The Hauts Plateaux Reserve
Map: 1/25000 Villard de Lans IGN Top25 3236 OT

At the heart of the Vercors, the Hauts Plateaux Reserve covers 17,000 hectares, and is the largest land reserve in France. Under the management of the Parc Régional Naturel du Vercors, its main goal is to insure control and monitoring of the flora and fauna biodiversity on this area where pastoralism has been practiced for many centuries.

Since 2011 part of the Reserve has been transformed in an “Integral Biological Reserve” covering 2,160 ha managed by the National Forestry Organism, as all the French National Forests.

The Reserve is also a scientific laboratory, since a bio-climatic observatory has been implemented in order to measure the impact of global warming on fauna and flora. Because of its position between the North and South Alps, it is submitted to contrasting climatic influences, Mediterranean, Oceanic, and of course altitude.

Alternation of pastures and woods (Forests: 37%, Herbaceous habitats: 31 %, Rocky areas: 32 %) gives the Reserve a unique landscape. Between 1050 m and 2341 m, the Reserve covers the montane, subalpine and alpine zones.

The montane zone is characterized by vegetation groups of the fir-beech stand. At the transition between montane and subalpine zones, vegetation is characterized by open spruce woodlands and clearings.

Above 1600 m, the subalpine zone is occupied by the largest “hooked pine” (pinus uncinata) forest of the French Alps, and is tightly linked with lapiaz, grasslands and limestone rocky grounds, as well as moors.

Above 2000 m, the alpine zone habitats are dominated by calcareous grasslands, screes, lapiaz…

During glacial periods the whole Reserve surface was covered with a thick ice sheet which has eroded the surface in a particular way, giving a typical micro-topography characterized by mounds and depressions at a decametric scale. This original morphology determines typical patchwork vegetation of a great importance for biodiversity.

In many places, bare Barremian limestone bedrock appears leading to characteristic karstic landforms (see the Font d'Urle sheet): limestone pavements, lapiaz, shafts, screes … Water is so rare on the Reserve that the administrative boundaries between villages and between Isère and Drôme departments are straight lines from one spring to the next one.

Within the limestone strata, a layer known as “Font Froide marls” corresponds to deeper marine deposits and gives different and interesting habitats we will get across during this hike.

Starting point: “Maison forestière de La Coche”

Pteridophytes already identified on the Réserve (database of the Conservatoire Botanique National Alpin)

Asplenium adiantum-nigrum L.
Asplenium fontanum (L.) Bernh.
Asplenium ramosum L.
Asplenium ruta-muraria L.
Asplenium trichomanes L. subsp. quadrivalens D.E. Meyer
Athyrium distentifolium Tausch ex Opiz
Athyrium filix-femina (L.) Roth
Blechnum spicant (L.) Roth
Botrychium lunaria (L.) Swartz
Cystopteris fragilis (L.) Bernh.
Dryopteris carthusiana (Vill.) H.P. Fuchs
Dryopteris dilatata (Hoffm.) A. Gray
Dryopteris expansa (C. Presl.) Fraser-Jenkins
Dryopteris filix-mas (L.) Schott
Dryopteris villarii (Bellardi) Schinz & Thell.
Gymnocarpium dryopteris (L.) Newman
Gymnocarpium robertianum (Hoffm.) Newman
Huperzia selago (L.) Bernh. subsp. selago
Phegopteris connectilis (Michaux) Watt
Polypodium vulgare L.
Polystichum aculeatum (L.) Roth
Polystichum lonchitis (L.) Roth
Polystichum setiferum (Forssk†l) Woynar
Polystichum x illyricum (Borb.) Hahne
Selanigella selaginoides (L.) Link