

# *Pyrénées* Monte Perdido

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

NATURAL LANDSCAPE | CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



• Pyrénées - Mont Perdu  
• inscribed on the World  
• Heritage List in 1997



# Pirineos Monte Perdido

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

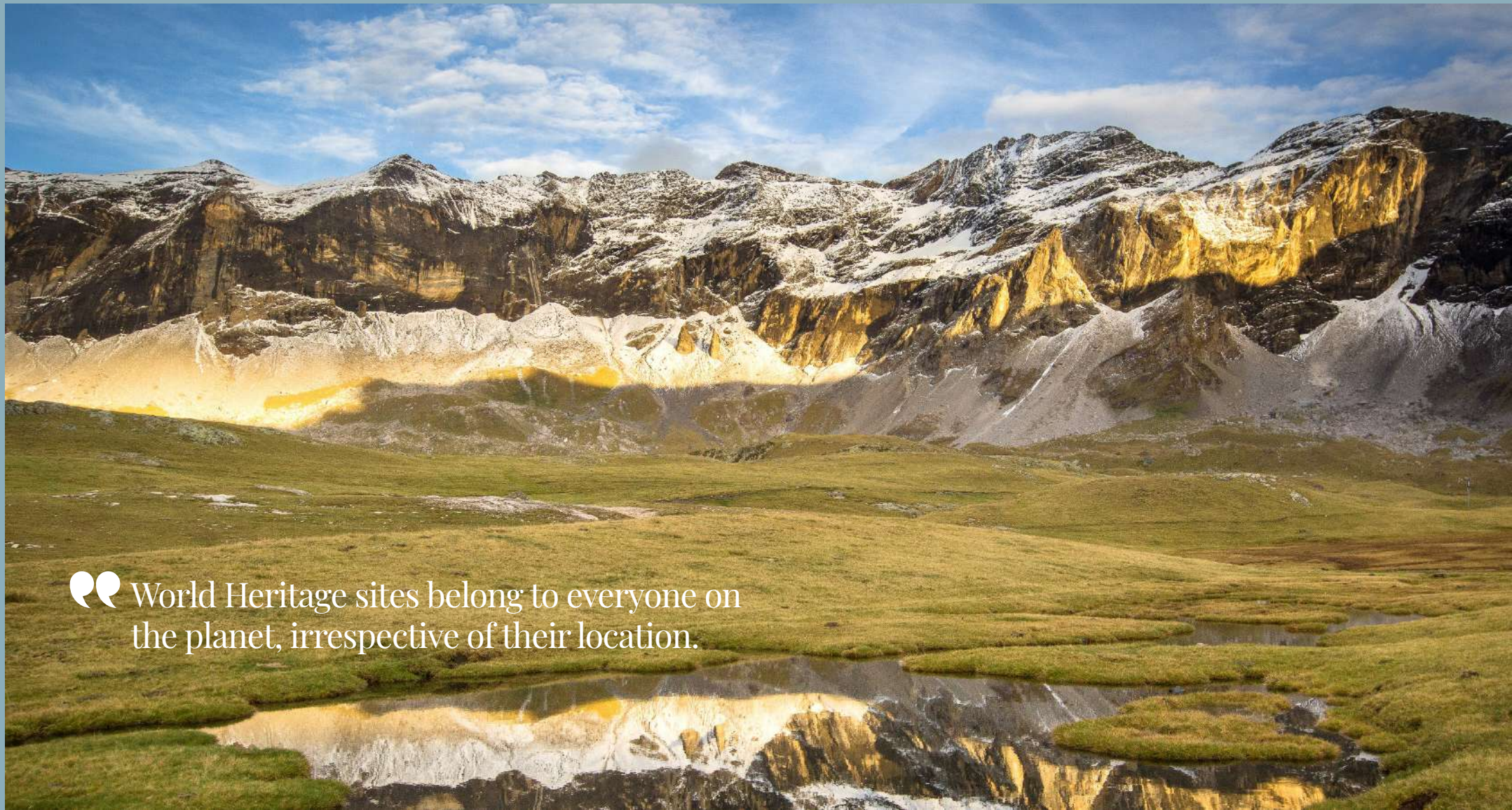


NATURAL LANDSCAPE | CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The Ordesa Valley | The Añisclo Canyon | The Escuaín Gorges | The Pineta Valley |  
The Gavarnie cirque | The Estaubé cirque | The Troumouse cirque |  
The Barroude cirque

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





“ World Heritage sites belong to everyone on the planet, irrespective of their location.

