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Pyrénées-Orientales - 66



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P.O. Life

October/November 2006 - N°7

Le magazine anglais des Pyrénées-Orientales

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Edito

Bondia !

Well, summer may be over but the sun is still smiling (most of the time!) and the PO, whilst maybe a little sleepy, has not yet gone into hibernation! The ski slopes are only an hour away, golf courses are open throughout the year, beaches are still pleasant, Spain is just round the corner, there are exhibitions in museums and art galleries, wine tastings..... On ne peut pas demander mieux. La vie est belle, no ? !

Whilst we're talking French, autumn is a good time to brush up on your command of this fine language. Why not try the exercises on pages xxx or contact one of our sponsors for those long-put-off French lessons ?

As usual, we bring you a restaurant review but don't forget to check out our site www.anglophone-direct.com for more reviews on dozens of restaurants in the region, or why not add your own ?

Wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, we hope your autumn is golden this year in the PO.

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WALK THE REGION

With Christian Piquemal

A MEDIEVAL DETOUR to BESALÚ

Doorway to historical Catalunya

This outing in Spanish Catalonia combines easy rambling and cultural discovery. The morning walk explores, almost on plain level, a beautiful countryside hiding remarkable examples of Romanesque churches.

The afternoon visit of the ancient town of Besalú reveals an outstanding collection of architecture from the 11th to the 19th centuries.

In between, a good meal with local specialities can easily be arranged.

Access: Take the motorway direction Spain and leave it at Figueres Nord. Drive into Figueres following the main avenue. At the second traffic light, turn right direction Olot-Besalú. After the roadwork before entering Besalú, turn 180° to the right on a small road direction Beuda. Park 2.5 km further in front of the church Sant Pere de Uligardà (12th cent.). Total drive: 1h.15 from Le Boulou.

The walk: Take the footpath signposted "Sta Maria de Palera/St Sepulcre" going into the woods. You end up on a wide track. Turn left and follow it until reaching a 18th century farmhouse. The church Santa Maria de Palera (12th cent.) is just round the corner.

Step back to the signpost "St Sepulcre de Palera". It leads you to an ancient path and to the legendary church Sant Sepulcre or Sant Domènec, typical of the Catalan Romanesque architecture. Don't miss the outstanding chevet at the back.

Go down the steps at the front and walk along a small road for 80m. Turn left at the signpost "Pi de les Conques". The footpath crosses a track then goes deeper into the forest, narrowing gradually. You finally meet up with the main road and follow it on the left (careful with the traffic) for 250m to reach the hamlet of Beuda with its 12th century church and 15th century castle. (One of the renovated houses is a restaurant). To go back take the same way in reverse (2 hour walk and 6,5 km to and back) or...

Option: If you want to further explore the countryside, take the little road starting on the right just when going

down from the hamlet (notice the signpost with names of houses: Can Vilà, Can Tries, etc). It goes across woods and meadows to typical farmhouses, some of them beautifully renovated (count 1h.30 more).

The visit of Besalú: Drive back to the town and park near the medieval bridge (direction Girona, 200m on the left). It gives way to the ancient county capital, classified as a National Monument and filled with exceptional historical heritage: traces of Iberic and Roman presence, 3 Romanesque churches, vestiges of the synagogue and Jewish baths...

We recommend the local restaurants: "Can Queir", "Fonda Siques-Cal Parent", "Curia Reial", "Pont Vall".

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Erratum

OOOPS! WHAT AN ASS...!

The last issue of PO Life described the donkey sticker on the back of cars as representing the French Catalanian and the bull sticker as representing the Spanish Catalanian. In fact, the donkey is the symbol of Catalonia, French and Spanish, whilst the bull is the unofficial national symbol of Spain.

.....following on from a load of bull!

The whole thing goes back to the Osborne sherry company who put up large black silhouetted images of a bull in semi-profile to advertise their sherry on sites near to major roads throughout Spain. When a law was passed in the 1990s prohibiting such advertising, the bull was already nationally famous, so it was agreed that the bulls would remain, but the name Osborne would be removed. There are now nearly one hundred examples of the Osborne bull advertisements, often sited on a low hilltop so as to be clearly silhouetted against the sky, but only two still bear the word Osborne - one being at the Jerez de la Frontera airport in Cadiz, and the other in the nearby town of El Puerto de Santa Maria, where Osborne headquarters are found.

