

NATURE TRAIL



Espaces Naturels Sensibles

# LE PAS DE CÈRE

COMMUNE OF THIÉZAC

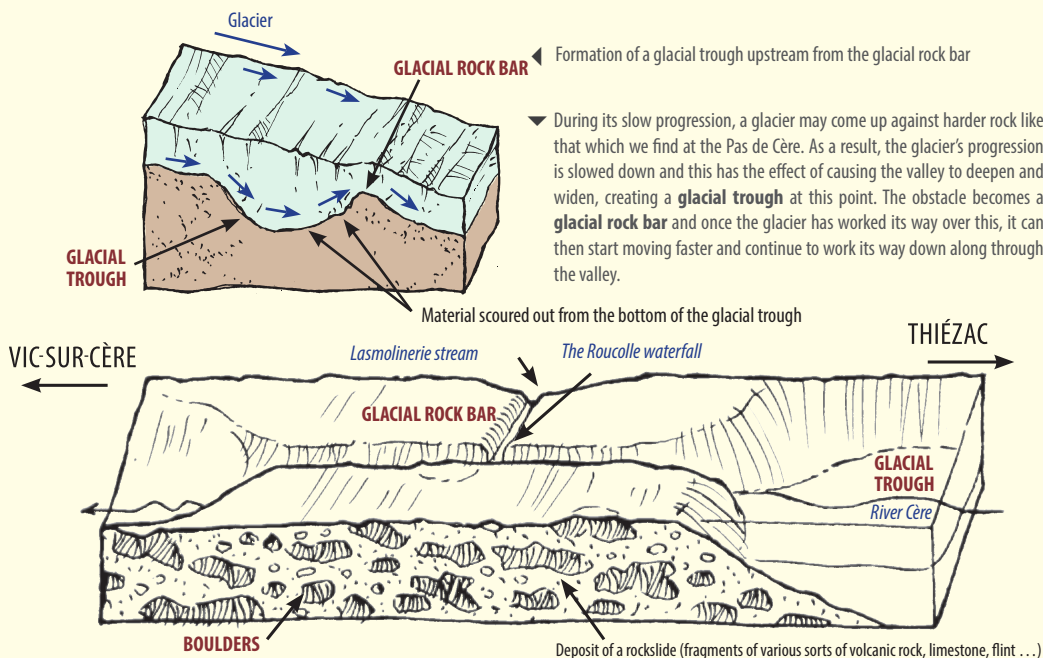
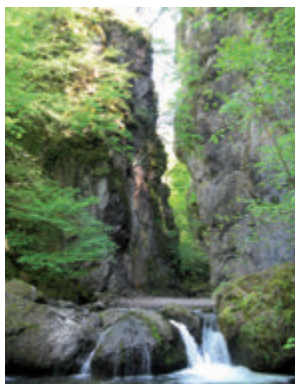
A footpath and  
discovery trail  
in the heart of  
the River Cère gorges!

# When the River Cère forms a gorge ...

A walk along the banks of the River Cère is an opportunity to discover a deep gorge that has been formed over the course of thousands of years. This is the result of the river carving its way through the hard rock at this site. At the foot of the cliffs at the Pas de Cère, the turbulent river may suddenly seem calm as it goes on to then meander its way peacefully down the valley that gradually opens up downstream.

The landscape here is a contrasting mixture of narrow gorges leading into the green valley. The reason for this lies in the area's geological formation. The valley of the River Cère was once a glacial valley made up of a long series of river basins separated by glacial rock bars.

The spectacular Pas de Cère gorges are at the very heart of a vast natural area spread over almost 5 hectares. The site is classified and protected as an Espace Naturel Sensible in the Cantal area.





....**The River Cère**

has its source in Le Lioran, crosses 3 départements (Cantal, Corrèze and the Lot) and flows a total of 120 km before joining the River Dordogne. It forms one of the main valleys in the Monts du Cantal area.