## A few words about World Heritage

¿What does it mean to be en-listed as a World Heritage site?

World Heritage is a designation awarded to locations or properties, situated anywhere in the world, which hold exceptional universal value. As such, they are registered under the protection of the World Heritage List so that future generations can continue to enjoy them. These places and properties, whether they are cultural, natural or both of the above, are as diverse and unique as the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the Australian Great Barrier Reef, the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador, the Taj Mahal of India, the Grand Canyon in the USA or the Acropolis of Greece.

### The Pyrenees–Monte Perdido site.

Shared by France and Spain, the Pyrenees - Monte Perdido limestone massif is carved out in classic geological forms, in particular deep canyons in the south on the Spanish side, and spectacular cirques to the north on the French side. With

spectacular geo-diversity and key places to fully understand the Pyrenees' formation, making it worthy of World Heritage status, the site is centred around the summit of Monte Perdido at 3348 Mts, and covering an area of 30639 Hectares, it boasts exceptional landscapes of meadows, lakes, caves and forests over its alpine slopes.

The Spanish side of the site is also part of the Ordesa-Viñamala Biosphere Reserve and the Sobrarbe-Pirineos UNESCO World Geopark, thus making it a holder of the UNESCO triple crown. The three UNESCO bodies come together on this part of the site.

The settling of human beings in the region goes back to prehistoric times, since at least the early Neolithic period (7000 BC). The archaeological sites at Añisclo and Escuaín, Coro Trásito, Góriz, the stone circles of Gavarnie, Batanes and Gurrundué and the dolmen at Tella all bear witness to them as well as the Cave art of Añisclo and Fanlo.

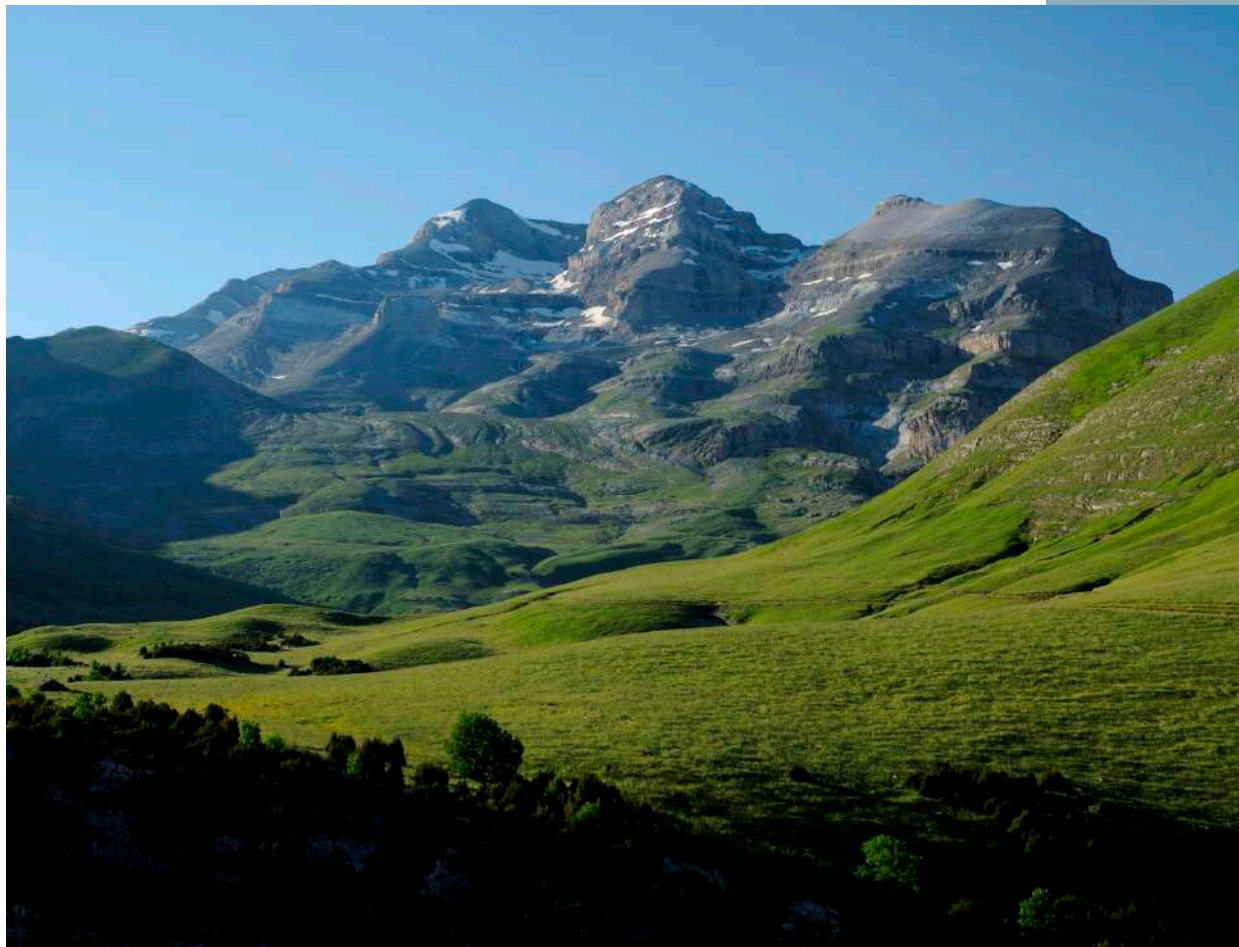
These villages were at the heart of a pastoralist system based on the moving of



