

Cochons, which flow down towards Port Glaud contain small endemic Goujon fish (*Pachypanchax playfairii*), endemic shrimps and caddis flies, reminders of the ancient mainland origins of Seychelles. Birds to look out for on this trail include Seychelles endemic bulbul (*Hypsipetes crassirostris*), sunbird (*Nectarinia dussumieri*), blue pigeon (*Alectroenas pulcherrima*),kestrel (*Falco araea*) and swiftlet (*Aerodramus alaphrus*) , together with ground doves (*Geopelia striata*), tropic birds (*Phaton* spp.) and the introduced Indian mynah (*Acridotheres tristis*) and Madagascar fody (*Foudia madagascariensis*). The area is also habitat for the endemic scops owl (*Otus insularis*), and fruit bats (*Pteropus seychellensis*) may be seen leaving their roosts. At the Port Glaud end of the trail some of the best mangrove swamp left in the granitic islands lies along the main road, particularly in the Port Launay direction, where all seven mangrove tree species are present.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Introduced cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*), now so abundant in Seychelles forest, was exploited commercially during the 20th century. Cinnamon bark, chipped off the trunks and dried, and cinnamon oil distilled from the leaves, were exported in large quantities. The ruins of several distilleries are a special feature of this trail, reflecting the importance of the area to this economic venture. The distillation process was fairly crude in the earlier part of the century but became more sophisticated later, with further investment in infra-structure. This is reflected to some extent in the ruins, the distilleries at lower altitudes having been in operation until more recently. Enormous amounts of wood fuel were required to produce the steam that was passed through the cinnamon leaves. Water was channeled in from nearby rivers, using bamboo and later metal guttering , to cool the distillate so that the oil could be collected. By 1955 more

than 90 tonnes of cinnamon oil was being exported annually, representing 70% of total world production.

Small communities built up around the distilleries. clusters of fruit trees and the ruins of some of the houses can be seen along the trail. Notable is the Father's house, not far from the distillery in Mare aux Cochons valley, which was also the Grand Case for the Roman Catholic Mission there. More recently abandoned houses are seen at Mon't d' Or, along the routes leading down to Port Glaud. During the 1970s, after the construction of the airport which resulted in tourism becoming the most important economic activity, the cinnamon industry slowly collapsed. Various attempts have been made to revamp the cinnamon industry but so far with little success.

Much of Mare aux Cochons belonged to the Roman Catholic Mission at one time, although the alternative name of Mare d'Antin (and also Glacis d'Antin) recall a previous land owner. The Swiss Fathers were responsible for the building of the beautiful stone bridge in the middle of the valley, where rivers draining both ends of the valley meet and start their descent to the coast. The arched bridge was built in the Swiss style and is unusual in Seychelles. Part of the Mare aux Cochons property was later sold to a local family and part was acquired by the government. During the 1980s part of the valley was used as a military training ground and a number of trenches remain visible.

Attention: For hikers taking the route towards Port Glaud river crossing may be difficult after heavy rain.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAIL.

Length: 7-10Km, depending on route taken.

Time to go and come back: 3h or more

Main interest: Landscape, history, the fresh water marsh

Physical difficulty: Medium to high

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National Parks
Authority**

MARE AUX COCHONS

NATURE TRAIL

MORNE SEYCHELLOIS

NATIONAL PARK

MAHE

This trail is made up of a network of trails each one as impressive as the other and are all interlinked with the upland valley of Mare aux cochons.

Whichever of the route you choose to follow allow a whole day because the routes take between 3 and 4 hours of straight walking, without allowing time for diversions and discovery explorations. Note that there are several alternative diversions which are not shown on the map. There are several riverside picnic spots for your enjoyment.

THE ROUTE:

Le Niol is the starting point for many of the suggested routes. The information point is located in the vicinity of the terminus. This point can be accessed by SPTC bus route No. 32 that can also drop you right in the Centre of town on your way back. The road is motor-able for another kilometer or so but parking space can be limited. At least four routes can be proposed for your excursions.

Route No. 1: Le Niol- Mare aux Cochons marsh – Danzil.

Route No. 2: Le Niol – Mare aux Cochons- Le Niol.

Route No. 3: Le Niol - Mare aux Cochons – Port Glaud

Route No. 4: Port Glaud – Mare aux Cochons - Port Glaud.

Le Niol-Mare aux Cochons

The houses at the start of the trail give way to open scrubland and forest, with several opportunities for views over the North West of Mahé,towrds Silhouette and North island and even over to the East towards Ste Anne Marine National Park. The rocky summit of Mont Le Niol is always above you. At one time the road was motorable as far the steep ascent to the Mare aux Cochons valley.

Mare aux Cochons– Danzil

The path zigzags steeply down into a valley and descends through forest. The ruins of a cinnamon distillery may attract your attention before you reach the paved road which continues steeply down to the bottom of the hill. The Danzil bus terminus is next to the sea for bus route 21(Belombre –Victoria).

