



VENTABREN



- A SHORT HISTORY.

SUMMARY

- *Etymology, The coat of arms , History of the village, The village and the castle , Queen Jeanne, The church, The priory of Ventabren, The hermitage, The windmill, The aqueduct, Frantz Mayor de Montricher, VENTABREN TODAY.*

♦ ETYMOLOGY

-> The name of Ventabren has been under discussion for many times; several origins have been suggested:

1. Ventabren could be linked to antiquity .It was written in Greek on one of the tombs which was discovered at the bottom of the village .It came from the celto-ligurian word “*Vinitouta*”.
2. “*Ventabrenum*” is the name given during the roman period to an important home which existed in the neighbourhood of Fons-Vicarri, Venta meant a place of residence and Bren meant head or chief . But it can also mean: exposed to winds, and here in Ventabren we count thirteen of them, from the great mistral to sirocco.
3. *Ventabrilum*: wind of the sea, seawinds.
4. The most probable derivation: Vent: the wind and Bren: to gather and thresh wheat so that the wind carries away the shell of the seed. The wind called the mistral and the wheat have been linked not only to the land but to the name of Ventabren as well since the introduction time of windmills by the Sarrazins.
5. The Larousse dictionary informs us that in 1145 the name of the village was written Ventabran and became *Ventabren* in 1154. The derivations comes from:

Vin't (celto-ligure): wind

Bren (gaulois): little mountain, steep rock.

But the most poetic name of the village is certainly “The Blue Hill”. This vivid expression was given because of the foliage of the olive trees which shimmered in the light and gave a blue sheen to the mountains. Today pine trees have supplanted many of the olive trees.

❖ THE COAT OF ARMS

Description: “From the blue to the top of the golden mountain
On a river of the same
To the chief counsel of the gueules.
Illuminated by a golden sunshine.

The coat of arms is supported by two olive branches.

Interpretation:

Beneath a radiant sun her high mountain reflects a golden hue .She is equally a wonder to be admired by the light of a clear, beautiful moon. Her blue sky is infiltrated at sunset by the shades of purple and pink lined clouds which signals the beginning of twilight. The Arc River is overflowing with savory fish whose scales glimmer in the water.

○ HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE

If we were way back in time, we would have met dinosaurs at the bottom of these mountains. They have found an overwhelming activity of giant animals in what was then only a marsh. Eight thousand years before Jesus Christ the “*Montadiens*” made their camp in Ventabren and formed one civilization called the Low Provence. The original site is found at “*The Beet Shelter*”, a place called “*The Planted*”. It was an enormous snailery of 20 meters long.

We cannot talk about Ventabren without mentioning “*Marius’ Camp*”, a vast roman camp which dates from 102 B. C. Traces of it are clearly seen on the plateau above the Roquefavour aqueduct. The fortifications, of which one wall is 600 meters long, protect the north side of the camp. The other sides have cliffs for natural defense. A trench 4 meters wide and 2.5 meters deep filled with hedgerow protected the access. They found at this location three observation towers. The camp was huge, it contains two legions of 6000 men each or 12000 men. In spite of the scrubbrush, the location of the tents is visible, it is distinguished by a rectangle outlined in rock; two roads intersect at right angles in the middle of the camp. In this same camp there were some archeological digs which allowed us to find the remains of a celto- ligurian site . Pieces of pottery and clay objects are on display at the museum.



⌘ THE VILLAGE AND THE CASTLE

In the tenth century, the village houses grouped themselves around the castle which was recently built. The Sarrasins devastated the villages forcing the residents to flee. People fled to the heights for security that they could no longer found on the plains.



Le château dit de la Reine Jeanne.

We can consider that the birth of the village of **Ventabren** was somewhere between 920 and 940. At that time William I, the Count of Provence, got rid of the Sarrazins for the last time, and distributed all the free lands to his friends. They in turn built fortified structures, **Ventabren's** castle was obviously one of it, and it was known as the royal castle. It was an imposing structure encircled by towers and ramparts and totally inaccessible from the down side. It is therefore most probable that the village was constructed at the exact location that it now is, during this time frame. It nestled itself as close as possible under the shelter of the castle. Numerous cellars still give testimony to the vestiges of their medieval past (pillars, ribbed vaults and vaults with an arch at the center). The fact that **Ventabren** was possessed by the lords was attested to in a document of Raymond Baux on 7 September 1170. The fortified castle was quite a defensive structure, its architecture was very simplistic. Its walls were constructed with choice materials and very thick. The interior was flanked with towers, some round, some square but all high. The castle has only one door on the top side, the other sides, built on rocks by pic were absolutely inaccessible. In the inside there were some cellars and an immense cistern. One could go down to the lower rooms by degrees (rock steps). A chapel was attached to the castle. The lords, the castle residents, had direct access to the chapel from their apartments.

