



PUILAURENS

CASTLE

T O U R G U I D E

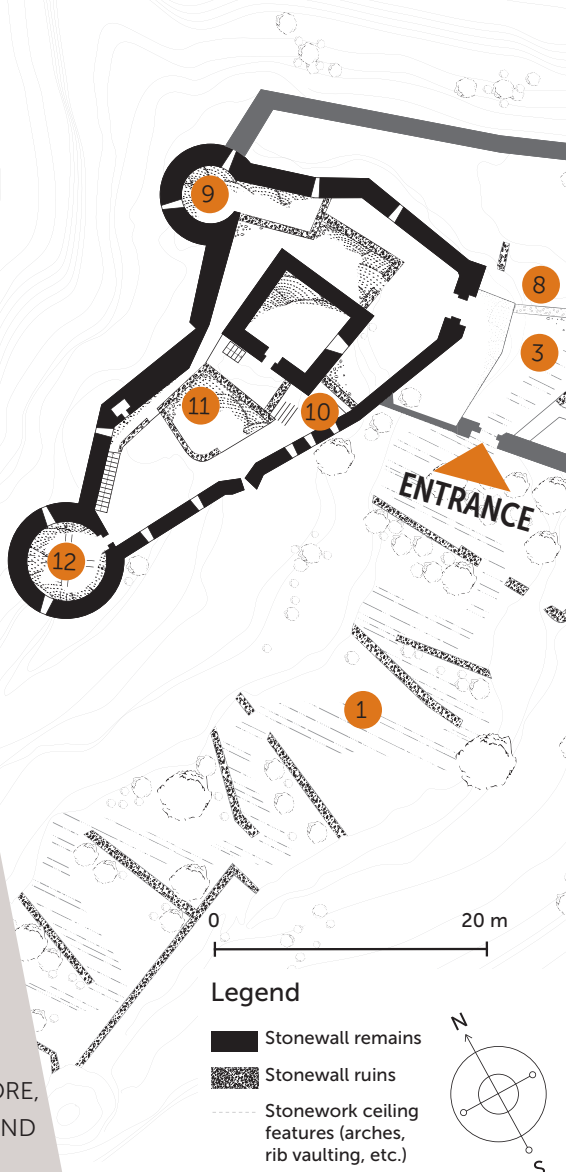


PUILAURENS CASTLE

CASTLE AND VILLAGE OF PUILAURENS ELEGANT HEIGHTS

WE OFFER YOU THIS VISITOR GUIDE TO HELP YOU EXPLORE THE SITE OF PUILAURENS: THE CASTLE, THE VILLAGE OF PUILAURENS-LAPRADELLE AND SOME SCENIC NATURAL SPOTS. IT WILL SHOW YOU WHAT WE FIND BEAUTIFUL AND INTERESTING...

THEN, IF YOU ARE CURIOUS TO KNOW MORE, SEE MORE AND SHARE MORE, YOU WILL FIND OTHER TOOLS AT YOUR DISPOSAL.



MOMENTS IN HISTORY

« The Spaniards! A huge troop! They must have gone through the Col d'Aussières to get here like that. Our comrades have gone to reinforce the siege at Leucate, these Spaniards must have heard about it... What should we do? There is only me to man the barbican, and we are too few in the castle to defend the outside. They will quickly get through the first two gates of the mazes and arrive here. Sacrificing myself is useless. I'm leaving. I'll go through the postern-gate behind, it's safer. We will wait for them in the courtyard, and there, I guarantee them a welcome they will not have time to remember! Some may get through, but we have more than one trick in our bag. Unless we are betrayed, we can keep the upper Castle for a long time... »



THE ACCESS 1

A REAL CHALLENGE FOR ATTACKERS

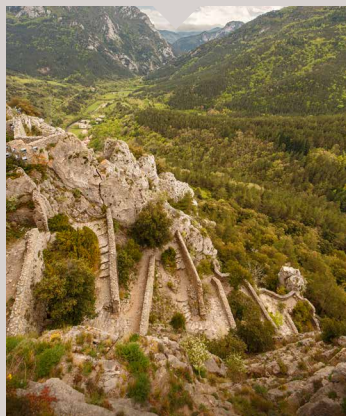
In the Middle Ages, the path was built in stages, so as to facilitate the advance of men. Some cobbled passages remain from this era when the steep cliff of the inaccessible mountain, the high walls with long arrow slits and the towers overlooking the road were enough for defence purposes. Then artillery was invented and the fortress had to adapt. The turns became mazes, the rock walls were raised and the access road was blocked by several massive gates. At the top, a bunker defended the last gate before the fortress itself. Attackers who managed to get to this point would have received a rather direct reception....!





