

PÉRIGORD NOIR
FAVOURITES ♥

A stroll around...

Montfort



THE HISTORY OF MONTFORT



You can approach Montfort from the east, by taking the Route du Château de Montfort, the D703, which winds through evergreen oaks, between the cliffs and the river. The castle appears, **perched on the cliff**, overlooking the Dordogne River. If you approach from the west, from Vitrac, you first see it above the small village nestled below.

The first mention of the castle appears in a letter from Pope Nicholas 1 to Assevarius, the abbot of Sarlat in 866, and then at the beginning of the 13th century during **the Albigensian Crusade against Cathar heretics**.

Montfort, belonged to the Viscount of Turenne. It was in a desirable, **strategic position**, overlooking the Dordogne, between the kingdom of France to the north, the county of Toulouse to the south-east and the English fiefdoms to the south-west. **It was owned by Bernard de Casnac and his wife**

Alix, sister of the powerful viscount of Turenne. They supported the Cathar faith practised in the County of Toulouse and were accused of serious atrocities against the Catholics. **In 1214 their castle was destroyed** by Simon de Montfort-l'Amaury who was fighting the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars, initiated by Pope Innocent III. All that remained of the castle were **the walls' foundations**.

From then on it was as if there was a tragic curse on Montfort as over the centuries, it was repeatedly built, destroyed and rebuilt again. **In the 13th century it was reconstructed by Marguerite de Turenne**, the wife of Pons, but was then demolished in 1309 and again in 1350 and was certainly in ruins after the **Hundred Years War** (1337-1453).

The family Brézé rebuilt it after 1450, but in 1481, Louis XI threatened to destroy it after Jacques de Brézé killed his wife, Charlotte de France, who was the king's half-sister.

In 1510 it was returned to the Turenne viscount by Antoine de la Tour d'Auvergne. **It survived the Wars of Religion relatively unscathed**, though it was taken over by Huguenot soldiers for a while.

At the beginning of the 17th century, it belonged to **Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne**, a protestant who supported Henri de Navarre. When Henri converted to Catholicism to enable him to become Henri IV, King of France, he was less generous with his favours, and some of his close followers committed acts of treason in the **Biron Conspiracy**. Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, who was viscount of Turenne, Duke of Bouillon and Prince of Sedan, acted against the king, who in retaliation partially destroyed the castle.





However, the King pardoned him in 1606 meaning he could reclaim his lands, save his life and the ongoing **demolition of the castle was halted**.

In the 1670s the château was sold to the Duke of Roquelaure, Marshall of France and governor of Guyenne (a province at the time in South-West France). Montfort was restored and Louis XIV promoted its title from lord to count. Louis XV bought the castle in 1741 and then sold it to the Duke of Noailles. During the Revolution the castle was **pillaged and damaged**. In 1804, the son of the Duke of Noailles sold it to the doctor at Montfort, François Chatemisse.

In 1905, Mr Pomarel, a descendant of the doctor was the new owner. He carried out numerous restoration works. He added on a **neo gothic tower** to the part of the building which had survived from the 17th century. The beginning of the 20th century saw the rebirth of Montfort, thanks to successive owners.

In 1916 it was bought by Jean Galmot, from Monpazier. He was MP for French Guiana where he fought for the **freedom of the local population**. He also considerably improved the life of the inhabitants of Montfort, by bringing water into the village.

Jean Mercier, Director of the Coalmines of France, was the new purchaser in 1921. He improved the château by adding on the **white tower**. It came from the ruined château of Chabannes, near Sorges, to the north of Périgueux. He added on a **corbelled turret and a narrow tower** to balance and bring to perfection the architecture we admire today.

The castle has been well maintained since the beginning of the 1980s, first by a Saudi businessman, Mr. Ghaith Pharaon and today, by his son Mr. Wael Pharaon. The owner has beautiful gardens, hidden behind the walls.

SOURCE MATERIAL :

- > Anaëlle VIALENS, who carried out historic research for the Montfort information panel in 2017.
- > Louis CONSTANT, "Le comté de Montfort", publisher Éditions et Librairie, Paris, around 1910.
- > Jean MAUBOURGUET, "Le château de Montfort et son étrange histoire", Bulletins de la Société d'Art et d'Histoire de Sarlat et du Périgord Noir, 1987, n° 30, p.61-64 et n° 31, p.93-97.
- > Anne BÉCHEAU, "Vitrac en Sarladais. Au fil du temps, au fil de l'eau", Les Amis de Vitrac, 2008.

