



DESTINATION
Salagou
LE CLERMONTAIS

OFFICE DE TOURISME



Discovering the Clermontois

Mourèze and its Cirque



www.destination-salagou.fr

COMMUNAUTÉ DE COMMUNES  DU CLERMONTAIS

Welcome to the Clermontais, Pays Cœur d'Hérault.

The Communauté de Communes du Clermontais is actively engaged in promoting the heritage which mirrors its historical and cultural identity.

This little guide will help you to discover the natural patrimony and the monuments and buildings of its community members: MOUREZE

Have a good time and see you very soon !

SOME HISTORY

The Cirque de Mourèze with its magnificent and exceptional landscapes was formed 160 million years ago from the deposits of a warm and shallow sea.

Mankind has taken advantage of this ruin-shaped environment at least since the Neolithic times. Moreover, a small settlement was founded there within the natural enclosure, existing since the Metal Ages. Neolithic man found here in this place the means to live and find food. The origins of the present-day village are unknown, but it is around one of the most imposing dolomite columns that it has been reshaped, little by little. Since at least the 10th century, local life has been organized around the ancient fortress. The Roc Castel allowed not only the control of the meridian margins bordering Lodève with those of Béziers, but also an old itinerary connecting the middle basin of the river Hérault with the mountains of the Orb. This old stronghold, which was extended and modified throughout the Middle Ages came under the influence of the lords of Clermont l'Hérault and was abandoned at the start of the modern age.

For the preservation of the site, a parking fee will be requested at the entrance of the car park. We thank you for your cooperation. The municipality of Mourèze declines all responsibility in case of accident in the cirque or in the village of Mourèze.

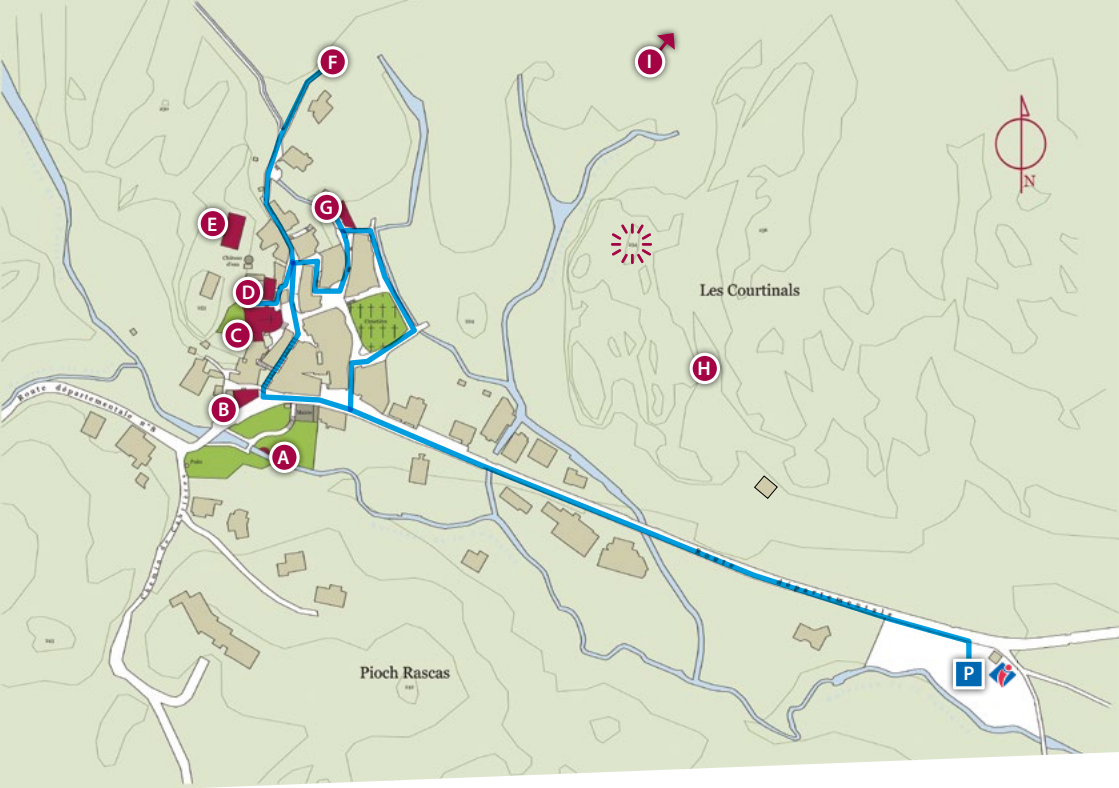
Mourèze, with its village clinging to the foot of the Roc of its castle is one of the most ancient ruin-shaped landscapes to have been signalled in France, along with the dolomite chaos in Montpellier le Vieux, in the Aveyron.

The origin of the name of Mourèze is said to be pre- Indo-European, "murr" meaning "muzzle". In Occitan, "mourre" also means muzzle. In the case of Mourèze, the name refers to a promontory because of its spectacular rocks.

The village, with a population of about 200 inhabitants, covers 3138,24 acres and receives about 100,000 visitors a year.

The Cirque de Mourèze has been a listed site since 1941. In 2003, it was made a classified site and was accepted in the **Operation Grand Site**, along with the lake Salagou, the aim being to protect and develop them.

A blue-marked circuit of 45 mins leaving from the car park will lead you to discover the village heritage.



BUILDINGS AND NATURAL HERITAGE DISCOVERY CIRCUIT

- A** The Fountain
- B** The Altar Table
- C** The Church of Saint Mary
- D** The Presbytery
- E** The Castle
- F** Discovering the Cirque

- G** The Oven
- H** The Courtinals
- I** Mont Liausson

— Trail marked in blue
leaving from the car park

☀ Vantage point

NB : The numbers on the buildings in the village of Mourèze correspond to the booklet :
“These walls that talk to us”.



A THE FOUNTAIN

Here you come to a very pretty square near the Town Hall, with a well and a wheel pump; transformed and engraved with an antique cross bearing the inscription "passant viens" (passers-by are welcome). Not far from it, built in the beginning of the last century, is a fountain in red marble that came from the Pic du Vissou called "a griottes". It was also used as a drinking trough and a communal wash basin.



B THE TABLE ALTAR

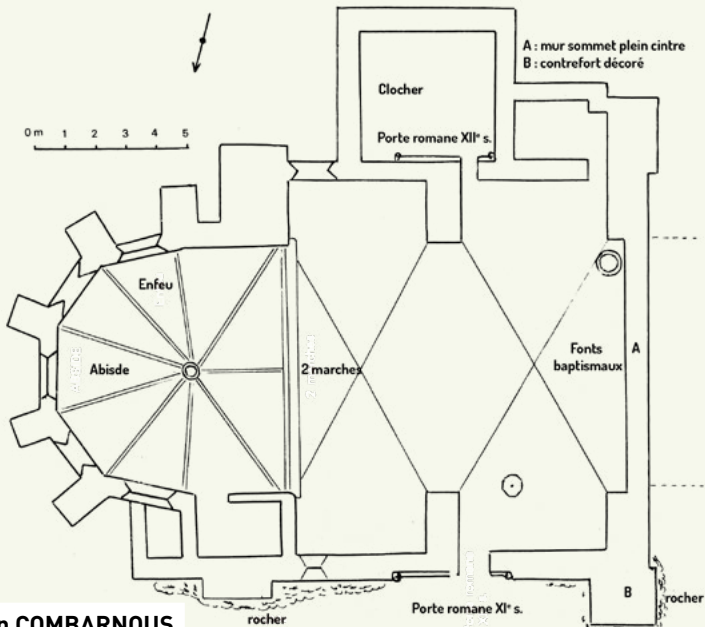
The origins of this marble table altar (6th, 7th centuries) were reused in the facade of this house. It might have come from the ancient church of Saint-Marie-de-Mourèze but also from another church in the area. It nonetheless makes up one of the main symbols of Christian art in the ancient diocese of Lodève. On this piece is a representation of a crown of laurel inside which there is a Chi-Ro emblem, a Christian symbol using the two Greek letters of Alpha and Omega which is the beginning and end of everything, being the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet. On each side of the Chi Ro, there are two groups of 6 doves symbolising the apostles. Between each dove is a tree, probably cypress, symbol of eternal life.

🕒 THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARIE

First mentioned in 990, the origins of this shrine, which at the time is under the control of the bishops of Lodève in 1162, is unknown. The actual building is on an intermediary platform between the castle and the village. In Gothic style, the church of Saint Mary was redesigned several times (13rd, 14th and 15th centuries) which might suggest that it was built on the foundations of an old Roman church as most of the churches in the area were in the 12th century. Its entrance gate, partly obstructed by an interior buttress, is in Roman style, as is the belfry. Fragments of walls from the Roman era have been preserved on its façade to the north, as well as two gates: one giving out to the north of the castrum (protected entrance) and the other opening southwards to the exterior of the village. This door no longer exists. In the 14th century, the choir and the nave were modified in a Gothic style. Access to the church is only through the North gate. At the end of the 16th century, during the Wars of



Religion, the church must have been completely destroyed, and then was restored again in the 17th century. The four angles of the monument are supported with huge buttresses, one of which must be the vestigial remains of a large building predating the church.



Plan by **Gaston COMBARNOUS**

The church faces to the east. It measures 62.2 ft long, of which 36 ft are for the nave and 26.2 ft for the choir; 39.37 ft wide, with 26.24 between the pillars. The construction is in medium-sized stone, similar to the Church of the Dominicans in Clermont l'Hérault. The nave comprises two bays covered with 17th century rib vaults (replacing the 14th century single bay) separated by rectangular pillars, built against but standing above, each of the two doors which they partly obstruct. Between the two pillars were chapels laid out. The northern and southern walls date from the 14th century, but some parts, as well as the two doors, date from the 12th century. The vault and walls were rendered in the 1970s. The seven-sided choir is made up of a pentagonal apse and an area forming a fore-choir. It dates from the 14th century and replaced the 12th century one for unknown reasons. The apse and fore-choir are covered with the same vault. There is a cornerstone leading from which are eight prismatic ribs that fall on a base, of which three represent human or animal heads. A tertiary rib links the choir's cornerstone to the top of the triumphal arch. This cornerstone is dated: it represents the hand of God hiding the handle of a sword, symbol of the cross of Christ. The polygonal side and its imposing buttresses with one or two projections are built on the rock.

The belfry, which resembles a real dungeon, must date from the same era. It probably completed the defence dispositive of the village and the protection of property and people, moreover much greater than what it is today. It comprises three levels and stands south east of the nave.

The church continued up to the rock face on which the castle was built. It had several ancillary chapels situated around the village, the vestiges of which are still visible today. The patron saint of the village is Saint Roch as following an epidemic of plague, the inhabitants of Villeneuve made a vow to walk in procession barefoot to Mourèze on every 16 August, to worship the relic of Saint Roch. This tradition was continued up until the 1970s.

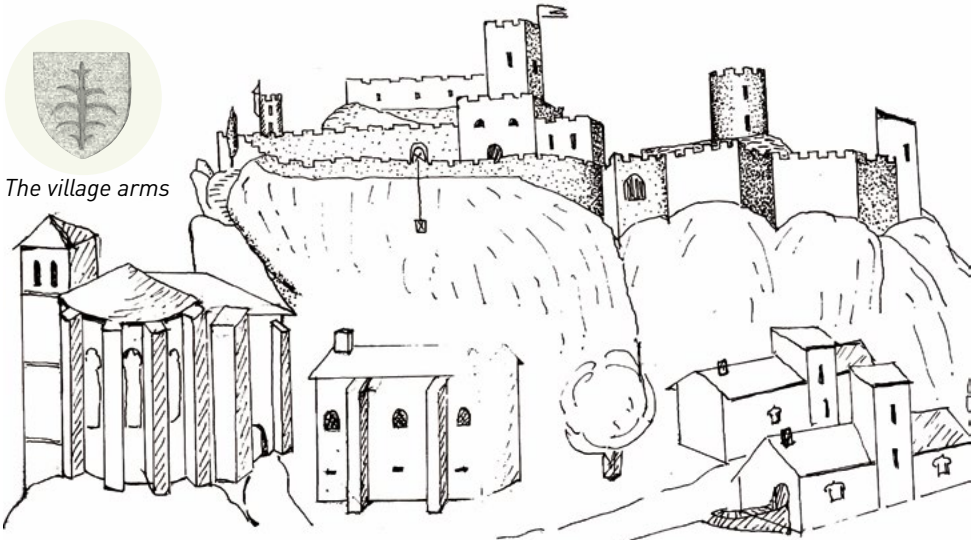


① THE PRESBYTERY

The Presbytery is situated on the same terrace as the church; it probably dates from the first half of the 18th century. A simple house covered with a lean-to roof, it can be distinguished however from the peasant houses of the village by the presence of a garden, already mentioned in the 17th century, and a large bay window with a central transom. It was restored a few years ago by the Communauté de Communes du Clermontais as part of a heritage appreciation programme.



The village arms



Mourèze in the Middle Ages, drawing by **Gaston COMBARNOUS**

E THE CASTLE

The imposing dolomite column where the Castle of Mourèze nestled recalls beautifully how often the search for exceptional sites prevailed when the first forts of the Middle Ages were built: an impregnable height from which men and territory could be watched and controlled. Named the Church of Saint Mary in 990 (Castro Morecino), the “castrum” (fort) of Mourèze belonged to the high aristocracy of the region. It was under the control of three aristocratic entities: the Guilhem of Clermont, the Guilhem of Béziers, and the counts of Lauzières. The most famous person in this family was the marshall of Lauzières de Thémines, the governor of Brittany who under the vigilance of Richelieu led the siege of La Rochelle in 1628. An instrument of power, the castle was under the sphere of domination by the viscounts of Béziers, at least up until the end of the 11th century. It appears that it was then passed on to the opposing power of the Guilhem of Clermont family and the bishops of Lodève. From the 13th century on, it came under the royal authority installed in Cabrières. The castle appears to have been extended and fortified with tall ramparts in the middle of the 14th century following the invasion of Cabrières by the English, which started a period of numerous problems in the

Languedoc. In the event of a siege, the castle was self-sufficient with its many cisterns and granaries. The inhabitants were beneficiaries of this protection. The castle had the reputation of being invincible. During the religious wars, the Duke of Montmorency laid siege to the town of Clermont l'Hérault and took control of its castle in 1584, but he did not manage to take control of the castle of Mourèze in 1587. After the wars, the building was of little interest and started to become progressively abandoned by its lords who preferred the splendour of the royal court over the cold and insalubrious conditions of their castle. Today, there are no visible remains of the original fortress, but pieces of the walls from a later period still bear witness to the stronghold which used to physically and symbolically dominate the village.

Motto : POST FUNERA VIVET

That it survives after death

After the Revolution, all property belonging to the lords and the clergy were sold thus bringing to an end the lordship in Mourèze.

Economy

The village was not very rich. It lived off the surrounding natural environment of woods and rivers which flowed below. The inhabitants produced wood logs and charcoal which they then sold to the people living in the surrounding areas. They also had to take care of their vineyards, the animals, and cultivate the fields. In the 19th century there were all the trades necessary for village life: shoemaker, dressmaker, blacksmith, road mender, teacher and rural guard. There were also shepherds as at this time raising sheep and goats was an important economical activity for the economy of the village. In spite of woods all around Mourèze, there were no loggers to cut the wood, the inhabitants did it themselves. They had to wait till the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century for the arrival of the woodcutters of Italian origin who also produced charcoal built in kilns in the top part of the cirque. The inhabitants had very little income and lived from their crops, which were often insufficient because the soil was not very good. Not enough food was produced within to feed the villagers, it was thus necessary to bring in food from the outside to feed the local population. Vineyards occupied little space and the production was barely enough for the population. The wood brought in sufficient money. The sheep and goats provided milk, cheese and meat and also cleared the cirque of its vegetation! There were also poultry, pigs and olives. And two mills: a wheat mill and a cloth mill on the Dourbie which disappeared before the Revolution. At the start of the last century, the region of Mourèze was well-known for having lots of game, with many rabbits and other small animals. During the war, this abundance of game was beneficial for the villagers.

Anecdote

In the 1920s, written on the corner of one of the walls was: "hotel, follow the line". A wire led straight to the centre of the village and a small inn where guests could eat thrush, woodcock, partridge and hare baked in a wood-fired oven.

The coal makers

The production of charcoal existed in the Salagou valley since at least the 18th century. The only track through the cirque had been traced by the chariots of the Italian charcoal makers, who transported their charcoal on foot from the bottom of the Mont Liausson to the road. Jute bags filled with charcoal were carried down by hand-pulled carts before being placed on boxes to be sold in the town or on site. 5 tons of wood was needed to produce about 1 ton of charcoal. It was an excellent source of fuel as it had no smoke, was lighter than wood, and therefore easier to transport. The charcoal makers continued to work during the war to supply cars that ran on gas. The charcoal makers lived in the village, but remained on site during the combustion process. They built a shelter in the shape of a dome to monitor the process and to protect themselves from the wolves still present in this time. The half-circle shaped kiln was made of logs measuring from 40 to 80 cms long. Once neatly stacked, the logs were covered with earth so as to ensure that the combustion was slow and without flames. A central chimney released the smoke. A complete combustion took from 8 to 10 days.



F DISCOVERING THE CIRQUE

A natural site of exceptional quality constituted from a chaos of ruin-shaped rocks of dolomite limestone. The rock comes from deposits of sediment left by the sea more than 160 million years ago. This phantasmagorical landscape is the work of the erosion that continues relentlessly to carve and sculpt.

Some words about dolomites

The Cirque de Mourèze is constituted of sedimentary deposits of earth from the second era, like the plateau of the Larzac. Dolomites are a mixture of lime and magnesium carbonate. The chemical erosion of water works in a very irregular manner on the carbonates thus producing these particular shapes to be found on the Larzac and the dolomite chaos of Montpellier le Vieux. Torrents of water allowed the softest parts of the rock to erode, exposing the great big blocks of stone underneath which resemble real statues reaching out to the sky. The stone is a little effervescent to acid and more or less crumbly. It comes from large deposits of sediment from the seas in the second era. The dolomite is subject to the erosion of water, the wind, hot and cold : the physiognomy of the cirque evolves every year. Some stones are called “peduncle rocks” because the base is narrower than the summit, like a mushroom.

The “statues” of the cirque

These dolomites have almost certainly been eroded by nature, but certain of the local scholars have suggested that the hand of mankind had something to do with some of the rocks which have shapes that are particularly familiar. Added to which, most of the traces of Neolithic human settlement have been discovered near these sculpted rocks. Among them are the 23 ft-high death skull, the Sphinx, the Fairies, the tamed Lion, the Mushroom, Quasimodo, the Tortoise, the Monkey, the Lovers, the Scorpion, the Bison,



the Mermaid, the Water Diviner ... To be noted is the presence of a system of defence around some of the rocks but their function has not yet been well-defined by the archaeologists. There were "habitation rocks" that prehistoric man used to live in and "totemic" rocks that had a particular signification like being the symbol of life and death with the rocks of maternity, the phallus and the young girl. The symbolism of the woman and procreation was important in this time because life was short, sickness was rife and procreation was vital to perpetuate the race. Allow your imagination to find these stone statues in the cirque or else try to discover others !



G THE OVEN

In the past the oven belonged to the clergy. Over the decades, it was bought-up by several proprietors who continued to bake until the beginning of the 20th century. After several years of being abandoned it was restored a few years ago by the Communauté de Communes du Clermontois as part of a heritage appreciation programme.



H DISCOVERING THE PARC COURTINALS

In the Neolithic times this place was inhabited by prehistoric mankind. Several axes, arrow heads and rare objects were found here. They had water, natural shelter and the means to find food. It was an ideal place to settle in. In ancient times, the shepherds who found polished hatchets imagined that they had fallen from the sky and took them to be gifts from heaven. They made holes in them and wore them round their necks or else used them as clappers for the bells of their flocks. Numerous other vestiges have been found in and around the cirque, like stone figures where human or animal heads can be distinguished. The high walls of the Park Courtinals form natural ramparts. Between the rocks, the streets, the cul-de-sacs, the slopes turned into terraces lead



to walls made into natural towers and ramparts. Above the bridge (at the entrance to the park) is the platform in the shape of a citadel. The aim of the sculpted rocks was defensive, to frighten off the enemy. There were lookouts in several places. The fortifications in this "town" were in fact natural, and men who lived there adapted to it. The Romans had established a garrison so as to keep an eye on the road.

A marked trail that takes 30 mins will allow you to discover the park and give you access to a belvedere that dominates the cirque and the village.

The municipality of Mourèze declines all responsibility in case of accident in the Cirque or in the village of Mourèze.

DISCOVERING THE FAUNA AND THE FLORA

The Salagou Valley and the Cirque de Mourèze are classified sites of the Natura "2000", a network which is a collection of natural land and marine sites identified for the rarity or fragility of wild life, animals or plants, and their habitats. Natura "2000" reconciles the protection of nature and socio-economic preoccupations.

The mosaic of landscapes has a great diversity of habitats which are home to a large number of plant and animal species of which there are 21 bird species protected in Europe: the Eurasian Eagle Owl, the Bonelli's Eagle, the common Kestrel, the Ortolan Bunting, the Dartford warbler ... Also to be found are other more common animal species such as the Ocellated lizard, the Montpellier snake, the Mediterranean tree frog, the small duke owl scops, the hoopoe etc.



This natural area is characteristic of very dry environments. The ground, almost bare of vegetation, is in direct contact with the sun and the light, which help generate all the richness of the Mediterranean biodiversity. Today, with the abandonment of agriculture and the multiplication of Aleppo pines, these typical environments, with their specific emblematic Grand Site features, are closing down, being covered with scrub and vegetation, and becoming ordinary. Some plant species to observe are: The Pubescent oaks, Green and Kermes, the Montpellier maple, the hackberry, the arbutus, the Laurustinus, the boxwood, the cypress, the juniper, the thistle, the thyme and the rosemary.

It is also possible to get a glimpse of the Spanish genet with its beautiful fragrant yellow flowers. In the past, this plant was used to weave a very solid cloth out of which were made sheets, dishcloths, and tablecloths.

In the middle of the last century, at the end of the pastoral period, nature regained its control over the cirque which went from a pre-war lunar landscape to a Mediterranean



garrigue landscape. A great many plant and animal species, some of them rare and protected, live in the cirque and its surroundings. In a countryside that is practically deserted, small woods of green and kermes oak, invasive maritime pines and a multiple of landscapes with thousands of fragrances are there to be discovered during sunny walks in the Cirque or in the shade of the slopes of the Mont Liausson.

It is forbidden to collect or cut plants from the site.



① DISCOVERING THE PIC SAINT JEAN (MONT LIAUSSON)

Mont Liausson and the Hermitage

The Pic Saint Jean (Mont Liausson) peaks at 1640 ft and makes a barrier between the dolomite of the Cirque de Mourèze and the red ruffe of the Salagou valley. At its base it measures 2624 ft in diameter. At its summit to discover is a very beautiful view over the lake Salagou and the Cirque. You will also find the vestiges of a hermitage there. Here is the story.

The first hermit to be mentioned in the texts from 1183 was called Enjalbert. He lived in caves, numerous on this mountain. In 1232, Pons du Bosc and Pierre Gontier started to build the hermitage. In about 1254, two new monks joined the two original founders. The hermitage in that time is passed over into the hands of the Knights of Saint Jean de Jerusalem de Nèbian, after being placed under the protection of the Bishop of Lodève. At the same time living there were four hermits, three priests and a layman called Ponce Gazel. The latter was an inhabitant of the village

unhappy with the life he was leading. He had decided to withdraw from the world and to live as a hermit. He settled into a cave in order to live in harmony with God. He wanted to be forgotten, but his bravery made him famous throughout the land. People travelled to see him, others wanted to become his disciples and live just like him. This became the beginning of a religious community removed from the world. At the summit of the mountain, they built a small monastery, with its own church and monastic rules. Around the church, small houses were built for the faithful. For a long time, this hermitage served as a place of retreat and prayer. This lasted a while but the community became scattered for various reasons and only the hermits remained. The chapel was used only as a station for the faithful during the processions up the hill to pray for rain or to stop sickness. The hermitage was named Saint John, not only after the Order of the Knights of Saint Jean of Nèbian, but also because the oratory was dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist. In 1650, the church was written as being destroyed and was only used as a resting place during the processions on Saint John's Eve and Whitsun. A fresco dating from the 14th century was visible on

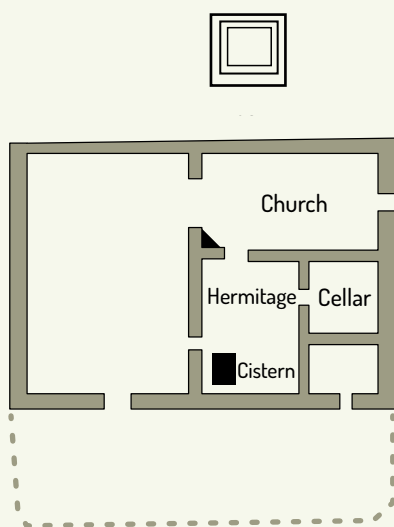
one of the walls of the chapel which collapsed in the 1920s, thus causing the fresco to disappear.

The church is mentioned in the 13th century. Oriented east-west with a single nave, it is said to have measured 39.4 ft by 19.7 ft, and had light coming through two small windows. It had a refectory, a dormitory and a small courtyard with a basin. In one corner, there was a small cistern for collecting rainwater. A garden, sheltering for animals and a small cemetery were also part of the hermitage. Next to the chapel was the hermits' accommodation, with a cistern and a cellar for food. Outside, were a small basin and a garden. The hermitage was fenced off because in this time there were still wolves in the area.

Anecdotes

At the end of the last century there lived a hermit. Being old, he was afraid to sleep in the hermitage which was threatening to collapse. Every evening, he walked down to the village to sleep in someone's house and the morning after he got up and left. When leaving his hosts, he always said: "One day I will pay you back". Too old to continue living at the hermitage, he retired to the monastery in Saint Guilhem. One day, his old hosts received a letter from him but it was insufficiently stamped, they weren't able to pay the difference and the letter was returned, and never came back. The mystery of the letter and the promised reward flew away.

The parish registries have recorded numerous marriages between the inhabitants of Mourèze and Liausson. This has been explained by the fact that the two villages are so close thanks to the Mont Liausson where couples liked to meet.



Echelle 10 mètres

Plan of the Hermitage
of Saint Jean du Mont Liausson
Archives **Gaston Combarrous**

DISCOVER MOUREZE DIFFERENTLY

■ The Rando cards « **Le parc des Courtinals** » and « **Le cirque de Mourèze** », are 2 hiking itineraries labelled FFRandonnée34, to use when discovering history, patrimony and local produce.

Le parc des Courtinals

Duration : 1hr

Distance : 1,2 miles

Level of difficulty : easy to average

Le cirque de Mourèze

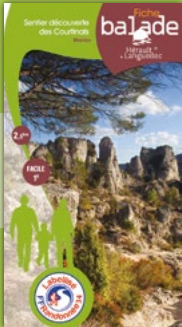
Duration : 3hrs

Distance : 4,9 miles

Level of difficulty : average to difficult

Available in the Tourist Offices of the Clermontais or download from internet site :

www.clermontais-tourisme.fr



■ The booklet « **These walls that talk to us** », takes an unprecedented stroll into geological times so as to understand more about the rocks used to build and decorate the habitations, squares and monuments. Making the walls talk is walking in the Clermontais villages while observing the old facades, roads and narrow footpaths, the cul-de-sacs, the way the doors and windows are framed and the engraved porches. It means becoming aware of how useful rocks have been to mankind in the construction of buildings that shelter, protect and house.

On sale in all the Tourist Offices in the Clermontais:

le Clermontais
Office de tourisme

CES MURS
QU'ILS NOUS PARLENT

Mourèze

Promenade géologique dans les 21 villages du Clermontais
12 arrêts - durée : 40 min



Bienvenue à Mourèze

Dans ce défilé de ruis, on se régale tant les roches sont variées ! Le fleur à joint et les joints sont de différents matériaux de Vosges est bien à main il faut quand même ouvrir l'œil ! Un conseil, frottez votre balade par le 1712.

Alors ouvrez grands les yeux, partez sur les traces de l'histoire du bâti, laissez parler les roches, écoutez-les, elles ont beaucoup à raconter !

Bonne balade !

COMPLAISSE DE COMMERCE / DU CLERMONTAIS

 Sentier Fleur de
Garonne / Vosges
04 67 64 68 85

 Musée de
Mourèze
04 67 96 23 86

 Association Promotion Nature
des Hauts-Clermont
La Laiterie - 38000 MOUTIERES
www@cc-clermontais.fr - 04 67 96 23 86

■ « **Mourèze et son cirque, toute une histoire** »

A guided tour to discover the village and its monuments, from the parc des Courtinals with its panoramic view over the cirque.

Duration : about 2hrs to 2hrs 30 mins

Level of difficulty : easy

Be prepared with walking shoes and drinking water

Infos and reservations **04 67 96 23 86**

or tourisme@cc-clermontais.fr

■ **Conducted guided tours are available with a Clermont Tourist guide** to explore the richness of the natural and architectural Clermontais patrimony and to take a plunge into the history of place that is full of character.

Infos and reservations **04 67 96 23 86**

or tourisme@cc-clermontais.fr

ALSO TO SEE IN THE SURROUNDING AREA

Villeneuve, the workers' city
The lake Salagou
Clermont l'Hérault



Offices de
Tourisme
de France



OFFICES DE TOURISME

Office de Tourisme du Clermontais

Place Jean Jaurès
34800 CLERMONT L'HÉRAULT
Tél. +33 (0)4 67 96 23 86

www.clermontais-tourisme.fr

OfficeTourismeClermontais

ot_clermontais

destinationsalagou - # clermontaissalagou

tourisme@cc-clermontais.fr

www.destination-salagou.fr



Seasonal Offices

At Mourèze and portable phone access
at Cabrières, Fontès, Paulhan
and Centre aquatique du Clermontais

INFORMATIONS

Communauté de communes du Clermontais

Espace Marcel VIDAL
20 av. Raymond Lacombe - BP 40
34800 CLERMONT L'HÉRAULT
Tél. +33 (0)4 67 88 95 50
accueil@cc-clermontais.fr
www.cc-clermontais.fr



Mairie de Mourèze

Route de Clermont
34800 MOURÈZE
Tél. +33 (0)4 67 96 08 47

Textes Laurent Schneider, CNRS - OT du Clermontais **Traduction** Carol Ann Highfield

Crédits photos CCC - OT du Clermontais - Philippe Martin - Virgile Cazes

Impression : JF Impression **Conception** : CCC

Remerciements Mme et M. Navas - Philippe Martin - le Syndicat Mixte du Grand Site Salagou - Cirque de Mourèze

