




VILLEROUGE-TERMENÈS

CASTLE

T O U R G U I D E



VILLEROUGE-TERMENÈS CASTLE




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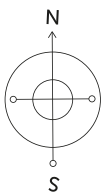


Cathar Country - the guide

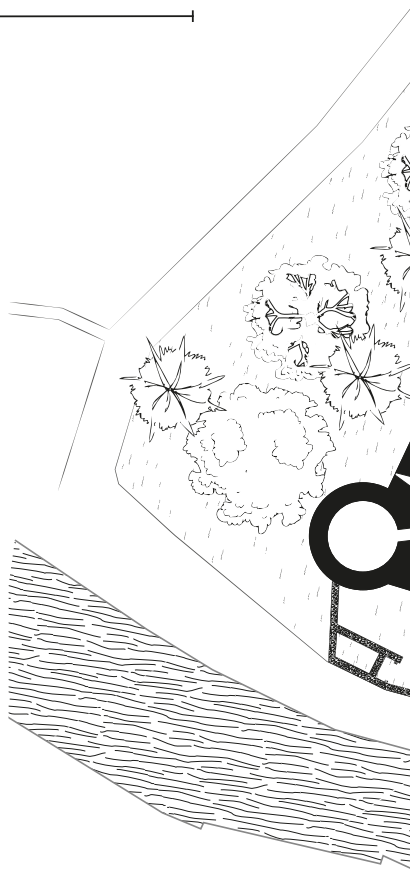


Castrum - the game









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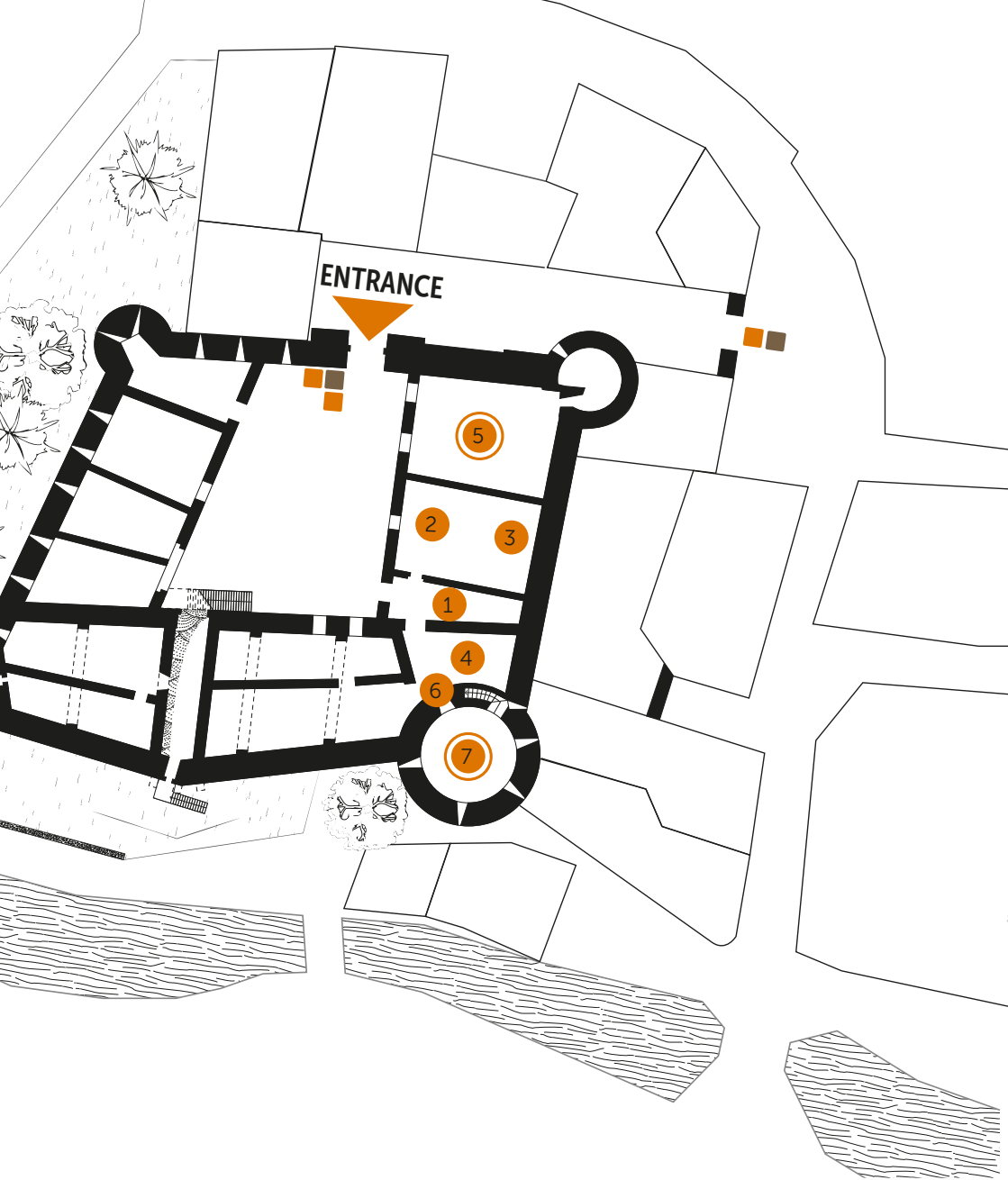


