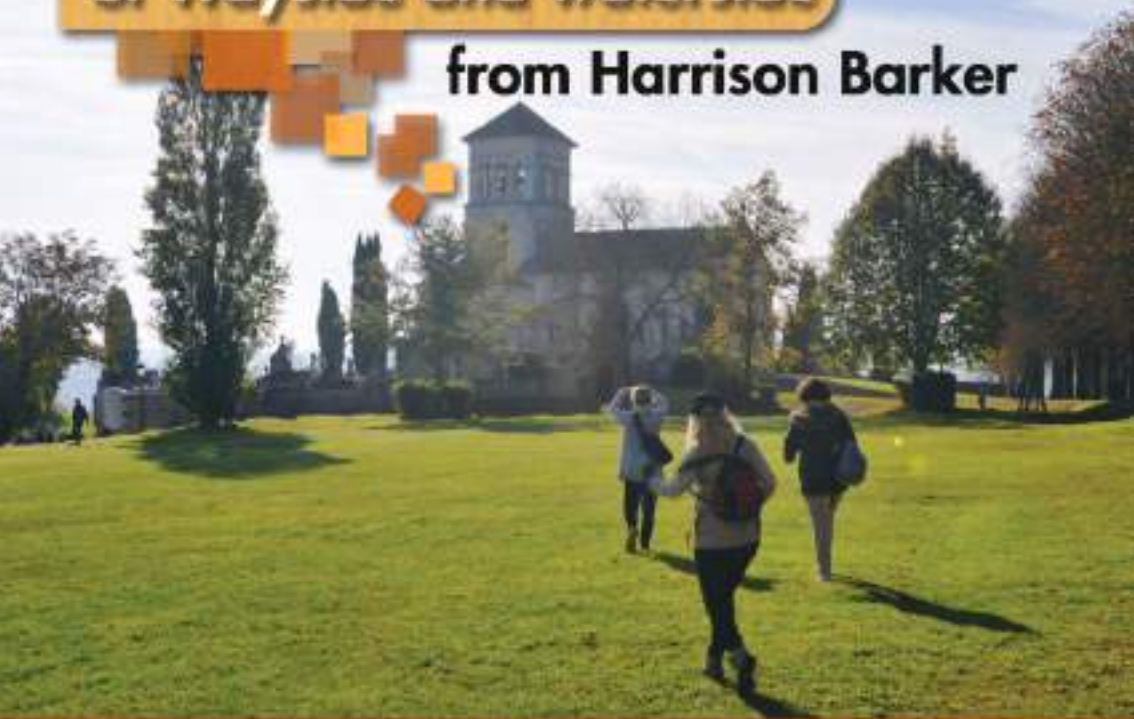


A chronicle of Wayside and waterside

from Harrison Barker



90 km ok hiking
in Val de Dronne



Dordogne
PÉRIGORD
LE DÉPARTEMENT dordogne.fr
DORDOGNE VAL DE PÉRIGORD

*Voyage de l'Anglais
en Périgord
à la fin du XIX siècle
par Harrison Barker*



Stories of hikes...

'Per los chamins de Périgord'

Harrison Barker is a nineteenth-century English traveller who wrote about his travels in southwest France and his encounters with the people there. "Two Summers in Guyenne, chronicle of the wayside and waterside" tells his journey on foot and by boat in the Dronne Valley. He leads us into a Périgord of the ancien time with its inns, its fries of studs, his mills, his characters...in a most entertaining way. Your journey begins in Aubeterre...

*Find your 'Stories of Hiking'
in the Dordogne on rando. dordogne. fr.*

**This document is prepared by the tourism service
Conseil départemental Dordogne - October 2019**

The old photographs illustrating this paper are from the fund "Laffargue-Guimard" and the collection of postcards from the Departmental Archives of the Dordogne.

The translation used is that written by G Margat in 1920, and which is now housed in the Departmental Archives

other pictures : CD24-© F. Tessier/OT PÉRIGORD Dronne Belle

© Henri Faissole HFC pictures - Little mouse photographs.

CC BY-SA 3.0 Xabi Rome Herault / Jack ma

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

ROAMING

Ninety kilometers

Dronne's valleys and hills

Markers : Green marks Harrison Barker

Vary the journey by canoe or taking the train. Follow the yellow and green markers, the pilgrim scallop shells or the GR

■ **MAPS : OPEN STREET MAPS**

■ **GPS** track can be downloaded from the website rando.dordogne.fr

■ **ACCOMODATION** : various accomodations are available along the way and a list can be loaded from rando.dordogne.fr

■ **FOOD SUPPLY** : list at the end of this booklet (p. 38)

■ **ATTENTION** : inquire about the opening of shops with the tourist offices (list in this booklet)

■ **ACCESS** : free parking at the top of the village « place du champ de Foire ».

Railway station in Chalais (15km) or Angoulême (50 km).

Bus schedule : www.transperigord.fr

Bus line n°14 Angoulême - Aubeterre : <http://citram-charente.fr>

A cycling route described in this booklet allows you to reach Ribérac from Brantôme. For other possibilities of return, [canoe, car ...], please contact the tourist offices [see page 56].

More informations : <http://rando.dordogne.fr>



Barker Road in Val de Dronne





TIPS FOR DEPARTURE

To benefit from bus transportation easily, it is advisable to leave from Périgueux, so it will allow you to return directly to Périgueux, since Brantôme.

If you return by bike or canoe to Ribérac, a direct bus also allows you to reach Périgueux.



THE VALLEY OF THE DRONNE

The valley of the Dronne is, according to Harrison Barker "a tributary of the Isle, that he who has not stifled the love of beauty in his soul can not see without allowing himself to be invaded by the charm of his sweet influence".

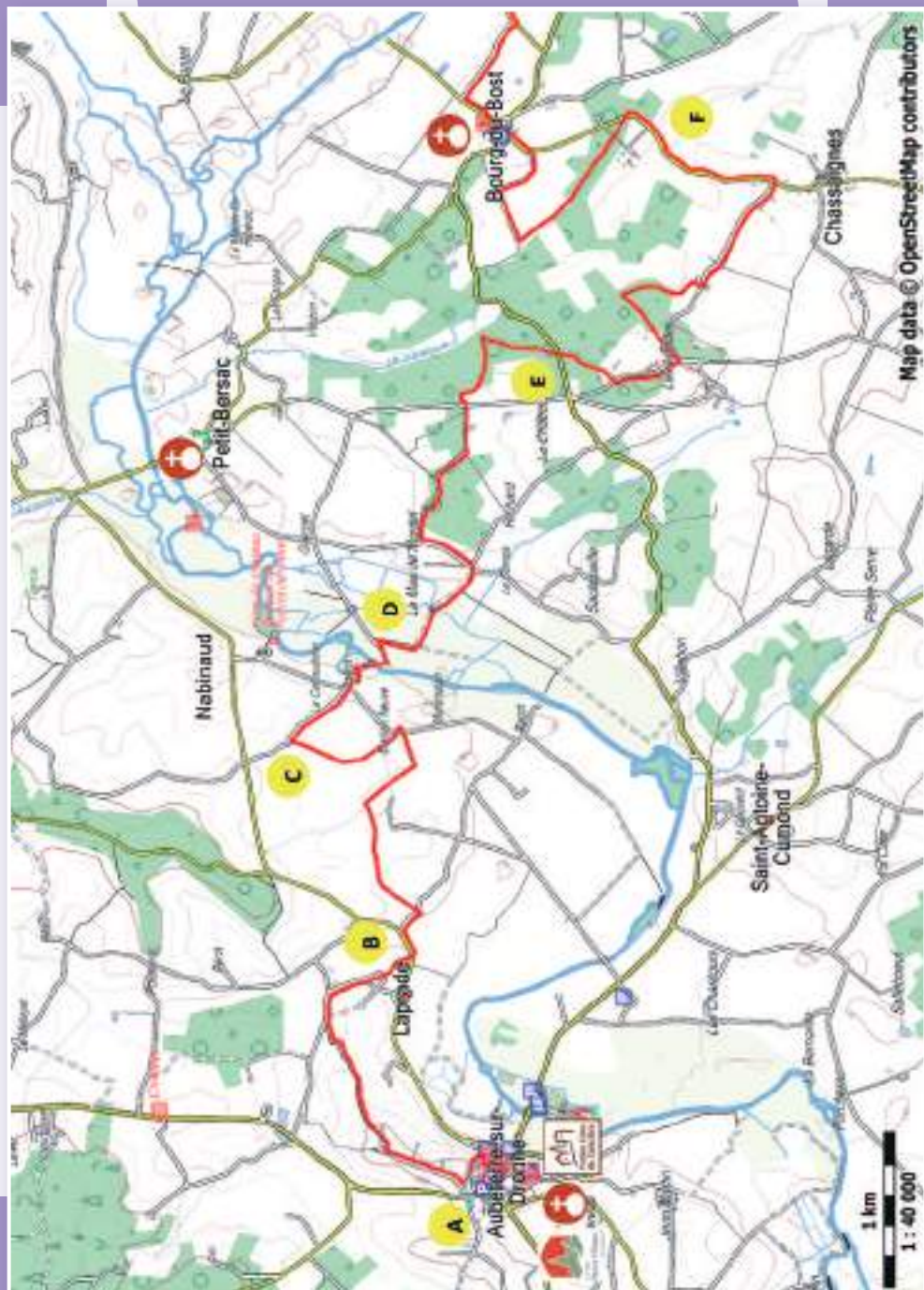
The valley of the Dronne is characterized by a relief of low altitude. On gently sloping hills bordering the banks of the Dronne and its tributaries, small lawns, dry heaths and woodlands hung on the slopes, bring a certain diversification and naturalness of the landscapes.

The river Dronne vaunted by Elysée Reclus, famous geographer of the nineteenth century, as "the most beautiful river of France" is enlivened during the summer of the sound of bathers who relax in its fresh waters.

On her way she crosses several mills, sometimes still active, cliffs prized climbers, villages of blond stone in the shade of many Romanesque churches in the area.

The valley was also marked by the Neolithic period, and the dolmens, the erect stones encountered on the roads are the last witnesses.

AUBETERRE - BOURG DU BOST PEDESTRE





BARKER'S WAY STEPS BY STEPS



DÉPART : AUBETERRE - CHASSAIGNES (12 km) 12 km

A Departure castle square of Aubeterre (free parking). Head towards the castle. Take the street forbidden to cars that goes up on the left (moat discovery trail). Pass the entrance of the castle, continue on the small road to the intersection. Take a right. At the end of the road, continue straight up to a meadow, take the path to the right.

50 m farther continue on the left. At the exit of the path you have to pass between the plots cultivated left to the bench, then to the right to join the road. Take the road on the right direction Poltrot until a fork at the cemetery. Turn right dir. "**La Grande Vigne**". In the bend, turn left onto a small road. At 50m, leave the road taking the path on the left.

B Back on the road, turn left (caution!) And then take the first small road on the right. Before the climb, take a path on the left. Pass a first barrier (thank you to close it), then a second in the extension. Continue straight, walk along a house, continue on the path opposite. Go between meadows, then turn right. Getting out the wood continue straight on a narrow path between cultivated lands. After cultivated lands, take the path to the left. At the intersection with another path, let the path leading to the road on the right and take the path along the trees to the left. Keep going straight. Enter the woods at the corner of the cultivated land, and then take the right path.

At the exit of the wood, go towards the houses at right. Find again the path that goes back to the hamlet of "**La Cave**".

C Cross the hamlet then take the first road on the right after the houses. Go back down to the Poltrot mill parking lot. On the parking, go to the mill, pass the facilities (wheels, mechanisms ...) and go towards a footbridge face to you. After the footbridge let the monkey bridge in front of you, and take right immediately. Go along the mill reach, then the barriers of children's games, and take the monkey bridge on the right which leads in Dordogne.

After the bridge continue straight, and at the intersection with a path, turn left. Pass in front of the welcome hut of the bathing site.

D At the beacon, take the path to the right, continue for 500m then turn on a path on the left. At the stream, go over the footbridge, then ascend straight on to the castle of Mas de Montet. Take the road on the left, then you fork on a path to the right facing the castle gate. Approaching a clearing and a house, you have to fork on a path to the right. At the intersection with a path at the exit of the forest turn left. Continue to the tar, and then turn right.

At the bottom of the valley, before reaching the meadows ascend on a path on the right..

E At the tar cross the road and take the path opposite. In the wood, climb slightly to the right. At the house continue the path straight on (if the gates are closed, please close them behind you).

At the tar, you have to turn left, and then turn left direction "**Chassaignes**" in the bend.

At the next turn, let the road, turn left, and walk along the houses: the road quickly becomes a path. At the bottom of the valley and at the end of the path, turn right. At the intersection with the road turn left. Take the first road on the left, and then go down for 250m before turning on a path on the right at the edge of the woods.

CHASSAIGNES - BOURG DU BOST (3,3 km) 15,5 km

Continue to the tar and turn left.

