

CHURCH OF SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE DE GAVARNIE IN GAVARNIE-GÈDRE



N°66 Collection «The Pilgrims Way
to Santiago de Compostela
in France»



Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture



Chemins de Saint-Jacques-
de-Compostelle en France
inscrits sur la Liste du
patrimoine mondial en 1998



Église paroissiale
Saint-Jean-Baptiste
Gavarnie

ROUTES OF SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA IN FRANCE

The « Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela in France » was designated a World Heritage Site in 1998.

Thus, UNESCO recognised the immense historical and spiritual value of this pilgrimage route.

The « site » comprises **78 components, 64 monuments, 7 monument complexes, and 7 stretches of trail** located across **10 regions, 32 departments and 95 communes**, illustrating the practices and rituals of the pilgrimage, devotions to St James, as well as other saints, and the physical and material conditions of the journey.

It brings together **religious buildings, hospitals, bridges and a city-gate** as landmarks on the pilgrim route.

This property comprises a collection of great architectural and artistic wealth, the largest recorded in France.

The management of the site is coordinated at national level by the *Préfet de Région Occitanie*. They chair the inter-regional coordination committee which includes all the property owners. It also relies on the French agency for the Compostella trails (Agence française des chemins de Compostelle -AFCC), which manages the listed site.

Formed in 1990, the AFCC promotes the Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela and the development of cultural tourism in the territories. Since 2015, the State has entrusted it to coordinate the network of owners, managers and stakeholders of the "The Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela in France" cultural site inscribed to the World Heritage List in order to collectively ensure the best conditions for conservation, receiving visitors and promotion.

For more information

www.cheminscompostelle-patrimoine mondial.fr

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Back cover (from top to bottom and from left to right) :

- Primatiale Saint-Trophime à Arles
- Abbatale Sainte-Foy-de-Conques
- Section de sentier entre Aroue et Ostabat-Asme (Pyrénées-Atlantiques)
- Basilique Sainte-Madeleine de Vézelay
- Cathédrale Notre-Dame d'Amiens
- Collégiale Saint-Étienne à Neuvy-Saint-Sépulchre
- Cathédrale Notre-Dame du Puy-en-Velay
- Mont-Saint-Michel
- Notre-Dame-en-Vaux à Châlons-en-Champagne
- Tour Saint-Jacques à Paris

ON THE BORDERS BETWEEN FRANCE AND — SPAIN, A PLACE OF PASSAGE AND WELCOME

Gavarnie is nestled in a valley in the Hautes-Pyrénées bordering Spain (Valleys of Barège* in France and Broto in Spain) at an altitude of almost 1400 m. Here are the headwaters of the Gave, a turbulent river, which gave its name to the site – it is known for its famous Cirque.

In the Middle Ages, Gavarnie had a hospital, a place to receive travellers rather than provide medical care, hence the name of the church district called « de l'Hôpital » (of the Hospital). Until the fifteenth century, the monk-knights and Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem*, then the Knights of Malta received travellers and pilgrims. They also developed the lands before

losing their rights to the valleys during the Revolution.

Originally part of Luz-Saint-Sauveur, Gavarnie became an autonomous municipality in 1842, before merging with its neighbour in 2016 to create the commune of Gavarnie-Gèdre (345 inhabitants).

In 1780 Gavarnie, the sub-parish of Luz, was limited to a few houses and barns spread along the valley, due to the risk of avalanche. The density of buildings increased, with inns, hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops, due to the increase in the number of visitors.

* see p. 14

Church and former presbytery.



When the first settlers arrived in these high valleys is unknown, but recent excavations in the *Cirque de Troumouse*, near Gavarnie, have uncovered evidence of occupation dating back more than 4300 years.

These places have been exploited for a long time: summer pastures* for grazing, trade and crossing the Pyrenees at the port* of Boucharo, also called port of Gavarnie or Pierres Saint-Martin This pass is accessible for a large part of the year, which has favoured its use.

The site of Gavarnie, « common » and neutral, remained undivided for a long time between the valleys of Barège and Broto. Spanish people worked in the hospital, and in the summer many Aragonese came to Gavarnie where they went to mass. This cohabitation was occasionally punctuated by violent clashes that had to be appeased. In fulfillment of the agreements made between the people of Barège and Broto, the « lies et passeries »*, every year on the feast of St. Madeleine (21st July), the French and Spanish swore on the missal, the cross and the

gospels of the church, to maintain their good relationship. The current border only dates back to the 1860s.

