

France : Ariège

A rock climbing guidebook
to the Ariège area of the French Pyrenees

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This page: Paul Phillips concentrating hard on
Cinquième dimension (7a) - *page 221* - at Sinsat. Photo: Mick Ryan
Cover: Sarah Stirling on the majestic slab pitch of
La Sabine (5+) - *page 205* - at Auzat. Photo: Mark Glaister

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Climbing at Appy in the spring sunshine on *Arête est* (4+) - page 250 - whilst the high Pyrenees are still plastered in snow. Photo: Chris Craggs

Guidebook Footnote

The inclusion of a climbing area in this guidebook does not mean that you have a right of access or the right to climb upon it. The descriptions of routes within this guide are recorded for historical reasons only, and no reliance should be placed on the accuracy of the description. The grades set in this guide are a fair assessment of the difficulty of the climbs. Climbers who attempt a route of a particular standard should use their own judgment as to whether they are proficient enough to tackle that route. This book is not a substitute for experience and proper judgment. The authors, publisher and distributors of this book do not recognise any liability for injury or damage caused to, or by, climbers, third parties, or property arising from such persons seeking reliance on this guidebook as an assurance for their own safety.

We first visited the area in 2006 and, on each subsequent visit, the place has intrigued us more and more: the benign climate, the superb scenery, the friendly locals and, of course, the mountains and the climbing.

The area described in this book is around the Ariège river that cuts its way through the foothills of the Pyrenees, flowing first west and then north. The Ariège region extends further west, to beyond St Giron but, in this guide, we are just covering the core area which is roughly centred on Tarascon-sur-Ariège.

Relative to other Rockfax France books, the area we cover in this one is remarkably small in extent, being not much more than 60km east-to-west and 40km north-to-south. Despite its small compass, the area is extremely varied and this is reflected in the climbing available. There is limestone, granite and gneiss to go at, from roadside caves, to high mountain crags and all stops in between. The proximity of all the crags to each other also means that you can easily sample any of the crags in the book without having to spend hours in the car, and can also visit multiple venues in the same day. Foix to Ax-les-Thermes is roughly 40 minutes drive and that will take you close to most of the climbing covered.

The equable climate, a long climbing season and a broad range of other activities on offer make this an attractive region for serious rock-jocks after an intense week of sport but also for families looking for an occasional day's climbing as part of a holiday. With mountain and valley walks, cross country and downhill skiing in the season, road and mountain biking, a variety of water-sports, caves to explore, spas to relax in and ancient castles to visit, there is plenty here to occupy your time. The Other Activities section on page 22 gives you a few pointers.

Perhaps the most surprising fact about the area is the way that it has remained under the radar for so long. Over the past couple of years I have frequently been asked what I am working on, and the answer, "A new guide to the Ariège", almost always drew a blank look. Well not any more; the cat is out of the bag and there is a new venue on the circuit!

Chris Craggs, October 2012

Mick Ryan about to discover the crucial hold that allows the completion of the last move has gone, on *Histoire d'os* (still 7a) - [page 103](#) - Calamès Grottes. Photo: Alan James

Access

Most of the cliffs in this book are well-known and have been popular for many years; unless indicated otherwise, you can assume there is a right of access. Unlike the UK, climbing in France is seen as a mainstream past time, bringing health benefits and income to communities. Support for this is obvious in the way that car parks, current restrictions, access routes, buttresses and actual climbs are clearly marked in many places. This means there is little doubt about where to park and how to get to the cliffs.

Climbers' Code

Park considerably - don't block access, and be prepared to climb elsewhere if there's nowhere to park.

Stick to the approach paths

- avoid short-cuts, especially through someone's private land. If there are signs, read them and follow any instructions.

Keep the noise down at the

crag - crags are often in areas popular with walkers who are keen to get away from all that.

Take your rubbish home with you - better still, make space for less considerate souls' rubbish, and remember that anything left at the crag is 'rubbish'. As an example orange peel takes around two years to decompose, and looks a mess while it does so!

Feedback - Online Route Database

The database at www.rockfax.com contains a listing of every route in the book, with the opportunity to log comments and vote on grades and star ratings. This information is essential to help us ensure up-to-date coverage for all the climbs. We can then produce updates and make sure we get it right in subsequent editions. To make this system work we need the help of everyone who climbs in the areas covered by this book, so if you think you have found a badly-graded route, or discovered a hidden gem that we have only given a single star to, let us know about it. Your general comments on other aspects of this book are also welcome.



Mike Waters climbing the classic *L'oeil du faucon* (7a) - page 155 - at Saut de l'Ours. Photo: Neil Foster

As far as we are aware, this is the first guidebook to cover a large chunk of the Ariège area, albeit as a selected volume. There are several smaller local guides that together cover most of the crags in the area. These may be available in the tourist information centres and bookshops, or from the Decathlon at Foix but some are quite old and probably won't be available for much longer. Most of these books are the work of Jean-Denis Achard and he requires a special thanks for the years of hard work he has put in.

Local Guidebooks available in 2012

Blue text indicates information not covered in this book.

Le Plantaurel (2000) by Jean-Denis Achard

Arabaux, *La Fajane*, Le Carol, Roc des Abeilles, Péreille, Dreuilhe, Roquefixade (*all sectors*), *Le Bosc*. An ageing guidebook for the Plantaurel crags with line topos. It contains about 260 routes including two crags not in this book and costs €13 but may not be available for much longer.

Autour de Bèdeilhac (2008) by Jean-Denis Achard

Calamès (*all sectors*), Roc à Steph, La Roche Ronde, Roc de Sédour (*including La Grande Paroi*). A nice guidebook, with lovely hand-coloured topos. It contains about 350 routes including several Calamès sectors not in this book and costs €20.

Niaux Limestone (2011) by Graham Lynch

Sabart, Alliat, Génat, *Cap de Couronnes*, Sibada, Baychon, *Le Refuge*, *Colonne Unique*, Saut de l'Ours, *L'Arche*. An excellent guidebook in English with a French language version expected soon, covering everything on the crags around Niaux with good photo topos. It contains about 540 routes including four crags not in this book and costs €20.

