

C267-ST The Regordane way

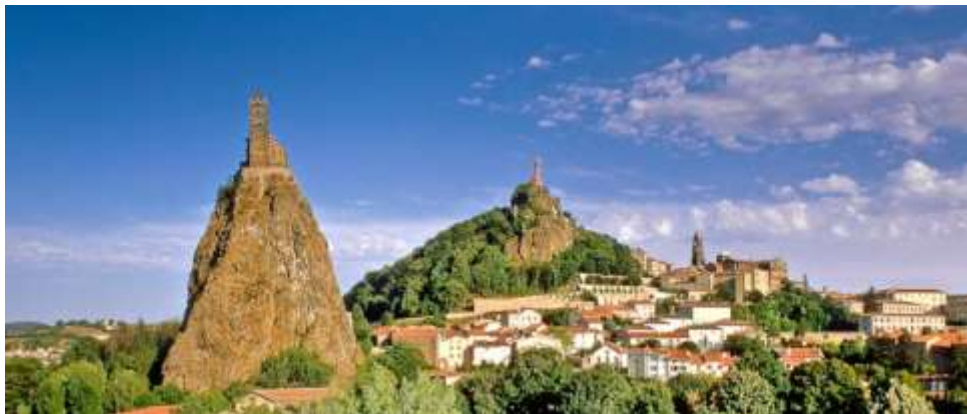


The Chemin de Régordane is the southern part of the old French route linking Ile de France to the Mediterranean, from Puy en Velay to Saint Gilles du Gard, ancient Roman port on the Petit Rhône river, a famous pilgrimage centre in the early Middle Ages. This natural migratory and transhumance path passes through the Auvergne, the Gévaudan and the Cévennes to reach the Camargue, crossing the Mont Lozère mountain range with ease through the famous Rochefort fault. This path became increasingly popular, being followed by many Christians heading to the tomb of Saint Gilles then to Rome and by the first crusaders embarking for Jerusalem. The churches, abbeys, monasteries and hospitals that punctuate the route welcomed these pilgrims. Commerce flourished, villages sprang up around abbeys and monasteries, the path was improved, with the

difficult parts being paved. Bridges were constructed and as the traffic kept increasing, attracting bandits and thieves, fortresses were built... and tolls installed! Centuries passed, other saints and places were honoured, France annexed the Rhône valley at the beginning of the 14th century and the Chemin de Régordane became more and more forgotten. A few centuries later, the Wars of Religion and the birth of a rural economy gave new life to this trail, whose activity ceased completely in the 19th century with the arrival of first the railway, then the road. Today, the railway's route partly covers the ancestral path, but on parallel paths or in the footsteps of our ancestors, you will cross these immense plateaux and climb up the valleys.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrival at PUY EN VELAY – The volcanic site of Le Puy is exceptionally beautiful with its rocky spires looking out over the plain. Packed with history, the town has always been a holy place and Christianity made it a sanctuary to the Virgin Mary. Le Puy



is worth spending time in. It is a place of pilgrimage and a starting point for other historic paths, including the very famous Via Podiensis leading pilgrims towards Santiago de Compostela. The episcopal city is a must, with Notre-Dame cathedral, the cloisters and St Michel d'Aiguilhe chapel perched on its rock and the old town. Le Puy is also known for its lace, the 'Verveine du Velay' liqueur, and its famous lentils. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 2 - LE PUY EN VELAY – LE BOUCHET ST NICOLAS via Costaros (26km) – You will cross the vast volcanic Devès plateau that stretches between the Loire and the Allier gorges. You will walk around the 'gardes' – small volcanic cones with fertile slopes. You will cross hamlets and small villages which thrive on lentil cultivation (green Puy lentils), hops, cattle farming – the famous 'Noire du Velay' cattle – and the production of a delicious cheese, the Velay fermier or farm cheese! You will leave the Costaros path to reach Le Bouchet Saint Nicolas, your first stop. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a guesthouse*

