



# GUIDE TO SELECTED TRAILS ALONG THE ECOLOGICAL CORRIDOR OF

POLIS-VALAMARË-RUNGAJË-MORAVË-GRAMOZ

A booklet created by local guides

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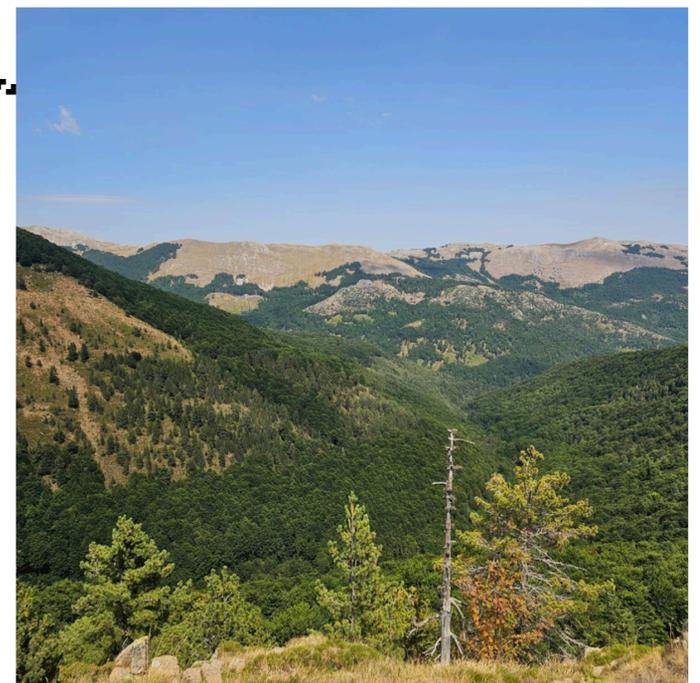
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# INTRODUCTION

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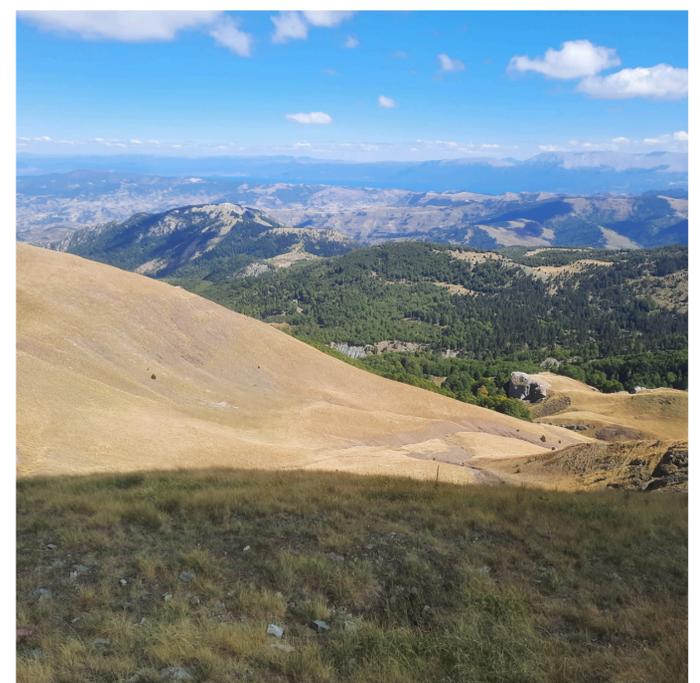
The ecological corridor “Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz” is located in southeastern Albania and represents a remote mountainous area that partially spans the municipalities of Librazhd, Përrenjas, Pogradec, Gramsh, Maliq, and Skrapar. This corridor stretches across six protected areas: Shebenik-Jabllanicë National Park, Stravaj-Sopot Nature Park, Pogradec Lake Protected Landscape, Guri i Nikës Protected Landscape, Mali i Tomorrit Nature Park, and Dardhë-Xhyrë Nature Park.

