

PYRENEES-MONT PERDU CIRQUES AND CANYONS *World Heritage*

In 1972, the General Conference of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) adopted an international treaty, the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Since then, it has inventoried and classified 1,007 cultural and/or natural sites in 161 of the world's countries (1 July 2014), thus establishing the World Heritage List.

The sheer number of sites and monuments listed by UNESCO demonstrates the wealth and diversity of the vast legacy that nature and our predecessors have bequeathed to us over the centuries. Today, we benefit from this heritage and have the responsibility of protecting it and transmitting it to future generations.

SOME IMPORTANT SITES IN FRANCE AND ELSEWHERE

There are currently 35 sites in France that have been listed under cultural criteria (the Canal du Midi, the Episcopal City of Albi, Grotte Chauvet Cave...), 39 in Spain (towns of Avila, Toledo, Salamancaque, Santiago de Compostella...). 3 have been listed under natural criteria in France (Gulf of Porto, lagoons of New Caledonia, Pitons and Cirques of Reunion Island), and 3 in Spain (National Parks of Garajonay, Doñana and Teide). Only one site in France is cited for both natural and cultural criteria: the « Pyrenees-Mont Perdu. In Spain, Ibiza is added in this list.

The world over, World Heritage sites such as the Taj Mahal, Machu Picchu, Halong Bay, Great Wall of China, Okavango Delta... are among the most exceptional cultural and natural sites of all.

A GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

The inclusion of a site on the World Heritage List means that its outstanding universal value has been recognised by the international community. It is a sort of worldwide quality award. It does impose a powerful moral commitment on the State or States in charge of such an exceptional site to animate, protect and promote it. The award does not come with specific financial support, but sites gain in prestige and ultimately reap benefits from the area's increased attractiveness.

THE TWO SIDES *of the same mountain*

This cross-border space with its outstanding beauty and assets lies mainly within the perimeters of the Pyrenees National Park in France and the Parque nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido in Spain. It was recognised by UNESCO in 1997 for both its natural and its cultural heritage.



The Pyrenees-Mont Perdu and the Maloti-Drakensberg Park in South Africa/Lesotho are the only World Heritage sites to be cross-border sites and to be listed for both their cultural and their natural heritage.

This limestone area is geologically remarkable for the spectacular glacial cirques in its north and for the vertiginous canyons, which are among the largest and deepest in Europe, in the south. Both sides have been shaped by human activity and in particular by pastoralism (livestock farming), giving the whole of the massif its original and universal character.

PYRENEES
MONT PERDU

World Heritage



Cirque de Gavarnie

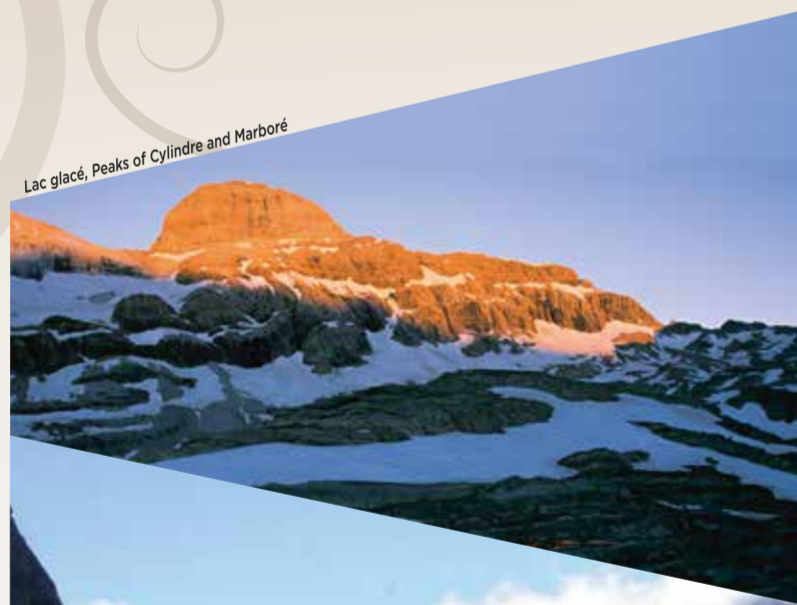


Ordesa canyon

« An exceptional World Heritage site in the Pyrenees »

