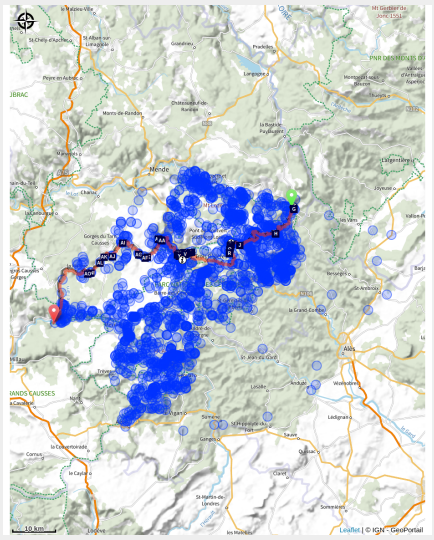
GR®736 Tarn gorge and valley

Mont Lozère



Topo Gorges et vallée du Tarn



A 300 km circuit between Villefort and Albi which will let you explore the river Tarn and its valley.

This hike between Mont Lozère and the Tarn gorge takes you through diverse landscapes with a wealth of natural heritage and villages with varied and typical architecture based on granite, limestone and schist.

The route is also multi-purpose. Find out how to do part of the circuit by canoe, mountain-bike or e-bike or else with a donkey. Enjoy different ways of discovering the river Tarn using non-motorised means of locomotion !

Useful information

Practice : Hiking on foot

Duration : 5 days

Length : 125.9 km

Trek ascent : 4399 m

Difficulty : Difficult

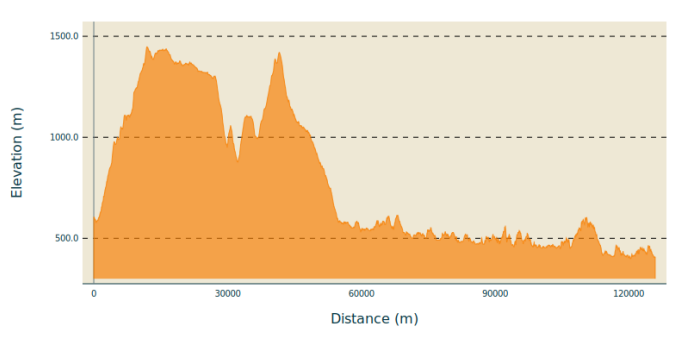
Type : Roaming

Themes : Agriculture and livestock farming, Architecture and village, Fauna and flora, History and culture, Water and geology, Transports en commun

Trek

Departure : Villefort
Arrival : Le Rozier
Markings : GR (long-distance hiking path)
Cities : 1. Villefort
2. Pourcharesses
3. Saint-André-Capcèze
4. Ponteils-et-Brésis
5. Concoules
6. Pont de Montvert - Sud Mont Lozère
7. Vialas
8. Cassagnas
9. Cans et Cévennes
10. Florac Trois Rivières
11. Bédouès-Cocurès
12. Gorges du Tarn Causses
13. Ispagnac
14. La Malène
15. Massegros Causses Gorges
16. Saint-Pierre-des-Tripiers
17. Le Rozier

