

Valensole and the Verdon Gorge

A loop from Valensole, via the Route des Crêtes and the Corniche Sublime

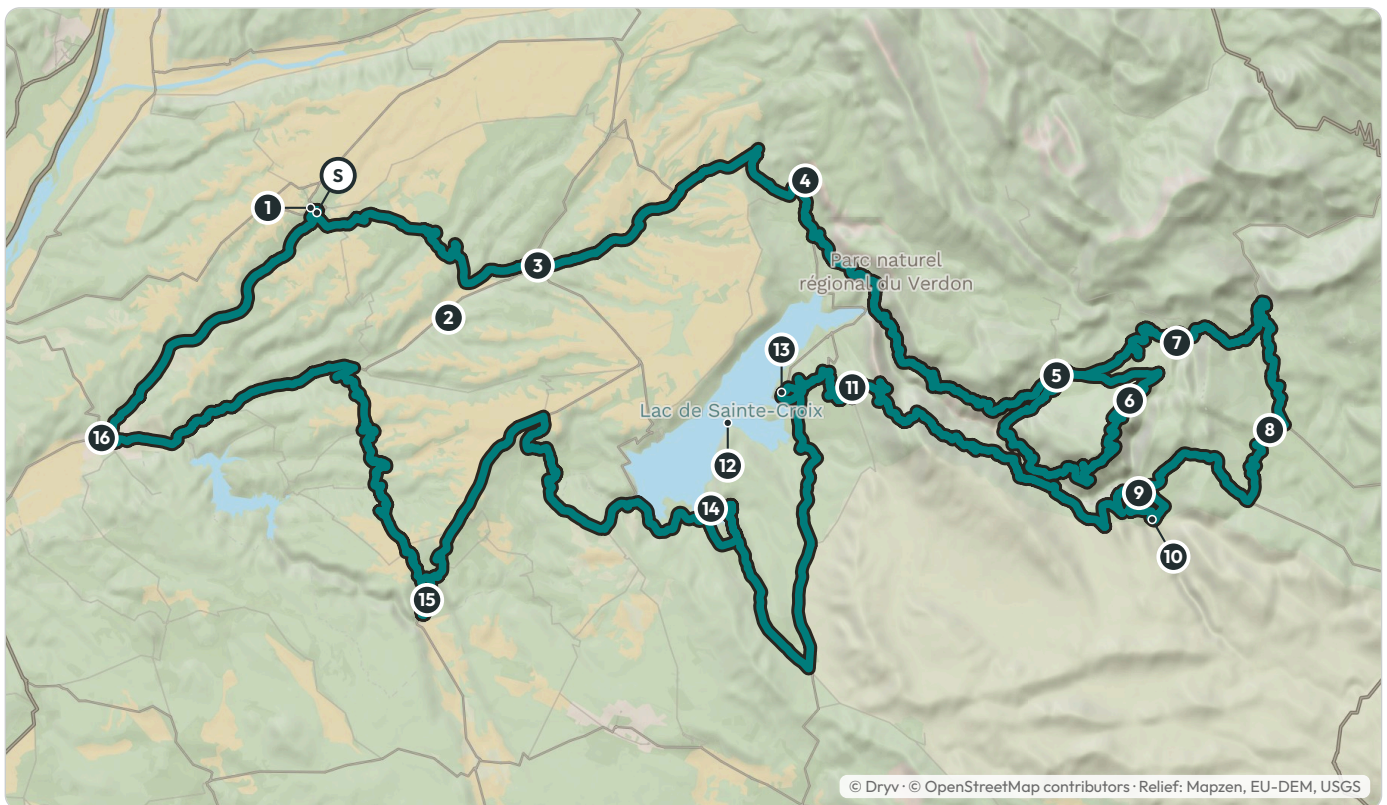
DISTANCE

223.6 km

DRIVING TIME

4 h 30 min

DEPTH OF THE GORGE

700 m

Cut by the Verdon between the Castellane and Digne Pre-Alps, the gorge is a narrow valley 25 km long and 250 to 700 m deep. In August 1905, Édouard-Alfred Martel made the first journey down its whole length, and it was he who named it a canyon.

From Valensole, the loop crosses the plateau and its lavandin fields through Riez to Moustiers-Sainte-Marie. It follows the right bank through La Palud, the Route des Crêtes and the Point Sublime, calls at Trigance, comes back along the left bank, from the Mescla Balconies to Aiguines on the Corniche Sublime, then runs beside Lake Sainte-Croix and returns through Quinson and Gréoux-les-Bains.

Much of the route is on narrow, winding cliff roads: allow a long day. In winter, part of the Route des Crêtes may be closed: check before you set off.

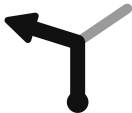
Text: Dryv, adapted from Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 4.0) – https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorges_du_Verdon, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentier_Martel · Map: full sources on page 2

PLACES ALONG THE ROUTE

1 Valensole	km 0.0	5 La Palud-sur-Verdon	km 47.2	9 Mescla Balconies	km 102.2	13 Les Salles-sur-Verdon	km 133.3
2 Valensole Plateau	km 9.7	6 Route des Crêtes	km 53.8	10 Artuby Bridge	km 104.4	14 Bauduen	km 154.3
3 Riez	km 12.8	7 Point Sublime	km 78.0	11 Aiguines	km 126.5	15 Quinson	km 183.0
4 Moustiers-Sainte-Marie	km 27.0	8 Trigance	km 91.7	12 Lake Sainte-Croix	km 133.1	16 Gréoux-les-Bains	km 210.0

