

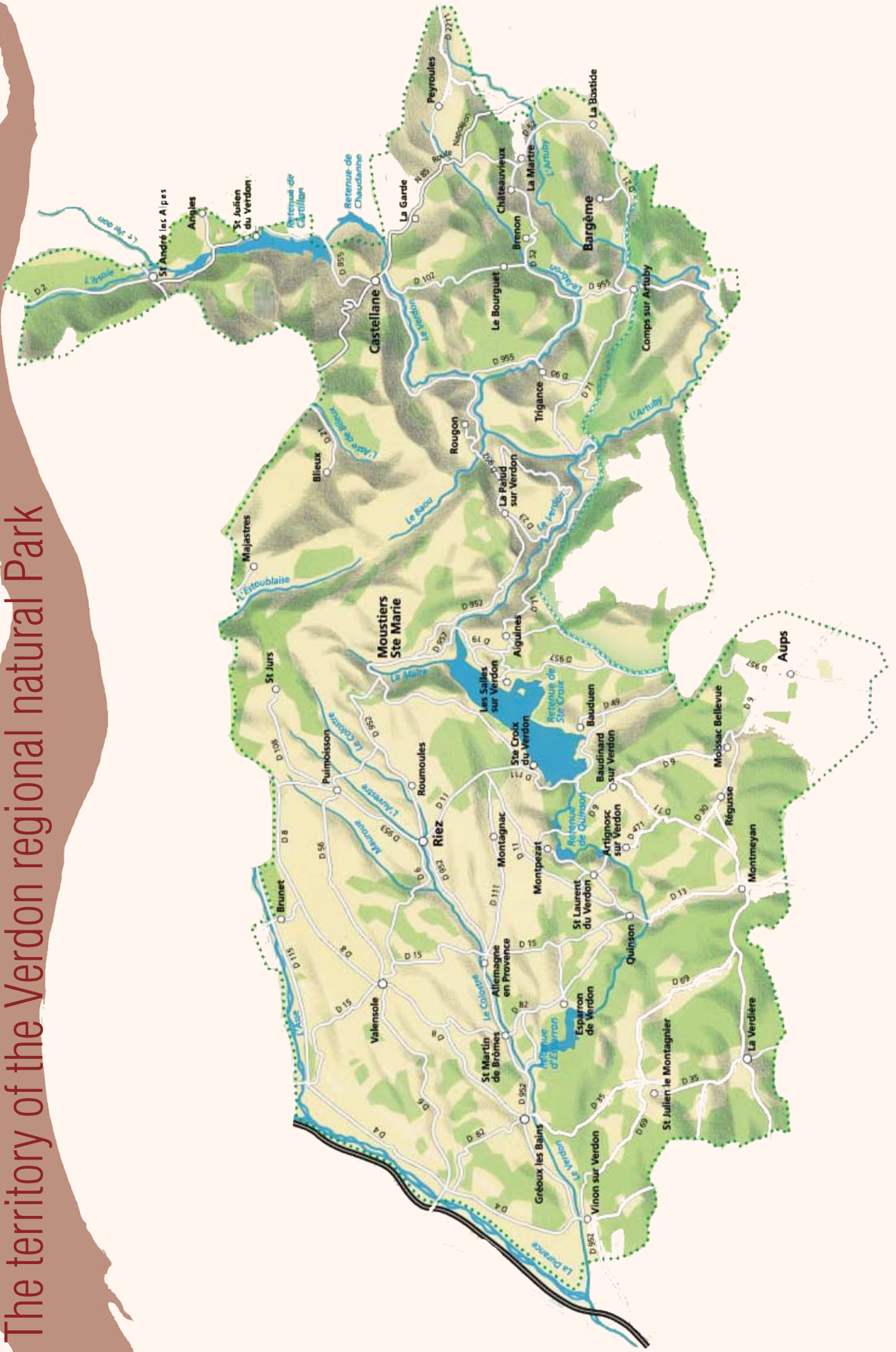
The Verdon regional natural Park



Press kit



The territory of the Verdon regional natural park



Presentation of the Territory

The Verdon Regional Natural Park is organised around the Verdon Canyons (Les Gorges du Verdon) and the five artificial lakes (Castillon, Chaudanne, Sainte-Croix, Quinson and Esparron) created by EDF between 1949 and 1974 along the two Verdon rivers (inférieur and moyen). These lakes strongly structure and define the landscape.

Geographical Facts

Over the ages, a unique geographical and geological context has lent to the formation of the Gorges du Verdon whose size and splendour have greatly contributed to the region's renown.