Day 3 - LE BOUCHET - LANGOGNE (26.5km) – Along the path, you will discover the Maar de Pechay, which, like the Lac de Bouchet, is the result of an eruption caused by underground water meeting molten magma. Today, this peaceful marshy lake is a rest stop for migrating birds. You will reach Landos, surrounded by marsh, then La Sauvetat, a beautiful village that housed a

commandery of the Order of St Jean de Jerusalem. A few kilometres further, you will visit Pradelles, a fortified enclave that housed a hospital for pilgrims heading for Rome or Saint Gilles. Finally, you will reach Langogne, a small town more than a thousand years old, founded by monks from the St Chaffre du Monastier sur Gazeille monastery. The Romanesque church contains a number of capitals with foliage and historical decorations. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 4 - LANGOGNE - LA BASTIDE PUYLAURENT (20km) – Across the high ground and through the forest, you will walk alongside most of the Allier valley to arrive in Luc, where the 12th century château provided protection for the Régordane trail. The château and village suffered a great deal during the many wars that followed but the ruins clearly show the importance of this fortress, a fine example of Middle Ages military architecture. You will climb back up the Vallée de l'Allier to Bastide Puylaurent, a village that sprang up at the end of the 19th century with the arrival of the railway.

Dinner, night and breakfast in a 1-star hotel with all commodities



Day 5 - LA BASTIDE – VILLEFORT (22km) – Through the forest you will climb up to the village of Thort and be stunned by Gargantua's table, a majestic neolithic dolmen. On the Molette plateau you will discover ruts carved in the shale by heavily laden carriages. Then you will go down towards Prévencières, a beautiful village with a 12th century church with a wall belfry and a majestic lime tree said to have been planted by the Duc de Sully, to celebrate the birth of Louis XIII. The path runs through the forest, going up and down and crossing a few streams and rivers. You will pass through the hamlet of Albespeyres before reaching La Garde Guérin, an old fortified village situated above the Chassézac gorges and ranked one of the most beautiful villages in France. You will cross the plateau before walking back down towards the Lac de Villefort and the village of the same name. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 6 – VILLEFORT – CHAMBORIGAUD (20km) – Via small roads, you will leave Villefort to reach the small village of Saint André Capcèze. On the way, you will once again see deep ruts carved by the many carriages that used this path. Past the old village of La Roche, you will go down towards St André, cross the Pont Perdu (lost bridge) and continue through the valley towards the village of Vielvic. Then, after crossing the Plagniol Bridge over the Malaudière stream, you will enter the Gard département. You will climb up towards the 13th century Château de Chambonnet and continue, across this verdant countryside, towards Concoules, a small village with a beautiful 11th century Romanesque church with a wall belfry. You will climb up towards the Ancise pass before heading back down towards Genolhac, an old medieval village which is experiencing a renaissance thanks to eco-tourism. You will head down towards the Pont de Rastel, birthplace of Jean-Pierre Chabrol, the Bard of Cévennes, and past the foot of the Château de Montjoie before reaching Chamborigaud, nestled in the lush Luech valley with its imposing railway viaduct. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 7 – CHAMBORIGAUD – ALES (29km or 23km) – *This stage can be shortened by a taxi transfer at the end of the afternoon (23km)* – The path more or less follows the original traces of the Régordane trail, which has now been tarred over. You will walk across woods, along streams and through hamlets to reach the Portes pass and the village of the same name that was once situated at the foot of the château. This was razed to the ground and moved in 1930 because intensive coal mining left it at risk of falling down. The impressive medieval château that still reigns majestic has also suffered from landslides. From this promontory, you will have an amazing view of the Massif des Cévennes. You will carry on along the path, discovering old mineshafts, ruined iron forges and coal conversion plants, vestiges of a flourishing industry, the decline of which in the 1950s plunged an entire region into distress. You will cross villages like Le Pradel and Le Mas Dieu with their half-abandoned mining communities.