Car stickers and T shirts of the Osborne bull were by now all over Spain - a symbol of Spanish pride - so the Catalonians 'hit back' by producing their own unofficial national symbol - el burro - a symbol of Catalanian pride!



Did you know

Your money or your life !

Initially enrolled as mercenaries by Don Carlos, in an attempt to take over the throne of France during the civil war of 1833 - 1848, the Trabucaires gradually abandoned their mission, and became smugglers, bandits and highwaymen, operating particularly in the mountains and on the Spanish frontier around Maureillas, Le Perthus, and Céret, in the Vallespir. The last of the Trabucaires were captured at the Mas de l'Aloi in Corsavy in 1846



Ssssssuprising ?

If you are interested in herpetology (the study of reptiles and amphibians), you may be surprised to know that the P.O. holds the official record of 90cm for the biggest four-legged lizard in mainland Europe, well surpassing the average maximum of 60cm for the species. A bigger one does exist in the Balkans, but is a relative of the common "slow worm" (also well known in the UK) and is legless - nothing to do with an over-indulgence in the local wine I hope!



La mygale

Are you sitting comfortably? Well, let me tell you about the mygale, a kind of black "satiny-skinned" spider (Latin name *Macrothele calpeiana*), quite large with stretched leg span about hand size - body about large olive size. Apparently they are endemic in Andalusia and one of their favourite habitats is among the roots of very old olive trees. It is those olive trees - imported from southern Spain (dug up with roots and earth) which have been the source of a few findings in the PO - for example in Canohès in somebody's garden. Their bite is poisonous but very rarely fatal unless especially allergic. They tend not to be aggressive - but will bite an unwary hand or foot if feeling threatened.....a bit like snakes in that respect. The good news is that our winters (especially this last one) are too harsh for the babies to survive (no breeding) and most adults cannot survive our winters either. If you or any of your neighbours have recently imported or bought from an importer, any really old (e.g. 500years) olive trees (they COST so not that many can afford them) then one would need to be careful



around the roots of that tree.

Merci à Roger Oliver pour ces affreux détails!!!

Byrrh - apéritif Catalan

Created by the Violet brothers from Thuir in 1873, and otherwise known as 'vin tonique et hygiénique au quinquina', Byrrh used to be a world renowned Catalan apéritif. The brothers apparently started off as travelling salesmen, selling various things including 'tonic'. With the arrival of the railway in Perpignan in 1858, they saw the chance to take full advantage of the new industry that it brought to the region, and put together the recipe for Byrrh, which was to become famous throughout the world. It is created from good quality Roussillon wines and quinine water, and said to be medicinal.



You can visit the winery in Thuir, which takes in what they claim to be the largest wooden vat in the world.

A heavy 'birden' for Perpignan

Round about sunset, most nights between mid-October and March, the skies of Perpignan are assailed by tens of thousands of small dark shadows. The starlings are back ! In a Hitchcocksque tableau, they settle on tree and telephone line until the morning when they swoop down on the fields and pillage seedlings, corn and crap. Quite apart from the agricultural menace, there is also the possibility that, if you go out as a brunette, you may well come home as a blonde !! The town of Perpignan has tried various measures to combat this very real problem, one of which was the installation of speakers which immitate the hunting call of the eagle.



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No cure for wind

There are not many disadvantages to living in the P.O but the heavy winds that sometimes batter the region are worth knowing about. The two most common regional winds are **la Tramontane** (Tramuntana in Catalan) and **le Marin**.

According to the dictionary, the word **tramontane** used as an adjective means 'an or coming from the other side of the mountains' or 'coming from another country'. This cold, dry and often violent wind blows from the North-West to the South-East in North Catalonia, accelerating

between the Northern Pyrenees and the South-East of the *Massif Central*. Locals say that that the Tramontane always blows in sets of 'odd' days, meaning that it will always blow for either one day, three days, five days etc

Meaning 'coming from the sea', **Le Marin** is a warm marine wind blowing inland from the Mediterranean (south-east) and often bringing with it low cloud and mist, and a humid atmosphere and causing heavy rain in coastal areas in winter

Another wind in the region is the *Scirocco*, a southern wind bringing hot dry air from Africa. This wind is quite rare in the region but when it blows, it leaves everything covered in a layer of fine red sand - souvenir from the Sahara desert!