Le Granit d'Auzat (1999) by Jean-Denis Achard

Auzat, Goulter, Pic Rouge de Belcaire. An aging guidebook with basic line drawing topos. It contains about 120 routes but is becoming very scarce.

Le Quié de Sinsat (1998) by Jean-Denis Achard

Sinsat (*all sectors*). This old single crag guidebook has basic line drawn topos. It contains about 222 routes but is now difficult to get hold of.

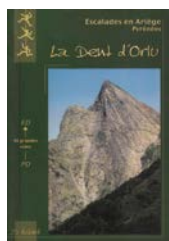
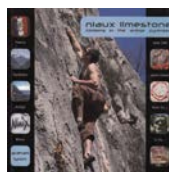
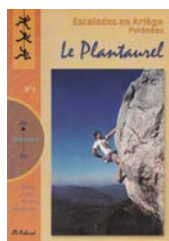
La Dent d'Orlu (2002) by Jean-Denis Achard

La Dent d'Orlu (*all routes*). An excellent guidebook with very detailed information for all the routes on this huge mountain. 50 routes covered (compared to 30 in this book) and it costs €20.

cafma.free.fr

A local web site with plenty of online topos and information for most of the crags in the area.

It is not the policy of Rockfax to replace local guidebooks, but rather to introduce climbers to the new areas, typically climbers who may be unaware of the wealth of climbing in an area and who are unable to acquire information via their own local sources. Rather than competing with local guidebooks, we hope that the increased number of visitors will lead to more sales of quality local guidebooks and a general boost to the local economy.



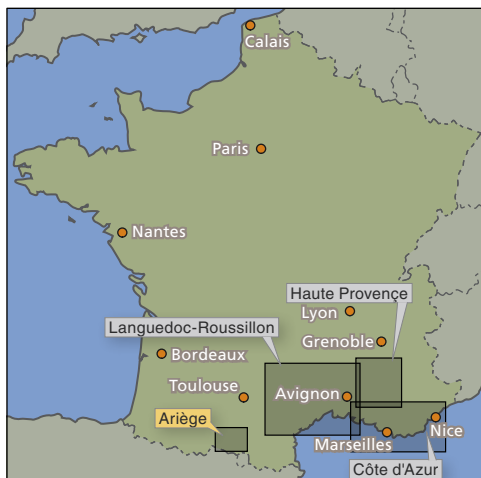
Climbing at Rémilassé, near St Giron, one of the outlying crags in the area not covered in the guidebook, proving there is plenty to do here for those who like to go off exploring. Photo: Chris Craggs

Rockfax publishes guidebooks to areas all over Europe. All the books are available from specialist outdoor retailers or direct from www.rockfax.com

Other Rockfax France Publications

France: Haute Provence (December 2009)

The first book in the Rockfax France series contains some of the finest sport climbing destinations in the world, all brought together in one clear and colourful book. From the magnificent walls of Céüse in the north, to the impeccable climbing playground of Buoux to the south, this book has a lifetime's worth of climbing waiting between its covers.

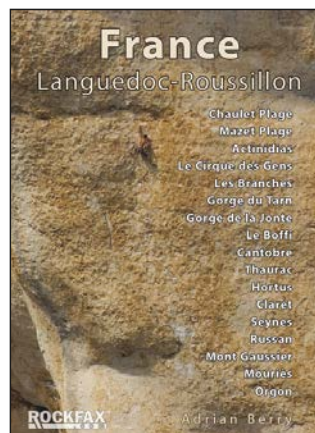
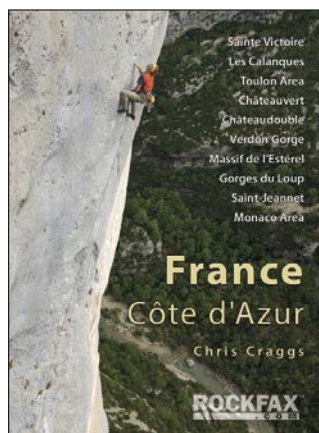
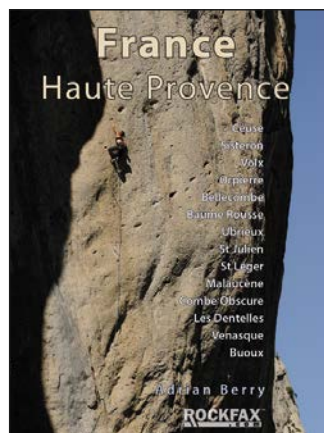


France: Côte d'Azur (December 2010)

The cliffs of the South of France rocketed to popularity back in the 1980s when it was realised what great climbing was available and how good the weather was down there. Since then other areas have attracted the attention of travelling climbers. Part two of the Rockfax France series - France : Côte d'Azur - reassesses these famous cliffs and also includes some of the great venues around Toulon, the sunniest city in France. Plus there is the popular winter venue of Châteaufort, the less well known Esterel and Châteaudouble areas, as well as the world famous Verdon Gorge. Add in Saint Jeannet and a selection of cliffs in the Nice area and this is an essential volume for any climber.

France: Languedoc - Roussillon (December 2011)

The third book in the Rockfax France series covers the extensive and fertile climbing area largely around the beautiful Parc National des Cévennes, but also crags that are close to the cities of Nîmes and Avignon. The book starts in the Ardèche then moves onto the Gorge du Tarn. Next is the multi-pitch adventures of the Jonte and the Dourbie. Moving south, the book covers Thaurac and Hortus before heading back east towards Claret, Russan, and Seynes. The last section covers the well-developed crags surrounding Avignon, including the legendary Orgon.



Sherri Davy on the Areu-monter (4) - page 45 - a typical offering at Sector Initiation, Arabaux. The Plantaurel hills roll away into the distance and the snow-bound Pyrenees peek over the crest. Photo: Chris Craggs

As ever this book wouldn't have seen the light of day without the help and encouragement of a large number of people. The local climbers who have cleaned and bolted the routes, produced guidebooks to the area and maintained a substantial web presence have to be thanked. We have tried to mention equippers wherever possible, apologies to those we have missed.

Long time local climber Denis Corpet has been especially helpful, he offered me his photo-library and his brains to pick - hope the finished product is up to scratch.