livestock, (sheep, cattle and horses) up to the mountain pastures over the summer months, in sharp contrast to the use of the surrounding lower lands. The Monte Perdido valleys and their paths served as links between the communities, who had more in common with each other than their equivalent neighbours at lower altitudes. On both sides of the Pyrenean mountain range the villages managed to conquer the “insurmountable wall” and strike up exchanges, alliances, trade agreements and cultural links based on peace and solidarity. The exploitation of high pastures like those of Gaulis and Ossoue is an unmistakable testament to transhumance. It is one of the only places in Europe where it has been continued for centuries to the present day thanks to ancient agreements.

Since at least the 12th Century, the Bernatuara pass and tarn have played host to an extraordinary phenomenon. Every year, Spanish shepherds from the Broto Valley, herd their livestock to France with a flock of more than 1000 sheep, crossing over the pass at nearly 2270 mts in altitude.

In fact, the cross border agreements on pastures which date from the 13th Century, award ownership of the grass on



the French side to the Aragonese shepherds during the summer months. It's an unusual and very much living example of why the *Pyrenees-Monte Perdido* site is so

deserving of its place on the World Heritage List as a cultural landscape. This practice strengthens the cross-border character of the World Heritage Site.



Monte Perdido's valleys and their passes served as links between the two communities.





## The Ordesa Valley

The River Arazas, which springs from the very heart of the Monte Perdido mountain range, also known as the “Tres-Serols”, is the origin of what is undoubtedly the best known and most visited valley on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees. One of Europe’s deepest canyons, its origins are glacial, as is clear from its characteristic “U-shaped” section profile. The receding of the glacier at the end of the last ice age exposed different types of relief, such as cirques like the one at Soaso, or vertical walls like the Tozal del Mallo, Tobacor or Gallinero. The total length of the valley is 13 km, from the Góriz cirque to the “Puente de los Navarros”. We are right at the heart of the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park, one of the world’s first, created thanks to the educational and conservationist work of Lucien Briet and Pedro Pidal in 1918.

Ordesa is furrowed with high plateaus like those of Las Flores or Pelay. Water is omnipresent, with a succession of waterfalls such the Cola de Caballo or the Gradass de Soaso, El Estrecho, La Cueva, Arripas, Abetos, Tamborrotera and Molinieto.

“The Ordesa Valley is characterized by its sheer vertical walls and the seams that plough through them.



*Thanks to a large number of itineraries of varying difficulty, you can explore and walk around most areas of Pyrenees-Monte Peridot site.*

The area is surrounded by forests of Scots Pine that flourish on the sunny slopes, Beech trees that are found in the shadier spots and Fir and Black Pine up on the highest, rockiest climbs.