A rich, diversified fauna and flora is to be found, presenting remarkable, sometimes endemic species. Some of these species benefit from special protection measures. The fauna, typical of a territory situated between the Mediterranean coast and the Alps, is composed of a myriad of species. Each species corresponds to these sites; the griffon vulture-recently reintroduced, bats, chamois, deer, the little bustard, wading birds and butterflies as well. The flora also is a reflection of evolutions due to various climatic conditions from North to South as well as the variations in altitude. Over one third of France's flora is represented within the Park's territory.

Inventories of numerous geological sites have been taken. These sites, of great worth and interest led to the creation of the Geological Reserve of Haute Provence whose perimeter of protection covers a great part of the Park's territory. Geological Reserve of Haute Provence whose perimeter of protection covers a great part of the Park's territory.



Population Facts

The last census, taken in 1999, calculated a population of 21 857 people living in the Park's territory- an average population density of 11 people/km². It is one of the weakest population densities recorded in France, but it can multiply by tenfold during the two summer months reaching more than 200 000 people.

Cultural Facts

The territory's history and culture have been intimately linked since prehistoric times, during which the first signs of human life appeared along the Gorges du Verdon, namely near the village of Quinson. The Gallo-Roman era also left its mark in the areas of Riez, Gréoux-les-Bains, Castellane all the way to Vinon-sur-Verdon.

The villages are divided into three categories: either set high up, at the plateau's edge or in the valley. As to not waste farmable land, housing was tightly grouped together. The houses, covered in Roman tile roofs, usually are multiple-storied. Narrow streets surround the houses and their gardens are found on the outskirts of the village. Here, the villages have the characteristic traits of typical, rural Haute Provence living.

Pottery, basketry, glass blowing, weaving and wood turning are among the various artisanal trades practiced.

The faïence from Moustiers, heir of traditions from the 17th and 18th centuries, is remarkable earthenware craftsmanship to be discovered as well.

The cultural festivals, developed over the years, contribute and strengthen the Verdon region's identity by sharing traditions in a creative manner, proof of the desire to bring new life to this territory.

Economic Facts

On the western part of the Valensole Plateau, the traditional rain-fed crops, such as lavender, are slowly making room for cereal crops. Beekeeping, closely linked to the growing of perfume plants, is an important element of local agricultural resources as is trufficulture (the farming of truffles) a tradition that is discreetly perpetuated. On certain parts of the plateau, the installation of irrigation rendered the development of arboriculture possible. The sector, including Gréoux and Vinon, differs in that it practices intensive farming using sprinkler irrigation. In the elevated Varois region the intensive farming of cereals develops where irrigation has been installed and where it hasn't, olive trees and vineyards are found. The Alps offers pastures for ovines. Lastly, the region of Artuby-Jabron-La Bruyère is distinct because of its market garden farming.

40% of the Park's territory is covered by forest. A few wood-related businesses continue to operate in the western part of the Park but it would appear that this is coming to an end.

The region's primary industry is represented by EDF's (Electricité de France) hydroelectric plants, producing over 500 GWh a year. For the company Canal de Provence, EDF also ensures the availability of 660 million m³ of water providing the drinking water to the cities and villages of the coast, for irrigation and for industrial needs. Today, only 150 million m³ of water a year is drawn and managed by the company Canal de Provence.

As for tourism-related businesses, they have particularly developed since the construction of the five artificial lakes. It is one of the local economy's strong points, as much for its diversity as for its quality. In addition, the development, over the past few years, of cultural activities, the sharing of local savoir-faire as well as the regional fare and craftsmanship have positively increased the number of people visiting outside of the peak summer season and encouraged visitors off the beaten path.

In the village of Gréoux-les-Bains spa tourism is developing. This activity drew 25 000 spa-goers in 1991, creating numerous jobs and considerable economic benefits from Vinon-sur-Verdon to Esparron-de-Verdon.

