

The Chalet Berwyn guide to the pistes of Serre Chevalier

“On the ski slopes it’s like black wind blowing through your legs. Some bits of the slopes are icy, but they’re OK to ski on. The slopes are great so come and stay at the Chalet Berwyn.” (Katy Jones – 8½ yrs)

I’ve split the descriptions into 3 areas, which don’t quite correspond to the lift pass areas, but are distinct in terms of describing lifts and pistes!

- **Briancon area** - everything accessed from Briancon town, up to the top of Prorel mountain ie the top of Rocher Blanc chairlift and Serre Blanc button tow.
- **Serre Che area** - from the end of the Briancon area on Prorel mountain, through all the lifts accessed from Chantemerle and Villeneuve villages, to the Cucumelle chairlift just under La Cucumelle mountain.
- **Monetier area** - everything accessed from Le Monetier Les Bains village, to the end of the Serre Che area at the Cucumelle chairlift, just under La Cucumelle mountain.

Lifts

Chairlifts are chairlifts so there’s not a lot to tell you about them!

There are a lot of button tows in the area, so I’ve mentioned if the tows are particularly vicious and difficult for snowboarders and inexperienced skiers. If it’s an important link tow I’ll mention if it’s a friendly gentle tow.

Restaurants

I’m not very good at stopping skiing to check these out, but I’ll tell you what the ones are like I’ve been in!

The Pistes

The chances of getting me to follow the green runs are fairly slim, so someone else will have to ski those and fill in the details!

This is a great area to keep everyone happy for more than a week. If you like getting off the piste and exploring hidden gullies and glades through the trees, then, given good snow, I think there are endless possibilities here. If you’re a mad extreme skier, there looks to be some good gullies off some of the peaks in the Serre Che area – you’ll just have to go exploring!

The Grand Serre Che ski trails marked on the back of the Piste map are good. With the **pink trail** you can get all the way from Briancon to Monetier on blue runs. If, like me, you like exploring and not being stuck in the same spot, the pink tour to Monetier is great. You get a real feeling of having gone a long way in the mountains, and of having escaped (briefly) from the man-made ski area. You can get to Monetier by 11am, although 12pm is more realistic to enjoy yourself. To make the return trip you have to ski red runs. If you don't fancy that, just get the bus back round, they're about every 10 minutes through the day.

The return ski tour (**orange tour**) from Monetier to Briancon is even more remote as you ski down the Cucumelle valley. Nearly all the runs on this are red runs. You can avoid dropping to the valley at Villeneuve and Chantemerle if you want to make this one a bit shorter.

Combining the **pink** and **orange** runs in a day to go from Briancon to Monetier and back is quite realistic for an average red skier. You'll even have time to stop for lunch!



Off-piste in the Echaillon valley – Serre Che

Happy skiing and I hope this guide grows as more people ski all the nooks and crannies!

BRIANCON AREA

Restaurants

Pra Long – a bit industrial looking at the Telecabine mid station. Go somewhere more scenic! Cafeteria snacks not very good. Does overlook the nursery slopes for ski school though.

Les Combes – would be a nice place to sit out in the sun when all the slopes were white (not Feb 05!). Just a small place, but a pleasant spot to sit and have a beer at the end of the day, before descending to town. The vin chaud is excellent, but just watch for a big queue at the last tow near the end of the day.

Lifts

Croix de La Noir button – the last tow to get back to the Briancon side, and the Prorel tele-cabine, at the end of the day. A gentle slope and a slow gentle tow.

Serre Blanc button or Rocher Blanc chair – from the top of the chair you can drop directly onto the Serre Che runs with no flat or poling, but from the top of the button you need to pole across to the Serre Che runs (OK on skis, but a bit of waddling on a board!)

The Pistes

Le Chemin / Notre Dame des Neiges / La Chaussee (Jenny's blue!) – an easier descent down from the bottom of the Roche Blanc chair to the mid station of the Prorel telecabine. Ok as a way down at the end of the day. Virtually all on narrow tracks, but at a gentle angle. If the snow cover is not good it's best avoided – ask Jenny!

Bergers – this is the first blue you ski down from the top of the Prorel telecabine. Gentle slopes all the way down to the Serre Blanc tow. The extension down to the chair is a zig-zagging gentle track, although you'll probably end up on the red section which is a bit steeper, and with a tight bend half way.

Remparts (red) – in mid Feb there was a very worn section at the top (parallel to Couloir black piste), and then another very worn section above the Croix Michel (red) link. It has some narrow pistes at the top, and widens out on the lower half. A couple of sections feel fairly steep.

Vauban (red) – narrow pistes nearly all the way, but easier than the upper Remparts piste.

SERRE CHE AREA

Restaurants

Grand Alpe – lots of big sun terraces to sit out on. Waffles and crepes sold outside. Self-service cafe, but the food seemed reasonable (pizzas, pasta etc). Kids meal deals. Toilets not great. Good views of the big open bowl above. The chocolate viennoisse (below!) is highly recommended if you're a chocoholic!



Serre Ratier – there are 4 different cafes in this spot.

- Serre Ratier – not good toilets. Has a terrace area where you are allowed to eat your own food.
- Cafe Soleil – real fire inside. Nice toilets. Cafeteria style food. Seemed nice just stopping for a coffee.
- Le Troll – looked like a proper restaurant
- ?? – the place up the back. Looked dark from the outside.