F Pass the brook of "Vindou" then continue. Leave a first path on the left (private property), and take the second on the edge of a wood. Cross the driveway leading to the castle, continuing in front. Continue straight to the intersection with a white path.

G Take at right, continue and take the first white path on the right after the cultivated field. Continue straight until the road that crosses the village. Cross and take the opposite street that goes down to the church.

BOURG DU BOST - COMBERANCHE ET EPELUCHE (3 km) 18,5 km

At the church, continue straight on the small road before turning on the first road on the right. To cross the Dronne, you will have to find a bridge. At the intersection with the RD, turn left and cross the bridge.

H Take the first path on the right. Continue straight for 1km, go over on the footbridge and walk straight to the village going ahead the church.

COMBERANCHE ET EPELUCHE - RIBÉRAC (11 km) 29,5 km

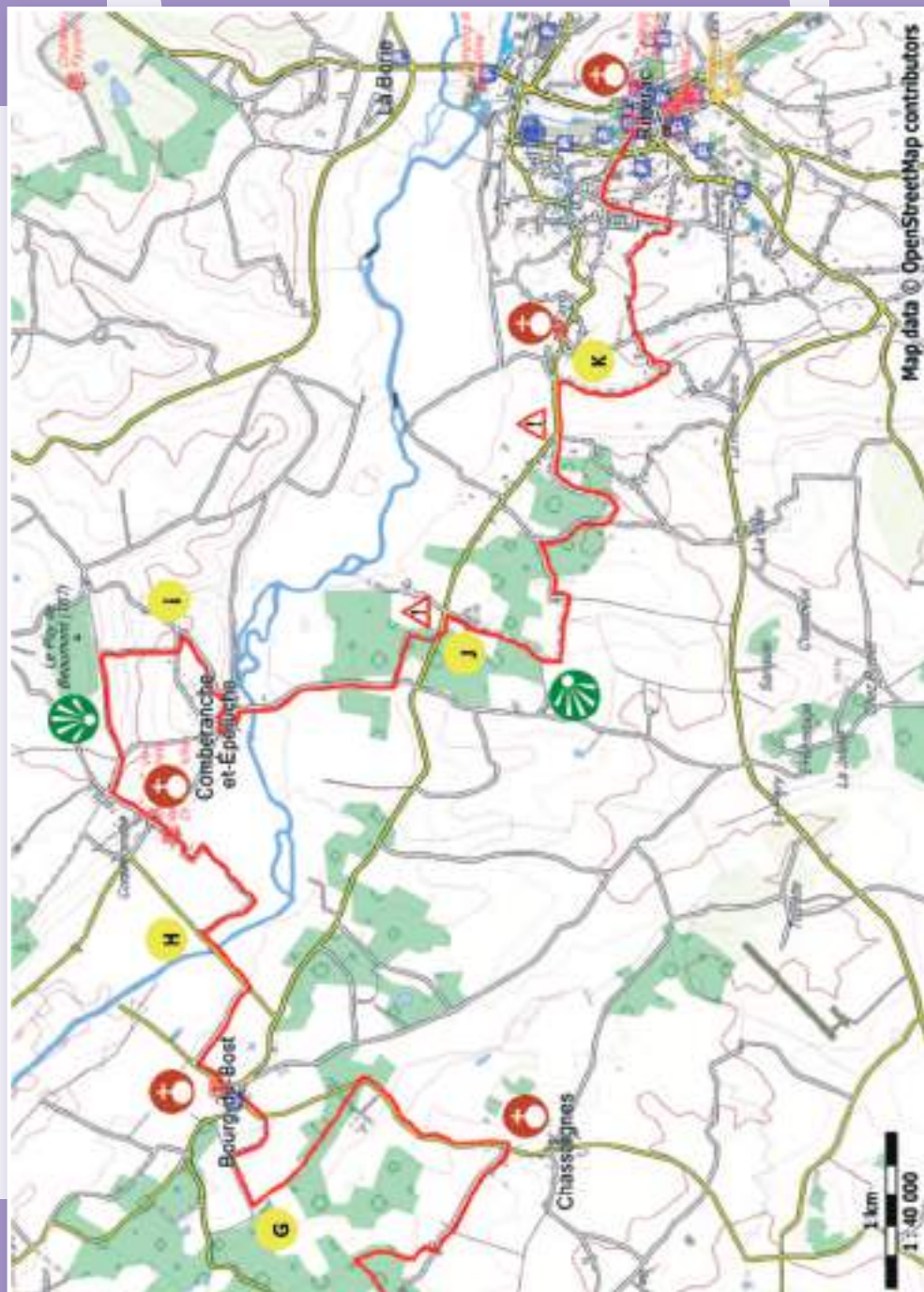
At the crossroads in the village take the small road facing you of and continue straight ahead passing in front of a cross of crossroads. At the top of the hill, take the first road on the right. On the ridge road, take the white road that goes left towards **Allemans / Villeteureix**. Stay on this path for 600 meters, then before the top of the coast, take a path that goes down to the right.

I At the tar turn left, then take the first right towards "**la Marronie**". Continue straight, pass at the foot of the church then at the crossroads, turn left. At the bottom, take the road on the right that allows you to cross the bridge, then continue straight for 1 km. Take a path to the left before the train gatekeeper's house. At the exit of the wood, turn right.

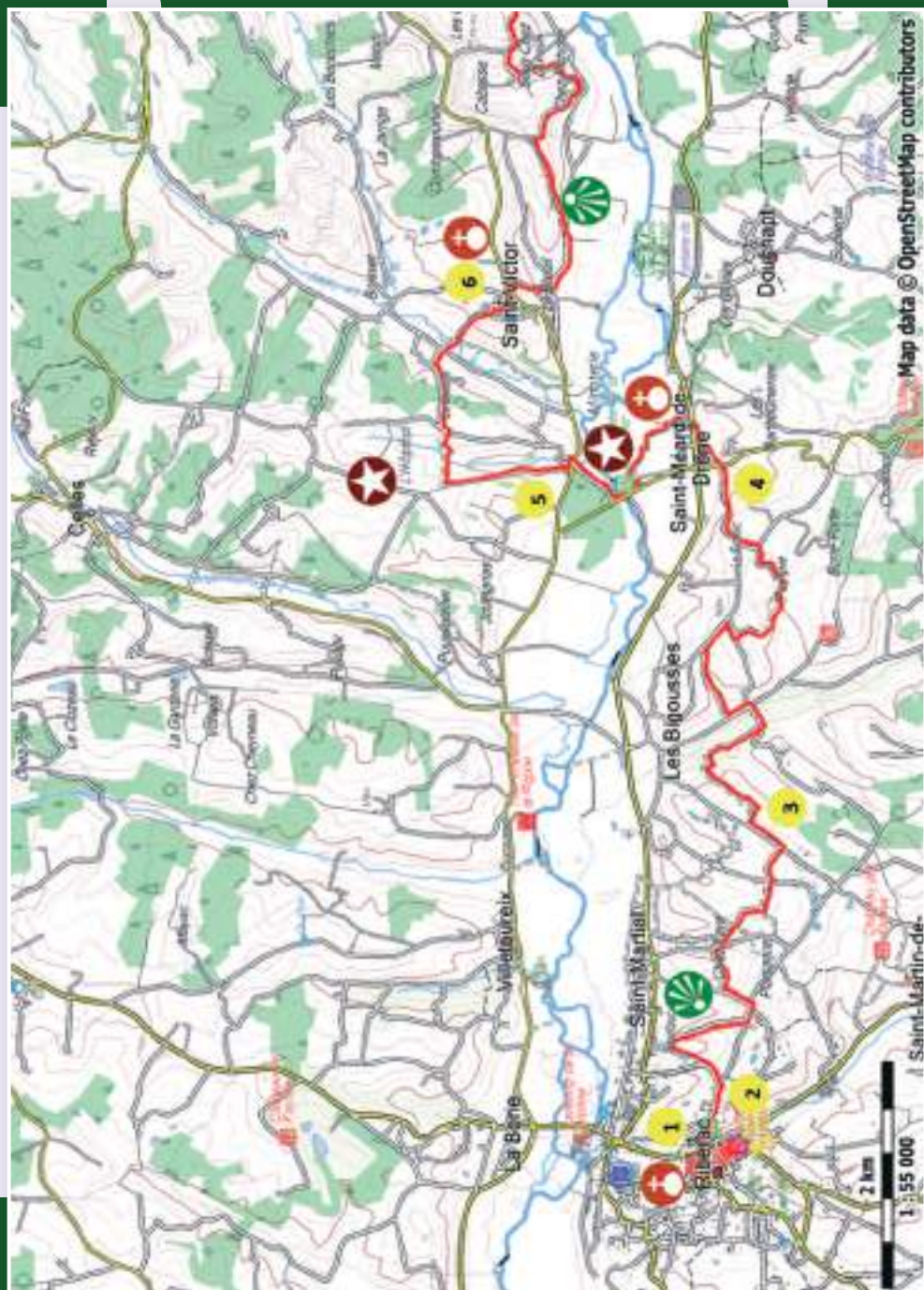
J At the main road turn left (caution) then take the first small road on the right direction "**Janicot**". Pass the hamlet, continue. Walk along cultivated lands then ride up to the houses by turning left. At the tar go on the left, continue on this small car road. At the crossroad with another road, turn right. Continue for 500 m before turning on a path on the left facing a farm. At the bottom of the small road, take the RD on the right (Careful!!!) which will allow you to cross the brook "**Le Boulanger**".

K After the creek in the climb take a path on the right (possibility to see **the church of Faye** bypassing the cemetery). Arriving at a small car road, to take on the left (Ribérac 2 km), continue 300m then, at the intersection with a road, take the path in front. At 500m at a fork of paths, turn right (yellow beacon). Arriving at a white path, turn left. At the road "**Mangout**", turn left a during 200m. then right and go down "**Alphonse Daudet Street**" (direction forbidden). At the end of the dead-end, a path go down and join "**Avenue de Verdun**". Turn left as far as "**Place du Général De Gaulle**" and **the Tourist Office**.

BOURG DU BOST - RIBÉRAc



RIBÉRAC - ST MÉARD DE DRÔNE





THE WAY TO BARKER STEP BY STEP



RIBÉRAC – ST MÉARD DE DRÔNE (11,5 km) 41 km

1 Departure from the Tourist Office go behind the children's games, and then take the street on the right. Go up to the main road. Cross and take opposite "**Rue Notre Dame**".

- Pass in front of the church of Ribérac, then take on the left "**Rue de la Nouvelle Eglise**".

- Then leave the tar for a path to the right "**Chemin des Abeilles**". Exit along the old church (collegiate church), get to the road, turn left and follow the cemetery.

2 At the top of the hill turn left on the street "**Roger Boniface**" direction "**Les Chaumes**". In a bend, take the grassy path that plunges into the valley. At the tar turn right, cross the hamlet.

- At the end of the climb, turn left. Take the first road on the left towards "**Les Vignes**". Going down take a small path on the right.

- Go straight up to the hamlet of "**Faye**". At the intersection with the road, turn right and then left towards "**les Francilloux**".

- In the bend take a path on the right. Leave a path on the left direction "**Villetoureux Celles Allemans**". Continue, then turn left towards "**Saint Meard de Dronne**". Stay on this road and at the washhouse, turn left. At the small car road cross it and take the path opposite.

3 Back on the road, turn left, then take the first road on the right "Domaine de la Claque". Cross the hamlet and take the path to the left BEFORE the farm buildings. Descend into the valley by this path.

- Reach the tar, to take on the left, then to pass on the creek and to take left towards **Saint Meard**.

- Let the road on the right.

- At 200m take the white path on the right. Once at the intersection with the road, take a right.

- On the ridge after the high voltage pylon turn right towards "**Les Chabroulies**". Take the grassy path that goes down to the left before reaching the houses, then go back up to the hamlet of "**Fompie**". Cross it by the small road. At the top of the hill at the intersection turn left, then leave the road turning right at the "**Syndic**". Go along the houses and continue on the same path, along the farmland, then reach the first houses of the village of "**Saint Meard**".

4 At tar continue straight ahead, pass the location of a gallo-roman villa in the cultivated field on the left. Take the road behind the town entrance sign, continue to descend towards the road and the town centre.

ST MÉARD DE DRÔNE - SAINT VICTOR (4,5 km)..... 45,5 km

- Walk along the road on the right and cross it to reach the church. Go past the church then turn right, walk along the side wall of the church to the washhouse and turn left. Continue straight and take a small grassy path on the left to the "**Moulin de la Pauze**".

At the entrance of mill, take the road on the left then the first path on the right.

- At the road, turn right, cross the river and turn right towards "**Le Puy / le Breuil**".

- Continue straight on this road until you reach a crossroads.