Further information

You cannot advance quickly in the mazes. A few steps and then you have to turn. Arrow slits are visible in the walls. Yet others, still invisible, can see us. They are much higher, on the first enclosure or on the tower that suddenly appears above our heads. The ramparts also keep watch ... The Castle blends in with the cliff. In the rock, on the left of the road, just below the Castle, some openings will remind you of caves or tunnels...



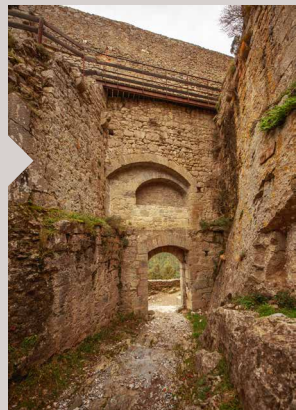
More to see

In the 10th century, Puilaurens and the whole Valley of Sainte Croix (upper Boulzane) belonged to the Abbey of Saint Michel de Cuxa. It is a territory rich in pastures, forests, minerals and inhabitants. The Abbey survived the uncertainty of feudal times and managed to keep this important possession. It was a very influential monastery. The Abbot, Oliba, even presided over the assembly that proclaimed the Truce of God: no fighting on certain days of the week. During the Crusade against the Albigenses, the Castle, which was under the rule of Aragon, was not attacked. It was a Southerner, Guillaume de Peyrepertuse, who apparently dispossessed the Abbey of its Castle. It then fell into the hands of Chabert de Barbaira, a loyal knight of the King of Aragon, Commander of Quéribus, Protector of the heretics. In 1255, however, after Chabert surrendered, Puilaurens came under the control of the King of France. He was then facing Aragon. Its location was strategic: it monitored the Col d'Aussières and locked in the upper Valley of the Aude. From Saint Louis to Louis XIV, continued renewal of fortifications were undertaken for this Castle used only as a rear base during the wars with Spain, which led to the Treaty of the Pyrenees of 1659 that set the border. Few attacks and constant adaptations explain why it is the best preserved royal castle in the region.

Here, as at Quéribus, the Cathars were able to find refuge long after the end of the Crusade. A community took refuge in the village near the Castle. Ironically, it was due to the Inquisition that we still have some traces of these ordinary people. Like that of Saurine Rigaud, a believer who had taken refuge in Fenouillet, where her son died after having received the consolation, the only blessing accepted by Good Christians, as they called themselves. She then went to Puilaurens, where a small community lived, including two sergeants who survived Montségur to bear witness. Pierre Paraire, Deacon of Fenolhedès stayed there, while some families of heretics had their houses there and hosted those who passed through the area...

THE LOWER ENCLOSURE ² TO ORGANISE DAILY LIFE AND DEFENCE

The entrance to the fortress rises up before attackers, massive, with double doors. To approach it, attackers had to endure a hail of arrows from crossbows, or later, shots from muskets, bursting forth from the ramparts. It is a deadfall gate and getting through it was not without difficulty... from above! Projectiles of all kinds fell straight down from the passage. Those who managed to enter ended up in a death trap...



The little inner courtyard 3

Called a "courette", this charming little name concealed a very effective defence system set up here in the 17th century: a mousetrap. Thinking that they had finally succeeded in entering the enclosure, an attacker would have faced 12 arrow slits pointed in his direction in a narrow space. Impossible to advance and difficult to turn around because the shots come from everywhere, including from the service platform of the deadfall gate. Above the courtyard, as if suspended, the upper Castle witnessed the massacre ...



4 Inside the enclosure at the green oak

The fortress is divided into two large areas: the lower enclosure, where we are, and the upper Castle that overlooks the courtyard. Inside the lower enclosure, many buildings have rubbed shoulders in different eras. A whole garrison lived here, men and animals, sergeants, a priest, a porter, dogs, hens ...