PHOTO CREDITS :

- > Vitrac mayor (old post cards from their photo library)
- > Agence Urope (first and fourth on the cover)
- > Françoise Martinet

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D703



La Source

8

9

Rue des Remparts

Château de Montfort

Route du Château de Montfort

7

6

Rue Base

5

Rue Haute

4

3

D703

Chemin des Pêcheurs

La Dordogne

2

Route des Bruyères

WC

P

Parking

1

Route de la plage de Caudon

Chemin de Pech de Huet

- Main circuit
- Very steep
- Alternative route

CIRCUIT



➤ *Park at the Route des Bruyères car park.*

1 ROUTE DES BRUYÈRES CAR PARK

In the village, the best views of the **castle** are from the car park and the adjoining junction. From there you can admire the complexity of its architecture, reflecting its turbulent history.

➤ *Leave the car park, turn right onto the Chemin du Pech de Malet and turn left to go onto the grassy esplanade. Walk in the direction of La Roche Percée.*

2 LA ROCHE PERCÉE

MMontfort, on the **cliff**, dominates the Dordogne valley. The river, has cut through the **limestone** to create beautiful cliffs. Here, erosion has created the **Roche Percée**, an astonishing natural sculpture, with a window opening onto a vast landscape where the meander, called locally, **cingle**, encircles the fertile lands of the floodplain. The food crops of the past have been replaced little by little by walnut groves, flocks of geese and duck, maize, sunflowers and cereals. Périgord is the second region in France for **walnut production**. It is protected by the "Noix



du Périgord", Walnuts of Périgord PDO, Protected Designation of Origin label. Since the end of the 19th century, trees have grown back, making the countryside attractively green.

➤ *Turn round, go down the steps and turn right towards the village. At the junction, turn left onto Rue Basse.*

3 LA RUE BASSE

Montfort has been labelled a **Site Majeur d'Aquitaine**, and benefitted from funding for an important renovation programme of the public areas in 2012 and 2013, from Europe, the State, the Region, the Department and the castle's present owner, Wael Pharaon, who is very involved in the life of the village. The architect wanted to highlight the village by portraying the castle as a sun and the lanes as its rays. The village has been awarded a one flower "**Villes et Villages Fleuris**" label for its remarkable planting programme.

The village is defined by **three roads**: the rue des Remparts, the rue Haute underneath the château and the rue Basse, next to the fields.

Small, still existing **medieval lanes** run between the principal roads. As you walk along rue Basse up to the second lane on the right, you can spot old architectural features, **a curved corner of a house, a small corbel**. The medieval layout is now only partially visible. Abandoned houses have disappeared over time, opening up the village. From this road, it is possible to see some of the upper parts of the château.

➤ *Turn into the second lane on your right and walk up it.*

4 GOING UP THE SECOND LANE ON YOUR RIGHT



Going up the lane, you can see a medieval building on the left. Its age is shown by a **pointed arch** with

a bevelled edge, very common in the gothic period from the 13th century onwards. This arched window is very low, showing that the lanes are at a much higher level than they were in the Middle Ages.

> *You come out at rue Haute. Turn left.*

5 LA RUE HAUTE

Walk along rue Haute, past small **picturesque houses**, until you reach the second lane on the left. On the way you can see how the village has been modernised. A **contemporary building** has been built across a lane. Latrines, which are not visible from this road, are still there below and to the left of this passage.

> *Go down the second lane to the left.*

6 GOING DOWN A MEDIEVAL LANE

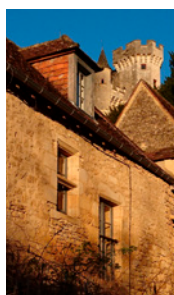


A group of medieval buildings are on the right side of the lane. The second house looks old. It was a small living space, common in the past, with a room on the first floor and an area for tools and animals on the ground floor. Its entrance door on the first floor is decorated by a **bevelled edge**.

The **adjacent house**, towards the bottom of the road, has an opening surrounded by an **eroded Gothic arch**. It looks as though it has been there for many centuries. This type of entrance existed in the 12th century. This suggests the village of Montfort has been here, under the protection of the castle, since at least the Middle Ages.

> *At the end of the lane you will come back to the rue Basse. Turn right.*

7 BACK IN RUE BASSE



Go north along rue Basse. There is a beautiful house with an internal courtyard, made possible by the disappearance of buildings. The next group of houses has windows decorated with **bevelled edges** and a **stone cross bar**. You may be

able to spot evidence of ancient lanes in private properties.