5 Take the road on the left and very quickly the path between two cultivated lands on the right. At the top of the coast, at the crossroads, turn right towards "**Saint Victor par Cadran**" (at the crossroads beautiful view on the village of "**L'hôpital**" whose history is linked to pilgrims). Once on the tar, turn left, then take the small road on the right. Enjoy the view on **Saint Victor**.

- In the descent, leave a road on the right in the bend and turn right just after, in face of the houses.
- At the crossing take the road in front, and in the bend take the grassy road that goes up on the left.

SAINT VICTOR – MONTAGRIER (6,3 km) 51,8 km

6 Walk along the cemetery. At the top of the road turn left, then go straight ahead face to the entrance of the cemetery towards the town center. Walk along the church and take the "**Grand Rue**" behind the church. .

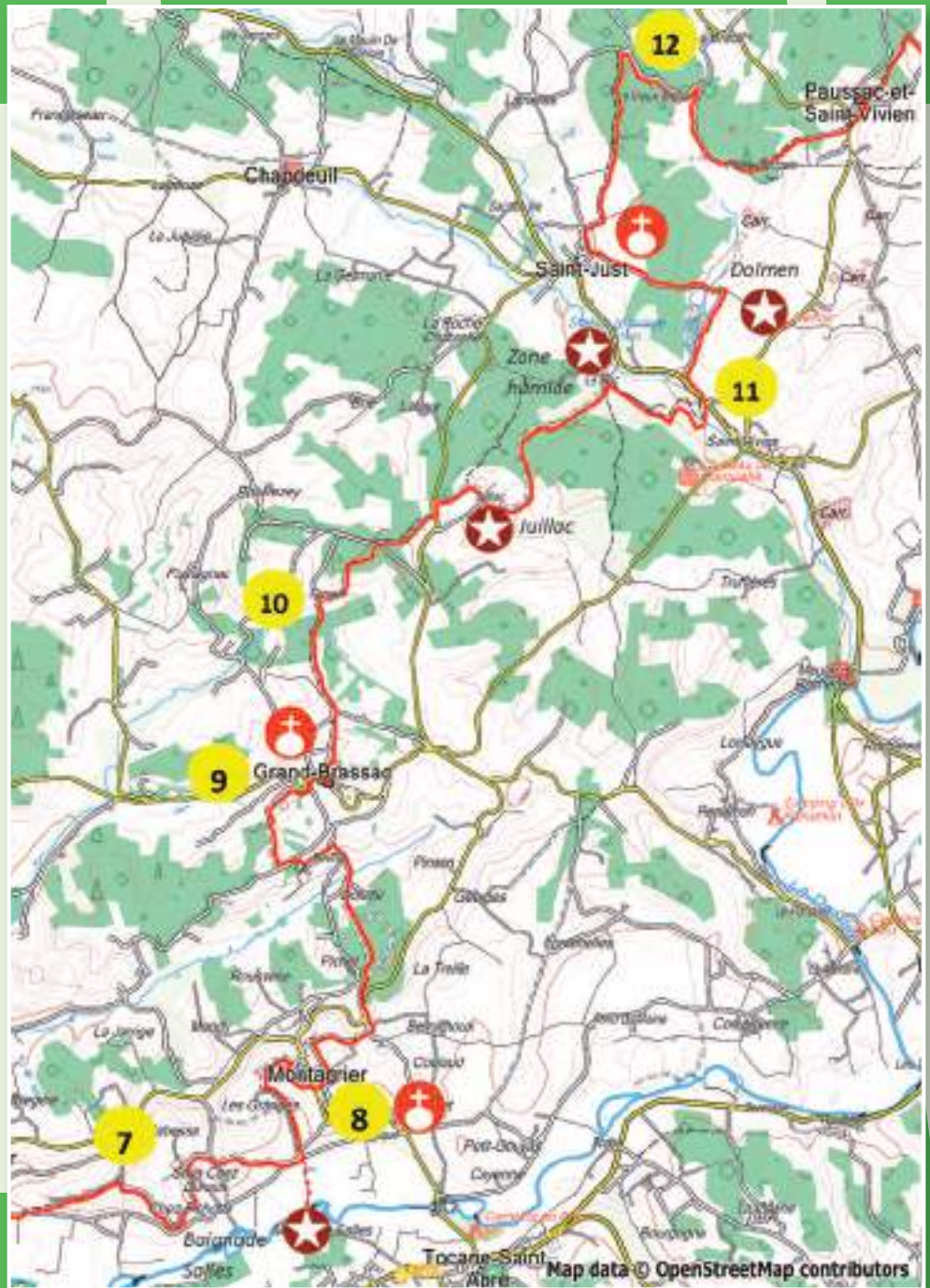
- At the stop panel turn left and immediately right on the path which goes down towards the valley.
- Arrive at the village of **Breuil**, and continue straight until you join the main road. Take this road on the left, follow for 500 meters. Then leave the road to take a path that goes up on the hill to the left.
- Climb, then at the intersection with another path take a right. Pass in front of the orientation table of the Breuil hillside, and stay on this white ridge path (leave signposted dirt road VTT on the right).
- At the tar, turn right and go down towards **Tocane / Montagrier**. After the descent, take a small road on the left, pass in the hamlet of **Pichotte**. In a sharp bend, before leaving the hamlet, take a path on the left. Pass near a well, continue.
- At the crossroads of paths, turn right and take the small road that goes in front.
- In the climb, take the path on the right, then the path that goes on the left.

7 At the tar turn right and go down towards "**Tocane / Montagrier**".

- Cross the farmland dominated by the **church of Montagrier**. At the tar turn left, then 100 meters, take the small road to the left direction "**Gandy / La Grange**", and turn left again to "**La Grange**".

At the end of the road, turn right on the white path. At the crossroads of paths, take the straight ahead. At the top of the hill turn right towards "**Tocane**". Back on the road turn right, then immediately the first street on the left.

ST VICTOR - PAUSSAC



MONTAGRIER – GRAND BRASSAC [4,8 km] 56,6 km

8 Pass near the church center MTB and lookout on the Val de Dronne (return 500m on the first street on the right).

- Otherwise take the first street on the left which leads to the fortified gate.

Before this door take the small road on the right which quickly becomes a path. At the intersection with the road turn left, then at the next crossroads turn left again.

Arriving on the main road, take it very briefly on the left, then turn immediately to the right direction "**Clos de Capitaine**". At the crossroads after a bend turn right, then take the path that plunges into the woods to the right.

At the bottom of the hill take the small road on the right, then the path opposite in the bend. Back on the road, turn right then quickly left direction "**Rouffiat**". Continue on the road, then in a bend to the cross take the path that climbs into the woods on the right.

At the top, turn left then turn right on a grassy path just before the hamlet. At the bottom of the valley stay on the road and continue to the cemetery. Walk along the cemetery and continue on the small road until the Departmental Road.

GRAND BRASSAC – SAINT JUST [9,8 km] 66,4 km

9 Take a right to get to **Grand Brassac**.

- Pass along the fortified church and turn left towards « **Chapdeuil** ».

- At the stop sign, stay on the road, take a bend and turn right towards "**La Tour Blanche**". Go beyond a house and continue on the path opposite.

- At the top of the coast, turn right, then take a path on the left. At the fork on entering the woods take straight towards "**Chapdeuil - Saint Just**".

10 At the top of the white road turn right towards the hamlet. Before the houses turn on the path to the left. At the road, cross and take the path opposite right [be careful not to continue on the main road, a small path goes on the right between the main road and the road, it is this one that must be taken].

Arriving at the road, turn left, then take the path to the right after the bend. Stay on it until the end.

At the intersection with another path turn right.

- Arrive in **Juillac**, pretty hamlet which one must cross while passing near the well, then to walk straight ahead. Continue on this path.

- Arrived at a house, pass it, leave a path on the right, get to the wetland observatory (on the left). Continue down to the main road, then take a path to the right before the road. At the entrance of the path, you have to fork on a path to the right which climbs up the hill.

Continue on the same path, pass over the footbridge to cross the stream and then go up again to the road.



11 At the road turn left, then take a path on the right "**Moulin de l'Etang**". 500 meters later, take the path that goes up right and arrive at a crossroads of several paths. (possibility to make a round trip to see a dolmen at 800m by turning right).

Otherwise, turn left taking the small road behind the arrows signposted "**Saint Just**".

- After passing through the valley, go up again by a path on the right. During the climb, at the bifurcation, take the path on the right. Exit the wood, arrive on the plateau and continue straight.

Before arriving at Saint Just it's possible to see the roofs of the castle of Marouatte, turning around.

SAINT JUST – PAUSSAC SAINT VIVIEN (6.5 km) 72,9 km

- Leave a path on the right just before reaching Saint Just, and follow the stone wall. At the big oak continue on the small road on the right (round-trip left to see the Romanesque church).

- Then take a white path on the right, then at an intersection at 50 meters turn left, then leave the main road for a dirt road to the left direction "**Leguillac de Cercles**".

- Walk Along a cultivated field then in a bend take the grassy path on the left.

- Arrive at the entrance of the wood, continue straight until the road. Take a right.

12 In the descent possibility to make a round trip (300m) to see the old village of carriers "**Vieux Breuil**".

- Go under the climbing cliffs on the left, then after the creek take the white path on the right.

- Continue straight on this path for 1,5 km, then take a small path on the left which goes up in the wood.

At the top of the coast, leave the "**Peyre Dermale**" or "**sacrificial stone**" on the right and continue straight.

- At the intersection with another path at the top of a small hill, turn left.

- Go back up to the village of **Paussac**.

PAUSSAC – ST JULIEN DE BOURDEILLES (6.5 km) 79,4 km

13 Arrived at the road, turn left and continue on the RD93 straight. Walk behind the church, in front of the war memorial and the climbing lodge.

- In front of the town hall, leave the road to Brantôme and take the direction of the cemetery in front of the cross. At the cemetery continue on the path that extends the road until crossing a small road.

- Turn right towards "**Boucle du Boulou**".

- At the intersection with another road, turn left, pass the hamlet of "**Les Guichards**" and continue following "**Boucle du Boulou**".

- At the exit of the hamlet, leave the road for a path on the right.

- At the top of the hill take the small road on the right. Cross the hamlet of **Puyfromage** while staying on the small road.

PAUSSAC - BRANTÔME



14 At the exit of the hamlet take a path on the left.

- Continue, leave a path that goes left. At the junction take direction "**Saint Julien de Bourdeilles**" on the left and continue straight.
- After the palombière leave a private road on the left and continue straight ahead.
- Exit the wood, follow the cultivated land straight. Before going down to the road leave a path on the left. Continue straight towards **Brantôme**, at the road turn left then at the fork X km go on a path on the left towards **Saint Julien de Bourdeilles**.

SAINT JULIEN DE BOURDEILLES – BRANTÔME (8 km) 87,4 km

15 In Saint Julien, go past the church and continue straight towards "**Laforêt**".

- After the end village sign post in the bend take a path on the left.
- Continue straight on this path, passing between the dry stone walls. At the crossroads of several paths turn right towards **Brantôme** by the GR.
- Continue on this path until you reach the tar. Take the road on the left.
- In the bend after the wooden security slide take the white path on the right. Continue straight until the path separates in two. Take the path on the left.
- At the bottom of the valley continue on the same path. Go along the wooden fence, then cross the road and take the path opposite.
- Arrive in a hamlet, take right at the intersection, leave a path right in the bend.
- After returning to the woods, at the intersection with a dirt road turn right, then at 50m turn left, staying on the same path.
- Go down from the plateau, passing to the left of an old stone wall, then in the descent leave a path on the left. At the intersection with another path continue going down to the departmental road on the left.