Apparently there is an old law passed by Napoleon which excused "crimes of passion" committed when the *Mistral* had been blowing for over three days. If you have spent time in the P.O during several days of the Tramontane, it is easy to understand how nerves get frayed! *

carry out first aid, lend blood pressure gauges (and show you how to use them), advise on the edibility of mushrooms picked (take them into the chemist and they will identify them for you), rent out materials such as crutches etc and take back unused meds, which are sent to third world countries for use if they are not out of date.

Unlike British chemists, you cannot buy film, batteries etc in a 'pharmacie'. They are strictly health, hygiene and beauty!

'Pharmacies' are easily recognisable by the green flashing cross displayed outside.

Most 'pharmacies' open shop hours and are closed Sunday and Bank holidays. There will always be at least one 'service de garde' in each area providing out-of-hours service in case of emergency. Look for a notice in the window of any pharmacy to find out which pharmacy is scheduled to be open each week.

- I have sunburn.
J'ai pris un coup de soleil.
- Do you have anything for a cold?
Avez-vous quelque chose contre un rhume ?
- I've been stung by a bee/wasp.
J'ai été piqué(e) par une abeille/guêpe.
- Can you recommend an insect repellent?
Pouvez-vous me conseiller une crème anti-insecte ?
- I would like some plasters, please.
Je voudrais du sparadrap, s'il vous plaît.
- I am allergic to...
j'ai une allergie contre...
- I have been sick.
Je viens de vomir.
- It is not serious.
Ce n'est pas grave.
- I have stomach ache.
J'ai mal au ventre.
- I feel dizzy.
La tête me tourne.
- I have a headache.
J'ai mal à la tête.
- Can you give me something for the pain?
Pouvez-vous me donner un analgésique ?

Next month... Choosing your GP (*medecin traitant*)

Citation

J'e hais vos idées mais je me ferai tuer pour que vous ayez le droit de les exprimer. Voltaire



FRENCH PHARMACIES

More than just a chemist

Pharmacists in France are highly-trained, as the position requires six years of university studies leading to a diploma. They are therefore generally highly competent in providing diagnosis and over the counter treatment for many common illnesses and ailments. Whilst certainly not a substitute for a doctor if there is something, they can be a good place to start if you're off colour. Do not be afraid to ask advice, describe your symptoms etc. They also

MORE TOP TIPS FROM OUR FORM...

PLAYING AROUND...

Golf, that is !

Every year, more and more golfers arrive from abroad. The Languedoc-Roussillon region has 21 courses, some of which have high-quality reception facilities, and, with the help of the CRT and the Languedoc-Roussillon Golf Course Economic Interest Group, is developing a range of golf promotion activities.

For example the "Golf-Pass" costing 190 allows you unrestricted access to a number of sites in the Languedoc Roussillon for 21 days.

Golf courses in the Pyrénées-Orientales

Golf de Saint Cyprien

Two courses, "le Canigou" (18 holes) and the "Saint-Cyprien" (9 holes) dotted with water obstacles. For both amateurs and experienced golfers. On the banks of the étang (lake).

Open: all year round, from 8h - 18h30 and 8h - 20h from June 1st - August 31st.

Green fee: 38 - 51

Golf du Domaine de Falgos (Saint Laurent de Cerdans)

On the Spanish border, the vast 650 hectare Falgos estate offers an 18 hole course and five-star accommodation.

Open: all year round

Green fee: 42 - 52

Golf de Font-Romeu

At a height of 1,800 metres, in a mountain setting, the famous health resort of Font-Romeu offers a naturally-undulating 9 hole course with a wide range of technical challenges

Open: 1st May - 11th November - every day - 8h - 19h

Green fee: 23 - 32



Virelangue du mois (tongue twister)

Cinq chiens chassent six chats.
Five dogs chase six cats

Tips from our forum....

