VTT N°10 - The Black Wood

Des falaises de Roquefort au Rougier



Village de Saint-Izaire (Virginie Govignon)



Between the Bois Noir woods and the red sandstone of Saint-Izaire, this easy route offers beautiful panoramic views over the village of Calmels-et-le-Viala and the Len Valley. And as a bonus : remarkable heritage !

Along scenic trails through the woods and sections of singletrack, this easy route winds through a beautiful landscape dotted with remarkable heritage sites : a chapel, a statue-menhir, and the birthplace of the famous archaeologist Abbé Hermet. At the end of the route, enjoy panoramic views over Saint-Izaire, a true red sandstone gem on the banks of the Dourdou River.

Useful information

Practice : VTT

Duration : 1 h 30

Length : 13.6 km

Trek ascent : 468 m

Difficulty : Medium

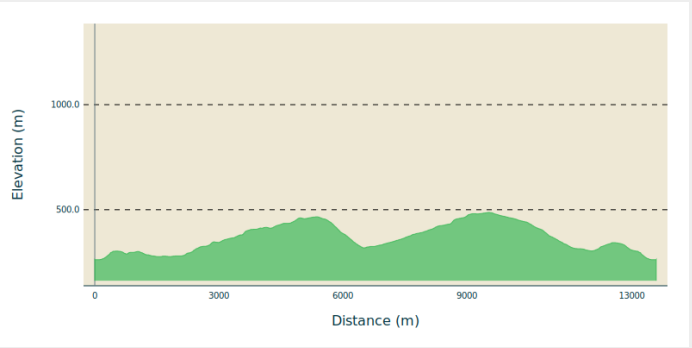
Type : Loop

Themes : History and heritage, Panorama

Trek

Departure : At the bridge on the village side, Saint-Izaire
Arrival : At the bridge on the village side, Saint-Izaire
Markings : VTT Parc
Cities : 1. Saint-Izaire
2. Calmels-et-le-Viala

