

# The Cévennes - a preview?

**No, the 2013 season hasn't run out of puff just yet. But the days are getting shorter already, and with fresh memories to exploit, it's a good time to start contemplating next summer's routes.**

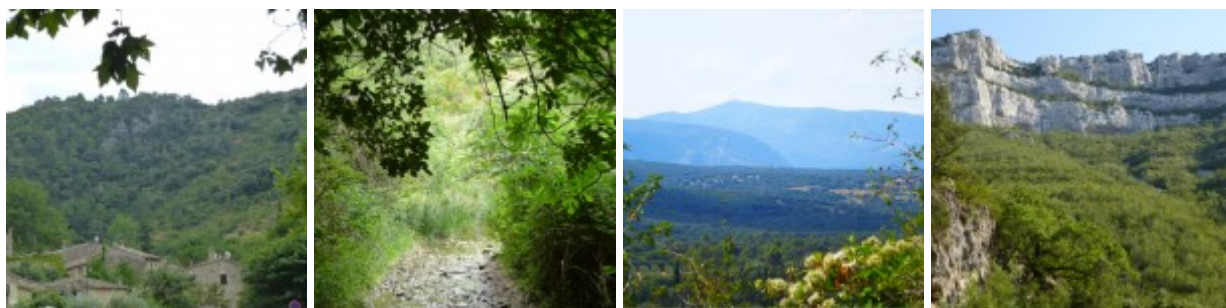


The picture above was taken by my wife during a walk with friends in early August. They were showing us the Cirque Navacelles, a circular canyon in the Cévennes of Southern France. Robert Louis Stevenson tramped around these mountains with a donkey over 130 years ago and [wrote a book](#) about it. Donkey-less, but willing to carry my own pack, I am somewhat obsessively wondering how best to roll in his footsteps.

During our hikes in the area this year, we were amazed at the diversity of terrain - ranging from burnt-looking karst land to cool river valleys. In the more moody and serious northern Cévennes, forests are denser and Mont Lozère reaches almost 1,700 metres. Further south, there are olive plantations and vineyards and Pic Saint Loup - a lowish, but brazenly shaped mountain just a bus ride from buzzing Montpellier. Every turning on our walks seemed to reveal enticing single track, and the views are equally compelling. On a good day, you can take in the Alps, the Pyrenees and the sea; all from the windy peak of Mont Aigoual with its quirky meteorological museum.



Strictly speaking, the Cévennes are the southernmost part of the Massif Central, rather than a range in their own right. As such, they could be incorporated into a longer tour starting in the Alps and crossing the Rhone south of Valence, where the two mountain systems draw closest to each other. [This site](#) could be helpful in planning the crossover. Yes, I suppose my thinking is getting a bit epic at this point, but I am slowly trying to introduce some realism. I have already ruled out the mammoth scheme of continuing on the pilgrims' route to Spanish Compostela from ancient Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert - I genuinely don't have the time and would make a very hypocritical pilgrim anyway. But I am still greatly attracted to the notion of riding all the way from the high Alps to the Mediterranean, strenuous though the living of that dream might prove.



To encourage myself, I have even devised a couple of rational-sounding arguments. For instance, it could make sense to eschew the arid terrain and thin population of the Maritime Alps, which would normally constitute the obvious finale on a ride from Geneva to the sea. The Cévennes with their maze of river valleys would spell a significant weight and comfort advantage, with less water to be carried less often... not to mention a financial one by avoiding the hideously expensive Côte d'Azur. The flipside would be the time requirements and the somewhat unspectacular sandy beaches near Montpellier. I would much prefer to end up at the Côte Bleue, just west of Marseille (pic below).



Given that preference, any map will tell you that this dream still needs some tweaking. Maybe I'll road-ride some of the itinerary, similar to my strategy during this year's heat-wave. Heretically, I could even abbreviate a few stretches by hopping on trains. But there's a folder titled *France 2014* on my PC desktop at home, and it's getting fatter and fatter as the current summer wears thin. The odd discussion [like this one](#) is in there, further whetting my appetite and indicating that route discovery should be fairly easy in the Cévennes themselves. Having maintained several such folders before, I'm guardedly optimistic about things - a slender majority of my folders have actually come true.