

identification data

Name
**AIGÜESTORTES
I ESTANY DE SANT MAURICI**
Protection Category
National Park
Autonomous Region
Catalonia
Province
Lleida
Surface Area
14,119 hectares
Longitude **0° 56' 25" E**
Latitude **42° 34' 14" N**
Created
21 October 1955

addresses

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DE AIGÜESTORTES
I ESTANY DE SANT MAURICI**
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Ecomuseo de los Pastores de la Vall d'Àssua
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diplomas

1988
Special Protection
Area for Birds
Espacio de la Red Natura 2000
Incluido en el listado
internacional del
convenio Ramsar
EMAS
Q Calidad Turística



AIGÜESTORTES I ESTANY DE SANT MAURICI PARQUE NACIONAL

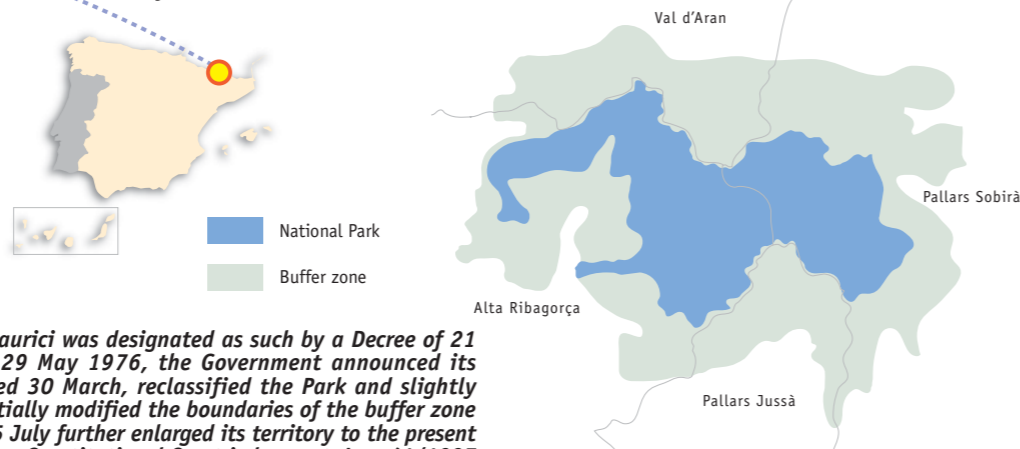
*Estany de Llebrera.
One of the beautiful lakes which dot the terrain.*



establishment

The National Park of Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici was designated as such by a Decree of 21 October 1955, with an extension of 9,851 ha. On 29 May 1976, the Government announced its reclassification and enlargement. Law 7/1988, dated 30 March, reclassified the Park and slightly increased its terrain. Law 22/90, of 28 December, partially modified the boundaries of the buffer zone surrounding the National Park. Decree 234/1996 of 15 July further enlarged its territory to the present 14,119 ha, with a buffer zone of 26,733 ha. Following a Constitutional Court judgement, Law 41/1997 amended Law 4/1989 on the Conservation of Natural Areas and Flora and Fauna, and the Park was returned to the Spanish National Parks Network.

Nature has been generous with this part of the Pyrenees. Not content with giving it magnificent landscapes and a rich and fascinating history, it has set it amid surroundings of great natural value and extraordinary beauty: Alta Ribagorça, Pallars Sobirà, Pallars Jussà and Val d'Aran. Visitors can choose from many charming walks, like the footpaths from Espot to Estany de Sant Maurici, from Boí to Estany Llong, and from Arties to the base of Montardo.



The National Park. The Park is located in the most north-westerly corner of Catalonia, between the districts of Alta Ribagorça, Pallars Sobirà, Pallars Jussà and Val d'Aran. It possesses all the most typical features of mountain terrain and stands as a magnificent synthesis of the whole of the central, most continental zone of the great Pyrenean range. The National Park of Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici boasts high-mountain *aigüestortes* or winding streams, almost 200 lakes, like Sant Maurici and Negre, the imposing crags of Els Encantats and Montardo, and the presence of the fir tree. Otherwise scarce in Spain, the loveliest group of firs is in the area known as Mata de València. Around the Park lie the Aranese valleys of Ruda, Aiguamòg and Valarties, wide open to the moist winds of the Atlantic, the wildly beautiful Pallarese valleys of Gerber and Cabanes, the lake zone of Vall Fosca, and the Montsent massif in the Àssua valley, with a long tradition of livestock grazing in its alpine meadows. The National Park is beyond doubt one of the most beautiful landscapes in the Pyrenees.