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Map key

-  Upper stonework
-  Lower stonework, in ruins
-  Sections no longer standing
-  Roof stonework (beams, cross-ribs, etc.)
-  1 Station for this leaflet
-  ① Upper level (encircled number)
-  Station for the Cathar Country app
-  Station for the Castrum app



ENTRANCE

5

2

3

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4

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7



4 handsome towers, crenellations, a fortified gate... the archbishops of Narbonne live in a real fortress. Integrated into the village's fortified enclosure, it protects the side that's most vulnerable to attack. In the 14th century, it was the archbishopric's administrative, fiscal and legal centre for Termenès, one of the richest areas of the Corbières region. This role explains why Bélibaste, the last of the Perfect Cathars, born on the archbishop's land in Corbières, was tortured here. The castle remained archbishopric property until the Revolution. It was divided up, modified and shared by a number of private owners in succession, until the end of the 20th century. Purchased by the municipality, the castle that we can visit today is a blend of medieval and modern, between historical facts and our own imagination...

INSPIRED DECOR MEDIIEVAL THEMES

The walls of the first two rooms are decorated in 20th-century frescoes based on real medieval examples. The ornamental grapevine theme around the doors of the first room reminds us of the importance of winegrowing during the Middle Ages. Wine played a key role in Holy Communion, symbolising and even - for believers - turning into the blood of Christ during Mass. It also had a major purpose in everyday life, readily replacing water which was often insalubrious. There were vineyards all over the kingdom, from the Paris region to the South of France. Imagine them, standing tall, disorderly and interspersed with other crops.



+ Further information

Two characters will accompany you throughout your visit: **Bélibaste and Bernard de Farges**. Room after room, their story is told and History revealed. That of the medieval society of Languedoc and, more precisely, of the conflict between Cathars and Catholics that took place during the 13th century until it ended symbolically with the burning at the stake of Bélibaste, the last "Perfect Cathar", executed here in Villerouge in 1321. By then the Cathar believers had been virtually wiped out. The Inquisition had got the better of them and the ties that united them. Brothers denounced sisters, sons handed over their mothers... mercy came only with betrayal, that was the Roman Church's demand on those it considered as heretics and who themselves claimed to be "good Christians"...

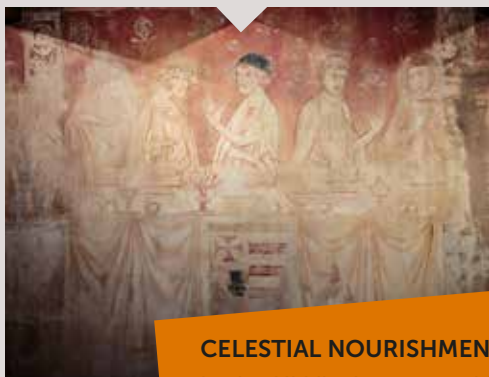
+ Further information

The next room exhibits items from a more recent history, from the 17th to 19th century and even the 20th. A furnace stands next to an enormous fireplace with a "*recantou*". This is a little alcove with a stone bench where cooking pots could be stood or people could sit to warm up and dreamily stare at the flames. It is half-moon-shaped. A sink is carved into the windowsill. Look up to see beautiful modern floorboards placed on the stone corbels. Here, periods in time interlock, inextricably...