During Easter week and from mid June until the end of September, access to Ordesa is limited. Buses take walkers and visitors from the village of Torla-Ordesa up to the Ordesa meadows. The valley can also be experienced from the summits of its southern end, thanks to a series of exceptional view points accessible

from the villages of Torla-Ordesa or from Nerín.

Situated at the foot of the Mondarruego in Torla-Ordesa you will find an Ethnological museum and the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park visitor centre.

Broto is home to many monuments and natural landscapes among which are the medieval bridge and prison and the Sorrosal waterfall, one of the Sobrarbe Pyrenees World Geopark’s places of geological interest.



The Bujaruelo Valley marks the western edge of the *Pyrenees–Monte Perdido* area. It also belongs to the outer protection zone of the Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park, as well as the Ordesa-Viñamala Biosphere reserve. The total length of the valley is 20 Km, from the glacial cirque where the River Ara begins at the foot of the Vignemale o Comachibosa (3303 mts), to the “Puente de los Navarros”. It’s one of the main communication routes for people living on both sides through the pass at “Puerto de Bujaruelo”, over which have passed pilgrims of the Camino de Santiago, smugglers, Pyrenean mountaineers and shepherds throughout its history.



“ From the bottom of the gorge between river pools and waterfalls, glancing up can be a dizzying experience.

## The Añisclo Canyon

Añisclo’s morphology is glacial in its upper reaches and fluvial in its lower stretches. The summits of the Monte Perdido range and the Zucas sierra or Tres Marias are separated by this grandiose canyon that runs for 20 Km.

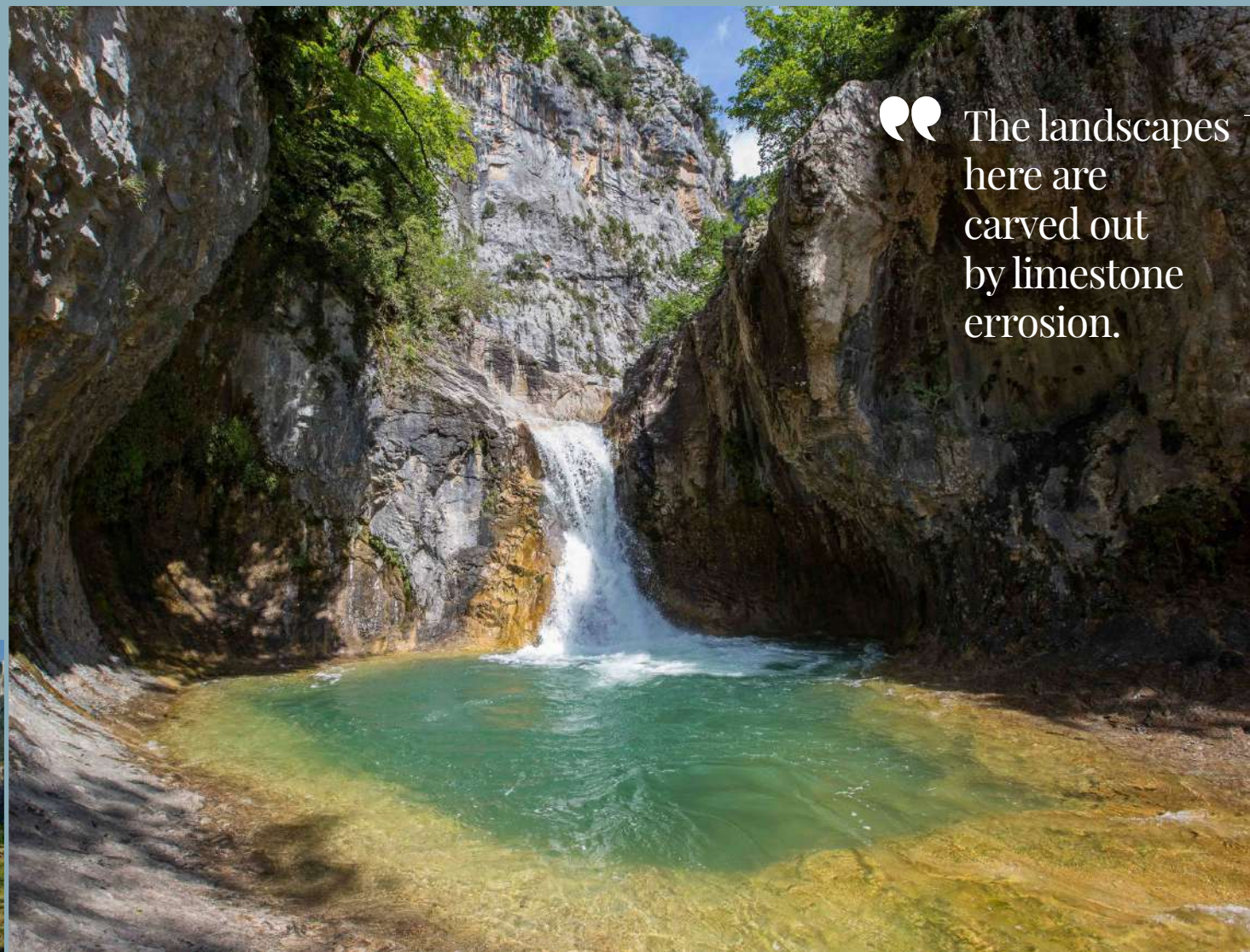
From the bottom of the gorge where the River Bellós runs, between pools and waterfalls, looking upwards can be quite a dizzying experience. The sheer walls that make up its sides are simply breathtaking. Among the more remarkable features of note are those of the Sierra Custodia, the Pico Mondoto or Sestrales, among others. Down in the Añisclo Canyon are the San Úrbez bridge and the hermitage, thoroughly magical places.