You will climb up onto the hills and follow the ridges to reach Druhle then Saint Martin de Valgagues. *Taxi transfer from St Martin to the centre of Alès, the end of the route through the suburbs of Alès is of no real interest.*
Night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel

Day 8 - ALES – VEZENOBRES (15km) – This stage is short and you can spend your morning visiting Alès, a town with a rich history whose story began more than 10,000 years ago! The town was heavily affected by the Wars of Religion, and the Vauban fort that looks out over the town was built as a reminder of the King's authority. The town experienced two periods of prosperity - first silk production then coal which ceased in the 1960s. Following the Gardon, then heading across vines and

scrubland, you will climb towards Vézénobres, a charming medieval village, the fig capital of Languedoc. There you will discover a number of middle Ages houses dominated by the château ruins. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 9 - VEZENOBRES – SAINT GENIES DE MALGOIRES (22km) – The original path is also tarred here – forming the Route Nationale road. So you will follow the Gardon, then walk along the hills that look out over the river, across scrubland, vines and orchards. You will go through the villages of Ners, Cruviers-Lascours to reach Brignon, an old hillside village and then Moussac where the old church is now a Protestant temple. You will cross the Gardon to reach Saint Geniés de Malgoires, which is surrounded by vines. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 10 - ST GENIES – NIMES (20km) – Walking cross country, you will reach La Calmette and look around this old village before crossing a vast scrubland-covered plateau. There you will discover ‘capitelles’, dry stone huts used as temporary shelters during the olive and grape harvests. Then you will walk along the Espeisse wood before reaching the hills of Nîmes. The site of Nîmes was occupied by the Gauls, then by the Romans, who built one of the western Roman Empire’s largest towns. The city was surrounded by a wall more than 6km long, of which the Porte Magne (Magna Gate) is one of the last vestiges. You will head down into the town centre through the magnificent La Fontaine gardens. *Night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 11 - NIMES – SAINT GILLES DU GARD (27km or 12km) - We suggest visiting Nîmes in the morning then a taxi will take you out of the city and its surroundings to walk the last 12 kilometres across the Costières de Nîmes vineyards. Nîmes, a Roman city, is packed with monuments - all of them beautiful. You will visit the Maison Carrée temple, the amphitheatre, the Castellum, the arrival point of the 50km aqueduct of which the Pont de Gard bridge is one of the most prestigious edifices. You will also visit the Temple of Diana, the exact function of which is not known but which formed part of the sanctuary of the spring. During your walk through town, you will discover churches such as the Saint Castor cathedral, the Grand Temple, and the many squares bursting with life, others calm and relaxing, that give this city its charm. In the early afternoon, a taxi will drop you off in the village of Générac and then you will reach Saint Gilles through the vineyards and orchards. In the middle Ages, this port was the only embarkation point for Rome and the Holy Land, and it was above all a sacred Christian place. People came from all over Europe to pray at the tomb of Saint Gilles, protector of children, the weak and the sick. From 1240, Aigues Mortes took over from the port of Saint Gilles, other sanctuaries found favour with pilgrims, and Saint Gilles de Gard fell into a slumber. From this period, the town has managed to retain the abbey which houses the Saint’s sarcophagus in its crypt. The church’s façade is a Provençal Romanesque work of art. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

Day 12 - Saint Gilles du Gard – The walk ends after breakfast.

Best Season

From End of April to middle of October

What's included?

- 11 nights’ accommodation in 2-star hotels or charming B&B
- 11 breakfasts – 9 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- Taxi transfers : Saint Martin de Valgagues to Alès, Nîmes to Générac
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) with the route marked on and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Emergency assistance.

Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above – Drinks – Entrance fees – Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls, are not included

Walk difficulty

Grade 3 – walks of between 5 and 8 hours a day with ascents up to 700 m. Some hiking experience is advisable. A reasonable level of fitness and some stamina are required for these walks. You may cover long distances in remote countryside and the terrain will be rough underfoot. In mountainous areas you will encounter some sustained ascents and descents

Getting there and away

To Le Puy en Velay

By train: Le Puy is well served from the main French rail stations with connections at Lyon, Clermont-Ferrand or St Etienne.

By car: Go to Clermont Ferrand along A71 motorway. Get off exit 20 and to Le Puy along N102 road via Brioude

Where to park : pay guarded underground car park. Special rate for one week or more.

From St Gilles

Taxi or Bus to come back to Nîmes , the nearest rail station.

(Bus timetables http://tangobus.actipage.net/upload/guides_horaires/st-gilles.pdf)