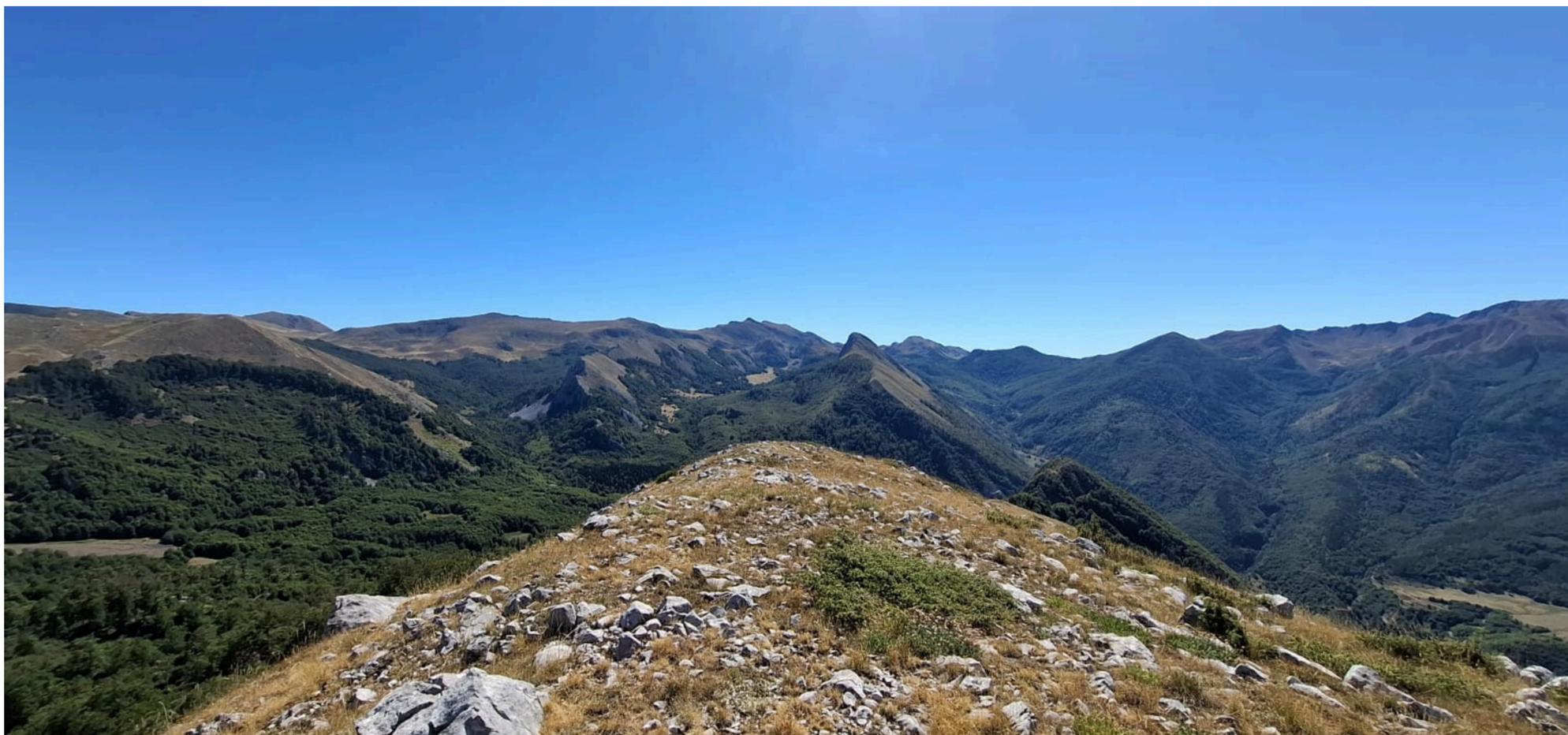


The “Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz” ecological corridor plays an important role in sustaining viable mammal populations by connecting the Pindus Mountains in Greece with Albania’s central mountain system. The Valamarë-Polis mountain range is particularly significant, as it represents the second confirmed reproduction area of the Balkan Lynx in Albania, where camera traps have recorded a family of three individuals. In 2020, the presence and reproduction of three large carnivores, the Brown Bear, Gray Wolf, and the Balkan Lynx, were confirmed in the Polis-Gur i Zi-Valamarë ecosystem.



Despite its natural values, the corridor faces increasing pressures from habitat fragmentation caused by logging, fires, urbanization, and unsustainable use or management of natural resources. These challenges are often linked to limited financial, technical, and human capacities; sometimes ineffective planning and management structures; a lack of data and studies on natural values; and weak enforcement of nature conservation laws and environmental standards.





## LLANGË - SHPELLA E AKULLIT TRAIL

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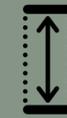
The trail begins in the village of Llangë, one of the oldest settlements in the Steblevë administrative units. This village holds historical and cultural significance for the area, reflecting the traditions and lifestyle of the mountain community. The Llangë - Shpella e Akullit (Ice Cave) Trail represents a unique combination of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities.



Easy



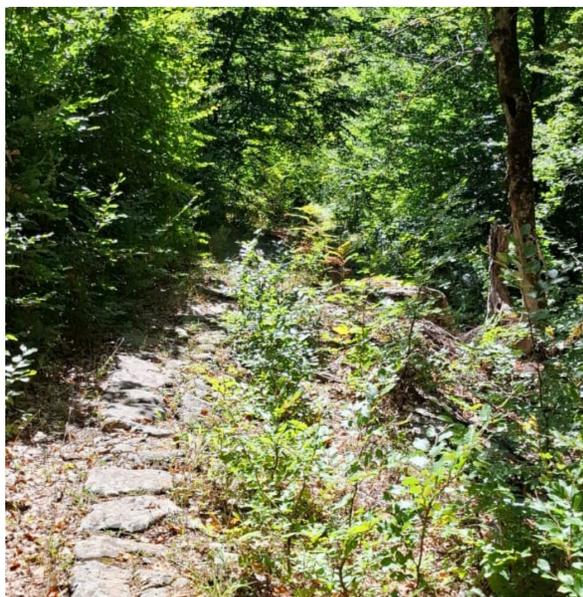
3 km



273 m



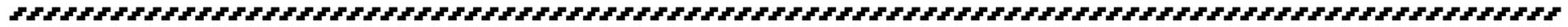
1 hr



The route passes through dense forests, offering shade and the coolness of nature. Beyond this section, the trail opens into pastures surrounded by woodlands, creating a clear contrast between the tree-covered terrain and open spaces for walking and resting. This mix makes the trail varied and enjoyable for both novice hikers and visitors with more advanced experience in mountainous terrains.

The Ice Cave, the final destination of the trail, is a rare natural phenomenon. Ice inside the cave is preserved even during warmer months due to unique microclimatic conditions. This makes the cave not only a tourist attraction, but also a site of geological and climatological interest, where natural processes of ice preservation in high-altitude areas can be studied.

# LLANGË - SHPELLA E AKULLIT TRAIL



## KEY POINTS

This trail is short and easy, allowing hikers to experience alpine landscapes and a unique natural phenomenon.

