



Val d'Aran

Catalonia



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## Val d'Aran





## The Val d'Aran: a valley with a difference

**The Val d'Aran** is a valley in the Pyrenees, with an area of 620 sq km, lying at the north-western tip of Catalonia, along the border with Aragon and France. It is the headwater valley of the river Garonne, which winds its way through Aquitaine before flowing into the Atlantic near Bordeaux. Thus the Val d'Aran is located on the Atlantic side of the Pyrenees, unlike other Catalan Pyrenean valleys which are on the Mediterranean side of the range and face southwards. Its orientation makes it a valley with a difference - a difference that is revealed, not only in its climate and wildlife, but in its history, language and culture, which have clear Occitanian roots. Nowadays Aranese enjoys official language status in the valley (alongside Spanish and Catalan). As a result it is one of the most living and dynamic of the dialectal variants of Occitanian, despite the increasing numbers of inhabitants of other origins who have been attracted there by the flourishing tourist industry.

The Val d'Aran has maintained its distinctive personality down to our own times mainly on account of its mountainous terrain, 30% of which is above 2,000 m. For centuries the mountains were a natural barrier to communications with the neighbouring lands of Aragon and Catalonia whereas the route into Gascony lay along the river valley. The mountain passes between

the Val d'Aran and other Catalan regions were impassable in winter and difficult to cross at all times of the year. When a road was built across the Bonaigua pass in 1924 and the Vielha tunnel was opened in 1948 the valley finally became accessible to wheeled vehicles and communications were possible the year round.

**A past all its own.** Under Roman rule the Val d'Aran was part of the Gallo-Roman territory of Novempopulania, the capital of which was *Lugdunum Convenarum* (nowadays Sant Bertran de Comenge or Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges). Among the many surviving vestiges from that period are stelae, tombstones and votive altars. A Roman road from Toulouse ran through the valley and on into the Pallars region over the *Petræ Albæ* pass (now the Bonaigua pass).

In the high Middle Ages the valley was part of the earldom of Comenge (Comminges). However it was soon joined to the different earldoms of Catalonia and Aragon – which were united in 1137 – through a series of complex feudal links, among them a “treaty of protection” signed in 1175 with Alfons I of Catalonia. Though Catalonia lost its hegemony over Occitania in the wake of the battle of Muret (1213), at which Peter the Catholic was killed, in 1220 the House of Barcelona retained its power over the Val d'Aran.



Sauth deih Pish (Várradócs)

The treaty of Corbeil (1258) between James I 'the Conqueror' and Louis IX of France (Saint Louis) left the Val d'Aran under the dominion of Catalonia and Aragon and King James himself visited the valley in 1265. Relations with France were tense, nonetheless, and the valley was invaded and conquered by French troops in 1283. A long diplomatic dispute ensued and for some years the Val d'Aran was governed by the kings of Majorca as part of the lieutenancy of Rosselló (the Roussillon). However, thanks to an agreement reached at the Council of Vienne in 1312, James II of Catalonia and Aragon secured the appointment of a mixed commission which met in Vielha and restored dominion over the Val d'Aran to the Catalan king (23 April 1313).

That same year, James II granted the Val d'Aran a charter known as the "Querimonia privilege", which played a fundamental part in the life of the valley and established important tax exemptions. The valley was divided at the time into six *terçons*, each of which elected a *conselher* (councillor). Together the councillors made up the *Conselh Generau* (general council). In 1389 the Montsó parliament assigned the valley to the Principality of Catalonia. *The Conselh Generau* remained in existence until 1835 when the Val d'Aran was placed under the jurisdiction of the province of Lleida. Under the Territorial Division of 1936 (reinstated in 1988) it was recognized as a *comarca* (region) of Catalonia. In 1991 the *Conselh Generau* was restored under the terms of the 1979 Catalan Statute of Self-government which acknowledged the historical rights of the Aranese. For ecclesiastical purposes the Val d'Aran was part of the diocese of Comenge (Comminges) until the end of the 18th century. In 1805 it was transferred to the diocese of Urgell.

**The Val d'Aran today.** The Val d'Aran has become one of the most fashionable and attractive areas in the Pyrenees for winter sports tourism, an activity that is well established thanks to the long snowy winters. The beautiful scenery and the opportunities to practise hiking and mountain sports virtually all year round also appeal to nature lovers, while those in search of cultural stimulation enjoy the charm of the villages and hamlets, the fascinations of medieval art, the prestigious cuisine, and the vitality of the folklore.





The "Cupboard of the Six Keys"



The "Querimonia privilege"



## The fashionable place to ski

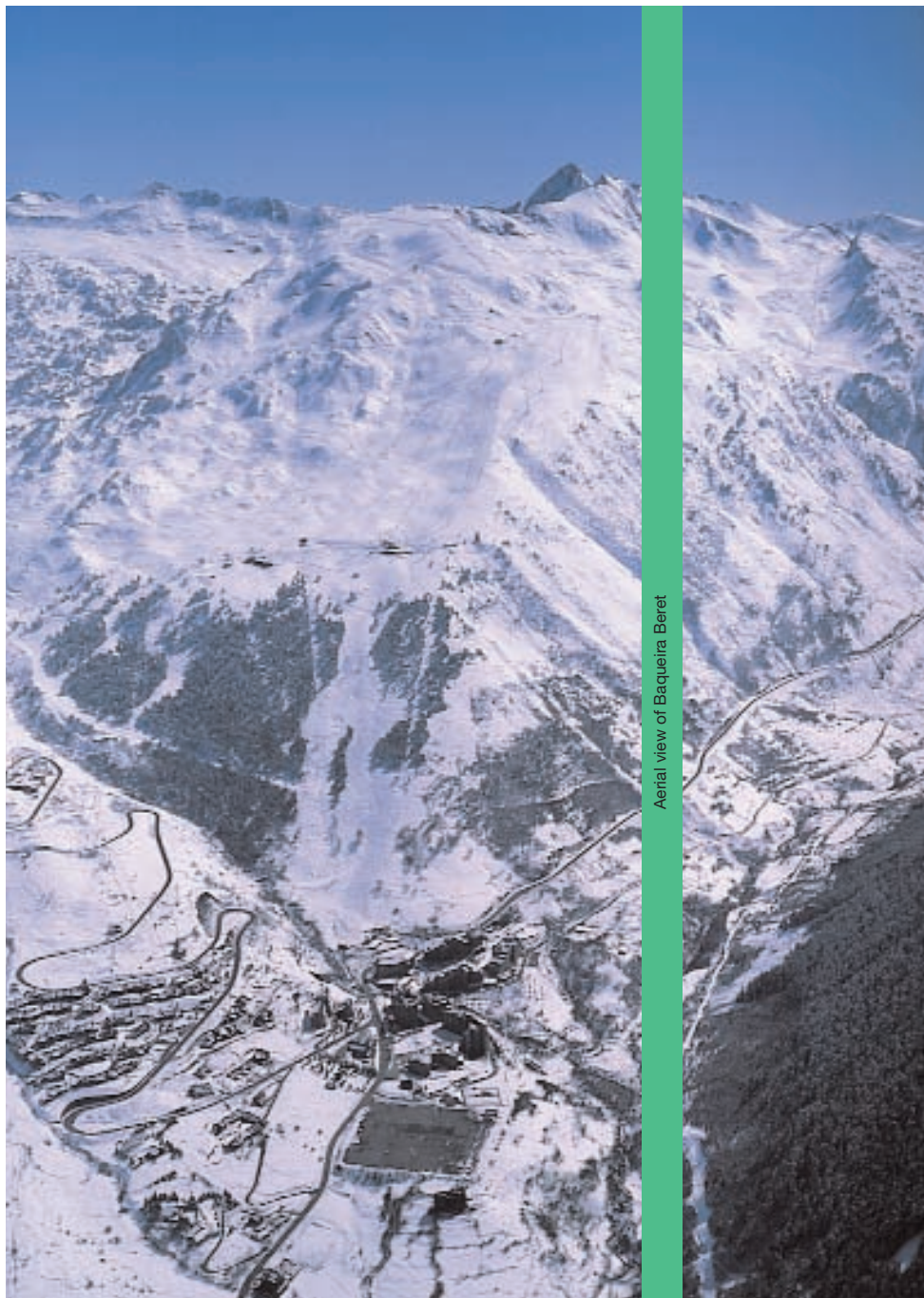
**The skiing and winter sports facilities** of the Val d'Aran enjoy tremendous prestige, thanks largely to the valley's location on the Atlantic side of the Pyrenees which makes for a colder climate and heavier snowfalls than in other parts of the Catalan Pyrenees. With a thick layer of high quality snow, the winter sports season is a long one.