And so, interactions between the two Pyrenean slopes were numerous with the regular passage of travellers, merchants, shepherds and pilgrims on their way to Zaragoza, Montserrat and Compostela. A stop at the hospital* or « almshouse » at Gavarnie provided them with lodgings and food (bread, hot salt water, blanket and bench and wine) as they approached the passes. It was the same in the nearby valley of Héas with another respite* stop and its pilgrimage chapel, and on the Spanish side with the hospital of San Nicolas de Bujaruelo.

These guest houses consisted of small groups of stone and wood buildings with thatched roofs: chapel, monastery, hospital and outbuildings (barns, oven, stables, mill ...) all living from the income of the land, rents (in lambs, wool, grain and cheeses), flocks of sheep and donations.

Roland's Breach (La brèche de Roland), overlooks the Cirque de Gavarnie, between France and Spain. The epic tales of the Iberian adventures of Charlemagne and his nephew, the priest Roland, are part of the Pyrenean Legendry as told to the pilgrims of St. James. Lavedan and Pays Toy are marked by rocks bearing traces left by the hero (« Pas de Roland »), his sword or his horse.

Postcard (around 1900) showing the Hospital district with the church, some thatched houses and barns.

In an environment devoid of trees, we can see on the right the path taken by pilgrims to the Port de Boucharo and at the bottom the Cirque. (AD 65, 5 Fi 188/343).



AN EXCEPTIONAL SITE



Found in the heart of the Pyrenees National Park, the Cirque de Gavarnie enjoys many accolades : UNESCO World Heritage (1997), Important Site for the Occitanie Region.

THE MEDIEVAL HOSPITAL

(XIIth-XIIIth CENTURIES)

Gavarnie appeared in the archives around 1140. Raymond-Guillaume de Benque donated to « Sainte-Marie's [Madeleine] Hospital ».

The settlement then seems to have been maintained by the valleys of Barège and Broto (Aragon) and then entrusted to the Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem* who accommodated and protected travellers and pilgrims as they did in the East. Developing the area, crops and transhumance herds provided resources.

The XIIIth and XIVth centuries were prosperous periods for the hospital at Gavarnie. Fifteen to twenty people were attached to it : priests, hospitallers, knights, brother servants, « donat(e)s » (laity acting as servants), shepherds and servants.

It was at his time that the Hospitallers of St John received the parish of Luz where they fortified the church of Saint-André. The settlement at Gavarnie also had many properties, with income from the Barège Valley, from Saint-Gaudens (Haute-Garonne) and from Spain, as well as fortified houses in Luz and Lourdes (Garnavie Tower).

The kings of Aragon and the bishops of Huesca granted protection and grazing rights for the hospitals 1500 ewes.

