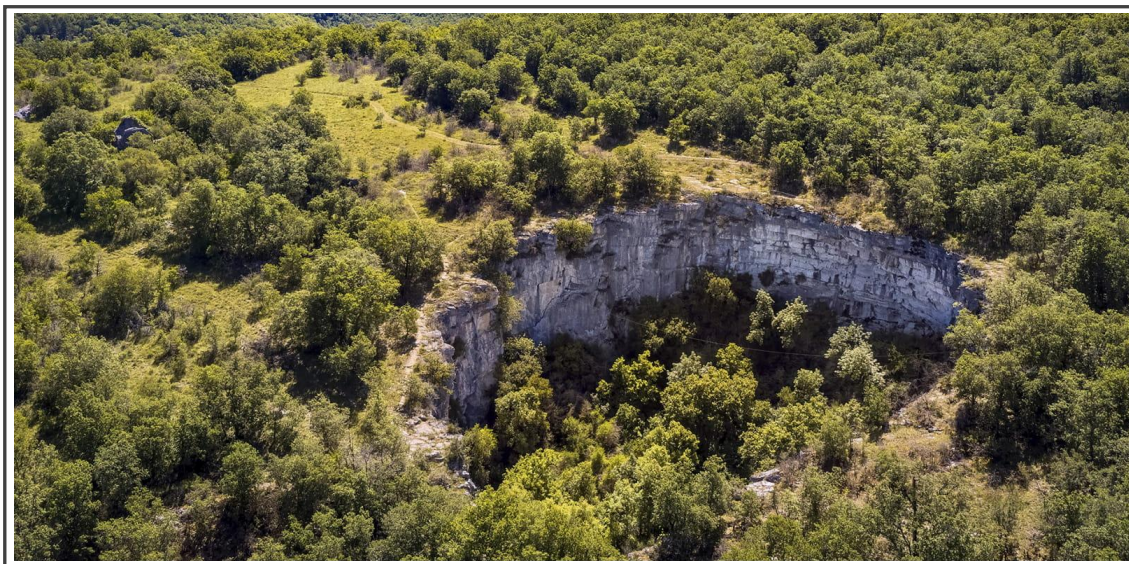


Jurassic limestone plateaus, medieval villages and delicious cheeses and wines: a stroll through the Causses du Quercy (Lot Department – France)

R. Oyarzun, P. Cubas, J.J. Ménard, F. Ménard, F. Oyarzún & K. Cortés

Aula2pontonet – 2025



Karst landscape in the Jurassic limestones of the Causses du Quercy Regional Natural Park, and also a UNESCO Global Geopark since 2017. Karstic path of the Igue de Crégols (Parc naturel régional des Causses du Quercy - Unesco Global Geopark, 2025); an igue is a natural cavity excavated in the limestone by runoff water, which is geologically known as a doline.

The Lot Department

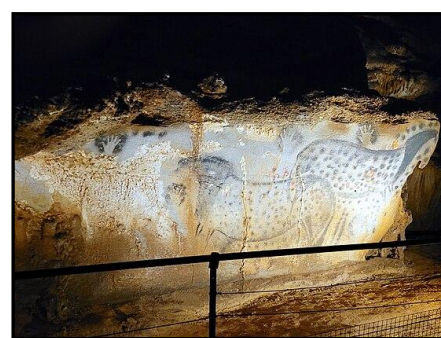
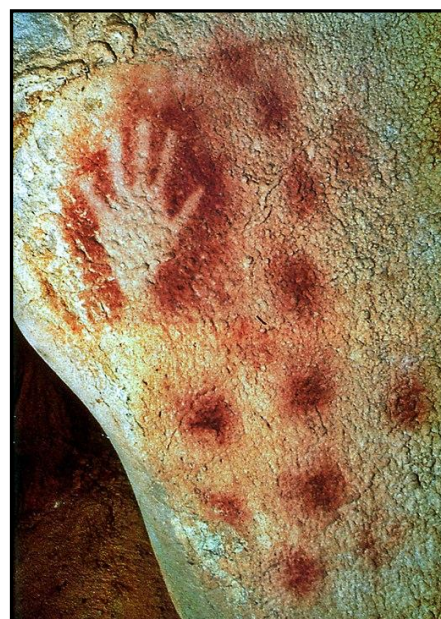
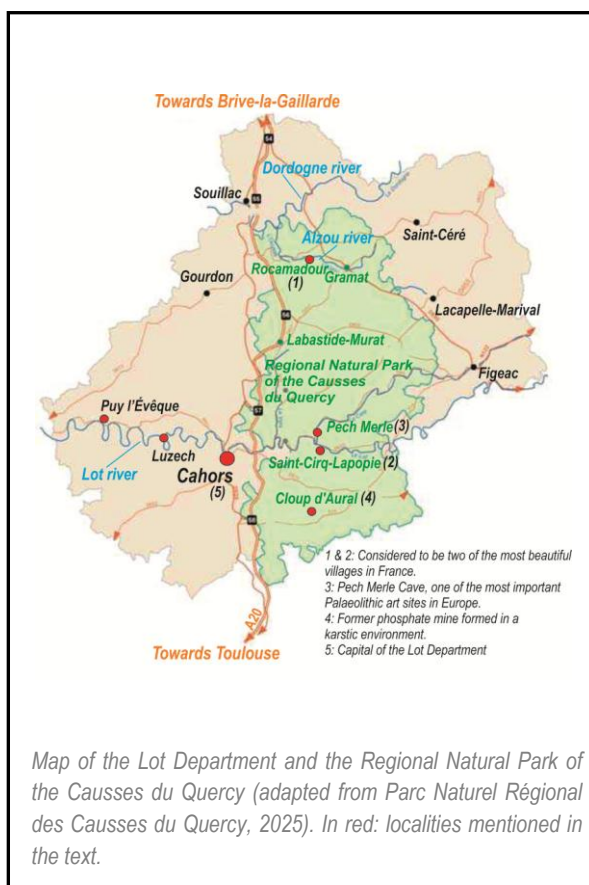
The Lot Department is located in the southwest of France and owes its name to the river Lot, with Cahors being the largest city and economic centre of the department. The Department was created in 1790 during the French Revolution, from the former province of Quercy (Wikipédia, 2025a).

The department hosts the Causses du Quercy Regional Nature Park, a UNESCO Global Geopark since 1 May 2017 (Cahors Vallée du Lot, 2025a).

But what are the causses? The causses are a group of limestone plateaus, valleys and gorges located to the southwest of the French Massif Central. The term is derived from the Latin (*calcinus*: *calcareous*). Their altitude ranges from 700 m to 1200 m, making them a medium-range calcareous mountainous environment (Wikipédia, 2025b).



The Causses du Quercy Park has numerous anthropological and palaeontological sites, such as the Cave of Pech Merle, one of the most famous in France and Europe. It is an ornate cave located in the municipality of Cabrerets, which opens up in a hill (*pech* in *Occitan*) that dominates the Sagne and Célé valleys. Cave paintings have been found there dating from the Gravettian period (*Upper Palaeolithic*) to the Magdalenian (*the last archaeological culture of the Upper Palaeolithic*) (Wikipédia, 2025c).



Artistic works in the Cave of Pech Merle. Above, hand and dots; below, spotted horses. The cave is considered a historical monument of France and represents one of the most important sites of Palaeolithic art in Europe. (Wikipédia, 2025c).

The area is rich in cliffs, ledges and shelters that bear witness to a long history of human activity still present in the region. There are also numerous dolmens, burial mounds, Gallo-Roman roads and even an aqueduct in Vers (Cahors Vallée du Lot, 2025a).