Present-day facilities are concentrated in the large complex at the ski resort of **Baqueira Beret** (Naut Aran), located near the source of the Garonne amid lofty peaks and spectacular high-mountain scenery. It is the largest winter sports centre in the Pyrenees and the infrastructures, skiable terrain and services are on a par with the finest in the Alps. Inaugurated in the 1964-1965 season, it has been gradually enlarged over the years and a large residential area comprising hotels, apartments and recreation facilities has grown up around it. The frequent presence of the Spanish royal family has enhanced its fame and boosted the influx of visitors from all over Spain.

**The great Pyrenean ski resort.** Baqueira Beret is located between minimum and maximum elevations of 1,500 and 2,510 m respectively. It offers 78 runs

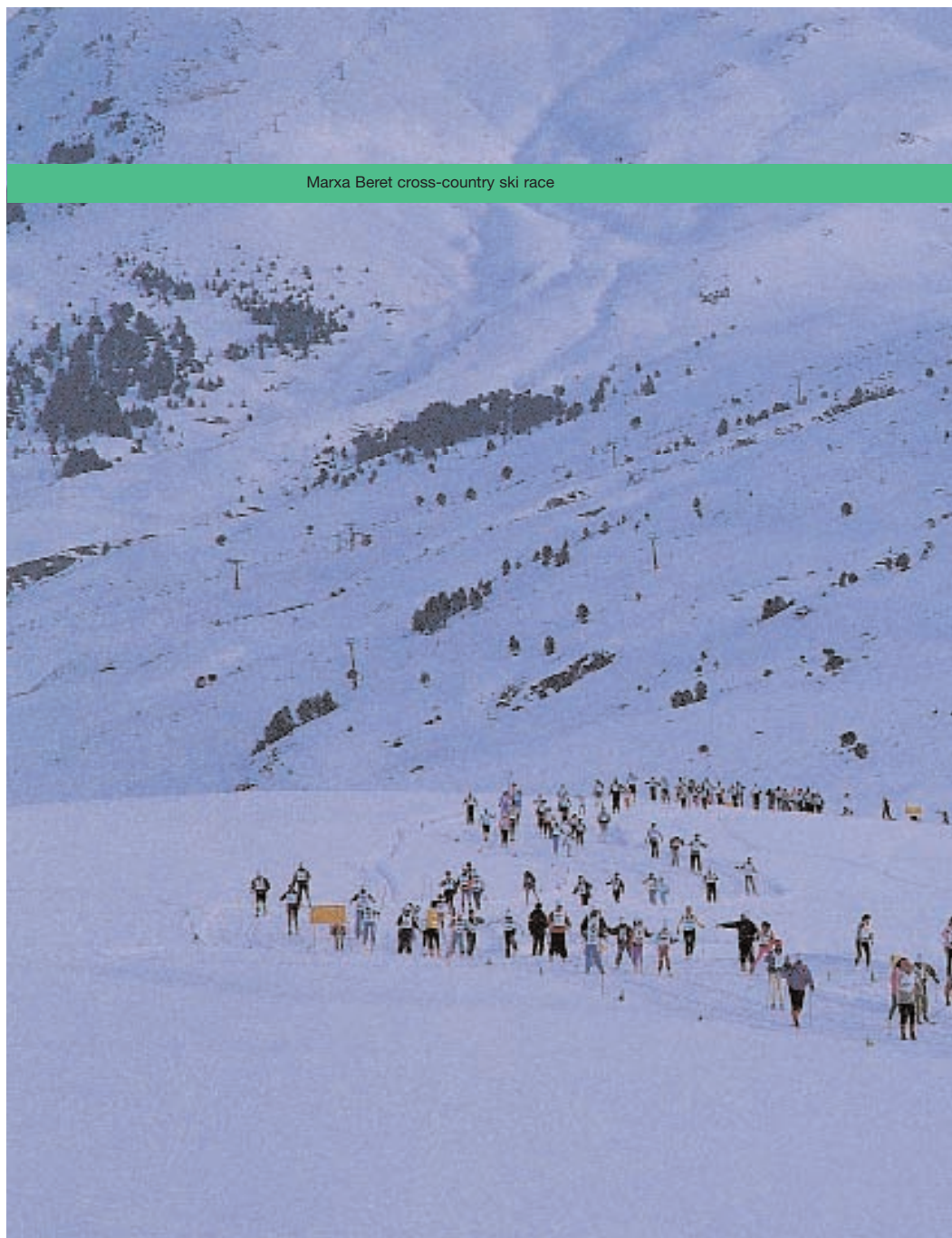
– of four levels of difficulty – with a combined length of 120 km and a skiable terrain of 1,922 hectares, within which the Beret zone is particularly outstanding. All the slopes are marked and monitored by radio from a control tower. There are 33 ski lifts (20 chair lifts, 5 ski tows, 1 gondola lift and 7 magic carpets capable of handling 57,983 persons per hour). and 546 artificial snow cannons. Beret also has a Nordic skiing area with a 7-km cross-country trail. Other facilities include 17 cafeterias and restaurants, sun terraces, 1 snow park for children, 16 schools with over 400 teachers, a fixed half-pipe at Argulls, a slalom stadium, and medical services. At the foot of the slopes is a residential area with lodging for over 6,000.

Baqueira Beret is the scene of many national and international competitions every year and an important international cross-country ski race known as the **Marxa Beret** is staged there at the beginning of February. Other snow-related sports activities include heli-skiing, dog-sledding, snow-shoeing and paraskiing. In summer the El Bosc, Mirador and Bonaigua chair lifts remain open and there are opportunities for rambling, mountain hiking and other activities.



Aerial view of Baqueira Beret

Marxa Beret cross-country ski race









### From Pla de Beret to the shrine of Montgarri [SNOWSHOES]

**Route:** an hour and a half (4.5 km) upriver along the path on the left bank of the Noguera Pallaresa from Pla de Beret (1,800 m) to the shrine of Montgarri.

**Level of difficulty:** low if weather is good and snow in good condition.

**Access:** by the C-142 road from Baqueira.

**More information:** Oficina de Torisme de Vielha (see p. 49).

## Useful addresses

### Information offices and reservations

**Baqueira Beret Office**  
 P.O. Box 60  
 25530 Vielha-LLeida  
 Tel. (+34) 973 639 000  
 Fax: (+34) 973 644 488  
 Snow conditions: Tel. (+34) 973 639 025

**Vielha Office**  
 Sarriulera, 10  
 25530 Vielha-Lleida  
 Tel. (+34) 973 643 068  
 Fax: (+34) 973 640 372

**Barcelona Office**  
 Diagonal, 652. Building A - ground floor  
 08034 Barcelona  
 Tel. (+34) 932 058 292  
 Fax: (+34) 932 058 290  
 Snow conditions: Tel. (+34) 932 058 291

**Madrid Office**  
 Hermosilla, 1  
 28001 Madrid  
 Tel. (+34) 915 765 207  
 Fax: (+34) 914 315 574  
 Snow conditions: Tel. (+34) 914 311 481

**Baqueira Beret Maison**  
 102, Cours de Verdun  
 33.000 Bordeaux  
 Tel. 00 33 556 814 474  
 Fax: 00 33 556 480 952  
 Snow conditions: Tel. 00 33 556 527 397

[www.baqueira.cat](http://www.baqueira.cat)

