

# Walks from Domaine des Rochers

There are many lovely walks you can undertake, right from your front door in Domaine des Rochers. Some of them are described here and although none is excessively difficult we have tried to grade them according to both difficulty and approximate time.

- \* Gentle
- \*\* Involves some steep gradients and/or uneven tracks
- \*\*\* More challenging; reasonable fitness required

## 0 - 1 hour Walks

You will benefit from the map associated with this guide.

### Aubaïgues\*

Aubaïgues (sometimes spelled Aubaygues and pronounced "oh-by-eeg") is a pretty hamlet, part of the St Etienne de Gourgas commune, and takes its Occitan name from the white flood waters (alba aigua) which swell the Aubaïgues stream after heavy rain.

Leave by the bottom gate, turn left and follow the track to the village. The large building dominating the village is the remains of a fortified chateau dating from the 11c. Although it is unfortunately not open to the public, the 12c romanesque chapel of St Michel just below its walls is worth a visit. Look for the light switch beyond the central pillar on the left.

### Deux roches\*

This is a relatively easy circuit through the forest. Leave by the top (pedestrian) gate and turn right. Take the left track at the fork (follow LOE2 signs) and continue past two roads to the right until you come to a track on your left just before a low-lying field. Follow this with the field on your right. The track will bring you round and back to the Domaine gates after crossing the main (LOE2) forrest road.

### Puech Louvia\*

Another easy circuit with some lovely views. Leave by the top (pedestrian) gate and turn right. Take the left track at the fork (LOE2) and then, after a bit of a climb and a few sharp bends, the first right which takes you in the opposite (westerly) direction below the impressive cliffs of Puech Haut. After a right-angled right turn the track will lead you down to Carrefour Louvia just above the domaine.

## 1 - 2 hour Walks

### Aubaïgues/sentier muletiers\*\*

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Leave by the bottom gate, turn left and follow the track to the village. The large building dominating the village is the remains of a fortified chateau dating from the 11c. Although it is unfortunately not open to the public, the 12c romanesque chapel of St Michel just below its walls is worth a visit. Look for the light switch beyond the central pillar on the left.

Returning towards home, after passing the water course and the vegetable gardens just outside the village, you will see a path rising uphill to your right. Marked with green blobs, this is an ancient mule track by which the villagers reached their higher terraces and fields. After climbing for 10 minutes, the track turns sharply left and continues uphill through a clearing until it meets a main forest road. Turn left and follow the forest road back down to the top, pedestrian, gate of the domaine.

## **Roc de l'Eglise\*\***

This is a lovely walk with marvellous views.

Leave by the top gate, turn right and after 300m, at the fork, turn right uphill. Follow this forest road until you reach another fork at Mas Caisso by a small stone mazet (shed). Follow the road to the left, climbing higher, until it levels out and passes eastwards below the cliff face. You will pass by a massive rock island, isolated to the left of the road which is known as the Roc de l'église. Further on, when the road meets a forest road labeled LOE3, turn left and descend steeply until you reach the lower forest track, LOE2. Turn left to return to the domaine.

## **2 - 3 hour Walks**

### **Parlatges Village\***

Leave by the top (pedestrian) gate and turn right. Take the left track at the first fork (follow LOE2 signs) and continue past two roads to the right and a low-lying field on your left. Continue on LOE2 (right at the fork, marked "réservé au service) and follow this contour road with a massive rock outcrop towering above you until you see the village below. Look for a low stone set in to the left side of the road which marks (yellow stripe) a path allowing a short descent to the village. At the bottom, cross the old bridge and explore the narrow streets and alleyways. Look for the chapel at the top end of the village; it hosts a magnificent alter-piece by the renowned local sculptor Paul Dardé, a contemporary of Rodin. You need the church lights, in a box to the right of the door, to see it properly.

On re-crossing the bridge on your return, turn right and the road will lead you back to the fork and then the low field. Take the track to the right just past the field which will bring you round and back to the Domaine gates after crossing the main (LOE2) forest road.

## **3 - 4 hour Walks**

### **Bergerie de Courcol/Puech Haut\*\***

This is a wonderfully scenic route which involves some steep climbs. Leave by the top, pedestrian gate, turn right and right again at the fork soon after. Follow the road which winds up above the property until you reach a stone building and some ruins: the remains of Mas Caisso. Take the left-hand route which continues to climb until it levels out and runs below the cliff face of Puech Haut, past the massive outcrop of Roc de l'église and continues eastward. Not long after the Roc d'église take a track on the right which zig-zags up the mountain on a path supported by the old stone terraces. Continue until the path mounts the brow and descends gently over wild strawberry plants to the old bergerie situated on the 700m high spur from the Causse du Larzac known as Plateau de Courcol. Look for the (once) stone faced lavagne, fed by a channel from the bergerie roof, where rain water was collected and stored for the sheep.

On the opposite side of the track from the bergerie a path leads uphill to the highest point of Puech Haut with a wonderful 360° vista with the Causse du Larzac and the Cevennes mountains to the north and the Mediterranean plain to the south.

Return to the bergerie and turn right to continue on your original track until you hit a road after 20 or 30m. Turn left on the GR7 and follow the road eastwards over the plateau. In May and early June you will see a mass of asphodels in flower as well as many other varieties including dwarf irises and dwarf daffodils, all indigenous.

If you wish, make a diversion on the path towards St Privat where you will get views over the St Privat valley.

