

# CAMIN ROMIEU: THE WAY TO ROME



In Occitan, Camin Romieu means the Way to Rome. In 313 AD, Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, granting all Roman citizens freedom of religion. Twenty years later, Christians from Aquitaine travelled to Rome, the Christian city in what still is the first known pilgrimage. As a result, the term Romieu became the generic word for pilgrims.

A section of the Camin Romieu is found in Aude, along with a section of the Camino de Santiago or Way of Saint James (Camin Sancti Jacobi).

Ancient trade (especially in metals,) took place along these routes, which led to the major Mediterranean ports of Béziers, Agde, Narbonne as well as to the Atlantic Ocean and its British trading posts.



Chapelle Saint-Symphorien d'Agel, Aude(II)

Source : Dossier de presse Camins 2019



## 1.The Roman Roads

Paul-Marie Duval - *Publications de l'École Française de Rome* Any 1989 116 pp. 739-756

The purposes and use of Gallo-Roman roads

Road building produced some stylistic variations. The official maximum width was 13 metres (approx. 43 feet) in a city and 5-8 metres (16-26 feet) in the countryside. And 6 metres (approx. 20 feet) seems to have been common. Pavements and cobblestones were reserved for cities and suburbs. And there were various designs:

- **Via**, built to carry two chariots, one travelling in each direction.
- **Yactus**, which was big-enough for one-way traffic.
- **Iter**, enough for pedestrians, people on horseback or litters.

These three official widths structured and organised the imperial network. In some cases there were dual carriageways and even enough room for three lanes of traffic with a sidewalk.

The variety of Gallic vehicles was equalled only by their remarkable quality.

Having lived in both plains and forests, Celts' nomadic lifestyles gave them superior skills as wheelwrights and coachbuilders. They were so good, the Romans borrowed almost all of their vehicles, and kept their names. The French word char (meaning wagon, and its derivatives: charrue - plough, charron - wheelwright, chariot - cart) comes from the Gaullish car-rus rather than the Latin currus. Charpente (framework) comes from the Gaullish carpen-tum: a four-wheeled cart topped with a structure, a kind of ancient mobile home.

The modern French slang word for car: bagnole comes from benne or banne, which in Gaulish was benna and meant a kind of two-wheeled car/cart. Petorri-tum, a four-wheeled vehicle, is a Celtic word.

The Via Aquitania is the most structured of the Roman roads (in France); so the Via Tolosana, later known as the Via Arelatensis (Way to Arles) or the Camin Romieu is indeed a Roman road.



## 2. Great European and French Pilgrim Routes

The Way to Rome ran through Arles and Saint Gilles, along with Saint Guillem le Désert and Toulouse, which all became major pilgrimage sites in the High Middle Ages.

The Codex Calixtinus written by Aimery Picaud in around 1140 is the very first pilgrim guidebook. It doesn't describe the itinerary as such, but it does recommend the holy places a pilgrim should visit.

After Arles and Saint Guilhem Le Désert, Aimery recommends visiting Saint Thibéry and Toulouse: you can see how travellers would have had to cross the Minervois region to reach these two destinations. Making it to Toulouse gave pilgrims the right to receive graces and indulgences, even if they were unable to continue to Santiago de Compostela.

## 3. The Camin Romieu in Aude

E. Griffe describes the Chemin Romieu or Saint James Way in Les Vieilles Routes du Pays Audois (The Old Roads of Aude):

The Chemin Romieu or Pilgrims Way

“Another, probably very ancient road lay to the North of the Roman Road (Via Aquitania). It connected Béziers directly to Castelnaudary, bypassing Narbonne and Carcassonne.”

In The Route of the Chemin Romieu, he clarifies: “The modern road from Béziers to Carcassonne follows the route of the Chemin Romieu from Béziers as far as Homps. So before arriving at the Cabezac Bridge near Bize, the ancient road would have gone slightly to the South of the current road: the land register still mentions it under the name Chemin Romieu.”



Capelle de Félines-Minervois, Aude(II)

Source : Dossier de presse Camins 2019

## 4. The Camin Romieu in the Minervois Region

Capestang: The Saint-Jacques Hospital symbolises the ravages of time. It has stood for longer than we know. And we do know that, from the mid 12th century, such institutions multiplied around Bize Minervois in order to welcome and help the poor. It must have been well-known to pilgrims heading to Santiago de Compostela. And it was particularly important in the 18th century. Malaria sprang out of the fetid waters of the étang, sowing desolation. Abnormally high death rates were truly shocking.