"If you're looking for cool in the summer and beautiful views its hard to beat the Domain De Falgos up in the mountains near Cardagne..... or just slip up there for a cool beer and to take in the superb views. It's also a hotel with girly spa, beauty therapies etc for the female dept ...has a pool'n'Jacuzzi..... 1.5mins from Spain".

"I have joined St Cyprien, and started playing in seniors competitions - friendly and not too serious. Still coming to terms with French handicap system. Last competition one guy had handicap of 53!!! He only came second in Stableford competition".

"Falgos is a better, shorter, tighter and hillier, cheaper course but about an hour drive from St Cyprien. Just as easy to go into Spain - good courses, well kept, more interesting".



Word and phrase origins

(En deux langues.....In two languages)

Savez-vous comment on appelle un collectionneur de nounours ?

Un "arctophile" ! (Venant du mot grec "arktos" qui signifie ours et d'où vient aussi le mot "arctique" !

Do you know what we call a collector of teddy bears? An "arctophile"! (Coming from the Greek word "arktos" meaning bear and from whence comes the word "arctic" !

Proverbe

All's well that ends well. Tout est bien qui finit bien.

RIVESALTES INTERNMENT CAMP - CAMP JOFFRE

"Lest we forget"

Camp Joffre, internment camp in Rivesaltes from 1938 - 1970 and destined to abandon, has been bought in part by the conseil generale, and a memorial erected in order that its sinister history may never be forgotten.

Southern France became a major haven for Jewish



refugees attempting to flee to neutral countries, whether legally or illegally. In 1935, the commune of Rivesaltes, situated on a rail route and 40 km from the Spanish border, was considered a strategic position. Five km from Rivesaltes, the army occupied 612 hectares between Rivesaltes and Salses, to construct a camp, which was originally intended as a military base. Three years later, it became the Camp Joffre. In 1939, at the start of WW2, the camp became a military transit base and in 1940 a refuge for Spanish refugees fleeing the Franco dictatorship.

After the signing of the armistice, France was split into two and the « zone libre » in which the Pyrenees-Orientales was included, came under the administration of the Vichy government. It was at this point that the sad and sinister history of the camp Joffre began to unfold.

Gradually, the camp became a place of internment for families of gypsies, Jews and Spanish refugees. With a capacity of 8000, it was not long before the camp was overcrowded, families were separated, and conditions deteriorated enormously. In 1942, under German pressure, the camp became a 'Centre national de rassemblement des Israélites' - a 'sorting centre' for Jews who were then sent on to the death camps such as Auschwitz, via Drancy. Two thousand five hundred and fifty one Jews are recorded as having been deported from Rivesaltes - four hundred of them were children. In 1942, when the Germans occupied the 'zone libre' they closed the camp.



When the south of France was liberated in 1944, in a sad form of poetic justice, Rivesaltes was reopened until 1948 for collaborators and traitors, and in 1945 housed German soldiers and prisoners of war. In 1962, the camp at Rivesaltes once again became a ghetto; this time for the hundreds of thousands of Algerians or 'harkis' who fled Algeria during the battle for its independence from France. Many of these families did not leave the camp until its closure in the late sixties.

Today, the camp still has a military presence, despite the fact that much of it is in ruins, and is also used to detain 'étrangers en situation irrégulière' - illegal immigrants etc

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CATALAN CUISINE

Trinxat

(Cabbage and Potato cake - a winter dish from the Cerdanya)

Trinxat, in Catalan, means chopped or shredded.

Ingredients

- Savoy or green cabbage
- 10 thick slices of salt pork or bacon, diced
- 2 lbs. potatoes, peeled
- 3 tbsps. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and minced



Boil the cabbage and potato until well done and very tender. Mash both ingredients together with a potato masher. Season to taste with salt, and set aside. In a frying pan, lightly brown salt pork or bacon on both sides, drain on kitchen roll and set aside. Fry garlic, in olive oil until soft, 2-3 minutes; then add oil and garlic to cabbage mixture, mixing until thoroughly combined, but still a bit chunky; Stir in the bacon or salt pork. Drop the mixture into hot oil by large spoonfuls, pat into smooth patties with a spatula and fry until browned on both sides, or mound onto a serving platter without frying and garnish with any left over bacon.

