



# PUILAURENS

CASTLE

T O U R   G U I D E



# PUILAURENS CASTLE



## Storm

In case of high winds or storms, leave the upper part of the château, keep away from any metal objects or trees. In case of lightning and in the absence of a closed shelter, do not run or walk - sit or crouch head down, legs together, arms glued against the body and hands on the head.



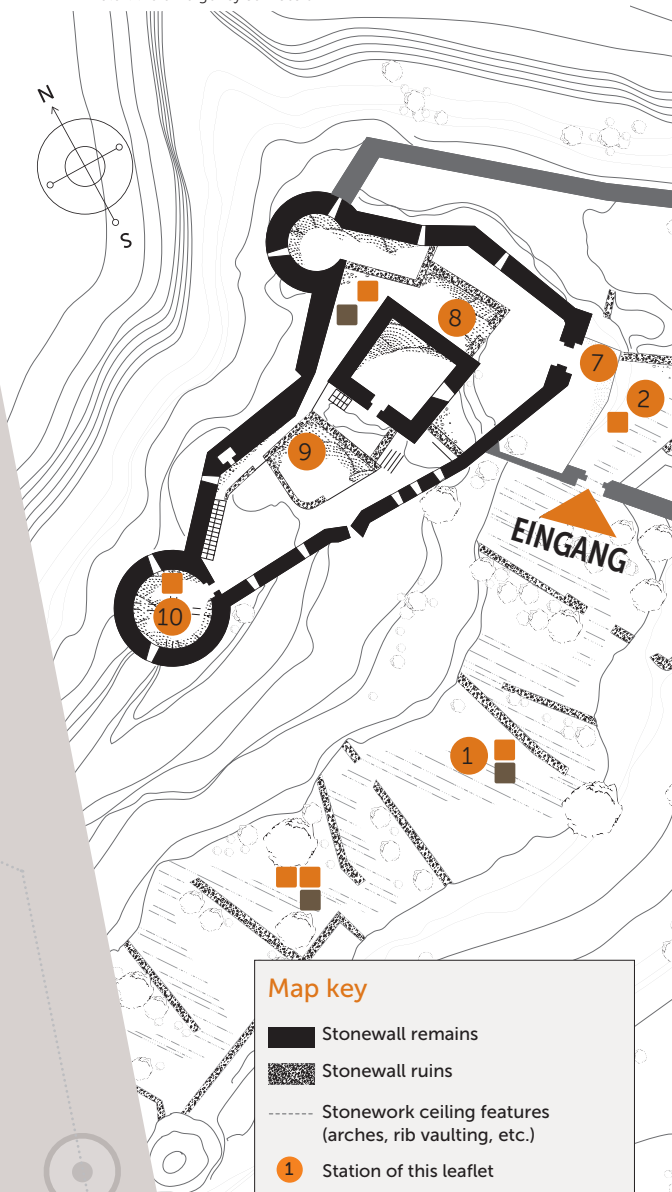
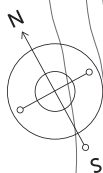
## Fire

If the fire is outside the château, remain inside the château and wait for the emergency services to arrive.



## Accident

In case of an accident or other event posing a danger: alert the emergency services on 112.



EINGANG

## Map key

Stonewall remains

Stonewall ruins

Stonework ceiling features  
(arches, rib vaulting, etc.)

1 Station of this leaflet

Station for the Cathar Country app

Station for the Castrum app



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Cathar Country - the guide



Castrum - the game



audetourisme

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## 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...!

#### PLANTS AND THEIR LITTLE SECRETS

Some were used for healing, others for making witches' broomsticks... The botanical trail which intersperses the climb towards the castle allows you to discover several plants, trees or shrubs that are typical of the region. Stop near the common dogwood, the grey-leaved cistus, or the juniper... And discover their uses and legends.



## 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



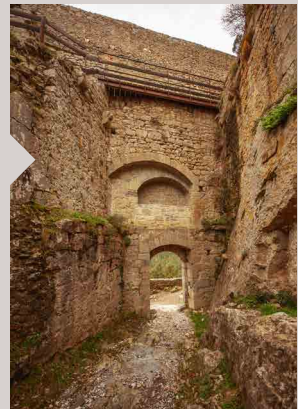
In the 10th century, Puilaurens and the entire Sainte-Croix (Haute Boulzane) valley belonged to the abbey of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa and were under Aragonese domination. The abbey of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa managed to preserve this important territory, rich in pastures, forests, ores and inhabitants, until 1255. Puilaurens was then taken under the wing of the King of France, which was then defended against Aragon... A real turn around!