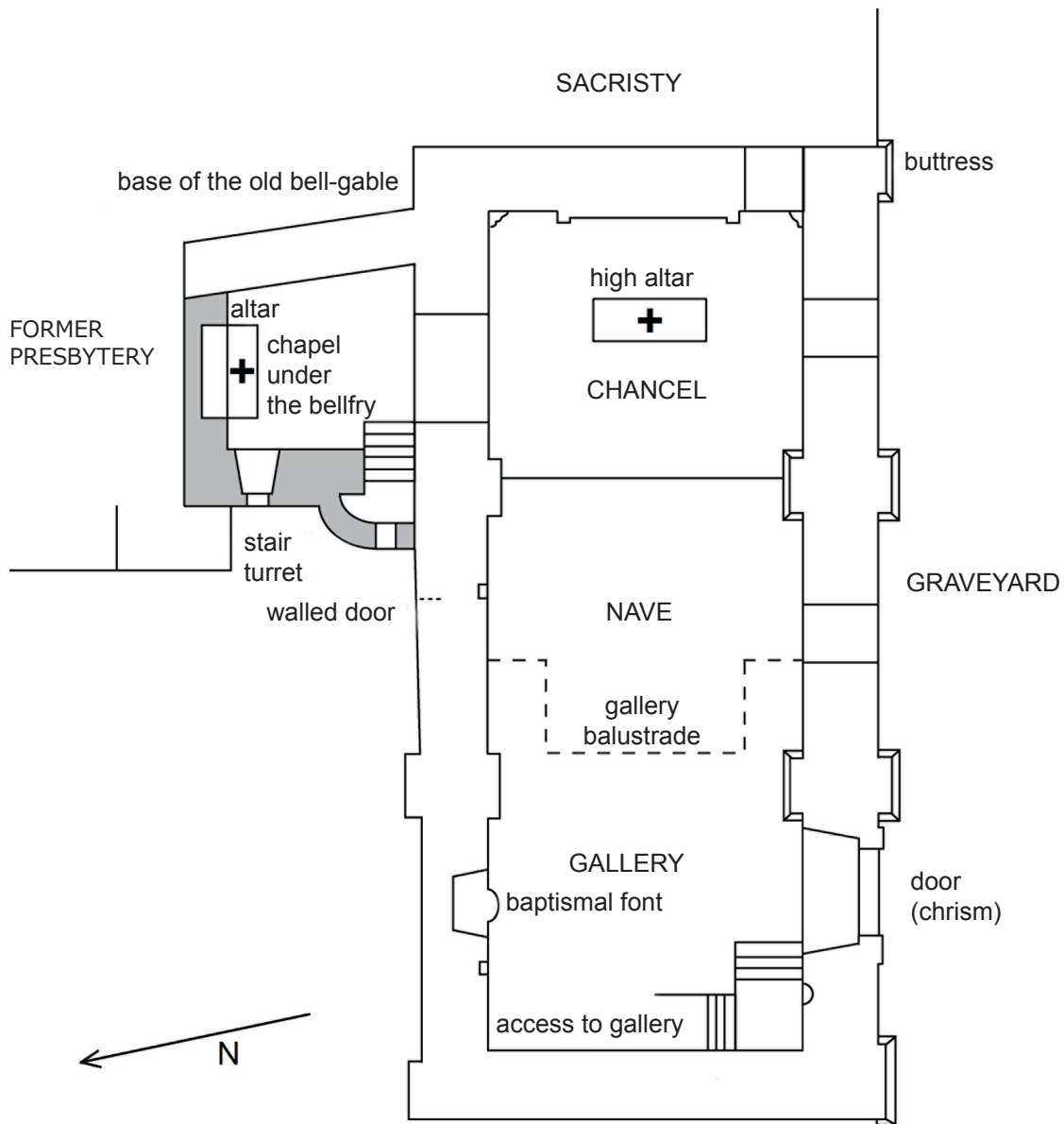
Nevertheless, from the XVth century the knights of Saint John abandoned the Pyrenees and entrusted their settlements to farmers who sent them the income.

In Gavarnie, the hospital function continued due to the support of the valley communities of Bigorre (France) and Aragon, with some periods of disorder.

In 1523, the war between the two kingdoms put an end to the treaties of « lies et passeries »*, and the hospital was looted by the Aragonese who nevertheless spared the church. In the 1550s, the Barégeois took the initiative to rebuild the travellers' house with the coats of arms of Bigorre and France on the doors and windows.

Seeing this as a denial of their rights over the settlement, the Brotois destroyed the building. Following this incident, the representatives of the two sides reached a new agreement for the joint management of the site, which was then restored.

A description, dated 1578, of the church, the cemetery, the monastery and the hospital is preserved. This dilapidated building comprised a stable, two cellars, a kitchen, a common room, a stone staircase that lead to three rooms and an attic. The outbuildings were a barn, an oven and a mill.



0 1 2 3 4 5m

□ XIXth century reconstructions on medieval foundations.

■ XIXth century extension (belfry)

Ground plan of the church of Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Gavarnie.



Romanesque Tympanum with a Christomon.

A LITTLE-KNOWN CHURCH

« Gavarnie is a very ordinary village, with a view over the amphitheatre [the cirque] which one comes to visit » (Hippolyte Taine, 1855). Despite the thousands of depictions and descriptions of the site, very few mention the church, except for its « Templar skulls » (see furniture).

The building, built on the edge of the road leading to the Port of Boucharo, is dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene, a common name for the chapel of a place of hospitality, and to Saint John the Baptist, patron saint of the Hospitallers who became the Order of Malta. An inventory from 1710 lists some ten relics* of people from the Bible and the Gospels. They have been kept in Gavarnie since the Middle Ages, and

are attributed to the Virgin, to Christ (wood of the cross...), to Aaron and several saints: Laurene, John the Baptist, Bartholomew, Mary Magdalene, Holy Innocents...

Additionally, there are two iron rods reputed to cure rabies (like the « keys of Saint Peter »). While most churches have few or no relics, the number preserved here, their prestigious origin, authenticated by papal documents, made them extraordinary objects of veneration on the pilgrims' route.