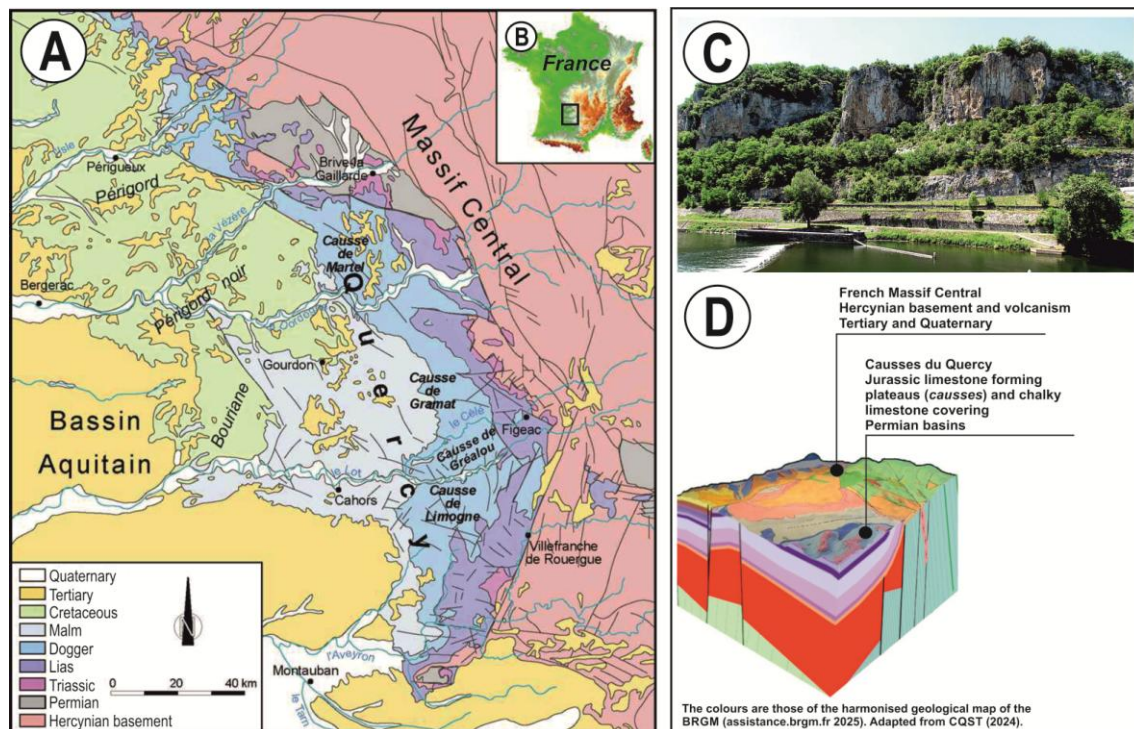
At this point we would like to recommend an excellent field guide that deals with most of these topics in modern language and with excellent images. We are referring to the work of Thierry Pélissié et al. (2019) *Causses du Quercy*, published by Omniscience, 240 pp.

This guide is an invitation to discover the department and the Causses du Quercy Regional Nature Park through the originality of its geology. The book teaches us how to read the landscape, its relief, its rocks, its vegetation, and how to decipher the traces of its history.

We also recommend visiting the excellent Cahors Vallée du Lot (2025a) website about the Geopark, with all kinds of information for visitors:

<https://www.cahorsvalleedulot.com/es/explorer/decouvrir-les-lieux-emblemiques/les-causses-du-quercy/>

To understand the formation of the limestones that make up the plateaus (*Causses du Quercy*) we have to refer to the tectonic and sedimentary evolution of the region. As in the case of Iberia, it all began with the collapse and erosion of the Hercynian (*Variscan*) basement, the French Massif Central in the case in question and the Iberian Massif in the case of Spain and Portugal (e.g. *Doblas et al.*, 1994).

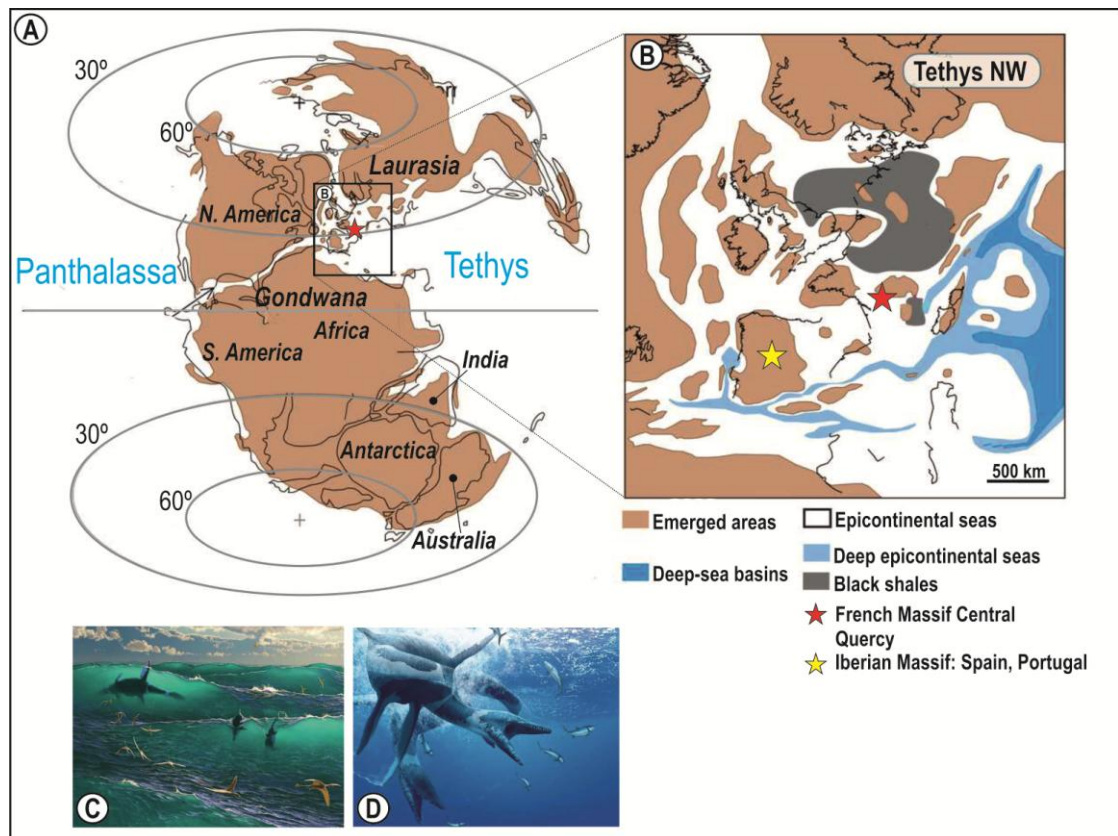


A: Regional geology of the Causses du Quercy. Adapted from Astruc et al. (2008). B: Location of the main map. C: Jurassic limestone cliffs facing the Lot river (Image: Jojob.47, 2015). D: 3D-model of a part of the Lot region; rock types are shown on the model surface and at depth (up to 2000 m). The area depicted is a 16 x 16 km square on the surface. Adapted from CQST (2024).

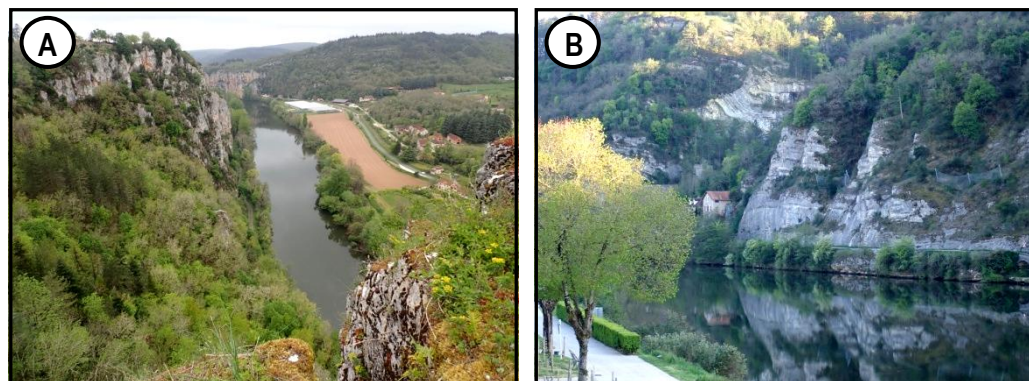
Similar to the case of Iberia, the Alpine Tectonic Cycle of France (*during which the Causses du Quercy were formed*) must be understood as an extensional thinning during the Permian of a compressively thickened continental crust towards the end of the Hercynian Tectonic Cycle. This extension continued until the Triassic, giving rise at that time to the development of a new tectonic cycle, the Alpine Cycle.

A bit of geological history (Pélissié et al., 2019)

- During the Permian, large subsiding basins were formed where a sedimentary fill of up to 4000 m was formed, and although they do not outcrop in the region (*because they are covered by the limestone plateaus*), the sandstones and red clays that were deposited there indicate that the humid tropical climate of the time strongly oxidised the iron they contained.
- During the Triassic, torrential water courses brought more sediments from the Hercynian chain in the form of sands, gravels and blocks.
- During the Jurassic a large extensional episode begins in this part of Europe. The sea progressively covers the eroded Hercynian chain with a dominant clay sedimentation. The Central Atlantic Ocean begins to open up (e.g. *Oyarzun et al.*, 1997) and the Tethyan Sea begins to form in the east. The climate is very warm and large quantities of carbonate sediments accumulate, which will later form the large limestone plateaus of the Causses du Quercy.