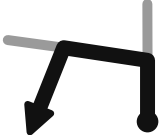
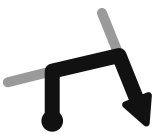
NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
1	0 m total 0.0 km	—		Start: Valensole, village hall car park (place 1). Head south on Chemin des Coussieres
2	210 m total 0.2 km	Chemin des Coussieres		Turn right onto Chemin de Saint-Pierre, then immediately left onto Rue du 18 Août 1944, which becomes Ancien Chemin d'Allemagne
3	540 m total 0.8 km	Ancien Chemin d'Allemagne		Bear right onto D 6
4	11.62 km total 12.4 km	D 6		Turn right onto D 953
5	270 m total 12.6 km	D 953		Turn left onto D 952
6	200 m total 12.8 km	D 952 Allées Louis Gardiol		Stop: Riez, Allées Louis Gardiol (place 3). Head east on Place de la Colonne
7	140 m total 13.0 km	Place de la Colonne		At the roundabout, take the 2nd exit onto D 952
8	13.89 km total 26.9 km	D 952 Route de Riez		At the roundabout, take the 2nd exit onto Avenue Frédéric Mistral
9	80 m total 27.0 km	Avenue Frédéric Mistral		Bear left

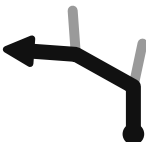
NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
10	90 m total 27.0 km	—		Stop: Moustiers-Sainte-Marie, visitor car park (place 4). Head south-east
11	70 m total 27.1 km	—		Bear right onto Avenue Frédéric Mistral
12	50 m total 27.2 km	Avenue Frédéric Mistral		At the roundabout, take the 2nd exit onto D 952
13	720 m total 27.9 km	D 952 Route de Riez		At the roundabout, take the 1st exit to stay on D 952
14	1.94 km total 29.8 km	D 952 Route de La Palud		At the roundabout, take the 3rd exit to stay on D 952
15	17.25 km total 47.1 km	D 952		Turn left onto Chemin du Vignal, then immediately right
16	110 m total 47.2 km	—		Stop: La Palud-sur-Verdon, Vignal car park (place 5). Head north-east
17	40 m total 47.2 km	—		Turn left onto Chemin du Vignal, then immediately left onto D 952
18	1.04 km total 48.3 km	D 952 Route de Castellane		Bear right onto D 23
19	5.58 km total 53.8 km	D 23 Route des Crêtes		Stop: Route des Crêtes, Escalès viewpoint (place 6). Head south-west on D 23

NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
20	15.65 km total 69.5 km	D 23 Route de la Maline		Turn left to stay on D 23
21	660 m total 70.1 km	D 23 Route de la Maline		Bear left to stay on D 23
22	180 m total 70.3 km	D 23 Route de la Maline		Turn right onto D 952
23	1.22 km total 71.5 km	D 952		Keep left to stay on D 952
24	6.22 km total 77.8 km	D 952		At the roundabout, take the 1st exit
25	220 m total 78.0 km	—		Stop: Point Sublime, car park (place 7). Head east
26	250 m total 78.2 km	—		At the roundabout, take the 1st exit onto D 952
27	5.57 km total 83.8 km	D 952		Turn right onto D 955
28	6.19 km total 90.0 km	D 955 Route de Castellane		Turn right onto D 90
29	1.50 km total 91.5 km	D 90 Route de la Cornuelle		Turn right onto Route de Draguignan

NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
30	160 m total 91.6 km	Route de Draguignan		Keep right onto Rue du Portail
31	40 m total 91.7 km	Rue du Portail		Stop: Trigance, car park (place 8). Head west
32	180 m total 91.9 km	—		Bear right onto D 90
33	3.95 km total 95.8 km	D 90 Route de la Cornuelle		Turn right onto D 71
34	6.41 km total 102.2 km	D 71 Route d'Aiguines		Stop: Mescla Balconies (place 9). Head south-east on D 71
35	2.19 km total 104.4 km	D 71 Route d'Aiguines		Stop: Artuby Bridge (place 10). Head north-west on D 71
36	21.41 km total 125.8 km	D 71 Route du Verdon		Turn right onto D 19
37	180 m total 126.0 km	D 19		Turn left onto Allée du Château
38	400 m total 126.4 km	—		Turn right onto Chemin de Boudraou
39	100 m total 126.5 km	Chemin de Boudraou		Stop: Aiguines, car park (place 11). Head west on Chemin de Boudraou

NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
40	220 m total 126.7 km	Chemin de Boudraou		Bear right onto D 19
41	2.98 km total 129.7 km	D 19 Route de Chabassole		Turn left onto D 71
42	3.09 km total 132.8 km	D 71		Bear right
43	460 m total 133.3 km	—		Stop: Les Salles-sur-Verdon, Avenue de Bocouenne (place 13). Head north-east on Avenue de Bocouenne
44	150 m total 133.4 km	Avenue de Bocouenne		Keep left to stay on Avenue de Bocouenne, which becomes D 957
45	12.54 km total 145.9 km	D 957		Turn right onto D 49
46	6.02 km total 152.0 km	D 49		Keep right to stay on D 49
47	2.05 km total 154.0 km	D 49		Keep left to stay on D 49
48	220 m total 154.2 km	D 49 Rue des Jardins		Turn left
49	50 m total 154.3 km	—		Stop: Bauduen, car park (place 14). Head east on D 49

NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
50	2.23 km total 156.5 km	D 49		Bear right onto D 71
51	5.97 km total 162.5 km	D 71		Turn left to stay on D 71
52	2.01 km total 164.5 km	D 71 Route de Riez		Turn right onto D 9, which becomes D 211
53	7.60 km total 172.1 km	D 211		Turn left onto D 11
54	10.70 km total 182.8 km	D 11 Route de Montmeyan		Turn left onto Allée des Prés du Verdon, then after 100 m left
55	220 m total 183.0 km	—		Stop: Quinson, Museum of Prehistory car park (place 15). Head south-west
56	80 m total 183.1 km	—		Turn right onto Allée des Prés du Verdon, then after 100 m right onto D 11
57	410 m total 183.5 km	D 11 Route de Montmeyan		Bear left onto D 15
58	230 m total 183.7 km	D 15 Rue du Var		Turn left to stay on D 15
59	170 m total 183.9 km	D 15 Le Cours		Turn left to stay on D 15

NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
60	730 m total 184.6 km	D 15		Bear right to stay on D 15
61	1.74 km total 186.4 km	D 15 Chemin de Valensole		Stay on D 15: turn right, then after 70 m left
62	3.35 km total 189.7 km	D 15 Route de la Distillerie		Keep right to stay on D 15
63	470 m total 190.2 km	D 15 Route de Riez		Stay on D 15: keep right, then immediately keep left
64	4.17 km total 194.4 km	D 15 Route de Riez		Keep right to stay on D 15
65	2.39 km total 196.8 km	D 15 Route d'Allemagne		Keep left to stay on D 15
66	2.07 km total 198.8 km	D 15 Route de Quinson		Turn sharp left onto D 952
67	10.74 km total 209.6 km	D 952		At the roundabout, take the 4th exit onto D 8
68	40 m total 209.6 km	D 8		Bear right to stay on D 8
69	230 m total 209.8 km	D 8 Avenue du Verdon		Turn left onto Rue des Eaux Chaudes, then immediately bear left onto Esplanade Charles-de-Gaulle

NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
70	120 m total 210.0 km	Esplanade Charles-de-Gaulle		Stop: Gréoux-les-Bains, Esplanade Charles-de-Gaulle (place 16). Head west on Esplanade Charles-de-Gaulle
71	160 m total 210.1 km	Esplanade Charles-de-Gaulle		Bear right onto Rue des Eaux Chaudes, which becomes D 8
72	240 m total 210.4 km	D 8		At the roundabout, take the 2nd exit to stay on D 8
73	580 m total 210.9 km	D 8		At the roundabout, take the 2nd exit to stay on D 8
74	440 m total 211.4 km	D 8		Keep left to stay on D 8
75	10.20 km total 221.6 km	D 8		Keep right to stay on D 8
76	1.21 km total 222.8 km	D 8 Route de Gréoux		Turn left to stay on D 8
77	210 m total 223.0 km	D 8 Route de Gréoux		Stay on D 8: bear right, then immediately keep right; D 8 becomes D 6
78	310 m total 223.3 km	D 6		Turn right to stay on D 6, then after 110 m bear right onto Avenue Segond, which becomes Chemin des Parcs
79	220 m total 223.5 km	Chemin des Parcs		Turn right onto Aire de Valensole, then immediately bear left

NO.	DISTANCE	ROAD	DIRECTION	INSTRUCTIONS
80	70 m total 223.6 km	—		Finish: Valensole, village hall car park (place 1)

ALONG THE WAY

1

Valensole

Village · km 0.0



Valensole climbs a hillside like an amphitheatre, 595 m up, between the plateau that bears its name and the Notre-Dame valley. Saint Mayeul was born here in 910. When he renounced the world he gave up his feudal rights over Valensole to the Count of Provence, keeping only the house where he was born and the church, where he set up a community of his order; he was later elected Abbot of Cluny.

Later a Cluniac priory, the church of Saint-Blaise still looks down over the village: its nave, rebuilt in 1789–1790, joins a Romanesque west front to a large Gothic choir with rib vaults. Two gardens in Valensole are listed: the Clos de Villeneuve, which holds the Remarkable Garden label, and the garden of the Château du Grand Jardin. The lavender festival is held on the third Sunday in July.

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2

Valensole Plateau

Plateau · km 9.7



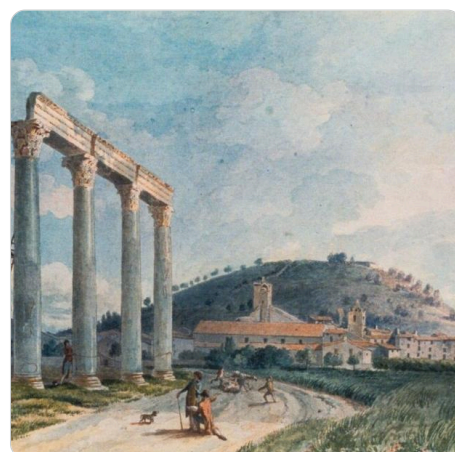
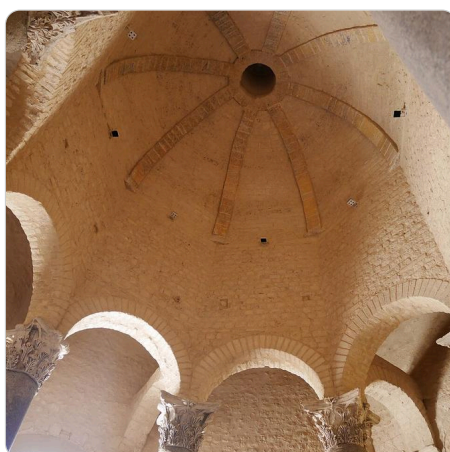
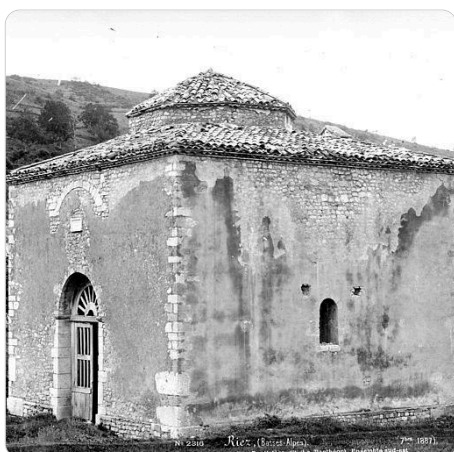
Between the Durance to the west and the Verdon to the south, the Valensole Plateau covers 800 km² at an average height of 500 m; the Asse valley divides it into two unequal parts. It is a basin on the edge of the Alps, filled with coarse conglomerate known as puddingstone, which erosion has carved into valleys and hills.

