

Hiking routes in Alt Camp

5



Around the Serra
de Selmella



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NB: Any established written accounts are limited in terms of concrete time and space. The natural evolution of the landscape and human activity can mean that some accounts may become less reliable over time.

5. Around the Serra de Selmella

On this rather interesting hiking excursion, we discover two castles close by the river Gaià: one at Selmella, which crowns the mountain range of the same name, and one at Saburella, on the top of a hill. From either of these two places there are magnificent panoramic views of the Gaià valley and a good part of the area known as Camp de Tarragona.

The hike sets off from the Cal Figueres *masia*, having arrived to this point by car from Pont d'Armentera. The ascent is well worth the effort, since, as we become closer to the crags, the mountains become more rugged.

Once we have parked the car, we will continue along the road until finally it becomes a track, at which point it really starts to climb. Soon we will be able to see the Saburella castle towers and we will continue making our way up to Coll de les Agulles and on to Plana de la Guixera. The little hamlet of Saburella suddenly appears which, up until this point, remained hidden behind the hill. At this point, it will be well worth taking the time to have a good look at the castle ruins, at 830m, and the little church of Sant Llorenç. On our return, we will make our way along the west side, from where there is a magnificent view off the Rupit torrent with the Cogulló mountain conglomerate closing off the north end of the gully.

The route makes its way along former cart tracks, the condition of which is good and equally suited to biking as walking. However, it is well to bear in mind that it is also a relatively steep route and we will find neither water nor much in the way of shade.

All these places come under the local councils for Pont d'Armentera and Querol and for the most part, the l'Espai d'Interès Natural de Saburella declared to be an area of natural interest.





Saburella castle

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Pont d'Armentera. Part of the Alt Camp district (350m), which mostly extends across the mountainous territory to the right of river Gaià. Comprised of the unpopulated village of Selmella and the neighbouring village of la Planeta. Available services and facilities include grocery shops, accommodation, restaurants, bars, medical service and pharmacy.

From Pont d'Armentera, by car, we make our way 4.5km along the local TV-2141 road in the direction of Selmella, until we come to the 2km mark, where we will find the entrance to Mas de Cal Figueres. Here we park the car to begin our walking or biking excursion. The road rises steeply alongside Rupit gully until coming to the plains at the foot of the Serra de Selmella, occupied by cultivations and *masies*, the majority abandoned and in a state of ruin.

Time

Distance

0:00
Partial



0:00
Total

0,000
Partial



0,000
Total

Mas de Cal Figueres (580m). We continue to make our way along the road. On the left, the un-tarmacked track goes to Mas de Cal Figueres, now a restaurant. Here large expanses of land have been levelled out and planted with trained vines and fruit trees. The track continues, goes round the sierra and climbs up towards Selmella, or alternatively by taking the narrow Estret de Rupit to meet up with the track which links Cabra to Vallespinosa (GR 7 and GR 175-5).

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0:09 🕒 0:09

0,800 🚶 0,800

Entrance to Mas de Cal Tous. Continuing along the road, we see Cal Tous on our right, a typical building, above all from behind. The *masia* has been constructed on an embankment and, whilst the yard represents a typical aspect of *masies*, the rear of the property extends to the bottom of the embankment and gives the building an impressive appearance which, painted white, is an imposing sight on the landscape. The *masia* is permanently inhabited. On the left we pass by just beneath the ruins of Selmella, along the crest.

0:13 🕒 0:22

1,050 🚶 1,850

Mas Batllet. End of the asphalted road. We continue to make our way along the track and the absence of tarmac allows us to see the composition of the ground consists of permanently alternating layers of sandstone and reddish conglomerates as well as layers of more calcareous stone. Cal Batllet is set on the right hand side of the road and was at one time an imposing *masia*, although its appearance now is somewhat deplorable, the inevitable result of the rural depopulation, which took place in the second half of the 20th century.

0:08 🕒 0:30

0,500 🚶 2,350

Where the tracks fork (600m). Here we take the ascending track. The one to the right would take us to the river Gaià and the Pont d'Armentera along the Batllet, Rosic and Pendot gullies.