The Rivers Aso, Yesa and Bellós flow across the Vió Valley, whose prime location in the upper part of the valley gives it magnificent panoramic views. Vió, with its small collection of traditional buildings lends its name to the valley. Close by to this village is Buerba, with its beautiful traditional Aragonese chimneys. Fanlo still boasts several grand old houses, two of which have towers and are classified as properties of cultural interest.

Nerín is the starting point for several walking routes: heading towards the “Sierra de las Cutas”, an amazing mountain plateau opposite the Ordesa Valley leading up to Góriz and Monte Perdido. It’s also the starting point to go up Mondoto where you’ll be amazed by the simply stunningly panoramic views of the Añisclo Canyon visible from its peak.



“ The landscapes here are carved out by limestone erosion.

## The Escuaín Gorge

At the foot of the Tres Marías the villages of Escuaín and Revilla are perched up high either side of the banks of the River Yaga which cuts through the Escuaín

gorge. This is a karstic landscape whose features have been carved out over time by limestone water erosion. The quaternary glaciers have also left their mark, particularly at the Gurrundué cirque which is a natural paradise for the Lammergeier and the Golden Eagle.

Perched up on its hills, Tella’s Hermitages watch over Monte Perdido, like stone sentinels frozen for all eternity. Tella is the village of Saints and Witches, a place clearly steeped in magical history. Its Bear cave and its famously well preserved Dolmen add to its intrigue.

Bestué, which sits between Sestrales and Castillo Mayor, is one of the Sobrarbe region’s more charming villages with its ancient traditional buildings and its magnificent Aragonese chimneys.

It is surrounded by terraces formerly used for crop farming. Now abandoned, these terraces bear witness to the hardship of village life years ago when farming would take place on steeply sloping plots of land. This is an access point to the Sesa mountain which separates the Añisclo Canyon from the Escuaín gorges.







## The Pineta Valley

Pineta, that runs for 17 Km, is the valley with the most alpine characteristics within the *Pyrenees-Monte Perdido* site. A series of peaks mark out the upper limits of the immense Pineta cirque with its hung valleys such as “La Larri”, along which the waters of the River Cinca gush down a succession of magnificent waterfalls.

Up high, on the Balcón de Pineta, lies the

Marboré Tarn, under the towering the summits of the frontier peaks of Astazús (3071 mts), Tucaroya (2919 mts) and the Pico de Pineta (2861 mts).

Bielsa sits in the entrance to the valley. Its not only well known for its Carnival, but also for its painful past during the Spanish Civil war, when it was one of the last strongholds of the resistance against Franco’s army.



## The Monte Perdido mountain range



The real backbone of the territory that is classified as World Heritage is made up of the “Tres Serols”, a name given to them by Sobrarbe’s inhabitants to describe the three peaks: Cilindro (3328 mts), Monte Perdido (3348 mts) and Pico Añisclo or Soum de Ramond (3253 mts).

