



Saint- Bertrand- de-Comminges Valcabrère





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THE SITE THROUGHOUT THE AGES



Because it is now off the beaten track of modern traffic routes, it is difficult to imagine that the former Cité was once a thriving capital of the Roman Empire, and later a bishopric until the French Revolution.

Yet it is obvious that the political clout and wealth of such a project as the cathedral of Sainte-Marie could not have arisen in a wilderness.

BIRTH OF A CAPITAL

Prior to being called Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges, the town's name during antiquity was Lugdunum Convenae, the county seat of the Cité des Convènes, whose territory more or less extended over the present Comminges all the way to Aran Valley.

The very first references to a bishop in Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges date back to the 5th century. The subsequent periods that led up to the 11th century are less well known, owing to the fragmentary archaeological remains and the absence of written accounts.





TOWARDS AN AGE OF RENEWAL

The arrival in 1083 of Bertrand de l'Isle, the new bishop of Comminges, resulted in subsequent reconstruction work on the cathedral in the upper town.

The building as it is today was mostly renovated during the Gothic period and the Renaissance.

The basilica of Saint-Just de Valcabrère was completed in 1200, thus bringing developments in the suburban area of the town, hitherto devoted only to Roman necropolises, to a close.

In 1793, the bishopric was divided up and the religious community left, causing the town to turn in on itself and lose an important part of its activity and influence.

A SITE AT THE HEART OF PILGRIMAGES

The site of Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges also owes its development to the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

As a stopping place along the piedmont route, and as an alternative to the route that passed through Arles, pilgrims drawn by the popularity of saint Lizier and saint Bertrand would leave the main route to pursue their journey through the Aude, Ariège and Comminges.

Nowadays, the basilica of Saint-Just de Valcabrère and the cathedral of Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges are listed on Unesco's World Heritage list, as belonging to the routes that lead to Santiago de Compostela.

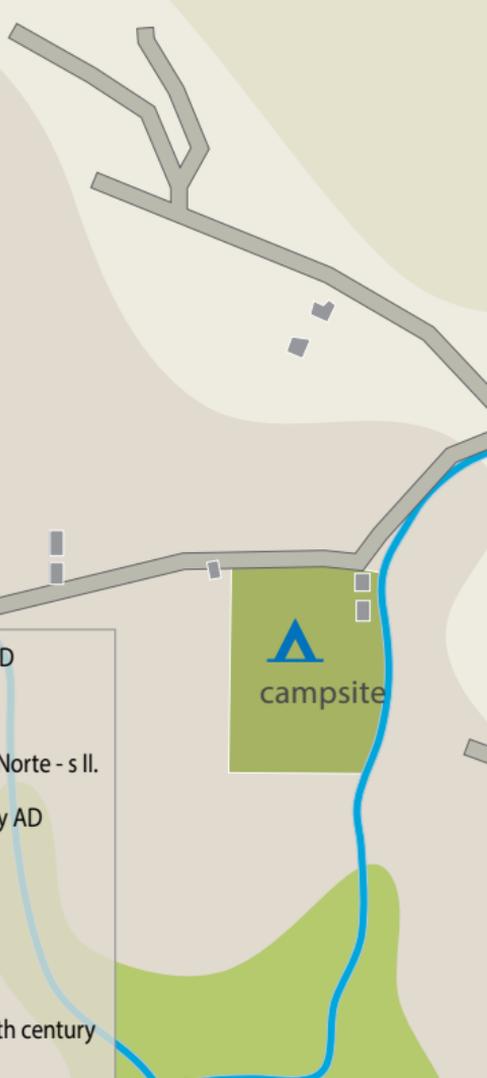


MAP OF THE TOWN



Keys

- Roman era – 1st century BC – 6th century AD
- Medieval times – 7th century/14th century
- Modern times – 15th century to the present
- Gates of the upper town
- P Car park
- ▲ Picnic area
- i Les Olivétains: Reception - Information



