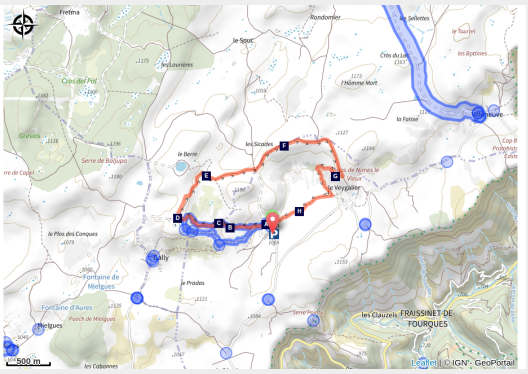
A walk around Nîmes-le-vieux

Causses Gorges



Nîmes-le-Vieux (© Eddie Balaye)



The chaos of Nimes le Vieux, shaped by the whimsical dissolution of dolomitic limestone, rises up as a final viewpoint above the abyss of the gorges encircling the causse. Karstine the water droplet will help you appreciate the recent scientific discoveries about the journey of water deep beneath the Causse Méjean.

The Nîmes-le-vieux path offers a variety of landscapes typical of the causse Méjean (limestone plateau): stony, arid hilltops, deep basins of soil, cliffs that rise like ramparts and vast expanses of jagged rock whose shapes provoke questions and set the imagination free.

Useful information

Practice : Discovery trails

Duration : 3 h

Length : 6.1 km

Trek ascent : 136 m

Difficulty : Easy

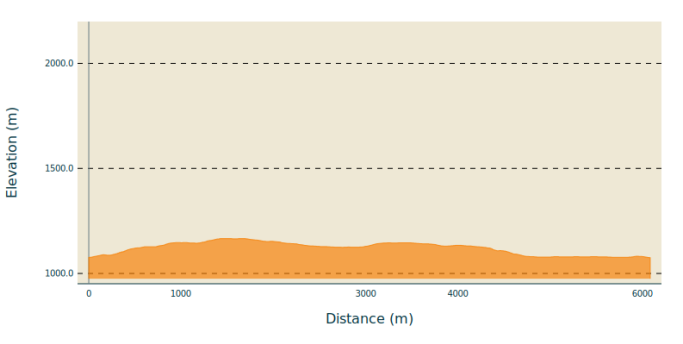
Type : Loop

Themes : Agriculture and livestock farming, Causses and Cévennes / UNESCO, Water and geology

Trek

Departure : L'Hom or Le Veygalier
Arrival : L'Hom or Le Veygalier
Markings : Nîmes-le-Vieux
Cities : 1. Fraissinet-de-Fourques
2. Vebron