& QUEEN JEANNE

Queen of Jerusalem and Sicily, countess of province, of forcalquier, and of Puymont, daughter of Charles, Duke of Calibre and granddaughter of Robert of Anjou became the Queen of Naples at 14 years old.

As the countess of Provence, all what she did was very appreciated by the population. Several times she united the states of Provence in order to decide of what measures would be

necessary for the defense of the country. From that time, the primitive castle took on a great importance.

In 1345 in Naples, Queen Jeanne had her husband Andre of Hungary assassinated by her lover and cousin, Louis Tarant. She then married her cousin but, in mortal danger, she left Naples for Provence near the end of 1347. Three ships, completely decorated with flags, ornaments, and gold entered in the port of Marseille where the whole city welcomed her on the quai. The houses were decorated with branches of boxwood and of Cyprus. The people played their fife and drums. The first consulate shouted: "in the name of all Marseille, oh illustrious queen, in the name of Arles, of Forcalquier, of Aix, of Avalon and of the Basque country, in the name Comte of Nice, Comtat Venaissin, of the Comte Sault, and Comte de Nice, we welcome you among us with joy.

Before her departure from Italy on 17 Feb 1347, Queen Jeanne named Fouque d'Agoult as the Senechal of Provence by proclamation. But she revoked him in 1349 to name Raymond of Baux.

In April 1349, she returned to Naples; defeated in Italy, she died in 1382 at the age of 58.

In 1381, her adopted son, Louis D'Anjou donated the castle to Bertrand Ajoult, member of a very powerful provencal family. Several families followed him with different levels of wealth in the possession of **Ventabren**.

In 1425, the castle became the property of the Qui Queran.

In 1472, it belongs to the Bardelins.

Then, in 1591 it went to the family Gaillard- Longjumeau who retained the lands that they had received from Henri IV; they were the last lords of **Ventabren**. From the beginning of the 18th century, they no longer lived in the castle but in the house "*La Baronne*".

In 1589, the castle was inhabited by De Vins, general of ligue.

The fortress stood firmly against time and war. In a private note it was stated that before the revolution, the towers remained intact. It was the public, who in 1794 initiated a certain Micoulin to destroy this castle "*which brought back such angry memories*." The inhabitants of the village at that time, whether out of interest or to repair their house or just fear, aided in the demolition of the castle.

Thus the traces of the lords of **Ventabren** disappeared. Aside from several picturesque episodes under the reign of Queen Jeanne, or at the time of league, the normal daily life in **Ventabren** continued calmly under the labor and work following the rhythm of the seasons.

In 1851, there were 327 houses in the village.

In 1857, 31 August exactly, we inaugurated the arrival of the railroad.

A banquet of 150 places was prepared; the inhabitants, who numbered 241, were farmers.

In the 19th century, **Ventabren** had several factories and plants.

1820: a factory that worked cooper

1830: a papermill

1857: a cleaner for sheet

1869: four mines

1890: six plants for producing olive oil

1924: electricity arrived to the village

■ THE CHURCH, PRIORY, AND THE ERMITAGE OF STE HONORAT

The chapel of the castle, after having served for long time as the parish church, disappeared except for one arch.. In spite of this, it was respected until 1800 because people made pilgrimages there on the 3rd of May to receive mass and to attend the old fraternity of the Holy Spiri.

Two bells constitute the belfry of **Ventabren**, one is inscribed with the date of 1539 (florencee). The other indicates that it has as a godfather the Barren of Longjemeau and as a godmother; his mother, the lady of **Ventabren**.

We owe to the abbey Dau, rector in 1875, the erection .of the statue of the Immaculate Conception at the end of the road which leads to the castle.



◆ THE CHURCH

In 1650 a chapel was built in the village in honor of the Mother of God. It was restored and enlarged during the 18th century and the new church held its first service in 1772.

It is also dedicated to St Denis (the saint who is venerated in all the wine countries and who gave himself to the pagan god Dyonisos).

22 August 1933, four treasures arrived and were baptized at the church.

Actually, they consisted of several valuable Art works, one of them is a primitive painting of Avignon's school, a 12th century wooden gilded alter table, and some 11th century baptismal fonts.



✕ THE PRIORY OF VENTABREN

In the middle ages the Priory was nothing more than a small house, it served as a parsonage to the priest who officiated at the castle chapel.