A number of local ex-pat climbers have offered advice about the routes; grades, quality, what to include and what to leave out. Graham (and Christine) Lynch were our first guides to the area. Graham's book Niaux Limestone has proved an excellent resource and is worth buying for coverage of many more routes than we have included in the Niaux area.

Co-authors John and Anne Arran have given us a great place to live in the heart of the Ariège, and proved a prodigious force when it came to checking routes and doing the donkey work of writing them up. Without them the book would be slimmer and a lot less detailed.

Jon Stoelker proved a great help with the Calamès area and has written up his local crags in timely fashion and in great style.

Tony and Sarah Whitehouse, Thomas Cook, Ruth Jenkins, Mark McGowan, Hazel Jones (and friends) and Terry Spamer have also helped with loads of useful comments. Colin Binks has popped in repeatedly on his way to/from Spain and helped with a lot of the checking of routes as well as posing for photos.

The Rockfax/UKC team have been involved at all kinds of levels - from route checking to the actual production of the book - thanks as ever.

Sherri has belayed, taken notes and photographs, cheered me up and chivvied me along, sold the advertising and done the organisation - and always with a smile. I couldn't have done it, or the previous 20 books, without you.

Chris Craggs, October 2012



Chris Craggs at Auzat. Photo: Sherri Davy



Anne and John Arran. Photo: Gordon Jenkin

A big thank you to all the local route equippers for making this area the stunning location it is with a huge melting pot of creations. Rest is not the order of the day and since arriving four years ago more sectors are emerging both in the valleys and also in semi-equipped higher mountain terrain. Besides the route cleaning and equipping a great job has been made to make the base of crags friendly but rest assured if you want an adventure there are many more to be had!

Thanks to the ex-pat climbers who have shown us around at one time or another after we landed in the area ready to explore. Climbing partners and crag advisors include Ivan Van Cleef and Marie-Pierre Bayol, Terry Spamer, Thomas Cook, Graham and Christine Lynch, Stevie Haston and Laurence Gouault-Haston, Jon Stoelker, Ian Storey, Sam Smith, Andy Mitchell and also local climbers Pablo Péper, Jean Bouichou, Jules and Eric Villepinte and sometimes-local Mark McGowan - hope no-one has been forgotten!

Andy Ridehalgh of Suryapyrenees.com was invaluable in helping with mountain bike info as well as triathlete and sometime-climber Sean James on his selection of road bike options. Ruth Jenkins has been particularly supportive in helping with the walks section. Thanks to David Marfaing for his reassurance. One of the benefits of running Chez Arran is that our guest climbers provide a constant source of feedback on routes and crags we may not regularly visit ourselves - a big thanks to all for helping!

Thanks to the Rockfax team for making our barbecue a lively one on their visit and zooming about route checking - great to see you all - we certainly hope it isn't the last visit.

Co-author Chris Craggs has been a linchpin and constant source of required urgency and often inspiration, in the process offering useful tips on Photoshop, PDFs, generally chivvying us along and steering us in hopefully the right direction. Not to forget Sherri who always kept a jolly persona at the post-crag barbecue and charmed our cats.

John and Anne Arran, November 2012

Rockfax is grateful to the following companies who have supported this guidebook.

Climbing Walls

Awesome Walls - Page 2

St. Alban's Church, Liverpool.

Tel/Fax: 0151 298 2422

The Engine House, Stockport.

Tel: 0161 494 9949

Sefton Road, Stoke-on-Trent.

Tel: 01782 341 919

North Park Fingles, Dublin.

Tel: 01 8800088

Garter Street, Sheffield

www.awesomewalls.co.uk

Outdoor Gear

Black Diamond - Outside back cover

www.blackdiamondequipment.com

Mammut - Inside front cover

www.mammut.ch

Beta Climbing Designs - Inside back cover

www.betacimbingdesigns.com

Accommodation

Chez Arran - Cover flap

Tel: +44 (0)7951 058053

www.chezarran.com

Gîte de la Borde - Page 31

Tel: +33 (0)561644942

www.gitedelaborde.co.uk

My Pyrenees Adventure - Page 21

www.mypyreneesadventure.co.uk

Base Calamès - Page 19

Tel: +33 (0)561017680

www.basecalames.com

Le Forge - Page 29

Tel: +33 (0)561642950

www.climbAriège.co.uk

Outdoor Activities

Spa-Treks - Page 29

Tel: +33 (0)642 654653

www.spa-treks.com

Ariège Logistics

The Plantaurel

Calamès Area

Niaux Area

Auzat Area

Sinsat Area

Ax-les-Thermes Area

Mountain Walks

The Plantaurel

Calamès Area

Niaux Area

Auzat Area

Sinsat Area

Ax-les-Thermes Area

Mountain Walks

Dave Gregory and Colin Binks taking the evening air after an autumn day on Calamès. Sédour is visible across the valley, with Tarascon in the middle distance and the Upper Walls at Sinsat just poking into view. Photo: Chris Craggs



Col d'Agnès and Spanish hire car. Photo: Chris Craggs

Driving

The French autoroutes are fast and usually (national holidays excepted) uncrowded. If you've got a long drive it makes sense to break the journey, sleeping in rest areas is acceptable, but if you're looking for a bed without spending too much, find a Formula 1 (www.hotelformule1.com) or, a bit nicer, an Ibis (www.ibishotel.com) or Etap (www.etaphotel.com).