8 + ▲ **Basilique St-Just**

- 1 Thermal baths and Forum temple – 1st century AD
- 2 The "Macellum", or market place - 1st century AD
- 3 Square with porticos - 1st century AD Termas del Norte - s. II.
- 4 Thermal baths on the northern side – 2nd century AD
- 5 Circular monument - 1st century AD
- 6 Theatre - 2nd century AD
- 7 Paleochristian basilica – 5th century
- 8 The basilica of Saint-Just de Valcabrère – 11th/12th century
- 9 The Roman chapel of St-Julien

▲ **campsite**

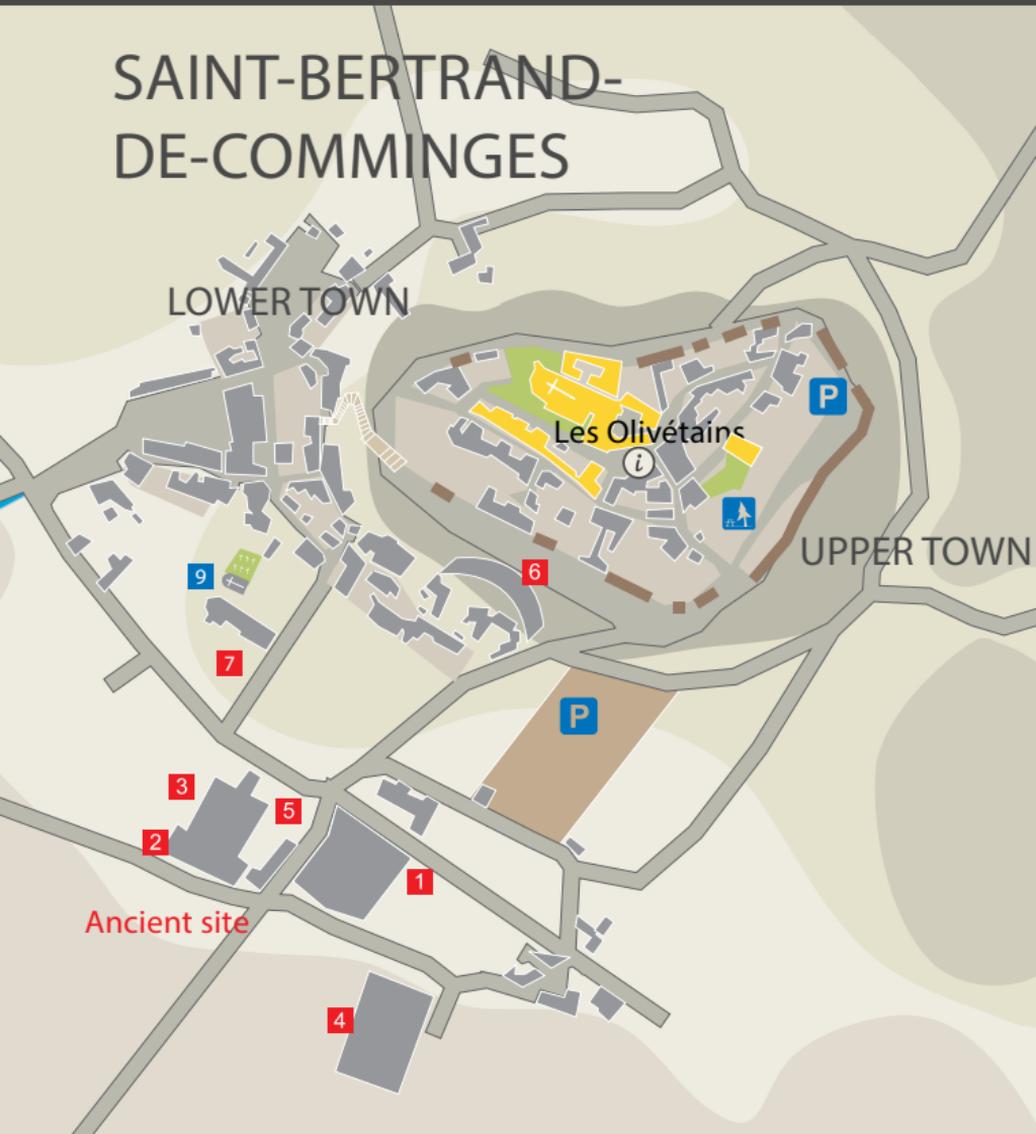
VALCABRÈRE

LA GARONNE

- 10 i Les Olivétains - 19th century
- 11 Cathedral and cloister – 11th/16th century
- 12 Cathedral terraces
- 13 Half-timbered houses – 16th century
- 15 Majou gate
- 16 Cabirole gate
- 17 Hyrisson gate
- 18 Stairs of 142 steps
- 19 Departmental archaeological museum



