

The Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert trail

Causses Gorges



Le chemin de Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert

This magnificent 240-km-long trail with its wealth of heritage is marked by many crucifixes and links the former monastery Dômerie d'Aubrac to the Abbey of Gellone in Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert.

From Antiquity onwards, this trail was used as a drovers' road and trade route to link the Aubrac uplands to the garrigues (arid shrubland) of the Languedoc. It leads past a stunning variety of architecture and landscapes. Hikers or pilgrims coming from the plateaux to the gorges, from the Aigoual massif to the Cirque de Navacelles, will complete their long journey in the picturesque village which gave the trail its name!

Useful information

Practice : Hiking on foot

Duration : 4 days

Length : 81.9 km

Trek ascent : 2601 m

Difficulty : Medium

Type : Roaming

Themes : Architecture and village, Causses and Cévennes / UNESCO, Fauna and flora, History and culture

Trek

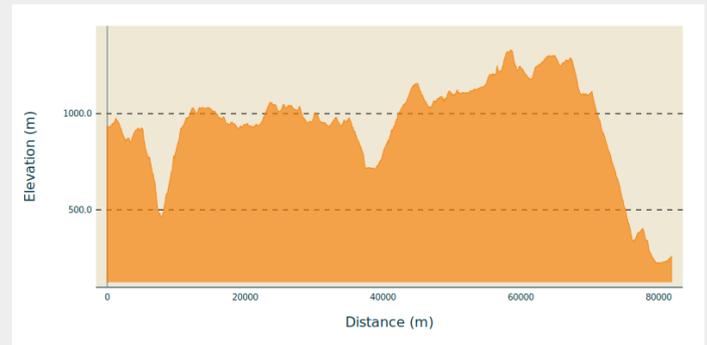
Departure : Champerboux

Arrival : Avèze

Markings :  GR (long-distance hiking path)  GRP (regional long-distance hiking path)

Cities : 1. Gorges du Tarn Causses
2. Mas-Saint-Chély
3. Hures-la-Parade
4. Meyrueis
5. Lanuéjols
6. Saint-Sauveur-Camprieu
7. Val-d'Aigoual
8. Dourbies
9. Bréau-Mars
10. Arphy
11. Aulas
12. Le Vigan
13. Avèze

Altimetric profile



Min elevation 224 m Max elevation 1330 m

Only the section of this GR® [long-distance hiking path] which crosses the territory of the Cévennes National Park, from Champerboux to Le Vigan, is described here.

