



Office de Tourisme de la
Vallée de la Fontaulière

Sites and heritage




Montpezat
SOUS BAUZON



ardèche
TOURISME

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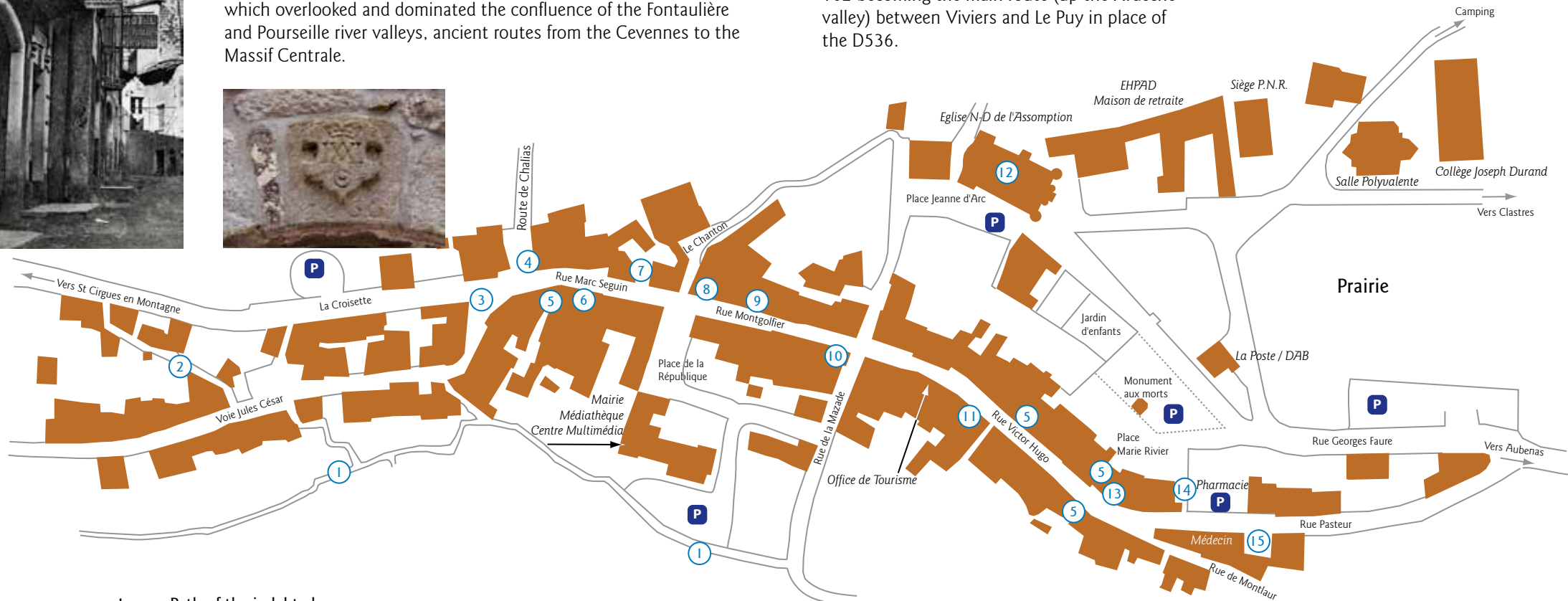


The Market Town

For many centuries it was an important staging post for mule trains and the centre of trading between the mountains and the Rhone Valley. This is why most of the buildings (shops, workshops, inns with immense stables and many large private houses...) are to be found alongside the main road through the town. In the middle of the nineteenth century many of these buildings lost much of their ancient character when their original facades were demolished to make way for the widening of the road. However, much interesting architecture remains yet to be discovered throughout the town. Commercial activity more or less ceased during the twentieth century with the RN 102 becoming the main route (up the Ardèche valley) between Viviers and Le Puy in place of the D536.



The market town of Montpezat was first established (initially the lower town, La Ville Basse, then the higher town) around the Montlaur Castle – of which only a few ruined walls now remain – which overlooked and dominated the confluence of the Fontaulière and Pourseille river valleys, ancient routes from the Cevennes to the Massif Centrale.



- 1. Path of the indebted
- 2. Path to the gardens (Orts)
- 3. Round fountain
- 4. Cross on the bridge to Chalias
- 5. Arched passageway

- 6. Ancient stables for mule trains, bourgeois houses
- 7. Covered market
- 8. Forged iron balcony (Perruchon)
- 9. Renaissance house
- 10. Le Tourrail (ancient fortification)

- 11. Birth house of Marie Rivier
- 12. Statue of the Pieta
- 13. Facade of the ancient presbytery
- 14. Water channel
- 15. Ancient convent



Les doubles

These are vaulted passageways found at points all along the main road allowing access through the buildings to the gardens, squares and lanes behind. One of these passageways (called "double noire") has a right-angled curve. Leading from the main road to the Place de la Poste it is particularly well frequented. These passages are equivalent to the "lyonnaise traboules". They help in draining away into the béalière, water running from the steep slopes next to which Montpezat is build.



