



« For me this trail means liberty, sharing, peace and quiet, discovery, and meeting others on an equal footing, at walking pace. It's a lifestyle which revitalises you ! »

Path between Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert and Saint-Jean-de-la-Blaquière

A CONTEMPORARY ADVENTURE

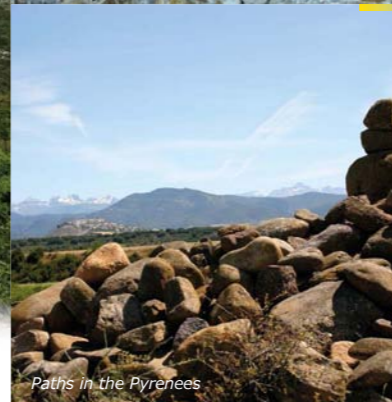
Used nowadays by thousands of women and men of more than 130 nationalities, the Compostela Ways are meaningful for them. Meeting different people, cultures and discovering nature, ramblers and visitors find along the Way and in the major stopping-places an inexhaustible source of discoveries, the chance to recharge their batteries and to change their pace of life.

Classed as the GR®653 by the Fédération française de randonnée, the path is signposted in white and red by volunteers from the Federation and is maintained by technicians from local authorities.



Church, Oloron-Sainte-Marie

Signage



Paths in the Pyrenees



Pont du Diable, Aniane / Saint-Jean de Fos

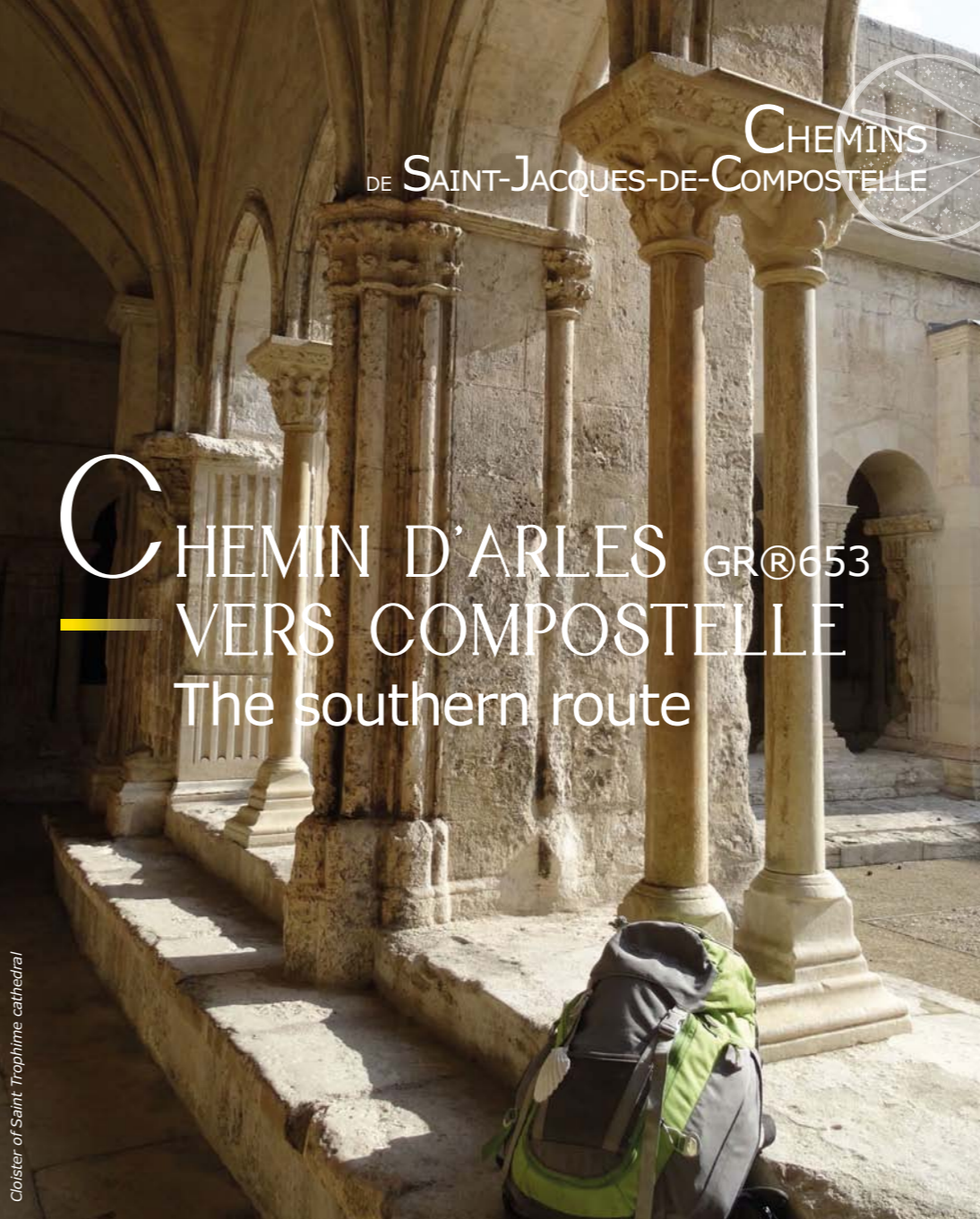


Basilica of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse



Walkers on the GR®653

Choir of Saint Trophime cathedral



CHEMINS
DE SAINT-JACQUES-DE-COMPOSTELLE

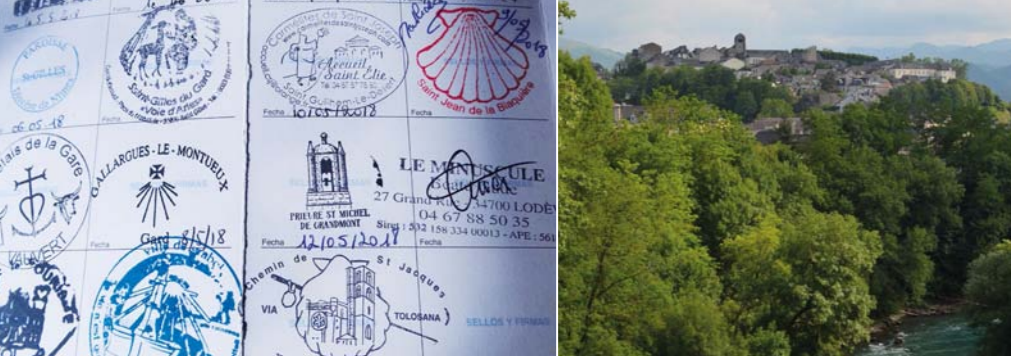
CHEMIN D'ARLES GR®653 VERS COMPOSTELLE The southern route



Saint-Jacques, Hotel of the Hospitallars of Saint-Jean-de-Jerusalem, Toulouse

CENTURIES OF PILGRIMAGE

The pilgrimage to the shrine in Galicia is intertwined with the history of Europe. It began to develop considerably from the 9th C. onwards, drawing pilgrims both humble and illustrious. It reached its peak between the 12th and 15th centuries, even becoming the third most important Christian pilgrimage after Rome and Jerusalem. Its recognition as «a European cultural itinerary» by the Council of Europe in 1987 and the inclusion of the property «the Santiago Pilgrim Ways in France» on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1998 brought this cultural heritage back into the limelight.



Credential, pilgrim's passport



Oloron Sainte-Marie, view over the Gave river and the Pyrenees



Sainte Marie Cathedral, Auch



Hotel-Dieu Saint-Jacques, Toulouse



Monts d'Orb near Saint-Gervais-sur-Mare, Hérault



Abbey of Saint-Gilles



View over Arles and the Rhône

THE ARLES WAY (GR®653)

Log book destination Compostela

As of the year 1000 AD, the Southern Way, from Arles to Puente la Reina in Spain, has been used by pilgrims from the West and from Italy. This route across the South of France crosses the areas where the Occitan language is spoken.

