

TERMES CASTLE

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Cathar Country - the guide



Castrum - the game

+ 3D VISIT

chateau-termes.com
menu option: "Plain les yeux"

audetourisme
payscathare.org

SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS



Storm

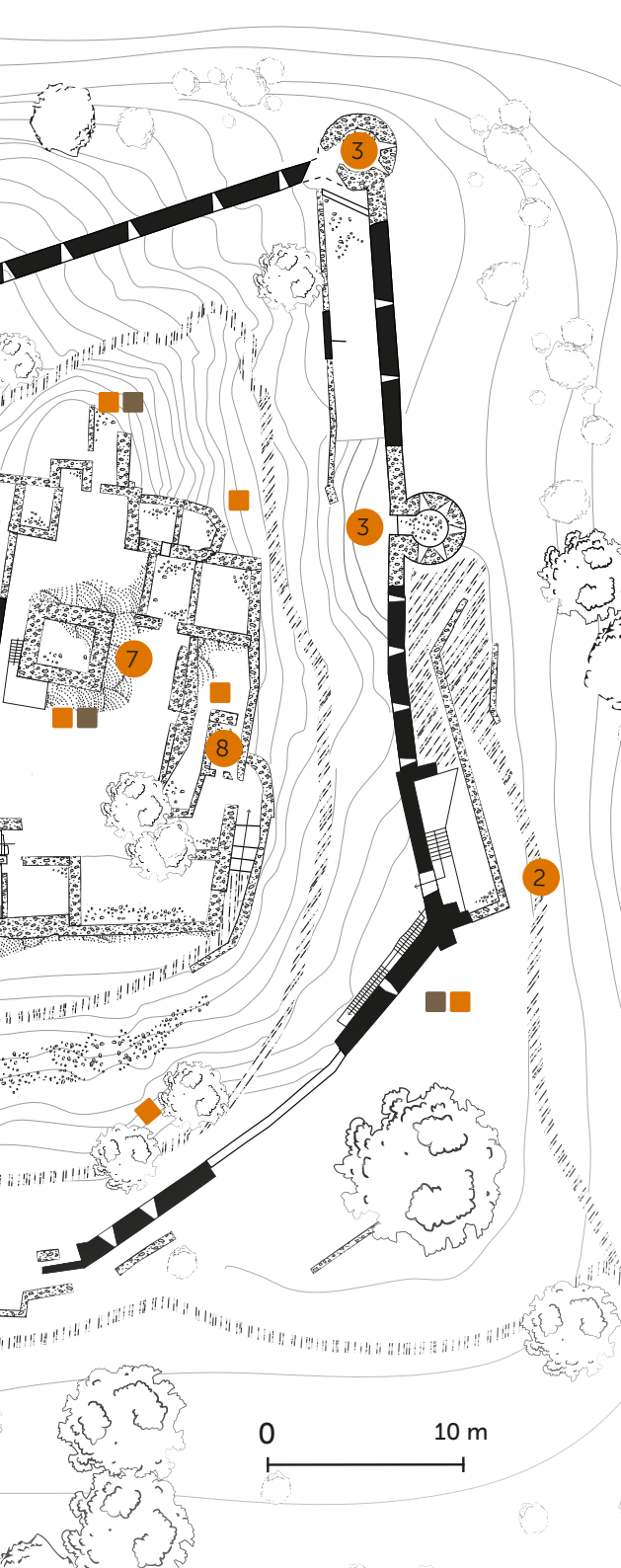
Leave the upper part of the castle, keep away from any metal objects or trees. In case of lightning and in the absence of a closed shelter, do not run or walk - sit or crouch with you head down, legs together, arms tight against the body and hands on your head.



accident

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





Before leaving the reception, we recommend you watch the video that presents the history of the site over 1000 years. It will give you the main points to help you understand the 1210 siege in particular.

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VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL 1

When climbing up to the castle, stop for a moment, look and imagine...

In the 11th and 12th centuries, the Termes family held mining power comparable to that of the nearby Lords of Cabaret (Lastours). It then welcomed the Cathar faith, and maintained a lively court frequented by troubadours. Its castle was considered impenetrable...

Further information

Imagine, like the sea storming a cliff, houses crowded together up the entire slope to the sides of the precipitous fortress. Follow these stones right up to the sky, to feel the impressive presence of the seigneurial castle and its keep, which dominated the landscape.

More to see

This rich and iconic seigniory would be attacked by Simon de Montfort in 1210, at the beginning of the crusade launched by Pope Innocent III to end the Cathar heresy in the region. The capture of Termes, had an extraordinary impact in its time and gave rise to many stories. Later, in 1228, Termes became a royal fortress. It was dismantled in the 17th century.