The Camin Romieu enters Aude at the Commandery of Preissan, near Ouveillan, and reaches Argeliers at the place known as Saint-Jaume (Saint James) near the Camin Romieu.

It continues to the Cabezac hospital (1327) where an area of the old Roman Road is mentioned in the land registry of the commune of Bize Minervois (romain is a deformation of the Occitan word romieu).



E. Griffe describes the Cabezac hospital: "... a papal bull signed by Pope John XXII on 5 December 1327 reveals that Cabezac was home to a hospital entrusted to the canons regular of Saint-Ruf of Valencia: *hospitale de cabessaco ordinis sancti augustini, Narbonen. Diocesis consuetum per canonicos Sancti Rufi gubernari Valentinen, dispositionem pertinens.*" This interesting text reveals the existence of one of the hospitals built on the Chemin Romieu, a place where pilgrims to Santiago could stop.

Shortly afterwards, the village of Pouzols-Minervois is home to 3 Romieu bridges registered on a way that shares the same name; the cemetery and church of Saint-Étienne, which were ruined by the Black Prince in 1355, and the Hospital de la Caritat, founded by the Knights Hospitaller (1142), who also established communities in Capestang and Homps; The Coq d'Or hostel on the Camin Romieu belonged to the Sire of Lathenay (1528). The leude (toll charged for travelling between the abbeys) had to be paid here (15th and 16th century land maps and compoix property registers show the Camin Romieu).

The Camin Romieu reached Homps: with its commandery and the Saint-Michel church and hospital built by the Knights Hospitaller.

Azille was a meeting place for pilgrims heading to Santiago de Compostela. It became the seat of a pilgrim brotherhood active into the 18th century and is home to the Saint-Jacques chapel (which contains two statues of the Saint, a pilgrim register, ceremonial staffs, a Santiago cross and an outdoor statue of the Saint).

The heptagonal church at Rieux-Minervois is a place to admire Santiago crosses, a real treasure; and a bust of Saint James.

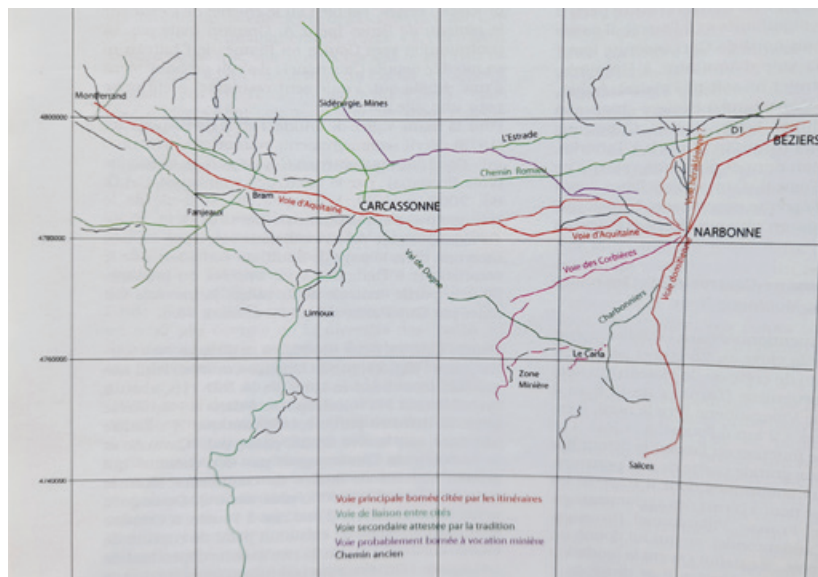
The Saint-Sauveur church in Peyriac-Minervois has a Saint-Jacques chapel once reserved for pilgrims. It's home to a statue of Saint James and an altar decorated with three shells that has been listed in France's national register of Historic Monuments. Peyriac-Minervois was also the seat of a Santiago pilgrim brotherhood with connections to the hospital at Douzens.

