

Case Walk 2: Chateau Roquefixade

Start: Roquefixade centre of the village. To find on a map: 20 minutes east of Foix on the D9A, just north off the main route to Lavelanet.

Parking: a car park is located on the edge of the village.

Difficulty: Suitable for children 7+. My 4 year old daughter managed it with no problem! There is about 300m of ascent/descent. Good walking shoes/boots are essential. Water should be carried (always June-Oct as the temperature is generally 25 degrees plus). The descent is a little steep in places but short and not dangerous.

Points of Interest: Cathar castle. Mountain views. Alpine flowers. Beach woods. Birds of Prey.

Refreshments/Accommodation: The friendly Gite Etape offers refreshments (a deserved cold beer or a cup of tea!), meals and rooms.

The walk starting at the village of **Roquefixade**, below the impressive Cathar castle of the same name, is still one of my favourites. The village itself is pretty, nestling below limestone crags. From the church follow the signs to the Gite Etape (behind the church) and then at the Gite turn right finding the red markers. The path initially takes you out along the ancient Cathar Way for about 500m, then turns left (now follow yellow markers), climbing up through old deciduous woodland, through giant old beach trees, eventually bringing you out on top of the limestone ridge. Here you then get some fine views of the Pays d'Olmes mountain range and across the wide valley to the more famous Montsegur Cathar stronghold perched high on a rocky crag. You continue along the wide ridge which opens out into grassland, with views all round, towards Toulouse and around towards Mirepoix, Carcassonne and the Black Mountains on the far horizon. In spring there is a carpet of wild flowers, with a myriad of colours, plus butterflies and hummingbird-months busily gathering pollen. In a short while you come to a point directly above the Chateau, with more views to the high Ariège Pyrenees and back down the valley towards medieval Foix. The castle is worth a visit (it is free!) and is a good distraction for children who will want to scramble inside the walls - but please pay attention as there are no safety barriers and the drop from the top is a long way down! You can ignore the castle and descend easily and quickly (it is a bit steep but not difficult) joining again the Cathar Way following the red markers to return to the village.

I highly recommend you take a small detour to the Gite Etape in Roquefixade for a well earned refreshment!