

GOULT



La Maison de Village

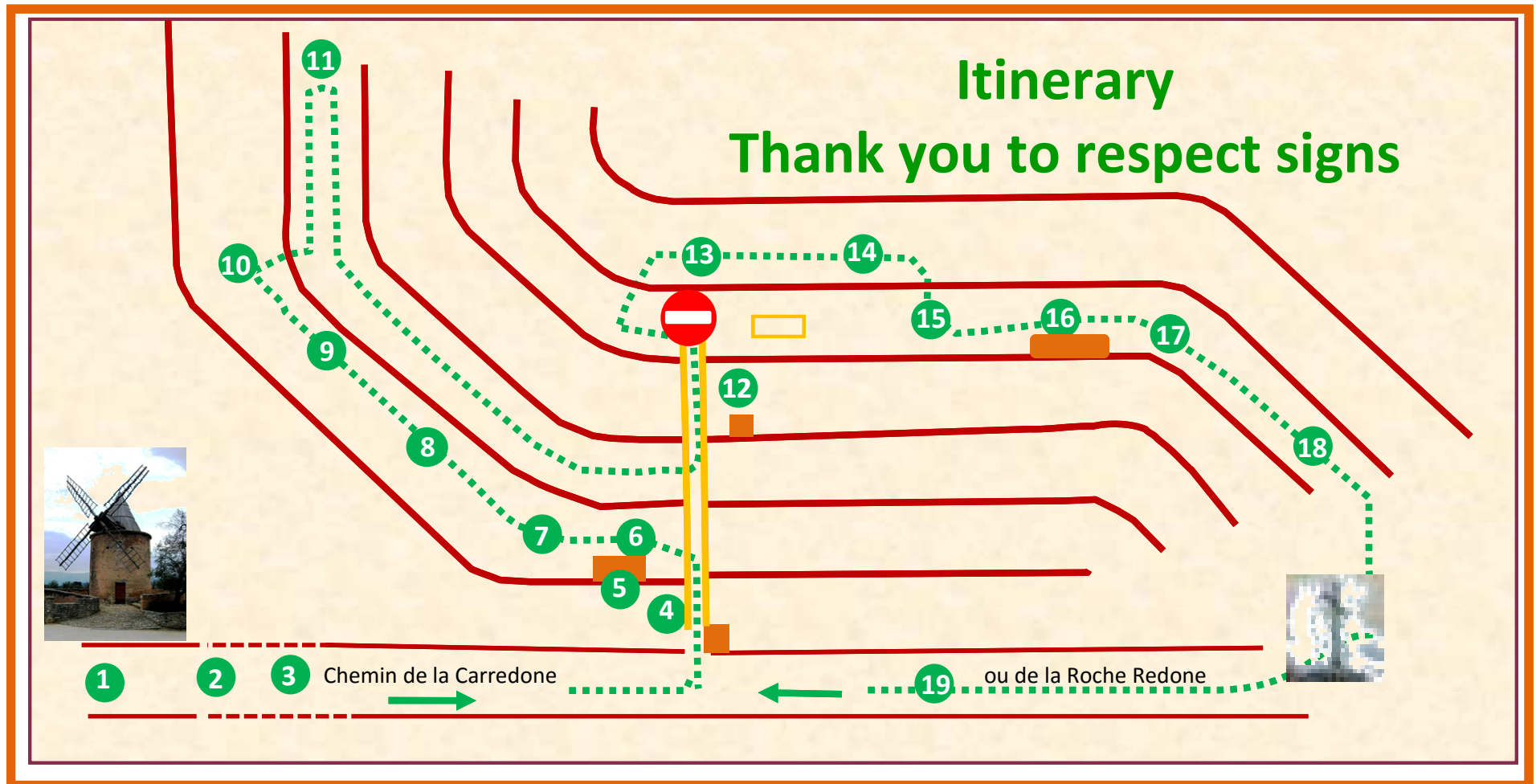
Rue de la République
84220 GOULT
www.goult.fr

VISIT THE
« CONSERVATOIRE
DES TERRASSES
DE CULTURES »



To get to the CONSERVATOIRE DES TERRASSES DE CULTURES

Take the "Rue de la République" as far as the "Porte à Herse du Château" (the former gateway to the old village), turn left up the "Jeu de Paume" and go on to the "Moulin de Jérusalem". Keep straight on along the "Chemin de la Roche Redonne" and then follow signs for "Visitez le Conservatoire des Terrasses de Cultures". Trail map: please follow the signs (blue).



Number 1 : a country road

The name Carredone (or Roche Redone) of the communal road evokes the rounded rock to which it leads. A former cart track, it is the main artery of the neighbourhood and gives access to the parcels of land.