Further information

The ramparts around the lower enclosure still have many of the battlements, behind which a soldier could hide. The towers are also still standing. It is this complex that gives the Puilaurens Castle its evocative silhouette viewed from the outside and a feeling of protection on the inside. Listen to the silence of the wind...

The cistern 5



On the left of the green oak, a small passage leads to a cistern, installed Under a building where remain tracks of a chimney and a sink sink. The pink coating, which ensured that it was watertight, is clearly visible, but most importantly, this cistern has retained its system of overflow drainage. Facing the cistern, look to your left: a gargoyle carved into the stone opens its small beak towards the ground. One can imagine that this precious water was recovered, for example, to fill a trough...



Further information

Continuing on after the cistern, we pass by a beautiful door, carefully built. Perhaps it was an access to the Castle itself before being included in the enclosure.

More to see

In 1637, the garrison of Puilaurens was called in as reinforcements to support the siege of Port-Leucate. This was during the Spanish War, led by Louis XIII: the Kingdom of France set out to conquer its borders. Only a few men stayed here who had to face a massive attack by the Spaniards arriving from Prades. It was a massacre. As you retrace your steps, you face the upper Castle. At its feet, on the right, a long gutter is formed between the cliff and the wall. It is thought that in 1637, men and dogs, cornered, were killed here.

The postern 6

A postern is a little door. It is discreet, and provides access to the outside. You will find it at the end of the lower enclosure on your right. Pass by it. It is placed at a right angle and is also defended by arrow slits, as small as it is... follow the path to discover a majestic lookout.



+ More to see

Two towers, originally both “open-gorged”, or half towers, defend the lower enclosure. The one on the right was closed in the 17th century when the defence system became obsolete. The other, at the end of the enclosure next to the postern, remained as it was. It is easy to see why it is so interesting. The levels are clearly visible: with ladders, they provided access to the ramparts. Why not stairs? Because if an attacker succeeded in entering, the ladder would be pulled up and he would be trapped: in an open tower, where he could not escape the arrows from the defending troops in the enclosure...

THE LOOKOUT ⁷

Below, on the right, the village of Puilaurens and on the left, farther away, the village of Lapradelle. The Boulzane Valley goes up, on one side, towards the Col d'Aussières, Rabouillet, Sournia and Prades and on the other side, goes down to Lapradelle to join the D117 Departmental road and then opens on the left towards Carcassonne and on the right to the Corbières, the Fenouillèdes and the sea.



THE UPPER CASTLE ⁸

HISTORY AND LEGEND

Above the small inner courtyard stands a second enclosure, also defended by a deadfall gate, towers and ramparts. While in the lower enclosure the buildings were mainly for storage, here mainly housing was built, including that of the chatelain. They have been reworked many times over the centuries.

+ More to see

The footbridge that we use today is recent, but reminds us of the early access. It was by a wooden pontoon, perhaps removable, overlooking the courtyard. You can see its supports, corbels, hanging on the walls on both sides of the passage. Just before going up, on the left, a stone staircase, of which there remain some beautiful vestiges, led to the ramparts.

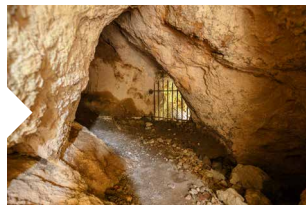


👁 Further information

Both the first and the second enclosure were built to closely embrace the cliff. At the end of the bridge, to the left of the door, an arch spans the rock. Looking at it closely, you can see that the rock reveals a fault, a weak point. This arch, made of eight stones roughly cut close together, is there to relieve the weight of the wall. This is known as a “discharge” arch. Another, larger one, is visible inside the second enclosure, not far from the gallery.

The gallery 9

There is a network of galleries that cross the cliff under the Castle, as suggested by the few visible openings on the trail. Are these secret passages? In reality, they were used, not to escape, but for the conservation of stores. Closed in by some walls, they acted as a kind of cooler that works with the air currents ... that you can feel as soon as you approach it.



Two Romanesque arrow slits open into the wall just in front of the staircase that leads to the square tower and the ramparts. Compare them with those in the lower enclosure, typical of the time of Saint Louis, recognizable by the upper parts of their frames carved in quarter-round.