Principal ecosystems
Woodland and meadowland. High mountain terrain with glacial geomorphology and lacustrine and fluvial systems on granitic rocks.

Origins of the Park. The Park owes its present appearance to the action of natural agents deployed over millions of years. Foremost among them were the geological movements of the Tertiary period which uplifted the Primary rocks, and the advancing glaciers of the Quaternary period. The glaciers modelled the landscape, carving out U-shaped valleys, cirques, rugged crests and literally hundreds of lakes. Some of these lakes, those at a lower altitude, have gradually silted up, so creating flat marshland where the waters wind and separate into a multitude of streams; the "aigüestortes" (winding streams) which are among the Park's most emblematic features.

Water. Water is the ruling spirit of the Park, whether in the form of rivers, waterfalls, marshes or lakes, almost 200 lakes of which dot its terrain and make it one of the densest lacustrine zones of the Pyrenees. The winding streams achieve the height of their beauty in two rivers, the Sant Nicolau and the Aiguamòg. Some of the *estany*s or lakes lie along valley floors, among them Sant Maurici and Llong, but most occupy the high glacial cirques, for example lakes Mar, Rius, Monges, Mangades, Travessani, Negre, Contraix, Gerber and Saborèdo.

man and his imprint on the park and its surroundings



**The Watchtower,
Espot.**

The Park is home to one of Europe's most important centres of Romanesque art and architecture.

**The Church of Sant
Clement, Taüll.**



Cultural aspects. The National Park is part of a zone with a rich cultural heritage. The villages of the Pyrenees have always been defined and constrained by their geography: a ruthless mountain terrain which has hindered both external and internal communications, and a harsh climate which has limited human settlement to small villages in close proximity to one another. Few remains can be found from Palaeolithic or Neolithic times. It is not until the Bronze Age that we start to find traces of these valleys' inhabitants, while Romanisation advanced no further than the Aran Valley. The territory is indissolubly linked to the rise of the Christian kingdoms of the Pyrenees and its architecture to the Romanesque. It was here that the first independent communities sprang up, in the form of small counties loosely linked to the county of Tolosa, which by the end of the 9th century had become the independent counties of Ribagorça (in the west) and Pallars (in the east). The Middle Ages brought with them an unprecedented cultural awakening with the advent of Romanesque art and architecture: churches with their sculptures and mural paintings, elegant bell towers, monasteries, castles, watchtowers and bridges make up a unique artistic heritage perfectly integrated within the surrounding nature.



The economy. The social and economic changes of these past years have created a new framework for the zone, with tourism as one of its main resources. Even so, many traditional agrarian and farming activities have come down to us intact, along with a rich cultural legacy featuring ancestral festivities like the *fallas* (to celebrate the summer solstice), traditional dances and livestock fairs and markets which have been held year after year since time immemorial.

**The charm of Taüll village
under snow.**

flora and fauna

Flora. The unevenness of the Park's terrain, which ranges from 1,200 to 3,033 m, and its different-facing valleys, allow for a wide variety of plant habitats and species. The valley floors are occupied by mixed woods of deciduous trees like oak, ash and aspen, and beech which is found in valleys with more of an Atlantic climate. *Pinus sylvestris*, or Scots pine, also makes its presence felt. These woods alternate with former meadow and pastureland, the product of man's intervention. As we move higher, this vegetation gives way to other, hardier species. Imposing fir forests grow in the shade along the Aranese valleys of Valarties and Aiguamòg, the Mata de València d'Àneu and the Escrita river in Pallars Sobirà. The fir is dominant in these thick woods, whose undergrowth is rich in mosses. Higher even than the fir and Scots pine occurs another of the Park's botanical specialities: the mountain pine, the tree species best equipped to survive the long, hard winters of the High Pyrenees. It occupies a large area of the National Park and can grow at altitudes of almost 2,400 m. Above this mark, we enter the domain of the Alpine meadows, where well into July we can witness the blooming of the Pyrenean gentians and Pyrenean lilies. Among loose stones and rock crevices we can still find tiny plants which have put down their roots in the smallest scraps of earth, like houseleek, opposite-leaf saxifrage and moss campion. Besides all these there are the plants which live along springs, rivers and lakes, like orchids, the cottongrass or butterworts, small carnivorous plants which can catch insects in its sticky leaves.