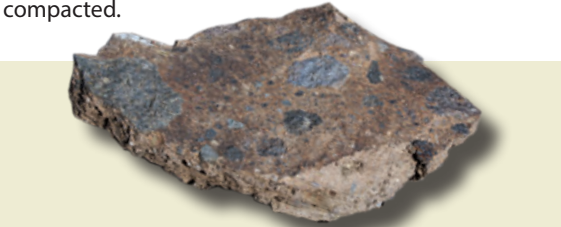


Mount St. Helen's

**The best way to really appreciate the history of the Cantal volcano is by studying the geological characteristics of the area, when it partially collapsed roughly 7 million years ago.**

It wasn't until the disappearance of Mount St. Helen's in the USA in 1980, that the important role played by huge rockslides in the evolution of composite or strato-volcanoes was properly understood.

At the Pas de Cère, the substratum in which the River Cère digs out its valley is composed of **breccia**: a special type of rock that is formed following a rockslide resulting in broken fragments of rock that are then assembled and compacted.



**Volcanic breccia rock** is a material that is frequently used for building purposes and often used in the Massif du Cantal area. It is chosen for its mosaic effect thanks to it being made up of a mixture of broken fragments of different material.

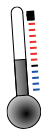
.....  
**A site of natural interest from as far back as the 18th century**

Up until the 18th century the gorges were reputed as inaccessible and dangerous. Rousseau and the pre-romantics of his time, had another way of looking at the natural world and **man's perceptions changed** from one of fear to one of attraction. Natural scientists took an interest in the gorges and writers of the first local guidebooks marvelled before this wonderful site. This coincided with the time of the growth in tourism, as more and more aristocrats started coming to the area. This was largely helped by the development of the rail services. **In the 19th century the Pas de Cère had become one of the best known sites in the region.** In 1891 the mineral water spring of Vic-sur-Cère was made open to the general public. The site became a popular place for short strolls and for people coming to the town to enjoy the spring water from the comfort of their hotel. The hotels were incidentally all provided in electricity thanks to the hydroelectric installations built just before getting to the gorges.



Collection A.D. Cantal

# A site with an abundance of plants and wildlife



The gorges are so deep that very little sunshine really reaches them. As a result, the air remains cool and moist, creating the perfect conditions for an abundance of plants and vegetation to grow. The natural landscape takes on many shapes and forms; abrupt woody slopes, rocks, meadowland downstream and of course the river and river banks. Trees and shrubs of all sorts thrive along the banks of the river, but particularly so Black alder (*alnus glutinosa*) and the Ash tree.



Photo CPIE

**Alliaria officinalis** or garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) has heart-shaped, slightly spike-like leaves, that when crushed, smell like garlic. The plant's seeds can be used to make mustard and evidence of their use can be traced back to around 6,000 BC. The discovery of some remains of prehistoric pottery shows that garlic mustard is one of the oldest discovered spices to be used in cooking in Europe.

"Moss grows abundantly under the moist canopy and rocks, tree trunks and broken branches are covered with a striking and lush, green carpet(...) The gorge is filled with plants that are not put off by the site's harshness. One has the impression of being inside a greenhouse surrounded by nature, in a unique and confined atmosphere (...): there's something mysterious about the place and as a visitor, one is naturally inclined to walk slowly, to whisper, to listen to the silence reverently broken only by the sound of the rushing water."

An extract from a booklet published by the Orleans Rail Company in 1898

Here are some of the many different plants that you will come across during your walk:



## Greater celandine

(*Chelidonium majus*) is also commonly known in Europe as tetterwort. The whole plant is toxic in moderate doses but there are numerous therapeutic uses when used at the correct dosage. This includes the treatment of warts by applying its yellow to orange latex on the wart. The latin word chelidonium means "swallow" and indeed the plant is also commonly known as swallowwort since the species belonging to the poppy family, flowers at the same time as the arrival of these migratory birds.