The béalière

This is in fact a water channel which once played an important role in the life of Montpezat as it was used both for irrigation and for working the mills in the town. Having been diverted from the river Pourseille at a point above the town, it runs parallel to the main road; first of all running by the side of the road before entering a lavoir (washing place), then it disappears under the houses, crossing beneath the road near the fountain and continuing still unseen in a culvert before reappearing under the arches in the small garden adjoining the pharmacy.

Not so long ago, before the construction of the water works, the béalière was used to drain wastewater and today still plays its part in helping to drain off excess rainwater.



The parish church

Celebrating its Centenary in 1986, the parish church was built to replace the church of Notre Dame de Prévenchères, which had become very dilapidated and was deconsecrated.

The very old statue of the Pieta found in the right-hand chapel dedicated to the blessed Marie Rivier, was originally in a chapel dedicated to Notre Dame de Pitié. This chapel was demolished to make way for the construction of the Place de la République (in front of the present Mairie). Marie Rivier, founder of the Congregation of the Presentation of Marie, was born in Montpezat in 1768.

The dressed stones used for building the church walls are fine representation of the geology of the area.



The Lower Town

The old street of the lower town

This area of Montpezat dates back to the late 12th, early 13th century, built after the construction of the church at Notre-Dame de Prevencheres and the Castle of the Montlaur. Originally a pathway used by mule trains, the road has suffered much disintegration, since its promotion as "royal road" around 1720.

Nevertheless, some beautiful facades remain (1633) and along "rue de la Gravenne" (the name of the volcano dominating the whole area) many facades and roofs are registered as protected.

Next to the castle, on the small square, is a cross dating from the time of the Plague with buboes (symbolic of the effects of the plague) carved on the upright base.





The big bridge

The RD536 crosses the Fontauliere canyon on a bridge, height 52 metres. In 1912 this bridge replaced the suspension bridge built in 1847 after a design invented by Marc Seguin. Although the current bridge is built of stone, the residents of Montpeat continue to call it "the Iron Bridge".



The factory bridge

Next to this old bridge, in place of former grain mills, are the ancient silk mills, known locally as factories (hence the name of the bridge). The women who worked in these factories came to work via "la calade", a paved path known as "Echelette".



The Black Rock

A narrow road just before the bridge on the RD536, descends towards the river then crosses it at a point known as the Black Rock. This was once the main route up towards Le Velay (Le Puy).



1. Castle of the Montlaur
2. Castle of the lower town
3. Notre-Dame de Prévençères
Priory of Clastes
4. Cemeteries
5. Chapel of St-Roch ~ Calvary
6. Castle at Pourcheyrolles
7. Waterfall
8. Information area
9. Big bridge
10. Factory bridge
11. L'échelette
12. The Pyramid
13. Chapel of the lower town

Notre Dame de Prévenchères

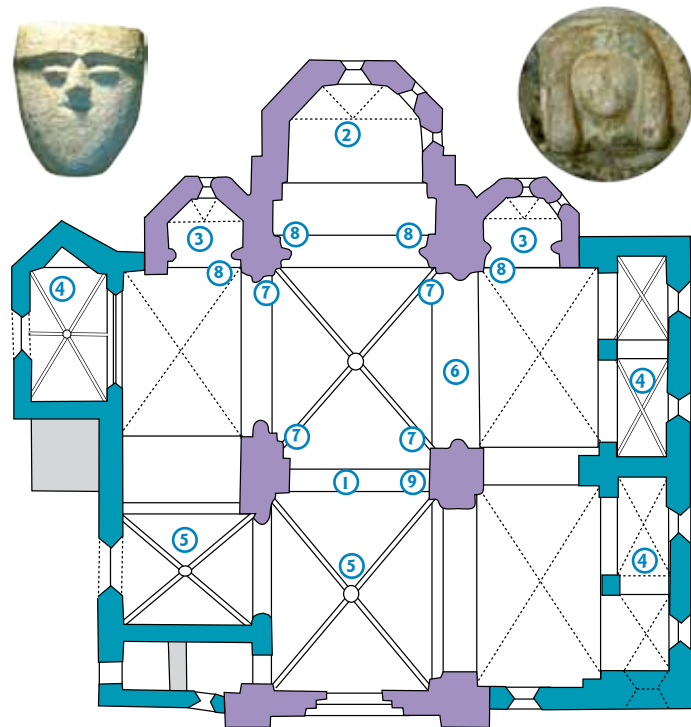


Mention of Notre-Dame de Prevencheres is first found in a decree of Pope Alexander III dated 1st April 1179, listing all the assets of the important Benedictine abbey of Saint-Chaffre in Monastier, Haute Loire.

Situated close to the ancient way connecting the Rhone Valley with the Auvergne via the Col du Pal, this imposing church was therefore on the pilgrimage route to Le Puy-en-Velay. This important location meant that it was subjected to many trials and tribulations and the first chapel was soon brought to ruin. It was rebuilt during the 12th century in the Romanesque style and enlarged in order to accommodate both pilgrims and the parishioners of Montpezat.