Number 2 : the plants on the walls: lichens

Frequently what appears to be the colour of the stone is in fact a covering of plants. The most characteristic of these are lichens. They form a sort of crust in a variety of colours. Bigger plants also grow between the stones, such as little ferns and (flowering) succulents from the Crassulaceae family.

Number 3 : enclosure walls

The walls served two purposes, firstly to mark the boundaries of property in an area of intensive production and secondly to protect crops from sheep and goats.

Number 4 : the road

This road is private. It was only usable by pedestrians or at most a mule or a horse.

History

We know that dry stone construction techniques are prehistoric so it is difficult to date the creation of the terraces that were repeatedly abandoned and then cultivated according to the needs of the population. Certain sites, particularly wine-growing ones, were certainly developed in the Gallo-Roman period. Stones bearing a date are evidence that numerous terraces were rebuilt right up to the last quarter of the 19th century, a period which corresponded to a high demand for cultivable land as a result of

the growing population. In the interim, there were several cycles of abandonment and cultivation, but there is very little information prior to the 18th century. The last major period, which without a doubt saw more land developed and cultivated than any other part of France, was a relatively limited period, between 1750 and 1870. In the 20th century the First World War and rural depopulation were largely responsible for rural desertification and the abandonment of the hillsides.

Number 5 : the 'borie'

The uses of the current building have evolved over time. Originally built as a temporary lodging, it has been used as both a storage shed for stocking tools and as a seasonal stable. As you can see, the stones are laid horizontally, or better, lean slightly towards the outside (to stop water entering). The rows are joined together by the careful joining of the stones. Large slabs of stone, which distribute the weight evenly between the walls, were used to close the top of the construction. The building was thus made all the stronger for its heavy load.



Number 6 : you are now at the heart of the 'Conservatoire des Terrasses de Cultures de Gault'

Men had to modify the sloping land in order to expand their agriculture. Around the Mediterranean, due to the weather, the hilly countryside and the size of the population, this was a particularly prevalent custom. Terraces for crop cultivation represent the most advanced stage of these modifications, but they are not just simple walls, and their construction shows a considerable savoir-faire. The installation of this particularly intensive form of agriculture required an extremely complex organisation of the area and the use of numerous devices. Today there are multiple reasons, notably economic, which have led to the abandonment of these parcels of land that are now fast disappearing under the combined assaults of erosion and natural vegetation. However, these areas, so powerfully moulded by man, pose serious problems when their management is no longer assured. This 'Conservatory' is intended to bring to light the problems raised today by these open spaces and terraced landscapes and to enable experts to come up with proposals and suggestions to assist in solving them as part of the 'Programme Terrasses' in which the APARE (Association for Regional Protection and Action) participates. In 1988, this site was the result of 7 years of research and development.

Number 7 : beehives

Placed in niches like these, by taking advantage of the thermo-regulation provided by the wall, the bees could resume activity with the first warmth of spring without the hives taking up space on cultivable land.

Number 8 : the olive tree

Even if it has only really been developed since the 19th century, the olive has found its place in the Provençal landscape. On the terraces it is sheltered from the frosts to which it is sensitive. It is happy growing in the relatively poor, stony soil found on the hillsides and can live for thousands of years. Successive cold winters and economic misfortune in olive growing have, however, seen a reduction in the number of trees. After a century of regression, there are currently signs of a timid recovery in olive growing.

The olive tree is not always the only occupant of the land. There are also almond trees and, during difficult times, vegetables such as chickpeas, lentils, beans and salads might also be cultivated.



Number 9 : Pierriers (piles of rock debris)

The rocks extracted from the ground were primarily used for construction, those surplus to requirements were stocked in special places to avoid taking up valuable ground space.

Number 10 : the tops of the boundary walls

The top of the wall is normally particularly carefully constructed to ensure that the last row of stones stays in place. The technique of using flat standing stones one against the other is frequently used to mark the boundary of a property.

Number 11 : water tanks

Water is particularly precious in this dry land and everything possible was done to collect and store it. Here, a water tank dug into the rock enabled about 20 m² of water to be collected after heavy rain.

Number 12 : the little hut

This nice little spot was constructed as much for leisure as for work. This can be seen from the size of the window, exceptional for a construction of this type, the presence of a little garden marked out with stones and the presence and age of the trees, which were kept for shade.