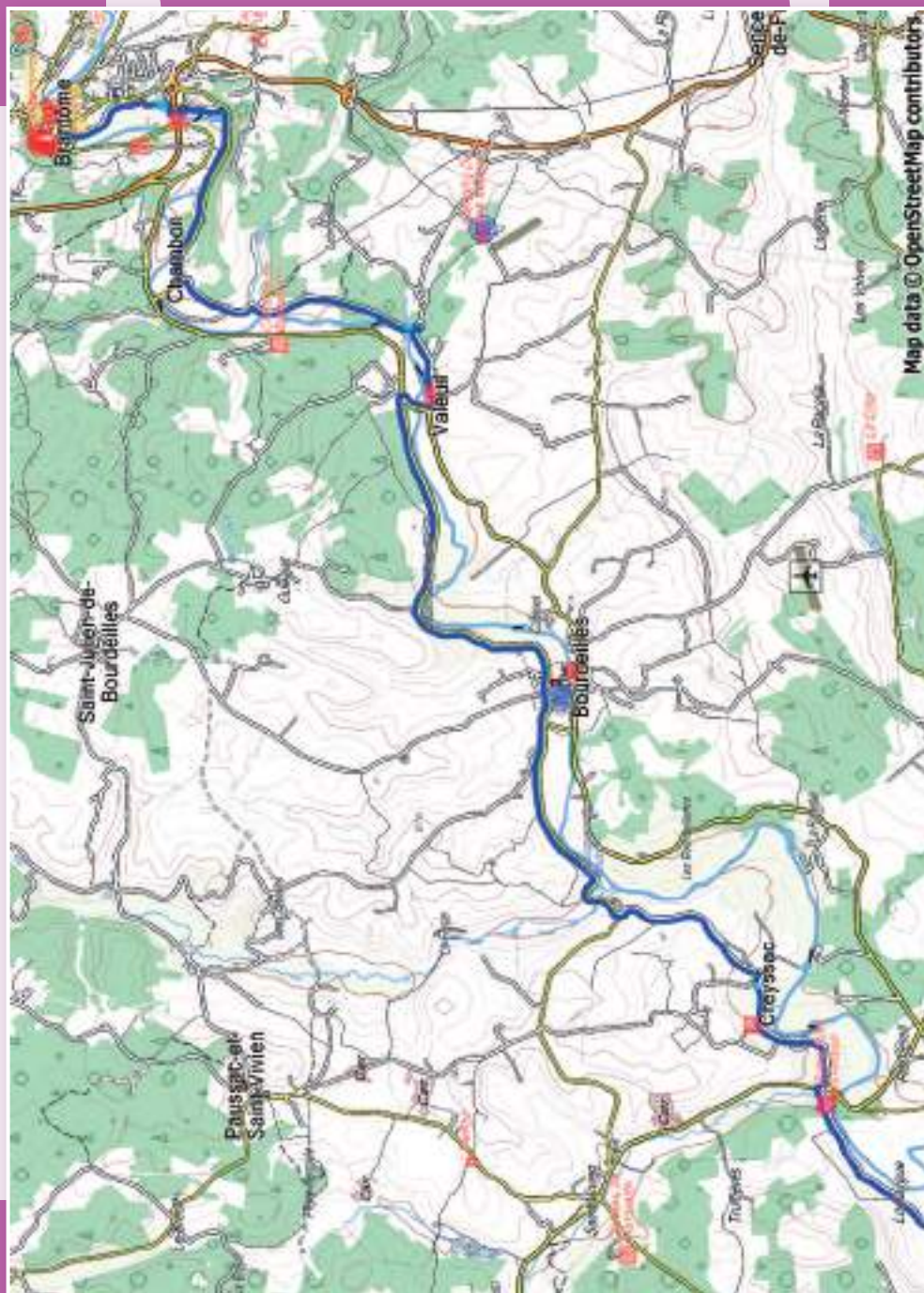
16 Cross the road on the footbridge. Go up on the same path, past a first house, leave the road and go up on the white path on the left.

- In a bend leave the white path to take a dirt road on the right.
- In the descent do not miss the point of view on the Romanesque church of **Saint Pardoux de Fleix**.
- At the bottom of the coast, turn right towards **Brantôme abbey**. Go down the small street, past ahead the house n° 5 dating from the fourteenth century. In front of the mansion at the corner of **rue Daumesnil** and **rue Pierre de Mareuil**, continue going down on the right.
- At the road, take the right bend to the abbey while staying on the sidewalk. Go under the "**Porte des Réformés**", walk along the river and take the bridge facing the abbey to arrive at the **Tourist Office**.











RETURN TO BIKE - BRANTÔME



RETURN TO BIKE



- 0 m  Departure parking lot of Vert Galant. Take the road to the right leaving the parking lot
-
- 600 m  Dir. botanical garden
Continue on the way to the wetland
Go under the tunnel and exit to the left.
At the Vigonac mill, turn left (see Dronne mills page 32)
-
- 1,5 km  At the road turn right
-
- 3,1 km Follow dir. Moulin d'Amenot
-
- 5 km Walk past Amenot and the wash house
-
- 5,5 km  C2 dir. VALEUIL
-
- 6 km Valeuil. Picnic tables - (see page 33)
-
- 6,3 km  Dir Brantôme / Bourdeilles
-
- 6,5 km  D78 dir. Brantôme



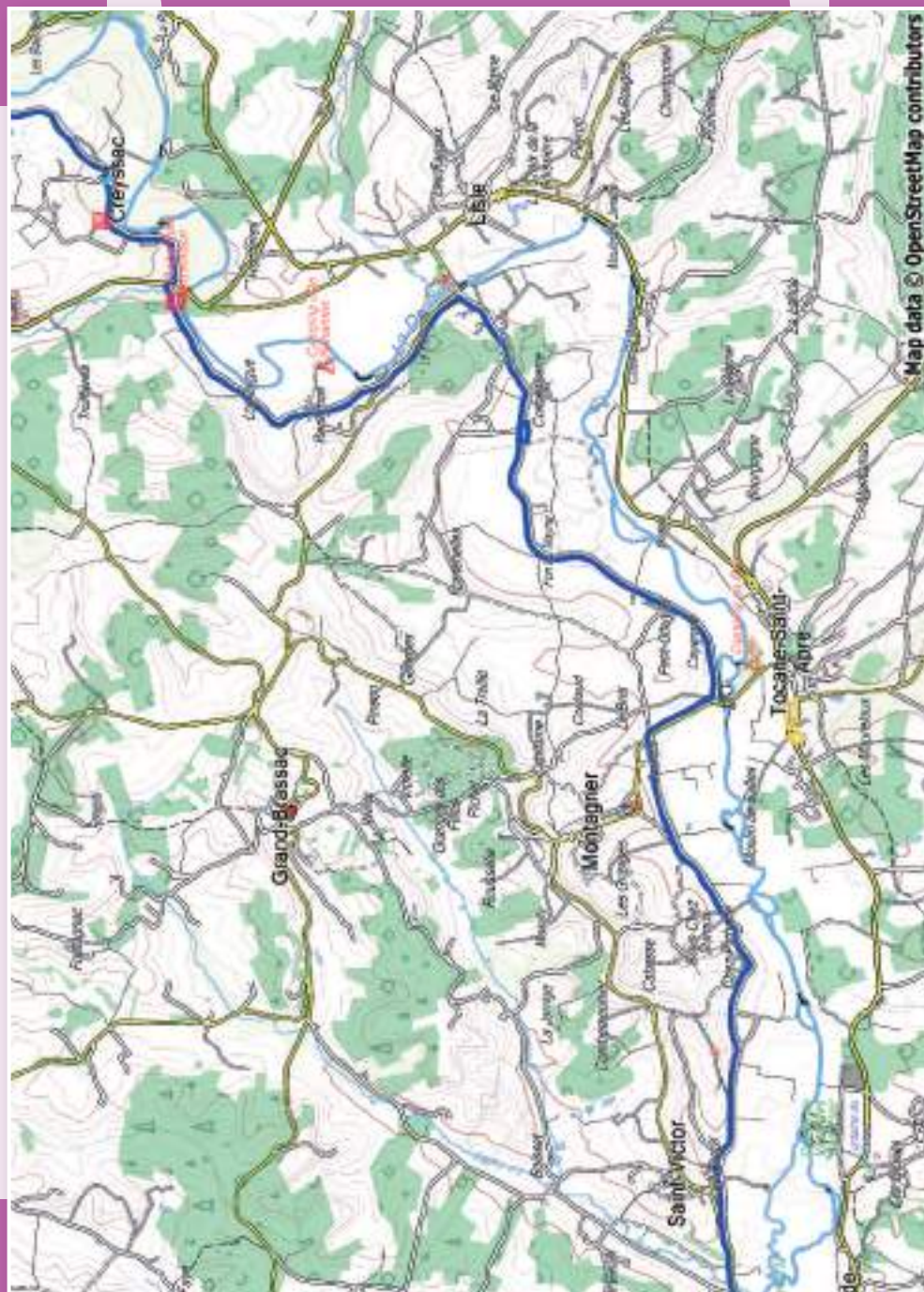


- 6,7 km ← D106 Bourdeilles by tourist route (picnic tables)
-
- 10,1 km Bourdeilles (see page 34)
-
- 10,3 km ↑ D106 Paussac Saint Vivien
-
- 12,7 km ← Dir Creyssac
-
- 14,2 km Creyssac (see page 36)
-
- 14,3 km → Dir Lisle
-
- 14,6 km Lavoir, picnic table
-
- 15,1 km 🍷 ← At the stop sign, « la Borie »
-
- 15,8 km 🍷 → D2 dir Saint Just
-
- 15,9 km ← Dir Moulin de Rochereuil (see page 37)
-
- 17,7 km ← Dir Renamont
-
- 18,9 km ← Departmental left at the top of the coast
-
- 19,6 km → Passage to Lisle (see page 37) - picnic tables
Right dir La Monedie
-
- 23,3 km ← Leave the road of Montagrier by turning on a small road to the left
-
- 24,6 km 🍷 → Maison de la Dronne (see page 38) - picnic tables
At the stop D103 dir Montagrier
-
- 25,2 km ← Turn left dir Casaque/Gandy sud/ Ribeyraud





RETURN TO BIKE - TOCANE





















Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors

RETURN TO BIKE - RIBÉRAC



























Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors



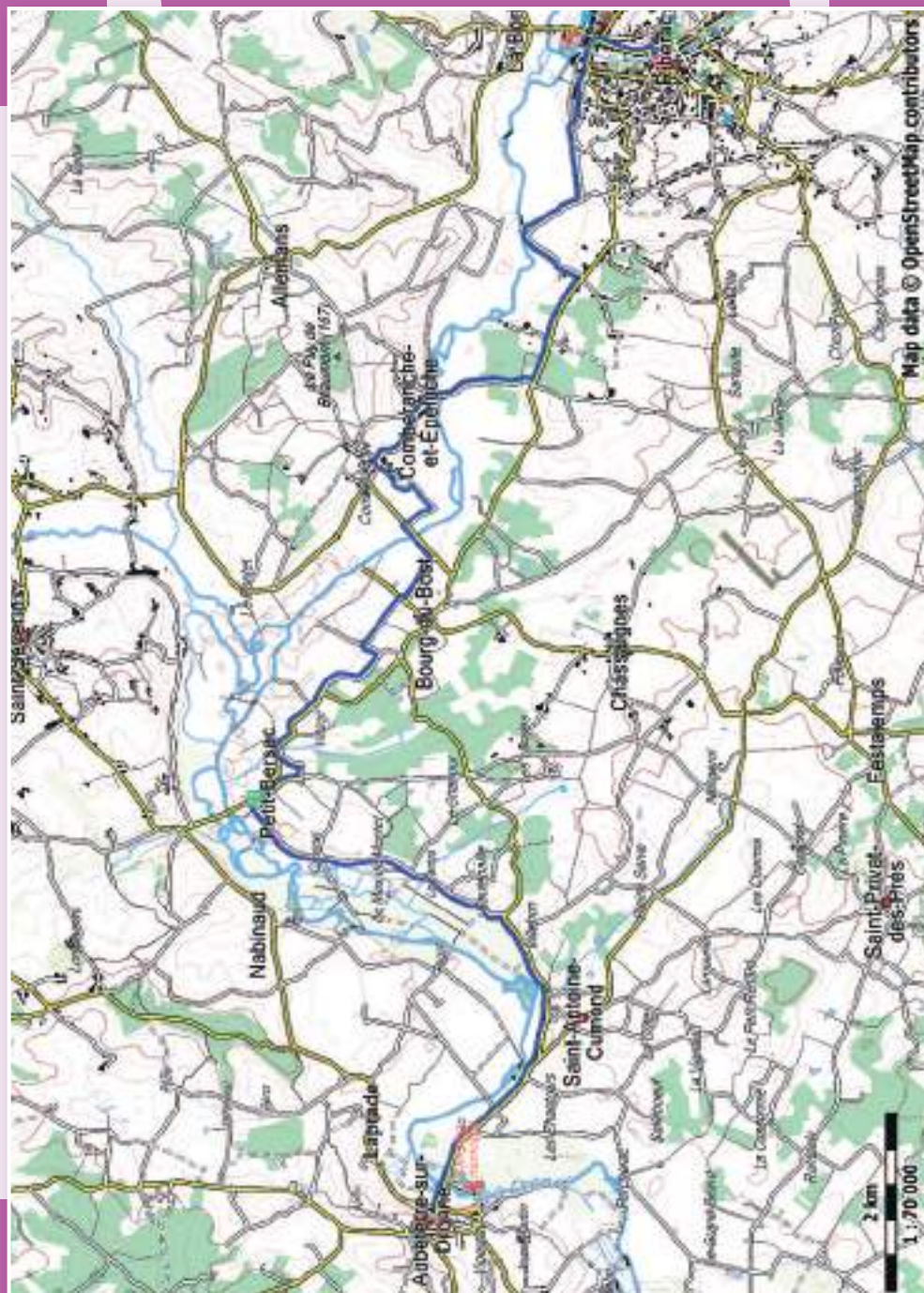
- 29,5 km Picnic tables
-
- 30 km   At the left stop sign
-
- 31,7 km   At the stop D104 dir Villeteureix
-
- 33,3 km   At the stop sign take the small road to the left «rural road»
-
- 34,6 km   At yield, cross RD [caution]
-
- 34,8 km   At yield the right passage
-
- 35 km  Dir Saint-Pardoux-de-Drôme
-
- 35,9 km  Dir « les Français, Les Ormes »
-
- 38,5 km   Au cédez le passage, route de St Sulpice
-
- 39,4 km Ribérac
-
- 41,6 km   At the stop take in front, pass under the houses and arrive on the square. On the square after the porch take the second road left, then turn right.
-
- 41,8 km   At the old courthouse turn right. Continue to the fire.