The Pyrenees National Park

The Pyrenees National Park, created in 1967, stretches east-west along the French-Spanish border for over 100 km, covering 6 main valleys between the upper Aure and Aspe valleys. As the only national park in the French Pyrenees, it protects, on the 45,707 hectares of its central zone, areas whose altitude ranges from 1,000 metres to the peak of Mount Vignemale at 3,298 metres. The Park covers the Aspe and Ossau valleys in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department as well as the Azun, Cauterets, Luz and Aure valleys in the Hautes-Pyrénées, and collaborates with the 63 districts that make up the affiliated zone.



Lac glacé, Peaks of Cylindre and Marboré

TWO COUNTRIES and one exceptional cross-border site

This shared heritage can only be understood by embracing both sides of the mountain, which are as dissimilar in appearance as they are united by their origin. Here more than elsewhere, mountains are at once a barrier and a crossing-point.



Mont Perdu

THE NATURAL HERITAGE AWARD

The Mont Perdu massif is highly representative of the great epochs of the Earth's history. It enables us to understand natural phenomena of outstanding aesthetic importance. In fact, the Pyrenees have specific natural characteristics that set them apart from other mountain regions. Created by the collision of the Iberian and western European tectonic plates, the Pyrenees present a geological unity in the Mont Perdu region that makes the phenomenon of thrust sheets very visible over a relatively small surface area. At Gavarnie, for instance, layers of marine sediment up to 1,200 meters thick have been measured, complete with a variety of corals and shells!

This « geological writing » is very rare in the world. For Franz Schrader, a major cartographer of the Pyrenees, it constitutes an « immense geological poem ».

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD

UNESCO recognised the exemplary value and exceptional history of the pastoral mountain communities, which organised themselves socially and politically so as to recreate peace on a daily basis, despite conflicts both local and especially between the French and Spanish kingdoms.

As early as the 13th century, oral agreements between the mountain communities of Upper Aragon and the French valleys of the Mont Perdu massif started to be put in writing. Later, they became « *Lies et passeries* » treaties guaranteeing the free movement of goods and people, as well as safeguarding activities and relationships. They are applied to this day.

The cultural landscape, and thus the particularity, of Mont Perdu consists of this social bond, which is adapted to the constraints of mountain life, be they related to altitude or climate, and steeped in the values of respect and trade. Here, social and cultural life is superimposed on the landscape.

The Pyrenees-Mont Perdu site covers a surface area of 30,639 ha, ranging from an altitude of 800 metres in the Rio Bellos valley to the 3,355 metres of Mont Perdu's peak. It includes three districts on the French side: Gavarnie, Gèdre and Aragnouet, and six on the Spanish side: Bielsa, Broto, Fanlo, Puertolas, Tella-Sin and Torla.

Church in Tella



Ramonda



www.pyrenees-mont-perdu.fr
www.pirineosmonteperdido.es

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The two National Parks share the objective of preserving the biodiversity and landscapes of their exceptional sites.

EXPLORING the Mont Perdu site

PRESTIGIOUS ROUTES AND LANDSCAPES IN THE HEARTLAND OF THE PYRENEES

To share in the site and gain an understanding of it, you really need to come for a stay. Walk a while on a trail ; get to meet a livestock farmer, guide or enthusiast ; mix sport and exploration ; penetrate into the very depths of the most characteristic site to grasp just how enormous they are : these are the best ways immerse yourself in our magic sites and appreciate them.

The many faces of this part of the Pyrenees, which was built out of the original limestone, and has been sculpted by ice and the water that runs off its slopes to flow towards the Atlantic or Mediterranean, conceal a profound structural unity.

