

La Soufrière from l'Echelle

Basse-Terre Sud - Saint-Claude



la Soufrière vue depuis l'Echelle (F.Salles - PNG)



Discover La Soufrière through some winding trails. This circular trail beholds a thousand secrets in the fields of geology and botany.

Useful information

Practice : Walking

Duration : 5 h

Length : 8.2 km

Trek ascent : 712 m

Difficulty : Difficult

Type : Loop

Themes : Geology, Top 10

Trek

Departure : Bains Jaunes, Saint-Claude

Arrival : Bains Jaunes, Saint-Claude

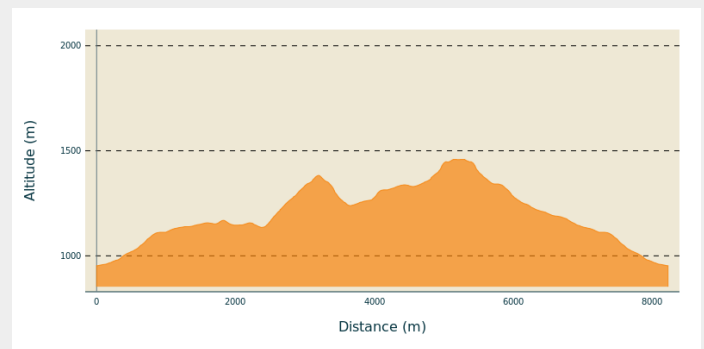
Markings : — PR (short hike network)

Cities : 1. Saint-Claude

2. Gourbeyre

3. Capesterre-Belle-Eau

Altimetric profile
































Min elevation 953 m Max elevation 1459 m

Hiking trail colour: yellow

Starting from the parking area of Bains Jaunes, take the "Pas du Roy" paved path. Leave the intersection for la Chute du Galion on the right and keep going uphill until Savane à Mulets. Go back up to the old parking area and keep right on the small, concrete road. Keep "Col de l'Echelle" on your left and follow the road towards la Citerne. Then take the steep trail to the left, following the signs to "Sommet de l'Echelle". Go uphill and past the top of l'Echelle. Come back down towards the bunker (formerly a geophysical shelter) and la Roche Fendue. The trail then heads off to the right. Pass le Col de l'Echelle and then take a left, leaving the path to Chutes du Carbet on the right. Turn left towards the top of La Soufrière, going round it at the base. Arriving north, leave the Carmichaël trail that heads towards the ridge and turn left. At the Grande Faille intersection, turn left again: the climb then gets quite steep. Once you have reached the top, go around the plateau of La Soufrière from the right, walking the shelter of the Mountaineering Club, the top of "La Découverte" and the chasms. Then head back towards la Grande Faille, keep going straight until la Savane à Mulets and return via the Pas du Roy trail. For a nice, relaxing break, head for the hot water springs back near the parking area.

On your path...



- | | |
|---|--|
|  Shortleaf fig (AA) |  Acomat boucan (AB) |
|  Les Bains Jaunes (AC) |  Le Pas du Roy (AD) |
|  The frogs of Guadeloupe (AE) |  Views of Baillif (AF) |
|  Viewpoint of La Soufrière (AG) |  Charianthus alpinus (AH) |
|  View of the crater of la Citerne (AI) |  Pitcairnia bifrons (AJ) |
|  Clusia mangle (AK) |  Top of l'Echelle (AL) |
|  La Roche Fendue (AM) |  Source of the Carbet river (AN) |
|  Guzmania plumieri (AO) |  Psychotria aubletiana (AP) |
|  Besleria lutea (AQ) |  La Grande Faille (AR) |
|  How La Soufrière was formed (AS) |  La Soufrière shelter (AT) |
|  Top of La Soufrière (AU) |  La Porte d'Enfer (AV) |
|  The Faujas landslide (AW) |  Clubmosses (AX) |
|  Peat mosses and other mosses (AY) |  Le Diablotin ("The Little Devil") (AZ) |
|  Dicranopteris pectinata (BA) |  Holothele sulfurensis (BB) |
|  Notre Dame de la Guadeloupe (BC) | |

All useful information

Is in the midst of the park

The national park is an unrestricted natural area but subjected to regulations which must be known by all visitors.

Advices

As Guadeloupe is prone to natural risks, extra care should be taken in this natural environment. For the benefit of all hikers, responsible behaviour is very important. Beware of sulphurous gas emissions, which are highly toxic: do not cross the protective barriers. In the event of bad weather at the summit plateau of La Soufrière, such as rain or fog, follow the yellow stakes in the ground carefully. Please note : the parking and swimming areas are not supervised. Make sure you adhere to any rules issued by the Regional Health Agency concerning hot baths.