- 42 km  Fire direction Périgueux-Angoulême.
-
- 42,7 km At the end of the straight line turn left and stay on the road below [leave Aubeterre route on left]
-
- 43 km Pass the old station (holiday centre).
-
- 43,4 km  After passing between the slopes of the old railway track take to the left [dead track]
-
- 43,6 km  Before the gates take the right path between the stones.
Continue all right
-
- 44,3 km  At the intersection with a road, turn right. Pass by the river.
-
- 45,8 km  At the intersection with the RD turn right.
-
- 47,2 km  Leave the RD for road to the right dir Epeluche
 Cross the bridge.
 Turn left into the village. Leave Epeluche.
 After entering Comberanche, take the first small road to the left
 Pass the bridge and continue on the way
-
- 50,8 km  At the road turn left, pass the Dronne
-
- 51,3 km  Turn on the first road to the right direction Bourg du Bost
 At the crossroads (junction church left) turn right
 Take the first white road to the left
 At the intersection with the road turn left
 Continue until the crossroads and then take a right dir «La Forest»
 Continue straight to RD then turn right
 After the passage on the «Vindou» take the road to the left
-
- 55 km  At the junction of the old station, turn right. Arrive at Petit-Bersac.
 In the turn take left dir the stadium
Pass by the church while staying on the road to the left, always continue straight on this road.
 At the stop sign take RD right. Enter St Antoine de Cumond.
 At the stop on the right dir Aubeterre.
 At the stop at the entrance to Aubeterre, take in front to reach the village centre.
-
- 63 km  Arrived.



RETURN TO BIKE - AUBETERRE





BARKER DRONNE GUIDE

A few details before setting off :

Aubeterre is the departure point for the Val de Dronne walk which, for practical reasons, you shall take the opposite way around to Harrison Barker. He came down the Dronne Valley on foot the first time and by canoe the second. However, by following in his steps in the direction Aubeterre-sur-Dronne to Brantôme, you can profit from his experience while returning to his departure point by canoe or bicycle ... or bus.

AUBETERRE-SUR-DRONNE as seen by BARKER

In southern Charente, bordering on the Périgord, Aubeterre-sur-Dronne is shaped like amphitheater circling a meander in the Dronne River. Its winding alleyways snake between white stone houses, oozing southern charm. Once a fortified village, it is today listed as one of the “Plus Beaux Villages de France” (most beautiful villages of France).



“Alba Terra” - Aubeterre-sur-Dronne’s - white houses with their honey-coloured roof tiles are set against a green and verdant backdrop. The village was built in terraces along the chalky, limestone cliffs which rise above the Dronne Valley. The rivers flows peaceably at the foot of the village providing a natural frontier between the Charente and the Dordogne and has long been coveted for its fortified situation between Périgord and the Angoumois. Set in a rural, protected area, today the village makes its livelihood mainly from heritage and nature related tourism. The subterranean church of Saint Jean, known as the monolithic church, is the village’s major monument, attracting thousands of visitors a year.

The château, three convents - those of the religious orders, the Cordeliers, the Minims and the Clarisses - the hospital of Saint François and two churches, Saint Jean and Saint Jacques all testify to the village’s rich historical and religious past. The convents and Saint Jacques’ Church are concentrated in the higher part of the village. The working district at the bottom of the village is today what makes Aubeterre-sur-Dronne such a charming place. It has always been the haunt of artisans and shopkeepers and forms the heart of the village, radiating out from the Place Trarieux, down the Rue St Jean until reaching the underground church.





Place Ludovic Trarieux, with its shops, café terraces, restaurants and Sunday morning market is the village's most lively spot.

Here a village ambiance is still to be found, with everybody calling out greetings to each other, stopping to share a coffee and discuss the latest news. The shady square bears the name of a famous Aubeterrien, Ludovic Trarieux, born here in 1840 and later to found the League of Human Rights.

On arriving in Aubeterre, H.Barker stopped to rest in an auberge where he met an old miller who, in the intense heat, took him on a guided tour of the village which made him appreciate the shade of the narrow alleyways. He wrote of his tour of the village in the following terms :

« We stopped at the parish church, but not so long as I should have, had I been a lonely wayfarer without anybody to guide me. It is a delightful example of a Romanesque style that is found much repeated in Périgord, Angoumois, and the Bordelais. The great interest lies in the façade, which dates from the eleventh century. Here we have a large central portal, and on each side of it, what the architectural design supposes to be a smaller one, but which in reality is only a sham doorway. The slender columns of the jambs, and the archivolts filled in with little figures, sacred, fantastic, and grotesque, are there, as in connection with the central "arch; but all this has only an ornamental purpose »

Consecrated in 1171, all that remains of the collegiate church of St Jacques which was built to cope with the huge numbers of pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela, is its ornately sculptured façade. In 1562, during the Wars of Religion, the nave, choir and belfry were entirely destroyed. The reconstruction that we can see today was completed in 1710. Inspired by the cathedrals of Angoulême and Poitiers, the church is built in limestone and its Saintongeais style tripartite façade displays a fusion of influences from East and West reminding us that the Romanesque style is an art of synthesis.

However, by the late 19th century, another church in Aubeterre was arousing great curiosity.

« But this church has not the interest of singularity which belongs to another at Aubeterre - that of St. John ».

« It is, or was, truly a church, and yet it is not an edifice. Like one at St Emilion, it is monolithic in the sense that those who made it worked upon the solid rock with pick, hammer, and chisel in which way they quarried out a great nave with a rough apse terminating in the very bowels of the hill. On one side of the nave, enough has been left of the rock to form four immense polygonal piers, whose upper part is lost to sight in the gloom, until the eye grows somewhat reconciled to the glimmer of day, which, stealing in through openings in the cliff, is drowned in darkness... ».

« On the opposite side is a high gallery cut in the rock in imitation of the triforium gallery. The row of piers separates the church proper from what was for centuries the cemetery of Aubeterre a vast burrow made by the living for the reception of the dead... ».

« Not a spring violet nor a gaudy flower of summer gave to the air the perfume, or to the earth the colour of sweet life, to soothe and lighten the dreariness of the dead such thoughts in the Middle Ages would have been almost pagan. Then the darkness of death was like the darkness of night here in this necropolis hewn in the side of the ancient rock, whose very substance is made up chiefly of other and older forms of life.” »



THE SUBTERRANEAN CHURCH OF SAINT JEAN

Hewn from rock in the 12th century, this church is evidence of the Christian fervour which existed in the Middle Ages and is a place of intense emotion.

Its original purpose was to conserve religious artefacts in a series of pits and in a reliquary inspired by the Sepulchre which had been discovered in Jerusalem during the First Crusade. The church, being hewn directly in the limestone rockface, is deemed monolithic.

Pilgrims en route for Santiago de Compostela could pray in front of the relics whose powers of protection were considered to be extremely powerful.

A church and its crypt sheltered under the rock [open for visits] must have existed prior to the vast room which was dug out behind the 17th-century supporting wall.

The sheer scale of the huge hall adds to the mystery while the hundreds of tombs it shelters are evidence of its sacred nature.

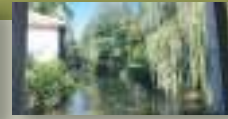
This vast necropolis, which has of course not remained untouched by time, can doubtless trace its origins back to the Cappodician underground cities discovered during the Crusades.

Over the centuries, countless Christian pilgrims have trod this ground and before them it would have been a place of worship for pagan peoples whose faith was nourished by cults of earth and water. The aura of magic and mystery remains palpable today for all those who enter the monolithic church.

Barker took the time to visit the outside of the chateau, even if he could not go in, before leaving the town.



« POLTROT »



You now need to walk to the Dronne River, which here serves as the boundary between the Charente and the Dordogne and cross it at a place called “Poltrot”. Barker, who spent the night in a nearby village [Nabinaud] made a special detour to see **Poltrot**, because :

« On my way down the hill, I stopped at the ruin of a mediaeval castle that belonged to Poltrot de Méré, the assassin of the Duc de Guise. All this country of the Angoumois, even more than Périgord, is full of the history of the religious wars of the sixteenth century ».

« The whole of the southwestern region of France might be termed the classic ground of atrocities committed in the name of religion. Simon de Montfort's Crusaders and the Albigenses, after them the Huguenots and the Leaguers, have so thickly sown this land with the seed of blood, to bear witness through all time to their merciless savagery, that the unprejudiced mind, looking here for traces of a grand struggle of ideals, will find little or nothing but the records of revolting brutality ».

« There is nothing left of Poltrot de Méré's stronghold but a few fragments of wall much overgrown with ivy and brambles ».

Having crossed the river on one of the two rope bridges, you will arrive at Monmalent outdoors leisure area in the municipality of **Petit-Bersac**. The village is the entry point into the Dordogne from the Charente and into the former province of the Périgord from the Saintonge; it also marks the point where the Oil language changes to Occitan. After walking through the woods for several kilometres, you will reach the Vindou stream which will leave you no option but to continue south and thus take you past the pretty little village of **Chassaignes**.

« CHASSAIGNES »

The village was once owned by the Knights Hospitaller. They built a church in the 12th century which was fortified in the 14th to include defensive quarters in which the villagers could take refuge, under the pyramid roof of the square belfry.

In front of the church, there is a two-basined wash house whose roof is supported by ten wooden pillars. Harrison Barkers speaks of the wash houses he see on his travels and which were, at the time, at the very heart of the villages' social life.



It is now time to take the road which crosses the Vindou stream. The path will then take you near the **Chateau de Pauly** on your left; it was built in the 19th century, unusually, in the style of the Bordeaux vineyard chateaux. You will then see in the distance, the belfry of **Bourg du Bost**.

« BOURG DU BOST »

On the road leading to Riberac, you go through Bourg du Bost whose Knights Hospitaller's 12th-century church has paintings that were only discovered hidden behind plasterwork in 1978. Among the paintings, situated right in the centre of the cupola is one of a two-tailed lamb with a halo holding a cross and a flag while the arches of the apse are decorated with representations of saints. The church has an automatic light and sound system which is activated as you enter the church, showcasing it nicely. The presence of the Knights Hospitaller (part of the Comberanche order) in the Middle Ages, brought prosperity to the village consequently attracting several powerful families as can be seen by some of the 17th century houses. Note the former Protestant church on the way out the village (currently used as the village hall).

Once again thanks to the road, you will be able to cross the Dronne with dry feet before taking the white gravel path to the right.



« COMBERANCHE ÉPELUCHE »



After walking for 1.5 km, you will see a huge church on the right. This is the church of Saint Jean de Comberanche which dates from the 11th century and was the chapel of the Commandery of the Order of the Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem situated a little further north.

Inside, the Maltese cross designs in the stained-glass windows and on a 17th-century wooden alter piece remind us of the original designation of, what is now, the parish church. The path then starts to climb treating you to a fabulously clear view over the Dronne Valley from the pretty ridge walk..

As you head back towards the river, you will catch sight of the village of Epeluche and the ruins of its Romanesque Church which was mainly destroyed during the endless battles of the Hundred Years War, although the typical 15th-century fortified belfry still stands and is still equipped. The two villages of **Comberanche and Epeluche** were originally independent of one another but in 1820 they joined and the church became disused.

Once the river has been crossed again, the path heads in the direction of the small town of **Ribérac**. Before reaching it, however, as the path runs parallel to the main departmental road for a few metres, fans of Romanesque art might be tempted to take a short detour to take a look at the church of **Faye** that provides a rare example of well-preserved Romanesque art which did not suffer too greatly during the Wars of Religion. This small church is of particular interest for its carved tympanum depicting, Christ in Majesty seated and giving his blessing within a mandoria, while, flanking the mandoria, two angels give praise. This representation is unique in the Périgord.

Eventually, you will reach **the outskirts of Ribérac** and then the town centre where Barker came seeking the trail of one of France's greatest troubadours.



RIBÉRAC as seen by BARKER

Ribérac, a small dynamic town with a population of 4000, has several beautiful buildings situated around the former sub-prefecture which provide fine examples of late 19th-century monumental civil architecture. The town comes alive every Friday with a large market to which, from November to March, is added a specific foie gras market, while in October and November it is walnuts which steal the limelight. The local produce market [Les Producteurs de Pays] gives visitors the opportunity of discovering a wide variety of local, labelled and approved produce.