## Pale toadflax (*Linaria repens*)

is a small herbaceous plant that belongs to the Scrophulariaceae family. It has irregular-shaped, lilac flowers with violet markings. The species flowers from July through to October and it can be found in areas of the woodland that are not too overgrown.



## Dog's mercury

(*Mercurialis perennis*) characteristically forms dense, extensive carpets that spread over the woodland area thanks to its underground rhizomes. Its discrete green flowers come out from April to June.

Photo CPIE



Hello there!

My name's Lilou the Otter and I live in the banks along the River Cère. The river starts in Le Lioran and flows all the way across the Carladès area down towards the town of Aurillac.

Follow me on my adventures with the help of this activity book that you can use during your visit to the Pas de Cère! Meet me up at the look-out platform overlooking the Roucolle waterfall and our trail can begin from there!



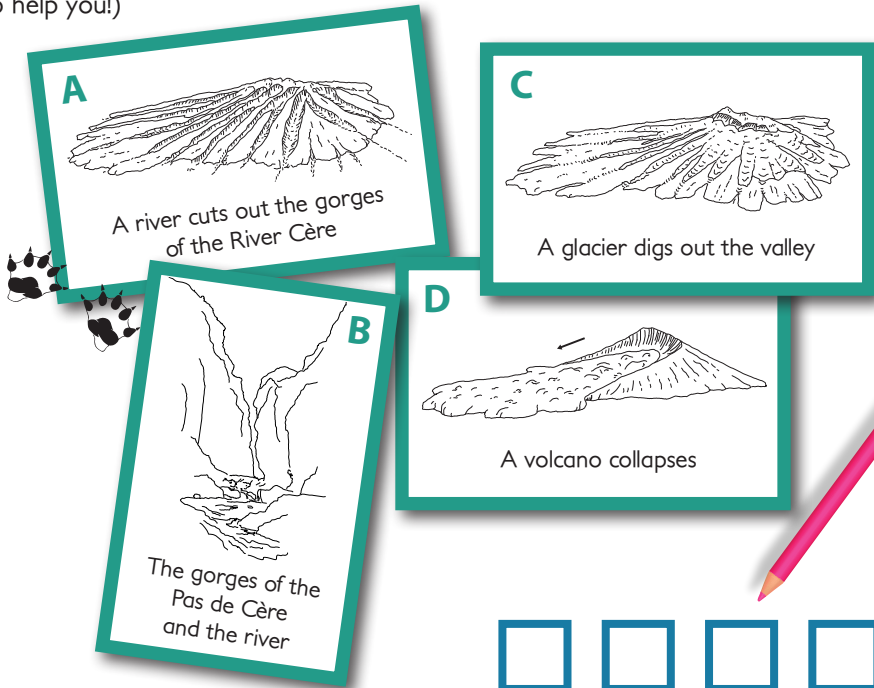
my  
"nature  
trail  
activity book"

The  
Roucolle  
Waterfall



# Oops!

Lilou the Otter wants to show you how the Pas de Cère was formed but she has mixed up all the cards! Help her put the cards in the right order to show the site's geological history. (Use the information panels at the look-out platform to help you!)



## Gap-fill

Lilou the Otter really looks after the environment. Complete the sentence below with the missing words ... and then make sure you follow her example ! Thank you.