**Reservations office**  
 Tel. 902 415 415



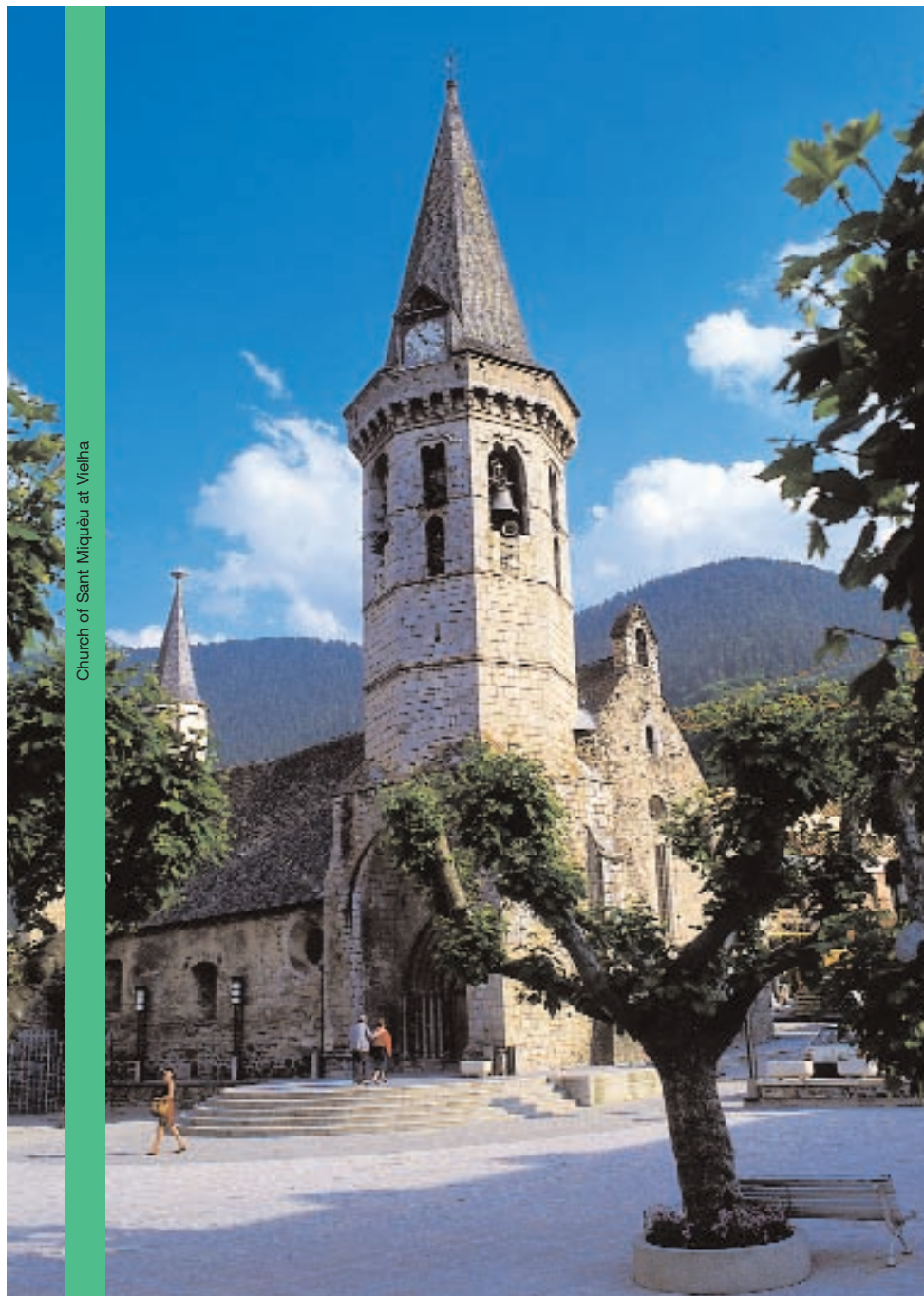
## Vielha, the Aranese capital

**In the heart of the Val d'Aran.** The Val d'Aran's chief town stands in a wide part of the valley, on the left bank of the Garonne, at its confluence with the Nere. On account of its strategic, central location alongside the old highway, Vielha had a political and administrative function from the Middle Ages onwards. Its origins, however, date back to Roman days, as its name - derived from *Vetula* - indicates. It was the capital of the *terçó* of Vielha (later called Castièro), as well as being one of the valley's three fortified villages and the seat of the government (the *Conselh Generau d'Aran*). From the Middle Ages onwards the governor and his advisers swore to respect and uphold the Aranese privileges in the presence of the councillors and other prominent citizens in the Romanesque church of Santa Maria de Mijaran. The reinforced ruins of this church (which was later used as an explosives store and blown up in 1938) are located further down the Garonne, near the menhir known as the Pèira de Mijaran.

**The old quarter of Vielha** – the district of Eth Cap dera Vila – stands on the right bank of the Nere.

In modern times the town has grown outwards, mainly along the old roads to other villages, until it almost forms a single built-up area with its closest neighbours, Betren and Gausac. The most handsome mansions in Eth Cap dera Vila are Çò de Rodés, Çò de Fedusa and Çò de Burgarol, built in the 17th century, with Gothic windows and doors with voussoirs. The 16th century Casa de Santesmasses, also known as Tor deth Generau Martinhon, deserves special mention and was donated by its owners to the Generalitat (Catalan autonomous government) to house the **Musèu dera Val d'Aran**. It is now the nerve centre of the activities undertaken by the *Conselh Generau* to protect, preserve and disseminate the valley's heritage. Inaugurated in 1984, it has major sections devoted to archeology, ethnography and art, and others dealing with topics such as geology, and plant and animal life. One of the exhibits is a carved wooden cupboard known as the "Cupboard of the Valley" or the "Cupboard of the Six Keys" which was made in 1753 and kept for many years in the sacristy of Sant Miquèu de Vielha. Important documents were stored in it,

Church of Sant Miquèu at Vielha





along with the *redolins* used to elect the *conselhers* (councillors) of the *terçons*, who took turns to keep the keys. Other exhibitions are held at Casa Joanchiquet in Vilamòs and in the church of Sant Joan in Arties.

Casa deth Senhor d'Arròs, also known as Çò d'Ademà, is a mansion built in 1820 in the hamlet of Arròs, in the western part of the municipality of Vielha e Mijaran. Since 1995 it has been the home of the Aranese General Historical Archive run by the *Conselh Generau*, the seat of the *Conselh Generau* itself and that of the Institute for Aranese Studies.

**The parish church of Sant Miquèu**, Vielha's most important historic building, was originally the chapel of Vielha castle, which no longer exists. The present church has Romanesque features and others in Gothic transition style (12-13th centuries). One is the magnificent Gothic porch which has five pointed arches, fifty-nine carved figures representing the Last Judgement, and a tympanum decorated with three reliefs, the most important showing Saint Michael slaying the dragon. The belfry – on which construction began in 1510 – is an octagonal Gothic tower adjoining the north-west corner. It has massive machicolations on the upper storeys and a pointed, pyramid-shaped roof and also served as a keep.

The interior of the church has a nave with semicircular vaulting, divided into three bays by sustaining

arches, and six side chapels. The crossing with its cupola and lantern are 17-18th century additions. The church houses some valuable works of art. One of the finest is a 12-13th century Romanesque wooden figure of Christ, the *Crist de Mijaran*, which came from Santa Maria de Mijaran and was part of a descent from the cross made in a workshop in Erill la Vall. Another is the 15th century Gothic high altar in polychrome wood attributed to Pere Despallargues or to the anonymous "Vielha master" who was a disciple of Pere Garcia de Benavari. Also of interest is the 12th century Romanesque baptismal font with its bas-relief ornamentation.

**Vielha is a bustling town** with cultural and sports facilities, shopping and services. Most of the valley's shops, restaurants, recreation facilities and hotels are concentrated there (28 establishments with accommodation for approximately 1,800 people, including the *Parador Nacional de la Val d'Aran*, on the outskirts). The weekly market is held on Thursdays. Old cattle markets still take place in Les, Naut Aran, Bossòst and Vielha in October. New fairs have also been set up, including an adventure sports fair and an antique and *brocante* fair. Several sports federations have their headquarters in Vielha and a large sports centre, the *Palau de Gel*, including a skating rink and a football pitch, was opened in 1994.