The church, almost oriented (with the altar to the east), measures eight metres by sixteen. Roofed with slate over two slopes, which

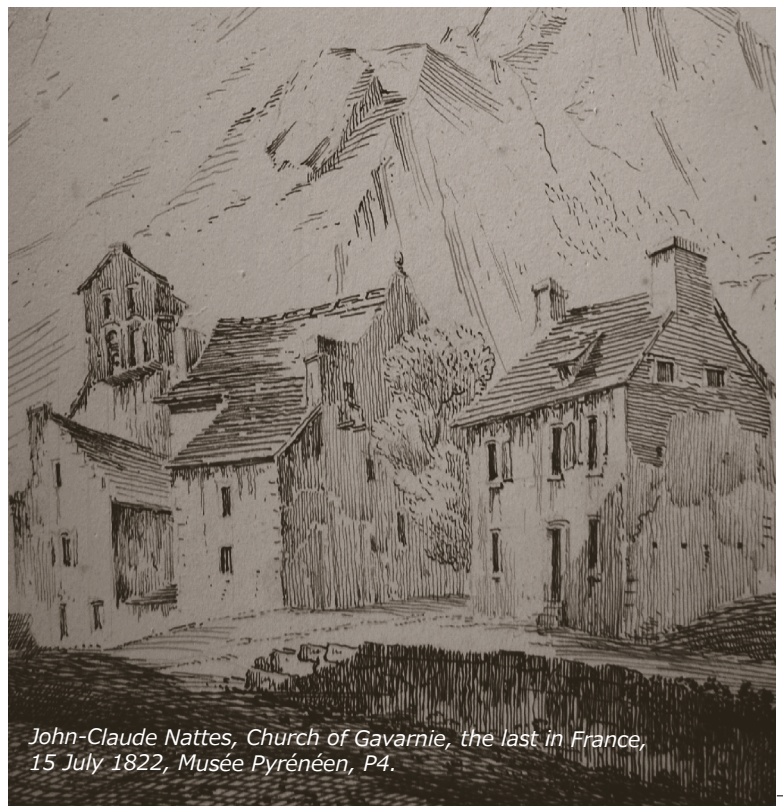
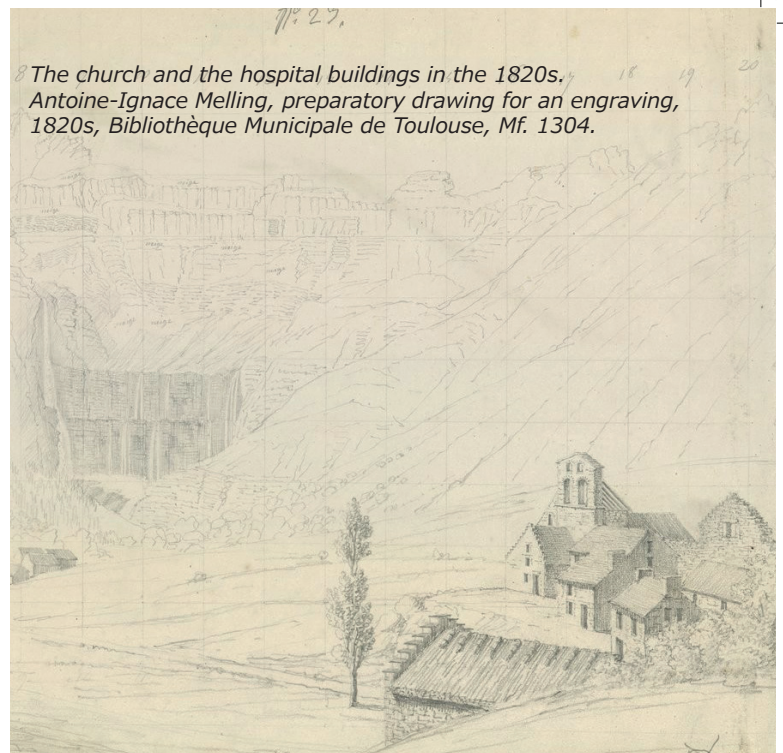
used to have a lower pitch, it forms an oblong rectangle encompassing the nave* and chancel* against which the sacristy* is built. The walls, rebuilt with fine stone in the 19th century, are enhanced by buttresses reinforcing the gables and interior pillars supporting rounded-arches* and the pointed barrel vault*. To the north, at the base of a square bell tower with a pyramidal roof, is a small chapel. The openings consist of a few lancet windows and a round-headed door. The former presbytery stands against the church to the north.