Altimetric profile

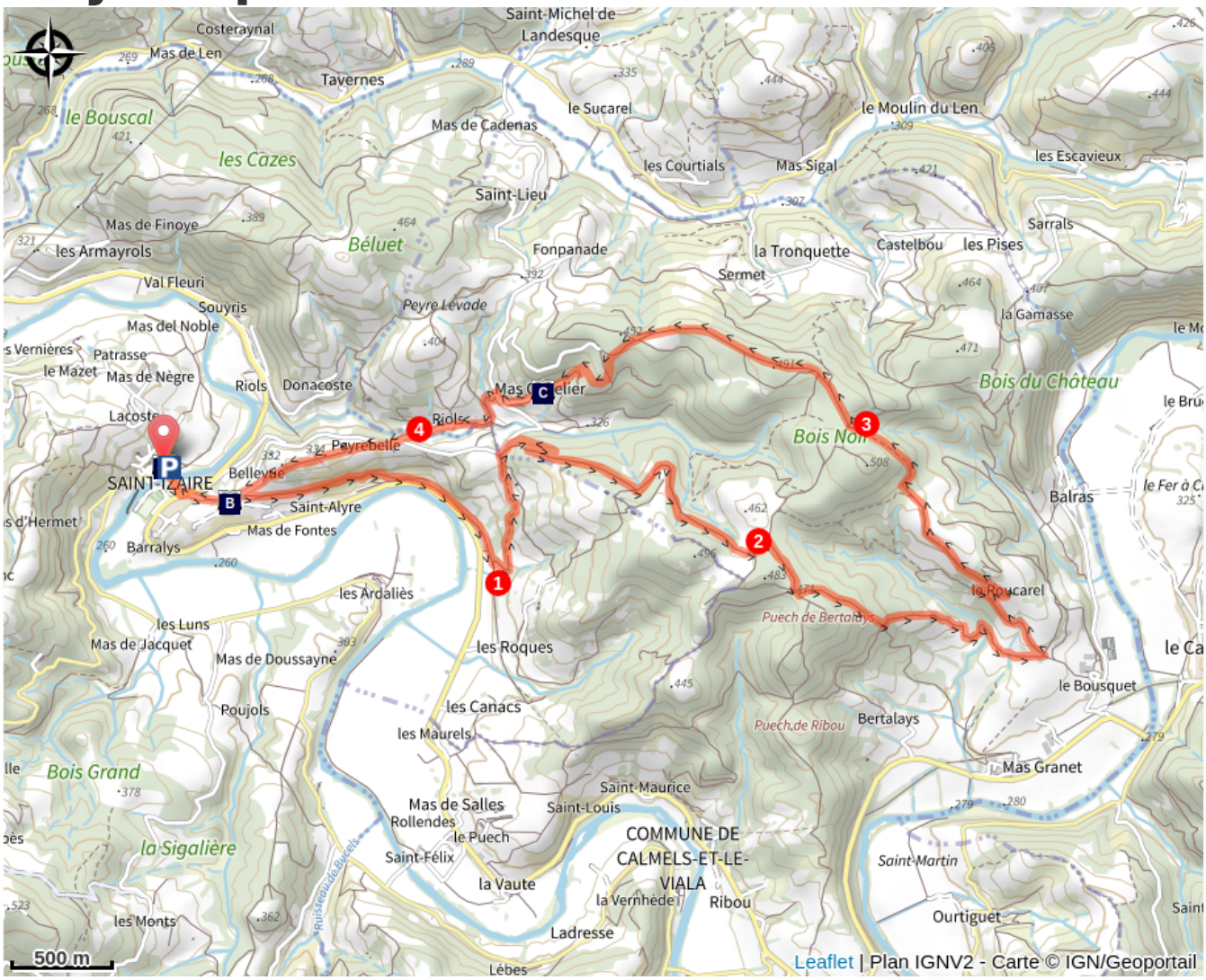


Min elevation 262 m Max elevation 487 m

Climb up to the Notre-Dame de Grâce Chapel, then go around it on the left to join the former railway line, which leads you towards the hamlet of Les Roques.

1. Follow a red dirt track along the hillside until you reach a statue-menhir. Take the path on the right to reach the top of the woods.
2. Continue eastwards, then descend towards the Cambon plain (near the Bousquet farm). On the left, the track takes you back up to the top of the "Bois Noir".
3. A shaded trail leads you back towards Mas Capelier (the birthplace of Abbé Hermet), then to the road. Cross the road and go through the hamlet of Riols.
4. Further along the road, a trail on the left takes you back to the chapel, offering commanding views over the village of Saint-Izaire.

On your path...



📖 Village of Saint-Izaire (A)
📖 Chapel of Our Lady of Grace (B)
📖 Abbot Hermet’s House (C)

All useful information

Gear

Bring a supply of water and suitable clothing.

How to come ?

Transports

All the information is available on the Tourist Office website.

Access

From Saint-Affrique, take the road towards Albi, then at Vabres-l'Abbaye turn right onto the D25 towards Saint-Izaire.

Advised parking

Car park next to the Dourdou river, on the right after the bridge

Information desks

Saint-Affrique Tourist Office
Boulevard Aristide Briand, 12400 Saint-Affrique

contact@roquefort-tourisme.fr
Tel : 0565585600
http://www.roquefort-tourisme.fr/



Source

Sites VTT FFC

On your path...



📖 Village of Saint-Izaire (A)

Saint-Izaire is a fortified village whose history is closely linked to its episcopal castle, the former summer residence of the bishops of Vabres. Mentioned as early as 862, the village gradually surrounded itself with ramparts during the 12th century to protect its inhabitants from feudal conflicts.

After the Wars of Religion, the fortifications lost their defensive role: openings were made in the walls, and some fortified gates were altered to allow carts to pass and houses to expand. Despite these changes, the layout of the streets, alleys, and houses has remained almost unchanged since the Middle Ages. The 15th- and 16th-century façades and windows still give the village its historic charm today.

Attribution : Virginie Govignon



📖 Chapel of Our Lady of Grace (B)

Overlooking the southern bank of the Dourdou River, the Chapel of Our Lady of Grace is an emblematic site of Saint-Izaire. Mentioned as early as 1461 under the name “Notre-Dame de l’Ouradou,” it was restored in 1730 before being sold as national property during the French Revolution and later converted into a sheepfold. Restored again in the 19th century, it now incorporates architectural elements from the former castle and old village church.

For many years, the chapel housed a relic believed to have protective and healing powers, especially against skin diseases and respiratory illnesses, and for the protection of pregnant women and newborns. These beliefs left a strong mark on local memory, making the chapel a symbol of protection for the village.

This tradition continues today through annual pilgrimages, particularly on August 15th.

Attribution : Xavier Waerzeggers



📖 Abbot Hermet’s House (C)

Born in Calmels in 1856, Abbot Frédéric Hermet developed a passion for menhir statues from a young age. At the age of ten, he made his first archaeological discoveries, but it was in 1888, when he stumbled upon the “Dame de Saint-Sernin,” that he truly embarked on a quest for other carved slabs. He studied these monuments and brought them to the attention of the scientific community between 1892 and 1926. In 1898, he coined the term “menhir statues” for these mysterious sculptures. Alongside his work on these prehistoric monuments, Abbot Hermet became a pioneer of archaeological excavations at Graufesenque, near Millau, where he explored Gallo-Roman remains starting in 1901.

Attribution : Delphine Atche