## ITINERARY

The main attraction of this route is the Ice Cave, which also marks the final destination of the trail.



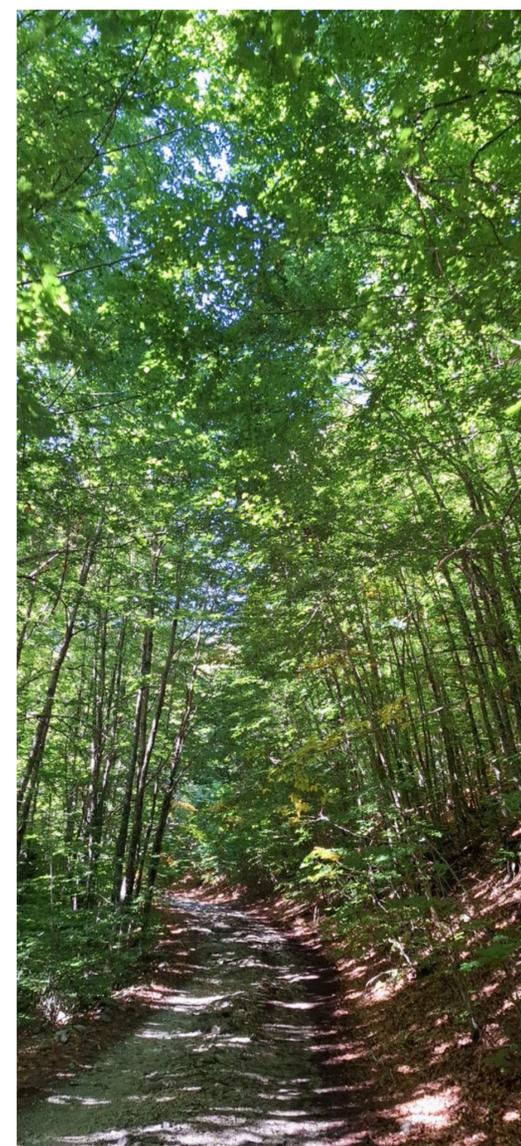
# STEBLEVË - DRAGAN LAKE - FAQET E LËMUEME TRAIL



	Moderate
	6.6 km
	603 m
	3 hrs

This route begins in the village of Steblevë. This mountain center is experiencing ongoing tourism development, thanks to improved road infrastructure and a growing number of visitors interested in nature-based and sustainable tourism. This development has created opportunities for integrating the local community into tourism activities and promoting the cultural values of the area.

The trail passes through alpine forests, offering a rich and diverse landscape. In addition to natural features, the itinerary includes cultural and social aspects. Near Dragan Lake, one of the main stops along the trail, there is a traditional shepherd's hut where visitors can experience local organic products and learn about the lifestyle of the area's shepherds. Within the park, about one kilometer from the trail, other shepherd huts still preserve the traditional practices of the region. This blending of nature with traditional culture makes the trail a unique space for both studying and experiencing.





Reaching Dragan Lake constitutes one of the trail's main stops. The lake has glacial features and is located near Dragan Rock, a rock formation with potential for climbing activities, adding a sports and recreation dimension to the trail.

The final point, Faqet e Lëmueme, is a distinctive geomorphological formation with smooth, flat rock surfaces shaped by natural processes. From this location, visitors can enjoy a wide panoramic view of Shebenik National Park, while the mountains of Dibra are visible on the horizon.



# RRAJCË BARDHAJ - RRAJCË LAKES TRAIL

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Moderate



11 km



753 m



5 hrs

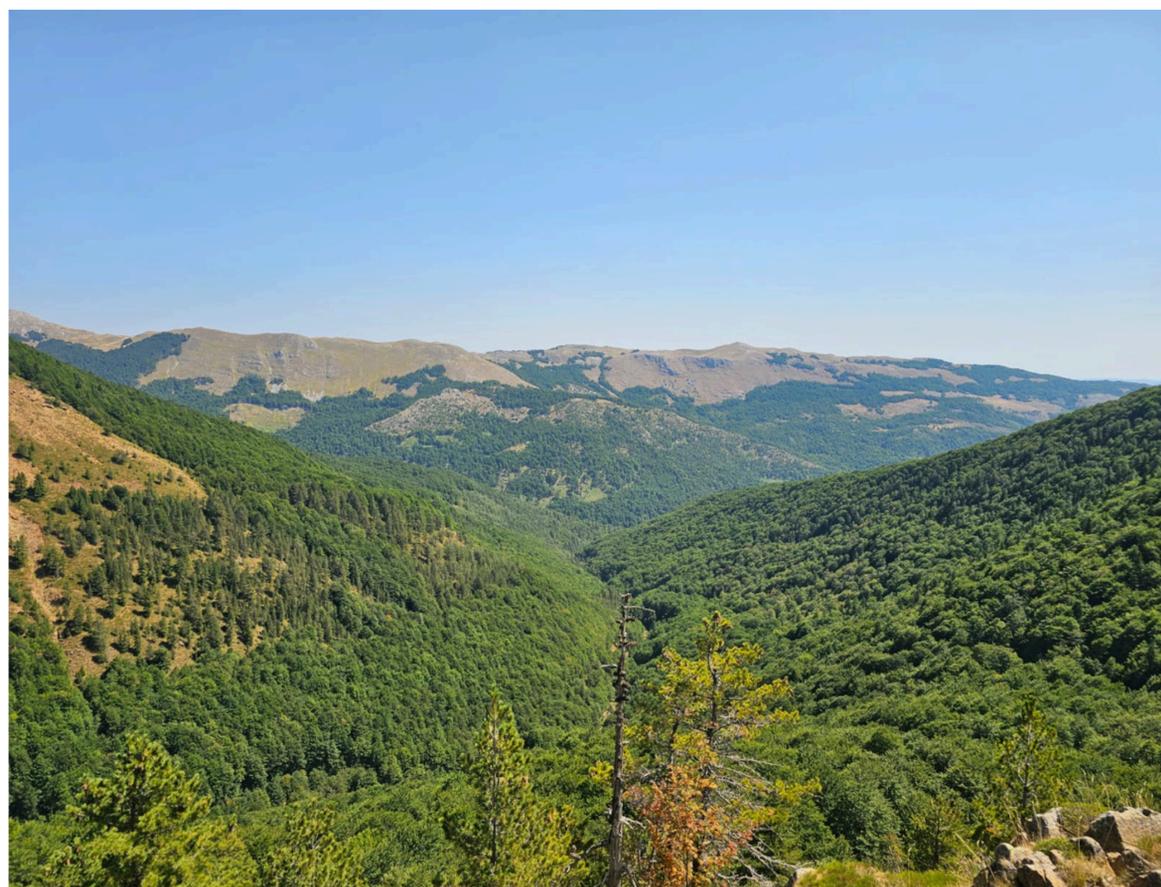
This trail begins in the village of Rrajcë Bardhë and ends at the Rrajca Lakes, offering a unique natural and cultural experience. Most of the route follows vehicle-accessible roads, making it suitable for tourists and ensuring safety during the hike. The trail passes through alpine meadows and dense fir forests, providing breathtaking views and opportunities to observe the local flora and fauna.





