

THE MONASTERY OF SANTES CREUS STANDS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF AIGUAMÚRCIA, IN THE ALT CAMP DISTRICT ON THE LEFT BANK OF THE RIVER GAIÀ.

The Cistercian monks who founded it came from the French monastery of Grand-Selve. At first they sought to establish themselves at Valldaura, close to Barcelona, but the site was too close to the monasteries of Sant Cugat and Montserrat. A year later they tried at Encosa, close to Llacuna, where they found very dry land. Finally, in 1160, during the reign of Ramon Berenguer IV, they founded the monastery of Santes Creus beneath the sierra of Montagut, in the valley of the Gaià.

The long history of the monastery of Santes Creus can be divided into two main periods.

The first period goes from the times when the abbots were elected for life, until the 17th century. This was a period in which the monastery enjoyed great privileges and great influence in general and political affairs. Although the monastery's estates were extensive and important, work and prayer were the dominant activities within its walls.

The second period was one of slow decline, beginning with the quadrennial abbots and the loss of economic and political influence, until the community was completely extinguished in 1835, with Mendizábal's seizure of church property.

These days there is no monastic community at Santes Creus; but we can still say that some of the intellectual and spiritual strength of those times yet remains, profoundly transformed into "*giant monks in a constant attitude of prayer*", monumental cypresses whose green hoods move to the rhythm of the strongest winds.



Plaça de Jaume el Just

As you leave the monastery you find yourself in the Plaça de Jaume II.

On the left-hand side is the Great Orchard. It is an enclosed orchard, very sunny and protected from the cold winds, a good place for fruit trees and vegetables to grow all year round.

In front of you some of the houses, the two first ones, adjacent to the Great Orchard, were hostleries; next to them the administration and then, on the corner, the treasury.

On your right, the Porta Reial, or Royal Gate, a 14th-century structure framed by a pointed arch.

Above it, on either side, are shields with the *fleur de lys* of queen Blanca d'Anjou and in the centre are the four-barred arms of king Jaume el Just.

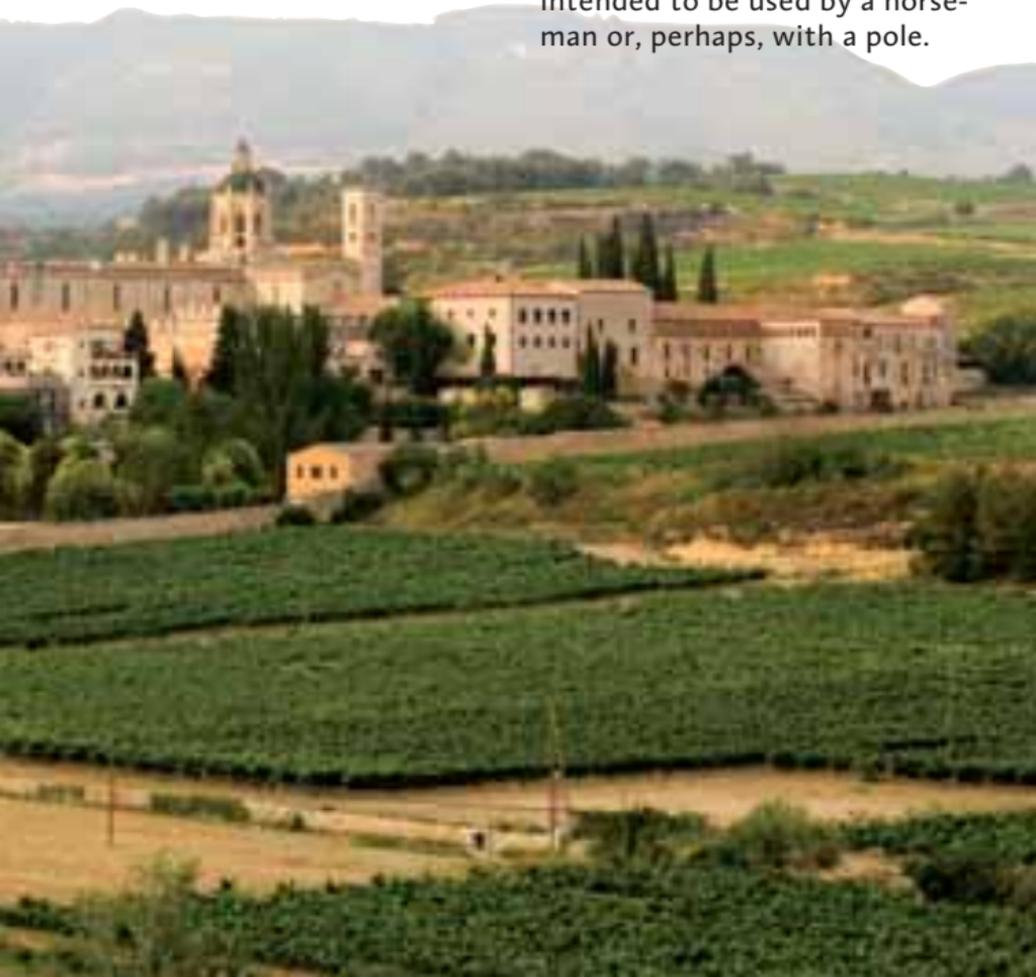
On either side of the gateway there are buttresses and brackets to support a vaulted ceiling, probably of a porch that was never completed.