> *Continue along rue Basse until the chemin des Pêcheurs.*

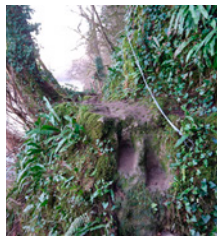
8 CHEMIN DES PÊCHEURS

> *Here the route is a path which is very steep, and can be slippery in wet weather. At the bottom you can either climb back the same way to the top, or continue. See 8bis.*

The chemin des Pêcheurs, Fishermen's Lane, takes you to the **spring** situated on the river bank, which used to be the village's water supply. The clear waters were also used for washing laundry. There is still the **small wash place**, dating from 1875. Some parts of the **old pump**, installed by Jean Galmot in 1919, are still there. Nearby the **Dordogne River** flows peacefully by. Until the end of the 19th century most merchandise was transported by this **river route in gabares, flat bottomed boats**. They were lively places. The boatmen called out for news and navigation advice. The cries of the living animals transported on board rang out down the valley. It was here the English crossed the river to take Montfort during the **Hundred Years War**. Today, it is the canoes which animate these shores during the high season. Fisherman also appreciate the river, which is classified Natura 2000, and where the salmon population has returned. In 2012, UNESCO designated it as the eleventh **Biosphere Reserve in the world**. It is the biggest in Europe. In summer it is very pleasant to swim in the river in the shade of the trees growing along its banks, or, if you prefer, a little further downstream, at the **Plage de Caudon**, with its famous rock.



8BIS ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TO POINT 1



Adventurous visitors can continue along the *chemin des Pêcheurs* **by the river** by using the two **foot supports carved** into the rock. The path takes you under the castle, along a route which is very steep and rocky in parts.

➤ To continue to point 9, turn back to climb up to the village.

At the end of the *chemin des Pêcheurs*, is the place where the **tap for Jean Galmot's water pump** was put, on the wall of the last house on the right, at the junction of the roads. It was the only place to get water in the village.

➤ Turn left onto the *rue des Remparts*.

9 RUE DES REMPARTS

The house on the left, just before the rampart walls, used to be a lively restaurant, much appreciated by the locals during the last century.

Next to it, along the ramparts, there are walled up **openings to old troglodytic dwellings**. The **rocky spur**, the castle is built on, is criss-crossed by natural galleries used in the past for commerce, animal shelters and meeting places, giving a very lively character to this road. During the 20th century, Mr Louis Lacombe, a wine maker at Montfort, used the first **gallery** as a cellar. On Sundays, people would come from Sarlat to buy "their quart" of wine, a small 55 litre barrel, called a *barricou* in the local Occitan language.

Further on, there is an abandoned **small boutique**, which was created in the rock with an arched entrance and serving shelf to the right. Then there is a small **sheep pen**, with a walled in entrance. Next there is **Gérard Auliac's workshop** (1948-2009). The famous artist and sculptor created his works in this cave. His work, **Le Badaud**, is known all over the world.



Le Badaud has been in Sarlat, since January 27, 2002, sitting opposite the huge door created by Jean Nouvel for the old Sainte-Marie church.

As you approach the entrance to the castle (closed to the public), you can see, on the rock, on the left, **traces where tools were sharpened**.

Next is the garden entrance to the castle. Continue to walk along by the walls. On the left, there is an old building with a small opening with **security bars in the form of a fish skeleton**. Before the construction of hydro-electric dams downstream on the Dordogne, fish were plentiful and were an important food source for the inhabitants.



Shortly afterwards, there are the remains of a **monumental gateway** from a church in Saint-Vaast de Béthune in Pas-de-Calais, which was destroyed during the First World War bombings. They were brought here by Jean Mercier, who was the owner of the castle from 1921 to 1944.

On the way to the car park, turn round to look back at this beautiful village, which is so peaceful today, in contrast to its very turbulent past.





NOT TO BE MISSED NEAR MONTFORT

- Romanesque church at Vitrac, Montfort is part of Vitrac
- The view point for the Montfort meander, on the D703 between Montfort and Carsac
- Canoe trip from Carsac to Vitrac, to admire the castle overlooking the river
- The Plage de Caudon, beach for cooling down and admiring the cliffs created by the river
- The beach at Vitrac Port, with recreational area
- Footpaths. Guides to walking circuits are available at the Sarlat, La Roque-Gageac and Beynac tourist offices
– Traces GPX at sarlat-tourisme.com :
 - **La boucle de Montfort** – 7.7 km, topo-fiche n°7
 - **La boucle de Marobert** – 7.1 km, topo-fiche n°8
- Map « Les châteaux de la Dordogne à vélo », bike circuit linking the cycle path from Sarlat to Cazoulès with La Roque Gageac, via Vitrac
- Map of walks IGN n°2036ET Sarlat Souillac, Vallée de la Dordogne
- Mobile telephone app itiAQUI with itineraries for walkers, bikes and on horseback

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DON'T HESITATE TO LEAVE
YOUR COMMENTS AFTER
YOUR VISIT TO MONTFORT