Altimetric profile

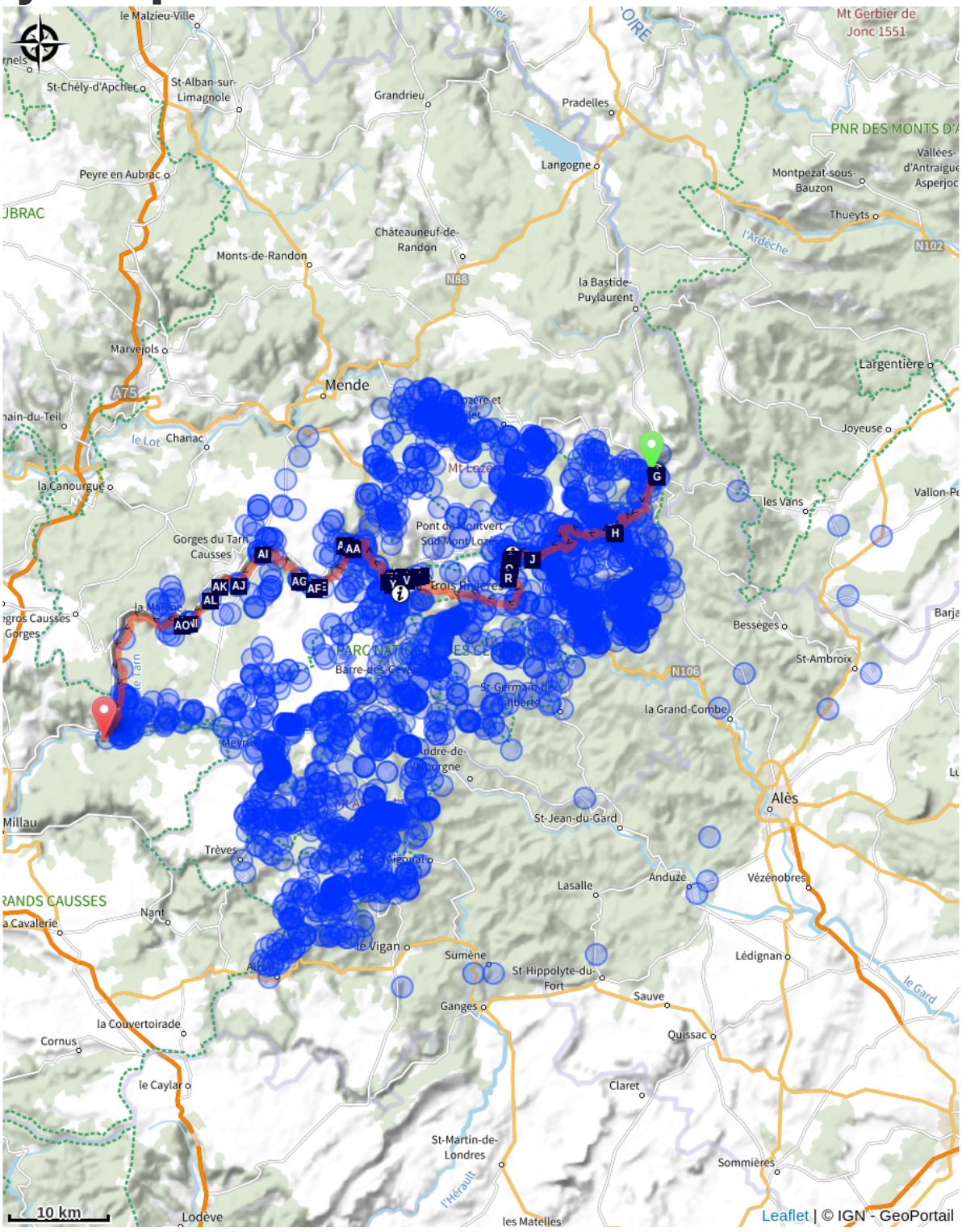


Min elevation 400 m Max elevation 1448 m

Only the section of the GR® long-distance hiking path that crosses the Cévennes National Park (from Villefort to Le Rozier) is presented here.

The official guidebook for the GR®736 by the Fédération Française de randonnée pédestre (FFRandonnée, French hiking federation) has been published in spring 2023. You can find it on sale in the Maisons du tourism et du Parc (joint tourist office and National Park information centres), the online shop at www.cevennes-parcnational.fr, in bookshops and sports shops and at https://boutique.ffrandonnee.fr

On your path...



- The fairs at Villefort (AA)
- The origins of Villefort (AB)
- The Regordane Way (AC)
- Stone architecture (AD)
- Rue de l’Église (AE)
- The sweet chestnut (AF)
- Place de l'Ormeau (AG)
- The mysterious boat (AH)
- Le Mas de La Barque (AI)
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Château d’Arigès (AX)

The European beaver (Castor fiber) (AY)

The iron-rich water of Salce (AZ)

Ispagnac church (BA)

The vintners of Ispagnac (BB)

Quézac Bridge (BC)

Quézac mineral water (BD)

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 a variety of reasons, there may be differences between the actual waymarks and the route shown in the guidebook.

Please follow the waymarks.

Make sure your equipment is appropriate for a multi-day hike as well as for 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 any gates and barriers behind you.