Altimetric profile



Min elevation 1075 m Max elevation 1166 m

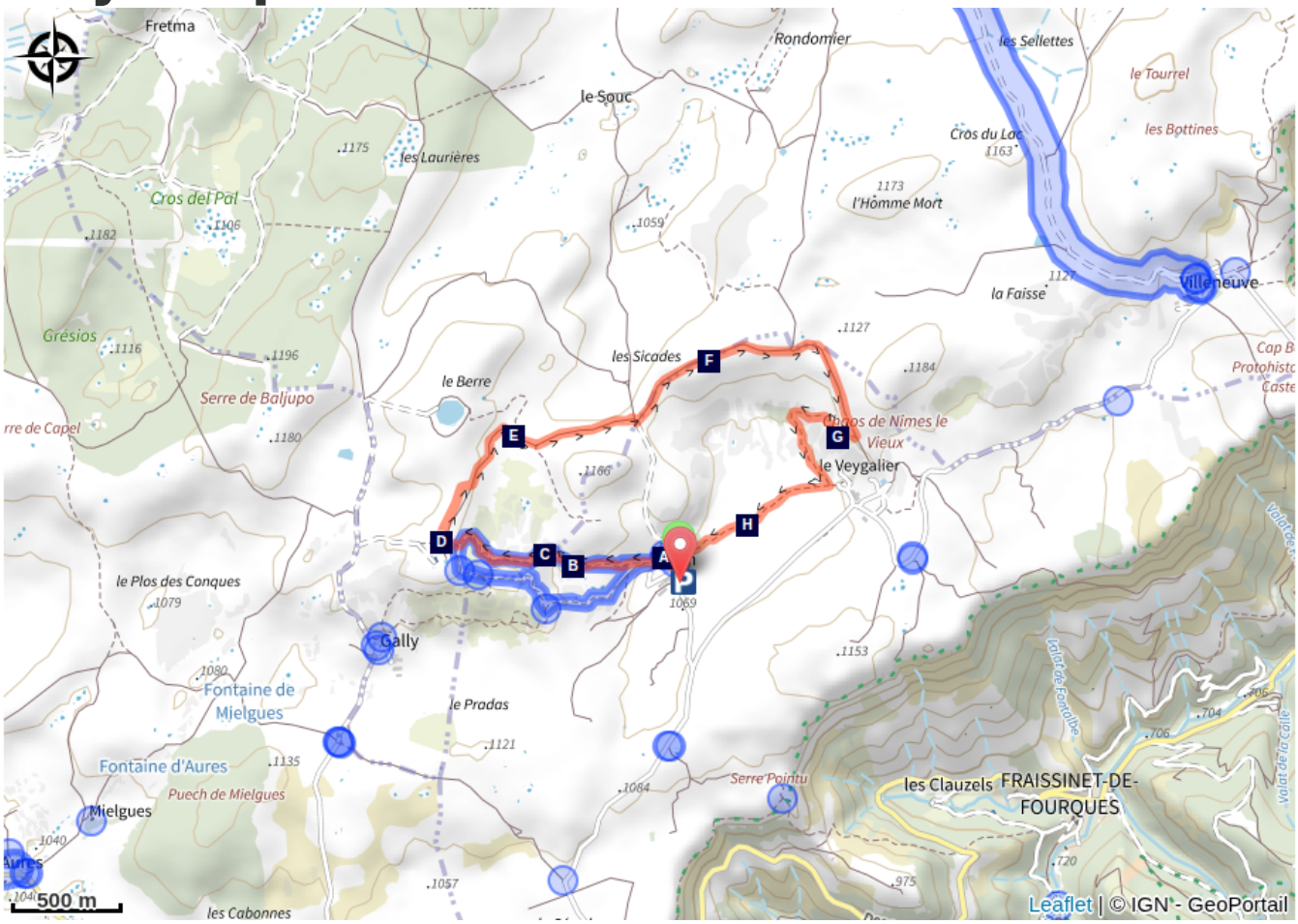
A few details:

From the L'Hom car park, walk through the hamlet for about 150 m. Turn left after the farm buildings.

From the Veygalier car park, go as far as the ferme auberge (farm inn), then continue on the grassy track (GR de Pays) towards L'Hom.

This route has been awarded the "Sentier karstique" (karst trail) label by the Fédération Française de Spéléologie.

On your path...



Let's start exploring (A)

A high plateau open to the sun: the causse (B)

The ghosts of Nîmes-le-Vieux (C)

Water, the invisible worker (D)

The nourishing Causse (E)

Sheltered in the middle of the chaos (F)

An arch (G)

The mysterious house (H)

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

Horse riding and mountain biking are not permitted or suitable on interpretive paths.

Because of the presence of protection dogs:

We strongly advise against taking your dog with you on this walk.
We strongly advise against using the path after 9 pm.

Please close all the gates along the route.

A short alternative route (without information panels) is offered all year round by the Veygalier farm, starting from and around the hamlet of Le Veygalier (blue square waymarks).

How to come ?

Access

Go to the Col du Perjuret pass on the D 996 from Florac or Meyrueis, or on the D 18 from mont Aigoual. At the Col du Perjuret, head towards L'Hom or Le Veygalier (2 starting points possible).
It is not possible to start this walk from Galy.

Advised parking

Car park on the right at the entrance of the Hom hamlet or at the Veygalier

Information desks

Tourism'house and national Parc at Florac
Place de l'ancienne gare, N106, 48400 Florac-trois-rivières

info@cevennes-parcnational.fr
Tel : 04 66 45 01 14
https://www.cevennes-gorges-du-tarn.com



Source

Parc national des Cévennes

http://www.cevennes-parcnational.fr/

On your path...