SAINT-BERTRAND-DE-COMMINGES



THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINTE-MARIE



The construction of the Romanesque cathedral, no doubt on the foundations of an existing cathedral, dates back to the episcopate of Bertrand de l'Isle (1083-1123). The most striking feature of this modest building is the numerous Gallo-Roman stones that have been re-used to build it. During the 12th century, the Romanesque cathedral underwent several transformations, with the addition of a dungeon bell tower and the extension of the cloister in particular. It wasn't until the 14th century, under the influence of Bishop Bertrand de Got, future Pope Clement V, that the monument acquired its present Gothic shape, with its raised nave and radiating chapels.



NOT TO BE MISSED DURING THE VISIT

THE STALLS OF THE CATHEDRAL

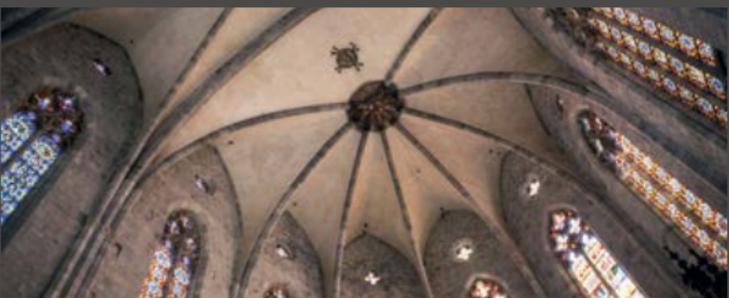
Built between 1525 and 1535 at the behest of Bishop Jean de Mauléon, these choir stalls were intended to isolate the canons from the flow of pilgrims. They are made of oak and include 66 seats as well as a seat for the bishop.

The wealth of this sculpted ensemble lies in the variety and profusion of its decorative details.

Worth seeing

The Tree of Jessé and the marquetry on the bishop's stall.

Admission fee applies.









THE ORGAN

The angle organ, also financed by Jean de Mauléon, was added to complete this ensemble a few years later. Its decorative carvings evoke the labours of Hercules.

Deprived of its pipes during the French Revolution and partially restored during the 19th century, this organ has been the object of substantial restoration work since 1970. It is still in working order and played during masses and concerts.

Every year between July and September, the Comminges Festival, created in 1975, puts on some twenty concerts devoted to the organ: a great opportunity to enjoy its exceptional acoustics!

THE CLOISTER

As a place of prayer for the community of canons, it boasts one Romanesque gallery and three Gothic galleries, the sculptured elements on the capitals reflecting these different styles. During the Middle Ages, the cloister was entirely closed, and the opening overlooking the Pyrenean piedmont was not created until the end of the 19th century.

A chapter hall extended out from the cloister. It was moved into the cathedral during the Gothic extension.

Worth seeing The pillar of the 4 evangelists.

Admission fee applies.



THE MEDIEVAL CITÉ UPPER TOWN



During the Middle Ages, the Cité included three different areas: the episcopal enclosure, the upper town and the suburbs.

Within the episcopal enclosure, the terraces to the north of the cathedral still bear some remains of the residence of the bishops of Comminges, which was deserted following the ravages wrought by the wars of religion during the second half of the 16th century.

The upper town was protected by ramparts in which three entrances were set: Cabirole, Hyrisson and Majou. 16th century half-timbered houses bear witness to the living environment of the former bishop's palace during the lifetime of Jean de Mauléon.





NOT TO BE MISSED DURING THE VISIT



MAJOU GATE

As its name implies («majou» means «major» in the Langue d'oc), this was the main entrance to the town until the 18th century. On the first floor was the lookout post, later turned into a prison accessed through a tiny door.