In the 19th century it was mostly planted with almond trees, whose fine “princesse” almond went into calissons and nougat, and with truffle oaks. Cereals and lavandin have taken their place, and the plateau is known as the “granary of the region”. A hybrid of true lavender and spike lavender, lavandin is its best-known crop: it flowers in June and July, when beekeepers gather lavender honey from it, and is used for soap and perfume.

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3 Riez

Heritage town · km 12.8



Once the capital of the Reii, a Gaulish people whose name may mean “the Free”, Riez became a Roman colony where the two roads across the plateau met. In a meadow between the Colostre and the Auvestre stand four single-piece columns of grey granite, almost 5.90 m high, the last remains of a temple that may date from the late 1st century; they have been listed as a historic monument since 1840.

The baptistery, probably of the 5th century, is octagonal within a square, like the one at Fréjus; eight ancient granite columns with marble capitals stand round the font. The seat of a bishop from the 5th century to the Revolution, the town hosted two church councils, in 439 and 1285.

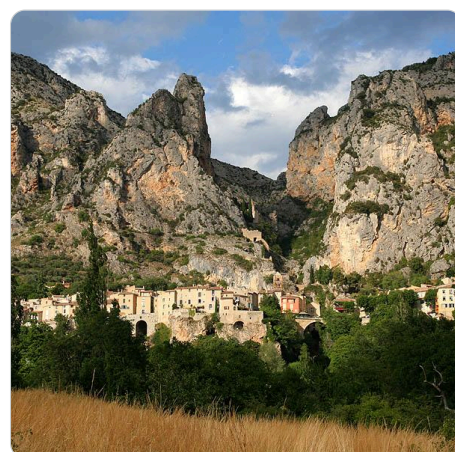
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4 Moustiers-Sainte-Marie

Historic village · km 27.0



Tucked against a rock face, Moustiers-Sainte-Marie is often likened to a Christmas crib, with its star hanging above the village from a 135 m chain stretched between two mountains. According to the legend told by Frédéric Mistral, it is the votive offering of the knight Blacas, taken prisoner by the Mamluks at Damietta in 1249, who had vowed a monument to the Virgin if he ever came home; the present star is a copy made in 1957.

The village became famous in the 17th and 18th centuries for its faïence, with its milky white glaze and “Moustiers blue”. Marcel Provençal revived the craft in 1925, and the faïence museum, founded in 1929, keeps pieces by the masters Clérissy, Olérys and Ferrat. Above the village, the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-Beauvoir has kept its Romanesque porch.

