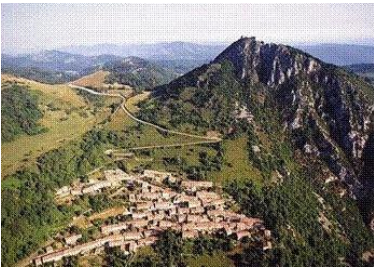


Montségur



The region around of Montsegur, the Lasset Valley is dotted with numerous prehistoric sites, and has some of the oldest traces of human inhabitants since the dawn of time. For example The cave of Chavet-Pont-D'Arc, (not open to the public) discovered in 1994 contains the world's oldest known cave paintings-dating back an astonishing 30,000 years! The region is also densely laced with deep and complex cave formations and underground rivers sources.

There are two parts to Montsegur, the village, and the famous castle, both being well worth a visit.

Located in the foothills of the Pyrenees, it's a place of histories, mysteries, legends and myths. The village with its 160 houses still looks as it would have looked over 100 years ago. It may be a small village, but its personality is the size of a mountain. Everywhere you turn, you see another small, almost-overlooked detail. There is also a museum that is well worth a quick visit to learn more about the rich history of Montsegur.

The Castle is located on the top of Mount Pog. while it doesn't take long to climb, it is challenging, taking about 20-30 minutes each way, The aspects that make the climb difficult are precisely the secrets to the Cathar success in holding off Crusaders, during the great siege of 1243.

It appears that some kind of fortress or temple already existed on the site of Montsegur, prior to it becoming a Cathar stronghold. However the only evidence of pre-Cathar human habitation on the peak of Montsegur, is a Roman coin dated between the years 260-268 AD. It was found in 1964 outside the north-east wall of the fortress where several terraced home were once located.



At a Catholic conclave held in Beziers in the spring of 1243, a call to bring down the "synagogue of Satan" at Montsegur was issued. Over the next ten months, a total of ten thousand troops would mass beneath the fortress, tightening the perimeter around Montsegur. The siege went slowly for the first 8 months, with Catholic forces trying to take the mountain and position catapults. By the end of 1243, the troops were demoralised by the lack of progress. Then in January 1244, Gascon mountain troops climbed the north-east tip of the *pog* during the night and captured the lowest point of the plateau. From there, the attackers began to fight their way up towards the fortress--capturing positions for the catapults The slopes of the plateau are still dotted with piles of stone missiles used by the catapults

On March 1, 1244, Pierre-Roger Mirepoix negotiated a fifteen day truce at the end of which Montsegur was to be surrendered. Any Cathars who abjured their heresy, would be forgiven. And others would be allowed to depart after being deposed by the Inquisition and abjuring Cathar beliefs. Most of the Cathar *perfecti* declined the offer, and twenty-six mercenaries, knights, soldiers and followers actually asked for *consolamentum*. This would guaranteed their death at the end of the truce.

At some point, either during the truce or before, two or four Cathars snuck out of the fortress and descended down the steep northern-eastern slope, carrying some sort of valuable objects. What this was and where is it now a subject of myth and legend. On March 16, between 205 and 225 Cathars marched down the southern slopes of the *pog* and positioned themselves on a mass execution pyre of wood and logs prepared earlier at the foot of the hill. Either they climbed ladders to the top of the bier or entered into an enclosure and were tied to stakes positioned in the wood. After the saying prayers the pyre was set on fire. About 60 of these Cathar martyrs have been identified by historian.

Montsegur /Mirepoix Map

Ginoles ~ Mirepoix: Distance 45Km, 55 minutes
Mirepoix ~ Montsegur: Distance 31Km, 50 Minutes
Ginoles ~ Montsegur: Distance 40Km, 55 Minutes