The Rrajca Lakes are glacial lakes located at an altitude of 2,000 meters above sea level. They were formed by glacial activity and represent excellent examples of natural alpine formations. The Bushtrica River originates in this area; it is one of the cleanest and ecologically significant rivers in Albania, although hydropower plants are currently under construction along its course. Rrajca is also an important region for various species of flora and fauna, including the Balkan Lynx, a key symbol of Shebenik National Park's wildlife.

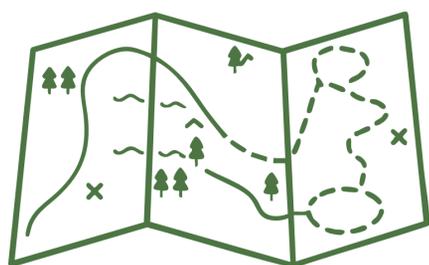
Hikers are recommended to carry sufficient water, food, and appropriate mountain clothing. Along the trail, there are two water sources. The route is most suitable for hiking from May to the end of September due to weather conditions and accessibility. This itinerary offers an excellent opportunity to explore the natural beauty and ecological diversity of Shebenik - Jabllanicë National Park, providing an authentic experience while contributing to the promotion and protection of Albania's natural heritage.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAIL IMPROVEMENT

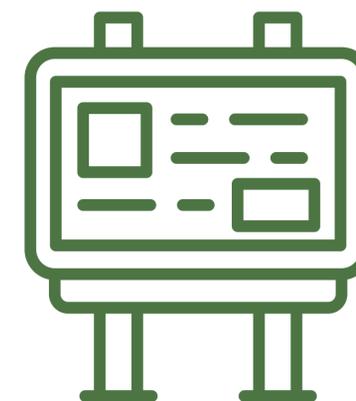


To enhance the visitor experience and ensure sustainable management of the trails, several actions are recommended across five key areas.

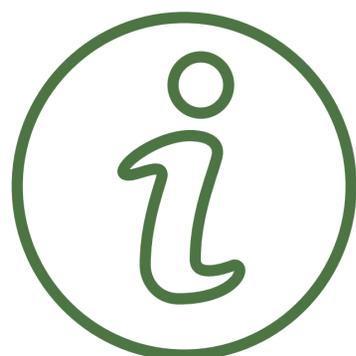


Refreshing trail signs with standard-compliant paint and installing orientation and warning boards at key points along the routes, as important steps to guide the visitors effectively.

It is also suggested to create rest areas with benches and shade. The placement of trash bins and regular trail cleaning are essential. Marking scenic viewpoints will allow visitors to observe landscapes and take photographs along the itinerary.