From the GR7, turn left at the large green water tank and descend from the plateau on the track marked LOE3. Follow this steep descent until you hit the forest track LOE2, turn left and this will take you home.

# 4+ hour Walks (with lunch)

(These longer walks provide a fair amount of shade along the way but you will, at times, be exposed to the sun. Make sure you have plenty of water with you.)

## La Vacquerie \*\*\*

The Auberge des Causses at La Vacquerie is highly recommended for lunch or dinner, but the pleasure is greatly enhanced by arriving on foot. The route takes you up to the Plateau de Courcol, involving a climb of some 400m and a distance of about 10Km. You need a minimum of 3 hours just to get there but allow extra for scenic stops and rests. If you don't relish the walk back, arrange for a taxi to pick you up after your meal.

We have described two ways to get to La Vacquerie and one return route. The first outbound is harder as you climb an extra 100m and it takes 30mins longer but it provides greater scenic variety. The second is more or less the same as the return route but has the advantage of offering a cheat! See La Vacquerie shortened route below.

### 1st Outbound.

For the first part of the walk, follow the directions for the [Bergerie de Courcol](#), though you will probably not have time to mount the Puech Haut summit. Continue on the track past the bergerie and turn left when you hit the forest track after 50m or so. You are now on the GR7 (grande randonnée); follow its red and white markers over the Plateau de Courcol on a mixture of track and path all the way to La Vacquerie. The Courcol is a narrow peninsular from the Larzac plateau at a height of 700 - 750m and if you take a short diversion left or right you will be rewarded with views north to the Cevennes Mountains and south to the Mediterranean plain.

### 2nd Outbound.

Follow the directions to Parlatges. When you get to the path down to the village marked by yellow stripes go past it for a few hundred metres and take the path, also marked by yellow stripes, uphill to the right. This will take you on a strenuous, 2 stage climb up to a higher contour road where you turn left. Follow this gently rising road until you reach a junction. Turn right and, after another 2-300m, turn left on to a metalled road (LOE3). The first track to your right after just a few mins will take you to La Vacquerie.

### Return.

If you are brave enough to return by foot, find the Ancien Chemin de Parlatges (marked by ceramic plaques) by taking one of the alleyways opposite the auberge and turning right after 30 metres or so. (This is the same chemin by which you arrived if you took the 2<sup>nd</sup> option.) Follow the track without diverting until, after 30 mins or so, you reach a T junction. Turn left on this metalled road and take the 1st proper road to the right where there is a "feux interdits" sign (there are 2 other tracks). At the following T junction, after 2-300 m, turn left and follow this gently declining contour path for several Km (ignore the yellow marked path downhill, even if you came that way) as it twists and turns above Parlatges village and below the massive rock outcrops of the northern edge of the Plateau de Courcol. The track ends by joining a steeply descending metalled road (LOE3) which takes you down to the LOE2 on which you set off some 8 hours before! Turn left for home.

## La Vacquerie cheat (shortened route)

If you want to knock 2 hours off the walking time without totally losing the sense of achievement, you can drive to Parlatges and park at the entrance to the village. Walk down to the bottom of the village and cross the stream. Turn left and follow the path (marked with yellow stripes) up to a forest track and turn left. You are now on the 2<sup>nd</sup> outbound above. Return from La Vacquerie the same way.

## Soubès \*

There is a very good café/bar in Soubès (pronounced “Soo- bess”, emphasis on 2<sup>nd</sup> syllable) which can be reached by 2 or 3 routes along quiet roads within 90mins on foot. Perhaps the best routing to take advantage of the scenery and sun-position is to go out via the road south of the D25 and the Rivière Brèze and back along Chemin de Molenty which is north of the D25, both routes being roughly parallel to the D25.

Set off as for Aubaïgues. On reaching the village look for the path near the chapel threading between the cottages leading down to a lower road where you turn left and cross the stream. Follow this road, bearing right at the first intersection, until you come to a T-junction with a tarred road after a few hundred metres. Turn left and follow this heavily wooded road (*Les Condamines*) parallel to the river for several Kms, passing the acclaimed wine domaine, *Mas Fabregous*, and the *Camping des Sources* campsite.

300m past the campsite look out for a track down to the river which it crosses and then rises up to the main road through Soubès (D25). Turn left and, soon after, find a path uphill on your right which leads up to the *Place du Terral* where the *Café du Terral* is situated, next to the post office and opposite the shop. (If you miss the path down to the river, don't worry, the road comes to a T, turn right and right again on to the D25. After crossing the river, there are several routes up to the Place du Terral)

### Return:

On leaving the café follow the one way road past the chateau and the school, through a crossroads, to a T junction. Turn left uphill and after 200m, just above the maison de retraite, Rouvière, take the track to the right, signposted for a wine domaine, *Mas Cauzels*, and follow this almost level track round the side of the hill towards St Etienne de Gourgas, where it becomes the tarred *Chemin de Molenty*. After the habitation thickens you'll see a path downhill to your right between two electricity boxes. This leads into *Chemin des Graves* which curves round to the left in a semi-circle eventually returning to Chemin de Molenty. Before that, at the lowest point, a concrete drive on the right becomes a path which will lead you down to the main tarred road between the village and the hamlet of Gourgas. Turn right and you'll hit the D25 after 2-300m. Turn left and, after crossing the river and passing the mairie, take the road to Aubaïgues and thence home.