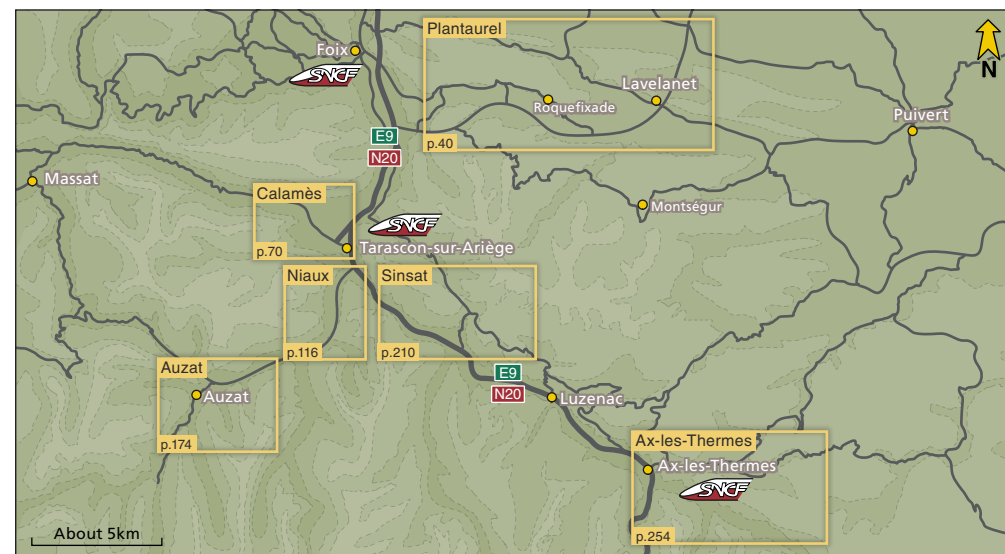
Check the AA or similar for the latest requirements when driving in France with regard to high visibility vests, SatNavs, breathalyzers, warning triangles, fire extinguishers and head lamps.

Flying

There are a number of airports in southern France served by budget airlines that are good for accessing the Ariège. Carcassonne and Toulouse are each about 1 hour 15 minutes away while Perpignan will take a little over 2 hours. From September to April, there are far fewer flights available. At these times Gerona and Barcelona are worth considering, leaving about a 3 hour drive from Spain. Expect to pay more at popular times like weekends, the busy summer months and school holidays.

Car Hire

You will need your driving licence and a credit-card. It is worth pointing out that car hire in Spain is roughly half the cost of in France, though some companies charge a daily premium for taking the vehicle across the border. The comparison site carrentals.co.uk is a useful resource for sorting through the maze of companies and offers.



Train

Eurostar operates a direct service from London to Paris. Onward travel on the TGV will get you to Carcassonne or Toulouse. Luggage restrictions are far more generous than those imposed by budget airlines. There is also a direct (sometimes overnight) service from Paris to Toulouse on normal trains, from which a good rail service continues up the Ariège valley directly under some of the crags.

Getting Around Without a Car

Public transport in the area is pretty limited, though the train runs though the main valley. Some of the cliffs can be reached by cycling, or even walking if you are stopping in the right places. Use of a taxi is another option as is sticking your thumb out.

Travel Insurance

UK citizens have reciprocal health care rights in France under the EHIC. Despite this, it is strongly recommended that personal travel insurance is taken out to cover rescue, medical and repatriation in the event of an accident.

BMC Travel Insurance - www.thebmc.co.uk

Satellite Navigation

GPS 44.39626
P 4.19651

All the parking spots are indicated with a precise GPS location. This is in the form of two decimal numbers as in the sample blue box. Different GPS devices accept these numbers in alternative formats; some devices are happy with two comma-separated numbers, others require a **N**orth and **E**ast value to be entered separately. This is a compact area, and a SatNav should get you to your designation without issues, though the best policy is to use your SatNav along with a map. Use the GPS co-ordinates in this book, and check and review the route as you approach the crag. The map above gives rough locations. Each chapter has a closer map which should let you home in on your chosen crag but a detailed local map will often be found useful and essential for the mountain walks.

Climbing in the sun on a winter's day in the South of France is always delightful, in fact many Brits may prefer to visit the south-facing cliffs in this book in the winter season. If you want to climb on the south-facing crags like Calamès or Sinsat, winter is definitely a good time for it always bearing in mind that this is a mountainous area and not one of the Costas. Other crags may be in poor condition at this time though.

Average Temp °C	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Foix (maximum)	10	13	16	16	20	22	24	26	23	19	12	11
Foix (minimum)	1	3	4	5	10	13	14	15	12	9	3	1

For most of the crags spring and autumn are the best times when you can choose between optimum cool climbing conditions in the shade or relish the warmth of the sun. Summer is the time to visit the north-facing venues - the steep caves like Sabart with its micro-climate, or head into the hills. Alternatively, choose your venue and time of day so that you chase the shade - the cliffs around Niaux are ideal for this. Consider choosing somewhere close to one of the rivers where you can go for a swim to cool off after a hot day on the rock.

Hours sun / day	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Foix (average)	3	4	6	7	8	9	10	9	7	5	4	3

The number and variety of crags in the Ariège means there's always somewhere to climb, no matter what time of year you choose to visit. Factor in the other activities on offer at different times of the year and summer or winter and you should never be short of something to do.

Rain days / month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Foix (average)	13	11	11	9	10	7	6	7	8	10	12	12

The average rainfall for the areas covered by in book is low but not as low as sun-seeking climbers might be used to in Spain and the Côte d'Azur. On a week trip you could well have a few days of rain to contend with which might mean a rest day, or a visit to a steeper crag for some ever-dry routes. After prolonged rain most of the steeper crags will suffer from some seepage.



Early season exploration in the mountains. If the sign says "closed" it means it! Photo: Chris Craggs

Your Ideal Accommodation...



In the heart of the Bèdeilhac climbing area, in the beautiful Saurat valley, our location is hard to beat. One of the best crags in the area, Calamès, is just a few minutes walk.

- Great value gîte sleeps up to 12 -**
- Family run Bed and Breakfast -**
- Superb location for outdoor activities -**
- Fully equipped self catering facilities -**
- Lots of outdoor space, perfect for kids -**
- Barbeque, free WIFI, Rail pick-up & Catering available -**
- Car free climbing, 300+ routes accessible on foot -**



BaseCalamès

www.basecalames.com

contact us: info@basecalames.com 0033 (0)5 61 01 76 80

The Ariège is a popular holiday destination for the French, but only in high summer. There are many campsites that are very quiet for the rest of the year, some have cabins for rent too. Apartments and gîtes are best found using the Internet: search the web for 'gites Ariège' and you will find a number of sites that allow you to book online. There are Tourist Information Offices in Foix, Tarascon and Ax that are happy to find you somewhere to stay, as well as something to keep you busy on a rest day.



There are several expat Brits who have quality accommodation in the area.