👁 More to see

In the first room on the first floor, a mealtime scene decorates the wall. This is also recent, but it is an accurate illustration of what meals were like at the archbishop's table. It depicts trenchers of dry bread or wood that were used as plates. At this table, everyone has a goblet. Normally a goblet was shared by several people. In the centre is the coat of arms of the archbishop Bernard de Farges, who we'll come across later on in the tour...



CELESTIAL NOURISHMENT

In the Middle Ages, everything had a symbolic value and everything depended on the will of God. Human society was organised in 3 orders: those who protect (nobles), those who pray (priests), and those who nourish (farmers). A man's nourishment depended on his status. The highest aristocrats were the ones who ate the most food, especially meat and game, as hunting was a noble pastime. They appreciated the meat of birds which, flying in the sky, were closer to God than pigs, for example, whose pork meat was left to the farmers...



An original fresco 3

The second room contains several medieval features. A corbel protruding from the wall is decorated with the coat of arms of Bernard de Farges. Next to the bread furnace is a later piece, the outstanding remains of a 14th-century fresco where you can just make out Saint Christopher. This means we're probably in the old castle chapel.

👁 More to see

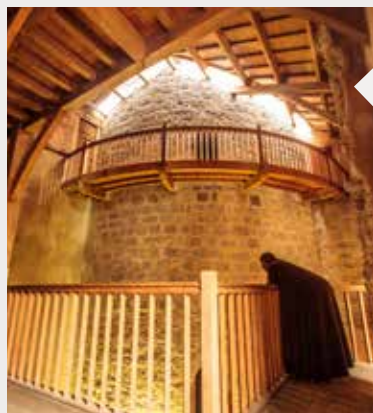
Saint Christophe carried the child Jesus across a river on his shoulders. In the red part of the fresco, a light-coloured semicircle dotted with narrow strips represents saint Christophe halo. The rest is fairly self-explanatory. His bearded face crowned by a halo, the legs of Christ whose knees are emphasised with a stroke of black, one of his feet resting on the right shoulder of the saint, who holds his staff in his right hand...



SETTING THE SCENE 4

THE INNER COURTYARD

Beams and stairways continue upwards. Golden chestnut timber adds warmth and opulence to the overall feel. This is a modern-day vision because in the Middle Ages, the courtyard, which now houses the reception area, had no roof. It had to be crossed to reach the keep, which still exists.



More to see

Turn round to see, beyond the model of the intendant leaning over the visitors, the keep, encircled by a timber walkway that you'll follow later. This construction has been accurately placed on the site of a medieval timber structure. The gaps left in the wall are known as "putlock holes" and are used in the modern rampart wall.

A spiritual, temporal lord (1st floor) 5

Archbishop Bernard de Farges was a very powerful lord. Of the villagers, he demanded work and taxes. He commanded power at every level of the justice system. Only the king could be called upon to repeal a sentence given by the temporal court of the archbishop. He was also the spiritual authority who received the tithe from his parishes.



Further information

A day ploughing, a day pruning the vines, or transporting the grape harvest to the cellar... the intendant was in charge of ensuring that the villagers fulfilled their duties to the lord. He also collected the tithe as well as other taxes. The intendant also tended to the archbishop's staff and his guests, as well as the archbishop himself.

Further information

In the 14th century, Villerouge was the headquarters of the two courts of the archbishopric. The Ecclesiastical Court headed by an ecclesiastic judge in charge of spiritual affairs. The Criminal Court which judged crimes in annual sessions at Villerouge under the presidency of the archbishop's seneschal. For the rest of the year, cases concerning Termenès were judged at Narbonne. Finally, the archbishop's notary had the final say on matters handled by his colleagues. It was also he who received wills, marriage certificates and other important family-related documents...

More to see (2nd floor)

In the attic, a couple whisper sweet nothings. Listen carefully to their light-hearted words...