So the parish of Ventabren remained dependent on the Abbey of Montmajour near Arles for centuries. In order to govern the land and collect the tithes, the Parish placed parsonages in certain places which represented the Mother Church. They succeeded one another with regularity for long time; they even obtained by a law from the parlement the right to be called co-lords. But the history of the parsonages comes to close with the secularization of the Abbey of Montmajour.

The great works of the Priory were constructed toward the middle of the 17th century by Michel Borrilly, priest at Ventabren. Thus the entry of the Priory with the shield of the Borrily family dates from the reign of Louis XIII. It is situated at the corner of the road going up to the Priory and on the road to the Ermitage.

The will and testament which dates 12 January 1688, year of his death, contains among other dispositions, the following:

He willed to the Priory of Ventabren the house which he had built in said place adjoining his house.

He willed 3060 pounds to the commune of Ventabren with the desire that this sum would be used annually to marry five poor girls who were born and baptized in said place.

He will to the poor of Ventabren and to the poor of the surrounding country side, 1800 pounds which would be give oat by Marrot Baille from said place.

In the 19th century the priest who lived there salvaged several statues and tomb stones from the castle and installed them in the interior of the garden.

In the 20th century M. Bonnel, the new owner enlarged the house by annexing several houses. They were occupied by the Spanish workers who worked in the mine at Coudoux.



❑ THE ERMITAGE OF SAINT HONORAT

In the beginning the Ermitage Saint Honorat was a monastery, called cloisteral Priory. In 966 it was returned to the jurisdiction of the Abbey of Montmajour near Arles.

Devastated during the revolution, it became Louis D'Ailhaud's property in 1791, who was already owner of the Roquefavour domain; then Joseph Porre owned it, and wanted in 1819 to restore definitively the domain.

In 1926 Mark Fraissinet, industrial, shipowner and banker from Marseille, acquired the domain of Roquefavour. One day, the new owner went to visit the ermitage but found the door closed; he climbed to the highest place in order to see the general disposition of the old Priore. He noticed unsurprisingly a man dressed in a rob, who greeted him respectfully and showed him the back of his head.

The archbishop rented the ermitage to Mr Fraissinet until 1914; it is from that moment that it was abandoned and deteriorated.

THE WINDMILL

The windmill also has its history. Its first building must date back to the Sarrazins of whom the master of this domain was very well known. Then came a partial destruction, and after

some years a reconstruction and transformation into a windmill that would pump water to the village. Until that time, the village collected water only from the houses' roofs. Several of these still exist and the rain water was captured coming down roof tiles through a type of gutter system. Finally, when the pump system replaced the wind, the windmill was reconstructed in its present day form. Inside it sheltered the pumping system necessary to provide drinking water for the entire village.



❧ THE AQUEDUCT OF ROQUEFAVOUR

Contrary to what people think, the aqueduct of Roquefavour was not built by the Romans as the *Pont du Gard*, but to replenish the water supply to Marseille which had become a life and death issue for the town.

The construction work did not begin until 1843 because of deliberations which needed to be finalised first. This gigantic structure linked the two mountains. The project was based on the 4th July 1838 law authorizing the town of Marseille to receive 6 cu meters of water per person from the Durance river.

The *bridge* measures 82.5 meters in height , and is 375 meters long ; its foundations are from 9-10 meters deep. It is a gigantic structure where close to 5000 workers had the task of transporting, building and assembling the structure. At the time the technical procedures were rudimentary: preparation of the land, cutting stones and masonry work were done by hand.

300 rock cutters extracted rocks from neighbouring quarries at Mont-Ribas and from Collet-de Bourret near Velaux.

The *water* from the Arc serving the paper fabrication was used to move a hydraulic wheel which, by means of a cord passed through the throat of a pulley, lifted the carts which were

filled with rocks. It was an ingenious and cheap way to bring ten tons of material up to the workers who were at high levels.

The organization of all the lifting apparatus was ingeniously applied because none accident happened during the whole time of work, which was entirely completed in May 1947.

29 June 1947 the cementing was completed and 30 June 0300 the Durance crossed the Arc for the first time; 8 July water arrived in Saint- Antoine (neighborhood of Marseille).

Lamartine, while he was looking at the monument, in a moment of admiration wrote :

“the aqueduct of Roquefavour is one of the wonders of the world”.

Napoleon III then president of the republic visited it in 1852 and made officer of the legion of honor, Frantz de Montricher, ingeneer of bridges and highways, author of the project and director of the work.



FRANTZ MAYOR DE MONTRICHER

When **Maximin Consolat**, mayor of Marseille called him to do this job, **Frantz de Montricher** was only 26 years old.