Mare aux Cochons Valley

The path through the valley is relatively level, with more gentle inclines. This was once a thriving agricultural area with fruit trees such as mango,orange,tangerine,breadfruit,golden apple and tropical raspberries, spice trees such as nutmeg and clove, root crops,watercress,as well as cattle and pigs.

The freshwater marsh or swamp is at the eastern end of the valley, with a path encircling it.There is an alternative route passing through woodland to the marsh. From the central open area of Mare aux Cochons there are excellent views of the surrounding slopes (including Glacis d’Antin,Mont Jasmin, Mont Le Niol, Glacis Sarcelle). There are several river-side picnic spots. Please remember to take home all your rubbish.

Glacis d’Antin (Deros) viewpoint

You can spend an interesting hour or so exploring this rocky outcrop to the south of Mare aux Cochons. The path climbs steeply through low forest and over glacis, and there are handrails, wooden bridges and ladders where necessary. The view is well worth the effort if the skies are clear . From the main viewpoint you look down over the whole of the Mare aux Cochons valley and right around from Mont Jasmin, to the tooth-like Morne Blanc,including Mont Le Niol and Morne Seychellois (often cloud covered), and down to the west coast and Thérèse Island. The path then continues up into cloud forest, past a cave shelter to a glacis with a more extensive view of the west coast.

Mare aux Cochons– (Port Glaud east-ern route)

This path is a continuation of the path which joins at the eastern end of the marsh. It passes further along the valley through a forested area with a good scattering of native plant before descending. Where the path forks, take the branch down to Port Glaud. There is a river to cross on this route, which can be difficult after heavy rain. Several ruined cinnamon distilleries and associated settlement lie along this trail. At Mont D’or at least two houses continued to be occupied until the early 1980s,originally built by Englishmen who settled in Seychelles and were active in the cinnamon industry and also produced patchouli oil, which is used in the perfume industry . One of these houses is directly on this route. There is another abandoned house relatively close, near the river where the southerly path joins this one.

Buses from Port Glaud to Victoria pass by route 13 (via Grand Anse and La Misère), by route 14 less frequently(via Sans Souci) and by route 9 (via Les Canelles in the south).

Mare aux Cochons–Port Glaud (waterfall/cave route)

This path branches off from Mare aux Cochons down through forest dominated by introduced trees such as Bois Beurre or Butternut (Pentadesma butyracea) and Jambrosa (Syzygium jambos), whose flowers are favored by endemic sunbirds and fruit bats. The large brown, rough-skinned fruits of Butternut are not utilised in Seychelles but the seeds have a high fat content. Endemic Vacoa Parasol (Pandanus hornei) are frequent in the river valley. You soon reach a huge overhanging boulder next to the river, which is a good picnic spot. Below is a cascade over the rocks. Nearby is la Buse cave, where a treasure is reputed to have been buried by the famous pirate of the same name. It is part of a conglomeration of enormous boulders and entry is difficult and not recommended. About 20 meters further down the path is an

alternative trail back up to Mare aux Cochons valley, along a ridge with an interesting variety of endemic plants, including pitcher plants (Nepenthes pervillei). The main path continues downhill through forest, with the main river on the right. Passage may be difficult after heavy rain. The path then bears left uphill, away from the river, over a ridge and down numerous steps until Rivière Mare aux Cochons is reached. Across the river is an abandoned house, which must be passed in order to join the main path at Mon’t d’ Or, leading down to Port Glaud. (Note that a second abandoned house lies some 20 meters up this path.)

Buses bring you back to Victoria.

ECOLOGY OF THE AREA

Much of the trail passes through secondary forest with cinnamon (Cinnamomum verum) and other introduced trees predominating , but there is also a scattering of palms and other endemic trees such as Bois Rouge (Dillenia ferruginea). The route to Glacis d’Antin (Deros) is more interesting ,with a variety of habitats ranging from moist forest to open glacis. The climb reveals many endemic plants, including several palm species, Vacoa Marron (Pandanus sechellarum), Bois de Natte (Mimusops sechellarum), Bois Calou (Memecylon eleagni), Bois de Montagne (Campnosperma sechellarum) and Capucin (Northea hornei). Between the two main viewpoints is an area of cloud forest, with festoons of plants such as ferns and mosses capturing water from the swirling mists on the top of the mountain. The freshwater marsh of Mare aux Cochons is the best of the few upland swamps existing in Seychelles. Although modified by human activities, it retains the typical moisture-loving Vacoa Parasol (Pandanus hornei) and remains an essential habitat for native insects such as dragonflies and damselflies. It is also an important source of water for West Mahé . The rivers encountered in Mare aux



Stick insect (*Carausius* sp.)



Non-poisonous Wolf snake (*L. Seychellès*)



Vacoa Parasol (*Pandanus hornei*)



Cinnamon (*C. verum*)