## Useful addresses

**Tourist office of Vielha** (see p. 49)

### Musèu dera Val d'Aran

Carrèr Major, 26 – 25530 Vielha  
Tel. (+34) 973 641 815

### Archiu Istoric Generau dera Val d'Aran

Carrèr Major, s/n – 25537 Arròs  
Tel. (+34) 973 642 569

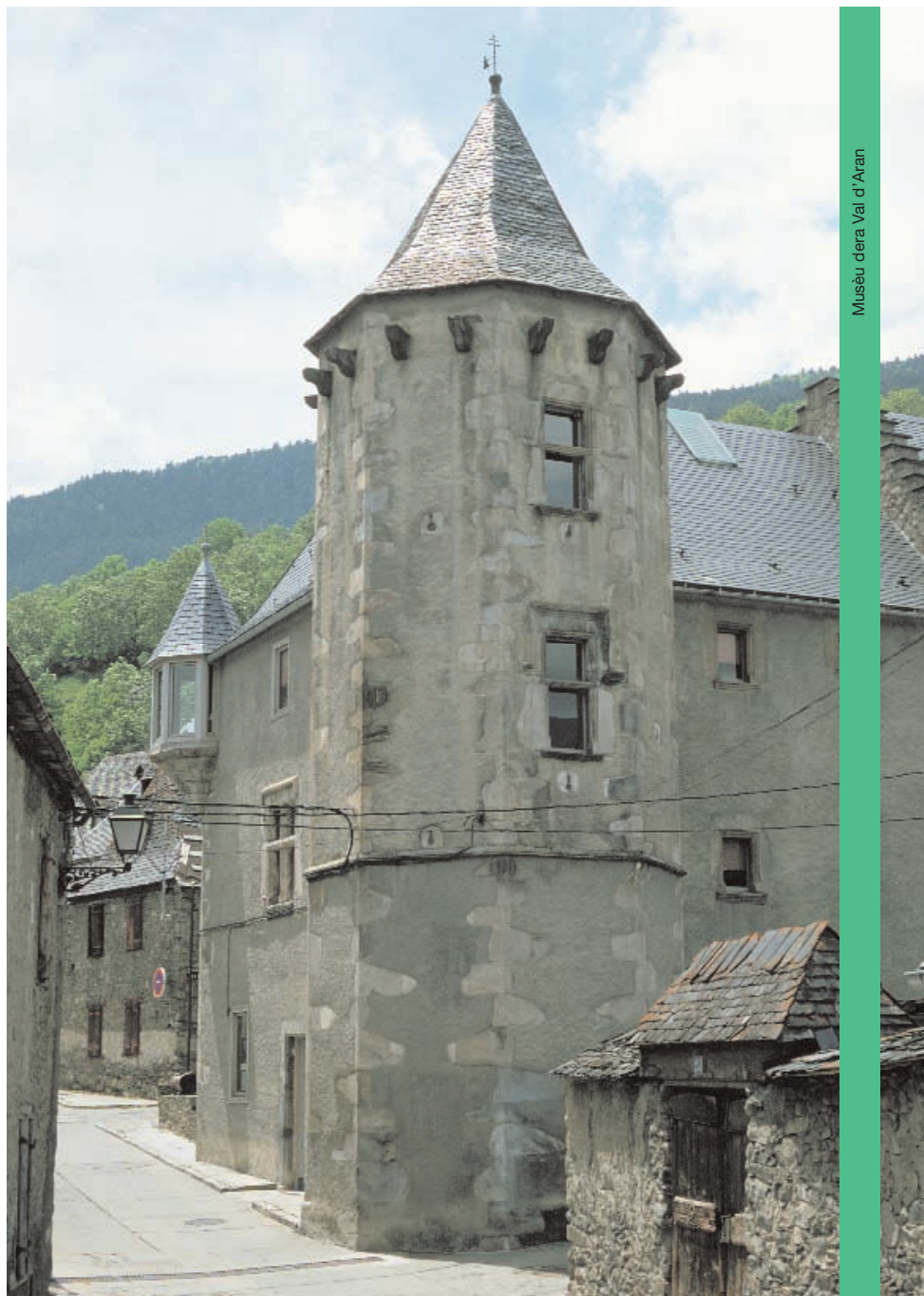
### Palai de Gèu

Av. Garona, 33 – 25530 Vielha  
Tel. (+34) 973 642 864  
[www.palaidegeu.com](http://www.palaidegeu.com)  
[www.visitaldaran.com](http://www.visitaldaran.com)



Palai de Gèu sports centre  
Crist de Mijaran







## The legacy of the Middle Ages



**The Aranese artistic heritage** is mainly medieval and religious in character, comprising Romanesque and Gothic churches, paintings and sculptures. Some highly interesting civil buildings can also be seen, however, and the villages and hamlets scattered throughout the countryside are full of fine examples of popular architecture – buildings of great character and personality, with typical slate roofs. Nor should the archeological remains from the Roman period be overlooked – the many stelae, tombstones and votive objects to be seen in church walls or museums.

After admiring the most noteworthy sights in Vielha, the chief town, which are described in a special section, visitors can follow our proposed itinerary through the villages and hamlets with the richest medieval art heritage. First mention among the hamlets in the large municipality of Vielha e Mijaran must go to **Escunhau** where one of the valley's oldest surviving houses – *Çò de Perejoan*, featuring

a coat of arms dated 1393 and later Renaissance-style windows – is located. The church of Sant Pèir has a fine 12th century Romanesque doorway with two archivolt and sculptural decoration including a figure of Christ on the tympanum, a *crismon* (divine monogram), and chequered bands. Inside are two fountains – a baptismal font and a holy water font – which are also in Romanesque style, a 13th century wooden figure of Christ with an ornamented cross, and a number of liturgical objects.

In the hamlet of **Betren**, between Vielha and Escunhau, there are more old houses with Renaissance windows while above them rises the 12-14th century church of Sant Estèue, in transition style. The Gothic church doorway has four archivolt with pointed arches, voussours profusely adorned with sixty relief figures evoking the Last Judgement, the same theme as in Vielha, and a beautifully decorated tympanum with the Virgin and Child in the centre. In the small church in the neighbouring



Wall paintings of the church of Sant Andreu at Salardú



Gothic altar of the church of Santa Maria at Arties (15th century)

hamlet of **Casarilh** we can admire an interesting white marble tombstone that reveals Gallo-Roman influences and a magnificent 12-13th century Romanesque wooden figure of Christ on the cross, reminiscent of the one in Salardú, with a crown of chiselled metal.

The hamlet of **Gausac**, downstream from Vielha to the west, possesses one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in the valley: the church of Sant Martin. The nave is divided into three parts by 15th century arches with moulding which rest on columns with beautiful capitals. The robust bell tower also served as a keep. Inside the church are a Romanesque font and some interesting Roman stelae. The churches of **Casau, Vilac, Betlan, Aubèr, Montcorbau, Arròs** and other villages also present Romanesque features.

As we travel through the villages that line the Garonne in the north-western part of the valley we soon come to the hamlet of **Es Bòrdes** where the fortress of **Castèth Leon**, one of the most important strongholds in this part of the Pyrenees, once stood on a rocky crag overlooking the meeting point of the Garonne and the Jòeu. It was the residence of the governors of the Val d'Aran until the 17th century and was destroyed by French troops in 1719 during the war of the Quadruple Alliance. Further along, in a lofty position, stands **Vilamòs** which has one of the oldest Romanesque churches in the valley, the church of Santa Maria, with a separate three-storey bell tower. On the main street is Casa Joanchiquet, a typical Aranese house built round an enclosed courtyard, with various outbuildings, which was restored in 1996 to house a museum.