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5 La Palud-sur-Verdon

Village · km 47.2



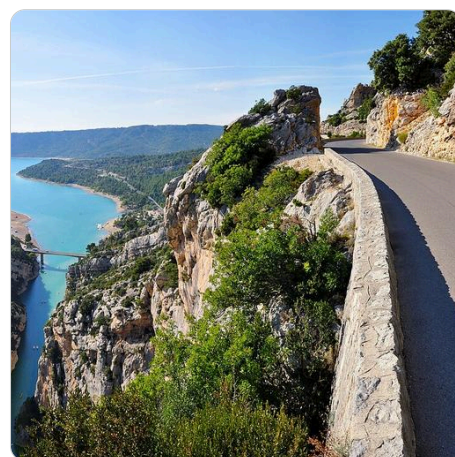
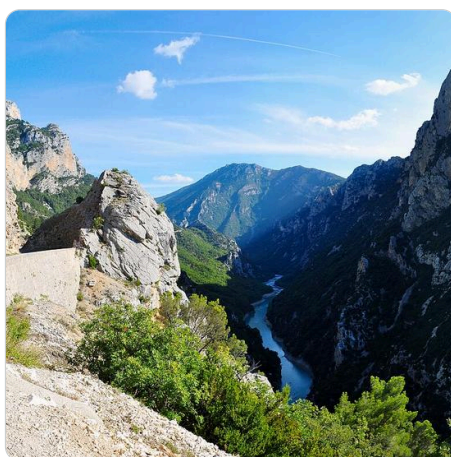
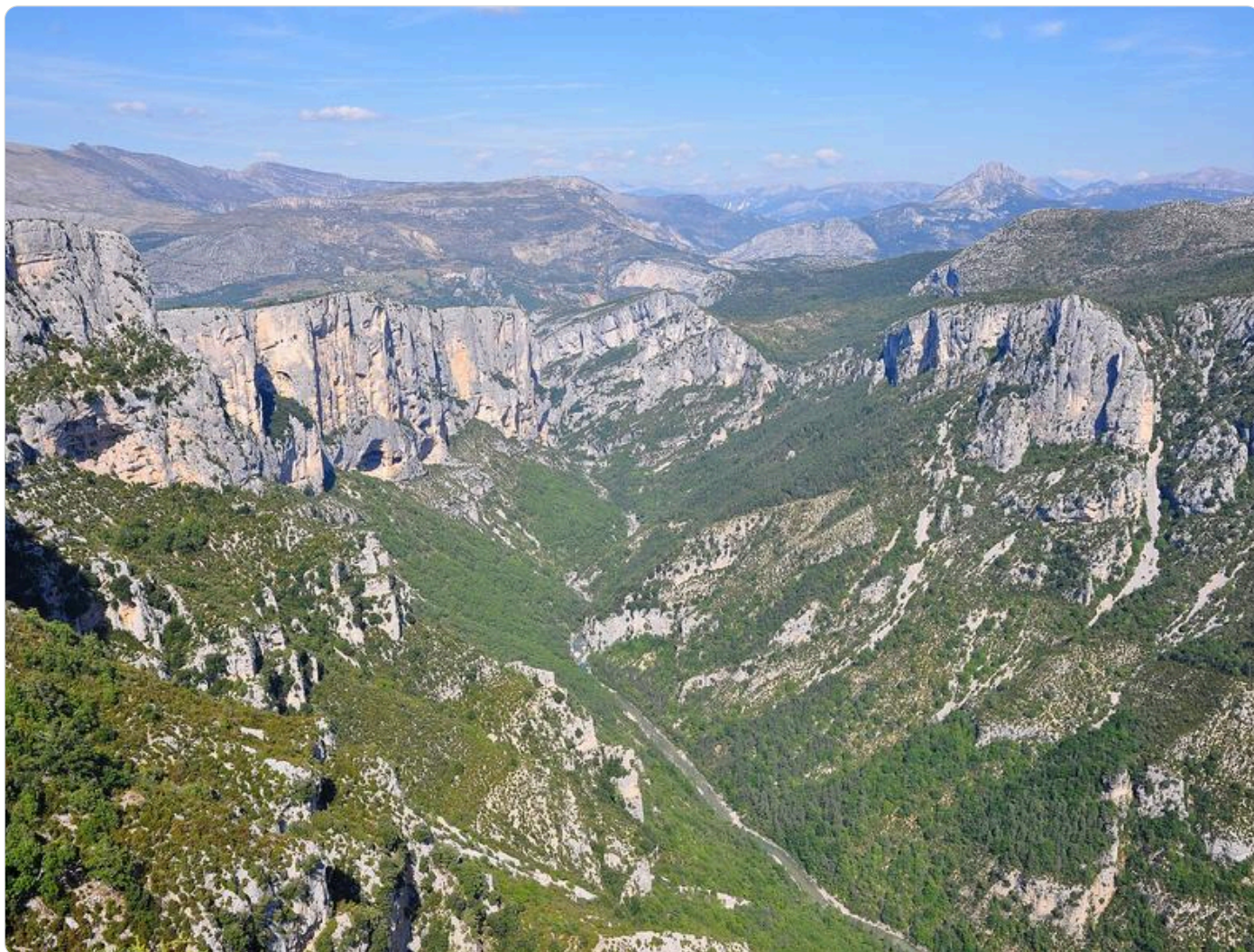
At 928 m, the village of La Palud is known for its Route des Crêtes and its viewpoints over the gorge. The place first appears in 1062 as *Castrum novum*, Châteauneuf, a castle built 1,143 m up which then had eight joint lords; the village itself is recorded in 1114. In the 12th century another castle was built at Maireste, a separate fief, on a hill once occupied by an ancient hillfort.

Above the village, the listed Château de La Palud keeps a 17th-century north front with mullioned windows, incorporated into an 18th-century enlargement. The church of Notre-Dame-de-Vauvert, rebuilt in 1868–1870, keeps an 11th-century bell tower decorated with Lombard bands.

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6 Route des Crêtes

Viewpoint · km 53.8



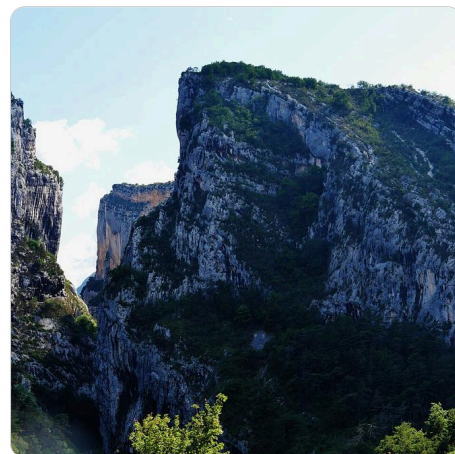
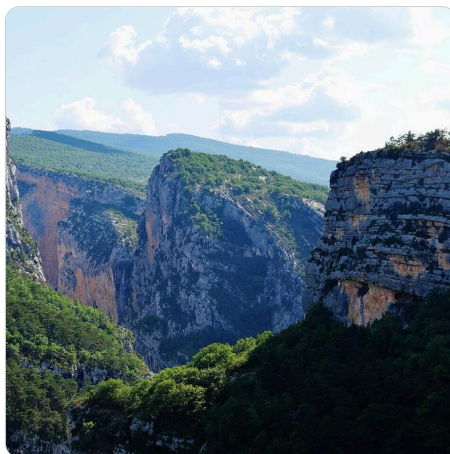
From La Palud, the Route des Crêtes, the D 23, makes a 23 km loop, mostly one-way, with 14 viewpoints over the canyon. This roadbook stops on it at the Escalès viewpoint, above the cliff of the same name, then passes the Chalet de la Maline, a refuge set up in 1936 at the instigation of the Touring Club de France.

From the chalet, the Blanc-Martel path runs for almost 15 km along the right bank to the Point Sublime. Laid out in 1928 by the Touring Club, it is named after Édouard-Alfred Martel, who went down the gorge from 11 to 14 August 1905, and Isidore Blanc, the Rougon schoolteacher who guided him.