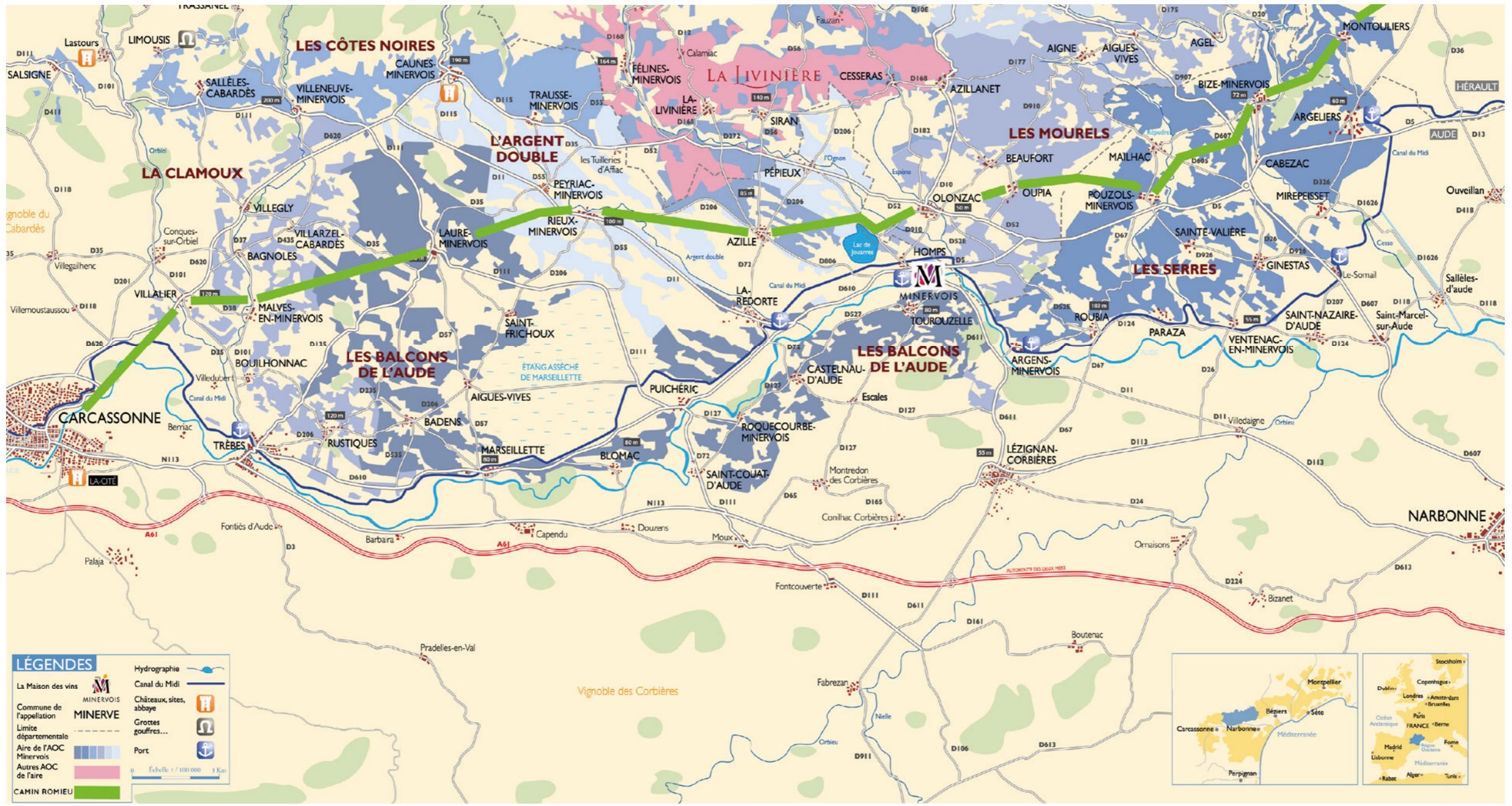
Laure Minervois has a section of road registered as the Chemin des Romieux in the land register: and its Saint-Jacques d'Albas estate is home to a chapel.





Source : Archives départementales





Source : Dossier de presse Camins 2019



The Camin Romieu continues through the villages of Saint Frichoux, Malves en Minervois, Villalier and Villedubert.

Sources: Association CAMINS – 4 rue des écoles - 11 120 SAINT VALIERE

To find out more and discover the work and events organised by the association, please contact Bernard Cauquil on +33 (0)6 33 49 07 73 or [caminsminervois@orange.fr](mailto:caminsminervois@orange.fr)



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