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. It is the best-preserved royal castle in the area.

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 is thanks to the Inquisition that we can remember these ordinary people. The Inquisition was an investigation and it was very thorough. This is how we were able to follow a believer named Saurine Rigaud. She firstly took refuge in Fenouillet, where her son died. He received consolamentum, the only blessing allowed by the "Good Christians", as the Cathars referred to themselves. We followed her to Puilaurens where, according to the testimony of two surviving sergeants from Montségur, a little community of believers lived. 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 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 2

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 ...



## 3 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 ...

### + More to see

En 1637, la garnison de Puilaurens est appelée en renfort pour soutenir le siège de Port-Leucate. Nous sommes en pleine Guerre d'Espagne, alors menée par Louis XIII : le royaume de France part à la conquête de ses frontières. Ne restent plus ici que quelques hommes qui vont devoir faire face à une attaque massive des Espagnols arrivant de Prades. Ils sont si nombreux que malgré l'efficacité des défenses ils réussissent à passer. C'est un massacre. En revenant sur vos pas, vous faites face au château haut. A ses pieds, sur la droite, un long boyau est formé entre la falaise et la muraille. C'est ici pense-t-on, qu'en 1637, hommes et chiens, acculés, furent tués.

## The cistern 4



On the left of the green oak, a small passage leads to a cistern, installed under a building where remain tracks of a 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...

### + More to see

Deux tours, à l'origine toutes deux "ouvertes à la gorge" défendent l'enceinte basse. L'une d'elles à droite, a été fermée au XVIIe siècle, lorsque ce système de défense est devenu obsolète. L'autre, tout au bout de l'enceinte à côté de la poterne, est restée en l'état. On peut en voir l'intérêt. Les étages sont nettement perceptibles : ils permettaient de desservir, grâce à des échelles, le chemin de ronde. Pourquoi pas d'escalier ? Parce que si l'assaillant réussit à entrer, on tire l'échelle et on le maintient dans un piège encore : une tour ouverte, où il ne peut se soustraire aux tirs des défenseurs présents dans l'enceinte...



## Further information

The rampart walk which crowns the first outer wall has preserved in many places its battlements, the gaps in the ramparts, and its merlons, the solid upright sections behind which soldiers could protect themselves. 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 postern <sup>5</sup>

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.

### Further information

The two stones that surround the lintel above the door form two large ogees.

This structure can also be found in the windows: it is the signature of royal building sites in the 13th century.



## THE LOOKOUT <sup>6</sup>

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 <sup>7</sup>

## 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.

7 8

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.



### + More to see

Des galeries traversent la falaise sous le château. S'agit-il de passages secrets ? En réalité, elles ont été utilisées, non pour s'échapper, mais pour conserver. Cloisonnées par quelques murailles, c'est une sorte de réfrigérateur qui marche au courant d'air... que vous pouvez sentir dès que vous en approchez.



## The ramparts 8

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 9

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 10

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 LAPRADELLE-PUILAURENS

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 IN LAPRADELLE



### THE TRAIN STATION AND THE VIADUCT

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.



### THE HAMLET OF HARKIS

Not far from the station, remembrance of the Harkis is given pride of place. Here, in 1962, there was a "hameau de forestage" (Harki camps located in forests). A few Harki families were placed in the buildings next to the memorial plaque. The French government financed their shelter throughout France. However, they were not warmly welcomed. These families carried out manual labour in forests for years, working on forest trails, bridges and plantations, among others.

The train station was built to welcome travellers from the Quillan - Saint-Paul-de-Fenouillet line, opened in 1904. It was contemporary due to the remarkable viaduct that overlooked Lapradelle and spanned across the Boulzane river over a curve 190m long. The trench backfill of the Col Campérié was used to carry out the train station's platform. After the 1939 war, the railway line ensured the transport of goods, in particular from the feldspar coming from Salvezines, a village in the Haute Boulzane area, and wood, one of the locality's major resources until the end of the 20th century.



TPCT

### THE RED TRAIN

You can take the Red Train for the landscapes or for a little adventure. From Rivesaltes to Axat, the Red Train offers themed journeys or simple but magnificent rides on a regular basis.