Bivouacking in the Cévennes National Park is regulated. Get informed at La Maison du tourisme et du Parc (joint tourist office and National Park information centre) in Florac-Trois-Rivières (tel. 04 66 45 01 14).

How to come ?

Transports

Summer only bus lines

- line 254 La Garde Guérin - Villefort - Bagnols les bains - Mende
- line 253 Mende - Bagnols les bains - Mont Lozère
- line 261 Mont Lozère - Pont de Montvert - Florac
- line 258 Florac - Le Rozier

https://lio.laregion.fr/

Access

Villefort on the D906 from Génolhac or on the D901 via Le Bleymard.

Advised parking

Villefort

Information desks

Office de tourisme Des Cévennes au mont Lozère
le Quai, 48220 Le Pont de Montvert sud mont-Lozère

info@cevennes-montlozere.com
Tel : 04 66 45 81 94
https://www.cevennes-montlozere.com/



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 office Mont-Lozère, Villefort
43, Place du Bosquet, 48800 Villefort

contact@destination-montlozere.fr
Tel : 04 66 46 87 30
https://www.destination-montlozere.fr/



Source

Comité départemental de la randonnée pédestre 48

http://lozere.ffrandonnee.fr/

Fédération française de la randonnée pédestre

https://www.ffrandonnee.fr/

On your path...

The fairs at Villefort (AA)

Since 1511, Villefort market has been held on Thursday mornings. In the early 19th century, there were up to 14 fairs a year. Children had to attend mass at Saint-Loup-et-Saint-Roch Chapel to be allowed to go to the fairs. Large crowds were attracted to the fairs by their good reputation. The fair held on 14 September was one of the most impressive, with countless cattle blocking the village's squares and lanes. Today, Villefort is a lively place with bric-a-brac shops and artisan fairs.

The origins of Villefort (AB)

In the Middle Ages, Villefort was known as Villa Montisfortis, a name that might stem from a former Roman agricultural estate. At the time, a castle overlooked the village, of which nothing remains today. This castrum was strategically located on the heights of Le Collet (at the southern exit of Villefort) to protect the Regordane Way – and to collect tolls.

The Regordane Way (AC)

The Regordane Way linking Alès (Gard) and Luc (Lozère) is a section of the important route that connected Lower Languedoc and the Auvergne in the Middle Ages. It facilitated trade between the Mediterranean basin and parts of the Kingdom of France. The mule-drivers that used it – known locally as Régordans or Rigourdiers – transported oil, wine and salt. It was also a religious path, taking pilgrims called Romieux to Saint Gilles It was progressively abandoned in the 14th century, when the port at Marseille and the fairs in Lyon grew in importance. Ruts left by cartwheels can still be seen north of Prévenchères (between Le Thort and La Molette) and near Saint-André-Capcèze.

Stone architecture (AD)

The architecture of Villefort's old buildings is typical for one-street villages:
• the houses with the two vaulted porches were once inns, tradesmen's or artisans' shops: one of the porches was used to store merchandise, the other to display it;
• the sculpted lintels above the entrances to some houses on Rue de l'Eglise and Rue de la Bourgade bear witness to the activities of former occupants;
• several facades have handsome mullioned windows from the Renaissance.

Rue de l’Église (AE)

The town hall is a former private mansion of the 15th century, with a spiral staircase and ground-floor rooms with vaulted ceilings. The lintel behind the gate comes from a fortified house in the village of Bayard, which is now under the waters of the Lake. On the facade of the 16th century house opposite is a finely crafted mullion window.
• The oldest house in the village is a listed monument and dates from the 14th century. It has Gothic windows and a pulley system once used to bring forage into the loft.
• An archway giving onto an internal courtyard shows you mediaeval walls made from large regular blocks.
• Two lintels bear Christ's monogramme: IHS, Iesus Hominum Salvator (Jesus saviour of mankind). One instance is followed by the inscription Ave Maria.