Notice the unusual doorknockers, intended to be used by a horseman or, perhaps, with a pole.



The Royal Gate

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Plaça de l'Església



Joc de Pilota

Before the church, on the right, is the corner known as the *Joc de Pilota*, or *Ball Game*, where the novices would play during their free hours.

The church, in the shape of a Latin cross, has a three-aisled nave. The transept and the central aisle have ridged roofs; the two side aisles, not as tall, void the water to north and south.

The sober, austere west end is very elegant. Notice the fortifications, with their crenellations and loopholes, which were completed around 1378. The doorway has a semicircular arch but Gothic mouldings; vegetable decorative motifs prevail. On each side of the doorway there is a pair of blind arches with shields, which may have supported two funerary urns. The great window in the west end, dating from the mid-13th century, contains much original stained glass.



West end of the church

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Plaça de Sant Bernat



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While descending the steps and looking at the Plaça de Sant Bernat, you might well ask, “Who lived in these houses and what were they used for?”

The life of the monastery required all sorts of facilities and many of them were in this square. On the first floor of the houses you see to your right, elderly monks lived, as well as the doctor, the apothecary, and their servants. The ground floors were storerooms.

On the other side, on the left, there was the treasury, the hospital of Saint Peter, the pharmacy and several other facilities for community use.



Font de Sant Bernat

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Right in the middle of the square there is a fountain, the *Font de Sant Bernat Calbó*, which was

built in the 18th century. Abbot Bernat Calbó was one of the great abbots of Santes Creus. It was he who blessed king Jaume I and his army here at Santes Creus before their departure to conquer Mallorca in 1229.



Courtyard of the abbot's residence

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Of the former Saint Peter's hospital the porticoed entrance remains, with its pillars and slightly pointed arches typical of the 13th century. In the mid-16th century the building was converted into the abbot's residence. Today it belongs to Aiguamúrcia municipal council.

Before leaving the square you should turn round and survey the magnificent group of buildings once again. The scratch-work facades of the houses, the fountain in the middle, the flight of steps beyond it, the austere west end of the church, between the Tower of the Hours and the Guard Tower: they all add up to a remarkable view.

Plaça de Santa Llúcia

Walk out beneath the vicarage to reach the Plaça de Santa Llúcia. The square owes its name to the little chapel dedicated to Saint Lucy that you can see on your left. It was the parish church of "the villages", Aiguamúrcia and all those who lived near the monastery. The church pertained to the abbot and was administered by a monk. It was consecrated in 1741.



Santa Llúcia

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Beside the chapel there is a barred way that leads onto a private estate on which the Molí de Dalt, or Upper Mill, once stood. A notable feature of the square is the Porta de l'Assumpta, or Assumption Gateway, a monumental Baroque construction framed by two columns topped by a niche containing a portrayal of the Assumption of Mary, patron saint of the Cistercians. Above this can be seen the abbey's device, the double cross. If you look out over the parapet you can enjoy a magnificent view of the Gaià valley and the Albereda.



Plaça Sant Bernat, with the church behind

© MHC

Camí dels Hortets



Assumption Gate

© MHC

This little square formed part of the outer monastic precinct; as well as the chapel and the vicarage, here were the stables, the blacksmith's, and sheds and store-rooms for animals and agricultural implements.