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7 Point Sublime

Viewpoint · km 78.0



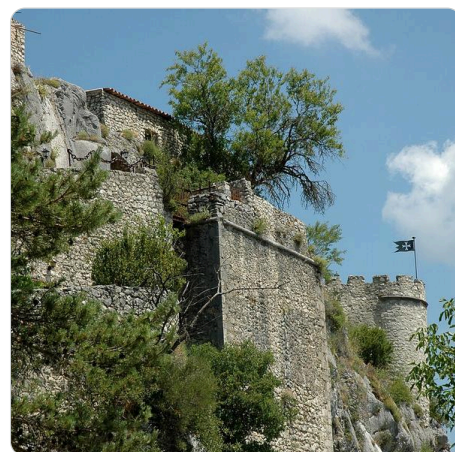
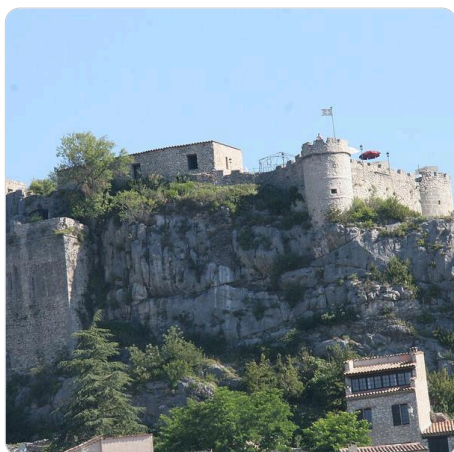
On the right bank, downstream from the village of Rougon, the Point Sublime is one of the most picturesque viewpoints over the Verdon Gorge. Its viewing platform is one of those the Touring Club de France laid out in 1929 and 1930, when it also had the road improved to bring in the first tourists. Directly below, the 18th-century Tusset bridge crosses the Verdon on an old transhumance track.

Above, Rougon is perched 930 m up on a spur. The ruins of its castle, built in the 11th century on a dizzying ridge, look over the entrance to the gorge; it once guarded the road to Castellane.

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8 Trigance

Village · km 91.7



Recorded as early as 814 as *villa tregentia*, a dependency of the abbey of Saint-Victor in Marseille, Trigance clings to a hillside 790 m up, at the foot of the Montagne de Breis, above the Jabron valley; the site is protected. The first castle stood on the summit of the Biach, at 1,213 m; the present one, a fortress built by the monks of Saint-Victor in the 9th or 11th century, looks down over the village.

The Demandolx and then the Valbelle families were lords of Trigance from the 15th to the 18th century. During the War of the Austrian Succession, an Austro-Sardinian army occupied the village in December 1746 and quartered its troops in the castle. Restored, the castle became a hotel and restaurant in 1964.

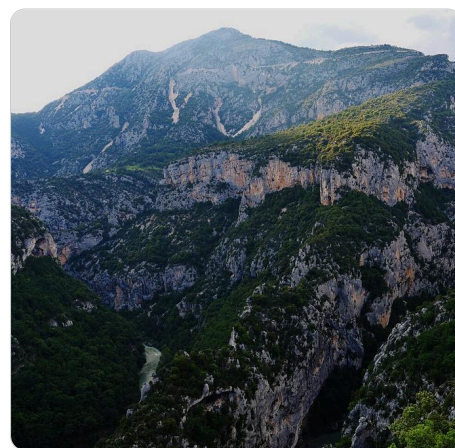
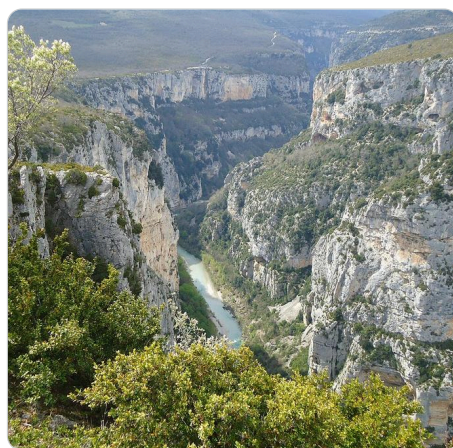
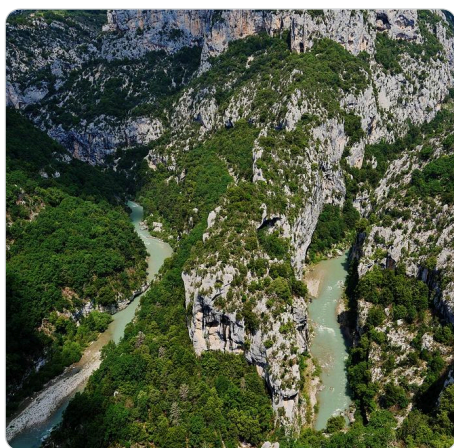
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9 Mescla Balconies

Viewpoint · km 102.2



The Mescla Balconies stand 200 m above the spot where the Artuby flows into the Verdon, deep in the gorge; the name Mescla comes from Provençal and refers to this mingling of waters. Here the Artuby ends its own canyon, 10 km long and about 150 m deep, which no road or path follows.

On 12 August 1905, the second day of his journey down the gorge, Édouard-Alfred Martel reached the Mescla with one companion, while the rest of the team followed from ford to ford carrying a boat that could no longer be used. Today a detour from the Blanc-Martel path leads down to the confluence, while the balconies stand beside the left-bank road, the Corniche Sublime, which the loop then follows to Aiguines.

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10 Artuby Bridge

Bridge · km 104.4



The Artuby Bridge, or Pont de Chauvière, spans the Artuby canyon in a single reinforced-concrete arch, just upstream from where the river joins the Verdon, more than 130 m above the water. Designed by the engineering firm Pelnard-Considère et Caquot, it was built from 1938 by the Nice contractor Thorrand et Cie, and carries the D 71 between Aiguines and Trigance.