**Bossòst**, a lively village on the left bank of the Garonne, boasts an attractive riverside promenade known as Eth Grauèr. The 12th century church of Era Mair de Diu dera Purificacion has three aisles and three apses with Lombard decoration, a separate square four-storey bell tower, and two interesting doors, of which the north door is the more remarkable: it features three arches of decreasing size, columns, carved chequered capitals and a beautiful tympanum showing the Pantocrator and the evangelists. At **Les**, another attractive village located



Church of Era Mair de Diu at Bossòst ↑

↓ Vilamòs old town





further downstream towards the French border, the small, 12th century church of Sant Blai stands behind a 17th century manor house known as Era Baronia.

The large municipality of Naut Aran, of which the chief village is Salardú, occupies the eastern part of the valley. The first village we reach on our way there from Vielha is **Arties**, the site of the ancient fortress of Entransaigües and the 12-13th century Romanesque church of Santa Maria which has three aisles, three apses and a doorway with six archivolt decorated with geometrical motifs. The most remarkable features of the interior include the wall paintings round the altar (1580) which depict the Last Judgement, Heaven and Hell, a 12th century Romanesque Madonna, and a baptismal font. The

handsome 16th century bell tower has four storeys. This is the only Aranese church to have been declared a Cultural Property of National Interest. Foremost among the old 16th century mansions are Çò de Paulet, which has some fine windows, and the former home of the Portolà dynasty from which the colonizer of California came (now a Parador Nacional de Turismo). The small but interesting Gothic church of Sant Joan (late 13th century), which once belonged to the Hospitallers, was refurbished in 1988 as a venue for temporary exhibitions.

The village of **Salardú** was of political importance from medieval times: it was the second royal stronghold in the valley and was once fortified. It has many historic buildings, among them several fine man-

Paintings at Salardú (detail)



Archivolt at Betren



sions in the old quarter and the remarkable church of Sant Andrèu in Romanesque-Gothic transition style (12-13th century). The church has three aisles and three apses with Lombard decoration, a doorway with five Lleida-style archivolts, and a separate, slender eight-sided bell tower (15th century). A magnificent 13th century wooden sculpture is venerated inside: the Crist de Salardú, which is reminiscent of the Crist de Mijaran. In recent years (1994-1999) some interesting late-Gothic wall paintings (end of the 16th century) have been uncovered: the glorified Christ and the four evangelists on the apse vault, the Fathers of the Church on the central vault above the altar, and male and female saints on the arches and columns.

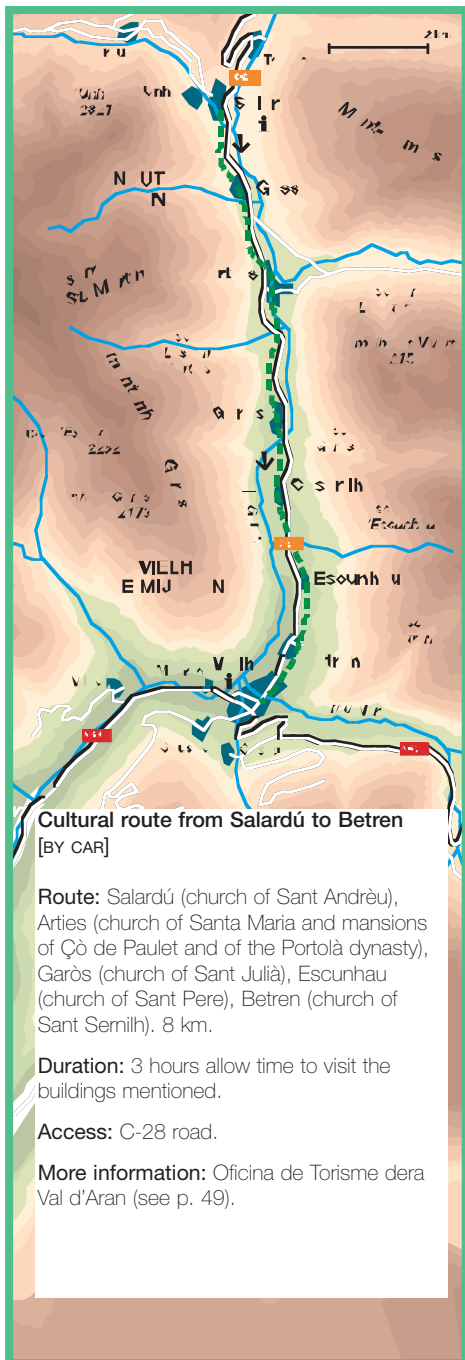
At the entrance to the neighbouring hamlet of **Unha** stands one of the valley's most interesting civil buildings, Çò de Brastet, a fortified manor house built in 1580 with windows and a door in Renaissance style. There is also a small 12th century Romanesque church - Santa Eulària - with three aisles and three apses. Near the hamlet of **Tredòs** - the first hamlet one reaches when entering the valley from the Bonaigua pass - is the 12th century Romanesque shrine of Santa Maria de **Cap d'Aran**, which is now a parish church. It has three aisles, three apses with Lombard ornamentation, a small crypt, and a doorway with archivolts and carved capitals. It once had wall paintings as well, but these are now in The Cloisters in New York.



Christ at Casarilh

Church of Santa Eulària at Unha





**Cultural route from Salardú to Betren**  
[BY CAR]

**Route:** Salardú (church of Sant Andrèu), Arties (church of Santa Maria and mansions of Çò de Paulet and of the Portolà dynasty), Garòs (church of Sant Julià), Escunhau (church of Sant Pere), Betren (church of Sant Semilh). 8 km.

**Duration:** 3 hours allow time to visit the buildings mentioned.

**Access:** C-28 road.

**More information:** Oficina de Torisme dera Val d'Aran (see p. 49).

**Useful addresses**

**Ecomusèu Ço de Joanchiquet**

Major, s/n  
25551 Vilamòs  
Tel. (+34) 973 641 815

**Musèu dera Nhèu**

Santa Eulàlia, 17-19  
25598 Unha  
Tel. (+34) 973 644 030

**Tourist Offices** (see p.49)



## The ideal countryside for walkers

By following the 48-km stretch of main road that runs from Pònt de Rei (Pont-du-Roi) to the Bonaigua pass along the course of the Garonne (the N-230 which, beyond Vielha, runs through the Vielha tunnel into Alta Ribargorça and the C-28 which links up with the C-13 and continues into Pallars), we can visit the main villages and obtain an attractive, but limited, view of the personality of the valley. However, to discover the fascinating world of the Val d'Aran as it really is we must leave the highway and enter the 370 km-long Aranese network of forest tracks.

**Off the beaten track.** The most secluded and beautiful spots in the valley – rivers and streams, lakes, springs and woods, country hamlets where time seems to stand still, panoramic views over lofty mountain slopes – can be discovered along the valley's main footpath, the GR-211. This signposted trail, which was opened in 2000, forms a loop nearly 100 km long and takes in many of the villages.

Some stretches run through flat, gentle countryside, others across challenging, high-mountain terrain. The stone marking the beginning of the trail is located in Vielha, at the meeting point of the Nere and the Garonne. Red and white marks and wooden signs indicate the five alternative routes.

Valiant hikers can choose between a wide range of landscapes, all well worth visiting. Here we will refer only to a few of the most important, but many other possibilities exist. One very interesting route follows the valley of **Era Artiga de Lin** (Es Bòrdes) along the river Jòeu to the gushing springs where it rises, the Uells deth Jòeu. The remains of the old shrine and the modern refuge of Era Artiga de Lin stand nearby amid woods of hazelnut and beech trees, oaks, silver birches and firs. From here one can go on to Còth deth Hòro lake, on the border of Aragon, opposite the massif of La Maladeta, from where the view embraces Mount Aneto and several more of the most impressive peaks in the Pyrenees.



Hiking in the Val d'Aran



Autumn landscape at Valarties

Another fascinating itinerary takes us to the **Colomers lake cirque**, a hollow of glacial origin lying on the edge of the National Park of Aigüestortes and Lake Sant Maurici. It leaves from Salardú and climbs up Aiguamog valley, via Els Banhs de Tredòs and El Pletiu de la Montanheta to the lake area and the Colomers refuge, above Major de Colomers lake, from where a magnificent panorama over other lakes and lofty peaks can be enjoyed.

