

Balkan Rivers Tour - Event # 9: Valbona River (AL), May 7-9



The Valbona Valley contains one of the best loved rivers in Albania. Its bright blue water and wild flow make a classic alpine river, while the remoteness and purity of the surroundings are simply amazing. Valbona has been a national park and neighboring Gashi Valley a "Strictly Protected Area" since 1996. Gashi is currently under consideration for UNESCO World Heritage Forest Status. Valbona, Gashi and other territories will soon to be combined, forming the new national park of the Albanian Alps – Albania's largest protected area, and one of the largest protected areas in the Balkans. Nonetheless, the river is currently facing 3 different hydropower developments that we know about, with rumors of 6 other licenses granted. All of these are to be constructed along a mere 25 km of one of the most beautiful, loved and "highly protected" rivers in Albania!



Valbona in the Valbona National Park Albania © Goran Šafranek

The construction of just one of these projects ("Dragobia Cascades") will destroy the eastern slope of Kollata Mountain to construct a 3m wide delivery tunnel. Kollata incidentally includes the highest peak in Montenegro, one of the most popular weekend destinations for hikers. It will destroy Cerem Valley, rerouting the whole river. Cerem Path is also part of the internationally recognized "Peaks of the Balkans" trail, which brings hundreds of tourists annually to the area. Sustainable tourism is the lifeblood of the area's small remote mountain communities - a bright new economic future for the past 10 years. It is up to the people and organizations that care to stop these destructive projects.



Valbona, popular fishing spot
© Carlos Rodrigues Villafane



HPP on Valbona under construction
© Catherine Bohne

Program

The Balkan Rivers Tour team will arrive in Valbona Valley on the evening of May 7 and then spend 2 days around camping and Hotel Rilindja. They will paddle river Valbona and walk the paths around this amazing valley.

Saturday, May 07 – In the evening, arrival of kayakers in [Hotel Rilindja](#) (Valbona valley) (Address: about 23 km from Bajram Curri on the Valbona Road (Ruga Azem Hajdari) Tropoja, Albania)

Sunday, May 08 – Event Day

10.00h Kayakers go paddling Valbona, non-kayakers will go hiking on the paths in Valbona valley

17:00h Gathering and lunch for all participant and kayakers at Rilindja Hotel and Campsite

19.00h Presentation of Balkan Rivers Tour and round table on dam craze in Albania

20.00h Screening of film “One for the River - The Vjosa Story”

Monday, May 09 - relaxed paddling on Valbona, hiking and bird watching for participants

Participants are invited to camp by the river (€4/night) or stay at the near Rilindja Hotel. Lunch €4-6.

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More info about the Save the Blue Heart of Europe campaign at www.balkanrivers.net