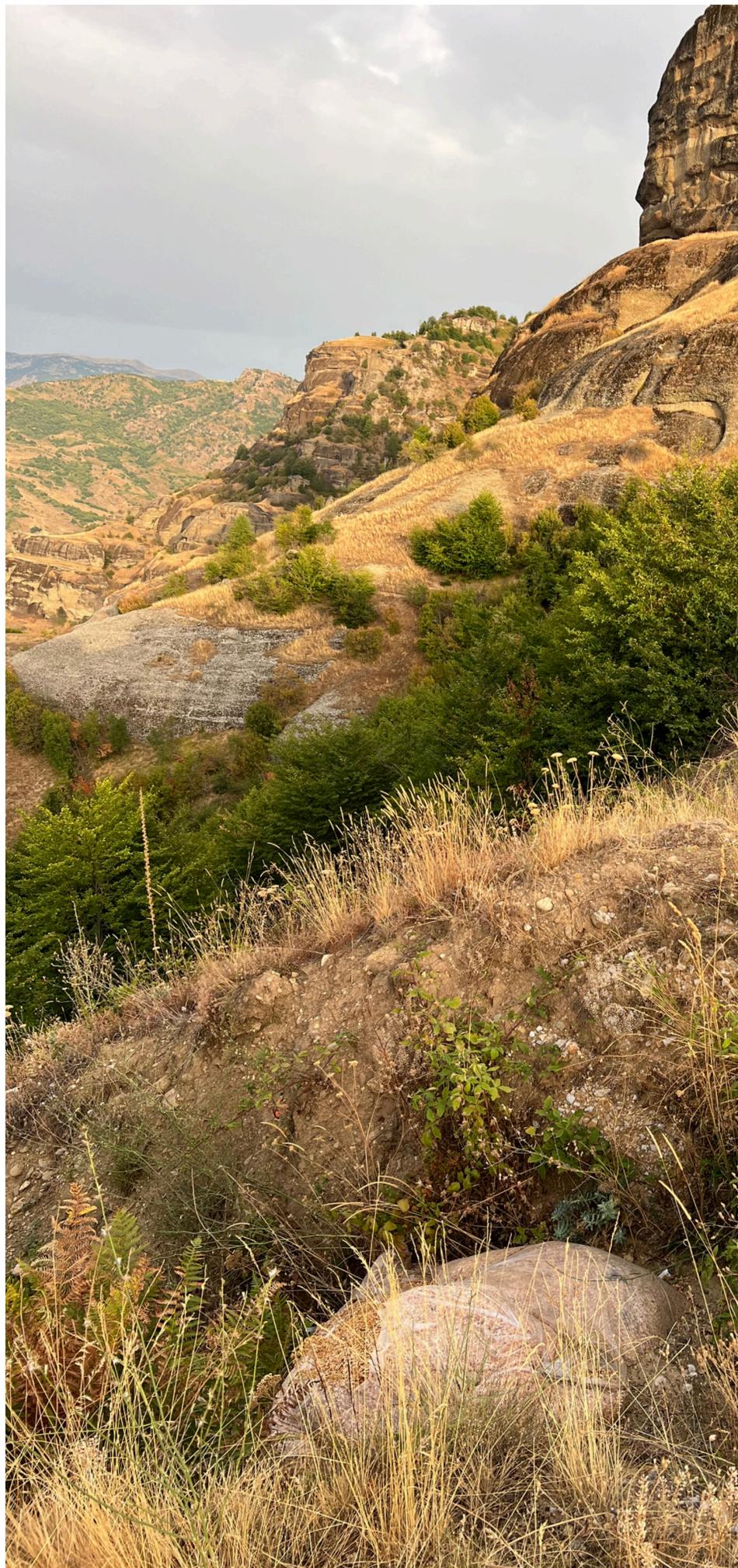


Installing educational panels about the natural, historical, and cultural features of the area would provide an informative context for visitors. Expanding the use of QR codes can offer additional digital content, such as interactive maps, audio guides, and other educational materials.



Warning signs in difficult sections, emergency numbers, and visible GPS coordinates are key elements to ensure visitor safety. Regular maintenance and monitoring of the trails are also necessary.

Engaging the local community in trail maintenance and the provision of tourism services can enhance the visitor experience while promoting community involvement in nature conservation. Promoting diverse activities such as hiking, biking, and stargazing, as well as developing brochures and apps for nature tourism, will make the trails more attractive and interactive.



# QAFË PLOCË - GURI I KAMJES - OSNAT TRAIL



Moderate



14 km



560 m



5-6 hrs

The trail begins at a location known as Qafë Pllocë, near the new Qafë Pllocë-Qukës road, at an altitude of approximately 900 meters above sea level. During the first part of the route, the landscape is dominated by the impressive view of Lake Pogradec, while the terrain passes through nature chestnut forests at elevations of 1,000-1,200 meters. Further along, the trail extends across alpine meadows and oak and beech forests, creating a harmonious blend of woodland scenery and open grasslands. The area is characterized by cultivated land with vineyards, walnut trees, and wide meadows, reflecting the traditional agricultural activities of the local population.





The main highlight of the trail is the Natural Monument "Guri i Kamjes." This unique geological formation is located 1,461 meters above sea level and serves as a natural boundary between the regions of Gora and Mokra. Guri i Kamjes is a sandstone formation shaped by natural processes of erosion, wind and temperature fluctuations. Its impressive dimensions - 100 meters long, 80 meters wide, and 70 meters high - make it a remarkable landmark. Viewed from above, it resembles a ship sailing over the green forest that surrounds it.

Beyond its natural value, the monument holds particular historical significance. On 28 July 1912, the "Besa Gorare" was pledged here, an important patriotic event during which representatives from Gora, Mokra, and Opari, led by Kajo Babjeni dhe Ismail Dërdusha, declared autonomy of their regions four months before Albania's Declaration of Independence in Vlora. This date is still commemorated by local residents as a symbol of pride and regional identity.





After the stop at Guri i Kamjes, the trail descends toward the village of Osnat, a characteristic mountain settlement where residents are primarily engaged in livestock farming and, to a lesser extent, agriculture due to the steep terrain. Currently, approximately 18 families live in the village, with a total population of 70-80 inhabitants. Traditional stone houses give the village an authentic character, although in recent years there has been a noticeable trend toward the use of metal roofing sheets as part of modernization and home maintenance efforts.



Overall, the Qafë Pllocë-Guri i Kamjes-Osnat trail represents an exceptional combination of natural, historical, and cultural values, offering a comprehensive experience for visitors seeking to explore the rich heritage and landscapes of the Mokra and Gora regions.