The massif is a meeting-point of the Atlantic and Mediterranean climates, a mountain haven for numerous species that have become rare or extinct elsewhere and a centre of endemism that is at the very heart of its uniqueness. There is a specifically Pyrenean Aster, Violet, Iris and Lily, just as there is a Pyrenean Desman, Brook Salamander and Izard. In the skies whirl bearded vultures, golden eagles, griffon and Egyptian vultures, the beech and fir forests conceal brown bears and capercaillies.

Ancestral human practices, both agricultural and pastoral, have also shaped the landscape.

On the French side, in the Gavarnie valley, in addition to the great limestone cirques or vertical amphitheatres of Barroude, Troumouse, Estaubé and Gavarnie, you will find the peaks of Les Astazou (3,071 m), Le Taillon (3,144 m), Le Gabietou (3,031 m), the cross-borders peaks of La Munia (3,133 m) and Le Marboré (3,248 m), underlined by l'Epaulé, la Tour and le Casque, breached by the legendary passage-points of Brèche de Roland and Brèche de Tuquerouye. A great waterfall over 400m high launches itself from the head of that famously gigantic expanse of sands, the Cirque de Gavarnie.

The Spanish side is dominated in the north by the Trois Sœurs massif, consisting of Mont-Perdu (3,355 m), Le Cilindre (3,335 m) and Le Soum de Ramond (3,254 m).

From the summit of Mont-Perdu, a series of impressive glacial valleys and canyons goes down fan-like. The most emblematic is Ordesa valley : under its immense ochre walls opening to the west, the waters of the Rio Arazas form a succession of magnificent cascades. The three other valleys are no less beautiful : the spectacular cliffs of the Nisclé canyon to the south, the Escuin gorges to the south-east and the dissymmetrical Pineta valley to the east, with its vertigo-inducing cliffs on one side and gentler shoulders on the other.

The difference in height between the upland and lowland zones of the Spanish National Park is about 2,600 metres ! At high altitude, the lac glacé Mont Perdu is the only sizeable lake, and there is still a permanent, though shrinking, glacier on the north face of Mont Perdu.

It is vital that you respect both the regulations of the National Parks and pastoral activities. You will need to adapt your behaviour to the spirit of the place. Each one of us must share in and help with the conservation and promotion of this World Heritage site.



The OBJECTIVES

MAINTAINING PASTORALISM

For centuries, pastoral activities have shaped the landscape of this area. Shepherds have roamed the mountain, leaving their imprint. Hay meadows have gradually given way to shepherd's huts and mountain summer pastures where cattle and sheep graze. This ancestral activity is symbolic of the site and must live on. To this end, local authorities on both sides of the Pyrenees in partnership with the agricultural sector are actively encouraging the maintenance of shepherds and their flocks. The creation of the « AOP (Protection of Designated Origin) Barèges-Gavarnie », the first AOP for sheep meat in Europe, is an example of a local initiative to safeguard a strong identity and high-quality skills. In the Spanish side, it's the same for veal and spirits of Broto valley.

PROMOTING THIS REMARKABLE SITE

The exceptional geological and natural merits of the « Pyrenees-Mont Perdu » site have gained it recognition and the inscription on the list of the World Heritage label. Local and national authorities both Spanish and French have combined their efforts in a development style that reconciles the preservation of ancestral skills, local culture, pastoralism and cross-border traditions with promoting the site. In order to attain these objectives, local stakeholders and politicians must be actively involved. Their exemplary governance will turn the site into a UNESCO benchmark.

PARTNERS & MANAGEMENT

Managing a cross-border UNESCO site requires shared efforts and time. In late 2011 a joint French-Spanish management committee was set up in an instance of true cross-border governance. Its equal make-up ensures a shared and coordinated management of the site. The committee is made up of 22 members (11 Spanish and 11 French representatives) and brings together all of the site's stakeholders : the French and Spanish governments, French and Spanish local authorities, both National Parks, and French and Spanish livestock farmers. The committee's presidency alternates every two years between the French and Spanish sides. A management plan has been drawn up based on a diagnosis and an action programme. Its aim is to develop the site by preserving its cultural and natural values, and hence its authenticity.