Above Majou gate is an ancient re-used gravestone bearing the name of a certain Andossius.

THE FORMER BISHOP'S PALACE (PRIVATE PROPERTY)

Following the wars of religion and the desertion of the palace adjoining the cathedral, the bishops set up residence in the two buildings located on either side of Cabirole gate. Extended by tiered gardens, the property boasted direct and private access to the cathedral. Abandoned by the religious community during the 18th century, the buildings were later turned into a court of law, as shown by the words «la loy» above the entrance doors.

THE FISH TAX

Carved on a stone in Cabirole gate and dated 1661, this inscription refers to the tax imposed on fish during Lent. It tells us which sort of fish were eaten during the 17th century: river fish (trout, common dace and loach) and sea fish, such as cod.





THE ANCIENT SITE

When looking at the ruins that extend at the foot of the hill of the former Roman town of *Lugdunum Convenae*, it is difficult to imagine that it once covered an area of 36 ha and boasted a population estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants. Although the urban fabric was later to thin, and the inhabitants were to withdraw into the upper town after the Barbarian invasions during the 5th and 6th century, the lower town was never completely uninhabited.

AUGUSTUS, AT THE ORIGIN OF THE EXPANSION OF LUGDUNUM

The oldest remains found on site date back to Emperor Augustus (27 - 14 AD). Augustus attached the *Cité des Convènes* to the newly created province of Aquitaine, thus making *Lugdunum*, its capital, a showcase of pacification in the Pyrenean area.

A STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Its geographical location between the plains and the mountains, and its position as a crossroads between the Garonne and the valleys of the Pyrenean chain, greatly contributed to the economic wealth of the *Cité*.

Around about the year 120, the town was granted the privileged status of a «colony», which just goes to show how important this county town *Cité* actually was. This measure bestowed the title of Roman citizens on its inhabitants, along with the rights pertaining to such a title.





THE FIRST EXCAVATIONS

The site was excavated between 1921 and 1969, under the authority of the town schoolmaster Bertrand Sapène and the Archaeological Society of the South of France. New excavation campaigns conducted between 1985 and 2005 gave rise to various publications.

Only a small part of its ancient heritage is still visible today: many remains discovered during archaeological digs were subsequently covered over and now lie hidden beneath roads and fields.

THE THEATRE

Backing onto the hill, this monument once dominated the ancient town. Having since been used as a stone quarry, all that now remains of the construction are the sparse remains of the corridors that led to the seating area, and the tiers where the audience once sat. The stage wall, now absent, stood where modern-day houses now stand. The western side of the theatre was demolished in 1788 during the construction of the access route to the upper town.







THE PUBLIC BATHS

The ancient town boasted three public bathing sites. Such profusion bears witness to the importance of bathing in Gallo-Roman times. Water was brought here from the spring in Tibiran just 3 km away via an aqueduct. The baths on the northern side have been better preserved: here the *palestra* used for sporting activities and the traditional succession of baths with underground heating are still visible, as well as the sewers that collected waste water to be emptied into the river Garonne.



THE TROPHY OF AUGUSTUS, exhibited in the chapel of Les Olivétains.

The «Trophy of Augustus» is a major ensemble discovered on the ancient site in 1926 in the form of dispersed fragments. There is no indication as to where it may have been located in the ancient town. This exceptional and monumental composition was erected between 16 and 13 BC in glory of the victorious Emperor Augustus, and his reorganization of the Gauls and Hispania. It is now part of the handsome collection that belongs to the County Council. After being carefully restored and exhibited, it can now be admired in the chapel of Les Olivétains.

THE BASILICA OF SAINT- JUST OF VALCABRÈRE



The site on which the basilica now stands was once a pagan necropolis and later a Paleochristian cemetery. Its construction during the 12th century put an end to the successive transformations of previous constructions. During the 19th century, the discovery of the parchment written in consecration of the main altar revealed the only indisputable date regarding the church's history - October 1200 - which is also the year of its completion. The walls of the basilica contain numerous fragments of architecture and sculpted features that once belonged to the ancient town. These re-used materials taken from the necropolis give it its undeniable originality.