The sweet chestnut (AF)

In 1900, sweet chestnuts were the main farm produce. The nuts of this so-called “bread tree” fed many families as well as their farm animals. Chestnut-growing is a year-round activity, but is especially busy at harvest time. Harvesters would meet in the evening for a brousillade (chestnuts roasted on a wood fire). When parts of the rural population left, many chestnut orchards were abandoned while others were cut down for their tannin to be extracted. Chestnut bleeding canker and chestnut blight, diseases caused by mushrooms, also killed off a great number of trees. Today, chestnut farming in the Cévennes is being revived with a focus on quality.

Place de l'Ormeau (AG)

Villefort's former market square, Place de l'Ormeau hosted Clédou market on Thursday mornings until the 1980s. The square teemed with smells and colours. Livestock, meat, vegetables, grains and chestnuts were sold here, especially in the 19th century. The lime tree on the square was planted on 11 November 1920 as a “victory tree” so that future generations might remember their ancestors' fight for freedom during the First World War. The Maison Chambon, with its double-archway entrance, has an inscribed lintel: Metre Iehan Martin 1595, flanked by a diamond shape and a heart.



The mysterious boat (AH)

Have you noticed the strange rock shaped like a boat (barque)? Is that what gave the hamlet its name? Alternatively, in the local patois, a berque is a gap in the mountain. So: Mas de la Barque or Mas de la Berque?
Mas de la Barque is part of the municipality of Vialas and borders the forest of Gourdouze. The estate of the Priory of Gourdouze, to which the forest once belonged, was declared government property during the French Revolution in 1789, before being sold to pay the state’s debts.

Attribution : © Biotope



Le Mas de La Barque (AI)

Le Mas de La Barque was only a forester’s house at the end of the 20th century. From the 1960s onwards, it was frequented by children’s ski clubs and then by families from the Gard on the weekend. During the week, the association “Union pour l'Animation de la Grange” organised field trips, heritage classes and theme days open to all. A costly infrastructure was gradually built (buildings, ski lifts, snow canons), then partly demolished again. Today, as part of an overall programme of reclassifying the site, it has been developed for tourism (cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dog-sledding, etc.) and is run by a semi-public company. The resort offers outdoor activities in summer as well as in winter.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



Frutgères (AJ)

This village used to be the parish seat and developed long before Le-Pont-de-Montvert, a mere hamlet, turned into a small village of about 60 souls by 1631. In the 12th century, the important Commandery of the Knights of St-John of Jerusalem settled in the parish of Frutgères. This religious and military order later took the name of the Order of the Knights of Malta. The parish church was burned down by the Camisards (Protestant rebels), who were responsible for the assassination of the Frutgères parish priest, Reversat, in 1702, one day after the murder of the Abbot du Chaila in Le-Pont-de-Montvert. The church had been built after the unification of the parishes of Frutgères and Grizac. In the early 19th century, the municipality was densely populated (25 inhabitants/sq km). The large estates needed numerous labourers to harvest their hay, rye and buckwheat.

Attribution : nathalie.thomas



Pont-de-Montvert (AK)

Marker 12
Le Pont-de-Montvert is at the confluence of the Tarn and two of its tributaries: the Rieumalet and the Martinet. The draille (drovers’ road) has today almost disappeared, but it was once used by flocks from the south of France to reach the summer pastures on the Mont Lozère. The first neighbourhoods were established along this axis. In 1630 the village was almost as extensive as in the early 19th century. Three stone bridges were built over the rivers, but the great floods of 1827 and 1900 seriously damaged or destroyed them. The grand Tarn Bridge is the only stone bridge still standing. New neighbourhoods developed on the village’s periphery, preserving the historic centre.

Attribution : © Guy Grégoire



The Camisards' path (AL)

Marker 11
This path used to be an important communication route linking Le Pont-de-Montvert with Barre-des-Cévennes. On 24 July 1702, it was used by a gathering of Huguenots coming from the Col des Trois Fayards, who intended to liberate their fellow Protestants being held by Abbot du Chayla in Le Pont-de-Montvert. These men thus used the path on which you stand. The tragic events that followed (including the Abbot’s violent death) triggered the Camisard War. The landscape surrounding the village is the result of intense agricultural activity. All neighbouring slopes were cultivated, especially with rye, on man-made terraces called bancels.