RESTAURANT REVIEWS

CHEZ FRANCOISE, CORSAVY (JOHN FAIRLOUGH)

Sometimes in life you have to "go the extra mile" to achieve something. Put in a little more effort than usual, but find that in the end, it's worth it.

Nobody would pretend that Chez Françoise situated in the main village square in Corsavy is the most accessible restaurant in POA. A trip half way up the Vallespir, then right after Arles sur Tech, followed by several kilometres of steep hairpin bends, means that a meal there is not for the faint-hearted.

Chez Françoise seems to offer a triple role as Corsavy's Epicerie, Café and Restaurant. Indeed on entering you pass through the shop, filled with enticing meats, cheeses, vegetables etc, which serve to whet the appetite for what is to come.

We went for lunch on a warm, early September Sunday, and were greeted by two very pleasant ladies who offered us a table either indoors in the rustic dining room, or one on the vine covered terrace. We chose the latter with fabulous views down the valley. The menu at 25 is one of those "no choice, it keeps coming" extravaganzas that French village cafes do so well. The dishes do change from time to time, but on this occasion we started with a plate of home made charcuterie. This was followed by a delicious pan-fried local trout. Next appeared a fluffy cephe mushroom omelette. By this time we were wondering what the main course was to be. It turned out to be a plateful of moist succulent roast guinea fowl, accompanied by sweet carrots and a crisp green salad. Dessert... yes we did have room (just) was a choice of patisserie, ice cream or a fabulous home made "flan" (egg custard). Local red wine (half a litre per person) is included in the price.

Should you not be able to manage the full five courses, a shortened version, at the appropriate discount is offered, but you should ask for this at the start of the meal. There does not appear to be a wine list, but the red was very pleasant.

Being Sunday lunch, needless to say every table was full, so reservations (04 68 39 12 04) are advised, but I would imagine at other times (every day except Monday) a table "on spec" could easily be secured.

All in all a lovely experience, a reminder of French cuisine of yesteryear, and the drive to Corsavy is an added bonus, with its breathtaking scenery. Highly recommended.



Test your French

1 Match up the proverbs

- All's well that ends well..
- All things come to those who wait..
- Desperate times, desperate measures.
- The end justifies the means.
- Every penny counts.
- It never rains but it pours.
- Leave nothing to chance.
- More haste less speed..
- Nothing ventured, nothing gained..
- Where there's a will, there's a way.

- A Qui veut la fin veut les moyens.
 B Un malheur ne vient jamais seul.
 C Qui va lentement va sûrement.
 D Tout est bien qui finit bien.
 E Qui ne risque rien n'a rien.
 F Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre.
 G Aux grands maux les grands remèdes.
 H Vouloir, c'est pouvoir.
 I Il ne faut rien laisser au hasard.
 J Un sou est un sou.

2 Quiz – Test your French AND your knowledge of the region.

- Le 'suquet' est un plat fait.....
 a) de saucisses
 b) de glace
 c) de poisson
- Pour appeler la police, on compose le
 a) 15
 b) 17
 c) 23
- L'one est l'emblème de
 a) la Catalogne
 b) l'Écosse
 c) l'Espagne

- Pour aller en Espagne en voiture, il faut.....
 a) deux gilets de sécurité et un triangle
 b) un gilet de sécurité et deux triangles
 c) prendre l'avion
- L'espadille typiquement Catalane s'appelle
 a) la sardane
 b) la vigatane
 c) la suntane
- Les gâteaux en forme de roue, enrobés de sucre glacé s'appellent
 a) les rousquilles
 b) les Russes
 c) les rouillés

3 Match up the acronyms

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1 ASSEDIC | A UFO |
| 2 BD | B Police riot squad |
| 3 TVA | C Legal alternative to marriage for same-sex couples |
| 4 DOM-TOM | D Parking ticket or fine |
| 5 OVNI | E VAT |
| 6 PACS | F Comic strip |
| 7 P-V | G Unemployment payment agency |
| 8 SPA | H French controlled territories (out of France) |
| 9 TTC | I RSPCA |
| 10 CRS | J Fax included |

....and here they are in full

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Et améliorez votre anglais !