Pont d'Armentera

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The plains of Cal Mandil. In the background, to the left, Querol and Montagut

0:09  0:39

0,500  2,850

Junction at Mas Mandil in a small flat clay soil area. We continue along the ascending track on the left. The one on the right would take us, via the cultivated fields of Mas Mandil, as far as the forest nursery plantations of Cal Camadall and Querol.

0:03  0:42

0,200  3,050

Small hill and track off to Saburella castle (660m). We continue along the track which climbs up to the left. A chain impedes vehicular access to the track which goes up to the castle and the small new construction works set up at the bottom. Once on the hill we have an excellent panoramic view of the castle and, towards the south, the low lying cultivated fields of Cal Mandil.

Castell de Saburella. *The castle is perched on the top of a peaked hill (695m), on the calcareous Muschelkalk rocks (M5). Views from the castle include: to the north, Sant Miquel de Montclar, set on the summit of the Serra de Montclar; to the northeast, almost at the foot of the hill, the Comadevaques gully, which makes its way down by Vallespinosa and, on the horizon, the summit of Formigosa; to the east, Puig de Montagut and Pinyana castle and, to the south, the Gaià valley and the Camp de Tarragona depression.*

The castle grounds, having adopted a rather unusual layout, are perfectly adapted to this hillside terrain. The remains of the perimeter wall alone are outstanding, both the height and width are of remarkable propor-

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tions (between 80 and 160cm). Rising above are the three unmistakable towers, set on the extreme north and south of the perimeter with the third in the centre of the west wall. The two round towers set on the two extremes were there to defend the castle's two entrance gates, almost 65m apart. The entire north tower is still standing to its original height of 9.5m and comprises the ground floor with an internal diameter of 3.5m, a second floor and a terraced roof. The south tower appears to have collapsed to the ground floor roof level. The central round tower is higher round with an internal diameter of 2.6m and a similar distribution to the previous two. The castle's structure is in a good state of conservation.

The lack of historical information on this fortified castle means it is difficult to determine the construction date exactly, although it has been set somewhere between the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 15th century. The castle has links with the conflicts between the Cervelló, lords of the castle and the lands of Selmella, and the Santes Creus monastery, which, from 1175 onwards, adopted a policy of buying lands and pasture rights throughout the entire region. For this reason, Saburella castle wasn't included in the defence system at the time of the Hispanic March on the Gaià border, since at the time it was under construction, the Reconquest having finalised some years before.

(Extract taken from: Marina Miquel, Josep Santesmases, Dolors Saumell. Els castells del Gaià. Valls: Les Guies de l'IEV-1. Cossetània Edicions, 1999.)

0:09  0:51

0,700  3,750

Pylons. Junction. We continue along the main track, leaving the track open to the left for the construction of pylons. Another 50 metres on and we pass another track on the right which goes to some uncultivated agricultural land.

To the left of the track, on the mountain, the vegetation consists of Kermes oaks and other trees and shrubbery with some fine pine and oak trees specimens. As we proceed along our way, we have the benefit of seeing the castle and its round towers from different perspectives.

0:09  1:00

0,650  4,400

Coll de les Agulles de Saburella (770m). Junction. Here we have to follow the track round to the left and which climbs up a steep slope. If we were to continue straight ahead we would go down towards Vallespinosa. The hill marks the boundaries between the districts of Alt Camp and Conca de Barberà.

Just before coming to the hill, we will have passed between the hills which form the "agulles" and we will have come across a red clay section. If we climb up to the top of the needle on our

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Time  2 h

Difficulty



9,500 km  Distance



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right, we will have some magnificent views, to the south, over the castle and the Alt Camp region and, to the north, in La Conca, we will be able to trace the Comadevaques gully as it winds its way from Vallespinosato, along the foot of the Serrat del Conillera, to finally come to an end in the river Gaià escarpment which runs beneath the plains of Mas Mandil and Mas Rosic.

