

WALKS AROUND THE CASTLE-MONASTERY OF SANT MIQUEL D'ESCORNALBOU

THE NAME ESCORNALBOU IS FIRST MENTIONED IN SOME 12TH-CENTURY DOCUMENTS THAT REFER TO A PLACE CALLED CORNU BOVIS. THE MEANING IS NOT KNOWN FOR CERTAIN AND THERE ARE SEVERAL THEORIES. WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT IT RELATES BULL WITH THE TYPE OF STONE OF WHICH THE MOUNTAIN IS MADE, BASICALLY SANDSTONE USED FOR MILLING AND GRINDING. ANOTHER EXPLANATION, HEARD IN THE VILLAGES IN THE DISTRICT, IS THAT THE NAME REFERS TO THE SHAPE OF THE MOUNTAIN WHICH, SEEN FROM A DISTANCE, IS SAID TO RECALL THE HORN OF A BULL.

TO REACH THE FORTIFIED MONASTERY YOU HAVE ALREADY HAD TO CLIMB A STEEP HILL, SINCE THE EXISTING BUILDINGS STAND 650 METRES ABOVE SEA LEVEL. THEY ARE IN A MIXTURE OF STYLES, AND THEY HAVE BEEN USED FOR A VARIETY OF PURPOSES OVER THE CENTURIES. THEIR

HISTORY BEGINS IN THE MID 12TH CENTURY, WHEN A HOUSE OF AUGUSTINIAN CANONS WAS FOUNDED, ATTACHED TO THE SEE OF TARRAGONA. BUT AFTER MANY CHANGES, HAVING BEEN INHABITED BY RECOLLECT AND OBSERVANT FRANCISCANS, AFTER WARS AND CONFLICTS, THE MONASTERY WAS DEFINITELY ABANDONED FROM 1835 UNTIL A DIPLOMAT FROM REUS, EDUARD TODA I GÜELL, BOUGHT IT ABOUT 1909 AND TURNED IT INTO AN EARLY 20TH-CENTURY MANSION. AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE YOU CAN SEE A RELIEF CONTAINING THE LETTER TAU (T) AND THE DATE 1912, A HISTORICAL REFERENCE INCLUDED BY EDUARD TODA TO REMIND US OF THE FACT THAT THE MONASTERY ORIGINALLY PERTAINED TO THE BISHOPRIC OF TARRAGONA, ALONG WITH THE DATE OF RESTORATION OF THE ARCH. THE ENTRANCE TOWER IS A REMINDER THAT ESCORNALBOU WAS A FORTIFIED MONASTERY, AND OF HOW ITS OCCUPANTS NEEDED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES FROM POSSIBLE ATTACKS AT TIMES OF WAR AND SOCIAL UNREST, AS DID OTHER MONASTERIES IN THE REGION, ALSO FORTIFIED, SUCH AS POBLET AND SANTES CREUS.



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1

Courtyard



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The walls you see from the courtyard tell the history of Escornalbou. The monastery was founded by order of king Alfons II of Aragon and I of Catalonia when he granted the lands at Escornalbou to Joan de Santboi, the first prior, authorising him to fortify the site, inhabit it and build there a house of Augustinian canons dedicated to Sant Miquel and subject to the Diocese of Tarragona.



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Anverse of a Barcelona croat from the reign of Alfons II with the king's image.

The T represents all the elements connected with the monastery's origins: the See of Tarragona, to which Escornalbou was subject, and one of whose symbols was the Tau. It is the first letter of Teos, the name of God in Greek, as well as of Tecla, patron saint of the diocese, and indeed of Eduard Toda's surname.

Here we find a shield with a T on a field of wavy bars, which symbolize Tarragona



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Here you can also see a shield with the arms of the kings of the Crown of Aragon, and another with the arms of Castile and Leon, which might have been added subsequently, perhaps as a homage to the wife of king Alfons II of Catalonia-Aragon, Sança de Castella. It seems to have been erected on the occasion of a visit by king Alfonso XIII to Escornalbou. Eduard Toda, with the help of his mother, Francesca Güell,



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Eduard Toda i Güell (Reus, 1885-Poblet, 1941).

undertook the rebuilding of Escornalbou and did a free, imaginative restoration, taking advantage of old materials and some pre-existing buildings. For example, on the lower storey of the wall of the church, to the right of the main doorway, are remains that probably come from an old Roman fortification built of white sandstone which, according to Eduard Toda, preceded the Romanesque monastery built of red stone.