make

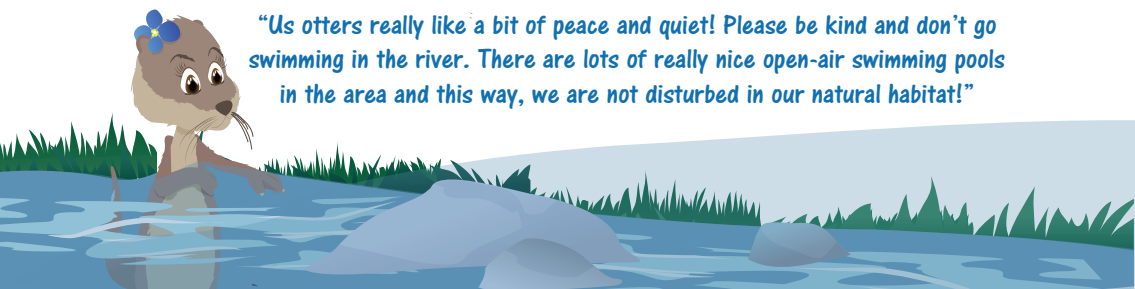
rubbish

have

take

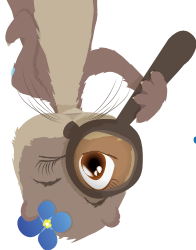
snack

If you ..... a little ..... while visiting the Pas de Cère, please ..... sure that you don't forget to ..... your ..... home with you.



*"Us otters really like a bit of peace and quiet! Please be kind and don't go swimming in the river. There are lots of really nice open-air swimming pools in the area and this way, we are not disturbed in our natural habitat!"*





## True or False ?

Test how much you know about the Pas de Cère.

(Use the information board down by the river to help you).

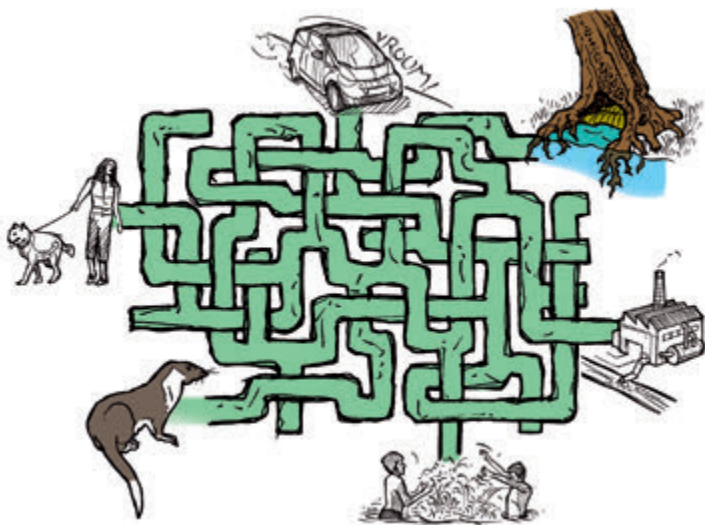
### True False

- ☐ ☐ 1. The Pas de Cère is the point where we can cross the river.
- ☐ ☐ 2. The Pas de Cère is a stick of rock.
- ☐ ☐ 3. The swan likes diving and catching insects in this river.
- ☐ ☐ 4. An «Espace Naturel Sensible» is a remarkable site that we must be careful to protect.
- ☐ ☐ 5. On this site we can find a rock called trachyte.

## Find the way



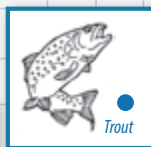
Help Lilou the Otter find her den but avoiding all the dangers on the way.



CARDS: D - C - A - B / GAP-FILL: If you have a little snack while visiting the Pas de Cère, please make sure that you don't forget to take your rubbish home with you / TRUE-FALSE : 1. True 2. False, the site is a rock bar, a collection of rocks that blocked the advance of the glacier tens of millions of years ago - 3. false, it's the white-throated dipper and not the swan - 4. True - 5. True, it's a volcanic rock. Remember, here you are at the foot of the Cantal Volcano / WHO EATS WHAT ? : Otter > trout, toad - Trout > water insect - Lesser horseshoe bat > butterfly, spider - White-throated dipper > water insect, tadpole - Great spotted woodpecker > insect larvae under tree bark / CODE: Thank you for coming here"

# Who eats what ?

Match each animal with what they eat



Butterfly

Trout



## Word-search

Find the key words about the Pas de Cère in the word-search below.