Gear

Depuis 2019, il est obligatoire d'être accompagné d'un guide de montagne pour pouvoir accéder aux cratères (équipement spécifique).
[Contacts](#)

How to come ?

Access

GPS coordinates of the start point : Lat : 16,03459 N - Long : 61,6701 W.

Go through the town of Saint-Claude, passing the post office and the university. Continue uphill on Route RD11, passing through the picnic area of Beausoleil. Keep going until the end of the road and park at the Bains Jaunes parking area, using one of the spaces provided. *(The Savane à Mulets parking area and main access road are closed to traffic because of potential landslide risk).*

Advised parking

Bains Jaunes, Saint-Claude

Information desks

Headquarters of the National Park of Guadeloupe

Montéran, 97120 Saint-Claude

info@randoguadeloupe.gp

Tel : 0590 41 55 55

<http://www.guadeloupe-parcnational.fr/fr/des-decouvertes/ou-sinformer/siege-de-saint-claude>



Source

Rando Guadeloupe

<https://www.randoguadeloupe.gp/>

On your path...



✿ Shortleaf fig (AA)

The shortleaf fig tree (*Ficus citrifolia*) is a member of the Moraceae family. It is quite a unique tree: as an epiphyte, it has the ability to grow on competing trees. Its aerial roots develop by dropping downwards and then branching out as the tree grows. It can strangle competing trees and kill them. The shortleaf fig can grow both on the ground and on buildings.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



✿ Acomat boucan (AB)

The Acomat boucan (*Sloanea caribaea*) belongs to the Elaeocarpaceae family. It is an extremely large tree that can grow up to 40 metres tall. It is the most spectacular tree in the *Sloanea* genus. It has an exposed trunk and magnificent buttresses, with reddish-brown bark that starts to peel off into thin strips when the tree starts to age. Formerly, visitors to the forest would make use of its enormous buttresses to shelter their fires and to smoke meat. It has since been established that lighting fires among the roots is not conducive to the well-being of trees.

Attribution : Emilie Savy / PNG



⚠ Les Bains Jaunes (AC)

Set amid the forest of the same name, the site of Les Bains Jaunes has long been a popular destination. The first dwellings here were the ajoupa of the Igneri people, followed by mouina of the Carib Indians.

Many years later, it became an important stopping-off point on the road to La Soufrière. In the late nineteenth century, the soldiers from Saint-Claude built a convalescent home and shooting range. Around 1910, the famous Mountaineers Club erected a makeshift shelter and later, in 1947, the Renaissance association built their own shelter, designed for hikers and swimmers. That building was later to become the Maison du Volcan, which has since closed. It is thanks to the soldiers of the Marine Infantry, who were sent to Bains Jaunes in order to "acclimatise themselves", that a stone lagoon - still in place today - was built in 1887.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



🕒 Le Pas du Roy (AD)

"Lest we forget that we owe the current path of Le Pas du Roy to the battalion commander, Mr. Legot. He replaced the old path that was originally mapped out by Mr. Rollin in January 1885 to guide the Count and Countess of Bardy to La Soufrière." Gérard Werter, "Coureur des Bois".

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



🐸 The frogs of Guadeloupe (AE)

There are two endemic species of frog in Basse-Terre: Hylode de Barlagne (*Eleutherodactylus barlagnei*) and Hylode de Pinchon (*Eleutherodactylus pinchoni*), and if you listen carefully you might just hear them ribbiting at Pas du Roy. Both species are dark in colour and measure 2-3 centimetres in length. But, the most common species in Guadeloupe is the Martinique Robber Frog (*Eleutherodactylus martinicensis*).

Attribution : Guy Van-Laere / PNG



📷 Views of Baillif (AF)

Views of Baillif to the west and Piton Tarade to the north-west.

Attribution : Emilie Savy / PNG



📷 Viewpoint of La Soufrière (AG)

From the old car park of Savane à Mulets, views of La Soufrière to the north and, on a clear day, of Les Saintes to the south.

Attribution : PNG



🌸 Charianthus alpinus (AH)

From the Melastomataceae family, *Charianthus alpinus*, commonly known in French as mountain fuchsia, is endemic to the Lesser Antilles. It measures between 1-2 metres in height. Its leaves are made up of five base veins and of particular interest are the fuchsia flowers, which attract hummingbirds.

