

## Going a Little Further Afield

Roquebrun lies in a low mountain area and is part of the Upper Languedoc Regional Nature Park.

The Commune includes several hamlets, established near cultivated areas, which once enabled them to live in a state of autarky — living from terraced crops (chick peas, lentils, vines...), chestnuts, olives, and sheep rearing...

### Saint-André

Saint-André-de-Vexos, once Roquebrun's parish church, was dependent upon the priory of Cassan. It was in the hands of a prior-*cum*-priest from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century to the Revolution.

The pre-Romanesque chapel was altered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ; today it is unused, and in private hands.

### (1) Ceps and the Chapel of Saint-Pontien

This building was saved from ruin by the town council in 1994. It was first mentioned in a charter of 940 under the name of « Saint-Pontien de Baraussan », referring through the «-an » suffix to the Roman founder of the « villa » that once stood on this site. Shards of large jars, called « dolia », and ceramics bearing the Graufesenque seal, made at Millau in the 1st century, make it possible to date the first settlement here to the time of the emperor Augustus (27 BCE – 14 AD). At a very early stage, probably in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, a church was erected near the villa. It had a square chevet and a necropolis containing tombs made with oriented slabs found round about. This edifice went through many changes, not least because of the sloping ground which could not support the walls, and its proximity to a thoroughfare often associated with war and looting.

### (2) Escagnès

A picturesque hamlet clinging to the hill... It will woo you with its vineyards, kitchen gardens, and hospitable inhabitants. The « gentle way of life » takes on its full meaning here.

### (3) Laurenque

As you climb up towards the hamlet, you see an old griotte marble quarry, producing dark red stone flecked with white. Laurenque is a small hamlet set on the rock itself (black schist).

The houses were built using flat stones, with arcaded terraces and porches with double arches with windows.

The main street forms a tunnel with the communal oven in the middle.

## ROQUEBRUN

### Of Stone and Water

#### An Outstanding Site

Roquebrun, known as « Hérault's Nice », is protected from the north wind by the Esquirol range, and enjoys a micro-climate with citrus and other exotic plants growing in open terrain.

Spring sees much mimosa blossom, with the annual festival on the second Sunday in February. This Mediterranean climate is good for the vine, because, as the popular saying goes, « grapes ripen by night !

For Roquebrun, this mild climate combined with ubiquitous water has been the source of its wealth down the ages.

A discovery circuit will take you round the village and its history, never far from water and in the shadow of the castle's tower.

## Origins

### A Human Presence since Prehistory

Roquebrun's special geographical location, along with its fertile lands, encouraged human settlement long ago.

Excavations have unearthed a rich array of implements and tools from the Bronze Age ; a cabin dating from the Iron Age is solid evidence of the birth of sedentary dwelling-places.

A Celtic deity is mentioned by a Latin inscription carved in marble in the Saint-André priory, and many Roman villas have been listed.

### A History Built About the Castle

The tower was built between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, and probably had two purposes. It was at once a belfry - *cum* - watchtower, strategically placed where

two valleys meet (the Laurenque, upstream, and the Orb, downstream), and a keep providing the defences for a lordly castle.

In any event, this massive, square construction, like an extension of the rocky pinnacle, so not easily accessible, was an excellent place both for spying the foe, and repelling him.

It was surmounted by wooden structures called hoardings (*hourds*), which jutted out and were used for hurling projectiles at attackers...

The Roquebrun castle was first mentioned in 1036, belonging to the family of the Viscounts of Béziers, who died out with the last of the Trencavels (12<sup>th</sup> century).

It was at that time that the name *Rocabruna* appeared. As the village grew, it was encircled by two successive walls.

In 1156, the castle was sold and made part of the castellanly of Cessenon, which was

part of the seneschalsy of Carcassonne.

This status was confirmed by Louis IX in 1247 ; a royal garrison was then established at Roquebrun.

In 1279, a body of consuls was set up in Roquebrun, its task being to manage the village and restrain the powers of the lord.

Roquebrun would then exist until the Revolution under the royal powers-that-be, with a lord and consuls. The castle was subsequently abandoned, and went to ruin.

## Wine-growing

Roquebrun's history is also very bound up with wine-growing, which developed apace in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though not without serious crises... The town council thus resigned during the viticultural crisis that struck the South in 1907.

Today, Roquebrun boasts outstanding vineyards of great renown (AOC Saint-Chinian-Roquebrun).

## The Orb

The mills on the Orb's banks attest to a variety of activities, replaced by the vine in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ; they included growing olives and cereals, and a textile industry based on broom and mulberry.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the building of bridges over the Orb (Roquebrun and Ceps) helped to open up the Commune, which was formerly reached by boats plying between the two banks.