1 Complétez les phrases.

1. The south of France is warmer _____ Scotland.

- a) them
- b) than
- c) as
- d) to

2. If I had more time, I _____ learn Catalan.

- a) will
- b) do
- c) am
- d) would

3. It is useful to know a second language _____ it can help your career.

- a) because
- b) because of
- c) although
- d) unless

4. I don't have _____ money left.

- a) some
- b) no
- c) any
- d) a lot

5. People _____ watch too much television get square eyes.

- a) what
- b) who
- c) which
- d) that

2 Pouvez-vous trouver les 10 fautes qui se cachent dans le texte suivant ?

If you goes to Barcelona, watch out for the man in a kilt. A debt collecting company has introduce El Cobarador Escocès (the Scottish receiver) that dresses in a kilt and full Scottish accompaniment, including a very high black hat, and followed the 'moroso' (bad payer) wherever he go..... in the metro, in bars and restaurants etc. The aim is to shame the 'moroso on sticking to him as glue. Apparently, many more peoples have paid up this way rather than suffer the indignity of being shadow by a Scotsman!!

Vocab

Debt collecting company - agence de recouvrement (de dette)

3 Trouvez les contraires des adjectifs suivants....

1 hot	A beautiful
2 fast	B good
3 hard	C expensive
4 light	D generous
5 bad	E heavy
6 loud	F thick
7 ugly	G soft
8 cheap	H slow
9 mean	I cold
10 thin	J quiet

Maintenant, choisissez le bon adjectif pour les phrases suivantes.

1. The pizza was so -----, it burnt my mouth
2. He hates spending money: he is very -----
3. Shhhhhh, your voice is too -----
4. In winter, I like to wear a ----- coat
5. ----- down! You're driving too -----!

4 Mettez les questions suivantes dans le bon ordre.

1. go / where / you / did ?
2. there / you / how / stay / long / did ?
3. born / you / when / were ?
4. does / how / it / cost / much ?

LANGUAGE TIPS

"Savoir" or "Connaître" ?

Savoir" and "Connaître both mean 'to know' ? How do we differentiate between the two?

Use 'Savoir' when following it by a second verb.

Eg je sais parler Français. Tu sais danser la sardane?

Use 'Connaître' when following it by a noun :

Eg il connaît mon frère. Connaissez-vous la route pour Perpignan ?

Blague

Une gousse d'ail qui rebondit après avoir été jetée contre un mur ?

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Wine Club

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(more recommendations and advice on www.forum.anglophone-direct.com)

Le Pot - vin de pays d'Oc 2004

"Produced by Dom Brial (Baixas), this fruity wine (13%) is very drinkable, without being in any way a 'grand vin'. Available in most supermarkets. I really enjoyed this, as an 'easy to drink' wine"

•Domaine de la Capeillette 2003 - La Tour de France
«Purchased from Le Cellier des Arcades in Céret. Délicieux! Thoroughly recommend it.»

•Domaine des Pierres Blanches, Fauquieres, 2005 (2€99 Champion St Esteve)

«I think I've found the best quality wine for under 4 in the PO. Lovely spice and blackberry nose. Full, fruity and dense with just the right amount of tannin. Tastes like a 7 wine.»

TWO DAYS ON THE VENDANGE

by Colin Lamont

Tractor driving

A phone call from Jonathan Hesford (pictured) in his first year as a vigneron in France found me unexpectedly sitting on a wee red tractor in a Trouillas vineyard, trying to remember how to reverse a trailer. I'm retired: I don't do work but thought I might just appreciate the wine more for being involved in the harvest.

The picking

Most of Jonathan's grapes are hand-picked by his squad of 'vendangeurs'. It's highly physical, with much stooping to find the grapes under the branches and leaves. Crates of grapes have to be collected and

lifted on to the trailer. Some growers put the grapes directly into a trailer to be tipped out at the winery, but Jonathan crates his so that they are not crushed by their own weight. A fierce sun beats down on the pickers. This is no easy job.