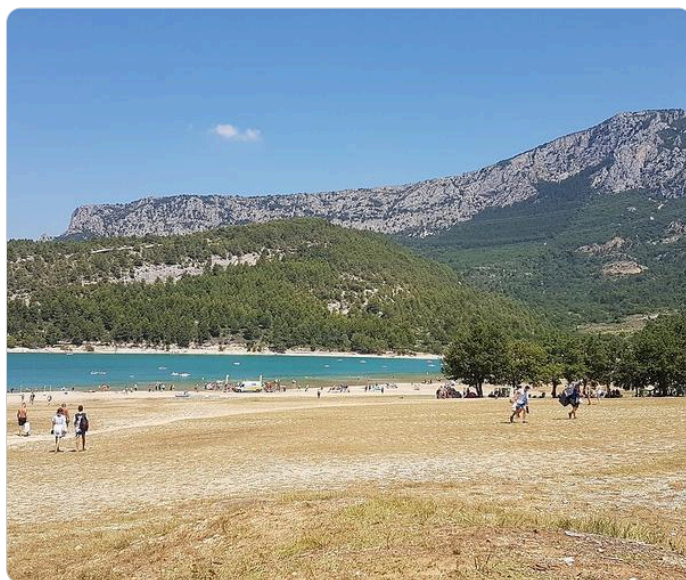
Upstream of the bridge begins the part of the canyon inside the Canjuers military camp. The bridge is the only crossing of the lower part of this wild canyon. It is used for bungee jumping.

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11 Aiguines

Village · km 126.5



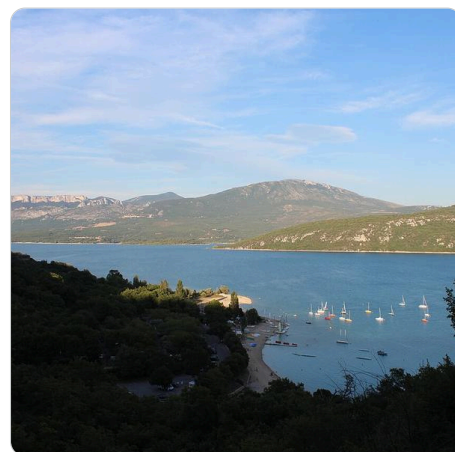
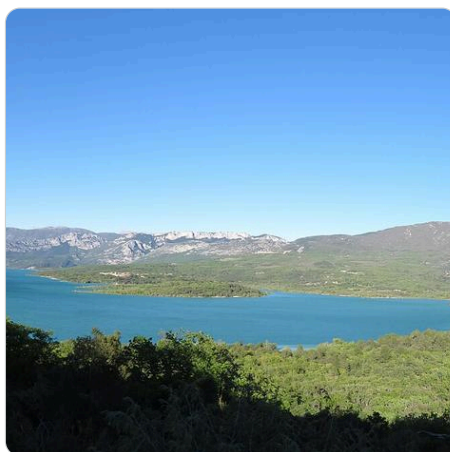
At the foot of the Grand Margès (1,576 m), Aiguines looks out over Lake Sainte-Croix and commands the way into the gorge; the Corniche Sublime comes out here. Held by the abbey of Saint-Victor in Marseille in the 11th century, the village later passed to the Baux, Blacas, Gauthier and Sabran families; its castle, now private, was rebuilt by Balthazar de Gauthier, lord of Aiguines from 1596 to 1641.

From the 16th century, wood turners settled here to work the boxwood of the nearby forests. Their nail-studded pétanque boules made the village prosperous until the 1920s, when the all-metal Intégrale boule appeared. A museum of wood turning occupies a former workshop.

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12 Lake Sainte-Croix

Lake · km 133.1



A reservoir formed by the Sainte-Croix dam, a concrete arch built from 1971 to 1974 in the Baudinard gorge, the lake covers about 2,200 ha, the fourth-largest reservoir in mainland France by area. The national electricity company, EDF, began filling it in August 1973; the final impoundment started on 15 November 1973. Only electric motors and sail are allowed on it.

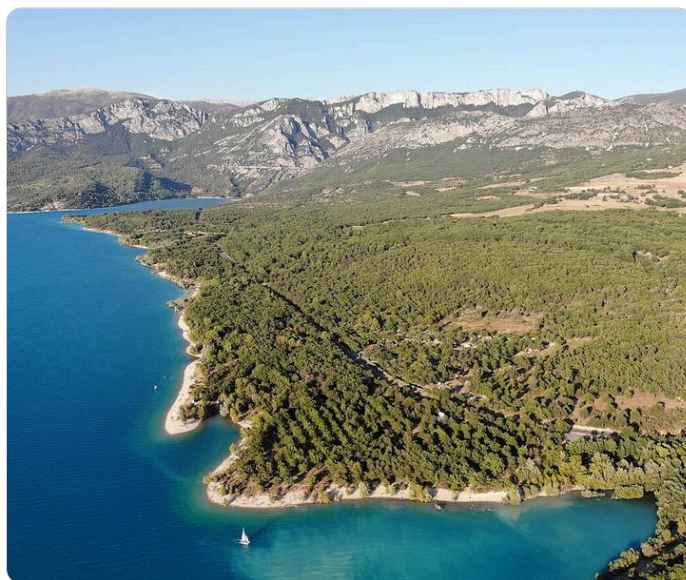
The idea of flooding the Les Salles valley was an old one: as early as 1908 Georges Clemenceau, then Prime Minister, travelled the Verdon by donkey, at a time when damming the river was already being considered. At the end of 1968 the planned water level was lowered to 482 m, and Les Salles-sur-Verdon remained the only village to be lost.