This part of the protected area is characterized by vast arid tracts of rocky, sparse land and on the north face of Monte Perdido there are still glacier systems.

The predominance of limestone in the massif makes it difficult for lakes to form on its surface which explains why there are only two in the whole protected area: “ El Lago Helado and the Marboré Tarn or Ibón”, part of whose water runs into the French side down the Gavarnie waterfall which geologically links France and Spain.

“ The peaks of the Tres Serols, backbone of the territory.



“ Roldan’s Breach.







## The Gavarnie Cirque

A glacial amphitheatre of which Victor Hugo once said "Nature's Colossus... The most mysterious architecture by the most mysterious of architects".

The scale of it is jaw dropping: An 8 Km ridge including 11 peaks above 3000 mts crowning a tiered wall of three levels with a total height of 1600Mts. But it's the architectural character of these mountains that stands out most, especially around Roland's Breach.

The Gavarnie Cirque boasts one of Europe's highest waterfalls (422 mts high), originating at the Marboré Tarn and geologically linking

France and Spain, its great height makes it the highest on the French mainland.

Gavarnie, one of the Pyrenees most emblematic villages sitting at the foot of the famous Cirque at the gateway to Roland's Breach, is the very essence of the Pyrenean spirit, a philosophy that entails climbing, writing and fully experiencing the mountains.

Famous authors like Victor Hugo or Georges Sand, painters such as Alfred de Vigny and other characters scientists and famous guides among them, have all referenced

“ The highest waterfall on the French mainland.



Gavarnie from their own point of view. The Notre Dame church at Bon Port is listed as World Heritage as part of the Caminos de Santiago de Compostela in France. Here you will also find the Pyrenees National Park visitor centre.

Gèdre borders with the Añisclo Canyon over the Estaube Cirque and with the Pineta Valley over the Troumouse Cirque. It also boasts the highest peak on the French side of the Pyrenees, the Pique Longue at 3192 mts.

Pastoral farming is still an important part of life in Gèdre and its water supply takes centre stage at the Pyrenees most powerful hydro-electric power station in Pragnères as well as in the Gloriettes reservoir.





“ The main pass  
through to Monte  
Perdido.



## The Estaube Cirque

Despite being the least known of the 3 French cirques, this is actually the main pass through to Monte Perdido from France via the Tucarroya passage. At its feet lies a vast expanse of the best fresh pastures in the region through which there is easy access from the Gloriettes reservoir.

Monte Perdido looms above the cirque, and it was up this path that Ramond de Carbonnières climbed to officially crown the summit for the first time in 1802.



*Photo, Left: Gloriettes Lake, with Monte Perdido in the background The Aires Cabin, in the heart of the Troumouse Cirque.*

## The Troumouse Cirque

The largest of the cirques, the Troumouse's impressive arching walls curve around an immense area of pastures below. The near perfect arch has a radius of 2000 Mts and stretches for 11 kilometres.

The sheer dimensions of this place along with its austere atmosphere combine to create an incredible landscape.

Access to the cirque is possible from the Maillet plateau 3 km below. From June to September, you can easily walk up or take a small tourist train.

The hamlet of Héas with its famous hermitage is well worth visiting being the only inhabited settlement in the heart of the World Heritage site. Steeped in history and legend, it was built on the track over to Spain and was the last refuge before the high mountain pass of La Canau.

The hermitage has been destroyed by avalanches and rebuilt on three occasions; the last being in 1915. Legend has it that it has links with the hermitage of Pineta.





“A crest of white rocks with hints of gold with the Dent de Gerbat pique sitting sentinel above it.



*The Ordesa Valley with its mighty walls and folds, from which we can glean earth's history.*

species of amphibians, 13 of reptiles and 4 of fish.

#### FLORA

The *Pyrenees-Monte Perdido* area is characterized by its hugely diverse landscape and the high concentration of different endemic plant species due to several environmental factors: climatic, edaphic, orographic and anthropogenic. We shouldn't overlook the effect on vegetation of the local inhabitants who have worked the land for centuries, causing significant changes in the structure and distribution of plant communities.

Within the protected area, it is possible to find specific species from Atlantic environments, Alpine areas, upper Mediterranean and Mediterranean zones. All of which have lead to a very wide range of vegetation covering more than 1500 species (half of Pyrenean flora). Some 120 endemic Pyrenean species have been identified to date.

