

The Route du Fer in Canigó

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A discovery of the Catalan mining heritage



The iron mining industry in the [Canigó](#) goes all the way back to the 2nd century B.C. and lasted until the end of the 20th century. Along with mountain farming practices and breeding, this was one of the main activities for the villages in the foothills of the Canigou Massif for over 2,000 years.

For centuries it was transformed into high-quality metal in the famous Catalan forges, and the 'soft iron' produced in the Canigou was for a long time used for weaponry, tools and decoration. It was used to decorate the doors of the Romanesque churches and abbeys across the region, as well as the balconies of the grandest manors. It became so sought-after that it was even chosen for the gates of the Château de Versailles. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the procedures changed and the ore from the Canigou was taken to the major ironworks to manufacture special steel products.

Entire families were able to live off the trade of coal merchants, muleteers, miners and blacksmiths. All the local resources were utilised, including the mountain streams, the forests, and crops and today's landscape has been marked by these trades. The extraction, transport and transformation of the iron ore led to the creation of isolated constructions, including open-pit mines, galleries, roasters, railroad tracks, ramps, overhead cables, etc. Mining towns were built at high altitudes near the most inaccessible deposits, to be able to welcome local and foreign labour.

From 1950 onwards, this industry was not able to match the competition, and so the mines closed and this marked the end of a prosperous era for the villages. But the local tradition of working iron went on and ironwork is still very much a key part of local Catalan crafts today.

Today, the industrial past of the area remains only in people's memories, shown through testimonies from the older members of the local population, old photos, the ruins, both discreet and the larger, more impressive, and the cultural heritage that all bear witness to the ingenuity, hard work and the teamwork displayed by these 'men of iron'.

The [Route du Fer](#) in Canigó takes visitors along various paths to learn the inner workings of the ironwork trade. We invite you to come to the various events or just explore the villages, either on the road or on foot, to discover the heritage sites and meet those who keep the traditions alive.

Examples of visitor's trails and hiking trails

- ✓ [Salver Mines](#) (Taurinya)
- ✓ [Rebolledes Roasters](#) (Baillestavy)
- ✓ [The Sénégal](#) (Sahorre)
- ✓ [The Pinosa](#) (Valmanya)

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