A PLACE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE ⁶

THE RAMPART WALL

The rampart wall links together the curtain walls (outer walls of the castle). Its continuity is broken by the massive keep and by a semi-circular tower similar to the one you're in, as well as a platform that serves the murder hole above the main gate. Protected by the surrounding mounts, the valley can be seen through the crenellation merlons. The mineral-rich soil is red in colour.



+ Further information

Silver, brass, iron... Termenès is abundant in resources that have been mined since ancient times. Villeroige attracted plenty of interest. In the 11th century, despite Papal excommunication, the brother of the viscount of Narbonne took over the archbishopric and ceded Villeroige to the lord of Peyrepertuse. The new archbishop, appointed by the Pope in 1081, hoped to recover this fiefdom but by that time the lord of Termes had got involved and had no intention of giving it up. Later, a crusader and friend of Simon de Montfort seized the seigneurie of Villeroige after the Albi Crusade... rather ironic for an ally of the Catholic Church! Finally, in 1216, the archbishop became the undisputed master of Villeroige.

👁 More to see

To the right of the door that you go through to leave the rampart walk, there's a beam fixed to the wall. Decorated with the coat of arms of Archbishop Bernard de Farges, it dates from the 14th century. Look closely at this coat of arms... Notice anything strange, compared with the one on the fresco in the downstairs room? It's the wrong way round! We can conclude that this beam must have been in a vertical position originally. But where exactly? Nobody knows.



The keep ⁷

The keep, the access to which could be blocked off for defence purposes, is one of the features that confirm the structure dates from the late 13th century. In this first room, on the second floor, there's a beautiful window seat where you can still see traces of the hinges and bolt of the window's small inner shutter.



+ Further information

This tower, which is fatter than the others, serves as the keep, to protect the most vulnerable part of the castle. A flight of steps leads to the lower room. The steps are built into the fortification where the castle's defenders were protected.

👁 More to see

In the lower room, the vault's circular keystone is similar to that of the keep at Arques castle.

THE VILLAGE OF VILLEROUGE-TERMENÈS

THE TOUR OF THE VILLAGE BEGINS... AT THE CASTLE.
For the simple reason that the village you're about to explore is huddled right up against the castle walls. The first few houses were probably built near Saint-Etienne church, not far from the cemetery. But during the 12th century, villages tended to cluster around their castles. These were the feudal times of all-powerful lords who wanted their subjects grouped around them, willingly or otherwise. It seems VilleroUGE-Termenès was no exception to this European movement that historians call "*incastellamento*", or encastellation.



THE MURMURING LOU



Leave the castle via the postern.
A few steps and you're down by the River Lou. The presence of water was a founding feature. Without water there could be no life, no castle and no village. The river is straddled by a little bridge dating from the 13th century. A cross stands in the shade of a beautiful arbutus tree, an alder by a stone bench is a perfect place for a rest before starting off down the cobblestone path which follows the river to the bottom of the high rampart walls. The cobblestone paving, like others in the village, was renovated by the inhabitants themselves during their citizens' weekends. They left the original stones, the large ones, in place.



THE RIVER LOU ON THE DEFENSIVE

The main castle gate opens onto the village. The gate is well protected by an access ramp which makes it difficult to attack from the front and from the curtain walls which meet above the murder hole from where defenders would throw all kinds of projectiles onto their attackers. On the other side of the courtyard, the postern was a more discreet exit point. At the end of a gallery, it opens onto a timber staircase which was protected by a brattice whose remains still cling to the outer wall. The River Lou flows at the foot of this side of the castle and acts as a defensive moat. This river has a Mediterranean temperament; calm, almost non-existent in summer, it has been known to break its banks when spring comes.





THE SPRING AND WASH HOUSE

Practically at the foot of the pink sandstone tower that brightens up the grey rampart walls, a reservoir retains water from a spring. Look closely. Water flows from a hole in the wall. There are two other holes at different levels. A chain hangs down. There used to be a plug at the end of this chain; usually made from boxwood. The plug was inserted into the appropriate hole to control the level of the reservoir according to needs. To the right of the spring the wash house is still standing. It was fed by a constant supply of water from the spring. The water arrived via the little channel at the foot of the wall and of the rock. A never-ending supply...



MEDICINAL PLANTS GARDEN

On the opposite bank you can see a herb garden planted in an orderly arrangement of squares. This is the Medicinal Plants Garden. Don't leave without visiting it, if you haven't already done so. You'll discover the herbs and medicinal plants that were so essential in medieval times and of which properties are being rediscovered today.



