

In 2026, the Hérault department, with the Terres d'Hérault Geopark, was awarded by 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 embody the strength and richness of our Geopark. 2,046 km² 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 limestone plateaus and peaks, canyons and cirques, volcanoes, plains, mountain ranges and 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 Lieude Slab: 270-million-year-old traces of land vertebrates

Fossilised footprints of four animal species: The Lieude Slab is a palaeontological site like no other in the world!

The tracks discovered tell the story of these fascinating creatures: Brontopos, massive herbivores looking like land-based battleships, 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 Canyon

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.

DID YOU KNOW? Several uprisings have marked the history of this "children's penal colony". The novelist Marie Rouanet recounts them in her book "Les Enfants du bague".

JOIN GEOMEDIATORS MANON NEBOUT AND SABINE LETEINTURIER, ON THE FENESTRETES 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-valleesherault.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 Astronomium'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.

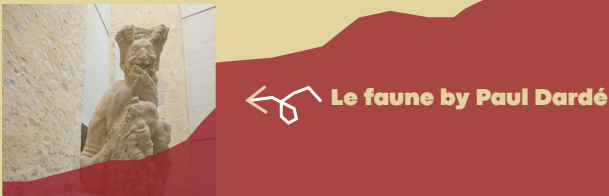
DID YOU KNOW? A pair of golden eagles has chosen this cliff-top site (located within a Natura 2000 area) to build their nest. You can also spot mouflon, the Caroux's iconic mammal.

TO DISCOVER



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

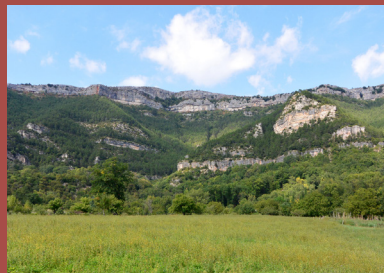
Destination Languedoc Tourist Office www.destinationhautlanguedoc.fr Grand Orb Tourist Office www.tourisme.grandorb.fr



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 windswept holm 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 CO₂, 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.



Goniatite

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.

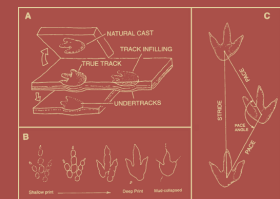
TO DISCOVER



The Peppers Farm at the End of the World with Gwladys Marhic • The Bridge, 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



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.

Hiking itinerary

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.tourismecanalumidi.fr

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

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 medical medicine, dermatology and for treating the oral mucosa.



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 50 km² 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 (APIA) 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

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

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 GRESLE AND MURIELLE DAMBREVILLE RIDEAU



As you follow the path that runs along the bottom of the gorges, alongside the Héric and then the Vivalis rivers, every step reveals some of the area's oldest rocks: over 300 million years of geological history right at eye level. Gneiss, micaschists 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

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

Follow us on our social networks!

and subscribe to the Terres d'Hérault newsletter:

herault.fr

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-Mourvère 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.