Attribution : © Brigitte Mathieu

A rolling stone... (AM)

Marker 10
On the plateau, the path has not always made a very distinct mark on the ground, evidence of little erosion. By contrast, the entire descent towards Le Pont-de-Montvert shows signs of more intense erosion, especially near the top where a large block has rolled into the middle of the path. It is the repeated passage of humans and animals that, combined with natural factors, eventually destabilised the rock. After the rock moved, the path was re-routed.

Sheepfold with lauze-covered roof (AN)

Marker 9
Unlike the previous sheepfold, this one was built out of heavy, compact and solid materials. A granite vault instead of a timber roof suggests the rarity of wood. The roof was made watertight by schist lauzes (tilestones) on a bed of clay or coarse granite sand. This place is called La Jasse de Chanteloup (jasse/jas: resting place for animals; canteloube in popular etymology = place where the wolves howl, or, according to scholarly sources, luppe = stone, height, rounded mountain).

Panorama (AO)

Marker 8
Views of the southern slope of Mont Lozère

A sheepfold in ruins (AP)

Marker 7
You need to leave the path on the left and walk for about 200 metres to see this former shelter for farm animals (ovines and bovines). The materials for its construction were found locally: granite for the walls, Scots pine or oak for the timber part of the roof, rye thatch for the roof. The variety of rye grown locally had fine long straw. It was cut by scythe at the end of July and put into swathes, then stored in stacks and threshed on threshing-floors. Finally it was made into small sheaves, which were soaked before use to make the last seeds germinate and make the straw less breakable during thatching.



Heath alternating with hay meadows (AQ)

Marker 6
Callune has established itself on the knolls, meaning the convex areas which have poor and dry soils, whereas the meadows occupy the concave areas with their deeper and damper soils. All of these territories offer food sources for specific fauna. You may see hares, but also birds of prey (buzzards, hen and Montagu’s harriers, short-toed snake eagles, common kestrels) and red-legged partridges.

Attribution : © Guy Grégoire

Pine-forest fauna (AR)

Pine forests associated with blueberry zones are interesting environments for fauna: stags and roe deer come to browse the blueberry plants. Wild boar, foxes, martens and all birds eat their berries, including the Western capercaillie, which was reintroduced here by the National Park. You can also find coal tits, European crested tits, wrens, robins, mistle thrushes and black woodpeckers. Some birds of prey, such as the short-toed snake eagle, may come and build their nests at the highest point of a topped Scots pine.



The river Tarn (AS)

The Tarn has its spring at an altitude of 1,550 m under the ridge of Mont Lozère. Having carved its way into the granite bedrock, it separates the Bougès massif from Mont Lozère. After Bédouès, it meets the river Tarnon and slowly enters the limestone region, in which its bed is increasingly deep. At its confluence with the Jonte, at Le Rozier, the Tarn leaves the department of the Lozère.

Attribution : © Yannick Manche



Fages Sawmill (AT)

Upstream from Bédouès, you will see a sawmill, which mainly produces wood to make crates and pallets. It also produces some timber. Today, local forestry companies utilise wood in a number of ways: for energy, paper pulp, timber, crate-making and construction.

Attribution : © Olivier Prohin



The brown trout (Salmo trutta fario) (AU)

This trout lives in our waterways and is an indigenous species. This stock is a part of our heritage. Its size varies with the quality of the water, fishing pressures, and the nature of the riverbed (hiding-places). In the summer, it hunts in white water and on the surface, and catches insects. In the winter, it eats larvae on the bottom. Reproduction begins in November and is staggered throughout the winter. The female lays its eggs on a gravelly stretch of the riverbed, into which it has dug a pit using its caudal fin. The male deposits its milt over the eggs. Once they are fertilised, the eggs are covered with gravel.
 Reproductive success depends on variations in the water flow and especially on the risk of the spawning areas drying out in dry winters.

Attribution : © Philippe Baffie



Saint-Saturnin chapel (AV)

Saint-Saturnin chapel stands at the heart of the village, surrounded by its cemetery. Inside every wall boasts a magnificent painted décor. It was built in the 12th century. Guillaume de Grimoard (the future Pope Urban V) was baptised here in 1309. It is next to the town hall (mairie) and is well worth a detour.