A HERITAGE BELONGING TO HUMANITY

There are numerous monuments along this Way listed as World Heritage by UNESCO in respect of the «Santiago Pilgrim Ways in France» : Les Alyscamps and the churches of Saint Trophime and Saint Honorat in Arles, the former abbey church of Saint Gilles, the Devil's Bridge between Aniane and Saint Jean de Fos, the former abbey of Gellone in Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, the Basilica Saint Sernin and the Hôtel-Dieu Saint Jacques in Toulouse, the cathedral of Sainte-Marie in Auch, and Sainte-Marie church in Oloron. This major places of interest all bear witness to the pilgrimage as it was in the past, and are part of a collection of 71 sites and 7 sections of the Way in France. (www.cheminscompostelle-patrimoine mondial.fr)

Along the way, a welcome awaits you in the stopover communes and from accommodation providers. Find their contact details and other practical information on the website www.chemins-compostelle.com, also on www.compostelle-france.com

THE PYRENEAN VALLEYS

From time immemorial, the valleys of the Pyrenees have been routes for travellers to follow and exchanges to be made. The Moors and the barbarian invaders from the North used them; giving way in peace time to pastoral activity. In the Aspe valley leading from the Béarn to Somport, transhumance has now taken over...

THE BASTIDES AND «SAUVETÉS» OF GASCOGNE

Gimont, Auch, Marciac, Maubourgue... as you cross the area, the bastides (mediaeval «New Towns») have some fascinating architecture to offer : arcaded central squares, central market hall, a regular layout... Founded for the most part in the 13th C. by local lords and political authorities, they followed on from the «sauvetés», places of refuge in which

the population was under the protection of the Church. Some pilgrims took advantage of this to settle there. The tradition of meetings and exchanges still continues in these places, as witness the lively markets of the South-West.

TOULOUSE, A KEY PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF THE PILGRIMAGE

«There is no holier place» can be read on an inscription which figures in the crypt of the St. Sernin Basilica in Toulouse. Numerous pilgrims flocked there from the 11th C. onwards, drawn by the hundreds of relics still present here. The city organised the creation of places where pilgrims could stay and be cared for, some of which still exist : the Hôtel-Dieu Saint Jacques, now a hospital, the Hôtel des Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem... Toulouse was also for a long while the only place where you could get across the Garonne.

FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE ATLANTIC

From the scents of the «maquis» (scrubland) to the smell of lush grass, from the woodlands of holm oak to the pines of the Pyrenees, this progression across the south of France provides a palette of contrasting landscapes, colours and emotions. The white stones and the ochre colours of the Languedoc are doubly beautiful in the sunshine, the Gascon slopes unfold their gentle, elegant curves, and the foothills of the Pyrenees welcome the pilgrim into the cool freshness of their forests.

SAINT-GUILHEM-LE-DESERT, A LANGUEDOCIEN VILLAGE

Guillaume (Guilhem in Occitan), Count of Toulouse then Duke of Aquitaine, one of Charlemagne's valiant knights, gave his name to Saint Guilhem by founding an abbey there, in the spiritual desert of Gellone. It was to this natural, arid environment of the Haut-Languedoc, a secret place of refuge, that he retired to meditate, tired of war and power. In the kingdom of the «garrigue» (scrubland) and of the olive-tree, the path linking the abbeys of Aniane and Gellone goes over the «Devil's Bridge», which for almost

1,000 years has resisted the floods of the Hérault river.



Abbey of Gellone

THE MIRACLES OF SAINT GILLES

A man cured after being bitten by a snake, another very sick man who regained his health after having put on a tunic worn by the saint, a third delivered from the Devil, a raging storm transformed into flat calm... These are some of the miracles as re-transcribed in the Codex Calixtinus, a 12th C. manuscript conserved in the cathedral of Compostela. These legendary events make Saint Gilles a major halt on the Arles Way.

ARLES, THE PILGRIMS' PORTAL

The Cathedral of Saint Trophime, where the relics of the first Bishop of Arles were kept, was a place the pilgrims absolutely had to visit. A masterpiece of Romanesque art, its cloister is one of the most richly decorated with carved capitals in the world.

Its portal is a pure gem of Provençal art. It opens the gates of the Arles Way for you to the antique routes of the Roman roads : from the Via Aurélia to the Via Domitia.



Tympanum of the Saint-Trophime cathedral

Before coming to the GR® 653, you can get to Arles from the Col de Montgenèvre along the Via Domitia, GR®653A. More info on Mon GR®