ROYAL DEFENCES 2

Entry Defences

As the houses of the castrum (fortified village) reached the foot of the castle, they actively participated in its defence. But when the castrum was evacuated and the hostile population pushed back to the site of the present village, the fortress found itself on the front line. It was therefore necessary to strengthen the exterior defences. The castrum was dismantled and the fortress rearmed using the principles of royal engineering, with towers, arches, a barbican (fortified gateway)...



Difficult advancement

The current path seems to correspond roughly to that of the royal era. In the 13th century, against the wall, from the corner to the rusticated tower at the end of the road, a barbican prevented direct entry into the castle walls.

It meant that entry was via a winding path, then passing between two walls.

It was therefore impossible to avoid the guards on the door and the soldiers on the path around the castle (Chemin de Ronde).

Further information

The shape of the arrowslit visible near the rusticated tower is called a "fishtail". Its flared base widened the angle of fire. We can guess that it protected a width of 5 or 6 metres on the access road, which is just below.



The towers 3

You are overlooking the towers built by the King of France. This is what they looked like before they were dismantled in the 17th century.



The archway 4

The archway opens onto a stunning landscape with hills in the distance. Just below, the Lords of Termes installed a small fort on the Rocher du Termenet.

During the siege of 1210, the crusaders took this small fortification and installed their siege engines between it and the castle. The castle walls were now within reach of the mangonel that was pounding them...

RAYMOND DE TERMES

The vassal of Trencavel, Viscount of Carcassonne, was an elderly man when he faced the Crusade. Described by his enemies as a proven heretical tyrant, this mighty Lord valiantly led the defence of his lands, and of his people. The siege was long, and difficult for the assailants. It nearly turned to his advantage. However, he did not manage to escape the crusaders. Thrown into a dungeon in Carcassonne, he died there in 1213. His son Olivier was forced into exile.

 Continue on your way, and take the path that leads to the upper part of the castle.

CASTLE LIFE



Water hazards 5

At the end of the year 1210, the siege of Termes by the troops of Simon de Montfort was still dragging on. Water was running low on the besieged side. So negotiations began. A "providential" storm filled the cisterns, and talks were interrupted. But the water in the cisterns was polluted, the besieged became sick and had to evacuate...

Further information

The pink render, a mix of lime and broken tiles allows us to see a water cistern. In the Middle Ages, it would have been covered. This very soft fine render of a thickness approaching 4cm, ensured the cistern was waterproof: it would still be effective today.

WATER NOT JUST FOR DRINKING

Essential for survival and hygiene, water was also widely used for construction. And the construction was ongoing. The castle was in constant evolution: it had to be maintained, repaired, rebuilt...



The chapel 6

Master Jean Picard, a roofer, surveyed the site in search of his seal... where the hell was it? We found it centuries later, during the excavation of the collapsed vault of the chapel, in the place where he had worked about fifty years after the Crusade. This seal is displayed at the reception desk.

Further information

At the bottom of the nave, leaning over the railing, you can see the base of some walls. This is the Lord's castle. These walls date it to the 10th century, a century before the first recorded mentions.



Lime coating 7

This small section of yellow wall on the keep, is a vestige of its exterior wall. The keep was undoubtedly entirely covered, both on the exterior and interior, with this lime coating. What we see today dates from medieval times. It still remains, faithful to the stone that protects it from the rain, wind and from being forgotten. At the corner of the keep, a recent excavation uncovered a bread oven... little by little the castle is revealing its secrets...

Boom!

Louis XIV ordered the dismantling of the castle. A Limouxin contractor was put in charge. He could not totally demolish the fortress, that would have been a gigantic undertaking. So, he contented himself with rendering it ineffective, removing its defences, notably by tearing down the towers, and by knocking down the keep using bombs cleverly arranged in the walls. This dismantling took a year, from the spring of 1653 to 1654.

BENOÎT DE TERMES

Benoît was Raymond's brother. He was an important figure who, before the crusades, took part in the debates between Cathars and Catholics, especially during the Montreal dispute. In 1226 he was elected Cathar Bishop of the Razès.

OLIVIER DE TERMES

Olivier, son of Raymond, was a child when Termes fell into the hands of the crusaders. He was a chevalier (knight) emeritus, a strategist, who made a name for himself. Until 1240, he resisted and fought. We find him alongside Jacques d'Aragon, the Counts of Toulouse and the Trencavels. Deprived of his possessions, this was a 'faidit' (banished) Lord who finally submitted to King Louis IX in 1241. He accompanied him to the East, becoming a crusader himself.



The passage of time 8

A string of different rooms across the ages. First it was a simple fountain, dating from around the time of the Renaissance. At the end, a door dating from the royal era with well-cut keystone, would have opened onto a room that was likely sumptuous: the vestiges of solid pillars outline the vault that supported a floor where there was a fireplace. One of the oldest walls of the fortress is there, recognisable by its loose stones, just above the left pillar. With its different renovations and constructions, the castle has become a many-layered site where each generation has left its mark...