Find out more at [letrainrouge.fr](http://letrainrouge.fr)





## 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.

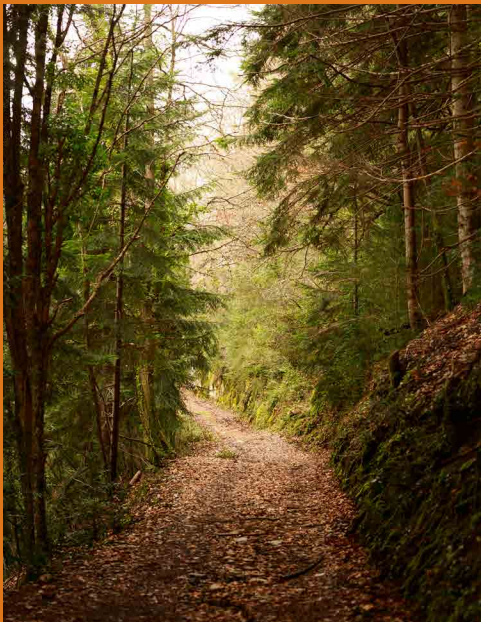
A little further along the road, below the Post Office, a little covered passage opens up leading to the park. This park offers a welcome shady break in summer. You can sit there quietly, let the children enjoy the games, a picnic and why not join in a game of boules on the bowling green... Further along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

## THE STRENGTH OF WATER

The Boulzane is a little but very lively river which turned the water wheels of the sawmills for a long time. The last one closed in the 1990s.

Its facilities are now used to produce a little electricity. In Lapradelle, one of these water intakes was preserved to clean the wool of the sheep that inhabited the many pastures in Puilaurens.

According to the elders, this wool was carried on foot to Mosset, on the piedmont plain of the Catalan Pyrenees.



## 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...



# WALKS IN PUILAURENS

## 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 abbey of St Michel de Cuxa, which held the Boulzane valley from the 10th to the 13th century, developed a silkworm farming activity.

## 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 bedrooms, a small skylight allowed the less ill to follow the service. The trap door on the floor is where they could hang their legs out to sit on the skylight. The latter is clearly visible in the back wall 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 lovely walk awaits you on this educational trail which highlights different aspects of the forest. Not far from the starting point, a stone tablet commemorates a plane crash to pay tribute to the memory of victims looking to join the Free French Forces in 1940.

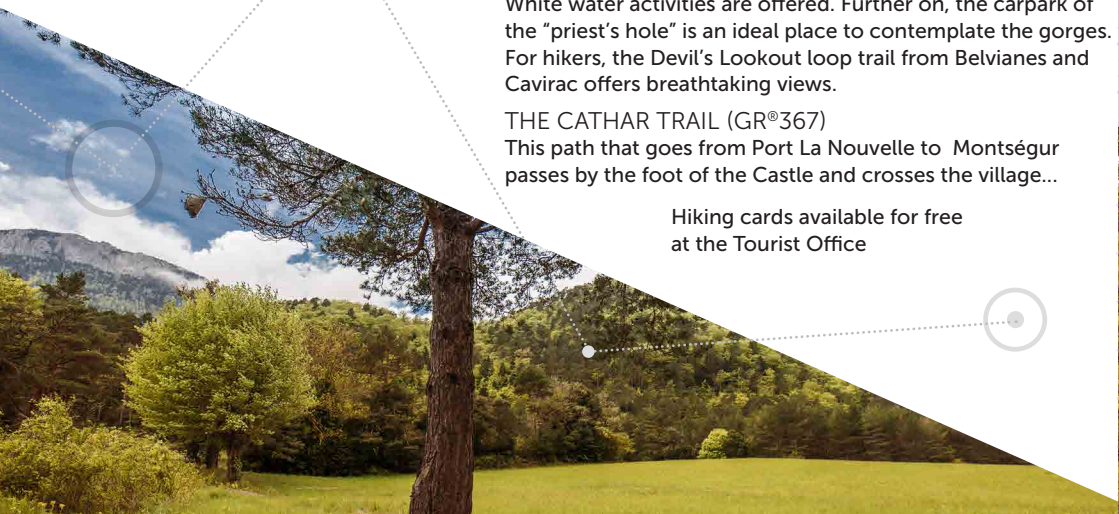
### THE PIERRE LYS GORGES

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...

Hiking cards available for free  
at the Tourist Office



## 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](http://citadellesduvertige.aude.fr)

LES  
CITADEL-  
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VERTIGE  
EN LIGNE POUR  
L'UNESCO





# 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

In the village of Axat.



### SHOP

At the Castle reception.



### PYRÉNÉES AUDOISES TOURISM OFFICE

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LAPRADELLE-PUILAURENS

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