The Romanesque church was the same shape and size as the present building; the base of the walls and the doors' tympanum*, sculpted with a Christmon* (XIIth or XIIIth century), remains. It attracted the attention of Victor Hugo who drew it in 1843.

In 1477 and 1578, the churches inventories, which are rather brief, mention three or four altars. However, the 1578 text describes a « descapilat » (uncovered) roof and a sacristy with few religious objects.

The church was restored in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries with the installation of Baroque furniture, some of which remain. A bell was cast in 1774. By the 1780s the hospital building lay largely in ruins. In their place the presbytery was built, and restored and enlarged during the 19th century.

In poor condition, the church of Gavarnie was almost completely rebuilt on its medieval foundations between 1820 and 1840. However, drawings and engravings give us a glimpse of its former silhouette. Surrounded by buildings to the east and north, it had a separate bell-gable with four bays which was replaced by the present tower (1854). The last restoration took place in 1990-2000.



RICH AND VARIED FURNITURE

The church in Gavarnie has a fairly mixed collection of furniture, but it covers a long period of time and includes some quality items. The inventory drawn up in 1477 indicates that fine objects have since disappeared. The church housed three bells, thirteen chimes, eleven of which were hung on a wheel, two silver chalices, a brass cross with rock crystal settings, candlesticks and silk religious vestments, and a dozen liturgical books written on parchment, witnesses to the many services sung by the monks.

The statues of the Virgin and pilgrims

In a niche in the north chapel stands a statue of the Virgin and Child known as Notre-Dame du

Bon-Port or Bon-Passage (listed as a historical monument in 1959).

It follows in the tradition of the Virgins in Majesty* of the Romanesque period but dates from the XIVth century. Like the missing statue in the chapel of the Plan d'Aragnoet hospital, she holds a flask in her hand (and not a bottle as is sometimes said) symbolising the comfort given to travellers.

It is framed by two statuettes of Compostela pilgrims, a tabernacle (with panels depicting the Annunciation) and elements from a dismantled XVIIIth Century retable (altarpiece).

Our Lady of Bon-Port (XIVth century) and pilgrims.



Statues of St John the Baptist



The other statues

The church has several carved, painted and gilded wooden statues. The one in the baptismal font* niche represents St John the Baptist; it follows the medieval tradition. Also of interest on the walls of the nave are the statues of a Virgin and Child and an unidentified bearded saint (listed as a historical monument in 1979).

The skull cabinet

One of the « curiosities » of the church in Gavarnie is a small (XIXth century) cabinet on the wall opposite the entrance, that, as the inscription painted on its pediment states: « Templar Skulls », contains eight human skulls.

The Templar Order was never present in Gavarnie but, as in Luz or Aragnouet, during the suppression of the Templars in the XIVth century, a romantic legend formed around the remains of warrior monks killed by the king's men. Accounts from the XIXth century mention the discovery of an ossuary and buried skeletons in Gavarnie.

The origin of these skulls is unknown, but they are mentioned in the church as early as the end of the XVIIIth century (there are twelve of them on the beams supporting the gallery). They became an attraction for travellers, including Georges Sand and Victor Hugo, who shivered as they handled them. Some even stole some of the teeth as a souvenir !

and the Virgin and Child.



The skull cabinet.





Statue of St James.



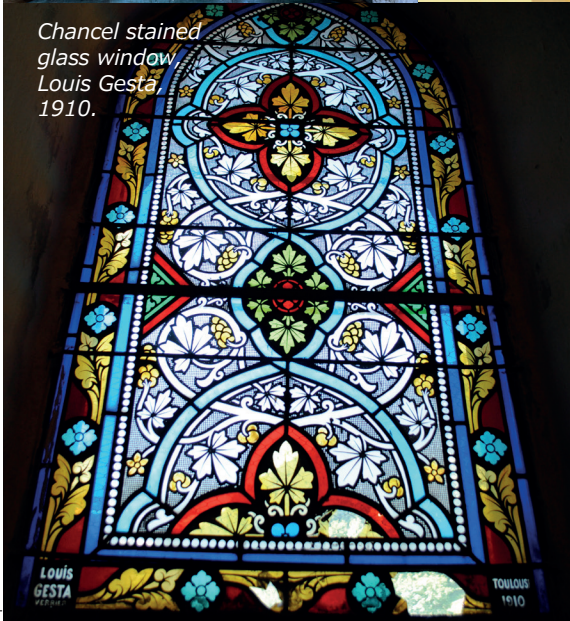
Statuette of pilgrim.