THE LORD IN HIS GARDENS

The path goes around the castle to reach the village. It takes you past some gardens, called horts, which were identified in the Napoleonic cadastre and are, it seems, within the medieval "*Condamine*". "*Condamine*" is an Occitan word which in Languedoc designates a "parcel of land belonging to the lord. Without a doubt, on good soil, probably the best". It might have been communal land which was exempt from fees, or a seigniorial parcel. Either way, this land has been providing for man for a very long time...

THE CHARM OF FLOWERY ALLEYS



Return to the village via the Rue du Couvent alongside the castle. This pleasant street is strewn with Mediterranean plants: acanthus, myrtle, pittosporum, sage... Growing at the foot of the houses, these plants give the street a springtime feel all year round. Part of the medieval enclosure wall almost certainly stood here, at the end of the street, near the very narrow passage leading up to the castle. After the POMs (Multiservice point) and the castle entrance, a street off to the left leads to a small square, a beautiful inner courtyard where a rambling rose climbs playfully up a stone wall.



AN OLD-FASHIONED REVOLUTIONARY

A flamboyant coat of arms! That of Luc Dagobert de Fontenilles, a general of the French Revolution. Through marriage, he became the owner of the mining district of Termenès. From the 18th to the 20th century, the mines guaranteed the country's prosperity, providing work as well as amenities. The tramway created in 1901 transported goods and passengers between Mouthoumet and Narbonne via Villeroze, until 1930. This very "Ancien Régime" coat of arms represents the power of a wealthy family....



WITHIN THE WALLS

A few metres on, the street widens again.

A dark street goes off to the right. It starts with an abundance of subtle pink and white Balfour's touch-me-not, a variety of *impatiens* commonly seen growing freely in many village of Aude.



The street continues. We're in the oldest centre of the village and probably inside the original 12th-century enclosure. On the house in the far left-hand corner of this street, you can make out the base of a vault.

This could be the remains of the Porte Saint-Etienne, a former gate to the Medieval enclosure. Standing in front of these remains, if you could see through the wall you'd be looking at the start of the Rue du Couvent.

TRADITION IN MODERNITY

The *Carrière Estrèita* leads to the Promenade which in turn, on the right, leads to Porte Saint-Jean. This street, built in the 19th century as villages grew denser and gave rise to the faubourgs, features a few eye-catching details. For example, a high pavement displaying some odd ashlar features... an example of the re-use of medieval stones, a common practice before the Romantic movement invented the notion of heritage. The façades on either side give an impression of unity. More than just an impression. Notice the arrangement and vertical alignment of the doors and windows. This is the traditional Corbières habitat: a downstairs shed to store wine and vine branches... living quarters upstairs and, at the top, an attic in which to hang ham, grapes, figs, etc.

RETURN TO THE MIDDLE AGES

Step through the massive gate, Porte Saint-Jean. The coat of arms of Pierre de la Jugie, archbishop of Narbonne from 1347 to 1375, is just about visible on a block of re-utilised stone. The hinges, still present, and the hole in the wall that accommodated the bar, bear testament to the enormity of the gate. This protection was completed by a murder hole. Pass underneath, turn left and continue down to the River Lou. At the corner of the alley, look up to see a pig sculpted into a re-utilised stone. A little further along, a house on the left features the remains of a mullion window dating from the 16th century. Mullion? This is a vertical element, made of stone in this case, placed in the middle of the window.



BEYOND THE ENCLOSURE

A final glance at the River Lou which runs through a fairly deep moat. A small channel, called a "béal", can be seen in the rampart wall. This fed water to a mill located downstream on the River Lou. Cross the little bridge, a modern one this time, to reach the cobblestone path leading up to Saint-Etienne church. The path, which goes up to the cemetery and around the church, will take you past a cross of supplication. Its base, the oldest part, is decorated with the arms of Pierre de la Jugie, who was archbishop of Narbonne in the 14th century.



THE CHURCH

Just behind the church, a narrow path forming natural steps leads up to a headland from where there is a stunning view over the castle and village and their natural backdrop of red soil and dark green hills. Look closely... Notice anything? Nothing? Precisely! There are no television aerials on the roofs. They're all underground. When they were dismantled, they made an original feature, piled up outside the town hall.