Another path runs parallel to this one but further to the west. It starts in Arties and proceeds up the valley that bears the name of the village – Valarties – via the Gresilhon springs and the little bridge of Rius through fir and beech woods to the dam on Era Restanca lake and the refuge of the same name. From here one can take a rough but beautiful path to **Mar lake** which has a small island in the middle and

lies amid crests and imposing rock walls at the foot of the great mountain of El Besiberri Nord (3,015 m).

A somewhat easier excursion, which can be done on a mountain bike, takes us from the **Pla de Beret** (Naut Aran), near the Baqueira ski slopes, to the hamlet and shrine of **Montgari** just a few yards from where two different rivers rise: the Noguera Pallaresa, which flows towards the Mediterranean, and the Garonne, which sets out on its journey to the Atlantic. After passing the Parros hut and Es de Cabau and crossing the bridge over the Noguera, we come to the 16th century shrine of La Mair de Diu de Montgari, with its rectory and its former hospice for travellers, and the now uninhabited hamlet of Montgari. A popular festive procession attended by many people from the Val d'Aran, Pallars and Occitania is held there each year on 2 July.



Era Antiga de Lin





Another footpath crosses the north-western tip of the valley. After leaving from the pleasant village of Les, which was once a spa and is known for its Crema deth Haro festival, we come to the quaint hamlet of **Bausen**, 2 km from Pònt de Rei (Pont-du-Roi), where the road crosses into Occitania. The path, dotted with livestock shelters and huts, climbs up via the Liat beech wood and the Escala de Saplan to the col and the **Vacanera range**, lying along the French border, the highest summit of which is the Tuc deth Plan der Ome (2,192 m). The path up the **Val de Toran**, in the northern part of the Val d'Aran, takes us from the hamlet of Canejan, which has also preserved its old-world charm, up a tributary of the Garonne to the mines at the head of the valley and the **Liat lakes**. The hamlet of Sant Joan de Toran lies in the centre of the valley. Beyond Hont dera Coma dam we come to a vast forest of beech trees, firs and silver birches, the Ermèr gorges and the Grauer plain before finally reaching the lakes.



The valley offers many more spots to delight nature lovers: the Varradòs valley, for instance, with its forests and the famous Sauth deth Pish waterfall; Bassa d'Oles, where a refuge is located; the Batalhèr plain and the **Baricauba fir forest** near Gausac; or the peak of **El Montardo** (2,833 m), at the southern end of the valley, commanding magnificent views over the Pyrenees.

**The perfect destination for action tourism.** In the Val d'Aran there are guides who are thoroughly familiar with the terrain to assist those planning to go rambling, horse trekking or cycling in summer, or to explore the mountains on skis or snowshoes in winter. There are also firms that specialize in the so-called adventure sports which have become enormously popular in recent years: climbing, horse riding, mountain biking, archery, rafting, canyoning, canoeing, and others. Opportunities for hunting are very limited and are confined to the Hunting National Reserve of Alt Pallars-Val d'Aran (municipality of Naut Aran) where strict regulations are in force. There are also restrictions on fishing and no stretch of river can be fished without a permit. Permits are issued by two fishing associations in the valley who publish information leaflets each year.







### Ascent of Montardo

[HIKING, CROSS-COUNTRY AND ALPINE SKIING, SNOWSHOES, OBSERVATION OF ANIMALS AND PLANTS]

**Route:** bridge of Rius (1,720 m, Valarties Valley), Era Restanca refuge, Oelhacrestada pass, Lake Monges, Montardo (2,833 m). 4 hours.

**Level of difficulty:** in summer, low for experienced walkers; rest of the year, for those with experience of the high mountains.

**Access:** by car from Arties to the bridge of Rius car park.

**More information:** Oficina de Torisme de Vielha (see p. 49).

If you require further information on active tourism companies, ski schools or mountain guides, please ask at the tourist offices (see p. 49).

### Spa Banhs of Tredòs

25598 Salardú  
Tel. (+34) 973 253 003 / 660 175 843  
[www.banhsdetredos.com](http://www.banhsdetredos.com)

### Spa of Les

25540 Les  
Tel. (+34) 973 648 717  
[www.termasbaroniadeles.com](http://www.termasbaroniadeles.com)





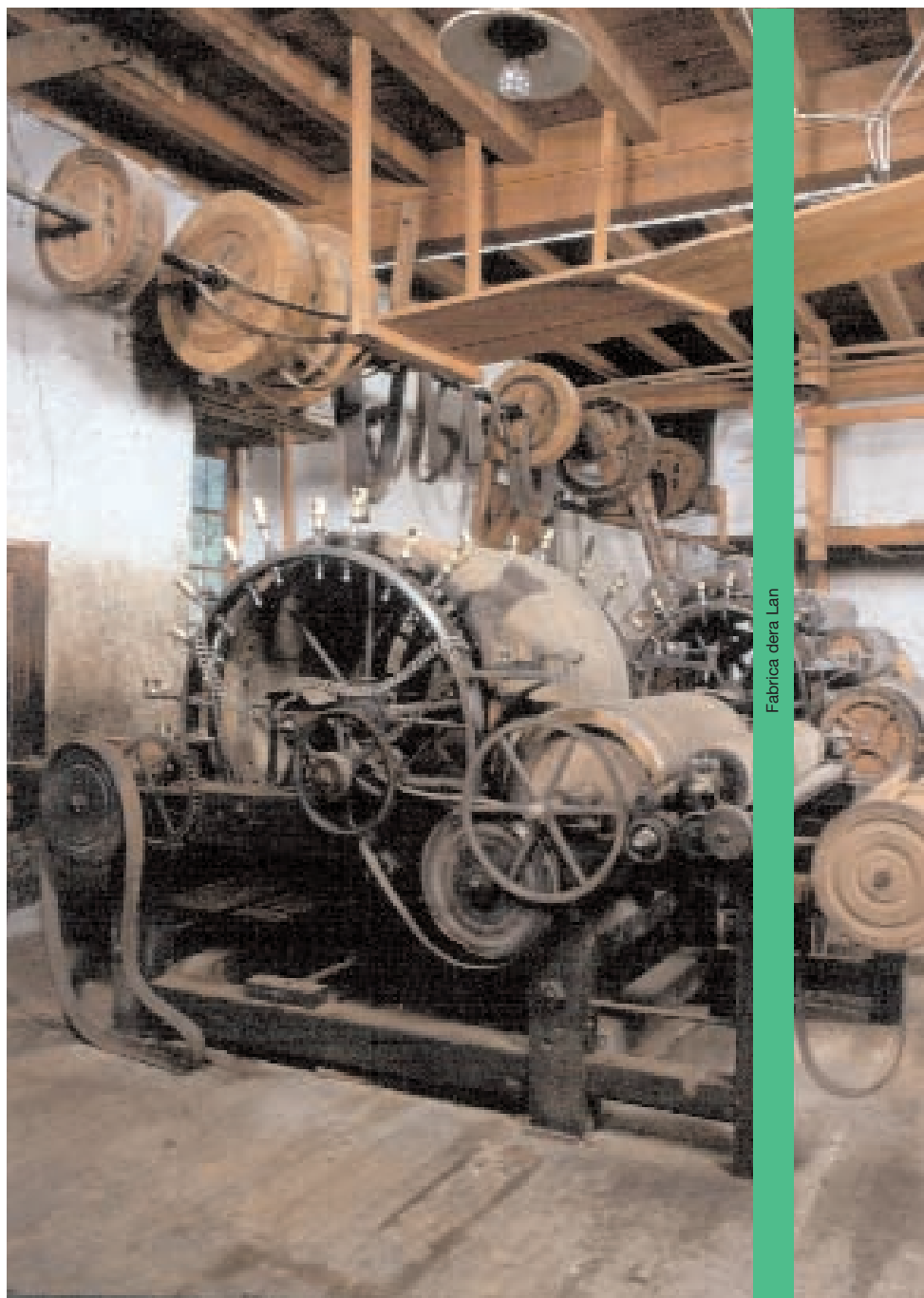
## An industrial tradition remembered

Recently a number of projects have been carried out which aim to restore the Val d'Aran's industrial heritage and add it to the existing list of more conventional tourist attractions. The old mines and the textile and flour mills are three highly significant examples.