NOT TO BE MISSED DURING THE VISIT

THE ARMS FRIEZE

Located in the upper part of the pillar to the left of the chancel, this ancient frieze symbolised Man's battle with death. It was initially part of the decorative features of a funeral mausoleum. It was later reused and placed upside down as simple construction material when building the new basilica, and was most probably covered with filler, like all the other inside walls.

THE GATE CAPITALS

Surmounting the column statues that frame the entrance gate, they depict the martyrs Saint Just, Saint Pasteur and Saint Étienne. Traces of polychromy are still visible on these capitals, which suggests that the portal was once most probably entirely painted.







CULTURAL AND TOURIST CENTERS

The Haute-Garonne County Council welcomes visitors to the site of Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges / Valcabrère in two different locations:

- « Les Olivétains »: Cultural and tourist centre -
Exhibition site
- « Departmental archaeological museum »:
Studies, conservation & research library
Exhibition area



LES OLIVÉTAINS

Cultural and tourist centre – Exhibition site
On the square in front of the cathedral of Sainte-Marie.

TOURIST RECEPTION

The tourist reception area provides free leaflets about Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges / Valcabrère, the surrounding area and Haute-Garonne area.

The bookshop sells a range of books devoted to the site, a great number of works devoted to literature, history and art, as well as a selection of maps and OS maps for hikers, etc.

The Groups service offers a range of guided tours led by professional guides:

- Visits with or without meals (the ancient site, the basilica of Saint-Just de Valcabrère, the cathedral of Sainte-Marie, the medieval *Cité*) on request.
- Discovery tours of the Comminges and Haute-Garonne.

A catalogue is available.

All our services can be customized, subject to prior request.

EXHIBITIONS

Each season, the Haute-Garonne County Council invites painters, sculptors, visual artists and photographers to exhibit their works in the Les Olivétains exhibition hall. Since Olivier Debré in 1992, some forty artists have exhibited their works there.



O

des Olivétains

- Informations touristiques
- Expositions
- Visites de groupes
- Librairie / Boutique
- Entrée libre et gratuite





Philippe BERRY
2008



DEPARTMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM



Studies, conservation & research library
Exhibition area - Rue du musée.

The result of lengthy restoration work undertaken by the Haute-Garonne County Council, the 19th century building is located on the remains of former buildings. In 1924, the first museum in the Comminges to be devoted to archaeology was established here; the building was listed as a Historical Monument in 1946.

AN EXTENSIVE PROGRAMME OF TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

At garden level, the building houses a reception desk and an exhibition area.

A SITE DEVOTED TO STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The study and conservation site of the Haute-Garonne archaeology department is to be found on the first floor. In addition to being a depository for extensive archaeological collections, it also boasts a library specialized in ancient history and archaeology, which is accessible by appointment to anyone conducting research work.





STAYING IN SAINT-BERTRAND

HOTELS

HÔTEL DU COMMINGES**

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 31 43

HÔTEL-RESTAURANT L'OPPIDUM**

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 33 50

RESTAURANTS

CHEZ SIMONE (upper town)

Tel. 00 33 5 61 94 91 05

LA TABLE DE SAINT-BERTRAND (lower town)

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 36 60

CRÊPERIE (upper town)

LE LUGDUNUM à Valcabrère

Tel. 00 33 5 61 94 52 05

For groups of 6 or more only

HÔTEL-RESTAURANT L'OPPIDUM**

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 33 50

CAMPSITE

CAMPING ES PIBOUS***

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 31 42

es-pibous.fr

SELF-CATERING, BED & BREAKFAST, AND COLLECTIVE ACCOMODATION

For any information, please contact Les Olivétains
on 00 33 5 61 95 44 44 or Haute-Garonne Tourisme on
00 33 5 61 99 44 10 - resa31.com





USEFUL INFORMATION

ON SITE

HAUTE-GARONNE TOURISME - LES OLIVÉTAINS

Parvis de la Cathédrale

31510 SAINT-BERTRAND-DE-COMMINGES

Tel. 00 33 5 61 95 44 44

olivetains@tourismehg.com

For opening hours, please call 00 33 5 61 95 44 44

DEPARTMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

Studies, conservation & research library.

