



Information about the mountain	
Name of the mountain	Canigó
Country	France
Region	Occitanie – Pyrénées Méditerranée
Altitude	2.784 m
Surface area	105.652 hectares
Surface of protected area	23.212 hectares
Name of local organization in charge of management	Syndicat Mixte Canigó Grand Site
Number of municipalities	64
Institutional recognition	<b><i>Institutional Recognition for Natural and Landscape Heritage:</i></b> 1 x Grand Site of France certification 3 x Regional Natural Park of the Pyrénées Catalanes 2 x National Nature Reserves <b><i>Institutional Recognition for Cultural Heritage (various certifications):</i></b> 1 x Unesco world military heritage 3 x « Plus beaux villages de France » (Most beautiful villages of France) 2 x « Villes et Pays d’Art et d’Histoire » (Cities and land of Art and History) 1 x « Ville et Métiers d’Art » certification (City and Crafts) <b><i>The massif holds a multitude of other labels or recognitions</i></b> among which 9 Natura 2000 sites, 1 Directed Biological Reserve, 99 Listed or registered historical monuments, 2 Parks and gardens of France, ...
	
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# Canigó

Come to wander in this  
spiritual and mythical landscape:  
allow this mountain to revitalise  
you with its story.

Standing out in the Pyrenees, the Canigó is an imposing presence. From Marseille to Barcelona, it catches your eye like a Mediterranean beacon. Its outstanding landscape, its rich heritage and biotic wealth, its geological history (natural and human), make it a site of premiere ranking. This iconic mountain is also known as “the sacred mountain of the Catalans”. The popular “Wall of Legends” described over the centuries by scholars, researchers and poets around this mystical place, explains the symbolic power and the fascination it still holds today over the people. Each landscape element refers to history myths and verbal memory, which have been re-interpreted and passed from generation to generation. The Canigó is a reminder of the historical brotherhood between Catalans on both sides of the frontier. They celebrate this each year on Sant Joan’s day with the festive tradition: «the flame of Canigó».



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### Proud Local People

Located by the coast, Canigó is the compass of Catalans and historically of seafarers. The Canigó lives in people. It brings together the inhabitants and the whole Catalan people beyond borders: they venerate it as their sacred mountain, a fundamental part of their identity. This pride is expressed when singing the hymn “Muntanyes regalades” or when sharing the flame of Canigó” to light many villages fires on the summer solstice night of Sant Joan. This fervour has consistently mobilized local groups to stop development projects with negative impacts for the mountain such as: a ski resort, a cross valleys road, the installation of a very high voltage line that was to cross the full massif.

### Reputation

The Canigó massif is a natural, cultural and landscape monument certified Grand Site de France. Its imposing silhouette emphasized by its location between the sea and the mass of Pyrenees explains the symbolic fascination it still exerts today and provides bio geographic crossroads of international scientific interest: geographers, geologists and botanists have studied this world-famous example of altitudinal distribution of plant species in a Mediterranean mountain as defined by H. Gaussen. It is also distinguished for the wealth of prestigious traces left by men’s activities and beliefs (great Romanesque abbeys, Unesco world military heritage...) and its lively intangible cultural heritage.

### Legends and Myths

Over the centuries the Canigó has inspired many myths and legends that provide a collective heritage of great value. Some tales relate to emblematic massif places linked to the action of biblical or historical figures, local saints: Noah tied his Ark on the Crest of Barbet, Peter the Great would have found a dragon in the waters of the Estanyol lake whilst ascending the Canigó ... Many stories include symbols of Pagan tradition: witches, water, bears, fire (the summer solstice “Sant Joan” festival reunites Catalans from all villages to light the flame on top of Canigó before disseminating it through the territory), semiotes (Romanesque art creatures), blood and gold as seen on the Catalan Flag.

### Power of Inspiration

The Canigó continues to inspire many artists from various disciplines. Their works consider this mountain as a special place embodying the identity of an entire people: it has become the sacred mountain of the Catalan people. Its literary fame started with the unmissable epic poem Canigó (1886) of Jacint Verdaguer during the Catalan cultural “Renaixença”, is now completed with texts from Josep-Sebastià Pons, Albert Saisset, Alain Taurinyà but also Rudyard Kipling. There are echoes of this omnipresent mountain in songs: from the popular “Muntanyes regalades” to the lyrics of Jordi Barre... Painters and photographers have also pictured Canigó from all angles: Juan Gris, Herblain, Desnoyer.

### Mediterranean Cultural Identity

The expression “Mar I munt” (“Sea and mountain”) summarises perfectly the special mix that Canigó forms by uniting the Pyrenean mountain range to the Mediterranean Sea. This very rich mix is present on both sides of the border. The diversity of landscape elements (low and upper valleys, foothills...) ensures an extremely diverse vegetal and meat production which combined with fishing results in an outstanding and unique Mediterranean gastronomic identity. This generous abundance is also reflected on the open character of local people, with strong values of respect and solidarity. Thus, they were prompt to welcome many refugees during the Spanish civil war, including the musician Pau Casals.

### Picturesque Landscape

Located just 50 km from the sea shore, the Canigó is often compared to a beacon visible from distant points in the Mediterranean. This natural monument offers a sumptuous snowy backdrop to a rich variety of marine, arboreal and wine landscapes that provide many local people with a sense of belonging and exert an irresistible power of attraction over visitors. These landscape entities and contrasting geological units, offer numerous natural resources and minerals (iron, talc, marble, gold...) which exploitation enabled miners, shepherds and smugglers to thrive until last century. Distinguished as “Grand Site De France”, this landscape has becoming central to the territory structuring projects.

### Sustainability and Anthropogenic Environment

This massif territory bears traces of human activities through time: orris (shepherds dry stones shelters), mining vestiges (galleries, roasting ovens, railways, overhead wires, hoppers...), man-made walled terraces to cultivate on slopes, water canals... With the rural exodus, the forest was regenerated, this exceptional massif was listed and certified “Grand Site de France” for the innovative way of addressing key issues: reduction of motorized access to the classified site, more sustainable redirection of visitor flows... This current landscape balance remains vulnerable to natural and climatic hazards (floods, landslides, geological fragility...) and to the negative impacts of human interventions.

### Particular Ecosystem

With its exceptional location between the sea and the Pyrenees the Canigó creates bio geographic crossroads resulting in strong contrasts across the landscape. Under the combined effect of substrate, altitude, orientation, climate and hydrology, living dynamics are expressed on the Canigó massif through five large floors/level of vegetation: alpine, sub-alpine, mountain, supra and meso Mediterranean. The rich flora includes 11 protected, many rare and 30 endemic species. Protected wildlife includes 125 species of birds and 17 of mammals. This biological diversity explains the wealth of environmental management schemes or protective measures (Natura 2000, Nature reserves, Regional Park...).

### Historic Places

Occupied since prehistoric times (dolmen), exploited by the Romans for its minerals, the Canigó became an overcrowded hideaway where several masterpieces of the European religious Romanesque art were produced and beautifully preserved, despite religious war and French revolution (abbeys of Saint-Michel -de-Cuixa, Saint-Martin-du-Canigó, Serrabona Priory...). With the Pyrenees Treaty signed in 1659, Roussillon was attached to France and Marshal Vauban modernised its impressive network of fortifications (walls of Villefranche-de-Conflent and Prats-de-Mollo, Fort of Bellegarde...). The massif shows also vestiges of its 19thc economic development in tourism, hydrotherapy and metallurgical industry.