V	D	X	G	L	A	C	I	E	R	I	J	X	E	R	E	C	E	ROCKSLIDE
S	Q	H	R	S	I	R	B	E	D	O	A	P	A	Z	S	G	C	WATERFALL
P	D	W	W	I	N	Y	V	X	D	S	B	J	P	L	O	K	U	ASH
L	E	S	S	E	R	H	O	R	S	E	S	H	O	E	B	A	T	CERE
X	C	O	F	F	M	E	J	G	U	E	V	O	L	C	A	N	O	DIPPER
M	K	E	W	E	C	I	P	B	G	X	Z	Y	B	E	G	E	X	DEBRIS
I	I	K	B	P	A	J	H	P	B	A	H	A	D	Z	B	I	F	GLACIER
A	I	X	P	D	F	M	Z	J	I	R	Y	I	L	U	E	Z	Y	GORGE
L	B	E	E	S	X	W	D	K	E	D	L	X	G	B	E	H	H	BEECH GROVE
N	L	Z	L	V	R	H	F	T	I	S	N	Q	O	E	C	V	Q	SWALLOW
R	K	A	T	N	W	Q	T	E	K	F	M	E	R	R	H	O	Z	OTTER
T	O	S	F	R	V	O	U	C	E	D	U	S	G	A	G	M	S	LESSER HORSESHOE BAT
S	C	C	O	R	W	F	O	O	J	H	W	X	E	B	R	J	Z	TROUT
M	D	Y	K	B	E	R	R	H	T	A	T	S	P	I	O	O	R	ROCK BAR
W	L	L	O	B	S	T	T	V	L	T	O	J	E	L	V	R	G	VOLCANO
S	T	R	Y	A	A	Q	A	L	S	A	E	A	M	Z	E	K	H	
B	K	T	B	S	W	R	O	W	H	N	X	Z	Y	I	K	Z	C	
Y	C	P	H	H	O	W	O	M	A	X	Z	E	F	J	Z	Q	I	

Replace each letter with the one that comes before it in the alphabet.

UIBOL ZPV GPS DPNJOH IFSF\*.

See you soon in Carladès!





## The River Cère's cold and highly oxygenated water .....

The water conditions make it the ideal place for different species such as the Fario trout, the Bullhead, the Kingfisher, the Dipper or the Ephemerids, insects that live as larvae for a year and then only one single day as a flying adult. Their presence is often a sign of highly oxygenated water that results from the fast flowing current.



Photo ©Hans Hillewaert, Wikimedia Commons.

**The European bullhead** isn't a very good swimmer and yet it can change its colour depending on its environment. In this way it surprises its prey by merging in with the colour of the river bed (homochromy).

**The White-throated dipper** (*Cinclus cinclus*) is a small brown and white bird, the size of a blackbird, that lives along the riverside. It feeds off the larva of water insects and dives underwater to find them. As it comes up to the water surface, the dipper then floats downstream a short way.



## ... The cliffs of the gorges are home to **Rock swallows** and bats, including the **Lesser horseshoe bat**.

This bat is typically found in areas with both woodland and marshland, in the vicinity of a river or stream where it can hunt for food. In 2010, 11 other species were recorded as being found in this protected area, Espace Naturel Sensible. This is an encouraging indication of the rich variety of bat species, in the Chiroptera order, that can be found in the valley of the River Cère.



### The Rock swallow

This migratory species can be found in Cantal towards the end of February/beginning of March until the end of October, when it flies to the south of France. A few breeding couples nest at the Pas de Cère.



**The Lesser horseshoe bat** only breeds in attics and hibernates in caves where the temperature remains constant.

# The otter, a special and protected animal here at the Pas de Cère



© Charles Lemarchand, Catiche Productions.

**The European otter** is a real survivor: hunted for its fur for a very long time, accused of decimating the number of fish in the river, poisoned by water polluted by toxic substances, and fleeing from Man increasingly intent on urbanization. All of this meant that the otter very nearly disappeared from Western Europe altogether. Since it became a protected species 30 years ago, the otter has begun re-colonizing rivers in France starting from the Massif Central and also the Atlantic coast. The growth in the numbers of this species still remains threatened however, due to man-made changes to the natural river flow and also the decline in the quality of the water.