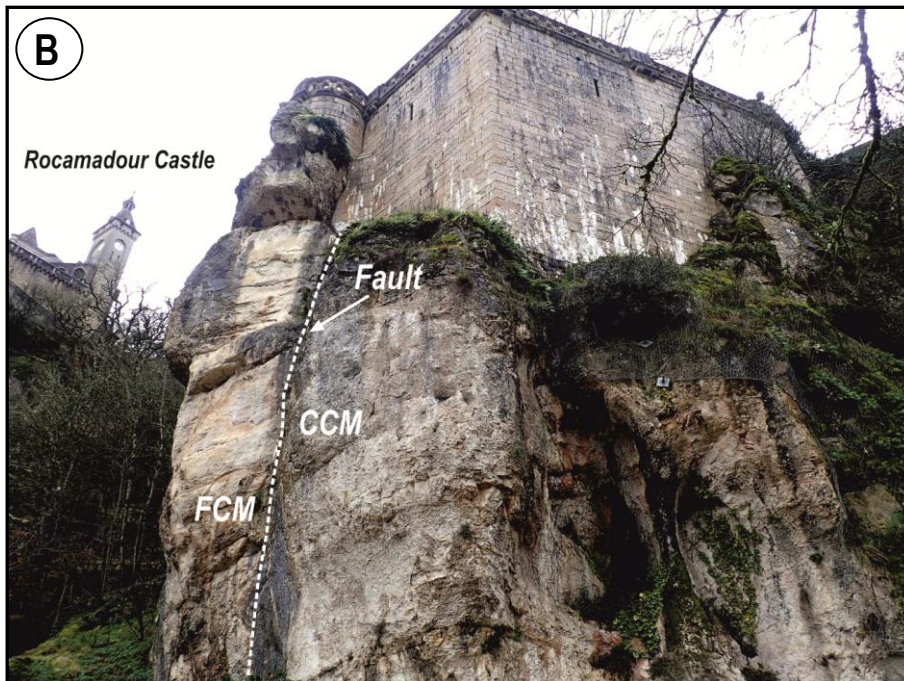
A: The seas of Tethys and Pantalassa, marine basins, and Jurassic landforms. Lower B: Detail of the previous one. Images adapted and slightly modified from Jattiot et al. (2024). C and D: Marine fauna in Tethys times, mainly plesiosaurs in the images (adapted from Smithsonian, 2019).



Upper Jurassic (Malm) limestone cliffs in the vicinity of Saint-Cirq-Lapopie (A) and Cahors (B). The river observed in both cases is the Lot. Images: P. Cubas.

- During the Middle Jurassic, Quercy is located in a littoral zone and oscillates between beaches, mangroves and lagoons. Sedimentation becomes more marine and homogeneous during the Upper Jurassic.
- Towards the end of this period, the northern edge of Aquitaine rises and the sea gradually recedes while the beaches are home to dinosaurs and pterosaurs. The uplift will eventually lead to the erosion of part of the Jurassic carbonate materials.
- This situation continued until the Late Cretaceous when the basin sank again, once more facilitating the formation of limestones, although they are more detrital and richer in phosphates, which in some cases gave rise to phosphate beds. This continued until about 70 Ma ago, when the sea retreated definitively.

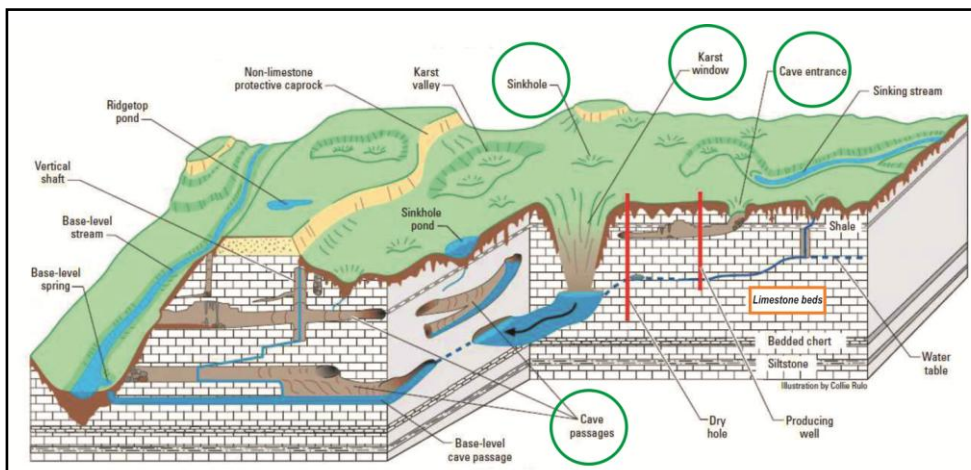
- During the Eocene (50 Ma) there was a continental collision between Iberia and the Indo-European plate, the most notable consequence of which was the formation of the Pyrenees, while further north the limestone platforms were folded and faulted.



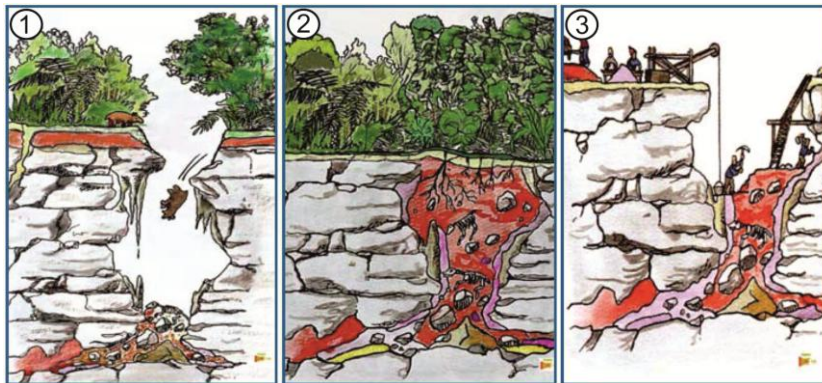
Folding (A) and vertical faulting (B) in limestones at Cahors and Rocamadour respectively. The fault brings fine carbonate materials (FCM) into contact with coarse carbonate materials (CCM). Images: P. Cubas.

Two stages of karstification and formation of the Quercy phosphates

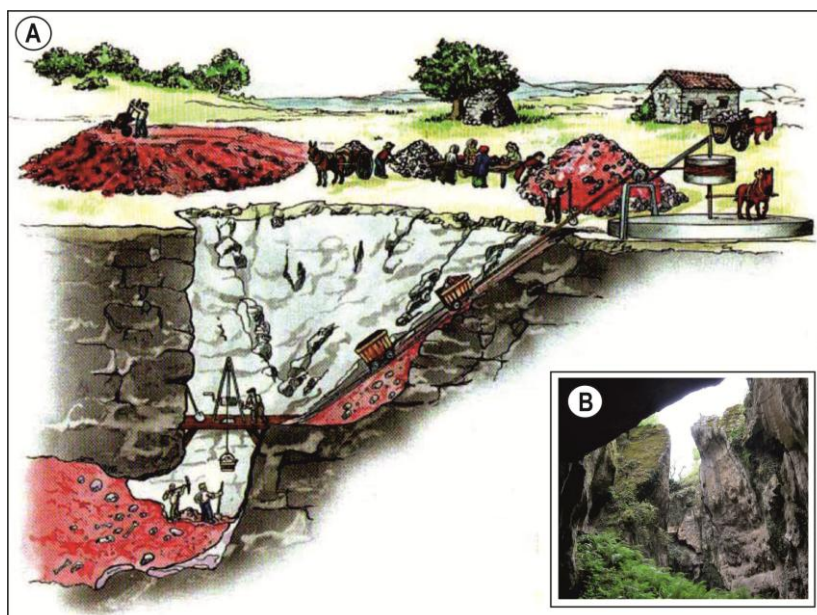
Subsequently to the aforementioned, the Quercy karst was generated during Paleocene-Eocene, and the cavities were later sealed by phosphate-rich clays, containing thousands of fossils in perfect condition (Global Geoparks Network, 2015). Phosphorite is a chemical sedimentary rock that contains high quantities of phosphate minerals (15-20%); the phosphate is present as fluorapatite, $\text{Ca}_5(\text{PO}_4)_3\text{F}$, in cryptocrystalline masses, although it can also appear as hydroxyapatite, $\text{Ca}_5(\text{PO}_4)_3\text{OH}$ (Wikipedia, 2025d). The most famous of the karstic manifestations of phosphorites in Quercy is the Cloup d'Aural.