The ramparts 10

Once you pass the square tower, which despite its archaic form, was built much later, you end up on the ramparts. There an interesting and beautiful sight opens up on this walkway that is present throughout the fortress. The ramparts of the first enclosure seem to intersect, through the play of perspectives, the one on which you are standing.

+ More to see

On the left are two machicolations. These are openings in the floor of the ramparts, which go down the full height of the wall. By leaning on the first machicolation, you can see the dizzying descent down to the cliff that protects it. This is a common defence system that allowed soldiers to drop liquids, stones, rubbish ... all kinds of waste...



Going down the stairs to the square tower, a round hole appears on the left, crossing the wall. It is actually a passage for a water pipe. On the right we reach a kind of courtyard where a staircase seems to reach the sky.

The high cistern 11

In this area, facing the stairs, the high cistern opens. We must bend over to see on its vault the "trap" from which water was drawn. A wooden staircase leads to three machicolations, one of which served as a latrine.

The tower of the white lady 12

A beautiful arched gateway opens onto this well-preserved three-level tower, which overlooks the access path to the fortress. The lower hall, where we enter, has a very plain cross-ribbed vault, the base of which is simply sculpted in a diamond point and the keystone is without ornament. This is not a chapel, as you might think. In this room, there is a very rare item. It is to the left of the entrance and takes the form of a small, rather narrow duct cut into the wall: it is a speaking tube, which enables someone to be heard from one floor to another...



THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE LADY

The White Lady ... everyone will tell you that she appears here on nights when there is a full moon... Who is she? She is a historical figure with a tragic fate. Blanche de Bourbon was married at the age of 14 to Peter I of Castile, rightly nicknamed "the cruel". He did not love her, as he already had a mistress, but marriage was a political affair. As soon as he was married, he got rid of his young wife, whom he kept far away from him. It seems that she wandered from castle to castle before he decided to make her disappear. In a convent or in a tomb, no-one knows...

THE VILLAGE OF PUILAURENS-LAPRADELLE

The village of Puilaurens is the oldest and the closest to the Castle. That of Lapradelle developed in the 20th century and it is located on the Carcassonne-Perpignan road. These two villages are joined by a river, the Boulzane, but they offer very different discoveries. Lapradelle is located on the main road, so we will take our first steps from there ...

WALKS



AT THE LAPRADELLE RAILWAY STATION

It is located a little above the forest house, on the left of the road coming from Perpignan, on the right coming from Carcassonne ... or just in front of you if you arrived on the Red Train. From this spot, you can see one of the most beautiful views of Puilaurens Castle.



This station, which the town hall recently bought to rehabilitate, was built to accommodate the travellers on the Quillan / Saint-Paul-Fenouillet line that was opened in 1904. It was contemporary with the remarkable viaduct overlooking Lapradelle and crossing the River Boulzane on a curve of 190 m long. The excavation materials from the trench for the railway of the Col de Campérié served as an embankment to build the platform for the station.

After the war of 1939, the railway transported goods, especially feldspar from Salvezines, a village of Boulzane, and wood, one of the major resources of this area until the end of the 20th century.

Not far from the station when returning to the road, the memory of the Harkis is honoured. There was a forest hamlet here. In 1962, some Harki families were housed here, in the buildings adjacent to the commemorative plaque. The French Government hosted them everywhere in France. This gesture was not without compensation ... These families performed hard work in the forests for many years: forest tracks, bridges, plantations... A model apartment, with period furniture, is currently being set up.



THE ROYAL FOREST OF FANGES

It was in this forest that Colbert had the trunks cut to manufacture the masts for the fleet of Louis XIV that was then in full development. This royal domain was bordered by walls of which some vestiges remain. Stones decorated with a fleur-de-lys are still visible. Since the 16th century in particular, the wood was generally transported overland, pulled by horses, as far as Quillan, where the wood was taken over by the "rafters", brave men who assembled the trunks in huge rafts that they guided down the rough River Aude...



AT THE PARK

Starting from Lapradelle railway station, a small path on your left runs along the road and leads to the War Memorial. It is here that the Green Meridian passes, and here it is indicated by a marker and a holly tree. This Green Meridian crosses France: the trees materialise the meridian line of Paris. On your way to the campervan reception area, just next to it, you can catch a view of the Castle.