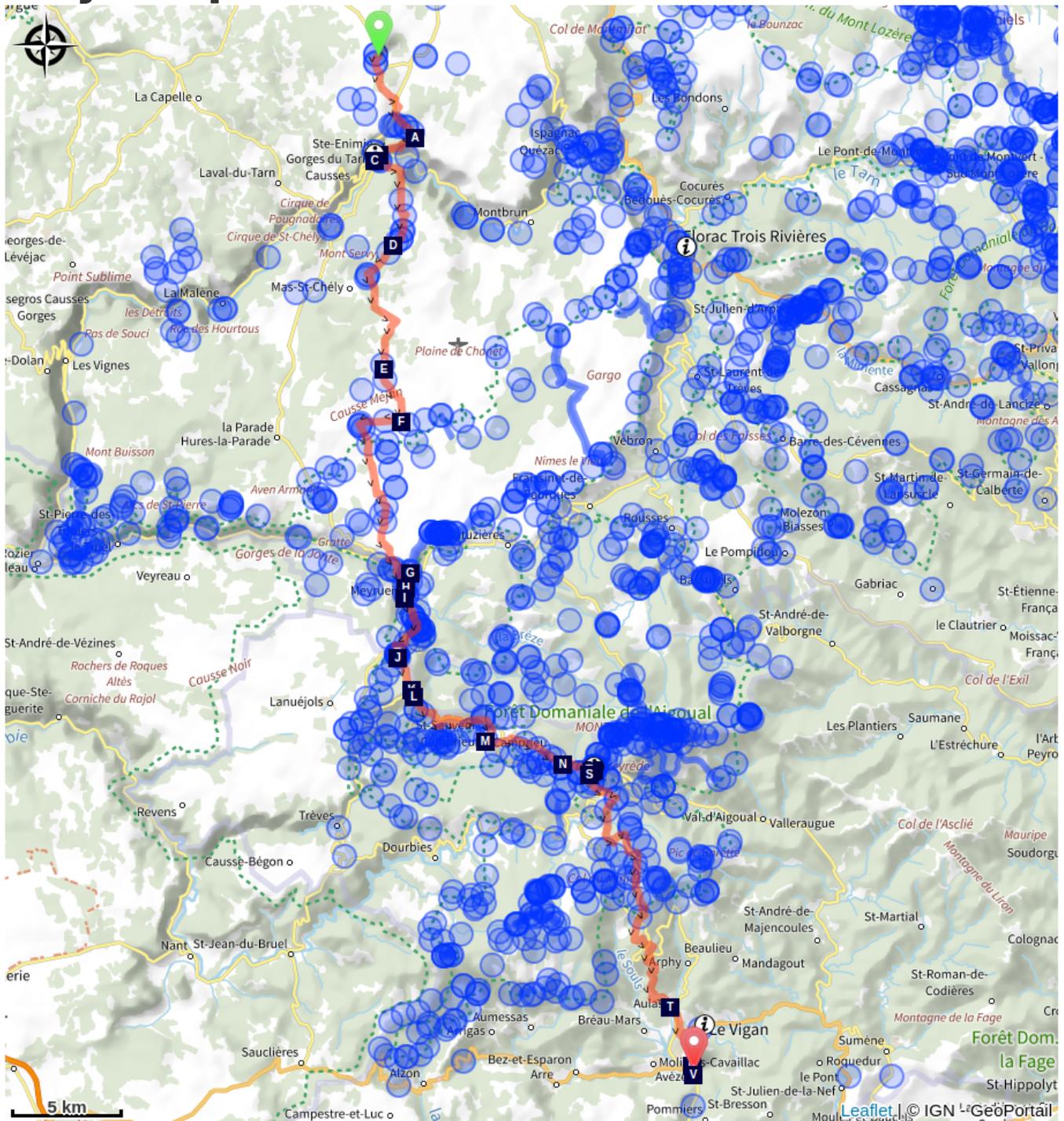
You can find the whole itinerary in the topographic guidebook *Le Chemin de Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert* (ref. 4834), published by the French hikers' federation (FFRandonnée) and available for purchase in the Maisons du tourisme et du Parc [tourist office and National Park information centre] the online shop www.cevennes-parcnational.fr, bookshops, sports shops and at <https://boutique.ffrandonnee.fr>.

All information is also available on the website of the association "Les Amis du Chemin de Saint Guilhem": <http://www.chemin-st-guilhem.fr/accueil/>

Stages :

1. Modification du GR®60 entre Le Bac et Ste-Enimie
5.2 km / 114 m D+ /

On your path...



Domaine des Boissets (A)

The bridge (C)

Le Buffre cross (E)

Pauparelle (G)

The village of Meyrueis (I)

The Commanders (K)

Camprieu (M)

La Serreyrède (O)

The terraces (B)

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The village of Aulas (T)

The Château de Montcalm (V)

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

NB: For various reasons, the waymarked path may differ from that shown in the topographic guidebook: please follow the waymarks on the trail. Make sure your equipment is appropriate for several days of hiking as well as the day's weather conditions. Remember that the weather changes quickly in the mountains. Take enough water, wear sturdy shoes and put on a hat. Please close all gates and barriers after yourself.

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>



Tourism & national parc'house

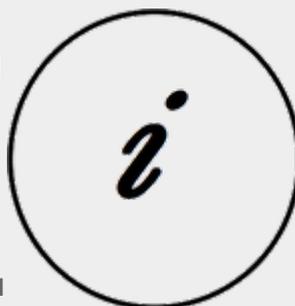
Col de la Serreyrède, 30570 Val d'Aigoual

maisonde-laigoual@sudcevennes.com

Tel : 04 67 82 64 67

<https://www.sudcevennes.com>

Accessibility : Accessible aux personnes à mobilité réduite sur les trois niveaux du bâtiment (ascenseur)



Tourism office Cévennes and Navacelles, Le Vigan

Maison de pays, place du Marché, BP 21, 30120 Le Vigan

contact@sudcevennes.com

Tel : 04 67 81 01 72

<https://sudcevennes.com/>



Tourism office Cévennes Gorges du Tarn, Sainte-Enimie

village, 48210 Sainte-Enimie

info@attractivite-tourisme-gcc.com

Tel : 04 66 45 01 14

<https://www.cevennes-gorges-du-tarn.com/>



Source



Association Château d'Aujac

<https://www.chateau-aujac.fr/>

On your path...