Physiographic and hydrologic features typical of a well-developed karst terrane (adapted from Taylor & Greene, 2008). **Green circles:** typical features found in the Quercy region. **Sinkhole, doline:** Doline is a word of Slovenian origin meaning valley or depression and refers to a special type of geological depression characteristic of karst relief (Wikipedia, 2025e). **Pit hole, karst window:** A cavity in limestone rock, which opens to the outside through a well, vertical or steeply sloping channel, caused by a karstic dissolution process or collapse of the roof of a cavity, through which water filters to lower levels. It is usually the degeneration of a sinkhole (Wikipedia, 2025f).



Formation process of the Quercy phosphate deposits (adapted from Pélissié, 2025). 1: Filling of a karst cavity with phosphates (red layer) and dead animals; 2: Silting up of the cavity; 3: Mining (19th century).



A: Diagram of the operation of an old phosphate mine in Quercy. B: Le Cloup d'Aural (Lot), one of the old phosphate mines in Quercy. A and B: Thomas (2020).

Thomas (2020) indicates that the Cloup d'Aural is an ancient Paleocene pit cave (*vertical cave*), filled and sealed by clay rich in nodules and phosphate encrustations during the early Upper Oligocene, and transformed into a phosphate mine in the second half of the 19th century. It has been open to tourists since the summer of 2000. It is one of more than 300 mines of this type of varying size in the Quercy region, known as "phosphatières" (*phosphate deposits*), which were formed between the Eocene and Oligocene periods.

The Quercy Paleokarst is the longest chronological sequence currently known on a continental domain anywhere in the world and has made it possible to record the climatic and environmental conditions for the evolution of life (Legendre *et al.*, 1997). Around 3.5 million years ago, the resumption of karst formation activity allowed the development of typical forms of this relief such as caves and sinkholes.

A Jurassic-type section: the cliffs of Rocamadour

One of the typical problems when examining horizontal limestone banks cut by valleys flanked by cliffs is that the limestones have to be observed precisely in these vertical planes and therefore the access is very difficult or impossible without professional climbing equipment and knowledge.



Studying horizontal layers in cliffs is not within everyone's reach. Image: Grieve-Williams (2021).

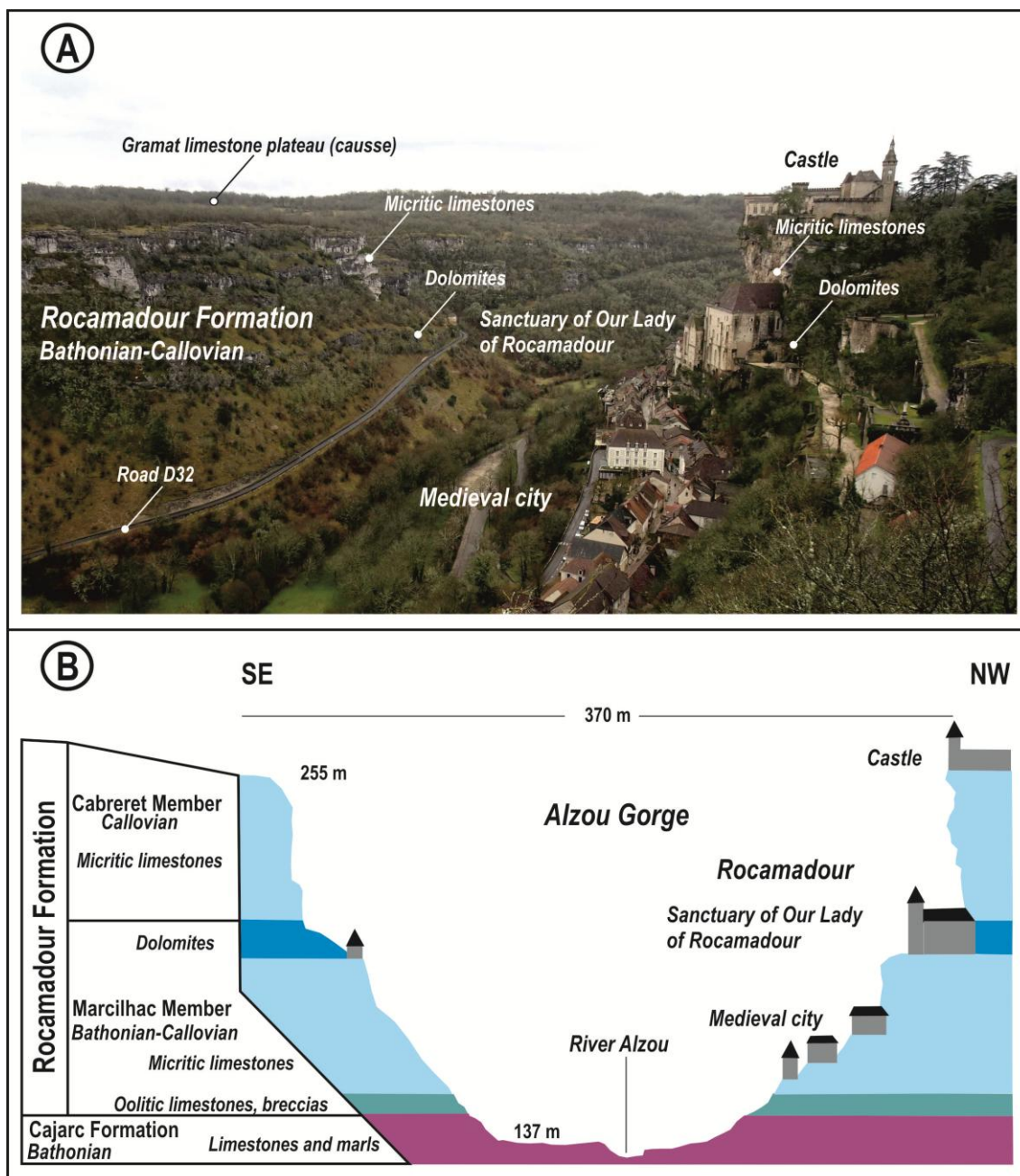
However, this problem is easily solved on the Rocamadour cliff, as there is a path (*le Chemin de Croix*) that goes down from the P2 car park to the sanctuary, from where you can continue down to the medieval town.

In Rocamadour (Astruc *et al.*, 2008) we find ourselves squarely in the Middle Jurassic (*Bathonian to Callovian*) represented in this case by a large carbonate platform with coral reef characteristics. The sequence starts at the bottom of the valley with the Cajarc Formation (*Middle to Upper Bathonian*) (*Saint-Chels Member*), which is only found in the Alzou valley; the rocks include carbonates and marls.

Moving stratigraphically upwards we find the Rocamadour Formation, in which two Members have been defined (see next figure):

1. Marcilhac (*Bathonian-Callovian*), on which the medieval town and the sanctuary stand, with massive oolitic limestones, microbreccias, laminated micritic limestones at the base; the upper part outcrops at the edge of the access road to the sanctuary and contains micritic dolomites.
2. Cabreret (*Callovian age*), with 50-metre-thick micritic limestone beds, with the Rocamadour Castle rising above this unit.

In this way Rocamadour offers the extraordinary possibility of visiting a complete sequence of marine Jurassic rocks from the *Bathonian* to the *Callovian*, strolling through medieval history observing buildings and religious art. This is a "3x1" tourist attraction that should not be missed on a visit to the Quercy region.



A: Rocamadour and the magnificent Jurassic limestone cliffs that line the Alzou River (Image: R. Oyarzun). View to the SW from the "Le Coin du Photographe" viewpoint. B: Geological section of Rocamadour (compare with image A). Adapted from Astruc et al. (2008).

Depending on your physical possibilities, there are two obvious ways to visit Rocamadour, its geology and sacred art. The first one is to leave the car in a car park (*car park P2*) on the upper plain and take a lift (*elevator*) down to the religious complex. From there you can take another lift down to the medieval town. It is advisable to check in advance if these lifts will be operating when you visit Rocamadour. The other possibility also starts at car park P2 (or, conversely, in the medieval city) and is the so-called Way of the Cross (*Chemin de Croix*). It is a monumental staircase that leads to the esplanade of the sanctuary, where the basilica of Saint-Sauveur, the crypt of Saint-Amador (*a World Heritage Site*) and the chapels of Sainte-Anne, Saint-Blaise, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Notre-Dame (*with the Black Maddona*), Saint-Louis and Saint-Michel are located.

At the top of the route, on the flat area of the car park, is the castle, whose walls (*although not the interior*) can be visited.