Chez Arran - advert on cover flap
They have four apartments, and offer rock climbing instruction, guided walks, yoga instruction and bike hire.
Tel +33 (0)5 61 05 86 54
Web www.chezarran.com
Email anne@chezarran.com

My Pyrénées Adventure - advert opposite
A house at Auzat which sleeps 6. Close to the popular granite crag.
Web www.mypyreneesadventure.co.uk
Email andy@mypyreneesadventure.co.uk

Base Calamès - advert on page 19
A gîte for 6 to 12 people, plus B&B, close to the crag.
Web www.basecalames.com
Email info@basecalames.com

Le Forge - advert on page 29
B&B with a shared kitchen which sleeps up to 20 people. Climbing wall, close to Foix.
Web www.climbAriège.co.uk
Email dan08@climbAriège.co.uk

Gîte de la Borde - advert on page 31
A gîte that sleeps up to 10 in four large bedrooms. Close to Foix.
Tel +33 (0)642654635
Web www.gitedelaborde.co.uk
Email ruth-jenkins@hotmail.com

Camping
There are several large campsites in the area, check their websites for prices, offers and opening times. Three near Tarascon are listed here but there are more:

Ariège Evasion
In Ornolac-Ussat-les-Bains.
Web www.Ariège-evasion.com

Le Pré Lombard
By the river in Tarascon-sur-Arège.
Web www.prelombard.com

Camping des Grottes
Across the river in Alliat.
Web www.campingdesgrottes.com

Trip Planner Web site

Climbapedia - www.climbapedia.com
Online trip planner with accommodation tips and advice for the whole of France.



self-catering accommodation

Affordable, attractive village house sleeps up to 6 in Auzat at the centre of the Ariège climbing area. Check out our website for pics and further info, or email andymitchell18@gmail.com.

www.mypyreneesadventure.co.uk

Ariège

Other Activities



Road Biking

This is a superb location for road biking with some classic cols such as Col de Port, Col d'Agnès and Port de Lers. There are also some great ski-resort climbs to Bonsacre and the awesome drag up to Plateau de Beille.

Nearly every year the Tour de France makes its way through Ariège with stages finishing in various places including the Plateau de Beille. To check out where the Tour de France goes see www.letour.fr

Here are some suggestions for your own tours:

The Two Cols Tour

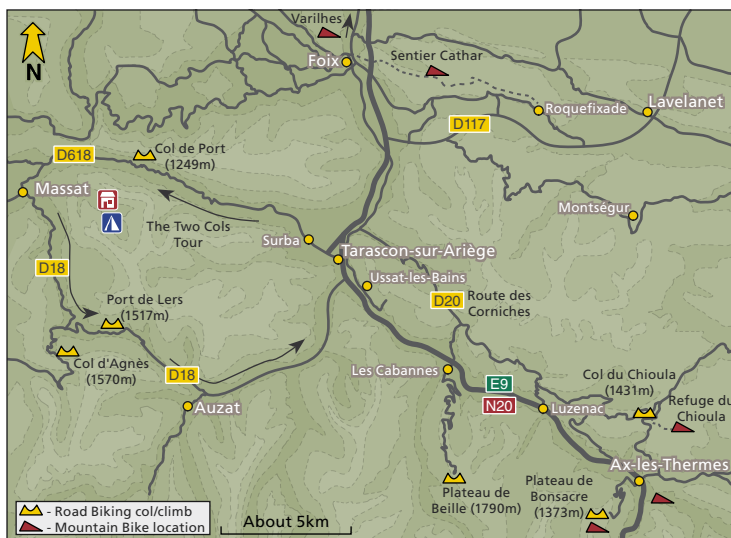
Start in Tarascon and head up the D618 towards Bédeilhac. Continue over the Col de Port (1249m) to Massat. From here head south on the D18 to Porte de Lers (1517m) and then descend via Auzat back to Tarascon. The really keen can nip up and down the Col d'Agnès (1570m) as well. Distance - 84km, 1700m of ascent, time 4 to 5 hours.

Plateau de Beille (1790m)

A beast of a climb from Les Cabannes. 15.8km, 1255m climbing, at an average of 8% with a max of 11% makes it a more significant undertaking than Alpe d'Huez.

Plateau de Bonsacre (1373m)

A smaller climb than Beille but still a big undertaking - 7.8 km, 670m of climbing, around 8%.



Col du Chioula (1431m)

Another decent climb - 9.7km, 711m of climbing at around 7%.

Route des Corniches (the D20)

This beautiful road runs parallel to the main valley road the N20 and it can be accessed from Tarascon, Les Cabannes and Luzenac. Usually a circuit will involve some time on the N20 as well.

There are often local races you can base a holiday around. There is useful information on here www.cyclosport-Ariègeoise.com and here www.sport09.com



Tour de France at Plateau de Beille. Photo: Anne Arran

Mountain Biking (VTT)

There are plenty of Mountain Biking options in the area, some of which take advantage of the ski lifts in the summer. Local tourist information offices usually offer VTT topos for sale, as do many supermarkets and book shops. In addition to the places listed below, Beille, Lordat and Larnat also have some tracks.

Ax-les-Thermes/Plateau de Bonsacre

The lifts at Bonsacre give access to 8 challenging runs of varying degrees of difficulty. The site includes a bike park. There are also 7 circular tours at Ax. More information here:

www.ax-ski.com/ete/

Refuge du Chioula

The Refuge du Chioula lies above Ax-les-Thermes, on the D613, which leads towards Quillan. There is a restaurant at the col and the refuge itself can be reached by mountain bike or on foot. The 'VTT domaine' has routes graded green, blue, red and black (as in ski runs). There are also children's activities at the restaurant during the summer. A stage of La Grande Traverse d'Ariège Pyrenees is between Ax and Refuge du Chioula with 18km of riding, featuring 650m of downhill and 1600m of uphill. It is graded black.

Sentier Cathar

The Sentier Cathar castle exploration route passes the chateaux of Roquefixade and Montsegur and through the Péreille Gorge. The full trip is usually a three day circuit but you can join it at several places to do shorter sections.

