

## **Route Four – "Extra Trail"**

This is a mammoth trail that takes you to a height of 1718m, if you are of the adventurous type or like to punish yourself, this is the trail for you. The long arduous climb begins at 639m above sea level in Vernet les Bains, thankfully the first 6.125km are on tarmac. This brings you to the Col de Jou, at 1125m.

From there all climbing is done via dusty fire track taking you up through the forest to Mariailles at 1718m, the highest point of this trail. Just before reaching Mariailles there is a chance to refill water reservoirs and bottles at a mountain spring at the side of the road, this water is drinkable and very cold! As you reach Mariailles a chalet has been converted into a café which may be a good stop for lunch before the long downhill.

There is an option to climb further up from Mariailles, to Collade de la Roquette at 2083m, but for some the climb to Mariailles is enough. After taking in some of the views here and taking time out with the cows, it's back down the same fire tracks to the Col de Jou. Here there are three options, one down an open fire track into Sahorre, a second being the road back down through Casteil into Vernet, the other taking a narrow hiker's trail up to the Tour de Goa at 1288m. This narrow track is particularly difficult riding in the heat and is only advised for experienced riders.

From the tower take the lower left hand trail through the coarse bush down to the Col des Manchas, following on from here brings you out above Vernet at the Pylon. The descent into Vernet can be taken by singletrack or by the open fire track through the dense forest.