**The mining tradition.** Cattle raising and forestry are the mainstays of the valley's economy but it also had a long history of mining dating back to the extraction of iron for use in ironworks and of cobalt and galena. The most important mines, however, were those that worked the zinc and lead deposits in the northern part of the valley, near the French border. In the early 20th century the price of zinc on the European metal market was calculated on the basis of Aranese zinc but in the second half of the

20th century the mines gradually closed down because they were not profitable.

The **Mina Victòria** near Bossòst, in the mountainous northern part of the municipality of Arres, has recently been restored. It was the valley's leading zinc and lead mine (producing sphalerite and galena) and was worked from 1907 onwards by two companies under Franco-Belgian ownership. By 1912 it was producing 80 tonnes of raw mineral daily and employing 100 to 150 workers in the galleries and on the surface. It closed down in 1953. A cable car used to carry the ore down to washing plant at Bossòst which still stands. The guided tour starts and finishes at La Bassa d'Arres and runs through the Sacòsta and Desaux galleries.



Fabrica dera Lan



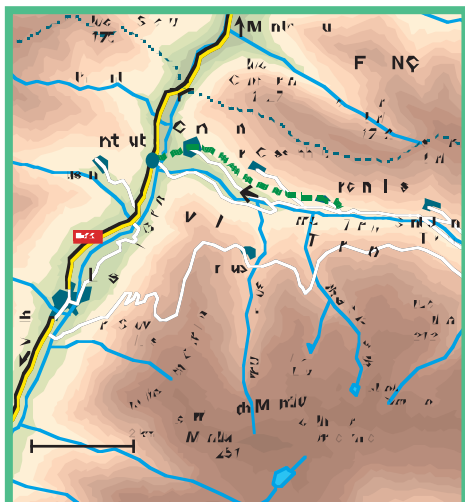
Mina Victòria



Mòla de Salardú grain mill

**A woollen mill.** The **Fabrica dera Lan** is an old woollen mill in Vielha which was driven by the waters of the Nere river. It is typical of the small textile industries that sprang up on both sides of the Pyrenees from the second half of the 19th century onwards. It was built at the end of the 19th century by Rafael Portoles Lufaste (1858-1936), who had learnt the trade at Miremont de Comenge (Miramont-de-Comminges). For the Aranese community, this factory was a step towards modernization. It has been so carefully restored that the machines are in running order. Visitors can follow the entire manufacturing process, from the "devil" that tore and separated the fibres to the scribbling and carding machines and finally the spinning, which was carried out on the top floor.

**A watermill.** The **Mòla de Salardú** is an old grain mill in Salardú that demonstrates this basic traditional productive activity. Both the hydraulic and mechanical systems are in operation, enabling visitors to see how the power of the water was harnessed and how the flour was made.



### Paths of miners and smugglers

[HIKING]

**Route:** Pèirarroth footbridge, Porcingles, PR-C-114 and GR 211, Canejan (906 m), Pontaut. 5.5 km, 1' 20".

**Level of difficulty:** a pleasant walk for those of all ages. Most of the path is signposted.

**Access:** by car from the N-230 to the Sant Joan de Toran road until the turn-off to Porcingles, where we find the Pèirarroth footbridge.

**More information:** Oficina de Torisme dera Val d'Aran (see p. 49).

**Tourist offices** (see p. 49)

#### Musèu dera Val d'Aran

##### Mina Victòria

Carrèr Major, 26

25530 Vielha

#### Fabrica dera Lan

Carrèr de Ribaèta, s/n

Cap dera Vila

25530 Vielha

#### Mòla de Salardú

Paratge dera Mòla (on the way to Aiguamoig)

25598 Salardú

Tel. (+34) 973 641 815

[www.visitvaldaran.com](http://www.visitvaldaran.com)

#### Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de

##### Catalunya (MNACTEC)

Tel. (+34) 937 368 966

[www.mnactec.cat](http://www.mnactec.cat)





## Traditions and folklore

The many festivals and traditions that are still celebrated today are a sign of the close links between Aranese culture and the past. These rites and customs are the popular expression of various episodes in the history of the valley and determined efforts are underway to recover its distinctive past.

**The annual cycle of the seasons** is a prime factor in many celebrations. The end of winter, which heralds the end of cold and hardship, and the birth of spring, with its vision of joy and optimism, gave rise to the **Magràs** (or carnival) festivities which are very widespread throughout the Pyrenees and deeply rooted in Gascon culture. Magràs gives way to Lent, a period which reaches its climax in Holy Week when major celebrations take place in Bossòst. This hamlet is the scene of the only Good Friday processions to be held in the Val d'Aran. At the Way of the Cross, which takes place in the morning, all the participants wear coloured clothing, except the Black Madonna

(Verge Negra or Verge Dolorosa) whereas attendants at the procession of the Holy Burial, which is held in the evening, are all dressed entirely in black. On 13 May the **Holy Cross Festival** takes place in Salardú. Crucifixes from the eight villages in the municipality are assembled round the famous figure of Christ on the cross (Sant Crist de Salardú) and carried in procession to the Pica Square where the blessing of the municipality takes place.

The villages of Les and Arties are the scene of the most spectacular celebrations to mark the summer solstice, which is related to fire and fertility. At Les a festival called the **Crema deth Haro** takes place on 23 June, the eve of the feast of Saint John. The top part of the *haro* – the trunk of a fir tree about 12 m high – is split open with wooden wedges. Then it is erected in the middle of the square and set alight and a festival full of colour, fire, Aranese dancing and noisy rejoicing takes place around it. Formerly the



Era Pòica Piqué dance

trunk was replanted the following day but nowadays this is done on 29 June, the feast of Saint Peter. Offerings are made by the two most recently married couples in the village. This rite, which is of pagan origin, evokes the symbolism of a pre-Christian festival: the tree trunk fertilizes mother earth and asks for the fields and people to be purified and made fertile.

In Arties the **Festa deth Taro** gets underway a few days before the eve of Saint John's day (midsummer's eve) when a group of men from the village set out in search of the tallest fir tree in the forest. This is planted on the village outskirts, on the path leading to the fields and meadows. On the night of 23 June it is set alight, the parish priest blesses it and, after it has been burning for a while, it is pulled down and dragged with ropes all round the village to the mayor's house, while the young people jump over it to the sound of the music.

**Aranese traditional dances** are numerous and varied. They were originally danced to the sole accompaniment of women's voices, though on solemn occasions there were small groups of musicians, often comprising a violin accompanied by a stringed tambourin and a three-holed pipe. Typical dances which are still performed in many Aranese villages include the following: **Es Esclòps** (a traditional dance in which girls and boys dance with a clog in their hands); **Eth Puntet** (a dance recalling the disagreements between sellers of black and white bread which is danced in a circle with baskets of bread in the middle); **Es Aubades** (the Aranese dance with the longest history of which each village has preserved its own version; in it the girls sit on a bench in the square while the boys keep dancing till the musician is tired out); **Era Pòica Piqué** (a dance known in all Gascon villages; the dancers execute a polka step and spin round); **Era Morisca** (boys and girls hold hands to form a chain and dance through the village streets during the Sheep Festival).

Numerous festive processions also take place. Among them are the famous gatherings of Montgarri (2 July), that of Era Artiga de Lin (third Sunday in June), that of the shrine of Santa Quitèria in Vielha (22 May), that of Sant Joan in Arròs (first Sunday in May), and that of Era Mare de Diu dels Desemparats

in Montcorbau (first Sunday in May). Other major festivals include: the annual village festivals – held mostly around the feast of the Assumption (15 August) or the feast of Saint Roc –; the festival of El Roser at Betren and Aubèr; the Corpus Christi festival at Bossòst; the Nativity Play at Les; the Living Crib at Vielha; and the gathering of Pyrenean music and accordion players held at Les in August.