Varilhes

Just to the north of Foix is an extensive mountain biking area at Varilhes. Les Bosses du Plantaurel has 10 tracks totalling over 142km. www.Ariège-vtt.fr



Sherri Davy tackles the byways from Chez Arran to Tarascon. Photo: Chris Craggs

Swimming

When the weather gets too hot sometimes the only activity you can contemplate is finding some water and leaping into it. Luckily the Ariège has a few great spots for a refreshing dip. The first two are some distance to the northwest, the rest are shown on the map to the right.

Lac de Mondéy

GPS 43.05780
P 1.43222 Lac de Mondéy is around 25km northwest of Foix. It has a sand beach for swimming, a snack bar and a picnic area. A lifeguard is on duty in the summer. The lake is also good for fishing, kayaking and bird watching. From Foix, take the D117 to Bastide de Serou then the D501 towards Suzan. Open year round.

Lac de Carla-Bayle

GPS 43.14830
P 1.38490 Another lake around 30km to the northwest of Foix. It has a bathing beach for swimming (with a lifeguard during the summer) and a playground. Sail-boarding, fishing, kayaking and a picnic area. From Foix, take the D117 then D11 and D191 to reach Carla Bayle. The lake is to the west of the town. Open year round.

Base Nautique - Mercus-Garrabet

Situated between Foix and Tarascon, this place offers a beach for bathing, a snack bar, waterskiing, pedalo boats, sailboats, plus a waterski and wakeboard tow cable. Open in July and August. The mornings are reserved for groups. Approach on the N20 from Tarascon and turn off for Mercus-Garrabet on the way to Foix, following signs.

Pont de Gers

A popular river-swimming spot between Auzat and Marc. Park by the bridge where a bridge jump is possible. There is also a small jump from a rock on the bank just below. At times there can be a hydro-electric release but a warning is given and the river is used



regularly for canyoning. 200m downstream of the bridge is a small parking area, the farmer allows swimming isn't happy about litter from picnicking. There are rock pools and slides with plenty of stones to skim.

Cascade de l'Artigue

A stunning emerald pool with waterfalls and a possible rock jump. From the parking at the Aire de l'Artigue, follow red and white GR10 markers towards the Refuge de Pinet and then the Cascade de l'Artigue, yellow markers. Crossing a foot bridge the waterfalls and pools are down on the right after 1.5km.

Etang de Comte

A mountain lake with a long approach but in some stunning scenery. From Ax, follow the RN20 south for 8km to Mérens turning right to the campsite shortly after leaving the village. Cross the Ariège river and take the forest track to the left of camping, which winds for about 4km up into the forest to a car park. It takes 1hr from the parking to the lake. From the bridge it is possible to walk up either side of the river. The walk to the lake is marked by red and white GR10 markings.

Other swimmable mountain lakes include Etang de Sourd above l'Artigue, and several above the Soulcem dam.

Kayaking

Ariège Evasion offers rental kayaks from Ormolac-Ussat-les-Bains. Most courses are from 3-15km finishing at Mercus and last from 1 to 3.5 hours. A pleasant trip but don't expect to meet any huge rapids. You are collected at the end to take you and the kayaks back to the centre.

www.ariège-evasion.com

White-Water Rafting

The departmental kayak school based in Foix offers a range of kayaking and white water descents, all accompanied by a qualified guide. They have the full range of equipment from inflatable kayaks, rafts (suitable for between 4 and 8 people), smaller individual inflatables and kayaks for 1, 2 or 3 people.

foixcanoe.wifeo.com
www.montcalm-aventure.com

Canyoning

Canyoning is a combination of swimming, climbing, sliding or walking down steep, fast-flowing mountain streams or rivers, armed with a wet suit! An easy intro is offered by many of the local providers, starting at around €40 per person. There are sporting canyoning trips and custom day or even weekend trips. Locations include Marc, l'Artigue and Orlu.

www.guides-Ariège.com
www.montcalm-aventure.com
www.oustal.pyrenees.free.fr



Kayaking down the main Ariège river. Photo: John Arran

Ax-les-Thermes is the main downhill resort with a fast gondola giving access to over 75km of pistes from 1,400m to 2,400m. (www.ax-ski.com). This is 25 minutes from Tarascon-sur-Ariège on the N20. The season is usually December to March. There's something for everyone, from gentle open slopes to off-piste runs through the trees, and the extensive network of snow cannon ensures there's always plenty of snow on the main pistes. It's good value too – currently a one-day lift pass costs only 32.50€ (winter 2012). Visiting Les Bains du Couloubret thermal baths in Ax-les-Thermes is well worth it afterwards to ease those aching muscles. You can catch the gondola from Ax town or drive up to Ax-Bonassere, assuming road conditions are okay. There is a train service from Toulouse, via Tarascon, to Ax with a reduced rate ski pass to encourage rail travel.

The Plateau de Beille (www.beille.fr) is the Pyrenees' premier cross-country ski venue. At over 1,800m and just 20 minutes drive from Tarascon-sur-Ariège, there are 70km of beautifully maintained circuits to delight and challenge Nordic skiers of all abilities. It lies above Les Cabannes village which is 8 minutes drive from Tarascon-sur-Ariège. There is a free shuttle bus from here. You will also find many marked snowshoe trails. There is a great panorama from the top of Beille and you can try dog sledging with some fabulous huskies and Pyrenean mountain dogs.

Other nearby resorts worth a visit include Chioula, Les Puymorens, Ascou and Mont d'Olmes. Andorra is slightly higher and the closest resort, Pas de la Casa, is just 30 minutes drive from Ax-les-Thermes.

Snowshoeing (Raquette à neige)

Actually an ancient method of travel, snowshoeing has grown to be a popular form of recreation with special trails developed in ski resorts as well as wilder mountain options. Plateau de Beille and Chioula offer specially prepared tracks. Snowshoeing is the perfect way to explore wintery mountains, moving through silent snow-clad forests and approaching frozen lakes.