A pile of stones 9

There are piles of stones everywhere. They have been brought to the surface during a dig, or have fallen when a wall has collapsed. They are the pieces of a gigantic puzzle that brings together several eras and different constructions. Those who work here at the restoration site observe the size, shape, and colour of the stones before using this or that stone in this or that wall.

+ More to see



The association for safeguarding the castle (ASCT) has been working on the monument since 1989. Since 2009, as a member of the REMPART network, it welcomes volunteers, mainly on sites where remains are being consolidated (masonry, dry stone...). Supervised by stonemasons or archaeologists, often in July, before 1pm, you will see ten or so volunteers working on a "heritage mission".


+ More to see

These stones are both essential and bulky. To find the medieval soil, one has to dig, and all these stones that need to be removed would prevent the site from progressing, and visitors circulating if they were not stored. Therefore dry stone walls are being built, while rubble and other debris is evacuated, loaded on tracked vehicles, a little away from the castle, via the path where you are standing...



THE BIRTH OF THE STONE

Each stone is born of the rock, each wall fits closely with it, following its outline. Everywhere the builders had to level off the rock to form flat surfaces on which to build. The extracted rock faces were used to make the stones of the walls. They change in appearance depending on the era in which they were mined. The oldest stones of the castle often have small striations, geological traces of plants or water.

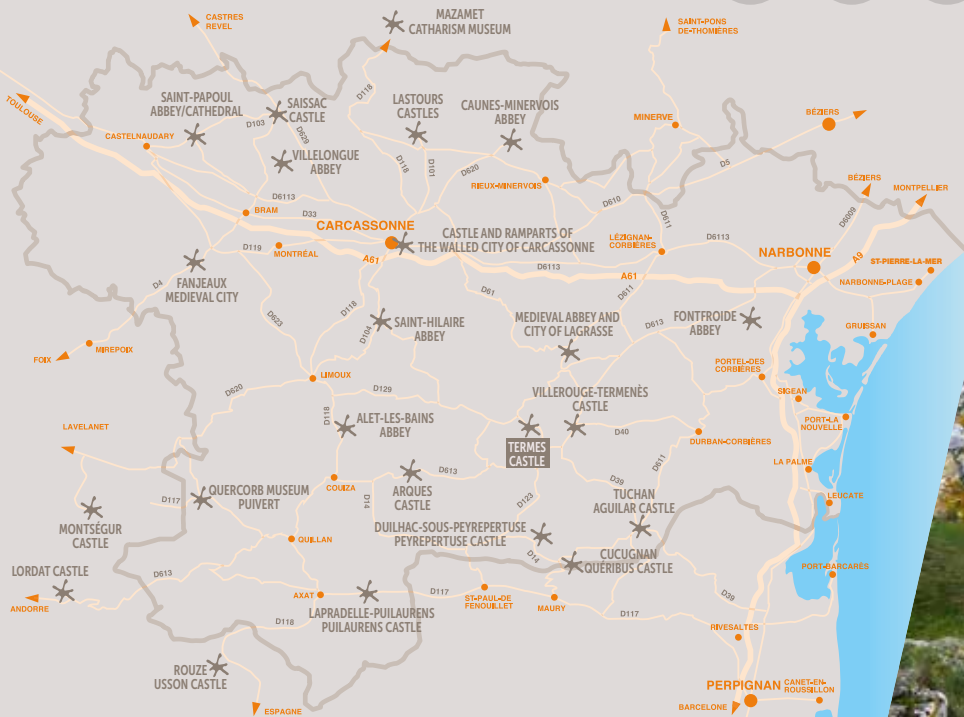
 Descend a few tens of metres, leave the wide track and follow the sign to the left on the flat.

The nature trail to reach the village 10

This small trail gently runs down to the valley, revealing the humble beauty of the scrubland. A particular plant inhabits the sides of the castle: the black henbane. It was used by the "witches", poor wise women who were considered evil, to make ointments and potions. It is now registered in the European Pharmacopoeia...



PRACTICAL INFORMATION



GOOD PRACTICES



Water bottle, hat/cap and sturdy shoes advised



Pets allowed

SERVICES



TOILETS

There are toilets at the reception (not accessible to people with reduced mobility) and at the Gorges de Termenet (accessible to people with reduced mobility).



PARKING

Free parking in the village.
Paid parking at the Gorges du Termenet.



SHOP

At the Château reception



LAGRASSE TOURIST INFORMATION POINT

Maison du Patrimoine - 16 Rue Paul Vergnes - 11220 Lagrasse
+33 (0)4 68 43 11 56



payscathare.org | chateau-termes.com

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THE VILLAGE OF TERMES

→ Follow our instructions and your instincts to enjoy strolling through the streets...