#### FAUNA

The *Pyrenees-Monte Perdido* site hosts a wide range of Pyrenean fauna, most of which is associated with alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems. Around 50 mammal species have been classified, as well as at least 80 species of nesting birds, 7

## The Barroude walls and Cirque

Located in an exceptional setting and also of glacial origins, the Barroude cirque is the counterpart of Troumouse, its walls running from the Troumouse peak to the summit of La Gela.

It spreads over a vertical black rock base compressed by a rhythmic series of sharp spurs whose vast channels and facades sit in perfect silence. Up above,

like a proud milestone, sits the Diente de Gerbat, a heavy ridge of chestnut coloured rock with golden tones. Magnificent overlays give us a glimpse of its thickness on the western edge of the Gavarnie mantle. The peace and tranquillity of the lacustrine plain that stretches out beneath these sheer walls seems to hark from another place altogether, an "imaginary lake" seems to hover above

its unravelling stream network.

The village of Aragnouet in the Aure Valley is the closest to the French-Spanish border reachable by the cross-border tunnel of Bielsa-Aragnouet. This village is also the gateway to the Neouvelle Nature Reserve and its magnificent lakes where you can find the Templar Chapel, listed as UNESCO World Heritage as part of the Camino de Santiago in France.



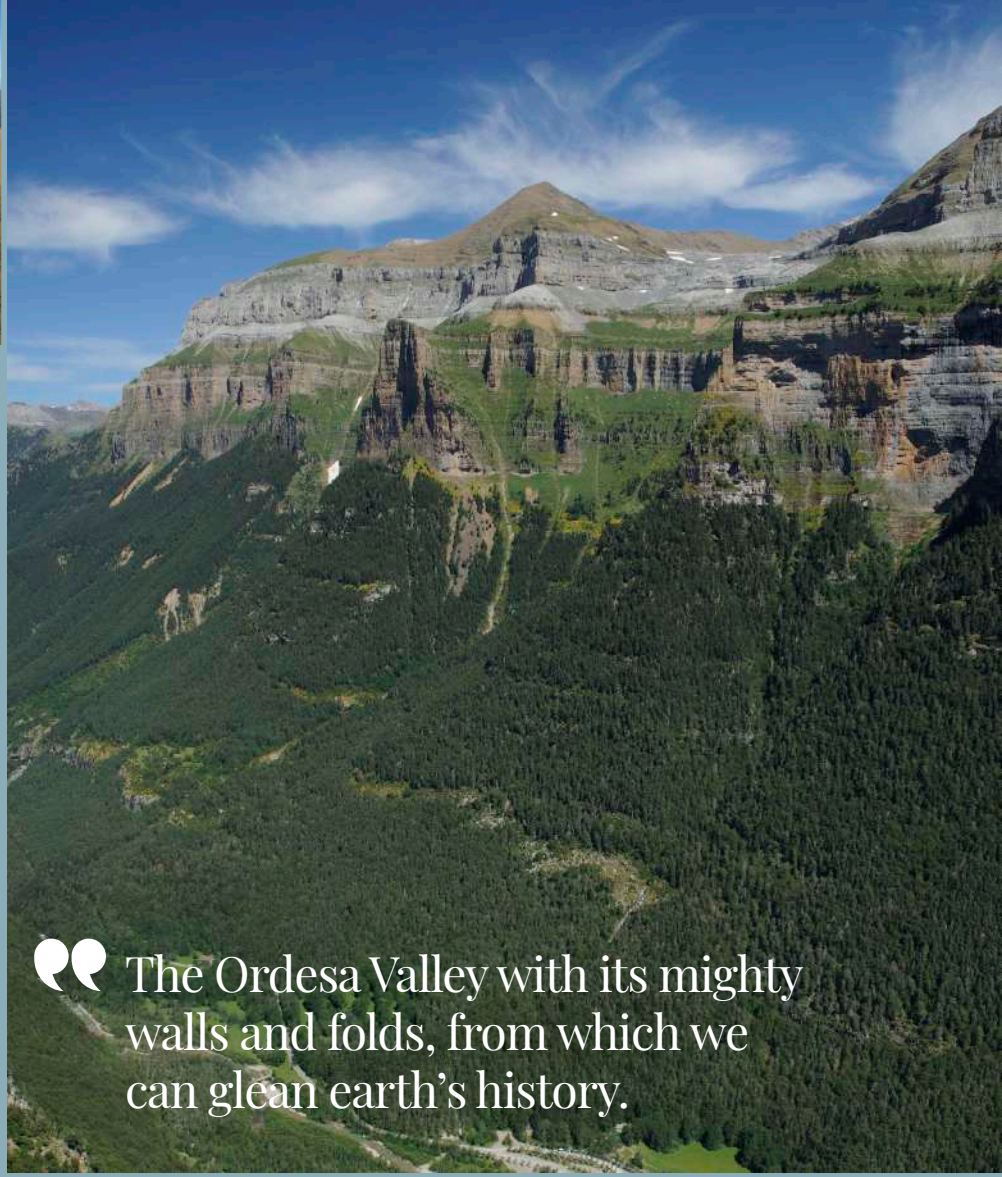


# Geo-Diversity

The Monte Perdido range has an exceptionally high geological value as much for its architecture as for its striking relief forms, making it stand out and qualifying it for World Heritage status.

On one side, a beautiful combination of folds and thrust faults reveal to us the structure of the mountains. These are key locations found in various valleys within the site which help us fully comprehend the formation of the Pyrenees. On the other side, the deep canyons of the south and the enormous cirques to the north create a dizzying landscape at whose feet there are still some small resistant glaciers to date.

The limestone mountains conceal kilometres of caves within them, some frozen, with subterranean rivers feeding an infinity of tributaries and resurgences, among them the great waterfall of Gavarnie!



“The Ordesa Valley with its mighty walls and folds, from which we can glean earth’s history.”