The trail starts in the narrow roads of the oldest part of the town. Once upon a time, a chateau dominated the valley where the cemetery stands today, and the houses stretched from the foot of its protective walls downwards towards the valley of the Ribéraguét stream. The chateau was at its finest during the era of Marie de Foix de Candale, Viscountess of Ribérac, grand-daughter of Marguerite d'Albret, who in 1565 received the Regent Marie de Medici and the future King Charles IX.



THE PATH OF THE TWO CHURCHES

The first church you will come across may remind those familiar with the Dordogne of Saint Front Cathedral in Périgueux. It is a recent church, built of concrete, which uses the codes of Romanesque art, particularly in its domes. The reference must obviously have been intentional on the part of the architect in a region which boasts such a concentration of Romanesque domed churches [see page 33].

Keep to the same path and the second church will appear before you. This one, the former chateau chapel, was built in the 13th century and transformed into a collegiate church in the 15th century. Decorated with painted motifs and crowned with a cupola from which hang pendants, it caught the attention of Harrison Barker who had come to Ribérac to visit the birth place of Arnaut Daniel, a famous medieval troubadour.

ARNAUT DANIEL AND THE TROUBADOURS

In the Middle Ages, a period rife with war, conquests and crusades, a movement unique in history came to light in the Périgord – that of the troubadours. Everybody, from kings, dukes, counts and barons – the great nobility of the Aquitaine – to monks and peasants got caught up by the stories and music and the “taboo” themes of the era with which they dealt: love, women, religion and politics with the development of a previously unheard of concept, that of “fin amor”, which invoked respect for women in particular and, more generally, respect for others...

This movement was to shake medieval Europe to the core. Its influence spread and the kings of other European countries began to try and write in Occitan and invited the best troubadours to their respective courts.

So, in this “Golden Age of Troubadours” the best and most renowned amongst them were, more often than not, from the Périgord...

...



Arnaut Daniel, born in the Chateau de Ribérac in the middle of the 12th century was adopted by the court of Alphonse IX. This medieval “globe-trotter” knew both misery and wealth before finishing life as a monk.

Applauded by Dante and Petrarch, Arnaut Daniel was rediscovered by, amongst others, Louis Aragon who in 1941 wrote “The Lesson of Ribérac or French Europe”. In discovering the work of these medieval heroes, the 20th-century poet glorified the duty of adventure and the compelling obligation to revolt found in these seemingly dusty words.

« Arnaut's modern critics admire him less than did Dante and Petrarch but he had a gift of sweet song, and he owed it doubtless in no small measure to the influence of the lovely Dronne, on whose banks he must have often rambled in childhood-that season when impressions are unconsciously laid up which shape the future life of the intellect ».

« "No Englishman should pass through Arnaud's birthplace with indifference, for he was the first to put into literary form the story of Lancelot of the Lake. Although Arnaud Daniel's castle has quite disappeared, much of the church, that was almost a new one in his time, still remains. It was originally Byzantine-Romanesque, but in the sixteenth century it underwent fantastic restoration, and was badly married to another style without a name. What struck me most on entering was the religious darkness through which one sees the suspended lamp of the sanctuary gleaming like a star, and behind it the dim outline of the altar. This crypt-like appearance is explained by the absence even of a single window in the apse, which is covered by a semi-dome. The Romanesque tower is very low and broad, with a broach spire roofed with stones.»



« What a contrast to the deep shadow of the church was the brilliant white light that I met outside, and to the grave-like silence the sawing sound of the cicadas, drunk with sunshine, in the neighbouring tree-tops....».

It is now time to leave **Ribérac** and cut across several valleys and tracts of farmland to arrive at **Saint Méard de Dronne**. On the way you will go past an ancient and large Gallo-Roman villa - although all that remains visible of it is the sign indicating its existence.

At **St Saint Méard de Dronne**, your steps will take you past the church. Dating from the Romanesque period, the 15th-century iconographic frescos were discovered under a limewash render painted to resemble stonework. The frescos comprise character scenes and the vaults are decorated with geometric motifs.

THE ROMANESQUE CHURCHES AROUND RIBÉRAC

The areas around Saint-Aulaye and Ribérac have the highest density of Romanesque churches in the Périgord, most of which were built during the 12th century and display original architectural elements such as domes or defensive lookout posts.

To fully appreciate the architectural specificity of these churches, a tourist trail linking forty odd churches has been created. [A map of the Romanesque Churches Circuit is available from all local tourist information offices.].

The domes, doubtless inspired by oriental architecture, allowed fortress-churches to be erected in the very heart of the village as can be seen in **Saint-Martial de Viveyrols, Grand-Brassac, Paussac-Saint-Vivien, Cherval or Siorac de Ribérac**. These churches, built of white limestone are streamlined, sober edifices with only a scattering of sculptures on the capitals and very few ornate doorways with the exception of Faye [a carved tympanum which is virtually the only one in the Périgord] **Saint-Privat-des Prés or Saint-Aulaye** [doorways decorated in the Saintongeais style].

There are beautiful wall paintings or frescoes in several of these churches such as **the collegiate church in Riberaç, Saint Méard de Dronne, Bourg du Bost, Bourg des Maisons, Saint-Paul Lizonne or Festalemps.**

The turbulent times and history of the Périgord have been the great enemy of these edifices but over the last few years magnificent restoration work has given back these Périgourdin Romanesque churches their letters of nobility.



Behind the church is a wash house, the beating heart of the village in times gone by and the place where local news and gossip circulated. Barker writes of the omnipresence of these wash houses and the role of the washerwomen bent double over their laundry “*which gave such character to the riverside landscapes of France*”.

Leaving the village by the waterside, you will see the **La Pauze** watermill-conservatory which houses a museum of the history, techniques and evolution of milling and bread baking.

After crossing the bridge over the **Dronne**, walk briefly along the road until reaching a path which climbs up through farmland. This is the “Chemin du Loup” (“*The Wolves’ Path*”), so called because the creature was known to roam this way. At the crossroads, you will see opposite you a hamlet called **Hôpital** situated on a pilgrim route ; this was doubtless a place of welcome for “cagots” (lepers).

The village still has a small 17th century chapel as well as [privately-owned] buildings which probably correspond to the place of welcome. When restoration work was undertaken on the chapel in 1938, bodies were found in the ground and the villagers were especially moved by one particular discovery: the skeletons of a woman resting her head on a man’s shoulder, his arm outstretched around her with lying sheltered between them, a 7 or 8 year child.

As Harrison Barker headed towards the hills in the direction of **Saint Victor**, a storm threatened overhead...

“A great dark cloud with fiery fringe now stretches far up the sky from the south, and there is a constant long drawn out groan of distant thunder. This storm is no loiterer it is coming on at a rapid pace, and it will be a fierce one. Still, the haymakers keep in the meadow hard by the road, working for dear life to fill the wagon, to which a pair of oxen are harnessed, and to get it safely to the village on yonder hill before the floodgates of heaven are opened”.

SAINT VICTOR

as seen by BARKER

Barker finally reaches the village of Saint Victor as the weather becomes more and more threatening. Walking around the Romanesque church, he makes a first discovery.

"On the very top of the hill is a little old church surrounded by cypresses and acacias. According to my wont, I pay a visit to the dead, who lie scattered all around the old church.... Scattered do I say? Why, the very ground on which I walk is made up of them....."



Barker thoughts thus turn to ideas of death :

"When another dead villager is buried, what occurs is merely a displacement of human remains. As one body goes down, the bones and dust of others come up to the surface. Wherever I walk I see bones, and if I were an anatomist I could tell the use and place of each in the human economy. One might well suppose that in these rural districts, where land is of so little value, there would be but slight disturbance of dead men's bones."

And finally, the gathering storm breaks above the head of our traveller who seeks refuge with a cobbler and his apprentice.

"Both looked up with an astonished, not to say startled, expression when I appeared simultaneously with a dazzling flash of lightning, followed immediately by a terrific thunder-clap. The thought expressed in the eyes of the cobbler as he looked up was, 'Are you a thunderbolt, or Robert the Devil?'"

Taken inside by the cobbler, Harrison Barker hears, above the din of the storm and the driving rain, the sound of the church bells tolling furiously [...] "The bell, however, was not rung now to give the alarm of fire, and to summon everybody to lend a helping hand in extinguishing the flames, but to persuade the storm either to go somewhere else or to act with moderation."

He compares this ancient custom with another he has witnessed on the plains of Quercy, where the peasants "... place bottles of holy water on the tops of their chimneys as a protection against lightning".

Harrison Barker does not want to “miss a crumb” of this situation which he describes romantically :



“There was to me something exceedingly grand and elevating in this storm that raged upon the hilltop, while the bell in the open tower, tossing like a cask on the sea, proclaimed over all the house-tops and the fields the fierceness of the struggle between the celestial guardians of the church and village, and the demons that thronged the air.”

The church of Saint Victor, situated in the village, is included on the département’s circuit of Romanesque, domed churches, despite its transformation over the centuries. Built in the 12th century, it was listed on the parish register of **the castellany of Montagrier** before the village itself was even built.

As the storm receded, Harrison Barker bid farewell to his host who would not let him leave without first partaking of a glass of plum eau de vie and an offer to “casse la croute” [“break bread”] with him.

Like you, Barker resumed his walk along a path which leads to a hillside and **a fabulous view** of the Dronne Valley. On this hill, the yellowed grass – the vegetation of a poor limestone soil well-exposed to the sun – harbours a great diversity of plants and insects which thrive in hot, dry environments.

A road-mender whom I passed saluted me with the words, *“Bonsoir* although the hour was eight in the morning. In these parts, however, bonsoir is frequently said at all hours. It is a colloquial peculiarity. Another is to address or speak of a gentleman and a lady as *“ces Messieurs*.

Montagrier : Harrison Barker wanted to go to Montagrier, but having strayed too far from the Dronne, he arrived instead at Grand Brassac. However, the municipality of Montagrier, flanked by the Dronne, is of great interest in terms of local flora and fauna and consequently there are several natural conservation sites in the area. The village is also architecturally interesting and protected for this reason too. The 12th- century church of Sainte Madeleine, built on the site of an ancient Benedictine priory, a satellite of the mother priory in **Brantôme**, is listed as a Historic Monument.

Barker, believing himself to have arrived at Montagrier, reached **Grand Brassac**, the next step of this trail : “It was clear that I had gone much farther from the Dronne than I had intended, but, after all, it mattered little where I wandered. I now said that I would see Grand-Brassac, and that I might find something there worth the walk. I was rewarded beyond aught that I had expected or hoped for”.

GRAND BRASSAC

as seen by BARKER

The name **“Brassac”** comes originally from a Gaul called Biracius; the suffix “acum” indicating “the property of Biracius”. The earliest written reference to the village goes back to the 13th century where it is recorded as Brassacum with Brassac only appearing a century later. Under the reign of Louis XV, it adopts the name of **“Le Grand Brassac”** to differentiate it from a village twenty kilometres to the west which is also called Brassac. The latter consequently became known as **“Petit Brassac”** before finally settling on “Petit-Bersac”

But what does Harrison Barker find in this village to satisfy his curiosity? The answer is the fortified Romanesque church which dominates the village due to its raised location.

“Here I found a very remarkable Byzantine-Gothic church of the thirteenth century, with a richly decorated front in strong contrast to the defensive motive so clearly expressed by the solidity of the structure, the smallness of the windows, and especially by the height of the entrance—some ten feet above the level of the ground.”

He goes on to describe the church’s architecture and comments on the Byzantine influence, noting that “is very apparent in the three domes”. He likens the church to a “mediæval fortress”. After visiting the church, our English traveller heads towards the inn which he considers to be the best of a bad bunch.

“It was a very rustic hostelry that would have repelled a wanderer less seasoned than myself to the vicissitudes of the highways and byways. I had, however, a cool little back-room with whitewashed walls to myself, and through the small square window near the table where I sat I could see something of the sunny world, with bits of tiled roof and green foliage, as well as the lemon-coloured butterflies that fluttered from garden to garden.”



At Table ... with Harrison Barker ! in the Val de Dronne

At the time Harrison Barker was travelling through the Val de Dronne, the gudgeon was a fish greatly appreciated by everybody and very often served in hostels and inns.

"Here a friture of the famous gudgeons of the Dronne is placed before the guest..." Barker notes that in many inns, liberty is taken with the regulations concerning fishing and the consumption of gudgeons in particular – more often than not by the very people supposed to impose said regulations." ... and a magistrate would feel as much aggrieved as anybody if the law were not laughed at when its observance would lay a penalty upon his stomach."

Farmyard animals, principally geese and chicken are slaughtered either to be preserved in fat or – shocking Barker – to be eaten straight away. "It is a bad custom in rural France to kill fowls just when they are wanted for the spirit."

Barker also found himself in inns just after the killing of "**Io Moussu**" ["the Monsieur"], the pig's nickname, whereupon the meal served is entirely composed of this animal even if the innkeeper sometimes tries to disguise the fact by adding other ingredients [garlic and tomatoes for instance] in a bid to hide the taste.