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Can you see the smiling face beside the doorway into the house? Eduard Toda, with his individual sense of humour, put protective images, which he may have brought from China, at several strategic points on the fortifications. See if you can find them!



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2

The Font del Sarraf

The name of this spring, which is currently dry, is interpreted as a reminder of the times of the Moors at Escornalbou. In fact, this spot, and the path that leads to it, are the scene of a legend of love between a Moor and a Christian. The story has it that in the time when the Moors occupied the mountain, the son of the local emir and the wife of the steward of Escornalbou fell in love. One day when the lovers were to keep tryst at the spring, the lady, fearing an attack by her jealous husband, when she saw her lover mounted on a horse, ran to mount in front of him. The horse began to gallop up the path and reached the place now known as the Salt del Dimoni (Devil's Leap), stopped and leapt off. It is said that the bodies of the lovers never appeared at the foot of the precipice, nor that of their horse; the Devil had been waiting for them below and had



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carried them off to hell. Further along the path, you will hear the sounds of the holm-oak woods, which many consider to be one of the most beautiful things about Escornalbou.



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Already in the mediaeval period there are mentions of a holm-oak wood, which no longer exists, where bandits took refuge. Below you can make out Argentera, one of the seven villages that made up the barony of Escornalbou from the last third of the 13th century; the monastery held the lordship over it and since its foundation the prior was responsible for the legal, financial and administrative affairs of this mediaeval territorial division.



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The old spring provided drinking-water for the monastery, although there were several cisterns for collecting rain-water, which was devoted to other purposes. Centuries later, the spring and its surroundings were the setting for many gatherings and discussions of Eduard Toda and his literary friends belonging to the *Renaixença* movement, who often visited the castle, particularly in summer.



© FOTOTECA.CAT
Moor, from the *Sant Jordi* panel, P. Niçard-R. Moger, c.1468, MDM.

3

The Friars' Walk



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The Friars' Walk was opened up in 1818, partly to obtain stone for the extensions to the monastery and partly to provide a leisure facility for the friars. Now, the path offers panoramic views that stretch from L'Hospitalet to the mountains of Prades, and along the coast from the Garraf massif to the river Ebre. Tarragona, Reus, the cape of Salou, Cambrils and the Parc Samà are conspicuous close by. There are those who say that on clear days the mountains of Mallorca can be seen on the horizon. On the west rises the peak of La Mola, 1,000 metres high, and on the north is the Montsant range.



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Half-way along the path you will come to the sanctuary of the Three Virgins, sheltered by the

rocks of the mountain. This may have been built at the time the path was opened up. To the right of the entrance is a prayer to Our Lady by the poet Victor Balaguer, carved on a stone plaque.



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Close to the sanctuary is an information panel describing the flora and fauna to be found on the mountain. The cool and humid microclimate here, almost 700 metres above sea level, means that the plant and animal species here differ from those in the surrounding area.



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4

The sanctuary of Santa Bàrbara

This sanctuary, which can be dated on stylistic grounds to the late 18th or early 19th century, is dedicated to Santa Bàrbara, who protects against storms and lightning, and was invoked to watch over the inhabitants of the monastery and of the barony's



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villages in the valley below. Eduard Toda hypothesised that the sanctuary was built on the remains of a tower which he considered to be of Roman origin, and which in Moorish times was known as the Zalòquia, or Aguait (watchtower) because of its location. The panorama that can be seen from the highest point on Escornalbou explains why the mountain was already occupied in prehistoric times: it dominates the entire region.