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13 Les Salles-sur-Verdon

Village · km 133.3



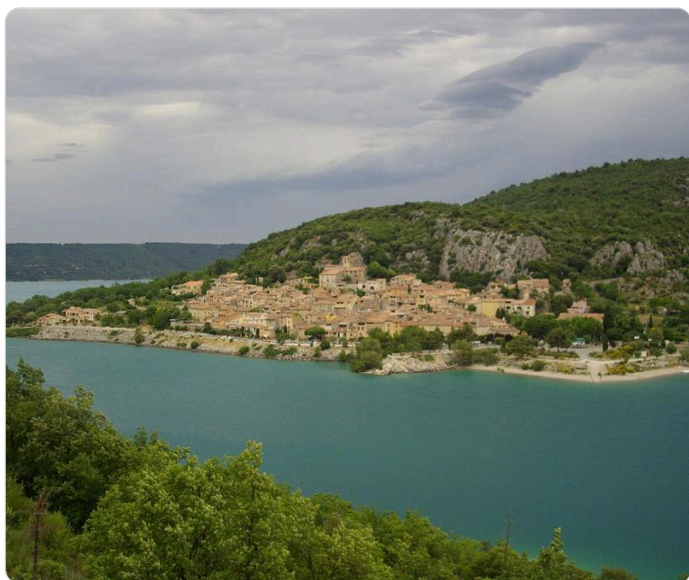
The old village of Les Salles lay at the bottom of the valley now under Lake Sainte-Croix. Early in 1973 all the vegetation in the valley was cleared, and by the end of the year the village looked as if it had been bombed; the houses were pulled down one by one and the cemetery was moved. At dawn on 1 March 1974 gendarmes evacuated the last inhabitants, and on 5 March the church was blown up.

The village was rebuilt higher up, on the shore of the reservoir. The bells of the old church hang in the tower of the new one; the fountain from the old square, taken down stone by stone, was rebuilt exactly as it was, and two wash houses were made from the stones of the old ones. A ten-stage history trail recalls the buildings of the lost village.

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14 Bauduen

Village · km 154.3



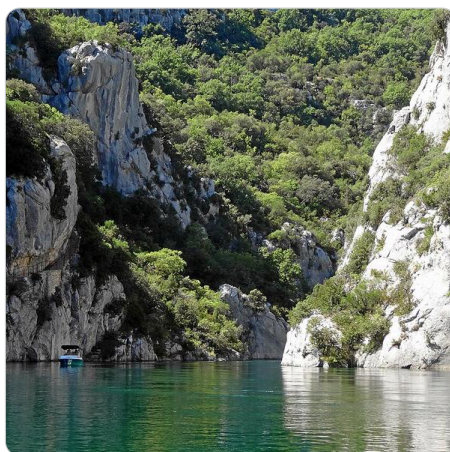
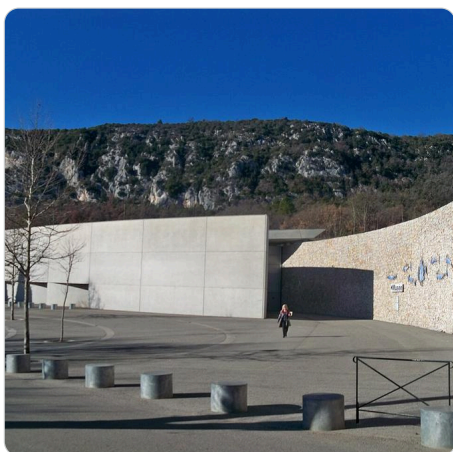
At 500 m, Bauduen lies between Lake Sainte-Croix and the steep edge of the Défens hill (736 m). In the Middle Ages the village, built in an arc, was fortified with ramparts, a watchtower and a castle; its parish church is dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul.

The first dam plan, for a lake up to the 500 m contour, would have drowned the village; Bauduen was saved at the end of 1968, when that level was lowered. The flooding did, however, cover the large karst spring of Fontaine-l'Évêque, near which a Neolithic burial cist had stood. The village was a setting for the television series *Le Mystère du lac*, shown in 2015.

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15 Quinson

Village · km 183.0



Between the Sainte-Croix and Esparron reservoirs, Quinson sits on a small alluvial plain 380 m up, hemmed in by high rock walls. Its boating centre is where kayaks and electric boats set off down the lower Verdon gorge towards Esparron. In that gorge, rock shelters known as baumes were used on and off for more than 400,000 years; the most important, the Baume Bonne, was excavated from 1957 to 1968 by Henry de Lumley.

The Museum of Prehistory of the Gorges du Verdon, designed by Norman Foster, opened on 28 April 2001: 120 m long, it is one of the largest prehistory museums in Europe. The present village moved down to the plain in 1419, when Yolande of Aragon allowed the villagers to build walls there.

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16 Gréoux-les-Bains

Town · km 210.0



The ancient name of Gréoux, *Nymphis Griselicis*, recalls its hot springs, the nymphs being the goddesses of springs. The Romans built baths here, and some of them, cut into the rock, survive in the town. Napoleon's sister Pauline Borghèse stayed here; today spa visitors and tourists bound for the gorge keep its hotels and shops busy.

Above the town, the so-called Templars' castle, which never belonged to them, is built round a rectangular courtyard, with parts from the 12th to the 17th century; a round tower and a square keep strengthen its walls. The lordship passed from the Knights Hospitaller to the Glandevès and then the d'Audiffred families. Marked for demolition in 1793, the castle escaped, and it has been a listed historic monument since 1840.

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