Like the gudgeon, game is also served outside of hunting periods. "Had I been a Procureur de la République the law could not have been broken in a more solicitous manner than it was in my behoof. Not only did I have gudgeons, en temps prohibé, but also partridge. It was not until the banes were carried out that I felt that I had missed an excellent opportunity of setting a good example by declining to eat partridge in the month of June."

"I took a road somewhat at random, and it led me by many windings away from the Dronne, up hills, where there were vines but no cornfields, and where the wayside trees were chiefly plums, laden with fruit fast purpling." Harrison Barker then speaks of the fruit dried in the sun – the prune – so beloved of English children...

Through hills and forests, the path leads to the hamlet of Juillac, where traditional houses surround a central fountain and then on to Petit Roc where there is an observatory of the damp zone situated in the bottom of the valley.

The Roc damp zone comprises a remarkable and picturesque natural site, rich in its wealth of flora and fauna. A limestone cliff overlooks **the Euche Valley** and has been equipped with a handrail to help enjoy the landscape and notice boards which illustrate the environmentally rich area and list the actions undertaken to conserve it.



Little by little, the path becomes increasingly rocky and the vegetation begins to resemble that of the dry plains. Heading up the Sandonie Valley, you can take a detour to visit the magnificent Peyrelefade dolmen : take a left turn before heading towards **Saint Just**. Saint Just is a pretty village centred around its Romanesque church with the Euche and its two tributaries, the **Sandonie** and the Buffebale running through it.

Before reaching **Paussac Saint Vivien**, you will see a sign showing a path leading to Vieux Breuilh. A quick detour will take you to this ancient quarry village and its semi-troglodyte houses. This “ghost village” has long had a mysterious image. In the middle of the quarry are the ruins of houses, and perhaps even a chapel, for the 12th and 13th- century quarrymen who lived on site while working on a job. One of the houses was renovated twenty-odd years ago giving us a chance to see what they were really like: the surface area was small [5 to 20m²], the ground floor served to store the quarryman’s tools while he would have lived, as indicated by the fireplace, upstairs.

Paussac Saint Vivien is situated on a limestone plateau above water-chiselled cliffs which provide shelter for peregrine falcons and a sports ground for rock climbers. **The church of Saint Thimotée** dates from the 11th century and comprises one of the many Romanesque, domed churches built in the Ribérac region at this period. The upper part of the chancel still bears traces of a system of defence oubtless constructed in the 13th century.

By the 15th century, the church appears to have doubled as a fully-fledged fortress with the addition of crenellations and machicolations. The western gate dates from the 16th century. Inside, the nave’s two bays are crowned with cupolas.

Some of the surrounding buildings are extremely old, such as the 15th-century **Paussac** manor house [now a residential home] or the 17th.-century dovecot with its ‘lauze’ stone roof.



The “Peyres” of Paussac

There are five listed megalithic monuments in the municipality of **Paussac Saint Vivien**, including the Peyre Levade standing stone situated near the ramblers’ path, which is one of the most remarkable in the Dordogne, comprising as it does a funeral chamber covered by a large slab of sandstone. Peyre Dermale, which is situated on the trail itself, is a monolithic slab of stone on which is mounted another slab thus appearing to be a dolmen or standing stone. The cup and ring markings pecked into the rock and linked by gutters, as well as the door carved into the rock have long excited local imaginations and bestowed these rocks with all manner of significations, as can be deduced from the local name: The Sacrificial Stone. Another legend has it that Death will come to claim any who are foolish enough to stand in the doorway.

Saint-Julien-de-Bourdeilles

The 12th-century parish church dedicated to **Saint Julien de Brioude** testifies to the great age of the village of Saint-Julien-de-Bourdeilles which grew up between Brantôme et Bourdeilles on a site most likely occupied since Gallo-Roman times. Built into the church’s facade, the belfry was fortified during the Hundred Years War. On 1st January 2016, **Saint-Julien-de-Bourdeilles** joined with Brantôme to form a new municipality : **Brantôme en Périgord**.

And now, just like Harrison Barker more than a hundred years earlier, you are about to arrive in Brantôme. As you head down towards the village you will see the Romanesque church of **Saint Pardoux de Feix**, the parish church up until the Revolution at which point it passed into private ownership and has remained private ever since.

“The pleasure grows as you descend, and when at length you reach the little town you are quite enchanted with the grace and elegance, the poetic and romantic charm, of the scene.”



BRANTÔME

as seen by BARKER

“Although the church, with its tower half built upon a rock, dates from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the influence of the sixteenth century is so strong that no other is felt. The eye follows the terraces with graceful balustrades in the shadow of old trees, dwells on the fanciful Renaissance bridge, that looks as if its first intention was to span the stream in the usual manner, but, having gone some distance across, changed its mind, and turned off at an abrupt angle then the little pavilion in the style of Francis I., connected with a machicolated gateway, fixes the attention.

There is something in the air of the place which calls up the spirit of Shakespeare, of Spenser, and of all the poets and romancers of the sixteenth century you feel that everything here belongs to them, that you are in their world, and that the nineteenth century has nothing to do with it.

Upon these balustraded terraces, beside the limpid river full of waving weeds, you can picture without effort ladies in farthingales and great ruffs, gentlemen in high hose and brilliant doublets you can almost hear the lovers of three centuries ago kissing under the trees - lovers like Romeo and Juliet, who kissed with a will and meant it, and who were afraid of nothing.”

“The abbey church of Brantôme is not without beauty, but it is the tower that is the truly remarkable feature. It was raised in the eleventh century, and although the architect - probably a monastic one - observed the prevailing principle of Romanesque taste, he showed so much originality in the design that it served as a model, which was much imitated in the Middle Ages.

It is not only one of the oldest church towers in France, but its position is one of the most peculiar, it being built, not on the church, but behind it, and partly grafted upon the rock.”



Situated on the edge of the Périgord-Limousin Regional Natural Park, Brantôme en Périgord is easily one of the most attractive villages of the Périgord. Raymond Poincaré called it the Venice of Périgord thanks to its island position, cradled between the two arms of the Dronne. The history of the village is bound up with that of its Benedictine abbey. Founded, according to legend, by Charlemagne at the end of the 8th century, the abbey was originally troglodytic before, little by little, braving life outside of the rock.

In the limestone cliff, half hidden by religious monastic buildings, are the caves in which the first monastic community lived and worshipped. The cave known as the “Last Judgement” is decorated with two monumental bas-relief sculptures carved directly into the rock – an enigmatic “Triumph of Death” and a “Crucifixion”.

Harrison Barker describes his impression of the cave: *“the walls of the cavern have been blackened by the damp, and these awful shapes reveal themselves but slowly to the eye, so that they look like a vague and dreadful company of ghosts advancing from the darkness.”*

Dedicated to one of the Innocent Saints massacred on the orders of King Herod, whose relics are conserved in the abbey church, the fountain of Saint-Sicaire is reputed to have miraculous qualities. The 11th-century belfry built on a rocky outcrop is one of the oldest towers in France. On the ground floor of the former inn is a museum of the works of Fernand Desmoulin [1853-1914] who, influenced by the spiritualism of the era, created between 1900 and 1902 mysterious drawings signed by three spirits: The Teacher, Your Old Master and Astarté.

Harrison Barker, a man of learning, also refers to Pierre de Bourdeilles, “Seigneur de Brantôme, author of the famous and scandalous ‘Mémoires’ - terrible chronicles of sixteenth-century venality, intrigue, and corruption, written in a spirit of the gayest cynicism.”



Pierre de Bourdeille [c.1540-1614], who went by the pen name of Pierre de Brantôme, is, without a doubt, the most emblematic figure of the town. Lay abbot of Brantôme and churlish chronicler of his era, his work was published posthumously, the most famous being *Les Vies des dames galantes* and *Les Vies des grands capitaines*. A 16th-century, right-angled bridge with an elegant renaissance pavilion as its entry point takes the visitor to the Monks' Garden with its three alters of repose. The garden was formerly the lay abbots' pleasure garden. Peyrelevade Dolmen [dolmen means standing stone in Occitan] dating from the Neolithic period guards the village at its eastern entrance.

The Pheasant Breeder

[...] At the hospitable board of this inn I made the acquaintance of a somewhat eccentric gentleman who lived alone in a large old house, where he pursued the innocent occupation of hatching pheasants with the help of hens. In almost every room there was a hen sitting upon eggs or leading about a brood of little pheasants. This gentleman was more sad than joyous, for he could not take his handkerchief from his pocket without bringing out the corpse of a baby pheasant with it - one that had been trodden to death by a too fussy foster-mother. I owe him a debt for having led me a charming walk by moonlight to see a dolmen - the largest and best preserved of all those I had already seen in Southern France and elsewhere.

You are now at the end of Harrison Barker's "dirt road"

To return to your starting point, we propose a descent by a «**water path**» as barker did in 1893 on the Dronne.

This itinerary is described in a separate document : «**the Chemin d'eau d'H. Barker en val de Dronne**».

For those who do not have the sea foot, an easy shared route allows to reach Ribérac by bike.

In travelling the 40km that separate Brantôme from Ribérac by bicycle, you will see the riverside Val de Dronne from a different aspect, still accompanied by Barker who visited virtually all of the villages you will go through (although not by bike, he was either on foot or in a canoe) during his travels.



THE RIVER DRONNE, THE WATER MILLS AND BARKER'S WATER TRAIL

Barker describes at length the River Dronne on which he enjoys his canoe trip speaking of “the charm of this most enchanting river”. The depth and width of the river change constantly.

Added to this, frequent mill dams made of stakes and stones or tree trunks which often gave way to rapids made navigation extremely perilous. “ It was an exciting moment as we touched the wave. The canoe made a bound plunged into the boiling torrent below”.

Sometimes the mill owners helped Barker get over the dam with his canoe. Throughout his journey, he writes of the different plants he sees, the alder which grows on the banks and whose roots are visible from the embarkation point.

Water lilies are very present, both white and yellow although never the two species in the same place. He sees lots of reeds, some of which slow down his navigation. There are a multitude of species of fauna such as dragonflies and frogs which live in damp areas. Sometimes, particularly as he approaches villages, meets boats full of day-trippers and picnickers - he describes this as he reaches Ribérac.



You will follow the river, sometimes closely, sometimes further away, but always heading towards **Valeuil**.

Located on the tourist route between Brantôme en Périgord and Bourdeilles, the village of Valeuil dominates from its lofty situation high above the Dronne.

As is attested by a document dating from 1107, Valeuil was the seat of an Archpriest and comprised 24 parishes from the 13th century to the French Revolution.

The 12th-century parish church is dedicated to Saint Pantaléon, a 4th-century martyr and the patron saint of doctors. The edifice comprises a nave, a vaulted front-choir with a dome and a semi-circular vaulted choir with a semi-dome. The church of Saint Pantaléon has been listed on the Supplementary Inventory of Historical Monuments since 1974.

After Valeuil, you will take the tourist road under the imposing rocks which Barker also saw after he left Brantôme.

"I looked at these with something of the regret that one feels when awaking from a long dream of wonderland. I knew that they were almost the last vestiges towards the west, in the watershed of the Gironde, of the stern Jurassic desert, gashed and seamed with lovely valleys, and deep gorges full of the poet's 'religious awe,' where I had spent the greater part of three long summers."





BOURDEILLES

as seen by Barker

"[...] I saw a round tower of unusual height with machicolations and embattlements, in apparently perfect preservation, rising from the midst of what once must have been a fortress of great strength, which on the side of the river had no need of a moat, for it was there defended by the escarped rock, to the edge of which the outer ramparts were carried. This was the castle of Bourdeilles, the seat of the family of which the Abbé de Brantôme was a younger son. I was soon able to get a closer view of it [...].

It is one of the most instructive remnants of feudalism in Périgord, and one of the most picturesque, by the contrast of its great gloomy keep and frowning ramparts with the peaceful beauty of the valley below. The tall donjon, 30 feet high, and most of the outer wall, are of the fourteenth century.

The inner wall encloses a sixteenth-century mansion, marked with none of the picturesqueness of the Renaissance period, but heavy and graceless. In the interior, however, are sculptured chimney-pieces and other interesting details. This residence was built by the sister-in-law of Pierre de Bourdeilles.

The burg itself, which lies close to the castle and is much embowered with trees, has something of the open, spacious, and decorative air of Brantôme. It tells the stranger that it has known better days. The broad terrace, planted with trees in form of quinconces where the people stroll and gossip in the summer evenings, is quite out of keeping with a little place that has scarcely more than a thousand inhabitants."



Harrison Barker also comments on the old bridge and the mill by the river..

"I have gone down to the waterside to follow the stream onward, and am held by the quiet charm of a half Gothic bridge that was thrown across it five or six hundred years ago the miller's house just below, with its bright little garden flaming with flowers a few inches above the water, and two great wheels turning slowly, slowly, as if time and change and the rush of life were the vain words of tiresome fools.