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 31 79

Every day from Monday to Friday, by appointment

THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINTE-MARIE

Open or audio guided tour (french, english, spanish, german and italian)

Tel. 00 33 5 61 89 04 91

reserv.cathestbertrand@wanadoo.fr

THE BASILICA OF SAINT-JUST-DE-VALCABRÈRE

Audio guided tour (French, English, Spanish, German and Italian)

Tel. 00 33 5 61 95 49 06

THE TOWN HALL OF SAINT-BERTRAND-DE-COMMINGES

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 33 12

mairie.stbertrandcomminges@wanadoo.fr

THE TOWN HALL OF VALCABRÈRE

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 31 31

THE COMMINGES FESTIVAL

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 32 00 / 00 33 6 83 26 07 79

festival-du-comminges.com



PARISH PRESBYTERY

Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 31 54

paroisse-de-saint-bertrand@outlook.fr

cathedrale-saint-bertrand.org

THE FRIENDS OF THE WAY OF SAINT JAMES

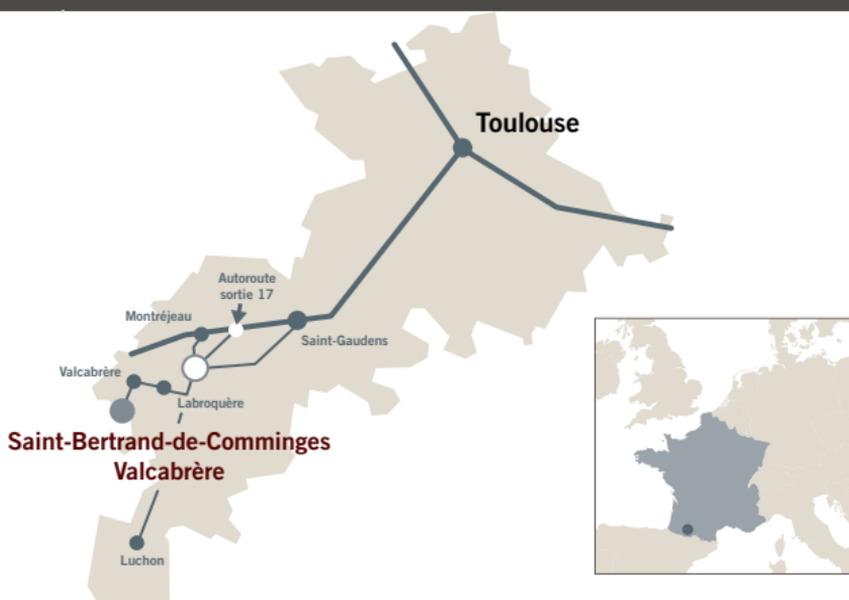
Tel. 00 33 5 61 88 33 12



Saint-Bertrand- de-Comminges Valcabrère

GETTING THERE

By road > From Toulouse, A64 motorway, exit 17, follow directions for «Luchon / Espagne», then follow directions for «Saint-Bertrand / Valcabrère». By train > the SNCF train station in Montréjeau. Coach and taxi service.



HAUTE-GARONNE WELCOMES YOU

HAUTE-GARONNE TOURISME

14, rue Bayard CS 71509 31015 TOULOUSE CEDEX 06
Tel. 00 33 5 61 99 44 00 | bienvenue@tourismehg.com
hautegaronnentourisme.com

LES OLIVÉTAINS

Parvis de la Cathédrale 31510 SAINT-BERTRAND-DE-COMMINGES
Tel. 00 33 5 61 95 44 44 | olivetains@tourismehg.com

CASTEL OF LARÉOLE

31480 LARÉOLE
Tel. 00 33 5 61 06 33 58 | chateaulareole@tourismehg.com

MAISON DE LA HAUTE-GARONNE

31290 AVIGNONET-LAURAGAIS
Tel. 00 33 5 61 81 69 46 | mhg@tourismehg.com

GRANDS SITES OCCITANIE

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