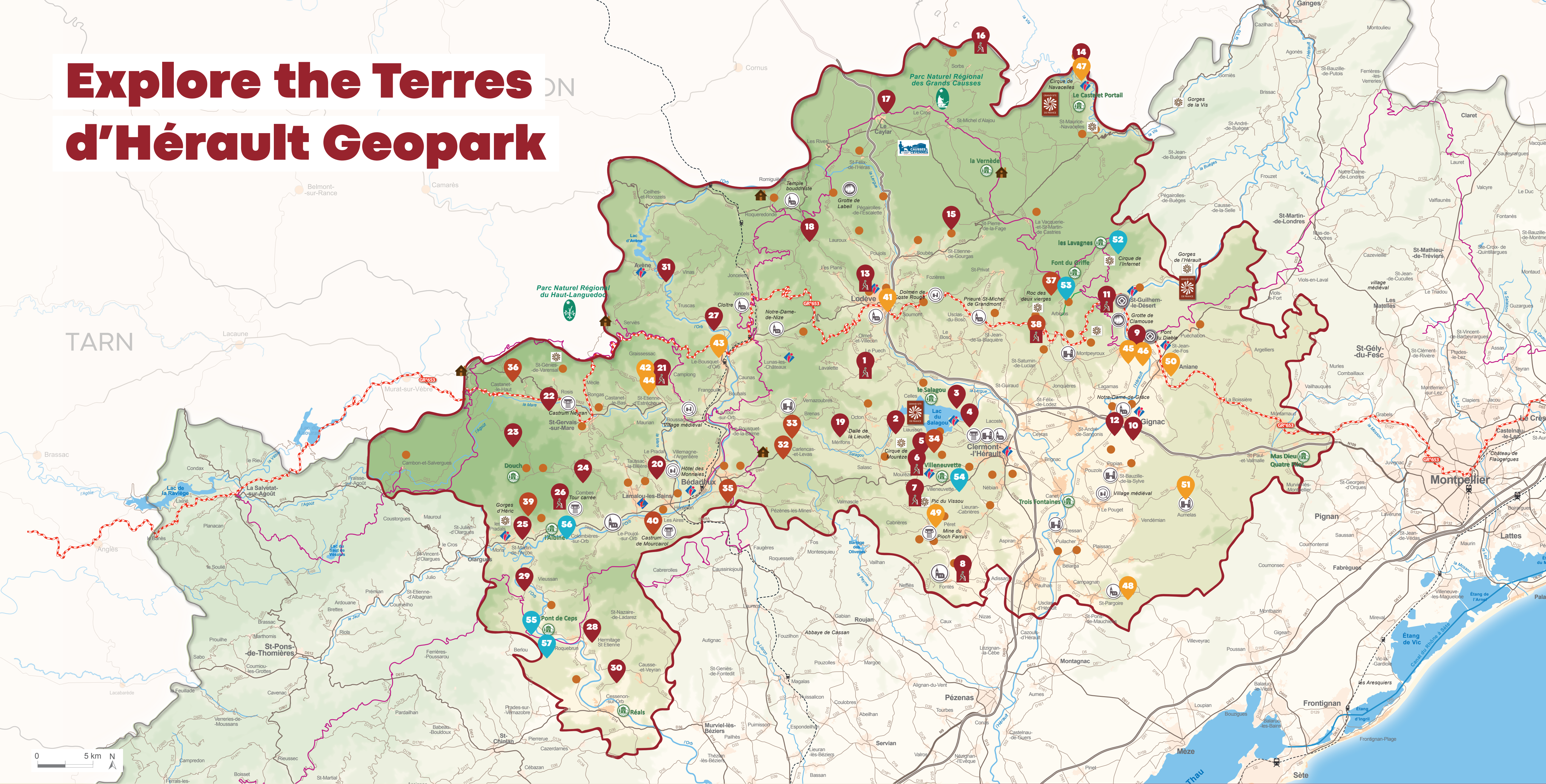
THE HÉRAULT REGION ON UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE LIST

- 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):

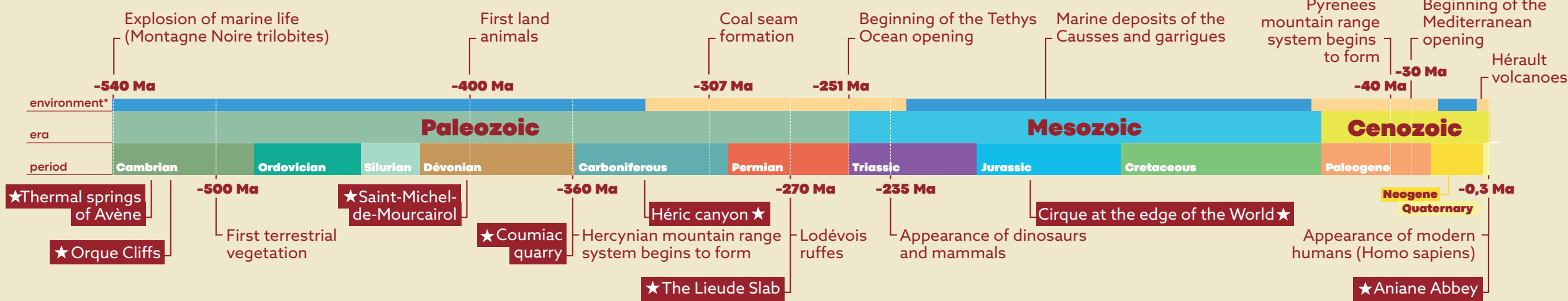
- the Haut-Languedoc PNR
- Great Causses PNR

Explore the Terres d'Hérault Geopark



THE STORY OF HALF A BILLION YEARS OF PLANETARY EVOLUTION

Ma: Million years ago
*Deposition environment (Languedoc)
■ marine ■ continental



Geological geosites and geo-hikes

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

Belvedere geosites and geo-hikes

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 32 Carlencas viewpoint | 36 Cross of Mounis pass viewpoint | 39 Caroux viewpoint |
| 33 Merquièrè pass viewpoint | 37 Saint-Baudille mount viewpoint | 40 Saint-Michel-de-Mourcaïrol |
| 34 Liausson viewpoint | 38 Virgin' Rock viewpoint
Geo-hike The Castellàs of Montpeyroux | |
| 35 Tantaço Peak | | |

Cultural geosites

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

Biodiversity geosites - Sensitive natural areas

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 52 Lavagnes | 54 Villeneuvevette | 56 Albine |
| 53 Font du Griffé | 55 Cep Bridge | 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 | ● Listed site | ● Castle | ● Heritage curiosity |
| ● Religious monument | ● Grand Site of France | ● Cave | ● 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!

Why?

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



Wildlife feeds and lives in calm

- | |
|---|
| ✗ Never pick up fossils or try to move them |
| ✗ Avoid nocturnal activity |
| ✗ Respect the silence of nature |