A little further along the road, below the Post Office, a little covered passage opens up leading to the park. This park offers a welcome shady break in summer. You can sit there quietly, let the children enjoy the games, a picnic and why not join in a game of boules on the bowling green...



THE WATERING CANAL

This canal goes around the village. It passes around the far end of the park, along a small path that currently cannot be used. It was once used for watering gardens. Some rather fussy owners had gates installed marking out the passage reserved for them, with very clear warnings! We can still trace the route from the park entrance. Today, the canal is essentially a drainage channel for runoff, which it empties into the river, thus protecting the village from flooding...



AT THE ROCK STOPPER

« We popped out the rock stopper... »: this is how a report from the Town Hall reported the widening of the road at the request of the Ministry of Water and Forests in the 1850s. It was not

until the construction of the Lapradelle viaduct that they had a road worthy of the name! The limestone extracted from this cliff modestly complemented the granite quarries of Roquefort de Sault. Downstream of where the road was widened, quite visible while going up towards Puilaurens, a path leads up the mountain on the right to climb to the Castle. It is only for good walkers because it is very steep.





THE STRENGTH OF WATER

The Boulzane is a fierce little river that has long turned the paddle wheels of the sawmills. The last one closed in the 2000s. One of these installations is now used in Lapradelle to produce a little electricity; it was even used to wash the wool of the sheep that used to populate the numerous pastures of Puilaurens. According to the elders, this wool was taken on foot as far as Mosset.

THE CHURCH OF PUILAURENS

The Church of Saint Laurent was in the 12th century at least the parish church of the village ... but the village was not there. It was located on the heights, near the Castle, with which it formed a complex called a *castrum*. In the 14th century a fire destroyed this first village.

It was at this time that the inhabitants asked the royal officers for permission to settle around their church, in a place called Trevalle, the current location. Permission was obtained in return for an annual tax payable in perpetuity ...

The current church has kept its Romanesque apse. The rest of the buildings are more recent, from the 14th to the 17th century. Inside, is a great surprise: an enormous altarpiece and four low-relief carvings in polychrome wood adorn the choir. It is the gold ornaments and the sumptuous Baroque decoration that unfold to tell the story of saint Laurent...

The pulpit in the nave is beautifully adorned with a carved wooden bas-relief, no doubt from a later era. At the end of the nave on the right, a beautiful door opens onto the presbytery. On the back wall, a kind of small dormer window opens: it is a hagioscope which enabled monks who were ill to follow the service.

The monks who lived here had developed an activity breeding silkworms. In one of the fields around the church, a mulberry tree is still standing.



ON THE ROAD TO THE GREENHOUSE

A nice path climbs behind the cottages through the boxwood. Very easy, in a few strides it leads to a place called the Lepers' cemetery. It is an enchanting place that overlooks a few pastures at the foot of the surrounding mountains. There we see, as at the beginning of the road, a Cross of Rogation. These crosses, specific to each village, were intended to attract the blessing of God on the fruits of the earth and animals. The fortress stands out proudly on its peak. From here you can continue on foot to reach the Castle reception.

THE HOSTELS AND THE "DORMER WINDOW"

Three large-capacity hostels are located in the old presbytery. One of them is equipped to receive people with reduced mobility. In one of the rooms a small dormer window opens which allowed monks who were ill to follow the service. On the floor was the hatch in which they could put their legs to sit at the dormer window. It is clearly visible in the wall at the end of the church.



From the village, behind the church, a good path leads to the Castle, which can also be reached by road.

STORIES OF THE VILLAGE[S]

2 CHURCHES, 2 CEMETERIES, 4 MONUMENTS TO THE DEAD, ONE SINGLE MAYOR...

Between Puilaurens and Lapradelle, an inexplicable rivalry has persisted for centuries. People from Puilaurens always got married and were buried in Puilaurens. It was the same for people from Lapradelle. « The elders never mention it ... », but there is still a monument to the dead in the church of Puilaurens, another in the church of Lapradelle, another in the Town Hall and lastly a fourth, the most recent, which seeks to be consensual, at the edge of the road coming from Perpignan or Carcassonne. On these monuments, the same names do not appear...