Ruth Jenkins snow-shoeing, Ax-les-Thermes. Photo: Anne Arran



Superb winter conditions at Bonassere, Ax-les-Thermes. Photo: Anne Arran

the original centre for climbing in the Ariège

ClimbAriege.co.uk

Accommodation and guidance for climbers of all standards in a relaxed atmosphere

“A unique experience”

“Home from home”

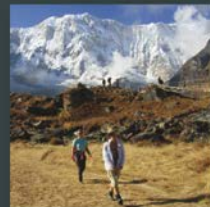
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Unique combination holidays in Ariège and beyond for active, relaxed and fun people



Activ-adventure



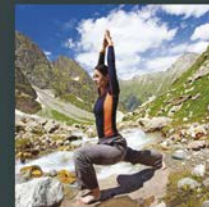
History & Gourmet



Snowshoe & Ski



Spa Treks



Yoga Treks

Pyrenean Trail Running

Trail running in the Pyrenees offers spectacular mountain terrain with fine views and interesting wildlife. See snow capped peaks, mountain Orris (primitive stone shelters) and tranquil lakes. There are many opportunities to find circuits on VTT tracks, in the mountains for example at Soulcem and even along the river at Sinsat. Several mountain races or "course à pied" take place here as well as mountain marathons – see www.sport09.com for events throughout the year.



Trail running at Soulcem. Photo: John Arran

Via Ferrata

The huge cliff and ridge to the east of Vicdessos are home to a couple of worthwhile and quite long Via Ferratas (see the Goulier crag information on page 178). They are open daily in July and August and at weekends from May to September. The approach starts at a small wooden cabin above one of the bends partway up the road to Goulier. The parking is a little further up the hill on the right-hand side of the road. In the season the cabin hires out kit and charges an entrance fee.



The bridge on the Vicdessos Via Ferrata. Photo: Chris Craggs

Caves

There are several spectacular show caves in the area which are well worth a visit - their scale is quite amazing. There are also several easy caves that can be explored with a torch, decent footwear and some commonsense. The one at Sabart (pictured) is a good example.

Bèdeilhac Cave - A huge cave, with a long but easy tour. www.grotte-de-bedeilhac.org

Grotte de la Vache, Alliat - Just off the path to the crag (see page 126).

Lombrives, Ussat-les-Bains - Said to be the largest cave in Europe. www.grotte-lombrives.fr

Grotte de Niaux - A long tour with cave paintings.



Deep in the Sabart Cave. Photo: Chris Craggs

Castles

The area is teeming with castles; most of which have a fascinating, if brutal history behind them as strongholds during the Cathar Crusade of the 13th Century. Montségur is a particularly striking example.

Gîte de la Borde

Large Farmhouse to rent in the Ariège



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Home - 0033 (0)561644942

e-mail - ruth-jenkins@hotmail.com

Ariège Climbing



Gaz Parry surfing his way across *Como un tigré* (8a) - page 124 - Sabart Pillar. The shot looks oddly correct when inverted too! Photo: Anne Arran


Ropes

The most crucial item of gear is your rope. At the very least you need a 60m rope but, if you're buying a new rope for a trip to France, we strongly recommend getting a 70m rope or longer. Single ropes are now available in thicknesses previously associated with half-ropes. Thin ropes are easier to climb with and lighter, which is good for the hike to the crag and your luggage allowance on the plane. Thicker ropes last longer and are better for working projects. For multi-pitch routes requiring an abseil descent, you may find that using a pair of half-ropes is preferable or a triple-rated rope which can be used both single and double. Alternatively, if you have a 100m single rope, you can make all the abseils and have the convenience of leading on a single rope, though long ropes are notorious for twisting and tangling at the most inconvenient of times.

Route Lengths and Lowering Off

The photo-topos have approximate heights, indicated next to some lower-offs. **These are guideline heights only.** It is important to remember that crag bases often slope, and people stand in different places when belaying. Also, manufacturer figures for rope lengths vary and some ropes have had worn sections chopped off the ends in the past. Do you really know exactly how long your rope is? The golden rule is always tie a knot in the end of the rope to prevent dropping a climber when lowering off.

Other Gear

Trad Gear - Only a few routes in this guidebook require more than a single rope and a set of quickdraws - 14 quickdraws is plenty for all but the longest of pitches. For the belays on multi-pitch routes, a couple of screw-gate carabiners and a sling each is a good idea. The few routes which need gear are denoted with the  symbol. For some of these you just need a small rack to supplement the fixed gear, on few others you need a more substantial rack. Check the route descriptions for more detail.

Belay Device - Make sure your belay device is suitable for your rope: too grabbing and you'll be cursing it each time you pay out rope, too slick and you may struggle to hold your partner. A belay device that you are happy to abseil on is also a good idea if you are considering longer routes.

Beyond these essentials, you may find tape useful for bandaging your fingers if the prickly rock starts to take its toll. For multi-pitch routes, a small sack with a water bladder, a long-sleeve shirt and a sun hat are good ideas. A good pair of approach shoes is also worth packing, as some of the crags are a bit of a walk from the parking spots.

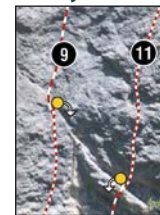
Alan James lowering-off at Auzat. Photo: Mick Ryan



Grades

The routes in this book are graded using the usual sport grade-system, or 'French Grade' as it is commonly known. This gives an overall impression of the difficulty of the route. The Ariège region in general has a reputation for rather stiff grading, pretty much across the grades. This isn't as outrageous as in some areas, perhaps the grades are best described as "good value". The best advice, especially when moving around between different rock types and climbing styles, is to sample a route a bit below your normal standard just to ease yourself in to the style of climbing. This is especially true on older slab pitches. Some of the venues with longer routes, especially Sinsat and the Dent d'Orlu, are best regarded as bolted mountain routes rather than sport climbs.

Belays and Extensions



Routes are bolted so that an ascent ends when you have clipped the belay, grabbing chains is not the custom. Multi-pitch routes are graded assuming you are taking each belay. Some single pitches often have extensions offering a longer and more difficult route. Most extensions are given extra grades in the route description, and some have different names. Extensions are not second pitches, and the grade of an extension assumes you have not rested on the belay, which would make it easier than graded. They are indicated on the topos with lines

going around the lower-off - see above.

Colour-coding

The routes and pitches are colour-coded corresponding to a grade band. This gives a rough comparison between trad routes and sport routes. For example, if you are happy on orange grades on trad, then you should consider routes given orange spot sport grades.