This beautiful building, plain and robust, was distinctive of the architectural style of the priories of Saint-Chaffre. Laid waste by the Huguenots in 1567 it was once again restored and extended by the

addition of gothic chapels. During the time of the Revolution, as well as the religious services, meetings and patriotic ceremonies were held here. In 1885 the townspeople decided it was too far away from the town and a new parish church was built to replace it. Now deconsecrated and used to store hay it gradually fell into disrepair and was left abandoned. Then in 1944 it was finally saved, being classified as an Historic Monument.



- Roman
 - Gothic
- ① — Roman Vaults
 - ② — Apse
 - ③ — Small apses
 - ④ — Added gothic chapels dedicated to St François, Ste Croix et St Régis
 - ⑤ — Keystones
 - ⑥ — Arch constituted by alternated light and dark stones
 - ⑦ — Consoles : heads, angel of St Luke, ox of St Matthew
 - ⑧ — Capital with vegetal motifs
 - ⑨ — Inscriptions « l'an 1567 ceste eglise a este destruite par les hugenotz », « a este releve l'an 1584 »
- 25 meters long - 20 meters width - Hight of the nave 9 meters

The Calvary

The first Calvary of wooden crosses erected on this site in 1691 by Capuchin missionaries was replaced in 1718 by stone stations, each having a niche containing a picture of the Mystery of the Passion. Impressive processions, especially on Good Friday, with participation of Montpezat's Brotherhoods of Penitents (Confrérie du St Sacrement et Pénitents Blancs ou Gonfalons, Confrerie du Cordon), followed the routed marked by the 29 stations. Starting at Pourtelas, skirting around La Ville Basse, they then turned back towards the church and climbed up to the Chapel of St Roch, the summit of the Calvary. This tradition was abandoned around 1920 and some of the stations disappeared or fell into ruin. Those remaining were restored in the 1970s.



The Chapel Of St Roch

The Chapel of St Roch has also been restored. The statue of the saint called upon to protect against disasters (plague, drought) is now found in the church in Montpezat. The interior walls were decorated with frescoes by Jean Saussac of Antraigues. You can ask for the key to the chapel at the Priory of Clastres, next to the church.



The Priory of Clastres

The Priory of Clastres was once a residence for monks (Clastre means enclosed - cloisters). It then became the dwelling of the Prior of the church of St Mary. It was converted into a hospital in 1895, then used as a farm building with the chapel as an outbuilding.





The Castles

The Castle at Pourcheyrolles

These ruins are privately owned and cannot be visited

During the 19th century this was considered as one of the most extraordinary sites in Vivarais but, unfortunately, is less well-known today. The two rivers of Montpezat, the Fontauliere and the Pourseille, carved canyons into the basalt plateau, leaving a narrow spur at their confluence. This Gothic Mansion, built around 1360 - 1370, is the work of the Flandin Cardinals, born into a local family. Cardinal Pierre Flandin was born between 1310 and 1320 and died in 1380. He held important positions with the Popes in Avignon and created at Pourcheyrolles a building inspired by the architecture of the Palais des Papes at Avignon.



The Castle in the Ville Basse (lower town)

(private property)

The "Castle", a beautiful manor with a Renaissance tower cannot be visited. The black stone used here, an easily worked material, is "lahar" taken from mudslides and mixed with volcanic scoria and lava.

Originally it was a defensive building with a windowless façade and a round tower. There was also a rectangular tower demolished in 1935.

The small chapel is connected to the castle by a footbridge. In the 15th and 16th centuries the notorial offices of the Valentins were located above it. Here was the most important toll point in the northern Cevennes



The fortified house indicates a great desire for pomp. Internally there are two towers, two blocks connected by a gallery and a third block for common use. You can still see a large mullioned window surmounted by the Flandin crest, also traces of a chimney place.

The castle was only accessible from one side and there was a separate fort defending the entrance. Deterioration of the fortifications began during the first wars of religion. It was still inhabited during the 19th century.

Today the ruins are clearly visible from a viewpoint by the side of the D536 and there is a breathtaking view from the small road to Bouteille, showing its proud position on this steep promontory.





The castle of the Montlaur (private property)

Only a few remains of the walls of the old Castle of the Montlaurs are now to be seen. It was built around the 12th century on a hill between the valleys of the Fontaulière and Pourseille rivers. Thus the Lords of Montlaur had control of the strategic Le Pal route linking Viviers to Le Puy. Below, on the southern side, a village developed but this eventually disappeared in favour of La Ville Basse (lower town). By the time of the Revolution, the castle itself was no longer inhabited.



There, in 1519 Catherine Peyretonne, known as the witch of Villaret, was interrogated, imprisoned and sentenced as a witch to be burnt at the stake.

Access to this site is via the rue de Montlaur, a paved street bordered by ancient houses. A sign, marking this point of access can be found in the main street of Montpezat.



Edition : Office de Tourisme de la Vallée de la Fontaulière
Rue Victor Hugo — 07560 Montpezat sous Bauzon
www.ot-fontauliere.net — Tél : 04 75 94 57 72
Texte français : Simone Delubac — Traduction Clotilde Ambrosini - Rita Patton
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