The winemaking

At the winery, the grapes were tipped into a machine (un érafloir) which separates the grapes from the stalks. From there the grapes were pumped either to the press (pressoir), if white or to a fermentation tank (cuve), if black. The stems were taken back to the vineyard for later return to the soil.

The white grapes were pressed immediately and piped off into a stainless steel cuve for fermentation. There are different types of cuve - concrete (béton), fibreglass (fibre de verre) and stainless steel (inox). Sometimes the grapes will be fermented in oak barrels. The temperature is carefully controlled during fermentation. Black grapes are pressed after fermentation: the skins impart colour and flavour to red wine. During fermentation, the skins rise to the top of the juice and form a crust. From time to time either this crust is broken up and pushed down through the liquid, or the juice is drawn from the bottom and piped into the cuve so that it will filter back through the skins to maximise the contact of the juice with the skins.

These two days left me tired, sore but feeling good. Man has harvested grapes and made wine in this part of the world for two and a half thousand years: just for two days I was part of that tradition.

A fuller version of this article with photos is online at <http://www.anglophone-direct.com/-Grape-picking>

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A refreshing change

Tired of sand in every orifice? When the sea is calm and the sun is smiling, the beach is always a pleasure in the PO but sometimes it's refreshing to leave the coast behind and head inland to visit some of the many lakes of the region. Often sheltered from the Tramontane, providing water sports, fishing or just a chance to get away from the crowds, the lakes of the Pyrenees-Orientales are worth a visit.

Lacs du Massif du Carlit

This cluster of a dozen lakes of various sizes, nestled amongst the wild and beautiful landscape of the 'hautes Pyrénées' make the climb to a height of 2100 - 2300 metres worthwhile and rewarding. Quiet, remote and atmospheric, the views will take your breath away.

A fisherman's paradise, it is necessary to check out the fishing regulations before setting up at the side of one of the lakes as there is a section of 'no kill' area where all fish must be thrown back. Some of the lakes are nature reserves and fishing is not allowed. The lakes are supervised by 'mounties' on horseback.



In stormy weather, or just somewhere to get out of the sun at siesta time, there is an 'abri' or shelter between the Estany Sec and the Lac de la Comassa, close to the lakes del Viver and Negre

For a walk with a difference, you can hire a donkey from Puyvalador to accompany you on your tour around the lakes and carry your rucksack! (for more info, tel: 04 68 04 41 22 Rieutort)

Les Bouillouses

Between Font Romeu and les Angles, Les Bouillouses is one of the most beautiful lakes in the area at an altitude of 2070 metres. A dam was built here at the turn of the century (an important water reserve : 16 million cubic

metres) which provided some of the electricity necessary to run the little yellow train, and a pathway leads to the summit of the CARLIT peak at an altitude of 2921 metres. It can be accessed by road from Mont-Louis but because of this ease of access, it becomes very busy in Summer, when shuttles operate from nearby car park la Borde in order to limit traffic.



The best way to visit this lake is, of course, on foot. From the lake at Matemale, also worth a visit for lake fans, visitors can take the chairlift to the station at the Roc d'Aude (2325m high). From there, there is a walk of about two hours to Les Bouillouses.

Villeneuve-de-la-Raho

Originally intended as a reservoir to supply local agriculture, the lake at Villeneuve-de-la-Raho quickly became a leisure area for sailing, fishing and sunbathing on the beaches specially created to accommodate the growing number of locals and tourists attracted to it for its easy access. Only 15 minutes from Perpignan centre (direction Porte d'Espagne/Barcelona) this lake is used all year round for walkers and joggers and also provides the water necessary for the 'canadairs' in case of forest fires.



Vinça and Caramany

Originally created from dams to supply water for agriculture, the lakes at Vinça and Caramany (Agly) are respectively thirty and ten years old, therefore very recent in 'lake years'. Both have become 'leisure lakes' with beaches, sailing, and supervised swimming as well as picnic areas, fishing etc. The lake of Vinça is easily accessible, just off the main road from Perpignan to Prades, and the Caramany lake is just outside Caramany (known for its excellent wine) near Ille sur Tet.

Citation

Nous devons croire en la chance ; sans cela comment expliquerions-nous le succès des gens que nous n'aimons pas ? - Jean Cocteau

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