0:11  1:11

0,750  5,150

La Guixera plain and saddle. We continue and come to a flat plain set at around 820m and which extends between las Agulles and the southern part of the Serra Morena, which, from Vallespinosa, reaches the highest altitude point on the Puig Cristià (924m). On the side of the sierra, there is what is known as the Costa de les Espases which runs along the Coll de Valls or Magí and is actually the road from Cabra del Camp to Vallespinosa.

From here to Selmella it will be as if we are making our way along on a long balcony overlooking Camp: we will be able to see more than 200km of terrain including the *masies* we walked by three or four kilometres back. The geological caprices and the tracks left by the geological faults also make a spectacular sight. The remains of the Selmella castle walls we see opposite give the mountain landscape an added attraction. The forested slopes of Puig Cristià are also beginning to look good from here.

0:07  1:18

0,650  5,800

The old fountain inside an ashlar stone portico. To the right of the track is a small building in ashlars which preserved what little water came from the mountain.

0:06  1:24

0,500  6,300

Junction at the cultivations. Here we continue straight ahead passing a road on our right which leads to a small plain with nurseries planted with young trees.

0:02  1:26

0,100  6,400

Track to Selmella (821m). We continue along this track until we come to the saddle in the hill beneath the castle and where there is a muddy overgrown pond in which wild boars could wallow at their leisure. If we were to continue straight ahead, we would take the footpath leading to the castle, on the top of the crag. To go to what remains of the village, we take the track down on the left, flanked by a group of Holm oaks, and finally come out in front of the church.

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Selmella. *An uninhabited village sheltered below the chalky crags and under surveillance of the castle walls. The only building left half-standing is the Església de Sant Llorenç or church (12th century), where only a short time ago the fallen roof rubble was cleared away and the remaining section of the vault was shored up.*

In the middle of the 19th century, although Selmella had its own identity, it was actually part of the municipality of Pont d'Armentera. The village was listed as having only three inhabited masies and a total 69 inhabitants. In the first decade of the 20th century, the houses were still standing but, by 1952, only one remained inhabited. The village's location, the shortage of agricultural terrain in these parts, the lack of good communications and the area's general isolation led its inhabitants to leave in search of better living conditions.



The remains of the Castell de Selmella



Església de Sant Llorenç

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The construction of the asphalted road to Cal Batllet must have initially improved communications for the people in this region, especially the larger villages on the plains but with the increased attraction brought to bear by the towns, as well as having better agricultural lands, the new road only served to speed up the people's departure from the masies located on the mountain plains.

(Taken from: Ignasi Planes de Martí. L'Alt Gaià, entre la Segarra i el Camp. Valls: Cossetània Edicions, Col·lecció Azimut-4, 1999).

El Castell de Selmella. *At an altitude of 850m, the castle is built right on the edge of a precipice which forms the chalky Muschelkalk rocks (M3) and the topography of the terrain makes for a magnificent view. Looking north we can see the Serra Morena with Puig Cristià; to the east, the Castell de Pinyana tower, the village of Querol, together with the castle, and also the summits of Montagut and Formigosa; to the south, the Pont d'Armentera and the Gaià valley; to the southwest, the Camp de Tarragona plains; to the west, the Conca de Barberà and the Serra de Prades and, to the northwest, the Serra del Cogulló-Comaverd. An enormous hackberry tree at the foot of the castle serves as a solitary sentry and warns visitors to respect these ancient stones. It has an aspect so impressive that it can even be made out from the Pla de Santa Maria. It appears that the castle's first fortifications were built at the end of the 10th century only to be destroyed by the Saracens in the Almanсур raid in 989AD, having attacked a good many of the forts on the frontier — river Gaià — and the province of Barcelona. However, the earliest documented evidence of the castle comes from a trial in 1011AD, in which the ownership of the castle was being disputed between the Cervelló family and the lords of Santa Perpètua.*

In the 10th and 11th centuries, the oldest and most important castles of all on the defence line of the Gaià had been built on the left bank of the



Different sign posts in the Selmella area

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The pond behind Castell de Selmella

river, that of Selmella, on the other hand, is from the earlier foundations on the right bank, in a clear attempt to penetrate the La Conca region, at the time in the hands of the Saracens.