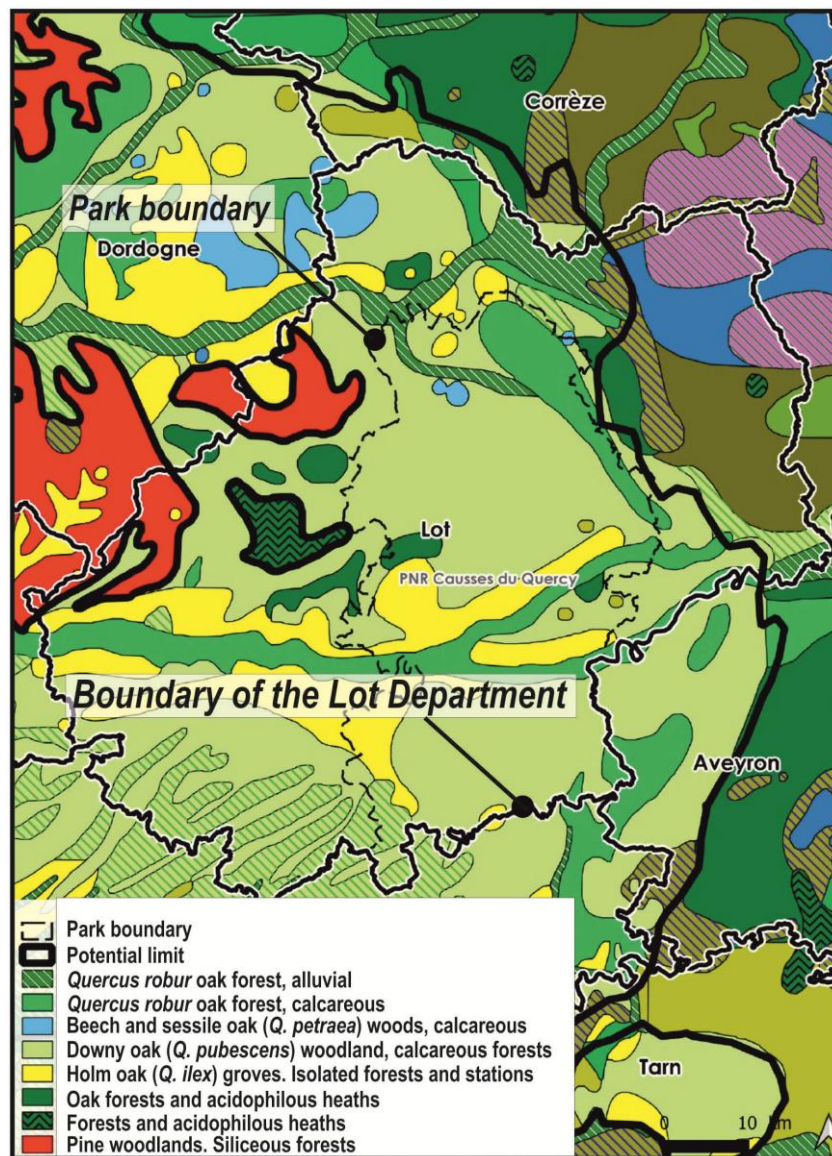


Descending from the P2 car park area to the religious complex, where, apart from the unique buildings, the micritic limestones (at the top of the complex) and dolomites of the Rocamadour Formation can be observed. See also previous figure. Images: P. Cubas and R. Oyarzun.

The region's forests

According to IPAMAC (2016), France's landscapes have changed considerably over the centuries due to demography, agricultural, pastoral and forestry practices, industrial development, etc. On a national scale, after more or less continuous deforestation until the beginning of the 19th century (*which marked a 'forest minimum'*), forest areas have doubled in little more than a century and a half. They now cover 27% of the national territory, more than 30% of the Massif Central and almost 50% of the Lot Department. These forests are mostly the result of natural recolonisation or recent reforestation, while others have survived land clearing and are the result of a much longer history.

From a phytogeographical point of view, the Quercy Regional Natural Park, located in the Aquitaine basin, occupies Jurassic, Cretaceous and Tertiary sedimentary soils, which are involved in the formation of calcareous soils. The potential vegetation of three quarters of the area corresponds to the dynamic series of pubescent oak (*Quercus pubescens*), with introgressions of Mediterranean species on the south-facing slopes. This series includes different stages of development from 1) pioneer vegetation rich in annual plants, 2) calcareous grasslands composed of xerophytic plants interspersed in mosaic with the previous stage, 3) meadows and grasslands dominated by hemicryptophytes, 4) forest edges composed of shrub and herbaceous species, and finally 5) deciduous forests, generally thermophilic, at supramediterranean level such as oak groves of *Quercus pubescens* accompanied by *Carpinus betulus*, *Acer monspessulanum*, *Buxus sempervirens*, *Rhamnus alaternus*, *Phillyrea latifolia*, *P. media*, *Pistacia terebinthus*, etc. At the eastern end of the department, on the lower Jurassic that allows the formation of deeper soils, the vegetation is more mesophilic, with average humidity conditions, and corresponds to the sessile oak series (*Q. robur*). The Mediterranean component of the holm oak series (*Q. ilex*) appears in isolated stations on the south-facing slopes and in the Lot and Dordogne valleys.

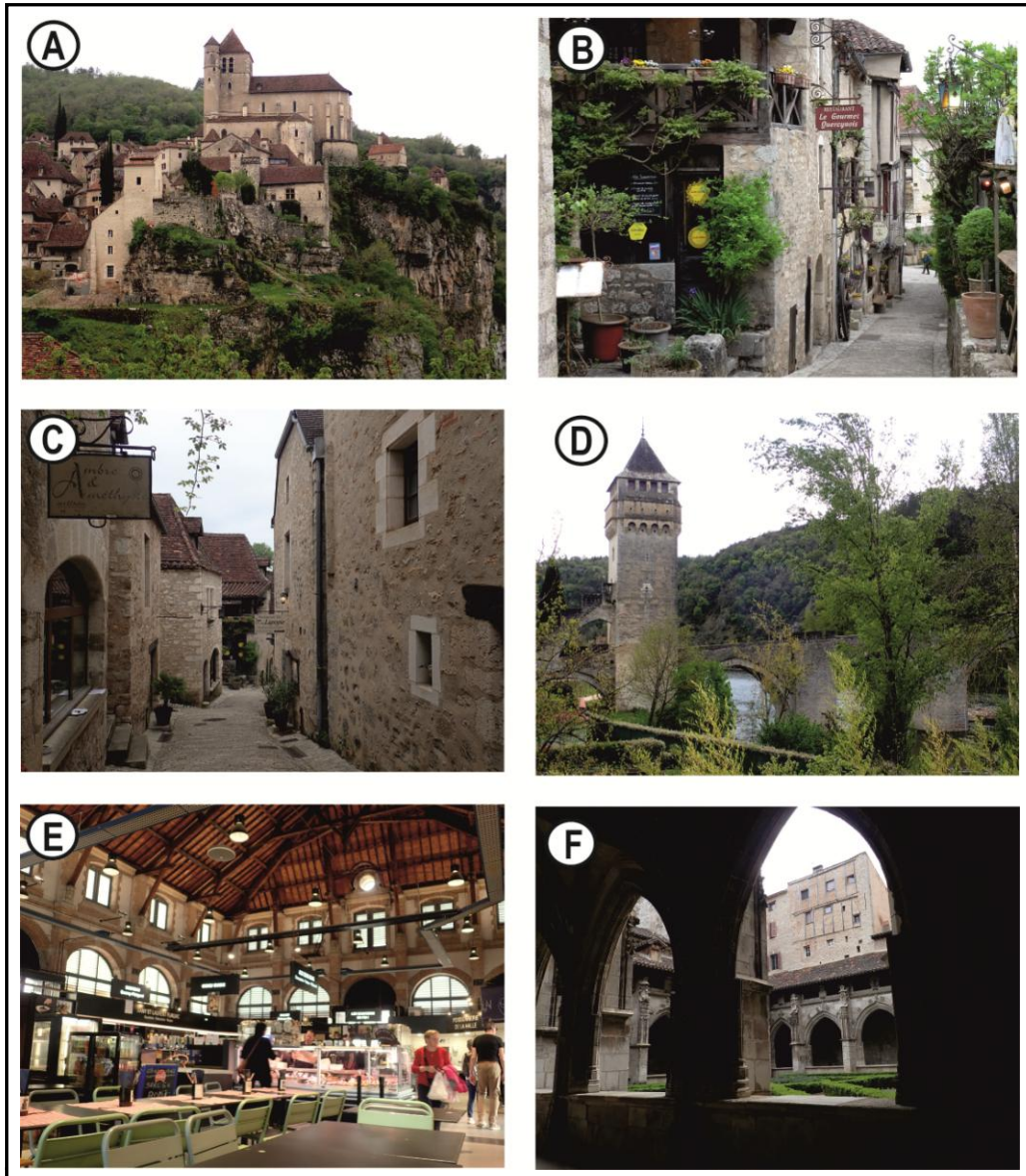


Vegetation series in the Quercy region (Boulet, 2023).