## DARDHAS - GURI I KAMJES - OSNAT TRAIL

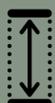
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Moderate



7 km



460 m



3-4 hrs

The trail begins in the village of Dardhas, which serves as the center of the administrative unit with the same name. The village is located approximately 12 km from the city of Pogradec, or about a 20-minute drive. Before the '90s, Dardhas held particular economic importance due to its coal mine, which operated until the early years of that decade. Following the mine's closure, most residents turned to agriculture, livestock farming, or migration, which continue to represent important sources of income for the locals.

At the beginning of the route, visitors pass by the old buildings of the former mine, where the administrative offices, canteen, and workers' dormitories were once located. Although these structures are currently abandoned, they retain historical and architectural value. With moderate investment, they could be revitalized to serve local tourism purposes, such as rest stops or information centers.

Further along, the trail continues toward the area known as Dardhishta, from which the village takes its name. This area is rich in old pear trees that give the landscape its distinctive character and reflect local traditions. As the hike progresses, the majestic Guri i Kamjes, the Natural Monument that dominates the landscape of the Gora region, comes into view.





Guri i Kamjes represents the main destination of the trail, a rare geological formation recognized for its remarkable dimensions and its natural and cultural history. From this vantage point, visitors can enjoy wonderful views of the region. After spending time at this location, the trail gradually descends toward the village of Osnat, known for its traditional livestock farming and the characteristic hospitality of its mountain community.

Overall, the Dardhas - Guri i Kamjes - Osnat trail represents a harmonious combination of industrial history, natural heritage, and rural life offering a comprehensive experience for visitors seeking to better understand the character of the area.

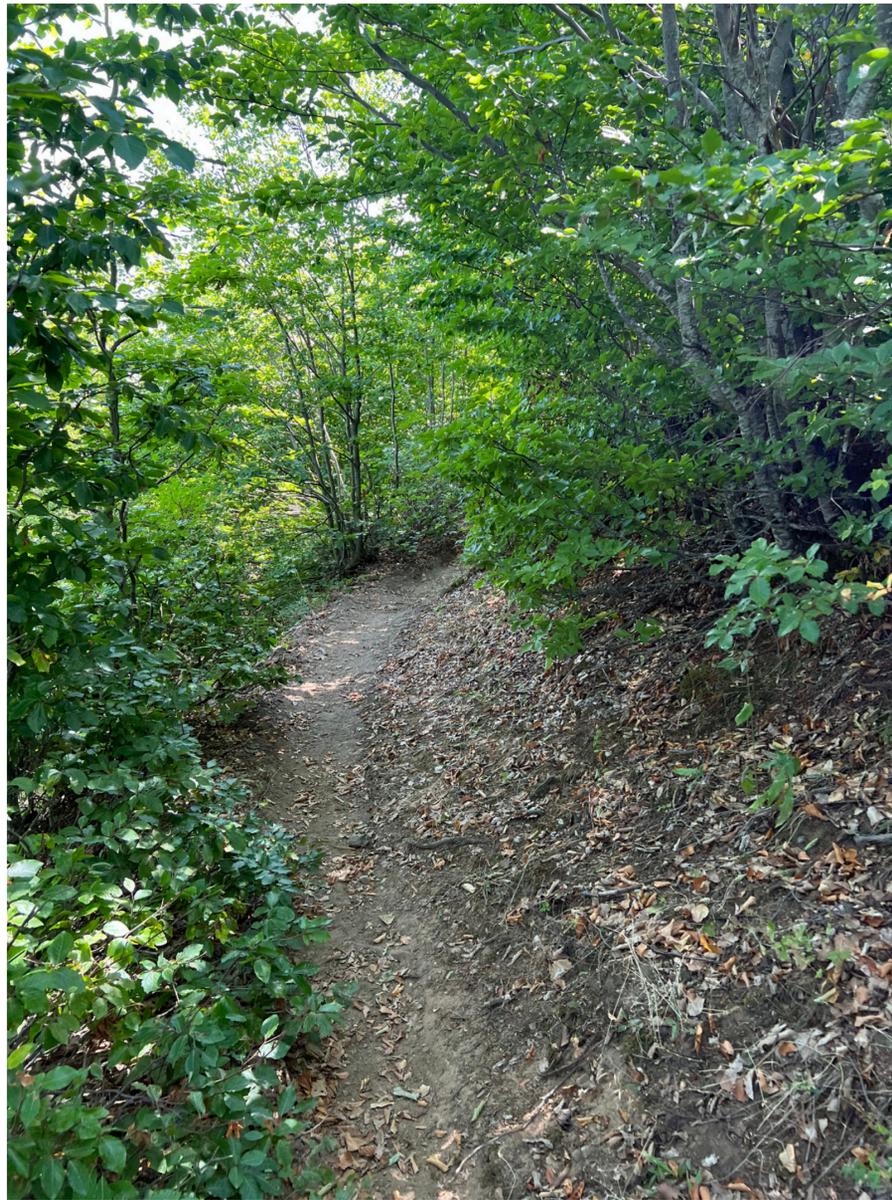
# DARDHAS - GURI I KAMJES - DARDHAS TRAIL



The Dardhas - Guri i Kamjes - Dardhas trail represents a circular itinerary that offers visitors a complete nature-based experience, beginning and ending at the same destination.

The main highlight of this trail is undoubtedly the Natural Monument "Guri i Kamjes," an impressive geological formation that offers panoramic views and a unique experience for visitors. Thanks to its circular layout, this route is particularly suitable for those who wish to explore the natural environment, cultural heritage, and biodiversity of the area without the need for additional transportation to return to the starting point.