XIXth - XXth century furniture

New neo-Gothic furniture was fitted following the reconstruction of the church. The marble altar dates to 1842. An earlier Baroque retable (altarpiece) was dismantled and replaced by the current plaster decoration to the chancel. Composed of three niches, in the centre it houses the group of the Baptism of Christ framed by the statues of the Virgin and Saint Joseph made at sculptor Pierre Vermare's Lyon factory.

A second bell was cast in 1898 by Dencausse, of Soues, near Tarbes.

The stained glass windows (1910) were made by Louis Gesta in Toulouse. The church also has a beautiful pulpit, a holy water font and a contemporary statue of St James.



Chancel stained glass window
Louis Gesta
1910.



Chancel retable.

The Pyrenean Cemetery

The cemetery of Gavarnie has the peculiarity of including many tombs of people not belonging to the commune, next to the burials of the inhabitants. Since the 1930s, the municipality has reserved a sector for the « Pyreneans »*. The remains of people from a wide range of backgrounds can be found there, and who, since the 19th century, have advanced the knowledge and understanding of the Pyrenees and the mountains in general. Here rest, not only Arlaud, Ledormeur, Gaurier... but also the representatives of the great families of guides : Passet, Adagas, Bernat-Salles, Courtade-Salles, Pujo, Trescazes. Plaques also commemorate the memory of those who went missing in the mountains and of soldiers who died on missions. This place of remembrance finds its extension in the cirque itself, since the Turon de la Courade houses the tombs of the Le Bondidier couple, creators of the Pyrenean Museum in Lourdes, and of another great mountaineer, Schrader.

Count Russell's statue

On the roadside, at the entrance to the village, there is a statue in honour of Count Henry Russell. This pioneer of climbing had caves dug into the mountains where he lived with guides and friends. In 1889 he rented the Vignemale Massif for 99 years ! The original bronze, unveiled in 1911, was melted down during the Second World War and replaced in 1952 by a copy.

Our Lady of the Snows

A monumental statue of the Virgin and Child overlooks Gavarnie from the Turon de Holle. A small chapel is located in its base. Named Our Lady of the Snows (Notre-Dame des Neiges), it was erected in 1927, at the instigation of the bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes and the French Alpine Club (CAF), as a protective figure for travellers threatened by avalanches. In the oratory next to the church you can see the model for the statue, made by Tarbes sculptor, Firmin Michelet (1875-1951).

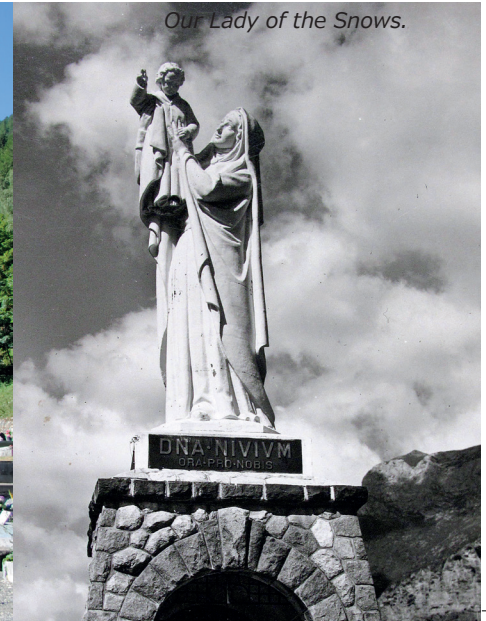
Statue of Henry Russell.



Pyrenean Cemetery.



Our Lady of the Snows.



GLOSSARY

Rounded-arch : stone arcade that reinforces the shape of a vault.

Altar : a type of table on which the priest celebrates mass.

Pointed barrel vault : an arch that is not rounded but has an ogival, pointed profile.

Barège : name of the valley where Gavarnie is located, that does not have a final « s », unlike the village of Barèges that does.

Chevet, chancel : name given to the part of the church, usually at the east, housing the altar.

Chrismon : greek letters inscribed in a circle that symbolise the name of Christ.

Summer pasture : highly regulated highland pastures where communities could herd their animals.

Baptismal font : a stone basin (baptismal font), where the priest gives baptism.

Hospital or respite : during the Middle Ages, a place along important routes that provided travellers, pilgrims and « poor passers-by » with shelter, food and some care or provisions.

Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem : order of religious monks and soldiers, founded in the Middle Ages to facilitate the access by pilgrims to Jerusalem and then established themselves across Europe. They became the Order of Malta.