Green Spots

Everything up to 4+

Good for beginners and those wanting an easy life.

Orange Spots

5 to 6a+ inclusive

General ticking routes for those with more experience.

Red Spots

6b to 7a inclusive

Routes for the very experienced and keen climber.

Black Spots

7a+ and above

The hard stuff!

Sport	British Trad Grade (for well-protected routes only)		UIAA	USA
1	Mod Moderate		I	5.1
2		Diff Difficult	II	5.2
2+			III	5.3
3			III+	5.4
3+	Sev Severe		IV	5.5
4		HS Hard Severe	IV+	5.6
4+			V	5.7
5		4a VS Very Severe 4c	V+	5.8
5+			4c HVS Hard Very Severe 5b	5.9
6a	5a E1 5c		VI	5.10a
6a+		5b E2 6a	VI+	5.10b
6b			VII	5.10c
6b+		5c E3 6a	VII+	5.10d
6c			VIII	5.11a
6c+		6a E4 6b	VIII+	5.11b
7a			VIII	5.11c
7a+			VIII+	5.11d
7b			IX	5.12a
7b+	6b E6 6c		IX-	5.12b
7c		6c E7 7a	IX+	5.12c
7c+			X	5.12d
8a		6c E8 7a	X-	5.13a
8a+			X	5.13b
8b			X+	5.13c
8b+		7a E9 7b	XI	5.13d
8c			XI+	5.14a
8c+			XI	5.14b
9a			XI	5.14c
9a+			XI+	5.14d
				5.15a

The Plantaurel	Arabaux	21	6	10	5	▬		10 - 20 min			✗	✗	✓	A small set of routes in a sunny rural setting. The climbing is unremarkable, but it is a pleasant spot. Decent bouldering.	42
	Roc des Abeilles	23	▬	1	7	15		20 min			✗	✗	✓	Steep, hard face-climbing and brutal crack-lines in a sheltered setting. A good winter venue if it has been dry.	46
	Le Carol	51	3	11	13	24		2 - 10 min			✓	✓	✓	Another good winter venue with some pleasant cracks and grooves, as well as a set of desperate face climbs.	52
	Roquefixade	38	2	13	13	10		5 min			✗	✗	✓	A big, lumpy, castellated cliff with a decent set of routes on the lower walls. Not a major venue, but worth a visit.	60
Calamès Area	Lavelanet	25	10	9	3	3		2 - 8 min			✗	✓	✓	Two buttresses - a small lump of rock and an old railway cutting. Easily-accessible routes across the grades.	66
	La Roche Ronde	25	1	18	5	1		35 min			✗	✗	✓	A rather grassy crag, but it is in a fine position and has a lot of good climbing.	72
	Roc à Steph	34	1	19	11	3		20 - 25 min			✗	✓	✓	A decent set of harder routes and a poor set of easy ones. Tree shade which can be useful in the summer.	76
	Calamès	185	7	75	65	38		15 - 40 min			✓	✗	✓	One of the major venues in the Ariège. A superb concentration of routes across the grades. South-facing.	82
Niaux Area	Roc de Sédour	75	1	9	18	47					✓	✓	✓	The Dévers is one of the best hard cliffs in the area, the Cimetière is remote but excellent. Shade early in the day.	106
	Sabart	43	▬	▬	9	34		10 min			✓	✓	✗	A huge shady cave with routes to match. Hard and upside down is the name of the game here. Offers climbing in the rain.	118
	Alliat	125	▬	14	32	79		3 - 20 min			✓	✓	✓	Another major venue with loads of great routes scattered across several walls. Afternoon shade is a bonus.	126
	Génat	64	▬	9	14	41		4 - 5 min			✓	✗	✓	A big, steep crag with a lot of hard routes and a few easier ones. Dry in the rain but some seepage.	142
Auzat Area	Saut de l'Ours	26	▬	1	8	17		25 min			✓	✓	✓	A couple of walls in a quiet setting, with a good selection of harder climbs up strong lines.	152
	Arbiech	12	▬	▬	4	8		45 min			✗	✓	✗	A small buttress on a wooded hillside. Worth a visit in hot weather as the trees keep it cool.	156
	Sibada	45	▬	4	24	17		8 min			✗	✗	✓	A fine west-facing cliff with easy access and a good spread of grades. Single-pitch face climbing is the norm.	160
	Baychon	68	▬	25	24	19		10 - 20 min			✗	✗	✓	A scattered set of buttresses in a sunny setting. Not very popular, despite some good routes.	166
Auzat Area	Goulier	8	▬	6	1	1		15 min			✗	✗	✓	A small set of climbs in a stunning setting. Offers a very pleasant day on mid-grade routes.	178
	Auzat	184	15	99	53	17		8 - 20 min			✗	✓	✓	A lovely granite crag, one of the major attractions here for the lower/middle grade climber. A week's climbing maybe.	182
	Pic Rouge de Belcaire	4	▬	2	2	▬		3 hours			✗	✓	✗	Proper mountain routes with a long mountaineers' approach. High summer only.	208
Sinsat Area	Les Toulousains	9	▬	▬	2	7		10 min			✓	✓	✓	A clutch of steep hard climbs which may stay dry in the rain. Some easier route may be added soon.	212
	Sinsat	168	13	54	75	26		15 - 80 min			✗	✗	✓	This is a major venue. South-facing hence a sun-trap in winter and too hot in summer. Some restrictions.	214
	Verdun	22	▬	14	8	▬		20 min			✗	✗	✓	A fine set of one- and two-pitch routes in a lovely setting. The approach is a little arduous, but well worth it.	242
	Appy	25	4	11	9	1		20 min			✗	✗	✓	A gneiss crag with a gneiss set of routes. Generally in the mid and lower grades and with magnificent views.	246
Ax Area	Ax-les-Thermes	64	14	35	10	5		2 - 30 min			✗	✓	✗	Three smallish venues around Ax-les-Thermes combine to make a useful resources. Generally slow to dry.	258
	Dent d'Orlu	30	▬	25	5	▬		30 - 70 min			✗	✓	✗	An Ariège jewel, a major peak with a lot of long and excellent climbs. Popular in the high season. Be aware of storms.	272