	Moderate
	10 km
	460 m
	5 hrs



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAIL IMPROVEMENT



The lack of adequate infrastructure remains a key challenge for the development of trails in accordance with established standards. Currently, trail marking and signage in the field are partial and require comprehensive renewal in line with official guidelines. Likewise, the installation of informational and directional signage remains limited. Although some initiatives have been undertaken by local businesses, these do not meet the necessary standards for visitor orientation and safety.

Registering the trails on specialized applications commonly used by tourists is also an important need, ensuring that itineraries are easily accessible. In addition, the preparation and distribution of updated physical and digital maps suitable for both local and international visitors is recommended.

In many sections, trails have become overgrown due to limited use, making periodic clearing and maintenance essential. An important aspect is the promotion of the trails through national and international nature tourism agencies so that they may be included in existing tourism packages and contribute to the sustainable development of the area.



Finally, to enhance the visitor experience, it is recommended to construct at least two wooden panoramic viewing platforms along the routes: one overlooking Pogradeci Lake and another near "Guri i Kamjes," where visitors can enjoy impressive views across the entire Gora region, with Mount Valamara visible in the background.

## GUR TOP - KROI I MUSHKËS TRAIL

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Difficult

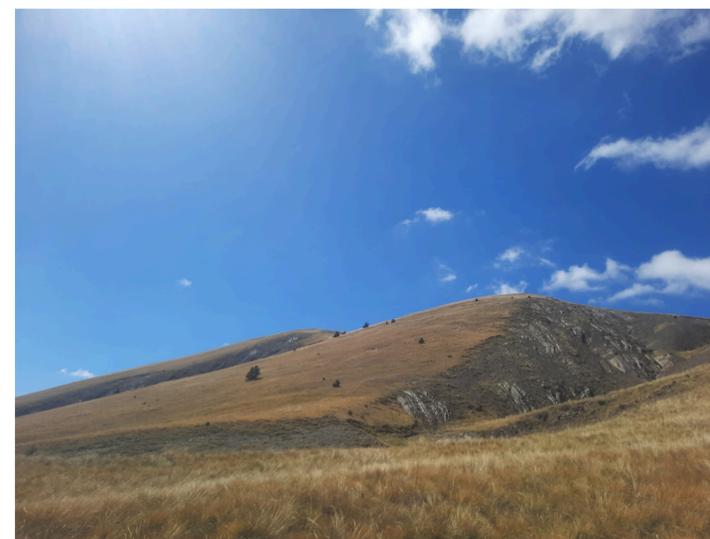
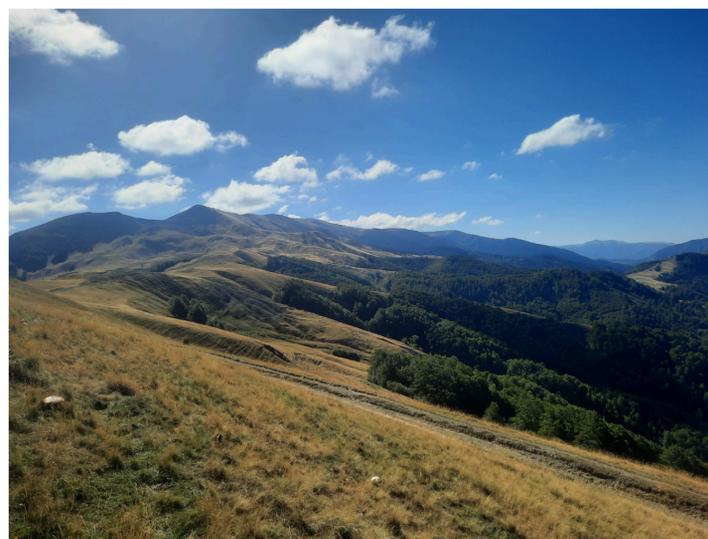


