



THE LARCH

One of the kings of the Alpine Forest

The larch is the only conifer which loses its leaves: this gives it better resistance against the cold. Its thick bark also provides it with good protection. In Siberia, they are known to survive temperatures as low as -66° C.

The larch thrives in climates which are sunny, cold and dry. It is still confined to areas above mist level. It belongs to a pioneering species which colonise empty places and dislike having to compete for space.

Larch forest is pleasant and restful, its trees allow a soft light to permeate. Its undergrowth is a green carpet where a variety of flowers and shrubs thrive and where forest birds come to nest. This is not the case in dark spruce forests where the floor can be almost without vegetation.

In spring, the forest is clothed in pasture green foliage, pleasant to touch. The branches are covered in small red flowers which, once they are pollinated, will become cones.

In summer, the needles are dark green and the undergrowth of the forest is bursting with flowers, rhododendrons, bilberries, clematis, etc.

When the first frost of autumn arrives, the forest breaks out in a blaze of yellow, orange and gold.

Then, in winter the larch sheds its needles. It is in this season that the tree seems sad, looking almost dead. The cones from the previous summer contain many dead seeds. Willow tits feed on these. Larch saplings flattened under a thick blanket of snow in winter soon recover in spring. This phenomenon causes distinctive marks at the base of the trunks to appear.

Mountain farmers has always favoured planting larch; the grassy undergrowth is good for grazing animals. Larch wood is strong and resin-rich making it rot proof. These qualities have meant it is still a popular choice with carpenters and joiners.

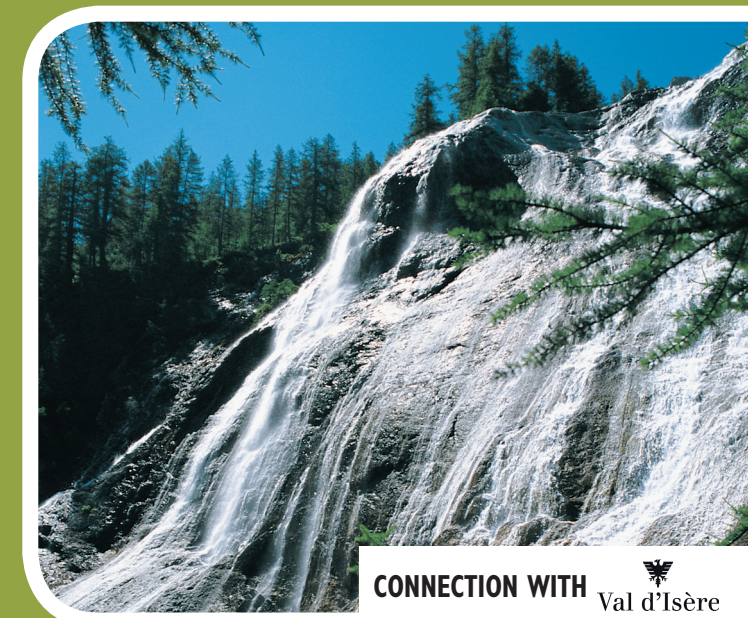
Unique to La Tarentaise, the population of larch in Bois de la Laye (20 hectares) has been classified by the I.N.R.A (National Institute for Agricultural Research) and the O.N.F (National Forestry Commission). Given the high standards in quality found there, cones from the trees are collected and the seeds are planted in other areas.

Text: Dominique Juin



Walk 2

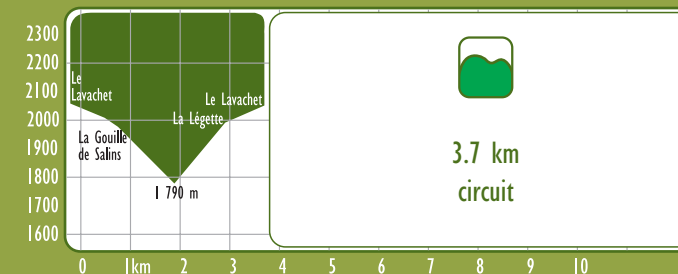
LE BOIS de la LAYE VILLAGE of Les COMBES (1,840 m)




CONNECTION WITH  Val d'Isère

HIGHLIGHTS:

This pleasant walk is on the theme of water and the route includes a spring, waterfalls, streams and a lake and is ideal for a gentle stroll or family picnic.



 Starting point
Le Lavachet: 2,070 m

 Climb: ± 335 m

 Duration:
1hr 45mins

Walk 2

LE BOIS DE LA LAYE - VILLAGE of COMBES



STARTING POINT:

In Tignes le Lac, walk or get a bus (free shuttle) to the village of Le Lavachet. The walk starts behind the tallest building in the village called "Tour du Lac".

DURATION:

1hr 45min circuit

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Bois de la Laye ecosystem is fragile. It comes in part from the combination of a larch forest and considerable surface water drainage.

- Respect the natural environment: keep to the paths, do not pick flowers and take your rubbish away with you.
- Do not venture on to the banks of the lake stream. There is a risk of being swept away by the current.
- The first part of the walk follows the Nature Trail in Bois de la Laye.

ROUTE:

Starting Point: From Le Lavachet, head towards "Bois de la Laye". The path gradually descends through alpine grassland.

- 1** At the second divide in the path, turn left towards "Lac du Chevril, Gouille de Salin". As you descend, notice the tired-looking stunted larches. This is the war zone between vegetation and the environment which can be particularly harsh in winter. The trees gradually retreat with altitude, but not without a fight.
- 2** At the next intersection, keep on towards "Lac du Chevril" on your right. The leisurely descent continues to "Gouille de Salin". This is a resurgence of the "Lac de Tignes": the water filters through the limestone massif and reappears as a large spring creating a waterfall into the stream that feeds the lake. Retrace your steps about 100 metres. You can avoid retracing your steps if you have already been here on a previous walk.
- 3** Turn right, still heading in the direction of the "Lac du Chevril". The winding path descends sharply, stepping stones help you avoid wet areas. The first waterfall comes into view with water flowing through the air between the source rock and the ground. After crossing a wooden footbridge, the path slowly descends to a second footbridge providing a way through terrain where water flows all around causing a gradual increase in noise level.
- 4** You come out at the foot of a large waterfall in the form of a bridal veil, a simply stunning location. At this point you can shorten the walk by 30 minutes by taking the new footbridge at Les Combes and heading for "La Légette". If not, the longer route follows the lake stream through the trees to the fishermen's bridge. On the shores of the "Lac du Chevril", trout are plentiful.
- 5** Cross the bridge and rejoin the old path which linked old Tignes, now flooded, and the high mountain pasture. Imagine the large rounds of Gruyère cheese being carried down by mules each day on this path, not so long ago.
- 6** Continue towards the ruined village of "Les Combes"; in the 17th century chapel, the only service each year is on Saint Anne's day: the Saint from whom the chapel takes its name.
- 7** Further up, at the place called "la Légette" turn left towards Le Lavachet, cross the stream using the bridge at the foot of the chalet and continue uphill until you return to the starting point.