ON THE ROOFTOPS...

Just behind the church, a narrow path forming natural steps leads up to a headland from where there is a stunning view over the castle and village and their natural backdrop of red soil and dark green hills. Look closely... Can't see anything? Then imagine. Imagine a jumble of television aerials in the small square outside the Town Hall, and the pride and joy of the local residents, following their decision to remove them, now able to contemplate the rooftop tiles in the dazzling sunlight...

EATING & DRINKING

At the castle, you can try authentic medieval cuisine from the grill, served in beautifully-made medieval-style plates. Whichever route you take from the church, whether you go along the River Lou or via the rock, it's easy to reach the village café and terrace, near the town hall and the municipal vineyard. Here, the grapes are harvested by the inhabitants. We tend to the vines in memory of our great grandparents and grandparents, for whom the vines became their main source of income.

When the mines stopped operating in the early 20th century. In fact, the winegrowers' cooperative stands where the tramway station was, right where your car is parked...



NEARBY



Notre-Dame Chapel

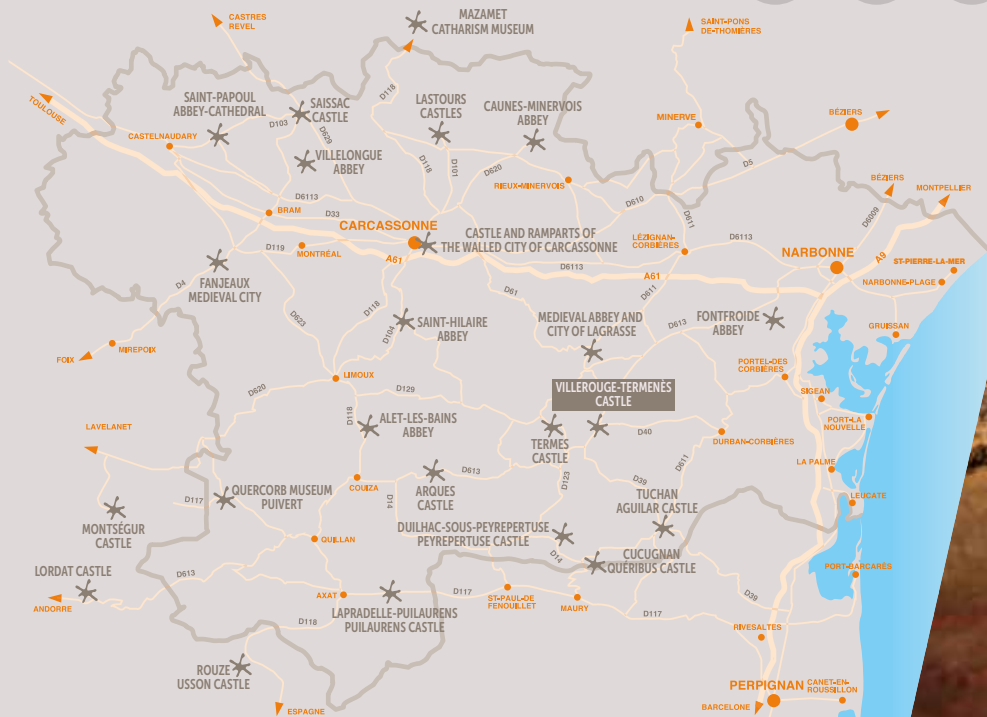
On this path, which leads to Termes, the Notre-Dame chapel makes a pleasant place to rest in the shade of a cypress.



A nice little ramble

The "Petite Vadrouille" path crosses ochre soils and garrigue, passing ancient mills along the way, and leads up to some beautiful viewpoints over the Corbières region... (guidebook on sale at the castle and at the Multiservice Point (POM)).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION



BEST PRACTICE

Pets allowed



In the event of a fire outside the castle, remain inside and wait for the emergency services to arrive.



In the event of an accident or potential danger, alert the emergency services on 112.

SERVICES



TOILETS

Public toilets can be found at the castle and on the car park.



PARKING

Car park at the winegrowers' cooperative.



SHOP

In the castle enclosure



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