Born on 19 april 1810, in Lully, in Switzerland, this gifted student entered the polytechnique at 16 years old before continuing brilliantly at the school for bridges and highways. He distinguished himself by his intelligence as well as by precocious common sense. Quite cultivated, he was at the same time a wonderful musician, a designer, a geologist and a passionate chemist. From 1835 he presented to the municipal counsel his drawings of a unique canal derived from the Durance that would provide Marseille with water it needed. His project; even though it was quite audacious for that time, was accepted. The aqueduct of Roquefavour became such an immediate success that a considerable amount of glory went to Montricher catapulting him into fame.

The city of Marseille, thankful to him, offered **Montricher** the directorship of all the public works projects. But in 1858 he left Marseille to supervise the work of drawing out the lake of Fucino in Italy. He contracted typhoid fever which carried him off at the age of 48. The city of Marseille chartered a steamship to return the body of the famous engineer so that he could be buried with honnors in the city.



L'aqueduc de Roquefavour.



Frantz Mayor de Montricher.



VENTABREN TODAY



Number of inhabitants: about 5000

Altitude: 238 meters

Area of the commune: 2850 hectares, bordered on the north by the autoroute A8 and on the south by :

The Arc River which empties into the Etang de Berre.

The commune originally was 3894 hectares, but in 1950 a part of the land has been used for another commune : Coudoux.

Ventabren is part of the canton of Pelissanne. It is 14 kilometers from Aix-en-Provence, 40 kilometers from Marseille and 14 kilometers from Berre.

Ventabren's inhabitants were mainly farmers and vinedressers.;

These two activities, though now more restricted, still have left the quiet residential village with a kind of charm. The village is spread towards the hills and the surrounding valley which has significantly changed its image.

NEAR THE VILLAGE

Beside the Roquefavour aqueduct, the windmill and Queen Jeanne's castle, **Ventabren** has other important attractions:

From the plateau of the cemetery, a magnificent view permits you to see on the horizon: the tower of Bouc, the sea over the canal of the Etang de Berre in Fos, the city of Martigues, the infrastructures of Fos, the plateau of Crau, the Camargue, the ridge of the Alpille, Mont Ventoux, the Luberon, the low Alps, the mountain St Victoire, the St Baume, the mountains of Allauch, the ridge of Etoile the summit of the islands of the golf of Marseille, the ridge of Estaque.

On this same plateau, which dominates the village, you will also find a protected, fragrant botanical garden of natural Mediterranean herbs and coniferous forest, a circuit which points out the different kinds of provincial flowers and an orientation chart.

On the route 64 which leaves the village going towards the *aqueduct*, a slope leads to the ruins of St Honorat Hermitage which belongs to the community of **Ventabren**. On the same road, you can find an ice house and an old oven.

On D10, in the direction of Aix-en-Provence on the left, you can find the domain of la Baronne, which is today a private property. It was the country house of **Ventabren's** lords. A wonderful 17th century rock fountain is located there. In the village, you can find many fountains and stone wash houses.

ASSOCIATIONS AND SERVICES

The community of **Ventabren** has numerous sports possibilities.

A sport park on the plateau of **Ventabren**, two tennis courts, a volleyball court, a soccer court, an archery range and a space for skate-boarders, for judoka and dance.....

In the village itself, there are two places to play petanque or boules, a game similar to our horseshoes, one below the post office and the other in the St Louis neighborhood. It has a mountain-biking trail up on the far south-east of the plateau, along the cemetery.

On the cultural level, the village offers: a library, a music school, a tourist office and a museum.

Community meetings are held in the three halls : the "*salle des fetes*", the "*salle ReineJeanne*" and the salle St Victoire.

The commune has a pre-school and a primary school; for the youngest there is a nursery. The "*SMIL.J*" club is where the young people of the village meet together.

The community has at least 25 very active associations ranging from sports to painting to culture, to social action, environment and youth....

Life in the village is supported by artists and commercial businesses

A lot of artists live in the commune, they are primarily in the building field: masons, plasterers, electricians, plumbers, architects, landscapers; painters.

Business people are also numerous: restaurants, bars, bakery, butchers, florists, dry cleaners, garages, a tabac, a video club, hair dressers, a super market.....

This list is of course not exhaustive

So, this is the legendary of Ventabren, which past will continue to shelter its soul of times gone by, in hopes and dreams will keep coming true as today. The village follows its past towards the future with a modern and prosperous agriculture, it continues to grow and renew itself. A tree whose branches are well developed and pruned, the old village becomes the shelter and the life-giving force that nurtures the new little seeds into beautiful fruit which ripens little by little under the warm golden sun and the blue bright sky of our Provence.



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