Domaine des Boissets (A)

The stone framework of several windows suggests that the first buildings were built as early as the 15th. The farm was operational until 1960. The hamlet consists of six buildings, houses, outbuildings and sheepfolds, in the typical Causse style. The internal courtyard was closed off by walls that were much higher than they are today. A bread oven, cisterns and threshing floor complete the complex, showing that the inhabitants lived in autarky.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



The terraces (B)

Locals have transformed the rocky slopes into hanging gardens by making use of the smallest of flat spaces. They carried the soil up in baskets or sacks on their backs. This is where they would have planted their vegetables and fruit trees (peach, walnut, almond). Until the early 20th century, almond trees were the “great resource” that made good use of soils too poor for other crops.

Until 1851, there were 54 hectares of grapevines for 850 inhabitants. The vineyards clung to 45-degree slopes, which made work difficult. The low yield, disease and mechanisation were all factors in the abandonment of this crop. The municipality of Ispagnac reintroduced vines in 2003 when a winemaker settled there; a second settled in Blajoux in 2006.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



The bridge (C)

Finally a bridge over the Tarn!
In the 13th century, the Benedictine monks of Sainte-Énimie built a bridge to replace the ford, or possibly a previous, more precarious construction. The new bridge linked Sainte-Énimie to the Causse Méjean plateau, where the Benedictine community owned land. Commerce and trade with Lower Languedoc (wool, woven products, wine) boomed. The village soon became an essential point on the important pilgrim route linking Le Puy-en-Velay with Aniane, via Saint-Guilhem le Désert. In the Middle Ages, it was rare to find so many bridges that could be crossed with carts and other large means of locomotion. The monks were true visionaries: today, the bridge is the only access to the Causse Méjean from the Tarn gorge that is authorised for buses and lorries weighing more than 19 tonnes (on the D986 linking Mende with Meyrueis).

Attribution : © OTGCC nc



Woods and deforestation (D)

Afforestation and deforestation seem to be the fate of the Causse landscape. In the Neolithic, the first farmer-shepherds settled on the fertile areas of the plateaux, which were covered by beech and oak forest at the time. This led to the forest being cleared for sheep pasture and for farmland. With demographic expansion, deforestation accelerated and the cultivated areas expanded. Subsequently, the local potteries, lime kilns and, later, mines brought about a new wave of deforestation to satisfy their need for wood.

Attribution : © OTGCC nc



Le Buffre cross (E)

This is one of the oldest and most handsome crosses in Lozère. On its cylindrical pedestal (12th c.), which is set on three steps, two persons face each other on either side of a holy water basin representing a human face. The basin is carved into the pedestal and also projects from it. The more recent actual cross is believed to date from the 18th century. Le Buffre cross is one of many that dot the Saint Guilhem route, to both guide and encourage pilgrims.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



The church of Hures (F)

The church was founded in the 11th century by the Benedictine monks of Sainte-Enimie to expand their arable land. It was built in four stages:

- The choir in the early and the nave in the late 12th century,
- the right-hand chapel in the 14th century,
- the left-hand chapel in the 18th century.

Each enlargement of the building corresponded to an increase in the Causse population. The nave has a beautiful window. To the right of the entrance is a funereal recess, which probably belonged to a local dignitary and in which were deposited a number of bones removed from the buried body.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



Pauparelle (G)

From Pauparelle, there is a nice view of the village of Ayres. This hamlet came into being in the 11th century around a Benedictine priory, founded by the Abbey Saint-Victor-de-Marseille on the current site of the castle. The latter, laid out in the 16th century on the ruins of the monastery, was pillaged and burned to the ground by the Camisards in 1703. Rebuilt in 1710, it is now a renowned hotel. Pauparelle is a private property that is not open to visits. Its name means “estate of the poor”. The farm buildings and living quarters date from the 17th and 19th centuries. Until 1850, the property belonged to the Charity Office of the town of Meyrueis, which, at that time, had about 5,000 inhabitants. (Jérôme Reversat)

Attribution : © Nathalie Thomas



Terrace (H)

Throughout the climb, you will see abandoned former crop terraces. A few grapevines have persisted since local wine-growing came to an end. They bear witness to the fact that the slopes around these hamlets and villages were once cultivated and planted with fruit trees and vines. Terraces like these were the only way for the valley's inhabitants to have flat areas with deep soil suitable for growing.