On the side of the bridge looking up-stream, each pier is built out in the form of a sharp angle. This was intended to lessen the push of the current upon the masonry in time of flood. A great many old bridges in Guyenne show a similar design."

Bourdeilles, along with Beynac, Biron and Mareuil is one of the four ancient baronies of the Périgord. The imposing castle which dominates the village from high on a rocky outcrop comprises two edifices built in two different eras and in two different styles. A 13th and 14th -century fortress and its 35m-high octagonal keep sits side by side with a Renaissance palace. The plans for the latter which drawn up by Jacquette de Montbron, the sister-in-law of the famous Pierre de Bourdeilles (c. 1540-1614) chronicler and lay abbot of Brantôme, better known to the literary world under his nom de plume, Pierre de Brantôme.



The rooms of the Renaissance palace are home to a remarkable collection of furniture bequeathed to the département of the Dordogne by two patrons of the arts. Opposite the entrance to the chateau is a 15th-century manor house, considerably modified over the following centuries, known as the Chateau de Sénéchaux as this magnificent property – which is today privately owned – was the former seat of the Seneschals of the Barony of **Bourdeilles**.

A bridge with cutwaters which was almost entirely rebuilt after the flood of 25 January 1735, straddles the Dronne River linking the village centre to the outlying quarter of Notre-Dame on the right bank,

An elegant mill built in the form of a boat in the 18th century between two branches of the river, harboured mill stones, an oil press and a fulling mill for cleaning cloth.

It is now time to leave the charm of Bourdeilles behind and take to the road.

At **Creyssac**, a little village off the beaten track, note the swell of water as it gives birth to a stream, the Bullidour, which feeds the wash house at the edge of the village before joining the Dronne River. The village is dominated by a 19th-century chateau built on the ruins of a 14th-century noble retreat which was destroyed during the Revolution.





LISLE

as seen by BARKER

The trail next takes you to Lisle, under the cliffs of Renamon, near the ruins of a Gallo-Roman bridge. Harrison Barker came here, guided by a Republican plasterer.

"The plasterer had a sense of the picturesque, and he had not over-rated the beauty of this spot. A little below the early Gothic arch, from which the briars reached down to the water, was an old mill, in the shadow of a high, overleaning rock, and great trees made a vaulting over the grassy lane, at the end of which the turning-wheel could be seen, with just a sparkle of evening sunshine upon the dropping water."

The mill evoked by Barker is the Rochereuil walnut mill, dating from the 12th century. With its fabulous horizontal wheel, it is still in activity and produces walnut oil using old-fashioned methods, as well as other walnut-based products.

Like Harrison Barker, you are about to arrive in the village of Lisle. All you need do is cross the bridge at the spot designated for swimming and to take a little detour to see a "magnificent Roman and Gothic edifice".

THE PLASTERER OF L'ISLE

"On our way to the river he talked much, and especially about his village, in which he took a very lively interest. It had not changed its principles, he said, for a hundred years.

And what are its principles ?

Republican. We don't go to church here., although there is no ill-will towards the cure.

And is all the country about here Republican ?

Oh no, not at all. There is a village close by that is full of religion. We are often called savages. When the curé asked the commune to give him 200 francs a year for saying an extra mass on Sundays, the majority of the inhabitants signed their names to a paper offering him 300 francs a year if he would say no mass at all."





Next, the trail follows the Dronne until the “Moulin du Pont” at **Montagrier**, which is today called the Moulin de la Dronne. This old flour mill dating from the 12th century was converted into an electric power station in 1907. Its architecture is typical of the floating mills of the Dronne River. It houses the wheel, the turbine and models demonstrating mechanisms using hydraulic power. .

Opposite the mill, downstream from the bridge, is the late 19th-century chapel of Notre-Dame de Perdux built in 1890 when an ancient pilgrimage dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption was reinstated. Engraved on the bell in Latin are the words “**I ask of you pity and I will lead you to Heaven**”.

To reach the centre of the village of **Tocane Saint Apre**, cross the bridge going back on your steps. Village churches very often testify to the history of their village and this is certainly the case of the church of Tocane St Apre which, although recent [19th century], symbolizes the unification of two villages : **Tocane, an old bastide village dating from the 14th century and relatively undeveloped and Saint Apre.**

This would explain the two separate entrances [one for each village] but there were also two bells, each village ensuring that its bell rung louder than its neighbour’s.

As he arrived at **Tocane**, Harrison Barker described how a man was readying himself to thresh wheat : “ *He had prepared the place by spreading over it a layer of cowdung, and levelling it with his bare feet until it was quite smooth and hard. It is in this way that the threshing-floors are usually made.*”

Still running alongside the Dronne, the trail goes past the swimming area and **Salles** mill where Barker stopped to eat. Taking advantage of the cold water, he tied “*a couple of bottles to the roots- of the alders*” to cool them, something still done by picnickers to this day.

Going back past **Saint Méard**, you can visit the imposing **Pauze Mill** which in its vastness appears to be blocking the river. The mill's mechanisms, which are still in working order, are spread over its four floors and a museum traces the history of flour milling and of hydroelectric activity developed since 1892.



Finally, follow the old railway tracks and then after a steep, but relatively short, hill you will reach the ridgeline which will take you to **Ribérac** along quiet back roads..



As for Harrison Barker, he arrived at **Ribérac** by canoe and looked for a place to moor it : *“I had to find a place where the boat could be left, and where it would be safe from the enterprise of boys - a bad invention in all countries.”*



He found a solution thanks to a butcher **who allowed him to tie up his boat and who even kept his food** for him in his pantry till the following day, *“An excellent service, for the drainage of his slaughter-house, emptying into the river by the side of the boat, was enough to make even a live fowl lose its freshness in a single night.”*



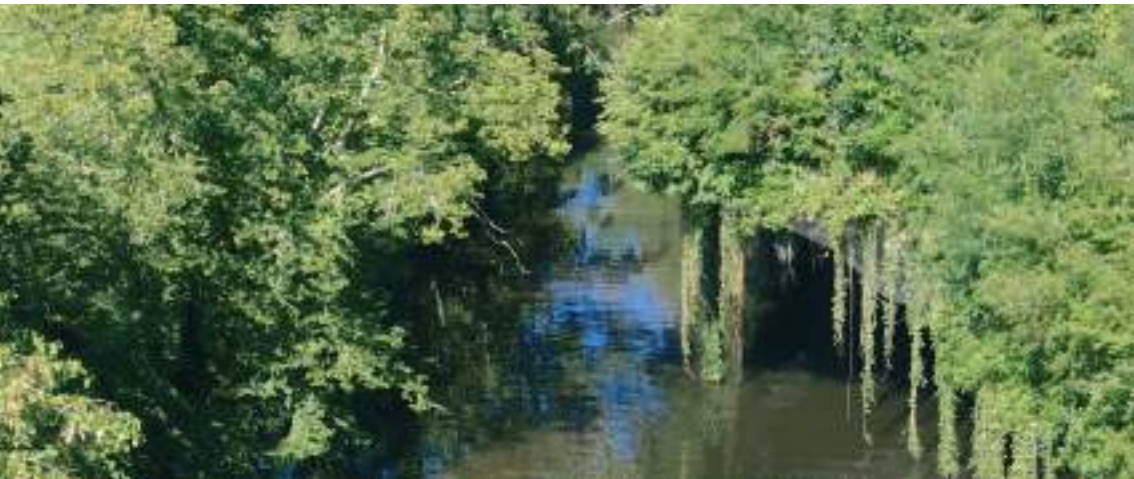


Between “RIBERAC and AUBETERRE” with Barker

From **Ribérac**, small roads follow an old railway line along which one can still see remnants of various bits of equipment, that will guide you along the River Dronne and its millstreams.

H. Barker continues his river journey noticing, “a little cluster of houses on a low cliff, and below these, close to the river, an old pigeon-house with pointed roof.” His journey took him past the village of **d’Epeluiche** where the cycle lane cuts across the ramblers’ trail alternating small paths with roads suitable for vehicles.

However, the paths each go their separate ways on reaching **Bourg du Bost**, where the cycle lane heads off towards Petit Bersac and the old station.



PETIT BERSAC

The village of **Petit-Bersac** is situated in a meander in the river on a Gallo-Roman site. Archaeological digs have shown an extremely dense land occupation on this, the western side of the city of Pétrucocres. An important thoroughfare called the “Diagonale d’Aquitaine” crossed the Dronne with a ford upstream from Petit-Bersac at **Chaboin** and downstream at **Vigéraud**. This route, which evidence shows existed even before the Roman settlement, shows that Petit Bersac was a privileged site at the crossroads of various communication routes. This would explain its particularly dense population from Antiquity until the Middle Ages.



Gallo-Roman and Merovingian objects discovered during the archaeological digs in the 1970s are on display in the local museum. [Please visit Ribérac Tourist Information Office for further information].

The church would appear to have been built in the 11th century on the site of a 5th-century Merovingian church which itself had been built on the ruins of the Gallo-Roman villa’s temple. The belfry was destroyed during the Wars of Religion and its bell thrown into a lake.

*Your trail continues past the Monmalant outdoors leisure activities centre [swimming, canoeing] to arrive at **Saint Antoine et Cumont**, the last Périgourdin village before **Aubeterre**.*

SAINT ANTOINE ET CUMONT

On the left bank of the River Dronne, only three kilometres away opposite Aubeterre on territory which is today the municipality of **Saint-Antoine et Cumont**, there once existed a convent belonging to the Hospitaller Brothers of **Saint-Antoine-de-Viennois** which bore the name of the Commandry of Saint-Antoine-lès-Aubeterre.

The Order of the Hospitallers of **Saint-Antoine**, founded in 1101, is one of the oldest.



The Order's mission was to care for those suffering from a type of plague called St Antony's Fire or Ergotism. It was founded by the Antonins in the former parish of Notre-Dame de Mirand (neither church nor parish exist any longer).

The village which has formed since these times is called **Saint Antoine** in memory of the foundation.

The village of **Saint Antoine** has a church (listed as a historical monument) with Roman origins to which were added chapels in the 14th and 16th centuries and whose belfry and façade were rebuilt in the 19th century.

In 2017, **Saint Antoine et Cumont** joined with the neighbouring villages of **Festalemps** and **Saint Privat des Près** to form a new municipality: **Saint Privat en Périgord**.

All that is now required is a last burst of energy and the Dronne riverbed to be crossed over several bridges and Aubeterre, the first village of the Charente after the river, appears marking the end of this bicycle trail.

END OF THE COURSE

You have now reached the end of your journey in the footsteps of Harrison Barker.

After Aubeterre, he continued by canoe until Coutras in the Gironde but struggled with the many dams he came across : *“the mills were numerous [...] The simple dam of piles and stones with a fall of 2 or 3 feet in height at the lowest point, gave way to a high and well built dam, with a fall of 8 to 10 feet”*.

Barker had visited the area shortly before embarking on his voyage down the Dronne, but on this occasion had travelled on foot visiting the Double Forest which he called *“the desert of the Double”* and the Abbey of Echourgnac and the town of Montpon.

Another trail following in the steps of Harrison Barker from Aubeterre to Montpon will soon be available and for those who already know they would like to stay in Barker’s company, an 80-km “Track and Water Trail” along the Dordogne Valley is available from Tourist Information Offices and on the site rando.dordogne.fr



LES SERVICES											
	GE	CH	CG	H	AL	B	R	GB	PH	B	OT
Aubeterre		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Petit Bersac						X	X				
Chassaignes											
Bourg du Bost						X	X				
Ribérac		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
St Méard de Drôme					X						
St Victor							X				
Montagrier	X				X						
Grand Brassac		X			X	X	X				
Saint Just											
Paussac	X				X	X	X				
St Julien de Bourdeilles	X										
Valeuil		X	X								
Lisle		X	X		X	X	X	X	X		
Tocane		X	X		X	X	X	X	X		
Brantôme		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

GE : Stage lodging or groups- **CH** : Guest room - **CG** : Camping
H : Hotel - **AL** : Food - **B** : Bar - **R** : Restaurant - **GB** : Bank teller
PH : Pharmacy - **B** : Bus - **OT** : Tourist office

Tourist Offices

Aubeterre : 05 45 98 57 18 - info@sudcharentetourisme.fr

Ribérac : 05 53 90 03 10 - ot.riberac@wanadoo.fr

Brantôme : 05 53 05 80 63 - brantome@perigord-dronne-belle.fr

It was good ?

This is the end of your hike. You want to report a problem, bring a testimonial, suggest improvements, please contact us at next : rando.cd24@dordogne.fr

or complete the quick questionnaire : <http://bit.do/Qrando>



Note

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



Walk up the Dronne Valley on the “dirt roads” of Harrison Barker from Aubeterre to Brantôme, two villages recognized as «Petite cité de caractère». Discover the mills, the raised stones, the villages nestled near their Romanesque churches, and the encounters that Harrison Barker made during his trip in the 19th century.

Perhaps you will take the water path back to the point of departure?