Attribution : © Nathalie Thomas



The Gautier goat farm (AW)

Yolande and Christian run a small farm where they make farmhouse goat's cheese, a typically Cévenol product. Their herd consists of 60 Alpine dairy goats, and all their milk is processed on-site into farmhouse cheese. From late November to late April, the nanny goats have a break so their little ones can feed!

Attribution : © Olivier Prohin



Château d’Arigès (AX)

This can be seen on your left, in a gap in the forest. It was only a share-cropping farm, whose buildings were in ruins, when the Lord of Issenges bought it in 1658. He lived in it from 1688. This Château, which is no doubt more comfortable than the « maison carrée » (“square house”), was built in a river bend of the Tarn and is surrounded by fertile soils well-suited for crop-growing.

Attribution : © com com Florac Sud Lozère



The European beaver (Castor fiber) (AY)

The calm deep stretches of the Tarn are good areas to settle for the European beaver, which lives in a lodge dug into the river bank. An essentially vegetarian animal, it bases its diet on cellulose. It eats young shoots, bark, aquatic plants, and foliage that is abundant in the riparian forest. It is thus useful in regulating the woody vegetation of river banks, facilitating the development of riverside fauna and flora. Through its activities, it prevents the potentially dangerous accumulation of dead wood during floods. It does not build dams.

Attribution : © Bruno Descaves

The iron-rich water of Salce (AZ)

After a small detour from the hamlet of
Salièges to the river Tarn, you will come across a spring of ferruginous water. For a long time, the ability to prevent (or cure) alcoholism was attributed to this water rich in Fe2+ ions, and made famous by a sketch by the stand-up comedian Bourvil. It supposedly supplies the iron that would normally come from regularly drinking alcohol. A small construction indicates the Salce spring (the path from Salièges is way-marked), as does the red tinting from iron oxide, which you find in many contact zones between schist and limestone.



Ispagnac church (BA)

St-Peter’s Church in Ispagnac is one of the finest examples of Romanesque architecture in Gévaudan. Built in the 12th century, it is dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Paul. The understated facade of this bulky-looking building has a simple gate with three semi-circular arches topped by a rose window that lets light into the nave. Once inside, you discover a simple and airy architecture. A sound-and-light show helps you to explore. To get the fullest impression of the architecture, you need to leave the building and walk around it to see the apse and its décor.

Attribution : cevennes-gorges-du-tarn



The vintners of Ispagnac (BB)

In 2003, Sylvain Gachet, from Savoy, reintroduced grapevines to Ispagnac and Florac, planting six hectares of terraced land. On soils of clay/limestone and schist, he attempted to breathe new life into the Domaine de Gabalie. In 2006, Elisabeth Boyé and Bertrand Servières set up as vintners in the Tarn gorge, also under the stimulus package bringing vineyards back to the valley. They cleared the land of the bartas (brambles) which had invaded almost all the parcels, and rebuilt the dry-stone walls before planting almond trees, vine peaches and five hectares of grapevines: the Domaine des Cabridelles was born. The winemakers share a cooperative cellar in Ispagnac, which is also a sales outlet. Why not make a short stop to try the wines (the cellar is next to the car park by the state school (école publique).

Attribution : cevennes-gorges-du-tarn



Quézac Bridge (BC)

This bridge crossing the river Tarn gives access to the village of Quézac, located on the left bank. Around 1350, Pope Urban V decided to fund its construction to facilitate pilgrims' access to the collegiate church of Notre-Dame de Quézac. It was finished in the 15th century. Its history is punctuated by partial destruction in floods, and by more or less solid rebuilding. It became a listed monument on 27 August 1931.

Attribution : © CC Florac Sud Lozère



Quézac mineral water (BD)

Quézac mineral water emerges naturally from the Diva spring, near the entrance to the village, in exceptional surroundings which have been naturally protected for centuries. This pleasant-tasting water is rich in mineral salts and trace elements and is also well-known to be beneficial for the stomach. The spring's water actually comes from Mont Aigoual. According to scientific studies, it takes 30 to 40 years for it to re-emerge in Quézac, after first settling in aquifers, where it acquires its effervescence naturally (rare in France).

Attribution : © Nathalie Thomas