

C26910-ST The Saint James'way

from Conques to Cahors via the Célé valley,
Pech Merle grotto and Saint-Cirq Lapopie



From Conques, you will reach Figeac via Decazeville, a town created in the 19th century at the height of the country's industrial coal mining revolution. From Figeac, pilgrims heading to Santiago de Compostela had several routes to choose from. Crossing the Causse de Limogne, limestone plateau, was the quickest route but also the most dangerous because the forest provided the perfect cover for ambushes. Or they could climb to the top of the Célé valley, or even go via Rocamadour, the sanctuary dedicated to the Black Madonna that has been welcoming visitors since the early Middle Ages.

The route via the Célé valley is unquestionably the most beautiful way to reach Cahors. You walk along the river, on the cliffs or across the plateau, discovering remarkably rich sites that bear witness to the area's past. Along the way, the route is

punctuated by châteaux, abbeys, old houses and incredibly charming medieval villages, and let us not forget the Pech Merle grotto, one of nature's wonders decorated by early man at the beginning of the Paleolithic period. You can loop via Saint-Cirq Lapopie, one of the most beautiful villages in France, then follow the towpath carved into the rock face on the Bouziés side to reach Cahors, an old town, two thousand years old, which has retained its very rich medieval heritage.

The walk

Day 1 – Arrive in CONQUES, one of the jewels of Romanesque art set against a verdant backdrop. The Abbey Church houses more than 250 sculpted capitals and boasts, on the west side, a magnificent tympanum representing the Last Judgement. The Romanesque cloister's remains are laid out around a fantastic serpentine basin. The Trésor de Conques (Conque Treasury) comprises priceless gold pieces including the St. Foy 'Majesty', a 10th century gold statue encrusted with jewels donated by pilgrims. The medieval village still has its old streets lined with timber-framed houses, Romanesque fountains, the town gates and some remains of the ramparts. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 2 – from CONQUES to LIVINHAC LE HAUT (24km – 6hrs 30 walking). After a final stroll around the village and one last look at the abbey's tympanum, it is time to hit the road again. You will walk down the rue Charlemagne, passing under the Barry gate and cross the 'romain' bridge over the Dourdou (dating from the 14th century, 'romain' was a distortion of 'roumieu', meaning pilgrim!). You will climb up to the St Roch chapel, once a place of pilgrimage, then cross the Noailhac plateau, past the chapel, and Laubarède before reaching Decazeville, a town founded in the 19th century and named in memory of the Duke of Decazes, who spearheaded the mining industry in this basin. You will leave the town quickly and climb up onto the hills before going back down into the Lot valley and arriving in Livinhac le Haut, nestled in a river loop. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a guesthouse.

Day 3 – from LIVINHAC LE HAUT to FIGEAC (25.5km – 7hrs walking). You will depart towards Montredon, built on a hillock dominated by the St. Michel church, then reach Guirande and the Romanesque St. Marie chapel. The route makes several detours across the countryside, which is however incredibly beautiful, to avoid the tarmac roads, and passes via La Cypièrre, St Félix and the Romanesque St. Radegonde church, before reaching St. Jean Mirabel, where the church has a beautiful 13th century tympanum. Finally, you will begin your descent into the Célé valley towards Figeac. The town still has many vestiges of its rich medieval past. Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 4 – from FIGEAC to CORN (21km – 5hrs 30 walking). From Figeac, you will climb the Cingle hill, and continue cross-country to Faycelles, a characterful village perched on cliff that looks out over the Lot. You will pass Beduer, with its imposing medieval château built in the 12th century, and leave the traditional path to follow a variant through the Célé valley that you will reach a few kilometres further on. You will walk along the river to reach Boussac then the Cavanot mill, built at the entrance to a fault in the cliff face. You will continue at the water's edge towards Corn, a village that boasted four châteaux in the middle ages. There you will discover several medieval shops and a wash-house/fountain fed by a spring. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a gueshouse



Day 5 – from CORN to MARCILHAC SUR CÉLÉ (20km – 5hrs walking). You will leave the village of Corn, passing close to the Roquefort mill and under the château perched on the cliff. The path curves around the foot of the rock face, then leaves the river a little to head back to the hamlet of Sainte Eulalie with its 10th century church, passing by its blue natural spring, where the Causse waters rise to the surface. You will keep going along the Célé towards the village of Espagnac, coiled up in a hollow where the river meanders. You will visit the old Val Paradis priory and the church crowned with a clock tower topped with an octagonal roof and decorated with a beautiful half-timber frame. You will cross back onto the right riverbank, climb up on the plateau before going back down towards Brengues where, on the way, you will discover the famous 12th century Château des Anglais that backs onto a particularly narrow rock shelter. Via the plateau, you will reach the village of Saint Sulpice with its ruined

feudal château. Here the houses, some of them troglodytic, and the gardens are attached to the rock face that hangs over them. The walk continues on the plateau and you will reach an old farm that is now a charming gueshouse.

Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a gueshouse

Day 6 – from MARCILHAC to CABRERETS (21km – 5hrs 30 walking). You will continue walking on the plateau to reach the village of Marcilhac, snuggled against a backdrop of white and ochre cliffs at the foot of the Célé. The village was built around a powerful Benedictine abbey, which was founded in the 10th century and owned the Rocamadour sanctuary. The abbey has been ruined and rebuilt several times. The chapter room, one of the last remaining vestiges, contains superb sculptures. Still on the plateau, you will reach the village of Sauliac sur Célé. The old part of the village is attached to the rock face and houses old fortified grottos that served as shelters when the inhabitants were under attack. Today, the village stretches over the terraces that look out over the Célé. The path runs along the ledge, offering magnificent views over the valley and the Château de Geniès, before leading you to the Château and museum of Cazals, a living museum that traces the region's rural and agricultural history. The path stays on the plateau, across fields, woods and a few hollows to reach Cabrerets. At the confluence of the Sagne and the Célé, the village nestles at the foot of the Rochcourbe cliff face, an immense wall of overhanging rock, to which the ruins of the medieval château are attached. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 7 – from CABRERETS at SAINT-CIRQ LAPOPIE (15km – 4hrs walking). The day starts with a visit to the magnificent Pech Merle grotto, which formed over millions of years. “An art gallery in a palace of nature”, as author René Teyssédou described it. One of the key characteristics of this grotto is the link between its natural beauty and the prehistoric works inside. You will go down into the village, cross the Célé and continue through the Monclar forest to reach the Lot river close to Tour de Faure, opposite one of the most beautiful villages in France: Saint-Cirq Lapopie, which clings to the rock more than 100 metres above the Lot. The county-seat of one of the three Quercy viscounts in the Middle Ages, the village was shared between several feudal dynasties, the dominant families being from Lapopie, Gourdon and Cardailiac. Because of this, several châteaux and fortified residences representing the seigniorial power dominate the village. Way below the fortified parts, the village streets, behind fortified gates, still boast a number of old houses with stone or half-timber facades built between the 13th and 16th century. Standing tall, they are characterised by their steeply sloping, flat slate roofs. The streets, where arcades of shops open up, still hark back to the artisanal activities that made up Saint-Cirq's wealth: tanners, coppersmiths and above all woodturners or ‘roubinetaires’, who made button moulds, bowls, goblets and barrel taps. Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.



Day 8 – from SAINT CIRQ to VERS (22km – 6hrs walking). From Saint Cirq, you will go down towards the Lot where you pass a succession of mills, dams and ports, which all bear witness to previous waterway activities. You will follow the towpath, which will offer up a few surprises for you before Bouziès. Once again, the rock face is a sheer drop to the water. A 300m long, 2m high trench had to be dug out to enable men and horses to pull the barges, those flat-bottomed boats that travelled upstream full of goods from the port at Bordeaux. You will pass the old river port at Bouziès and follow the Lot for several kilometres. You will enjoy the landscape, the water's calm and a resplendent natural backdrop. You will climb back up onto the plateau, go down once more to be level with the Lot and walk along it and then leave it quickly to climb up onto the plateau once again. You will follow the route through the forest that covers the higher ground, go down again towards the hamlet of Béars, and cross the Lot to reach the village of Vers on the right bank. Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel.



Day 9 – from VERS to CAHORS (21.5km). You will cross the Lot and climb up to the hamlet of Béars, perched on a mound in a loop of the river Lot. You will walk around the Puech de Béars and, via the forest, reach the banks of the Lot, which you will stay on until Cahors. At Arcambal, you can enjoy the Château du Bousquet, a building that has retained its very military air. On the other bank you can admire the magnificent village of Laroque sur Arcs, reflected in the river's tranquil waters. Finally you will reach Cahors, an ancestral town with a rich past, nestled in a meander of the river Lot. Night and breakfast in a 3-star hotel.

Day 10 – CAHORS – The walk ends after breakfast.

Season

From mid April to beginning of October but be careful this area is very crowded in summer time and we recommend you (if you can) to come outside this period. Nevertheless this area attracts a lot of tourists and you have to reserve earlier to get the best rooms.

What's included?

- 9 nights' accommodation in selected 2 or 3 star hotels and guesthouses with breakfasts
- 6 dinners (not dinner at Figeac, St Cirq Lapopie and Cahors, several restaurants nearby hotels)
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) or topoguide 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.
- Phone emergency assistance with English-speaking support (24/24 - 7/7 days)

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

Getting to Conques

By car : From the A20 motorway take D802 road coming from North of France or D653 road from South (Cahors). Continue on D840 to Decazeville and St Cyprien sur Dourdou. Reach Conques through the Dourdou valley.

Free unguarded car park in the village of Conques

By train : the nearest train stations are St Christophe Vallon or Rodez. Then taxis to reach Conques. Contact us for taxis reservation.

Back from Cahors

Several trains a day from Cahors to Toulouse or Paris.

Back to Conques : Public taxi from Cahors to Conques. Please contact us for more details.

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.