The current dominant forest types vary according to the different landscape characteristics, soil and climatic conditions and the way they have been managed by human societies in the past, both in terms of harvesting and reforestation. For example, the undergrowth forests that dominate the Causses were highly appreciated by the local inhabitants, who regularly used the woody resources for heating and grazed their sheep in the undergrowth.

Ancient peoples, their history (and prehistory)

The Quercy region not only has exceptional landscapes, geology, and woodlands but is also home to villages of incomparable beauty. Among these, two should be highlighted as they hold the coveted title of 'Most Beautiful Villages of France' (*there are only 11 in total*). These are Rocamadour, on the banks of the Alzou River, and Saint-Cirq-Lapopie on the banks of the Lot. This should not lead to misunderstandings, the rest of the towns and cities in the region are also spectacular, starting with Cahors (*capital of the Lot Department*) with its gardens and the marvellous Pont Valentré medieval bridge over a meander of the Lot, Puy-l'Évêque, or Luzech (*also on the banks of the Lot*), which will allow a visit to the ancient medieval routes travelling back in time (Vallées Lot & Dordogne, 2021).

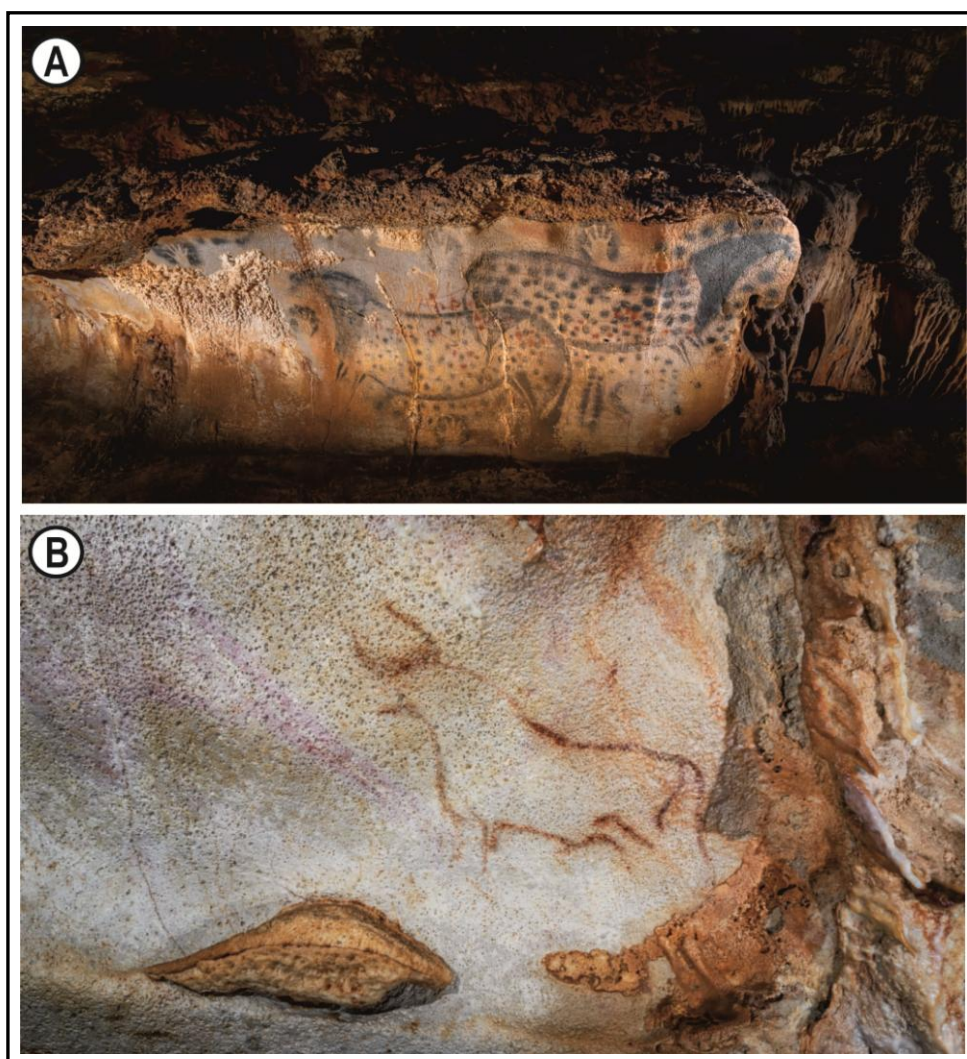


A-C: Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, the Church of Saint-Cirq-et-Sainte-Julitte (A), and its streets (B and C). D-F: Cahors, the Valentré bridge over the river Lot (D), the market (E), and the Cloister of the Cathedral of Saint-Etienne (F).

A little bit of history and prehistory

Where there is limestone there are usually karstic processes and where there are karstic processes we can find caves. These in turn constitute an essential element in the history of man, particularly during the Palaeolithic period when *Homo sapiens* (who arrived in Europe from Africa some 40,000 years ago) (Wikipedia, 2025g) was able to find refuge and develop his first artistic manifestations.

In this respect, the Pech Merle cave (*open to visitors*), about 27 km east of Cahors, is a key site for the study of the Upper Palaeolithic (*from the arrival of man in Europe to the Holocene*), with its extensive art, covering a wide range of stylistic and plastic features; it also contains other evidence of human activity, such as the trace of their bipedal gait (Duday & Garcia, 1983). The cave contains 700 painted or engraved motifs, including 69 animal figures, 13 human or parahuman figures and 595 abstract signs (Wikipédia, 2025h).



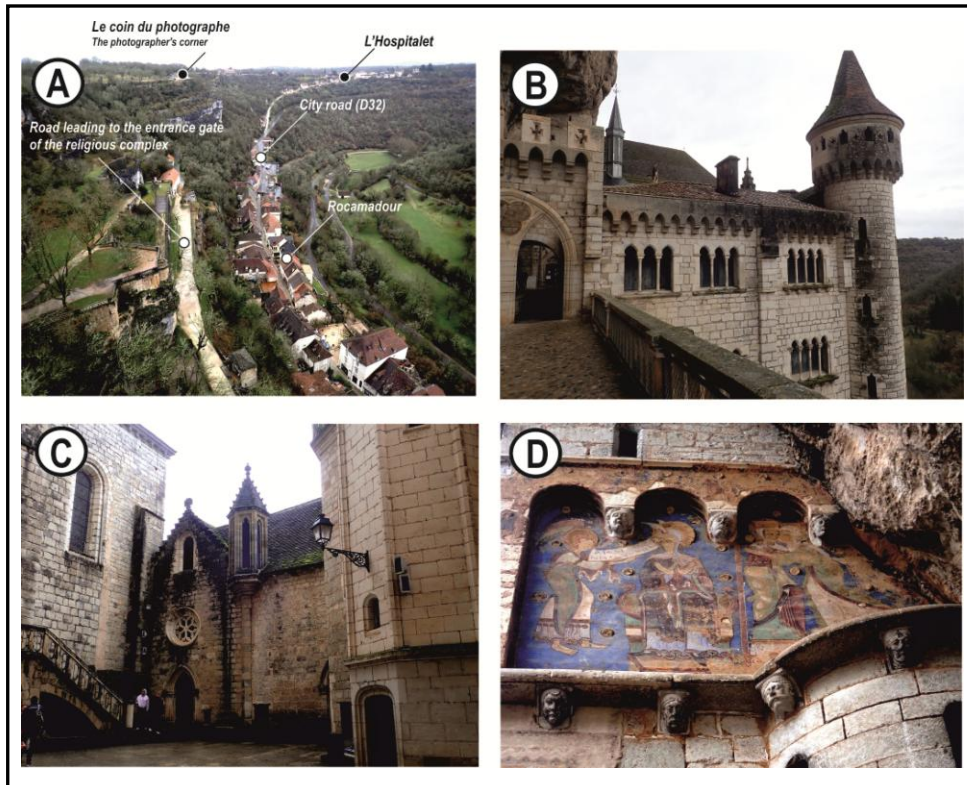
The Pech Merle Cave. A: The painting of the horses is a unique composition, an exceptional masterpiece that has been preserved for 29,000 years. B: An auroch, an extinct species of bovine, considered the wild ancestor of modern domestic cattle. It was one of the largest herbivores of the Holocene; it had massive, elongated and broad horns reaching 80 cm in length. Wikipédia (2025h), Cahors Vallée du Lot (2025b).