Lies et passeries : agreements concluded from the Middle Ages onwards in the Pyrenees between communities in the same valley or in different valleys to regulate their commercial and pastoral relations...

Nave : the part of a church where those attending religious services stand, apart from the choir.

Port : pass, place where a mountain is crossed.

Pyrenean : name given to sports personalities, scientists and writers who worked to increase the knowledge and understanding of the Pyrenees since the end of the XVIIIth century.

Relics : remains of a saint (bones, clothes...) encased in the altar when the church was consecrated.

Retable : from retro tabulum or de re stabilis: behind, fixed against the (altar) table. Decorated in stone, wood.... With « images » (paintings, statues, reliefs) above the altar. Found in the Middle Ages but become very imposing later.

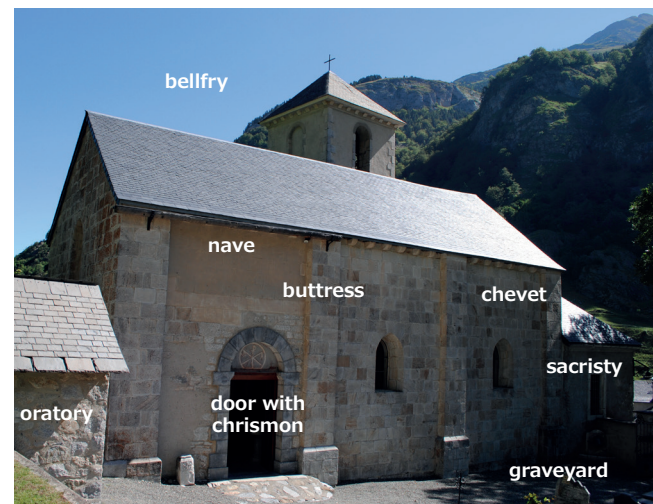
Sacristy : part of the church, or even an adjoining room, where religious objects are kept.

Tabernacle : from the XVIIth century onwards, a small cabinet placed on the altar, where the hosts are kept.

Tympanum : semi-circular stone placed above a door and usually decorated.

Virgin in Majesty : representation of the Virgin Mary seated on a throne and introducing the baby Jesus.

Different parts of the church



Our Lady of Bon Port.



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Pilgrim.



Knocker.



Retable detail.



THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

« Wars begin in the minds of men. It is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be nurtured ». (Ellen Wilkinson, UNESCO Constituent Assembly).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes the identification, protection and preservation of natural and cultural heritage throughout the world considered to have outstanding universal value to humanity.

This is the subject of an international treaty called the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, adopted by UNESCO in 1972.

« The concept of Outstanding Universal Value, which underpins World Heritage, is based on the

idea that certain sites are of such outstanding cultural and/or natural importance that they transcend national boundaries and are of equal value to present and future generations of all humanity.

As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the greatest importance to the entire international community.

The Committee defines the criteria for the inscription of sites to the World Heritage List ». (*Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO*).

To be inscribed to the List, a natural (work of nature) or cultural (work of man) property, and sometimes both, must meet certain criteria. These criteria help to define its outstanding universal value.





TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Heritage is the legacy of the past that we enjoy today and pass on to future generations.

All countries have sites of local or national interest that are rightly a source of national pride. It is from these that the World Heritage sites are selected, as they are considered the best possible examples of the cultural and natural heritage they represent.

They are indicated by an emblem, representing the interdependence of biological and cultural diversity in the world. The central square symbolises the results of human skill and the circle celebrates the gifts of nature. The emblem is round, like the world, a symbol of global protection for the heritage of humanity.

But heritage is also about rituals, artistic practices, know-how... what we call intangible cultural heritage. This form of heritage is protected by UNESCO through a convention adopted in 2003 which aims to identify and perpetuate these living traditions. This heritage has its own emblem to give it more visibility.

Therefore, under one or other of the conventions, many sites, buildings or rituals linked to pilgrimages in the various faiths, or great mythical routes, can be protected as part of the world heritage.

IN THE FAMILY OF PILGRIMAGES — AND PATHS OF HUMANITY

The « Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela in France » belongs to a large family of sacred sites, ritual sites and major traffic routes protected under one or other of the international conventions.