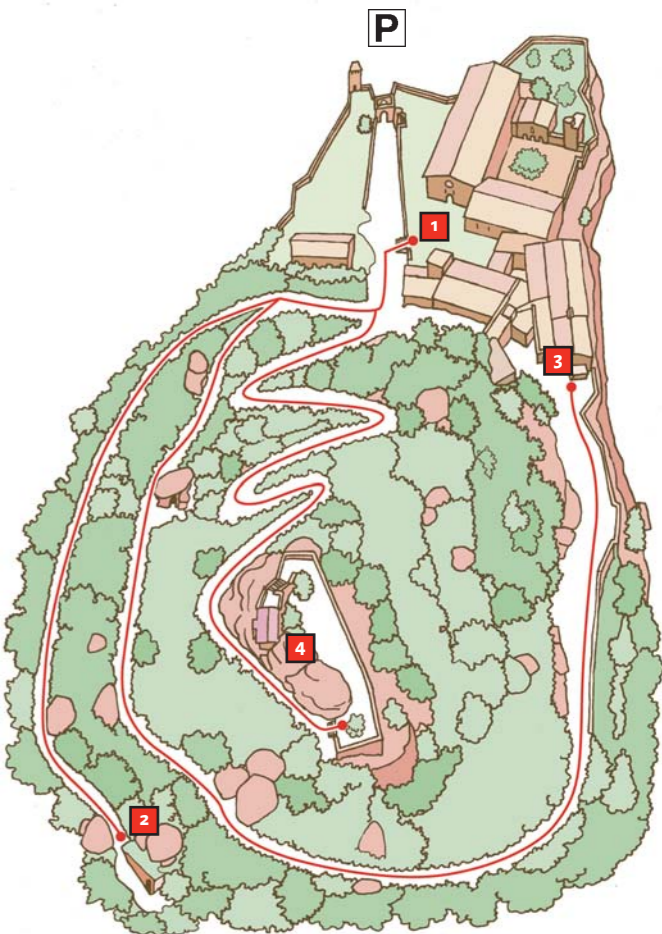


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The path that leads to the sanctuary of Santa Bàrbara ascends among leafy woods of pines and holm-oaks, and at some points offers splendid views.



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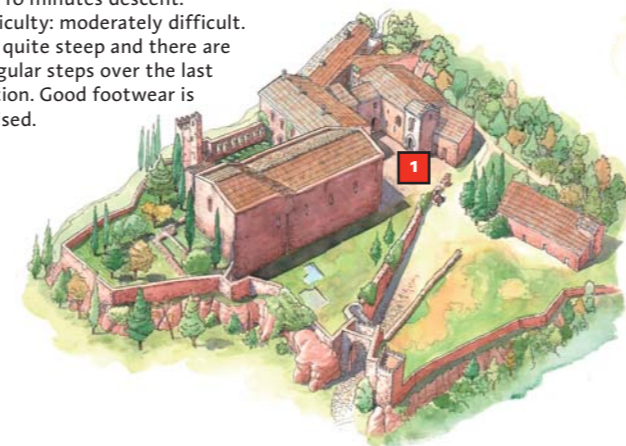
The three walks provide visitors with the opportunity to observe the various structures associated with the castle-monastery of Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou and to understand their historical evolution within the context of their surroundings. A walk along the three routes is an ideal opportunity to enjoy the peace and quiet of the countryside and the breathtaking views over the baronial domains and the Camp de Tarragona with the sea beyond. The green of the mountain of Escornalbou, and that of the Argentera mountain range will be a lasting memory of your visit.

1 THE COURTYARD
Guided tour of the building's interior.
• Length: 1 hour.

2 LA FONT DEL SARRAÍ
• Length: 10 minutes descent and 10-15 minutes ascent.
• Difficulty: moderately difficult, good footwear is advised.

3 FRIARS' WALK
• Length: 10-15 minutes.
• Difficulty: easy, the walk is over very level ground.

4 THE SANCTUARY OF SANTA BÀRBARA
• Length: 10-15 minutes ascent and 10 minutes descent.
• Difficulty: moderately difficult. It is quite steep and there are irregular steps over the last section. Good footwear is advised.


Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

The prickly- and glossy-leaved holly is a common sight in central-European woods and in some ways it comes as a surprise to find it in Escornalbou. It is well known as a traditional Christmas decoration but it has been protected and its collection has been prohibited because of the important function its red fruit serves as a food supply for fauna during the winter.

Bonelli's eagle (*Hieraëtus fasciatus*)

This is one of the largest birds of prey in our country. It makes its nest amongst the crags and, in Escornalbou, they can often be seen swooping in circles overhead.

Garden dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*)

The attractive garden dormouse can be distinguished by its long tail with dark fur resembling an artist's paintbrush and by its black markings around the eyes. This crepuscular and nocturnal rodent feeds on tender shoots, fruits, insects and snails.

Beech Marten (*Martes foina*)

This predatory bird of the Mustelidae family can be easily distinguished by white markings that extend from the throat to the breast in contrast to the brown colour of its body. It is commonly seen in humid woods where it feeds on birds, eggs and small mammals.

Short-toed treecreeper (*Certhia brachydactyla*)

The short-toed treecreeper climbs up tree trunks in a peculiar manner, in an ascending spiral. Having thus climbed a tree, it flies down to the bottom of another tree trunk in order to repeat the operation. It has a long, pointed beak with which it forages for insects and larvae under the bark.