Fauna. Despite the abundance of species, the Park's fauna is not easy to spot. In the quietest woods, we can occasionally catch the song of the capercaillie, the Tengmalm's owl or the black woodpecker, the largest of its kind in Europe. The marmot, the stoat and the ptarmigan are specialists in high-mountain living. Whereas the marmots spend the winter sleeping inside their comfortable dens, the stoat and the ptarmigan stay active all year, at over 2,000 metres, changing their coat or plumage, as appropriate, from its summer to its winter hue, in order to hide away from their predators. But the Park's most emblematic animal, and also the easiest to spot, is the chamois deer. It has short, fine, backward-curving horns and a remarkable agility which allows it to negotiate crags and rock slopes rapidly. The chamois tends to make short downhill migrations in winter, though it is not unusual to find small groups congregating in the highest reaches all year round. Looking skywards, we can frequently catch sight of griffin vultures, golden eagles or the mythical lammergeier, with its wingspan of almost 3 metres. The rivers are home to common trout, and their banks support a variety of vertebrates including the desman, which is endemic to the Iberian Peninsula and a fierce predator of river insects. Prominent among the amphibians is the Pyrenean brook salamander, an exclusive inhabitant of these lakes, gullies and cold-water rivers. The asp, "harmless if left alone", is the Park's most emblematic reptile.



**Alpine flowers adorn
the landscape.**

- FLORA
- 1 Mountain pine
 - 2 St. Bruno's lily
 - 3 Alpenrose
 - 4 Pyrenean lily
 - 5 Gentian
 - 6 Blueberry
 - 7 Fir

Lakes cover 15%
of the National Park's
total surface area.

DATA

Land area
Water area



**Water is present in many
corners of the Park.**



- FAUNA
- 8 Male capercaillie
 - 9 Chamois
 - 10 Tengmalm's owl
 - 11 Female capercaillie
 - 12 Lammergeier
 - 13 Golden eagle
 - 14 Ptarmigan
 - 15 Grey dormouse
 - 16 Stoat



**The peaks of Els Encantats
are a reference point
in the Park.**

The mountain pine holds
out up to the tree line.



**Fir and birch make
a striking contrast.**

visiting the Park



The fir forest on Mata de València



Alpine gentian and moss campion



Estany de Tumeneia and the Travessani needles



Estany de Ratera



Estans de Trescuro

General information. The main entrances to the Park, in Boí and Espot, lead onto the Aigüestortes flats and Estany de Sant Maurici, respectively. However, visits can also be made to other places of undoubted interest in the neighbouring districts of Alta Ribagorça, Pallars Sobirà, Val d'Aran and Pallars Jussà. The entry of private vehicles is restricted, and all cars must be left in the car parks located at Park entrances. There are public transport services in villages within its area of influence which take passengers inside the Park. Visitor Centres. Before beginning your tour, why not call in at our Visitor Centres in Boí and Espot? We can tell you the most suitable itineraries for your fitness level and the time you have available and inform you about weather conditions and, in winter, the risk of avalanches. You can also get to know and join in with the activities and guided excursions organised by the Park, visit our permanent exhibition or watch the audiovisual presentation. You will also find books, maps, brochures, souvenirs and all the information you require on the Park and the cultural and artistic heritage of its surrounding areas.

Routes
Trails. Walking is without doubt the best way to get to know the Park. And a large network of footpaths assure you can advance with ease. Remember prudence is essential in mountain zones. Make sure you leave enough time to get back to the exits. There are suitable routes for everyone and even the possibility of crossing the Park over several days, sleeping en route at mountain refuges (these excursions must be booked in advance). Guided excursions. If you wish to learn more about this natural space, its animal and plant life, history and anecdotes, join one of our organised excursions led by a guide-interpreter. You can sign up for these excursions at the Park's Visitor Centres. Recommended routes. From the car parks located at the two main entrances to the Park, you can follow signposted routes which take you to the Aigüestortes flats or the Estany de Sant Maurici. Enquire about the viewpoints located throughout the Park.

advice and safety

The Park can be visited all year round, but remember that it is covered with snow in the winter months. At this time of year, visitors must be extra careful, and find out beforehand about the weather conditions and the state of footpaths. In case of emergency or accident, all the refuges have radio transmitters connected to the Generalitat de Catalunya fire department. You should ensure you have suitable clothing for winter visits (boots, warm jackets, etc.) and are advised to inform the Park Visitor Centres in Boí (Alta Ribagorça) and Espot (Pallars Sobirà) of the route you plan to take. Visitors equipped with binoculars will certainly have the chance, at some point, to observe the different mammals and birds which live in the Park. The villages and people in the area round the Park have jealously preserved its culture, art and age-old customs. A marvellous discovery awaits you.

do not

- ▶ Stray off the paths and trails of the Park.
- ▶ Cross snowfields or other zones with packed ice or snow.
- ▶ Walk on the surface of frozen lakes.
- ▶ Wade into rivers, lakes, gullies and waterfalls.
- ▶ Get too close to the base of natural rock or ravine walls.
- ▶ Walk near precipices, or look through binoculars, film or take photographs near the edges of them.
- ▶ Climb or walk near mountain summits without the right equipment or training for each season and level of difficulty.
- ▶ Walk through the park outside daylight hours.