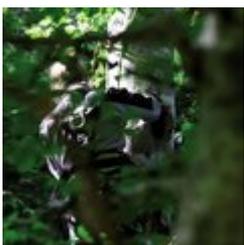
Attribution : © Nathalie Thomas



The village of Meyrueis (I)

The geographical location of Meyrueis is remarkable, nestled between the Aigoual massif, the causee Noir and the causee Méjean. Here the Camin Ferrat crosses the Jonte river. Pilgrims and transhumant flocks of sheep stopped in the village before continuing their journey. Many merchants came to its large fairs. Stroll through the lanes and relive the flourishing past of the belle époque. From the prosperous bourgeois residences to the marketplaces, everything still speaks of the past! Sheep's wool from the plateaux was woven here, silk was spun. There was intense economic activity. In the 17th century, Meyrueis became a centre for hat-making. By 1860, 17 milliners were busy making hats for Languedoc and Provence, beautiful and exceptionally high-quality hats made from felted wool and silk bourette. Discontinued as of about 1920, this activity left room for tourism, which today animates the village.

Attribution : Béatrice Galzin



Forest management (J)

The Mont Aigoual forest.

The wood harvested here comes from a forest that was reforested from the late 19th century onwards, after a period of overgrazing. This forest begins, grows and dies like all living beings. The job of foresters is to manage and support its development while respecting the laws of nature. They harvest trees before they die to make room for young trees. These tree trunks supply an entire economic sector, from the lumberjack to the skidder operator, the saw operator and the carpenter or cabinetmaker. Wood also accompanies you throughout your lives, from your cradle, furniture, woodwork and the wooden frame of your house to your coffin.

Attribution : Gaël Karczewski



The Commanders (K)

You are on a ridge path on the so-called “Commanders’ crests”. It is the last trace of the fact that this area belonged, from 1312 onwards, to the Knights Hospitaller and then to the Knights of Malta, who were based at the nearby hamlet of Servillières, at their “Commandery of Meyrueis and Servillières”. You are here on the border between the Gard and Lozère, marked by a standing stone. This ridge path is called the “wolf pen drovers’ road”, a variant thousands of years old of the main drovers’ road of La Lusette between L'Espérou and Meyrueis. Transhumant livestock would overnight here, in a closed-off space safe from wolves.

Attribution : Nathalie Thomas



Pierre plantée (Pierre plantée) (L)

Since ancient times, stones have stood along the Camin Ferrat: directional markers indicating a crossroads. Above all, they marked the boundaries of two parishes. Since the creation of Departments in 1790, they have outlined the border between Gard and Lozère.

Attribution : Béatrice Galzin



Camprieu (M)

In the 19th century, the village streets were bustling year-round with a throng of artisans, labourers and shopkeepers, who lived in these modest mountain houses that were also suitable for livestock rearing. Camprieu had: two cobblers, six clog makers, two basket makers, one carpenter, two wheelwrights, two farriers, one miller, two stonemasons, one glassworks, one sawmill, one dairy, two grocer’s shops, a haberdashery and ironmonger’s and one shop for ladies’ “fashion and dresses”. There was also a cheese cellar that produced Roquefort until 1932, a hotel and an inn.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



Notre-Dame-du Bonheur (N)

This Romanesque monastery was built in the 11th and 12th centuries by the rich Lord of Roquefeuil and Mandagout, with the noble intention of turning it into a “hospital for the poor”. He allowed the monks to reap the fruits and revenue of the land. In return, the villagers paid him sheep, pigs, poultry, wine and cheese. He also charged the transhumant herds on his vast estate pasture fees. The path that passed through this peatbog linked Languedoc to the Gévaudan. A snowstorm bell weighing 200 kg would ring in fog or blizzards to help merchants, peddlers, itinerant workers, farmers etc. find their way to safety. The monastery had six canons, the last of whom was forced to leave during the French Revolution. An association dedicated to preserving the Abbey of Notre-Dame du Bonheur is working to restore it.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



La Serreyrède (O)

Before 1861, the house at the Col de la Serreyrède was inhabited by two families of farmers. They owned some livestock and had a vegetable garden, whose terraces you can still see above the La Caumette track. From 1861 on, the farm was inhabited by a forest ranger. It was only bought by the state body Eaux et Forêts in 1883, to be turned into a forester's house. It became one of Georges Fabre's headquarters during the reforestation of the Aigoual massif. The Cévennes National Park, tourism office and Terres d'Aigoual growers have now joined forces to revive La Serreyrède with the help of the Communauté de Communes Causses Aigoual Cévennes – Terres solidaires.