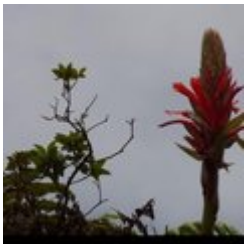
Attribution : Emilie Savy / PNG



◀ View of the crater of la Citerne (AI)

Volcanic activity has been happening inside and on the edges of the Amic crater for 3,000 years. Three magmatic eruptions followed: bringing about the Amic volcanic dome, the cinder domes of l'Echelle and la Citerne and finally, the eruption which took place around 1515 and resulted in the creation of the current dome of La Soufrière. La Citerne is a wide, unevenly-shaped funnel, around 50 metres deep. At its foot is a lake called Lac Flammarion, named after the famous French astronomer Camille Flammarion.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



✿ Pitcairnia bifrons (AJ)

A member of the Bromeliaceae family, *Pitcairnia bifrons* is a herbaceous plant endemic to the Lesser Antilles. Ranging between 80 cm and 1 metre tall, its leaves - located at ground level - are in the form of a rosette. It has a high inflorescence, with red/scarlet flowers.

Attribution : PNG



✿ Clusia mangle (AK)

Clusia mangle is a member of the Clusiaceae family. Endemic to the Lesser Antilles, it thrives at 800 metres above sea level, where there are strong winds and constant humidity. It is a shrub with leathery, fleshy and shiny leaves. Its fruits, which are between 1-2 centimetres, are similar to big yellow/green olives.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



△ Top of l'Echelle (AL)

Top of l'Echelle, at 1,397 metres above sea level.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



La Roche Fendue (AM)

Prior to the eruption in 1976, there were three openings here and a series of fumaroles - a marquis visitor attraction. The 1976 eruption was phreatic, meaning that the magma did not reach the surface but came into contact with groundwater, which subsequently underwent a pressure surge. Violent explosions then spewed forth old volcanic materials (rock and ash) and caused numerous earthquakes. During this dramatic period, one block struck this enormous rock and split it in two; it then became la "Roche Fendue" (The Split Rock). In 1976, during this period of volcanic activity, the population of the southern part of Basse-Terre had to be evacuated for several months.

Attribution : PNG

Source of the Carbet river (AN)

There is a noticeable rockslide on the path, upstream of the pool towards the Carbet river. Sometimes fumaroles can be seen here.



Guzmania plumieri (AO)

A member of the Bromeliaceae family, *Guzmania plumieri* is a tropical grass. An epiphytic (growing on tree branches) or terrestrial plant, there are 40 species of it. Its leaves are upright, rigid, thick and arranged in the form of a rosette and take in a lot of water, making them a very popular home for frogs. It features a yellow floral scarp in the middle.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



Psychotria aubletiane (AP)

Psychotria aubletiane, known in Creole as "Ipeka bata", is a member of the Rubiaceae family. It is a wetland shrub with upright branches. It features elliptical leaves, white flowers and fruits in small drupes that become a bright blue.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



✿ Besleria lutea (AQ)

Besleria lutea is a virtually perennial shrub with a shiny yellow inflorescence. It has dark green, leathery leaves and red berries.

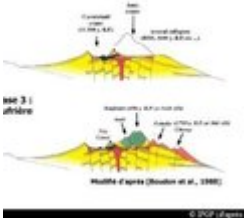
Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



📍 La Grande Faille (AR)

"La Grande Faille (The Great Fault) of the north, at around 100 metres deep and 3-4 metres wide, crosses La Soufrière from north to south [...]. In its northern section, it featured a chasm measuring 15 metres long, covered with a thick layer of sulphur crystals, which has been given the rather grand name of "Lac de Soufre" (Sulphur Lake)." Gérard Werter, "Coureur des Bois". On account of erosion caused by rainwater, sulphur powder has completely disappeared.

Attribution : PNG



📍 How La Soufrière was formed (AS)

La Soufrière is part of a recently-formed volcanic complex, situated in the south of Basse-Terre. It consists of two formations: the composite volcano of la Grande Découverte, whose last activity resulted in the creation of La Soufrière, and the smaller volcanic complex of la Madeleine - located to the southeast of the former.

There were three primary phases behind the formation of La Découverte.

* 200,000-42,000 years ago : Grande Découverte phase.

On the south side of the Pitons de Bouillante and Sans Toucher: alternating lava flow stages and pyroclastic stages. These brought about the formation of the Grande Découverte caldera, of which only the northern wall remains visible today.