NEARBY



THE COL DE CAMPERIE

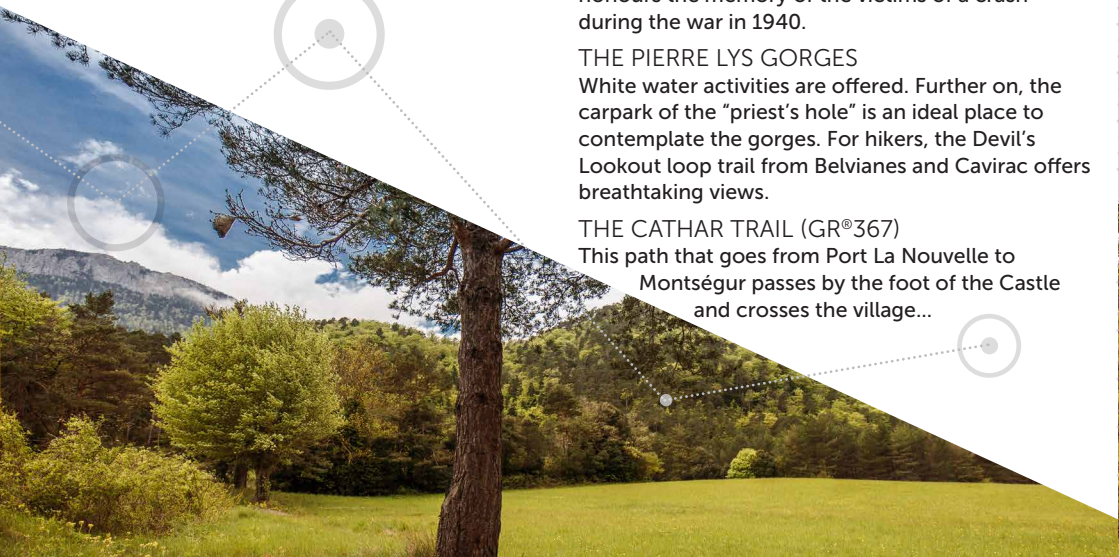
A beautiful walk in the forest awaits you here. It offers beautiful views of Puilaurens Castle. At the starting point, a commemorative plaque honours the memory of the victims of a crash during the war in 1940.

THE PIERRE LYS GORGES

White water activities are offered. Further on, the carpark of the "priest's hole" is an ideal place to contemplate the gorges. For hikers, the Devil's Lookout loop trail from Belvianes and Cavarac offers breathtaking views.

THE CATHAR TRAIL (GR®367)

This path that goes from Port La Nouvelle to Montségur passes by the foot of the Castle and crosses the village...



ON THE WAY TO UNESCO!

In the 13th century, at the end of the Crusade against the Albigenses, the power of the King of France was asserted in our newly conquered region. For the first time, a coherent system of defence was set up for the entire territory to face an enemy: Aragon. Peyrepertuse, Puilaurens, Termes, Quéribus, Aguilar, Lastours, and Montségur (Ariège) made up a line of invincible fortresses coordinated by the Seneschal of Carcassonne. A new, central defensive system where the citadel of Carcassonne was the headquarters. A spectacular architectural feat in the city and in these ridge-top castles blending into the rocks. Lastly, totally preserved landscapes and exceptional panoramic views. These are the main arguments put forward in the application for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

You can support this application at this website citadellesduvertige.aude.fr

PRACTICAL INFORMATION



GOOD PRACTICES



Sturdy walking shoes



Pets welcome (forbidden to equidae)



A dangerous visit in high winds and prohibited in case of violent storms

SERVICES



TOILETS

In the carpark of the Castle and in the village.



PARKING

At the Castle and in the village with charging stations for electric vehicles and a campervan area in the village.



CASH WITHDRAWAL

At the Post Office, for those who have an account at the Banque Postale.



SHOP

At the Castle reception.



PYRÉNÉES AUDOISES TOURISM OFFICE

Square André Tricoire - 11500 QUILLAN
+33 (0)4 68 20 07 78



www.payscathare.org | citadellesduvertige.aude.fr

www.chateau-puilaurens.com

Contact: +33 (0)4 68 20 65 26



Emergencies: 112