THE NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

The Castle-Monastery of Sant Miquel d'Escornalbou stands on a small projection from the mountain of Santa Bàrbara (649 m) that rises over the Camp de Tarragona with the Argentera mountain range behind.

These geographical conditions create a humid micro-climate well-suited to the growth of woods containing black pine, oak and holm-oak, although cork is also found. The fauna is fully consistent with the Mediterranean characteristics of the area. Also noteworthy is the red, sedimentary rock which much of the mountain is made of. In many places, it has been moulded into interesting shapes by erosion.

Black pine (*Pinus nigra ssp. salzmannii*)

On the upper parts of the mountain there are luxuriant woods of black pine. They are particularly abundant beside the Friar's Walk. The black pine is the tallest of the pines to grow in Catalonia and can reach forty metres. Its leaves are long, its pine cones somewhat small. The trunk grows straight up but in places exposed to north-westerly winds, examples with curved trunks that have yielded to their force can often be seen.

Common Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*)

One of the trees to be found in the humid woods above the castle-monastery where it grows amidst the small-leaved oaks, pines and sycamores. It can be readily identified by its leaves, the bottom sides of which are densely hairy and silvery-white.

Sarsaparilla (*Smilax aspera*)

This is one of the most abundant species in oak woods. It is a climber with abundant tendrils that enable it to cling to tree trunks. The red fruit hangs in clusters.


CODE OF CONDUCT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The surroundings of Escornalbou form part of the Argentera range of mountains. The natural environment is relatively fragile and it is therefore important to make every effort not to disturb it. It is important that you observe the following code of conduct during your visit.


Monuments

Do not walk close to the walls, it could be dangerous. The stone has a tendency to crumble, and is in a bad condition in some places. If you are with children you must be very careful. Access is available to places where safety measures are not always in place. You must not inscribe anything on the walls or write any kind of graffiti anywhere. There are other ways of recording your visit.


Fire

It is your obligation to ensure that any cigarettes or matches are completely and utterly extinguished. During the course of your excursion you will see copious vegetation we would like to preserve from the risk of fire and this risk is particularly high during the summer and during droughts.


Rubbish

Do not leave any rubbish. Such things as such as tins and bottles can harm both people and animals as well as polluting the environment and marring the landscape. Please use the litter bins or take all rubbish with you to dispose of properly.


Noise

Insofar as possible avoid making strident noises such as those produced by shouting and radios or other similar equipment. In the open air noise is highly perceptible and travels a very long way.


Plants and flowers

The plant life deserves our respect and we have a responsibility and duty to preserve it. If you are looking for mushrooms, do not cause damage to the woods by using tools or scraping the soil.


Dogs

If you have brought a dog with you, it is your responsibility to ensure that it is always under your control and does not cause a nuisance to other people, frighten wild animals, or harm the environment by digging in the soil and thereby damaging plants. Dogs are not allowed in the castle-monastery. Dogs' owners are responsible for any damage they may cause.


Car park

You are recommended to leave vehicles outside the monument precinct. A car park is provided.


Vehicle access

Vehicle access is permitted only on forest tracks open to the public. Observe the signs.


Camping

Camping is prohibited.

THE CASTLE-MONASTERY OF SANT MIQUEL D'ESCORNALBOU
GUIDED TOURS BY ARRANGEMENT

Tours with specialised guides are provided for groups and schools.
Information: Tel. 977 834 007
Reservations: Tel. 695 186 873

OPENING TIMES

Tuesday to Sunday:
From 1 October until 31 May: from 10 a.m. until 1.30 p.m. and from 3 p.m. until 5.30 p.m.
From 1 June until 30 September: from 10 a.m. until 1.30 p.m. and from 4 p.m. until 7.30 p.m.
The ticket office closes 30 minutes before closing time and entrance is no longer permitted.

SERVICES FOR VISITORS TO THE CASTLE-MONASTERY

WC
Audiovisuals
Shop
Only guided tours are permitted

CLOSED

- Mondays (except public holidays)
- 1 and 6 January, 25 and 26 December.

FREE ADMITTANCE

- Every Tuesday
- 23 April (Saint George's Day)
- 18 May (International Museum Day)
- 31 July (local festival)
- 11 September (Catalonia's National Day)
- 21 September (local festival)
- European Heritage Days.

INFORMATION

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