Selmella is also the most western part of the land belonging to the Cervelló family and, until the middle of the 12th century, formed a pact with the castles of Montagut, Querol and Pinyana, situated on the other bank of the river Gaià and which we can see opposite..

To appreciate the castle's standing we have to remind ourselves of some events. The Castell de Siurana was captured in 1155 (12thC) and was the last remaining Saracen fortification in Catalan territory. In 1158 the lands of Santes Creus were granted to the community of Cistercian monks which eight years previously had settled in Valldaura (Vallès Occidental). Various conflicts arose between the bishops of Barcelona and Tarragona over the jurisdiction of the new monastery, conflicts which finally came to an end in 1168, when it was agreed that Santes Creus was to become a new abbey in its own right and not subjugated to any bishop. From 1174, work began on the monastery's most important buildings: the church, the chapterhouse...

From 1175AD, the monastery began to adopt a policy of expansion and to purchase lands and reclaim pasture rights throughout the area. This fact, together with the donations and bequests received by the lords meant the monastery was to become one of the most important institutions in the region. Setting up the monastery in the Selmella region involved the construction of the Fontscaldetes farm and the Conill stables which, at the same time, generated significant conflicts between the lords. It also generated disagreements amongst the affected peasants, who took a dim view

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of being dependent on the monastery. Existing documentation indicates there were crucial conflicts between the peasants from la Cabra and Santes Creus towards the end of the 12th century.

As for the structure of the fortified enclosure, on the northeast boundary a large tower cut into the rock defends the castle entrance from in front of the moat. The central building is rectangular, 50 metres long by 15 metres wide. Of the perimeter walls, the best preserved is the southern boundary, built just beyond the outside limit of the rocky crag. The rubble extending through the inside of the enclosure gives a good impression of the walls and construction elements. Probably, as is the case with other castles, the buildings which originated from the 10th and beginning of the 11th centuries were reformed and extended centuries later and the remains we see are therefore from this second period.

(Taken from: Marina Miquel, Josep Santesmases, Dolors Saumell, Els castells del Gaià. Valls. Cossetània Edicions, Les Guies de l'IEV, 1999).

We return to the junction and continue to make our way west along the shady side of the Serra de Selmella. Opposite we can see the mountain conglomerates of Cogulló-Comaverd.

0:08  1:34

0,700  7,100

Track to the left. We continue straight ahead, passing the track to the left.

0:06  1:40

0,600  7,700

Junction next to land planted with young trees. We continue along the main track leaving the one to the right, which goes towards the cultivations and comes to the demolished Cal Cases masia. Before very long the track becomes much steeper.



The line of the Cogulló crest seen from Castell de Selmella

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0:06  1:46

0,600  8,300

Junction. Across a small flat piece of reddish ground, we continue straight on heading southeast. If we were to take the track to the right (very steep), we would come to the bed of the Rupit gully and we would link up, via the Estret del Palatí, with the GR 7 (Vallespinosa-Cabra section) and the GR 175 (Ruta del Cister, Pont d'Armentera-Montbrió de la Marca section).

Whilst making our way along the wide track a wide view opens up over the Rupit gully, Camp de Tarragona and the Mediterranean. The path makes a detour to by pass a gully.

0:05  1:51

0,400  8,700

Branch. We continue by taking the well-trodden track branching off to the left, heading northeast. As we make our way down we come across orchards belonging to the Cal Figueres *masia* and the corresponding access roads to the same.

On the right we pass the track which passes by a pylon and on to the crags of Clot del Capó and to Roca Vidala, the impressive balcony which looks out over almost the entire Rupit gully and only five minutes from this point.

0:08  1:59

0,700  9,400

Masia de Cal Figueres. We make our way behind the yard and the *masia* buildings which, as we have been able to see for ourselves throughout the excursion, is one of the few in the area which has been well maintained and still habited. Now also a bar and restaurant.

0:01  2:00

0,100  9,500

TV-2141 road from the Pont d'Armentera to Selmella, where this hike starts and finishes.



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