The Verdon River: 165m long

The sources: Foux d'Allos, Massif des Trois Evêchés

Main affluents: Issole, Jabron, Artuby and Colostre

The lakes:

Castillon: 500ha,

Chaudanne: 70ha,

Sainte-Croix: 2200ha,

Quinson: 190ha,

Esparron: 340ha

The Park's peaks:

the Summit of Mont Denier: 1749m,

Mont Chiran: 1905m,

Mourre de Chanier: 1935m

(highest point),

Crête du Teillon: 1893m,

Lachens: 1751m,

Le Grand Marges: 1577m

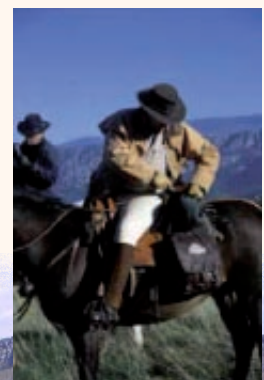


Photo : Marc DOUSSIÈRE



Chiran et Mourre de Chanier

Missions and goals

The Verdon Regional Natural Park

From prehistoric deposits to cutting edge hydraulic plants, the people of Verdon knew how to preserve the beauty and the wealth of the region with modern ecology. In order to remain the guardians of their territory, they obtained in 1997 that their region should become a Regional Natural Park – a guarantee of sustainable development for man as for nature. The Verdon thus became the 4th Natural Park of the Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur region and embracing the charter co-signed by the 45 villages, a community of the villages, the departments of the Alpes de Haute-Provence and the Var as well as the PACA region (Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur).

Following the example of the Regional Natural Parks, the Verdon has five objectives:

- Preserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage
- Develop economic and social activities
- Heighten public awareness on environmental issues
- Develop the territory
- Develop new and experimental actions

In addition, the Park's charter is based on three main missions:



Photo : PNRV (IM)

Water

Aware of the great responsibility in managing water and aquatic habitats, the Verdon Regional Natural Park has made it one of its priorities and obtains results at par with its goals. The Development and Management of Waters Plan (S.A.G.E.) is the tool chosen by the Park's elected body in partnership with the villages and the people concerned with the waters of the catchment area to preserve the collective use of the Verdon thanks to the global management of the heritage formed by the river and its environment. The good to excellent quality of both the rivers and the totality of the bodies of water in the catchment area lead to the maintenance of the exceptionally rich natural surroundings of the Verdon.

Agricultural Activities and Tourism



Photo : PNRV (GB)

1/4 of the 180 000 hectares of the Verdon Regional Natural Park's territory is farmland, characterized by diverse systems of agricultural production.

The Verdon Regional Natural Park works to help farmers so that they can become producers as well as managers of their land. The Park has developed a Territorial Farming Contract (C.T.E.) specific to its territory. This contract grants support and remuneration for the services offered by farmers such as the development of the area, the preservation of the environment and the enhanced appreciation of the territory. Tourism also plays an important role in the economic life of the territory. The Park's actions are concentrated on four main objectives: management of high-volume tourism, diffusion of the volume of tourism in time and in space, improving the quality of welcoming visitors and the conception of a plan for sustainable tourism bringing together the main actors in tourism as well as other institutional partners.

Landscape and Natural Heritage

Finding the true nature of the Park isn't so easy. Crossing paths with a Little Bustard or a Parnassius appollo (a butterfly protected by European regulation) is a serious stroke of luck! .

To facilitate the discovery of such treasures, the Verdon Regional Natural Park runs various programs to heighten public awareness and to educate about environmental subjects for visitors and residents of the territory.

Restore the heritage, study the fauna and flora, protect sensitive sites, develop welcoming and information centres like the 'Maison du Parc' (Bastide de Valx) opened last January, develop cultural centres and activities, manage the classified sites of the Gorges du Verdon... these are among the many actions led by the Verdon Regional Natural Park.



Parnassius Apollo . Photo : Alain GIOANNI

EXAMPLES OF CURRENT ACTIONS AND STUDIES:

Concerning water:

- Establishing the Development and Management of Waters Plan in the Verdon (S.A.G.E.).
- Studies for the development of a River Contract.
- Technical assistance for the villages.

Concerning agriculture:

- Conception and implementation of a Park-specific Territorial Farming Contract.
- Develop the Park's label.
- Promote regional products.

Concerning tourism:

- Conception and promotion of a sustainable tourism development plan.
- Conception and coordination of an outdoor activities plan.
- Restore and mark 1000kms of footpaths in partnership with the departments of the Alpes de Haute Provence and the Var.
- Promote hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking.
- Edit a discovery guide in partnership with the ADRI.
- Increase accommodation possibilities.

Concerning the development and planning of the territory:

- Studies to implement Opération Grand Site on the classified site of the Gorges du Verdon.
- Operation of the European programme LEADER+ and leader of the Local Action Group.
- Restoration of the Valx bastide (country house), Maison du Parc and the management of the Domaine de Valx.

- Reconstruction of the Estellié footbridge at the bottom of the Gorges du Verdon.