**The River Cère, is ranked as  
"a home for otters" by the  
Natura 2000 European network**

This title means that at this site, not only protected areas are provided for the otters to live, but also that the water here is of a good quality and an abundant food supply is available (fish, toads, crayfish).

Today, the River Cère offers all the conditions required for the otters to breed and colonize new areas. The down side is that as the young otters seek out new areas to live, they are sometimes run over as they cross the main road, the RN122, running along the valley of the River Cère.\*

© Charles Lemarchand, Catiche Productions.



\* The otter is highly territorial: each individual otter lives within a vast area that, for some male otters, can stretch as far as 40 km along the river.



© Noël Gouilloux, Catiche Productions.

A river with an abundant fish supply, good quality water, as well as peace and quiet ... a combination of the perfect conditions that have won over the otter to settle in the River Cère. As well as being a highly skilled swimmer thanks to its powerful webbed paws, the otter also roams for miles along the river banks.



© Glade Jacquemart



## Game for hide and seek

The otter spends a large part of the day hiding in the different nooks and crannies by the waterside. This sort of habitat is essential to the development of these animals.

As long as the environment offers enough peace and quiet, the otter will spend the best part of the night or daytime, resting and cleaning its fur. It will seek a peaceful spot to hide on a little ledge or in a shelter amongst the roots of the trees along the river, or else under drift wood on the river bank or in rocky holes.

In the mating season, the main nesting den used by the otter is called a *holt*, and is often found under the roots of large trees, with an entrance below the surface of the water.



Cross-sectional drawing of an otter's holt. © Noël Gouilloux, Catiche Productions.

## Do-not disturb !

The otter is an extremely discreet, largely nocturnal animal, making it a very difficult to observe.

Often the animal's droppings on the stones and river banks will be the only signs of the otter having been in the area. Otter droppings can be recognized by their special musky smell of honey and fish. You may also come across its tracks or maybe leftovers of what the otter has eaten (toad skins, crayfish claws, fish bones and flesh).

The presence of dogs, visitors and fishermen along the river banks disturbs the otters and this may explain why the growth in their numbers remains relatively limited.

**Please try and be as discreet as possible during your visit ...  
a bit like the otter !**

© Charles Lemarchand, Catiche Productions.



© Charles Lemarchand, Catiche Productions.



**As you discover this protected area, an Espace Naturel Sensible area, you are contributing to developing responsible tourism in France !**

*You realize how important it is not to build dams in the river, not to treat the river banks like a beach for many other places are far better suited to swimming than here.*

*You know that if you mess around in the water, you will disturb the otters that live here.  
Your efforts mean that you help to maintain a peaceful home for the otters.*

# Getting to the Pas de Cère

The site of the Pas de Cère is situated on the commune of Thiézac, just off the main road, the RD122 travelling towards Vic-sur-Cère.

- Look-out platform overlooking the Roucolle waterfall.

*Walk from the car park there and back 20 min.*

## Choice of two walking itineraries :

- « The mysterious gorges of the River Cère »

Park in the car park just off the RN122 coming from Thiézac or from Vic-sur-Cère. Walk along the river banks towards the Pas de Cère.

*Slightly hilly walk there and back and uneven footpath.*

- « Mystery at the Grand Hotel »

Historical visit with a mystery to solve. The clues are in French.

From Vic-sur-Cère, walk towards the hamlet of Salvanhac and start the mystery tour.

*Reasonably flat walk taking you to the Pas de Cère from the campsite in Vic-sur-Cère.*

For further information, please contact

**Carladès Tourist Information Office**

**Tel : 04 71 47 50 68 - [www.carlades.fr](http://www.carlades.fr)**



Other natural sites  
in Cantal are  
well worth a visit.  
Marked out footpaths  
will help you  
discover them.



Booklet created with the precious help of Arnaud Dardon, geologist in Thiézac and the revision committee members.