Number 13 : construction techniques

Even though a special knack is needed, the basic technical principles are rather simple. Joined together with as little space as possible between them, the stones must be assembled in "boutisses" (their larger side through the depth of the wall), systematically alternating the ruptured joints, the stones are laid on one another, thinning the wall from its base to its top. Finally a

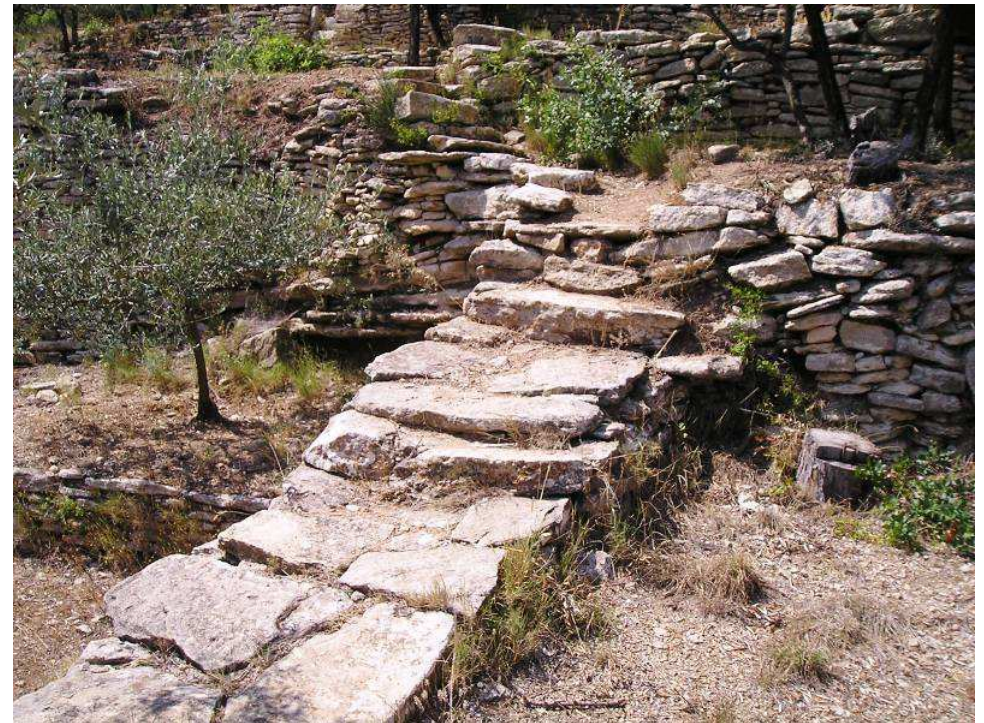
'drain' made of stones behind the facing is essential to ensure an even distribution of the pressure of the water.

Number 14 : relieving Arch

To fill up the gap in the rock here it was necessary to use the technique of a relieving arch, identical in principle to the arches in Romanesque cathedrals, which helps distribute the weight above.

Number 15 : Ramp

This ramp facilitated access from the Chemin de la Roche Redone on the crest of the hill. It was almost certainly able to accommodate a small cart. It is supported by two relieving arches (now blocked-up), the use of which has not been established.



Number 16 : flying steps

Numerous different types of steps gave access to all the terraces. The most spectacular are 'flying' steps, which are made up of long stones sticking out from the wall. Rather acrobatic, they are also irreparable if, as happens relatively often, a step breaks off.

Number 17 : the almond tree - 'Conservatory' for endangered varieties

Introduced into Provence in the 5th century, the almond is now an integral part of the Provençal landscape in the same way as the olive. Particularly well adapted to poor, stony land it was widely cultivated on Provençal terraces. The old varieties, the result of a long and patient selection by generations of farmers, are in regression and certain species are almost extinct. The number of plants cultivated was much greater than today. Many fruits, vegetables and cereals are in danger of extinction, whilst others have already completely disappeared. Another reason why it is essential to conserve these cultivars.

Number 18 : geology

The terraces were built with the stones available on site by excavation or simple quarrying. The molasse from the Miocene era, found here, is better known by the more general term of 'Pierre du Midi' and lends itself well to this type of construction due to the way it forms slabs of a relatively consistent thickness, thrown up by erosion or extracted with normal tools. This fallen block, too big to be eliminated, was used as a support for the walls and a small set of steps.

Number 19 : ground cover

Erosion by water or fire deteriorates the soil and eats away the hillsides. This has a direct influence on the composition of the ground cover which varies from forest type growth to bare rock with ever more flammable plants affording the soil less and less protection.

The abandonment of the terraces has resulted in the return of taller plants thanks to the soil being protected in the developed areas, whereas the un-developed slopes have seen their soil more or less carried away down the paths. This potential could be valorised by responsible exploitation, not least because, cultivated and maintained, the terraces have played and could continue to play, an important role in fire prevention.

Thanks for visiting us. Come back soon!