Concerning heritage:

- Reintroduction of the griffon vulture.
- Inventory of the natural abundance.
- Geological, botanical and wildlife studies...
- Create a reseau of museums and eco-museums present on the Park's territory as well as the creation of the Pass'musée.
- Participation in the creation of the Gorges du Verdon Museum of Prehistory in Quinson.
- Restoration of heritage constructions.
- Creation of cultural itineraries and territory discovery tours.
- Inventory of the wealth of cultural and archaeological heritage.

Concerning information and communication:

- Creation and implementation of activities to educate about the environment.
- Creating and putting on-line a web site for the Park.
- Creating a network among the villages and the Park's partners.
- Edition of works by authors and booklets on themes such as history, culture and local traditions.
- Trimestrial edition of a Park letter 'Par Nature'.

Many of these actions are in fact related to various domains, these lists are only of informative nature.



Landscape Variations

The Verdon Regional Natural Park

In the heart of Provence, in a rugged region, the landscape opens like a picture book telling 250 million years of geological history...The Verdon River, the backbone of the territory, has shaped the identity of the Verdon Regional Natural Park. The deep grooves of the 'grand canyon' shoulder the plentiful lakes and the vast plateaux. Further inland the countryside is tinted lavender blue, wheat blond bleached by the sun and mountain green. The plain is a palette of nuanced pinks of the fruit trees. And then, the 45 villages (some of them elected as among the 'most beautiful in France') dotted by chapels, baking ovens, fountains, washhouses and oratories...all forging the spirit of the Verdon Regional Natural Park. Alpes de Haute-Provence and the Var as well as the PACA region (Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur).

Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, at the grand canyons entrance, near the Sainte-Croix Lake is renowned for its faïence. In the heart of the famous gorges, La Palud-sur-Verdon and Aiguines are a rock climber's paradise. In Valensole, the rows of lavender on the plateau fill the summer air with a sweet perfume. Riez, the oldest Gallo-Roman city, has a colonnade from a tetra style temple (1st century) and a Paleo-Christian baptistery (5th century). On the left bank of the Verdon, the villages of la Verdière, Trigance and Bargème, grouped under their medieval châteaux paint a scene of homes huddled together under a canopy of tile roofs.



Comps . Photo : Marc DOUSSIÈRE

Natural Getaways...

In this territory, natural heritage is as diverse as the landscape is vast... Explore the hidden nature of the Verdon Regional Natural Park while on a walk to a peaceful destination. 1000 kms of trails have been marked, guiding you from village to village and introducing you to their landscapes. For the recreational-seeking spirit, many outdoor activities are offered (hiking, biking, horseback riding, rock climbing, paragliding, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, rafting...). These paths will lead you to the heart of the unspoiled splendour of the landscape. Perfect getaway ideas, naturally...

Esparron . Photo : PNRV (AC)



'Cultivated' Land

Music, traditions, sports...a dazzling array of festivals and events fill each season's calendar in the Verdon Regional Natural Park. Discover the territories' soul at the many museums. The avant-garde Museum of Prehistory in Quinson, the unusual Wood Turners' Museum in Aiguines, the Popular Arts and Traditions Museum in Castellane, the traditional Faïence Museum in Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, the modern museums of Faykod and Simon Segal in Aups or the educational Lapidary Museum in Riez shouldn't be missed. Not to forget the eco-museums and the thematic 'maisons': Maison des Lacs (House of Lakes) in Salles sur Verdon, 'Maison de L'environnement' (House of the Environment) in La Palud sur Verdon...places where knowledge is shared and acknowledgment is earned.



Lessons in Good Taste

Breathe in nature, savour its finest offerings flavoured with good country air. It is for a very good reason that the Culinary Arts National Council chose Valensole as being a "site of remarkable taste". Producers are proud to bring the best local products to table: truffles, honey, olive oil, goat cheese...all to be found at the many markets and the "maisons de produits de pays" (houses of local fare and craftsmanship) in Allemagne-en-Provence and Trignance.



Reference Works:

- *Le guide découverte du Parc*, co-edited by the Park and ADRI. 192 pages guiding you in discovering the natural and cultural wealth that stretches over the various hiking, horseback riding and biking itineraries...
- *Les Livrets découvertes du Parc*
40 to 80 pages with plenty of illustrations to guide the visitor in discovering the Park's thematic tours and outings.
- *La collection du Parc*, the first three publications, co-edited by the Park and Edisud, take a close look at:
 - "L'histoire des Gorges du Verdon" by Jacques Cru
 - "La découverte des Gorges du Verdon" by Alain Collomp
 - "La Préhistoire du Verdon" by Jean Gagnepain