Let's start exploring (A)

In 1908, Paul Arnal, a pastor in Vébron (Lozère) and secretary general of the Club Cévenol, noticed this site, which was not listed at all in geography books. This city of rocks made him think of a town. Echoing the chaos of Montpellier-le-Vieux, a comparable site discovered 25 years earlier by the great explorer of the Causses E.A. Martel, Paul Arnal named the place "Nîmes-le-Vieux". A chaos is a disorderly collection of rock blocks of various sizes. These blocks generally result from processes such as erosion, fragmentation or tectonic movements.

Attribution : © Philippe Crochet



A high plateau open to the sun: the causse (B)

A causse is a limestone plateau with a flat or gently undulating relief, often cut by gorges and with no rivers on the surface. The causse Méjean is one of the largest limestone plateaux in the region! To the touch, the rock feels rough. It is dolomite, a sedimentary rock related to limestone, made of calcium and magnesium carbonate. These components formed in a very hot climate on the floor of a sea that no longer exists.

Attribution : © Caroline Devevey



The ghosts of Nîmes-le-Vieux (C)

A karst landscape is characterised by remarkable geological formations created by water erosion, such as caves and potholes. As it seeps in, the water dissolves the limestone, or dolomite, carving out a vast underground network with galleries that can stretch for kilometres. Here, this phenomenon takes the form of ghostly rocks and is known as "covered karst". This process began 100 million years ago, before the gorges of the Tarn, the Tarnon and the Jonte were even carved out.

Attribution : © Eddie Balaye



Water, the invisible worker (D)

Water shapes the karst, and therefore the landscape of the causse. Its underground flow is invisible, yet clues at the surface reveal its work deep below. Together with the Tarn and the Jonte, the Tarnon is one of the rivers that encircle the causse Méjean. From here, you cannot see the water of the Tarnon because it lies lower down in the valley. You can nevertheless appreciate its handiwork: a deep cut into the limestone plateau. This incision has caused the level of the groundwater to drop ever lower. A steeper gradient, which has accelerated erosion by water.

Attribution : © Caroline Devevey



The nourishing Causse (E)

The large patches of green on the surface of the causse are dolines. Erosion caused by rainwater seeping in creates a bowl-shaped depression. As in a funnel, the ground slopes down towards the bottom of the bowl, which fills with clay that holds water. The land around you, although natural, is not entirely wild. For thousands of years, people have shaped the causses by practising agropastoralism, a combination of grazing over large areas and farming, which produces fodder and cereals.

Attribution : © Yannick Manche



Sheltered in the middle of the chaos (F)

Sheltered from the wind among the lapiaz (limestone pavement of fissures and furrows), the hamlet of Le Veygalier. The traditional homes of the causse are very well suited to an environment where wood is scarce. The architecture relies on limestone, which is plentiful and easy to shape. With no timber available for building, the roof structure is replaced by the vault. In the past, only rain met the needs of people and animals. Today, farms on the causse are supplied with drinking water from the mains. But as water resources decline, local authorities are encouraging the construction of rainwater collection tanks at the foot of farm buildings, to water the livestock.

Attribution : © Bruno Descaves



An arch (G)

The ruin-like relief results from the dissolution of the rock, which leaves the most resistant parts in place and gives them the most varied shapes. The parts that are now hollows underwent the most intense dissolution, creating in places true arches, vaults and sometimes small gorges.

Attribution : © Natacha Maltaverne



The mysterious house (H)

To meet the need for good-quality water and manage the resource sustainably, studies were carried out from 2017 to 2020 in a partnership between the National Park, the BRGM (Bureau de recherches géologiques et minières) and cavers. They made it possible to trace the route taken by groundwater beneath the causse Méjean and to learn more about the structure of the karst, as well as the flow and quality of the groundwater.

To follow the path of water through the karst, the experiment consists of injecting a coloured tracer and seeing where it comes out. The product is harmless to health and to the natural environment.

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