Village de Frejus – L Pi Mai

This is a hotel restaurant with a sun terrace and an open fire inside. Tables can be reserved and it might be worthwhile if you want to sit out on the sun terrace. Much more up-market than the piste cafeterias. The food looked very good. The best toilets I've found! I think you can also go there for apres-ski and then have a torch-lit descent down the green run to Villeneuve. Definitely needs checking out!

Frejus 2100

L'Aravet

L'Echillon

2300m

Lifts

Bois des Coqs 1-2 buttons – a very vicious button which potentially makes you airborne on the take-off, and has 2 bends in it, and a couple of steepish bits. Not good for boarders or inexperienced skiers.

Alpage button – very gentle button tow.

Combe 1-2 buttons – gentle button tow. Go on the right-hand side if you want to head over to the Villeneuve side.

Orre du Bois button – Not a very gentle tow, seemed OK at the start, but a couple of jerky bits part way up. Can use the chairlift instead to get to the same spot.

Rouge button – will probably give you a couple of jerks at the start. Not great for beginners.

Crete button – has a couple of bends in it and some steep bits, but doesn't seem to be jerky.

Clot Gauthier button – It's marked as a difficult tow. It isn't jerky at all, but it goes up a very steep slope, and as someone with short legs my skis were hardly touching the snow at one point!

The Pistes



Route de Frejus (green) – a very scenic run down from Frejus village to Villeneuve. It follows the track zig-zagging down the hillside. Reasonably narrow but a very gentle angle all the way.

Roche Gauthier (blue) – not a particularly inspiring run, and follows a fairly narrow track most of the way. Straightforward enough if you want to make the link through to Monetier.

Vallons (blue) – a traverse near the top and then pleasant wide open slopes down to the Grand Alpe restaurant. The lower half to Serre Ratier restaurant is a narrow track, easy angled, but not a run to do for it's own sake, more just as a way for getting to the next place.

Myrtilles (blue) – nice blue run with enough width to do gentle turns. Can split onto red runs in several places. In the middle part you can cut off the big bend and go briefly off piste to do some really friendly moguls and rejoin the piste at the bottom of the bend.

Foret / Marteau (blue) – long lovely blue all the way from the top of Combe 1-2 button down to Villeneuve village. Be careful in 2 places not to end up on black runs by mistake! One spot is where Olympique Luc Alphand goes straight ahead, and the blue Marteau loop goes 90° left

and then across to the L'Aravet restaurant. Then lower down where it crosses Casse du Boeuf black make sure you go left, which looks flat. However, if you want to cut the blue bend off here, the black is smooth, fairly wide, and not too hard at this point.

Bois des Coqs (red) – open at the top with a choice of routes through moguls. In the middle flatter area there's a great little swoopy gully and then the lower section alongside the tow is steeper, but no moguls, and quite wide.

Cucumelle (red) – a great wild-feeling open valley where you lose sight of all the ski tows for ages. Given good snow there is the possibility of skiing all sorts of lines down the valley. A short mogul section in the middle, and then narrower tracks to finish down to the chairlift.

Echaillon (red) – there's a lot of red lines marked very close on the piste map here. If you go from the top of the Cote Chevalier chair down the ridge towards the 2300m cafe, and then drop left into the Echaillon valley it's a really nice run. There are all sorts of off-piste lines into the gully which are great and not too hard. (In fact they're easier than the icy piste in Feb '05!)

Saludes (red) – lots of alternative ways to leave the Myrtilles blue run, which range from lots of moguls through trees to only a few moguls. A lovely run, moderately steep, but never desperate. After fresh snow the upper part of the run feels off-piste, but is not difficult.

Aiguillette (red) – has some reasonably steep sections for red, although never desperate. A nice swoopy gully bit high up. Seems to hold snow a bit better than its neighbour, Eduits.

Eduits (red) – steady throughout with no very steep bits on it. All smooth with no moguls.

Casse du Boeuf (black) – a great run all the way down to Villeneuve. It's got a couple of longer steep sections (as you'd expect!), but also the majority is not desperate. Get straight on the chair at the bottom and do it again!

Le Pylones (black) – for a back run this is not too hard, only short steep sections, and then easier flat bits. Narrowish piste all the way.

Olympique Luc Alphande – a mix of moderately and very wide pistes. Some reasonably steep sections, and feels very steep in icy conditions.

MONETIER AREA

Restaurants

Bachas – great coffees and very friendly staff. Pannini shack outside, and small cafeteria inside. Toilets OK.

Peyra Juana

Lifts

It's all chairlifts over here except a tow low down (Etoile), so it's easier if you're boarding or not too good at button tows!

The Pistes

Eychauda (blue) – all gentle slopes, a narrow track to the col, and then widens out a bit for the rest.

Cibouit (red) – quite a lot of moguls in the lower half, but with several choices of slope to pick out an easier line.

Yret (red) – reasonably wide most of the way with a couple of steeper bits. Given better snow than Feb '05 it looked like there would be some nice off-piste alternatives to the sides before dropping down to the Cucumelle.

Clos Gaillard (red) – in very icy conditions (Feb '05) this was desperate, harder than all the blacks in the area! Quite a few steep sections, a lot of mogul sections, a mix of wide and narrow bits through the trees, including a VERY narrow track at one point. I think in decent snow this would be a great run with lots of alternatives through the trees, but probably still hard for a red.

L'aya (red) – nice, reasonably wide pistes, generally not too steep, except one bit lower down.