21 km



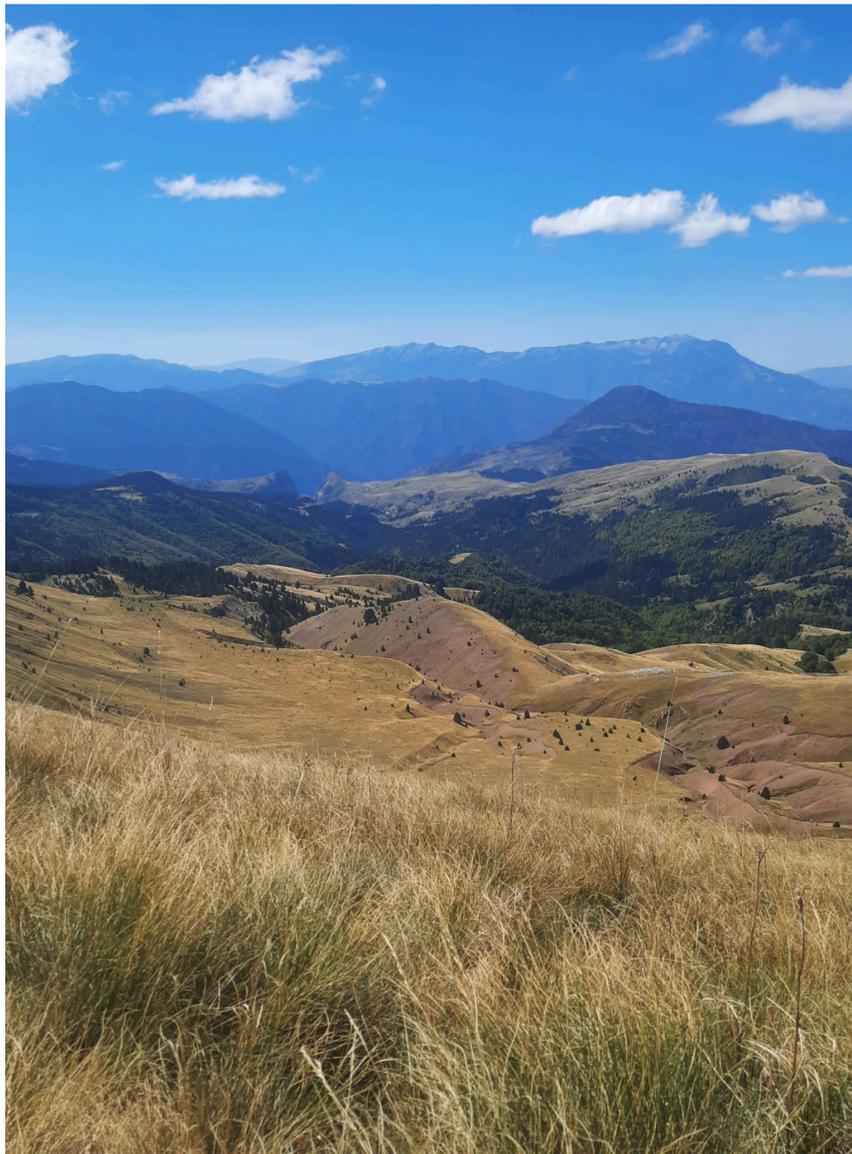
7-8 hrs

This trail follows a mountain route connecting Gur Top with Kroji i Mushkës, crossing one of the most untouched areas of the Polis-Valamarë-Rungajë-Moravë-Gramoz corridor. The rugged landscape and pristine nature make this itinerary a distinctive journey for discovering the biodiversity and beauty of Albania's mountain ranges. Due to its steep ascents and descents, this route is recommended for experienced groups equipped with appropriate mountain hiking gear.



The trail begins at Qafa e Rovjes and follows the path of an old forest road that was once used for transporting firewood. During the ascent, hikers will pass landmarks such as Guri i Gegës and the Lake of Gur Top, where they will prepare for the climb toward Gur Top, one of the main highlights of the route. From the summit, the panoramic views are breathtaking, a 360-degree vista encompassing lakes, mountain ranges, and forests. According to local accounts, the mountain received its name during the Italo-Greek War, when Italian army cannons were transported by mules through this area toward the Greek border.

After Gur Top, the trail continues along the Pogradec-Gramsh boundary, crossing green terrain where partridges and other bird species can be observed. Following a steep descent, the route proceeds with an ascent toward Mount Valamara, where the landscape is dominated by black pine forests and dense herbaceous vegetation. From the summit, visitors can admire glacial lakes and an expansive panorama of the surrounding mountain ranges.

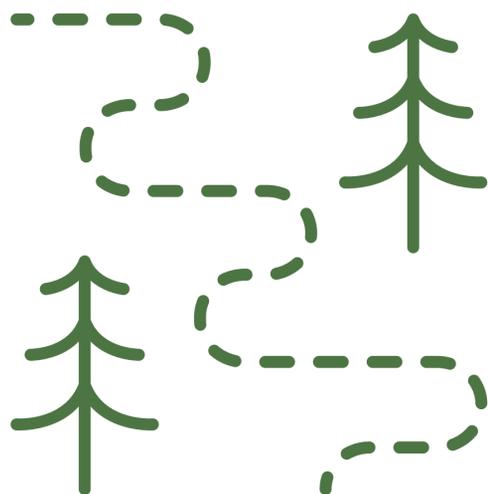


After this point, the route descends to a designated rest area for overnight camping, including the preparation of a campfire and tent setup. The following day, the trail continues along the ridge towards Kroi i Mushkës, reaching the Black Lake, located near the boundary between Gramsh and Korçë, where the itinerary concludes.

Guesthouses and accommodation facilities are available in Grabovë të Sipërme and around Black Lake, offering seasonal lodging during the summer months. Investments in winter tourism are currently being developed, although these remain in the planning phase.



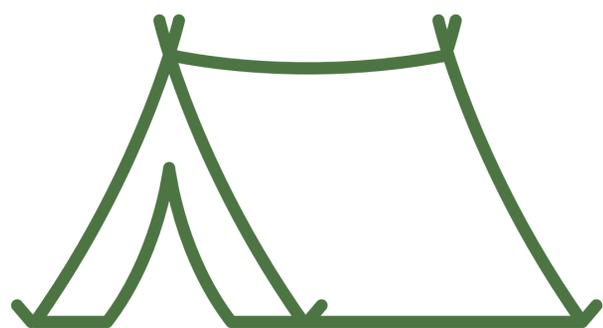
## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAIL IMPROVEMENT



The route from Qafa e Rovjes to Kroin e Mushkës follows older segments that have not been maintained for a considerable period and have partially lost accessibility. Improvements to the passage infrastructure in these sections are necessary.

Regular maintenance, as well as proper marking and signage, are essential to make the itinerary more accesible and user-friendly for visitors.

Due to the steep terrain and challenging conditions in certain segments, visitors must be adequately prepared and adhere to safety measures, particularly during extreme descents. However, this shouldbe complemented by appropriate warning signs and clear trail signage to ensure that visitors are well informed about potential risks along the route.



It is also recommended to designate specific camping areas along the trail and to install waste bins in order to maintain cleanliness and enhance the overall visitor experience.

Scan here to explore the trails:

