

## In 2026, the Hérault department, together with the Terres d'Hérault Geopark, was awarded the prestigious UNESCO Global Geoparks designation.

With this designation, UNESCO recognises the Hérault for the richness and uniqueness of its geology.

It also commends the commitment of an entire community: residents, scientists, tourism professionals, associations, craftspeople, winegrower... Together, they have driven this collective endeavour. Together, they embody the strength and richness of our Geopark. 2,046 km<sup>2</sup> of landscapes and nearly 60 geosites to explore: geological sites, cultural and natural areas of striking diversity. An open book on 540 million years of our planet's history, which can be read through the limestone plateaus and peaks, the gorges and cirques, the volcanoes, the plains, the mountain ranges and the caves. Fancy exploring with the family, hiking in the great outdoors, learning whilst admiring the scenery, or unravelling the secrets and mysteries of geology? The treasures of the Terres d'Hérault Geopark are just waiting for you.

**KLÉBER MESQUIDA**,  
President of the Hérault Department

## A wealth of experience to enjoy!

The UNESCO Global Label confirms it: Hérault's geology is truly exceptional.

540 million years of unbroken history, reflected in a spectacular variety of rocks (pelite, basalt, limestone, granite, gneiss, schist and sandstone) and a range of landscapes and landforms that is unrivalled. Why not discover or rediscover the Hérault through its geology?

Here are our top picks to guide your adventures.

## The Liède Slab: 270-million-year-old traces of land vertebrates

Fossilised footprints of four animal species: The Liède Slab is a palaeontological site that is unique in the world!

The tracks discovered tell the story of these fascinating creatures: Brontopos, massive herbivores looking like land-based turtles, and therapsids, vertebrates from which some lineages evolved into mammals. Long before the dinosaurs, they roamed a vast floodplain dotted with lakes, forming temporary oases where the animals gathered. These footprints are preserved in "red pelites", typical rocks of the Salagou basin. This soil is formed by the erosion of the ancient Hercynian mountain system, at a time when the climate fluctuated between arid and wet periods.



## Aniane Abbey and the Hérault Gorges

The Benedictine abbey was founded in 782 by Saint Benoît d'Aniane.

During the Wars of Religion, it was largely destroyed. In 1633, it was placed under the jurisdiction of the Congregation of Saint-Maur, which undertook a lengthy reconstruction project for the monastery, finished during the French Revolution. Having become national property, the abbey housed a spinning mill, which was subsequently sold to the State to establish a central detention centre there in 1845. Aniane Abbey remains a rare example of a fully preserved monastic complex in the Languedoc region.



In 1885, the central detention centre became an "industrial colony for young prisoners". By 1945, it had become a state-run correctional facility. It accommodated up to 200 children and teenagers, teaching them various industrial trades. It was abandoned in 1994.

## Saint-Michel-de-Mourcaïrol

Towering over a rocky outcrop at an altitude of 468 metres, Saint-Michel de Mourcaïrol, in the commune of Les Aires, is a testimony to a remarkable heritage.

Inhabited since Gallo-Roman times, it is said to have been home to a temple dedicated to Mercury, from whom it is believed to have taken its name. From the 9th century onwards, a castrum was established on top of the rocky outcrop to control the ancient Roman road linking Béziers to Cahors.

The castle was listed as a Historic Monument in 2014. It is one of the largest and oldest medieval fortresses of ancient origin. It covered an area of 4 hectares and was home to a village of knights and servants, defended by three walls built between the 9th and 13th centuries. The original dungeon has been replaced by the calvary near the chapel, where the information board offers a breathtaking view of the valley. In the surrounding area, you can see the remains of old mines, a reminder of the past extraction of lead and silver.



**TO KNOW**  
The Friends of Saint-Michel Association helps to preserve the site and offers guided tours to explore its history.

## LET'S TALK SCIENCE

In order to preserve the site, Jean-David Moreau, a world-renowned specialist in fossil footprints, has carried out very high-resolution photogrammetric surveys. This data is currently being processed at the Paris-Saclay University laboratory in order to create a complete 3D model of the slab.

A HIKE ACROSS THE CAYROUX PLATEAU WITH GEOMEDIATOR PHILLIPE MARZA



A trail through the narrow streets of Le Puech, the capitelles on the Cayroux plateau, and a chance to discover the views over the Lodévois basin. The Cayroux basalt plateau is representative of the volcanic period in the Hérault region between 1.1 and 2.2 million years ago and bears the traces of these ancient volcanoes. The Permian Lodève basin offers landscapes of a reddish hue, characteristic of the red pelite ("Ruffe").

Hiking itinerary

## DID YOU KNOW?

Several uprisings have marked the history of this "children's penal colony", notably in 1898 and 1938. The novelist Marie Rouanet recounts them in her book "Les Enfants du bagne".

JOIN GEOMEDIATORS MANON NEBOUT AND SABINE LETEINTURIER, ON THE FENESTRETTE GEO-HIKE



At the heart of the Infernet cirque, a rocky setting of vertiginous limestone and dolomite cliffs, winds the cobbled path of Fenestrettes. These masonry corbelled structures were built in the 18th century to allow mule drivers to pass through and reach the access routes in the mountains of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert and on the Larzac plateau.

Hiking itinerary

Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert Tourist Office  
- Hérault Valley  
[www.saintguilhem-valleeherault.fr](http://www.saintguilhem-valleeherault.fr)

A WALK THROUGH SAINT-MICHEL-DE-MOURCAIROL WITH ÉTIENNE DUMONT, HERITAGE GUIDE AND PRESIDENT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE UPPER COUNTIES OF HERAULT

A beautiful forest trail combining historical remains and panoramic views. From Les Aires, the trail winds its way through dense woodland, crossing the Ramas Pass and the Balque Pass. One of the highlights of this walk is the Saint-Michel-de-Mourcaïrol chapel, overlooking the castle ruins. The route also leads to the Coquillade Peak, a stunning natural viewpoint.

Hiking itinerary

Grand Orb Tourist Office  
[www.tourisme.grandorb.fr](http://www.tourisme.grandorb.fr)

## Extend the experience with the history of the Earth at the Lodève Museum



Through its permanent exhibition, "Tell Me About Life on Earth", it is one of the few museums in France to cover 540 million years of Earth's history using only local fossils. Each room immerses you in a geological period (Carboniferous, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Miocene...) with its landscapes, animals and plants. Enjoy the outstanding temporary exhibitions and admire the works of the great sculptor Paul Dardé.

[www.museedelodeve.fr/](http://www.museedelodeve.fr/)

**Visit to the Liède slab site**  
To ensure the long-term preservation of this site, access to it and visitor guidance are regulated. Please contact the Tourist Office.

Destination Salagou Tourist Office  
[www.destination-salagou.fr/](http://www.destination-salagou.fr/)



## TO SEE



- The Devil's Bridge and Gellone Abbey, monuments listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites as part of the Camino de Santiago.
- Argileum, The Pottery House
- The Grand Site visitor centre and its wine cellar

## EXTEND THE EXPERIENCE WITH A SKY TOUR AT THE ANIANE OBSERVATORY



The Astronomical Observatory welcomes you to its domes to contemplate the wonders of the universe with the Ciel et Astres association. You can also spend the night in one of the Astronomical's domes.

## The Cross of Mounis and the Orques Cliffs

With a height of 200 metres, the Orque cliffs form one of the most imposing limestone walls in the Geopark, to the north of the Caroux and Espinouse massifs.

From the Cross of Mounis viewpoint, the eye takes in these immense rock faces, where stones dating back more than 500 million years are piled high. These Cambrian limestones testify to the presence of a warm, shallow sea that once covered what would become our Hérault region. Deeply cut by ravines, the cliffs descend to the Mare valley, offering a remarkable geological cross-section through several successive layers.



Along the valley's axis, towards the east, lies the Carboniferous basin of Graissessac, a former mining centre in the Hérault region, theremains of which can be visited.

THE CLIMB UP TO SAINT-EUTROPE CHAPEL WITH GEOMEDIATORS CAROLINE LEJEUNE AND RONAN JAHENY

At the start of the trail, discover the Nougayrol mill, built in the 18th century. A hiking trail takes you along the northern flank of the Espinouse forest massif to the Saint-Eutrope chapel, nestled amongst the rocks. The trail crosses gneiss formations in which you can see feldspar crystals that resemble eyes (eyed gneiss).

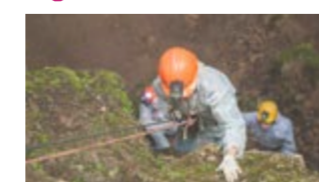


According to tradition, in the early Christian era the building served as a refuge for a famous hermit, whose name became associated with the sanctuary. The chapel stands on a rocky outcrop not far from the Camino de Santiago. The path leading up to it is quite steep; though short in distance, it comprises over 300 steps.

## DID YOU KNOW?

A pair of golden eagles has chosen this cliff-top site (located within a Natura 2000 area) to build their nest. You can also spot mouflon, the Caroux's iconic mammal.

## TO DISCOVER



There are several caves to explore in this area. Embark on an adventure with the Hérault Departmental Caving Committee.

Destination Languedoc Tourist Office  
[www.destinationhautlanguedoc.fr](http://www.destinationhautlanguedoc.fr)  
Grand Orb Tourist Office  
[www.tourisme.grandorb.fr](http://www.tourisme.grandorb.fr)

## Cirque at the edge of the World

On the southern edge of the Larzac plateau, the Cirque at the Edge of the World stands against a 350-metre-high cliff overlooking the hamlet of Gourgas.

This unusual landscape, with its ring of limestone cliffs, pale grey scree slopes and windsweptholm oaks, evokes a kind of enclosure around the world.

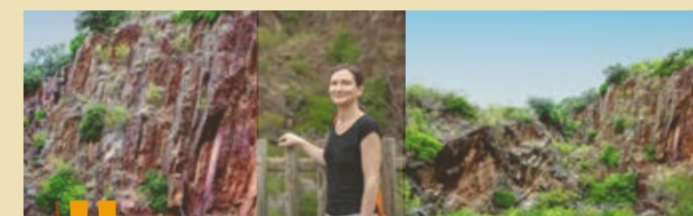


In Saint-Étienne-de-Gourgas, the landscape seems to open up like a natural amphitheatre. Here, water, rock and time have been interacting for millions of years.

Strong travertine formations (calcareous sedimentary rocks) have built up, formed by groundwater rich in calcium carbonate. Rising from the depths, sometimes enriched with CO<sub>2</sub>, this water gushes forth, releases its gases, and slowly deposits the calcite that will form the travertine... It is a landscape under construction, shaped by karst dissolution and calcite precipitation, a natural open-air laboratory.

## The Coumiac quarry, where geological time is measured

VISIT THE GEOSITE WITH GEOMEDIATORS BÉRANGÈRE BORDEZ AND DOMINIQUE SAILLARD



A mass extinction 372 million years ago, Coumiac saw one of the most spectacular events in Earth's history unfold: a massive crisis that wiped out nearly 75% of all living species.

A unique place in the world Coumiac is what is known as a "global stratotype": the official site, recognised by the international scientific community, where the boundary between two geological stages—the Frasnian and the Famennian—can be observed. The dark layer known as "Kellwasser", extraordinarily rich in fossils, bears witness to this: goniatites, trilobites, bivalves, conodonts... a flourishing world just before the collapse.



## The thermal springs of Avène

Avène thermal spring water originates from rainwater that seeps into Cambrian dolomite outcrops formed 530 million years ago.

These rocks form a vast natural reservoir surrounded by shale and sandstone: called an impluvium. The water seeps underground and becomes enriched with silica, calcium and magnesium. It then stops seeping at a depth of around 1,700 metres, where it reaches a temperature of nearly 70 °C. This long underground journey (lasting between 50 and 250 years) allows the water to gradually become enriched with trace elements (zinc, strontium). The water emerges at the Sainte-Odile Spring, on the banks of the Orb, before being collected to supply the Thermal Centre and the Avène production facility.

Known and used since 1873, this water is mainly used in thermal medicine, dermatology and for treating the oral mucosa.



## DID YOU KNOW?

It was in this place of primordial chaos that Saint Guilhem felt such a profound emotion that he chose to abandon his calling as a warrior and devote himself to prayer for the rest of his life. According to legend, he hidden his trusty sword, "La Joyeuse", in this setting.

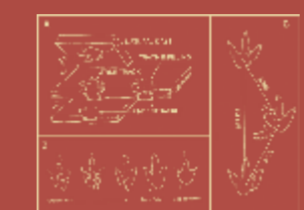
## TO DISCOVER



- The Peppers Farm at the End of the World with Gwladys Marhic
- Le café du pont, a local association dedicated to sharing, exchanging and promoting local and cultural activities

- The Bousquet House, a family-run farm (olive trees, vines and fruit trees) set in an exceptional terroir

GRÉZAC PLATEAU GEO-HIKE



Hiking itinerary

A well-maintained footpath starting from Lodève leads you up to the limestone-dolomite Grézac plateau. Here you can see numerous dry-stone structures, evidence of traditional building skills adapted to the local geology, as well as dinosaur footprints preserved in the rocks.

The famous "golden spike" embedded in the rock To mark this major transition in the history of the Earth, scientists have embedded a "Golden Spike" (which isn't actually made of gold) in the rock. Standing in front of it is like touching an event that took place 372 million years ago. At Coumiac, the rock bears the mark of the shift between two geological eras."

## DID YOU KNOW?

Exploited from the 4th century onwards for its ornamental marble, the Coumiac quarry supplied a highly valued stone right up until the industrial era, before closing in 1965. Its marble found its way into prestigious monuments such as the White House in Washington.

## TO DISCOVER

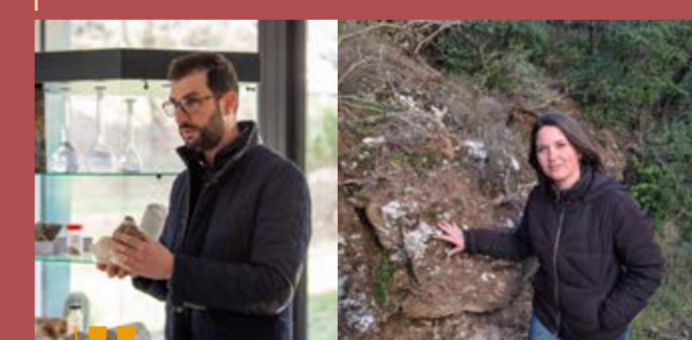


- The Viranel Estate in the Saint-Chinian AOP Sustainable viticulture on a family estate passed down through the generations.

Tourist Office: From the Midi Canal to Saint-Chinian  
[www.tourismecanaldumidi.fr](http://www.tourismecanaldumidi.fr)

Les Avants-Monts Tourist Office  
<https://tourisme-avant-monts.fr>

VISIT THE GEOSITE WITH GEOMEDIATORS ALEXANDRE DECAMP AND HÉLÈNE LEMAIRE



Ready for a heritage trail around the springs and the catchment area? The "impluvium", covering an area of 30 km<sup>2</sup> and located between the Hérault and Aveyron departments, is the area from which part of the rainfall replenishes the Avène thermal reservoir. The initiatives carried out in 2023 have helped to preserve this precious environment. The Association to Preserve the Impluvium of the Avène Waters (API'A) was established in 2021, bringing together all the local stakeholders involved. Its mission is to facilitate communication between all stakeholders, to enhance knowledge regarding biodiversity and water distribution (drinking water, thermal water and surface water), and to protect the area from the risks of fire and pollution."

Grand Orb Tourist Office  
[www.tourisme.grandorb.fr](http://www.tourisme.grandorb.fr)



You can also choose to take the PR trail that runs around the cirque. A truly unique hike!

Lodévois and Larzac Tourist Office  
[www.tourisme-lodevois-larzac.fr](http://www.tourisme-lodevois-larzac.fr)

## The Héric canyon, see the heart of the mountains

At the Héric canyon, the mountain reveals itself from the inside.

The water has carved its way through the rock to a depth of 800 metres, offering a spectacular glimpse into the Earth's history.

THE HÉRIC AND COLOMBIÈRES CANYONS WITH GEOMEDIATORS OLIVIER RAYNAL, JEAN GRESELE AND MURIELLE DAMBREVILLE RUDEAU



As you follow the path that runs along the bottom of the gorges, alongside the Héric and then the Vivalais rivers, every step reveals some of the area's oldest rocks: over 300 million years of geological history right at eye level. Gneiss, micascists and migmatites tell the story of a buried past: that of a continental crust pushed to extreme depths, subjected to colossal heat and pressure during the formation of the Hercynian mountain range. Some rocks even came close to partial melting, giving rise to migmatites with mixed dark and light hues. Veins of quartz and feldspar, folds and foliations form a natural work of art, where the stone retains the memories of the depths and the fire."

COLOMBIÈRES CANYON GEO-HIKE



In Colombières-sur-Orb, within the Haut-Languedoc Natural Regional Park, the geo-hike explores breathtaking scenery. There are numerous walks to explore the Caroux, the most famous of which is the 13-kilometre PR des Gorges de Colombières, with an elevation gain of 818 metres.

Hiking itinerary

## TO KNOW

Fancy a hike in the Caroux? "Bon Pied Bon œil" can guide you: tailored routes, themed trails (for children, heritage, animal tracks, walking in streams) and even a unique camping experience!

Minervois-Caroux Tourist Office  
[www.minervois-caroux.com](http://www.minervois-caroux.com)

## TO DISCOVER

Coste d'Orb Farm Guilhem Raynaud grows Tarassac onions on his farm in Coste d'Orb. He has chosen to continue developing his farm, which has been in the family for several decades. His ambition is for the Tarassac onion to be representative of its region, the Upper Orb Valley, and of a commitment to quality.



Ways to enjoy Tarassac onions Raw in a salad with Pélardon cheese, in an onion and Roquefort tatin tart, in soup, as fritters, or simply golden-fried in a pan to accompany meat.



geoparc.herault.fr

THE MAP COLLECTION

Your geo-hikes and all your leisure projects are on: [herault-tourisme.fr](http://herault-tourisme.fr)

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and subscribe to the Terres d'Hérault newsletter!

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THE HÉRAULT, A LAND OF EXCEPTIONAL LABELS  
The Hérault is the leading department in France in terms of number of sites designated "Grands Sites de France", a testament to its exceptional natural heritage.

4 "GRANDS SITES DE FRANCE" ARE LISTED HERE:

- Hérault Canyon – Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert
- Salagou-Mourvèze cirque
- Navacelles cirque
- Minerve Town – The Cesse and Brian Canyons

1 GRAND SITE IS CURRENTLY UNDERGOING THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS: Midi-Béziers Canal

The national "Grand Site de France" label aims to preserve sites that attract large numbers of tourists, while allowing visitors to explore them with minimal environmental impact.

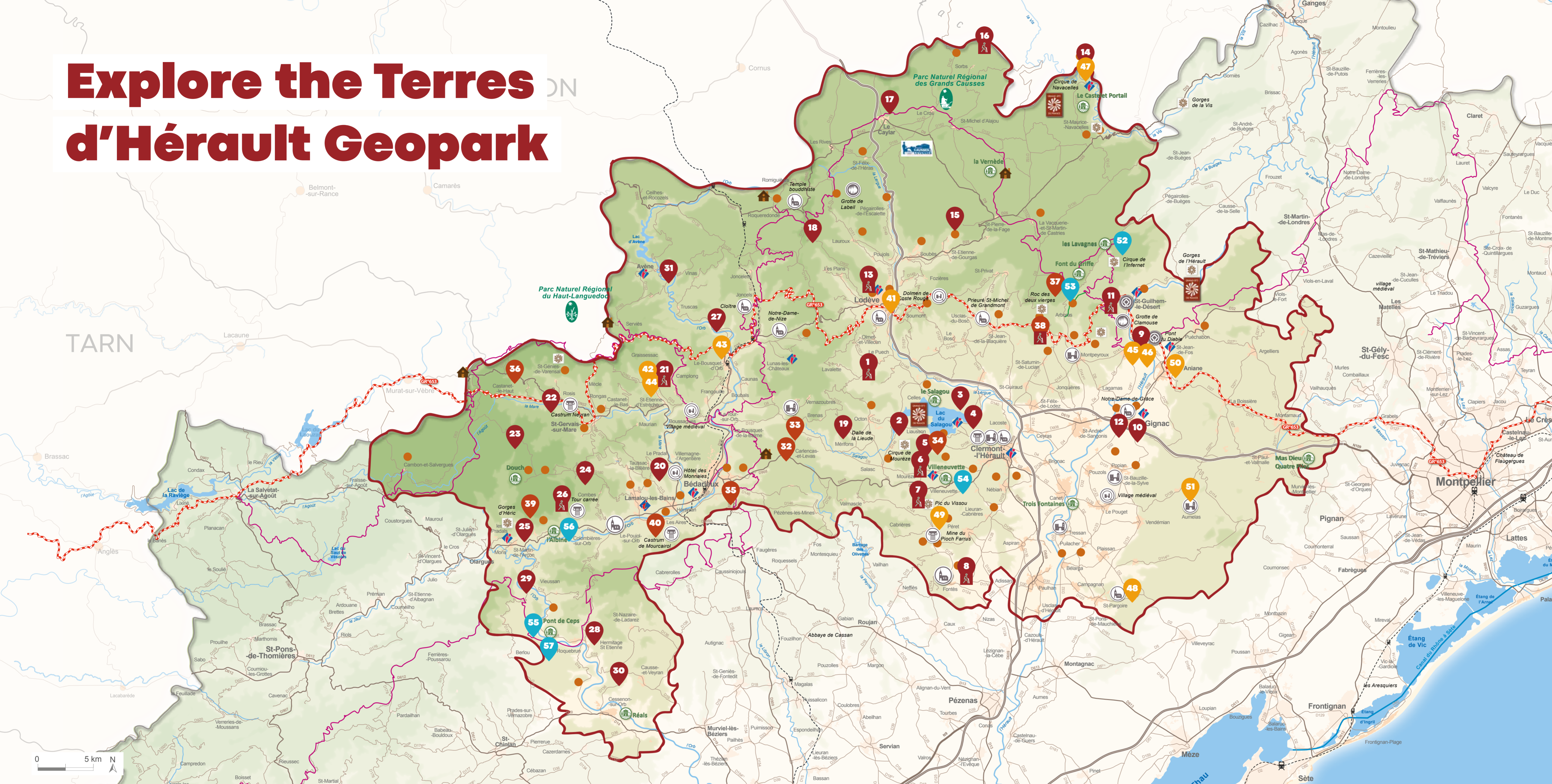
THE HÉRAULT REGION ON UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE LIST

- The Causses and Cévennes: a unique testimony to Mediterranean agro-pastoral culture and its traditional skills
- The Camino to Santiago in France, for hikers and history lovers
- The Midi Canal

THE HÉRAULT ALSO BOASTS TWO REGIONAL NATURE PARKS (PNR)

- the Haut-Languedoc PNR
- Great Causses PNR

# Explore the Terres d'Hérault Geopark



## Geological geosites and geo-hikes

- 1 Cayroux basalt plateau
- 2 Neck and dyke of "La Roque"
- 3 Auvergne basalt plateau
- 4 Germane basalt plateau
- 5 Liassson Mount
- 6 Mouréze Cirque
- 7 Pic de Visvou
- 8 Céressou
- 9 Devil's bridge
- 10 Gignac Way of the Cross
- 11 Infernet Cirque
- 12 Gravières pilot site
- 13 Grezac plateau
- 14 Navacelles Cirque
- 15 Gourgas «Cirque at the Edge of the World»
- 16 Sotchs of Sorbs
- 17 Caylar rocks
- 18 Perthus pass
- 19 The Lieude Slab
- 20 "Organs pipes" of Tauszac
- 21 Padène cliff
- 22 Chapel of Notre-Dame-de-Saint-Eutrope
- 23 Ourtigas pass
- 24 Forest of fighting writers
- 25 The Héric canyon
- 26 The Colombières canyon
- 27 Granite du Mendic
- 28 Montpeyroux nappe in Roquebrun
- 29 Montpeyroux nappe in Vieussan
- 30 Coumiac red marble quarry
- 31 Avène thermal springs

## Belvedere geosites and geo-hikes

- 32 Carlenças et Levas viewpoint
- 33 Merquièrre pass viewpoint
- 34 Liassson viewpoint
- 35 Tantaço Peak
- 36 Cross of Mounis pass viewpoint
- 37 Saint-Baudille mount viewpoint
- 38 Virgin' Rock viewpoint
- 39 Caroux viewpoint
- 40 Saint-Michel de Mourcaïrol

## Cultural geosites

- 41 Lodève Museum
- 42 Simon Mine
- 43 Mine Lights museum
- 44 Graissessac in the past museum
- 45 Argileum: Pottery House
- 46 Devil's Bridge Grand Site visitor centre
- 47 Auriol Balm Grand Site visitor centre
- 48 Saint-Pargoire parish church
- 49 Estebel exhibition gallery
- 50 Aniane Abbey
- 51 Aumelas Castel

## Biodiversity geosites - Sensitive natural areas

- 52 Lavagnes
- 53 Font du Griffé
- 54 Villeneuvevette
- 55 Cep Bridge
- 56 Albine
- 57 Roquebrun Mediterranean garden

## Other hikes

- Circuits PR (walking and hiking)
- Passa Meridia
- GR 653 - The Way of Saint James from Arles

## Services

- Departmental domains
- Departmental stopovers
- Tourist offices
- Information places
- Railway stations

## Heritage

- Unesco Heritage
- Religious monument
- Listed site
- Grand Site of France
- Castle
- Cave
- Heritage curiosity
- Archaeological site

## Eco-commitment

Preserving our Earth, our duty today and tomorrow. Geology tells us the shared story of the Earth and humanity. It commits us to protecting and enhancing our precious natural spaces. The Terres d'Hérault Geopark aims to be a place for sharing knowledge and educating people about these heritage and environmental issues. An approach in association with the world of research and education, in particular with "geo-mediators" in the field. Whether you're a school pupil, a family, a local Hérault resident or a tourist, discover the region and its natural treasures in a whole new way!

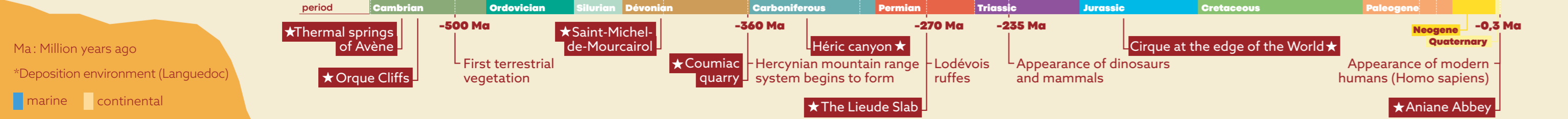
- To ensure the preservation of the Geopark and its natural areas**
- Never pick up fossils or try to move them
  - Avoid nocturnal activity
  - Respect the silence of nature

## Why?

Stones and minerals such as fossils are rare natural materials and are particularly fragile

Wildlife feeds and lives in calm

## THE STORY OF HALF A BILLION YEARS OF PLANETARY EVOLUTION



36 SAINT-EUTROPE CHAPEL 36 ORQUES CLIFFS 26 COLOMBIÈRES CANYON 39 CAROUX VIEWPOINT