THE VILLAGE

The area is dry, yet here water abounds. It murmurs in the streets, sometimes rumbles in the river Sou, which quickly becomes tumultuous when the rain is heavy. A richness for life, it is also an element that adds to the charm of these restored streets, a note of freshness and sparkling light.



AWARDS

Village of character, village of flowers, a special jury prize for "Urban Design Awards"... Many awards have rewarded the constant efforts of the elected officials and residents, to make Termes a village where it is good both to live and to visit. The renovated cobblestone streets, the lighting at ground level in the covered passages, the plants free to grow along the houses... Termes has reinvented the Corbières village.

→ Continue straight out of the reception to follow the river Sou.



A RURAL EDEN

When you leave the reception, as you walk along the banks of the Sou, you'll see a fountain with a watering trough. The water of a spring used to flow here, the horses came to drink, the stable, right next to it, was full. You would hear the hammer of the blacksmith, the bleating of the sheep. The mill, still visible just beyond the stable, used the power of the water collected in the irrigation channel. That was before WW1 and the

decline of the local economy. Today the irrigation channel continues to irrigate gardens on the banks of the Sou.

THE MILLS

Termes had two mills, one in the heart of the village, the other a little further downstream. The Moulin de la Buade is still in operation and produces a range of organic flours that you can buy on site.



→ Follow the small path along the gardens to the picnic table. There cross the Sou, go a little to the right and take the alley on the left, to walk alongside the church.

THE CHURCH

The Rec dal Ginestar runs along the cemetery and crosses the "Carriera de la Gleisa" street, on the left. The east end of the church has a rose window dating from the end of the 19th century, when major works changed the building's configuration.



LE REC DAL GINESTAR

The word "rec" in Occitan means a stream formed by the rain. It gave its name to this alley where water descends from the hill covered with broom (*ginesta* in occitan).



SIMILARITIES

The parish church was completed at the end of the 13th century. The king's engineers, strengthening the castle's defences, no doubt worked on the church too, as some stones resemble those of the Chemin de Ronde around the castle.



UNDER THE VAULT

The door and its intricate ironwork are reminiscent of those in Catalan churches. Inside, it is a beautiful and simple pointed barrel vault that welcomes us, providing welcome shade. On the pedestal of the stoup, a coat of arms is repeated 3 times, that of Pierre de Montbrun, archbishop of Narbonne in the 13th century. Another carved stone attracts attention: a cross, like a sword, and a blazon. It was placed on the hill, under the castle: we don't know any more, so let your imagination run wild...

THE SQUARE AND ADJACENT STREETS

Plastic bottles create small suns... A little further, a wooden beam looks like a ladder: in truth it is one, but for the cats of the house! On the square, a detail catches the eye. There are two poles set in a façade: they were shelves used for drying fruit.



STREETS AND ROOVES

Just after the church, the continuation of your walk will lead you to the Carriera Longa, where you should take a left, and go down a little further to find the Passage de la Cuberta. After this passage, and a tiny square, a second canopy appears with several trees creating a woven ceiling: boxwood, juniper, green oak...



A STROLL

Abundant water can be heard in the Carriera del Bayle where you'll arrive. The wide channel that leads to the river gives the street the feel of a spring. Climbing to the Carriera Boisset, which you follow to the left to reach the Carriera Sarradel, only takes a moment. Then comes the Camin dal Peyral which you will follow briefly to take the Carriera Estreta to the right. The restored "calades" (cobblestone streets), the Mediterranean plants that grow there, right next to the houses, the old sheepfolds with rustic doors... all invites you to continue your stroll.

At the end of the Carriera Estreta, the 4 Caires lead to the Camin de las leras just above. The word "ieras" means grain threshing floor.



AN INVENTIVE PLAYGROUND

The Camin de las leras overlooks the church. The roof extension is clearly visible. A little further, on an old threshing floor, a staircase descends behind the cemetery. The slope along this "iera" was used in the 1960s by the children as a "ski slope". There was so much chaff (the casing of the grain), which gushed from the thresher, that it covered the slope with a soft, slippery carpet!

LANDSCAPES

Until the beginning of the 20th century, Termes lived on sheep breeding, for wool. Some residents still remember a shepherd or a granny milking their goat in the street...

VITAL SPACES

Not one tree. Pastures and grain fields on terraces. These were the surroundings of Termes in the 19th century before the State created, in 1827, a new forestry code to ensure the renewal of the forest...



NEARBY



THE GORGES DU TERMENET

These dizzying gorges carved in limestone and pink sandstone welcome canyoneers, swimmers and walkers to their extraordinary setting. You can easily access the river, its waterfalls and its pools from the car park located below the castle (paid parking with toilets).



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

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CASTLE OF
TERMES

T O U R G U I D E

