof of this chalet protrudes from the middle of this mountain pasture and is a place of shelter during times of rain or fog.

Built during the first half of the 19th century, the Varambon chalet is the last remnant of the mountain pasture on the Grand Crêt D'Eau. It once housed a central kitchen in which the cheesemaker made Comté or Bleu de Gex. The two rooms located to the north served to keep milk fresh (the dairy) and to store cheese (the attic). Two stables to the south, which are now open to hikers during the day (and hold exhibits on the life of shepherds in the large stable), were home to around sixty dairy cows, young cattle and pigs, who were fattened up with whey (excerpt from the booklet: "Au fil de l'alpage" or "Through the alpine pasture").

Attribution : PNRHJ / Nina Verjus