

Puilaurens

Puilaurens Castle is one of the most impressive in the Cathar region, and is only a short drive away, and can be reached by car, or there is a footpath from Axat, if you are feeling energetic. On the limit between the counties of Aude and Pyrenees-Orientales, Puilaurens was for a long time the southern-most fortified castle in the kingdom of France. At 700 metres altitude, the castle overlooks the village of Lapradelle, surrounded by a fir forests.



The first mention of the castle of Puilaurens dates from 985 A.D. At that time the castle depended on the abbey of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa, before it was acquired by the King of Aragon in 1162. As Aragonese property it was outside the territory ravaged by the Crusaders during the Cathar wars. Like the castle at Queribus it continued to be a refuge for the Cathar even after the massacre at Montsegure up until 1250. Those who took refuge there included high nobles, such as Guillaume de Peyrepertuse.

Somehow, it is not known how, Puilaurens was ceded to the French some time before 1255. After 1258 its possession by the French crown was ratified by the Treaty of Corbeil, when the Aragonese border was moved south. In 1260 it was garrisoned by 25 sergeants.



This is one of the "Five Sons of Carcassonne, along with Queribus, Termes, Aguilar, and Peyrepertuse: five castles strategically placed to defend the French border against the Spanish. It was taken by Spanish troops in 1635, but lost all strategic importance after the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659 when the border was moved even further south to its present position along the crest of the Pyrenees. The present building mainly postdated the Treaty of Corbeil, and

is thus principally French. Some points of interest include the heavily defended steep zig-zagging approach path, remnants of a barbican, meurtrières (murder holes), and a spectacular donjon (keep). Most impressive of all in the south-west tower (the White Lady's Tower) there is a speaking-tube, built into the stonework and allowing people to communicate from one floor to another - exactly the same principle later adopted in ships to allow voice communication between decks.

A legend says that the White Lady, the niece of Philip the Fair, haunts the castle and can be seen walking in wispy veils along the ruins of the parapet walls on moonlit nights.