Attribution : © Jacques de Joly



The association "Terres d'Aigoual" (P)

The Cévennes National Park rents out part of the building to the association, enabling local farmers to sell their products directly to the public. The association brings together farmers who wish to promote what they produce and share their know-how. They also enjoy sharing their vision of farming- high quality produce and products,

- human-sized farms,
- mutual aid.

Come and discover their products!

Attribution : © Nathalie Thomas

From beech copse to mature plantation (Q)

Marker 1

Around 1850, before reforestation began, the inhabitants of the Cévennes were using local wood resources on a massive scale for heating and in industry, especially spinning-mills. Gradually, only a few beech copses remained, which were cut every 25 to 40 years. Grazing by tens of thousands of sheep further reduced the herbaceous plant cover. Much weakened, the plant cover was then also subjected to heavy precipitation, the so-called Cevenol episodes. It is against this backdrop that the lengthy work of the foresters began. To reduce risks and establish a lasting forest cover, the first technique was to make use of what was already present by converting the disused copses into mature plantations.

Productive forest (R)

Marker 2

Another method of creating a durable forest cover is to plant or sow. This work is carried out either on bare soil or among existing tree stands. The Aigoual reforestation programme was a gigantic effort, requiring 900,000 days of work, the planting of 60 million conifers and 7 million deciduous trees, and sowing of 38 tonnes of seeds. Spruces and pines, which can be planted in full sunlight and grow quite quickly, were widely used. Under the forest canopy, preference was given to firs.

🌲 Irregular forest (S)

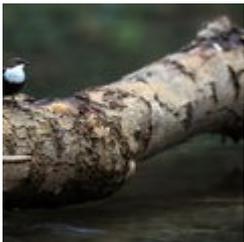
This tree population consists of trees of very different diameters, ages and heights. Species are mixed: mainly pine, but also beech, rowan and whitebeam. This is an irregular mature forest, a forestry dynamic that is interesting for several reasons: it creates permanent forest cover; resistance to soil erosion; better resilience against storms or parasite attacks; regular production, etc. In the small clearing to the left of the path, the sunlight now penetrating to the forest floor has made natural regeneration of beech and fir possible, ensuring the renewal of the forest.



The village of Aulas (T)

In the old days, the Place de l'Airette was where the wheat was thrashed. The village's two fountains – on the Place de l'Airette and on the church square – were created on the initiative of the village council in 1887. They were almost removed when the houses were connected to mains water but were preserved by the support of certain councillors. Aulas was called Aulacio in 1001, from the Latin man's name Aulas. In the 14th century, the village was fortified due to the many groups of brigands in the area. The ramparts were bordered by ditches and had gates. One of them, La Poterne, can still be seen. The village has remained picturesque thanks to its narrow lanes, its covered passage and its old buildings.

Attribution : Nathalie Thomas



🐦 The white-throated dipper (U)

White-throated dippers are nesting in the bridge's cavities. These birds look like they are in evening wear: white shirt and dark grey frock coat complete with an elegant tail, short and uplifted. They live in clean waterways with fairly strong currents. Perched on stones sticking out of the water, they inspect the riverbed agitatedly. Also called water ouzels, they can dive and then walk underwater while searching the riverbed for food. In one day, they can dive up to 1,600 times and stay underwater for a cumulative total of two hours.

Attribution : Régis Descamps



The Château de Montcalm (V)

The walls of the park surrounding the mediaeval Château de Montcalm border the road. The former fortress was remodelled several times. The fortifications and ramparts were pulled down in 1609. The residence was redesigned in the 18th century and an avenue of cedars planted in the park. In the late 19th century, the roofs bristled with crenellations. It was in the 1930s that the château assumed its current appearance.

Attribution : Nathalie Thomas