Crema deth Haro at Les



Casa Joanchiquet at Vilamòs

[www.festes.org](http://www.festes.org)

[www.firesifestes.com](http://www.firesifestes.com)

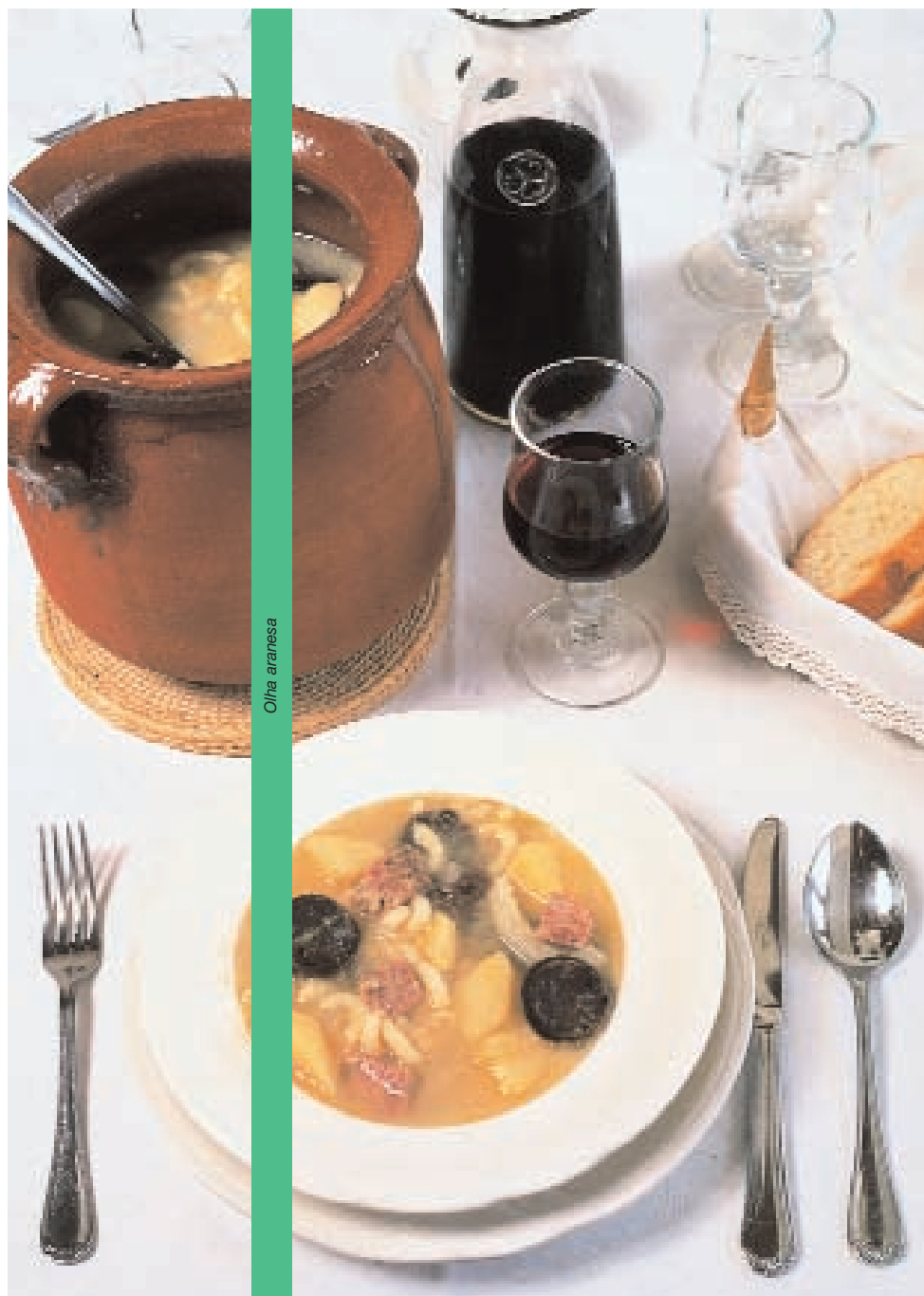
[www.festacatalunya.cat](http://www.festacatalunya.cat)



## A cuisine with a distinctive flavour

Aranese cookery owes its quite distinctive flavour to the valley's historical and cultural links with Gascony. This is especially true of the way local produce is prepared, for the produce itself is not very different from that used elsewhere in the Pyrenees. The great influence of tourism in recent decades has given the restaurant trade a boost and led to the recovery of dishes from ancestral cookery.

Local produce of special note includes berries from the woods, wild mushrooms – ceps, saffron milkcaps and fairy-ring champignons –, trout, a cow's milk cheese called *Val d'Aran*, and various types of sausages: *langoïssa* and *langoïssa seca*, *anditos* (blood sausages made with onion), *cueta*, *bolh* (subdivided into *bolh nere*, *bolh de codena* and *bolh de la lengua*) and *choriço*. All are protected by their own regional appellation.



*Olha aranesa*



**The most traditional and emblematic dish** in Val d'Aran cuisine is *olha aranesa* (a stew not unlike the *escudella i carn d'olla* eaten elsewhere in Catalonia). Other typical dishes include *sanganheta* (made from pig's blood), *truhada* (potatoes stuffed with meat), and *caulets* (cabbage leaves with a minced meat filling, served alone or to accompany game). Other mountain dishes offered by the valley's prestigious restaurants include: civets, especially those made from wild boar and chamois; other game dishes such as rabbit with mustard; fish dishes, including smoked, fried or baked trout, a fish which is plentiful in the Garonne and the Aranese streams. The typical pâtés and soufflés are evidence of influences from over the French border. The local lamb is both excellent and plentiful, as are the poultry – stewed or preserved in oil, vinegar and herbs – and products derived from poultry, such as *foie-gras*.

**Local deserts include** *crespèths*, also known as *pastères* or *pescajons*, *crema aranesa*, *milhes* made from hot fried maize, and *hariat*, made from buckwheat.



[www.gastroteca.cat](http://www.gastroteca.cat)





## General information

### Ministry of Enterprise and Labour

Territorial Services  
Av. del Segre, 7  
25007 Lleida  
Tel. (+34) 973 728 000  
[www.gencat.cat/empresaiocupacio](http://www.gencat.cat/empresaiocupacio)

### Conselh Generau d'Aran

Paseig dera Llibertat, 16  
25530 Vielha  
Tel. (+34) 973 641 801  
[www.conselharan.org](http://www.conselharan.org)

### Torisme Val d'Aran

Ctra. Gausac, 1 (Ed. Val d'Aran)  
25530 Vielha  
Tel. (+34) 973 640 688  
[www.torismearan.org](http://www.torismearan.org)  
[www.visitvaldaran.com](http://www.visitvaldaran.com)

### Ara Lleida (Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Lleida)

Tel. 902 101 110  
[www.lleidatur.com](http://www.lleidatur.com)

### Tourist Offices

#### Barcelona 08008

Pg. de Gràcia, 107 (Palau Robert)  
Tel. (+34) 932 388 091/ 92 / 93  
[www.gencat.cat/probert](http://www.gencat.cat/probert)

#### Alguaire 25125

Aeroport Lleida - Alguaire  
Tel. (+34) 973 032 700  
[www.aeroportlleida.cat](http://www.aeroportlleida.cat)

#### Les 25540

Pl. de l'Ajuntament, 1  
Tel. (+34) 973 647 303  
[www.turismoles.com](http://www.turismoles.com)  
Tourist Reception Centre (CAT)  
Av. Sant Jaume, 39  
[www.turismecat.cat](http://www.turismecat.cat)  
(next building)

#### Salardú 25558

Trauèssa de Balmes, 2  
Tel. (+34) 973 645 197

#### Vielha 25530

Sarriulera, 10  
Tel. (+34) 973 640 110

[www.catalunya.com](http://www.catalunya.com)  
[www.gencat.cat/empresaiocupacio](http://www.gencat.cat/empresaiocupacio)

# Map of the Val d'Arnan



 **Agència Catalana  
de Turisme**

**Tourisme**  **Val d'Aran**

 **Generalitat de Catalunya**  
Government of Catalonia  
**Ministry of Enterprise and Labour**