The Pyrenees-Monte Perdido site was declared World Heritage by UNESCO in 1997 as much for its natural value as for its cultural worth, also being a cross-border zone which includes the municipalities of Gavarnie-Gèdre, Aragnouet, Torla-Ordesa, Broto, Fanlo, Puértolas, Tella-Sin and Bielsa.







**Photo Authors** AE MEDIA/Pierre Meyer: Cover, nº 1,3,4,7,9,10,12,14 a 24,26,31 y 32.

**Photos** Comarca de Sobrarbe, Ignacio Pardinilla: nº 2,5,8,9,11,13,25,27 y 30; J.Izeta: nº 6,28 y 29.

**Design and layout:** jaujaestudio.com

**Editing and coordination:** Agence Touristique des Vallées de Gavarnie y Comarca de Sobrarbe.

---

#### Other info:

The project *Pirineos-Monte Perdido*, Word Heritage 2 (PMPPM2) has been 65% cofinanced by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Interreg V-A Spain France Andorra programme (POCTEFA 2014-2020). POC-TEFA aims to reinforce the economic and social integration of the French-Spanish-Andorran border. Its support is focused on developing economic, social and environmental cross-border activities through joint strategies favouring sustainable territorial development.

OFICINA COMARCAL DE TURISMO  
Plaza del Castillo – 22330 AINSA (España)  
Tel. 00 34 974 500 512  
info@turismosobrarbe.com  
www.turismosobrarbe.com | www.geoparquepirineos.com

AGENCE TOURISTIQUE DES VALLÉES DE GAVARNIE  
00 33 (0)562 924 805 / 00 33 (0)562 924 910  
infotourisme@valleesdegavarnie.com  
www.valleesdegavarnie.com

**[www.pirineosmonteperdido.com](http://www.pirineosmonteperdido.com)**

---



# Pyrenees Monte Perdido

## UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

NATURAL LANDSCAPE | CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



*The Pyrenees-Monte Perdido site is an area of exceptional value, with contrasting landscapes, enormous geo-diversity and key locations at which to understand the Pyrenees' formation. These landscapes bear living witness to an ancient culture of pastoral farming whose effects are still present today and to a cross-border community which has always thrived throughout its history. 4 French Cirques: Gavarnie, Troumouse, Estaubé and Barroude, and 4 Spanish Canyons: The Ordesa Valley, The Añisclo Canyon, The Escuin gorges and The Pineta Valley, make up an astonishing area around the World Heritage listed Monte Perdido, whose wealth of exceptional nature and culture must be preserved and passed on to future generations.*

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