A leap in time

Making a great leap in time, from the Stone Age (*Palaeolithic*) to Gallo-Roman times, let us say that the territory had a turbulent history dating back to the time of the Cadurci, who resisted Caesar and his legions at Uxellodunum (51 BC) (*Universalis.fr*, 2024). Uxellodunum was a Gallic *oppidum* located near present-day Vayrac on the Dordogne river in France. An *oppidum* is an elevated place, hill or plateau, whose natural defences have been reinforced by human intervention. This stronghold (*within the lands of the Cadurcan tribe*) was the site of the last revolt against Roman authority in Gaul, which was brutally punished (*Wikipedia*, 2025i). Roman Cahors was called *Divona Cadurcorum*, and was the capital of the Romanised Caourques. It was important enough to have an amphitheatre, a temple, numerous houses adorned with mosaics and, of course, baths (*Cahors Vallée du Lot*, 2025c).

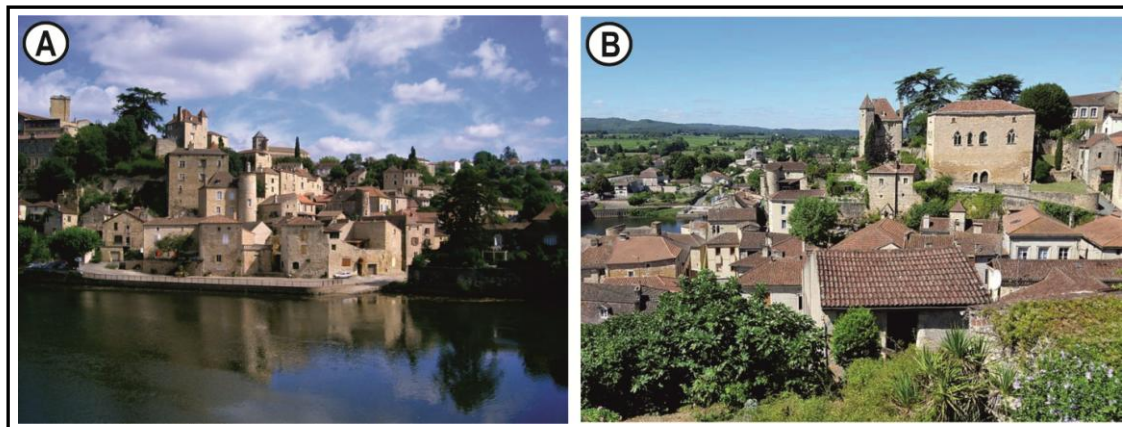
After the fall of the Roman Empire, during the early Middle Ages, the territory was then incorporated into Guyena (a former French province roughly corresponding to the Roman province of *Aquitaine Secunda*), the northern part of Aquitaine, which was separated to protect it from Carolingian intervention against the Basque revolts (*Wikipedia*, 2025j). However, it reappeared almost immediately as *Cadurcensis pagus*, as it became a county around 780. In 849, it became part of the county of Toulouse (*Wikipédia*, 2025j). From 950 onwards, the number and bellicosity of the feudal lords, entrenched in their strongholds, hindered the rights of the sovereigns of Toulouse (*Wikipédia* 2025j).

Cahors was a powerful bishopric in the Middle Ages, extending its influence over the country and favouring the foundation of abbeys and priories which became lordships. Rocamadour, for its part, attracted an influx of pilgrims (*Universalis.fr*, 2024). This medieval town is guarded by a series of fortified gates. A monumental staircase, which pilgrims climbed on their knees, leads to the esplanade of the sanctuaries (*Wikipédia*, 2025k,l), where the basilica of Saint-Sauveur, the crypt of Saint-Amadour and the chapels of Sainte-Anne, Saint-Blaise, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Notre-Dame (*with the Black Madonna*), Saint-Louis and Saint-Michel are located.



Rocamadour. A: The village, surroundings and access roads. B: Chapelle Saint-Louis - Notre-Dame de l'Ovalie. C: Chapelles Sainte Anne and Saint Blaise. D: Scenes of the Annunciation and the Visitation on the Tour-porche Saint-Michel that can be dated to the years 1180-1210. Decottignies & Camille (2011). Images: P.Cubas.

Also in our little tour we have Puy l'Évêque, an important medieval town, which occupied an extremely strategic position on the Lot. The town consists of a labyrinth of narrow streets and stairways lined with beautiful stone houses that descend to the slipway where the barges once docked for Bordeaux, with the ochre of the medieval facades reflected in the waters of the Lot (*Vallées Lot & Dordogne*, 2025).



Puy l'Évêque. A: View on the banks of the river Lot (image: Nemezeb, 2008). B: Upper part of the village (image: DordogneMaison.com, 2025)

Finally, and in the best possible way, let's talk about wines and the wonderful Rocamadour cheese

Magnificent wines: Cahors, Côteaux du Quercy, Côtes du Lot (Vallées Lot & Dordogne, 2025b)

Let's clarify first the following concepts regarding the protection of wine designations (BERNE, 2025):

- AOC/AOP: The AOC label is probably the best known of all, even among wine lovers with no particular knowledge. However, few people know that AOC and AOP are actually the same thing. The AOP (*appellation d'origine protégée*), is a type of label that certifies that AOP wines comply with the specifications imposed according to their origin. This certification defines the typical characteristics of a *terroir*.
- IGP: The IGP (*indication géographique protégée: protected geographical indication*) label has more flexible specifications than the AOC/AOP. But the aim is to promote wines whose quality, characteristics and reputation are linked to their geographical origin. An IGP wine must have at least one of its production phases in the IGP wine region (*harvesting, winemaking, bottling, etc.*).

To talk about Cahors wines is to talk about the Malbec grape variety (Cahors Vallée du Lot, 2025d). These vineyards are planted in the lands bordering the Lot, where the Malbec grape variety has found its perfect *terroir*. Let's clarify that *terroir* is a French term that does not have an exact translation, but refers to all the characteristics that make up the soil or land in which the vineyards grow and that influence the quality and taste of the wine. In this case the *terroir* corresponds to calcareous terraces formed by alluvial deposits of the Massif Central, but also to the plateaus located 300 m above river level, formed by gravel covered with clay. Malbec planted on terraces close to the river produces soft, fruity wines that become increasingly fleshy (*chamus*) as you move away from the water. As you move up the slopes, the wines become richer: this is where the great wines of Cahors are produced. With an area of 4600 hectares, the appellation has a clearly defined objective: excellence. Cahors has been an AOC since 1971.

As far as Côteaux du Quercy is concerned, these vineyards are located in the heart of the South-West, in the departments of Lot and Tarn-et-Garonne, formerly known as 'Quercy'. It is a region with character and a very rich *terroir* between the Aveyron valley and the Causses du Lot. The clay-limestone soils, permeable and aerated, allow the vines to extract the full force of the *terroir* from deep within. This sunny soil is ideal for crops, with vines growing alongside melons, lavender and sunflowers. The basic grape variety for AOC Coteaux du Quercy wines is Cabernet franc. Winegrowers combine it with Malbec, Merlot, Tannat and, to a lesser extent, Gamay. Coteaux du Quercy wines are reds and rosés to delight the palate. The reds are full of colour, supple and fleshy, with aromas of ripe fruit and subtle hints of spice. The rosés are fresh and fruity, with notes of red berries and white flowers. There is now a Union to protect these vineyards.



The Malbec grape originates from south-west France, where it is still cultivated on a little over 6000 hectares. The designation of Malbec, now popular throughout the world, comes from the dynamic Monsieur Malbeck, who spread the grape variety widely in the Bordeaux region in the 18th century. Mövenpick (2025).



Cahors AOC red wines from the Lot department. Different aspects. Office de Tourisme Cahors - Vallée du Lot / Union Interprofessionnelle des Vins de Cahors (2025).