* 42,000-11,500 years ago : Carmichaël phase.

Formation of the Carmichaël massif, dominated by lava flows, within the Grande Découverte caldera. Two successive eruptions destroyed the uppermost part of the volcano.

* 8,500 years ago - present : Soufrière phase.

Eruptions took place largely within or on the rims of the Amic crater. Three magmatic eruptions followed, giving rise to the current form of La Soufrière and l'Echelle.

Attribution : IPGP (d'après G. Boudon)



🏠 La Soufrière shelter (AT)

It was opened in 1935 by governor Bouge. Among the 1,000 people who climbed the volcano that day to attend the ceremony was Camille Thionville, the founder of the Mountaineering Club. He was 78 and this trip was to be his last hike of the volcano. At the time, it was common for hikers to spend the night in this small shelter. Renovated in 1982, it is now open as a shelter in the event of bad weather.

Attribution : Fabien Salles / PNG



⚠️ Top of La Soufrière (AU)

Situated at 1,467 metres above sea level, La Découverte is the highest point in Guadeloupe and the Lesser Antilles. On a good day the views can be spectacular, but it is also extremely common for there to be gusts of 50 km/h! With bumps and stony crevices, the plateau at the summit of La Soufrière offers a lunar-like landscape in places. It was the French naturalist Felix Herminier who was responsible for the toponymy of the summit of La Soufrière.

Attribution : PNG



🕒 La Porte d'Enfer (AV)

Here, at La Porte d'Enfer ("Hell's Gate"), bold and intrepid visitors to La Soufrière would complete their final ascent of the volcano. They stopped off half way through the Chemin des Dames and climbed the steep slope to reach it. It is guarded by La Guenon, a rock with a monkey-like face, which dominates one of the walls of this site. Not so far away from here, Le Piton Dolomieu (1,464m) is also visible. There are many names that allude to the infernal dimension of La Soufrière: la montagne à diables (devil mountain), le pont du diable (devil's bridge), la mare aux diables (devil pool), le diabolotin (the little devil) and of course, la Porte d'Enfer itself.

Attribution : PNG



The Faujas landslide (AW)

This landslide was caused by a phreatic explosion in 1798. Blocks of stone, ash and mud overflowed onto Matouba (top of the village of Saint-Claude) and into the valley of the Rivière Noire. The landslide was named after a famous geologist from the late eighteenth century, Barthélémy Faujas de Saint-Fond.

Attribution : PNG



Clubmosses (AX)

The Lycopodium genus includes a number of species which are botanically similar to ferns and spikemosses. As pioneer plants, the Clubmosses are the first to settle on the ground after volcanic eruptions. Thanks to the abundant spores that are produced in their small and densely-packed refracted ears, found at the ends of the branches, they can multiply freely.

Attribution : PNG



Peat mosses and other mosses (AY)

In upland savannas, peat and other mosses form thick carpets, reminiscent of peatlands in cold areas or temperate highland areas. Peat mosses and mosses dominate the vegetation of La Soufrière and in virtually flat areas or in basins that are constantly waterlogged, where they live in almost aquatic conditions.

Attribution : PNG



Le Diablotin ("The Little Devil") (AZ)

La Soufrière was once home to a bird named Le Diablotin ("The Little Devil"). This petrel nested in holes carved into the mountain sides. Living solely on a diet of fish, it left its home after dark to go fishing at sea. A highly-prized game bird, it disappeared from Guadeloupe in around 1880.

Attribution : PNG



Dicranopteris pectinata (BA)

Dicranopteris pectinata is a member of the Gleicheniaceae family. It is a pioneer species that is so typical of open and sunny areas. It colonises landslide areas, the edges of forest roads, river banks and, generally, any surfaces that have been severely stripped back in wet areas. This fern's network of underground roots plays a key role in consolidating the topsoil.

Attribution : PNG



Holothele sulfurensis (BB)

This species of spider (*Holothele sulfurensis*) can only be seen on La Soufrière massif, above 700 metres. It makes its home underneath rocks.

Dark brown in colour, it measures 1-2 cm. Despite being a tarantula, this particular species is not poisonous.

Attribution : PNG



Notre Dame de la Guadeloupe (BC)

After La Soufrière erupted in 1956, a statue of Notre Dame de la Guadeloupe was erected here, in a small chapel housed within the rock. The parishioners of Saint-Claude regularly adorn it with flowers and candles to give thanks to the volcano for its clemency.

Attribution : PNG