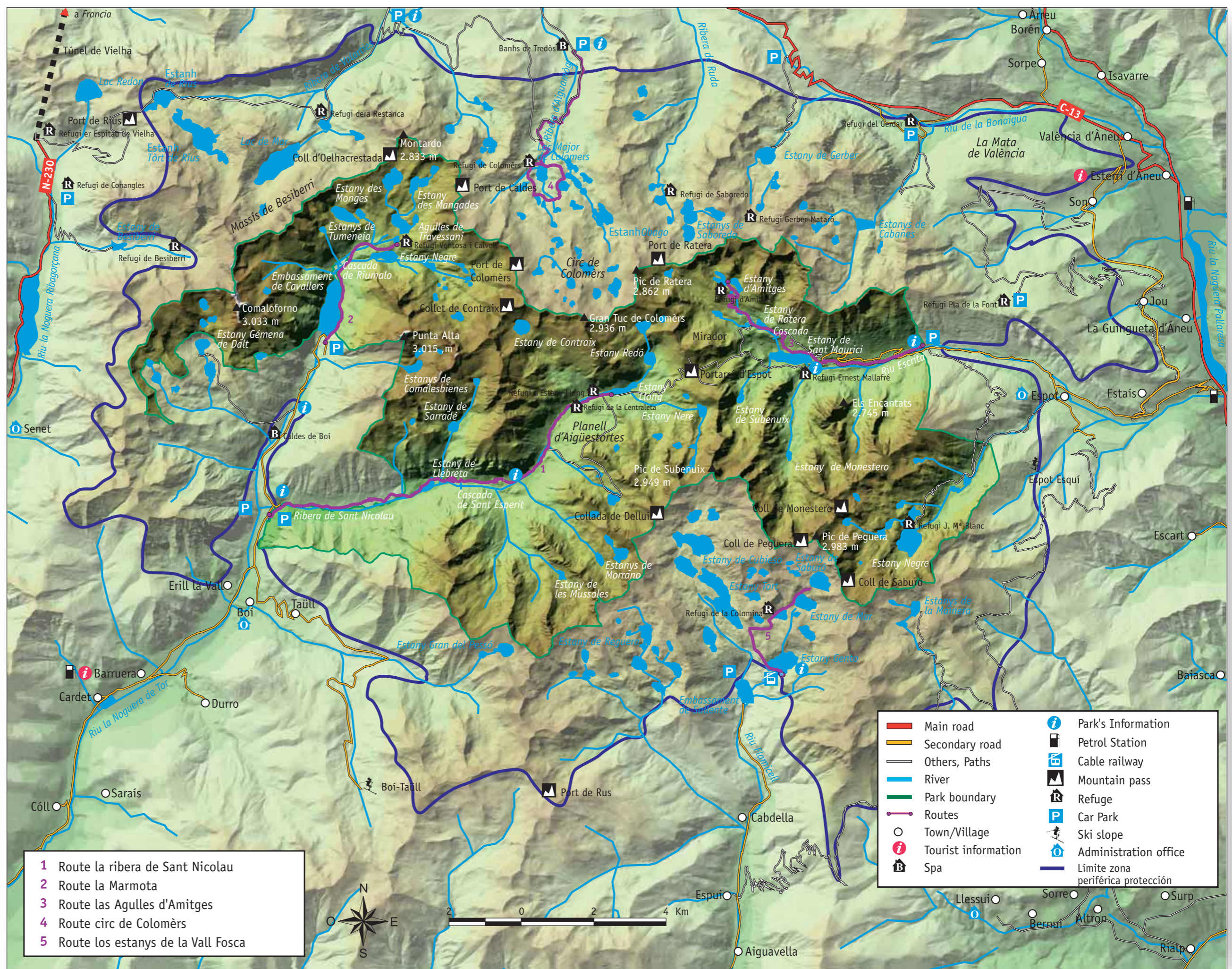
Please note that the following prohibitions apply within the Park boundaries:



map of Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park

AIGÜESTORTES I ESTANY DE SANT MAURICI PARQUE NACIONAL

Your safety is our concern, but it is your responsibility.



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For any further information related to the paths, ask in the Park Information Centres