Thus, without claiming to be exhaustive, we find sites and practices as diverse as the « Qhapaq Ñan, Andean road network » (2014), in South America; « Lumbini, birthplace of the Buddha » (1997), in Nepal, one of the most important holy places of Buddhism; « Ephesus » (2015), in Turkey, where pilgrimages have continued since Antiquity; « the services and hospitality offered during the visit to Arba'in » (2019), in Iraq, for those visiting the holy city of Kerbala ; or the « Limousin septennial ostensions » (2013), which consist of extravagant ceremonies and processions organised for the display and

revelation of the relics of saints preserved in the churches of the Limousin.

Special mention should be made of the « Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountains » in Japan, inscribed in 2004. This comprises three sacred sites, nestled in dense forests in the mountains overlooking the Pacific Ocean, linked by a walking route. They reflect a tradition that has been alive for 1200 years, a fusion of Shinto, rooted in the ancient Japanese tradition of nature worship, and Buddhism, which came from China.

Finally, let us not forget the « Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela : Camino Francés and Routes of Northern Spain », inscribed in 1993 and extended in 2015, of which the French property is in a way an extension of the other side of the Pyrenees.





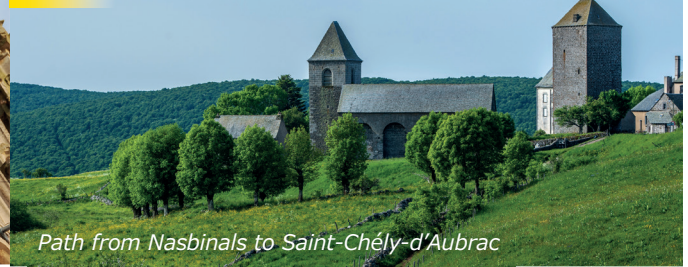
Bourges



L'Épine



La Charité-sur-Loire



Path from Nasbinals to Saint-Chély-d'Aubrac

A PROPERTY OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Throughout the Middle Ages, Santiago de Compostela was a major destination for countless pilgrims from all over Europe. To get to Spain, pilgrims crossed France. Four symbolic routes leaving from Paris, Vézelay, Le Puy and Arles to the Pyrenees summarise the countless routes taken by travellers. Pilgrimage churches or simple shrines, hospitals, bridges and crosses mark these routes and bear witness to the spiritual and material aspects of pilgrimage. A spiritual exercise and manifestation of faith, pilgrimage also affected the secular world by playing a decisive role in the birth and circulation of ideas and arts.

Great shrines such as the church of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse or the cathedral of Amiens - some of which are mentioned in the Codex Calixtinus - as well as other features materially illustrate the routes and conditions of pilgrimage for centuries. Seventy-one features associated with the pilgrimage have been selected to illustrate their geographical diversity, the chronological development of the pilgrimage between the XIth and XVth centuries, and the essential architectural functions, such as the former pilgrims' hospital in Pons, or the «pilgrims'» bridge over the Boralde. Additionally, seven sections of the Chemin du Puy are included covering a length of almost 160 km of road.

CRITERIA USED BY UNESCO

Criterion (II): Evidence of a significant exchange of influences over a period of time or within a cultural area on the development of architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design.

The pilgrimage route of Santiago de Compostela played an essential role in religious and cultural exchanges and development during the Late Middle Ages, as is wonderfully illustrated by the carefully selected monuments along the pilgrimage routes in France.


Criterion (IV): To provide an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological complex or landscape which illustrates a significant period(s) in human

history. The spiritual and physical needs of pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela were met by the creation of a number of specialised buildings, many of which were created or further developed along the French sections.

Criterion (VI): To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, ideas, beliefs or artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. The pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela is an exceptional testimony to the power and influence of the Christian faith in all social classes and countries of Europe in the Middle Ages.



 Sentiers aménagés

 Monuments, ensembles

 Sections de sentier

- 1 Nasbinals (Lozère) to Saint-Chély-d'Aubrac (Aveyron) : 17 km
- 2 Saint-Côme-d'Olt to Estaing (Aveyron) : 17 km
- 3 Montredon to Figeac (Lot) : 18 km
- 4 Faycelles to Cajarc (Lot) : 22,5 km
- 5 Bach to Cahors (Lot) : 26 km
- 6 Lectoure to Condom (Gers) : 35 km
- 7 Arroue to Ostabat-Asme (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) : 22 km






**PRÉFET
DE LA RÉGION
OCCITANIE**
*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*


**Chemins de
COMPOSTELLE**
patrimoine mondial

Agence française
des chemins
de Compostelle


**La Région
Occitanie**
Pyrénées - Méditerranée


**HAUTES-
PYRÉNÉES**
LE DÉPARTEMENT