Finally, the Côtes du Lot wines obtained the IGP label in 2011. However, the creation of 'Vins de Pays du Lot' dates back to 1968. This production is the result of the work of determined winegrowers who rebuilt the vineyards, damaged by two world wars and frosts. Several generations of winegrowers have succeeded one another to maintain and develop this production, which today guarantees the longevity of these wines. For more than twenty years, the Côtes du Lot wines have been recognised for their quality by this IGP. The geographical area of the protected geographical indication covers the entire department of Lot and, in particular, the Lot valley and the neighbouring hillsides and hills.

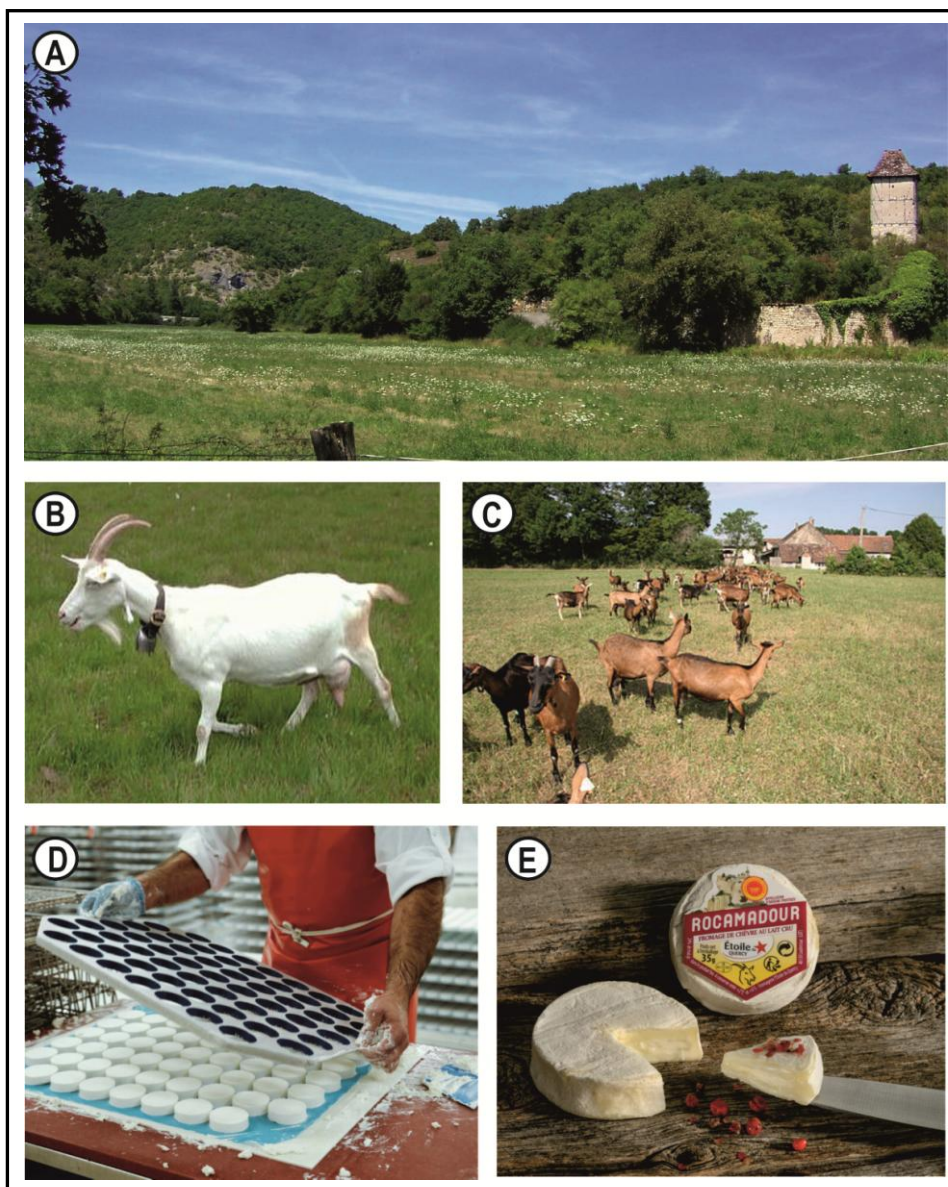
A small and spectacular cheese: the Rocamadour (Vallées Lot & Dordogne, 2025c)

One can talk for hours about French cheeses, and have long discussions about which one or ones would be the best, not to mention the origin, whether it is made from cow's or goat's milk (or sheep's near the Pyrenees). However, for two of the authors of this document (RO & PC) the Rocamadour is probably the most delicious, in particular the Rocamadour *fermière*, which far surpasses the best camembert or brie. It is a cheese that melts in the mouth, displaying all its aromas and flavours.

The Rocamadour cheese is small, round and soft, and the shepherds of the Causse were already making it in the 15th century. It was so important that it was used to pay the tithes of the lords of the time. Pilgrims

travelling to Santiago de Compostela (*the Way of St. James*) carried it in their saddlebags. Thanks to the raw milk of the goats that feed on the rich and varied vegetation of the Causses du Quercy and the know-how of the producers, since 1996, the Lot has had its own cheese with a prestigious designation and AOP (*Appellation d'Origine Protégée*). The production chain is kept on a human scale, with 90 operators involved in production, from the milk producer to the cheese refiner and seller.

The protection decree only authorises the Alpine and Saanen goat breeds, and crossbreeding between the two breeds is authorised. The number of goats per hectare must not exceed ten, while more than 80% of the goats' feed must come from the geographical area covered by the AOP. This consists of at least 70% natural pasture in the summer months or hay. The rest of the ration is made up of grains (*cereals, legumes*) and oilcakes.

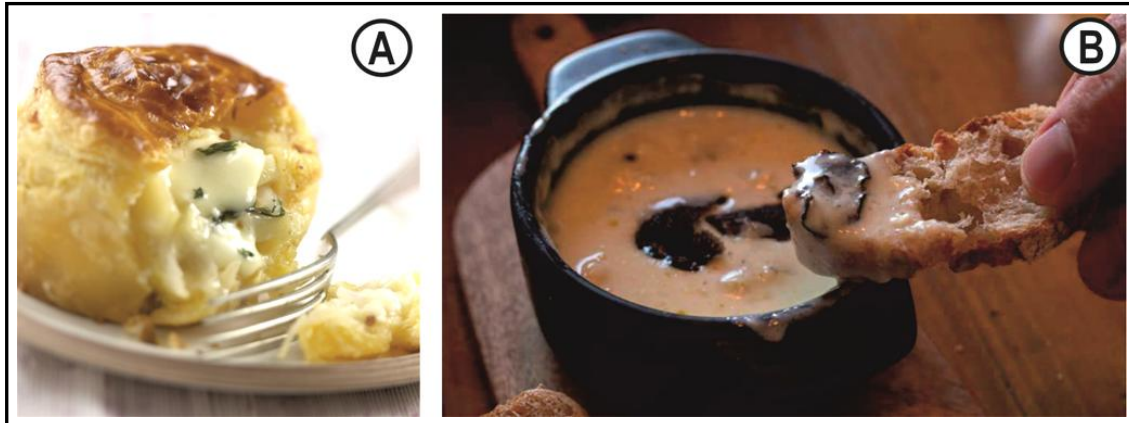


A: Example of a wooded *causse* landscape and valley floor pasture for goats in the region. B: The Saanen goat. C: The Alpine goat. D: The small format of Rocamadour cheeses. E: The final product.

According to Wikipédia (2025m) the *terroir* comprises fertile valleys (*clay and calcareous marls*) and *causses* that are arid in summer. The subsoil is made up of three geological formations. In the centre and west there are marls and limestones (*this terrain is karstic and very draining*). In the south, the clayey sandstones with calcareous banks known as *melasse de l'Agenais*. To the north and east, the

metamorphic formations include gneisses, schists, granites, sandstones and micaschists. The dominant vegetation is downy oak, characteristic of calcareous landscapes with arid episodes. It consists of a succession of thin groves and short pastures that suffer from the summer drought. Crops (*fodder, cereals, legumes*) are concentrated in the richer valleys, which are flat enough for mechanisation.

All the restaurants in the Lot serve the Rocamadour cheese at their tables. Hot or cold, it is undoubtedly tastier when served in a simple way: on toast with a drizzle of honey or saffron syrup. In more complex versions it is also used in a regional potato cake and there is even a version of fondue Savoyarde with Rocamadour cheese.



Rocamadour in the regional cuisine: two examples. A: Potato and Rocamadour pie (DireLot, 2019). B: Lotoise fondue - A recipe based on Rocamadour cheese and truffles (Lincourt, 2023).

Finally, and for all these reasons, let's say that Rocamadour confirms the Ernst Friedrich Schumacher's famous assertion that *small is beautiful*.

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