Leave the square through the old gatehouse, turn right and take the path alongside the *Font de la Cuixa* to reach the main road, known as the "carretera de Les Pobles", along which runs the wall that protects the monastery's northern side.

This is the cold side of the monastery. The stones are blackened by damp and worn by the lashing of the north wind.

The first thing that attracts your attention is the Guard Tower. It was built at the end of the 14th century, just after the church was completed.

Beyond, high on the transept wall, you can make out a plaque with shields. Legend has it that this is perhaps the tomb of a master mason who died here after falling from the scaffolding.

At the end of the wall that surrounds the monastery begins the Camí dels Hortets, or "orchard way".



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Water control building with the Sant Sebastià woods in the background

About fifty metres on the left, there is a small building which was used to control the flow of the monastery's water supply. Further along, on one side of the way, there are orchards where fruit trees and vegetables are grown. On the other, at the end of the wall, is the southern facade of the monastery. This view does not well reflect the grandeur of the spaces within the building. Next you can see the Guard Tower, and the facade of the Royal Palace, the facade of the new refectory, with its Gothic window, the remains of the old kitchen and the new reception area.

Following the road, further along, you cross a dike, or channel, which once collected water from a number of springs which over the years have ceased to run. After this dike, you walk alongside a reed bed until you come to a crenellated boundary wall in a semi-ruinous state. This is the wall that encircled the monastery's vineyard. This was known as the *Vinya Closa*, or enclosed vineyard. The way now passes by the *Els Manantials* estate, the *Torrent d'en Rubió* and the main road to *Aiguamúrcia* to the *Molí de Baix*, or Lower mill, where it ends.



Crenellated wall

Lower Mill and Upper Mill

The monastery of Santes Creus had two mills, the Molí de Baix, or Lower Mill, and the Molí de Dalt, or Upper Mill. Both of them have now been converted into private houses.

The site chosen for a monastery was very important, because it needed to be a suitable place if it was to develop. Somewhere far from noise yet with good communications, with good land with plenty of water and a quarry not far away to supply stone. Water was and is of primordial importance. The monastery of Santes Creus received water from dikes, wells and springs.

The water coming into the monastery was channelled into the kitchen, the laundry, the pond, the olive press, the fountains in the cloisters and in the Plaça de Sant Bernat. Surplus water went off toward ponds for the orchards and the mills. When the millponds held enough water, the milling of cereals and flour-making began.

The Molí de Baix, like the other, has undergone many changes and all that now remains is the pond, remains which you will see on the left, on the way to the Albereda, along the road from Aiguamúrcia to Santes Creus.

After about 400 metres you come to the entrance of the *Planes del Molí* estate and on the other side you can glimpse the Albereda, or poplar wood. Closer to the monastery, on the right, you see boundary wall in front of you. If you look over the wall, you can discern a group of buildings with a stand of pines behind them; these are the buildings of the old Molí de Dalt.



The Albereda poplar wood

On reaching Santes Creus again, you will find some paths on the left that descend into the Albereda, or poplar wood. It covers an area of about 9 hectares on the left bank of the river Gaià.



Greenery and water

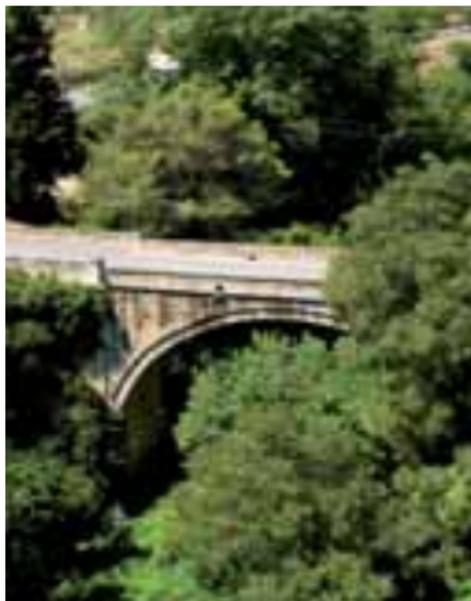
The densest vegetation is to the north and south. You can find trees here such as small-leaved elms, white poplars, hackberries, pyramidal poplars, maples, horse chestnuts, ashes, oaks, figs, plane trees and many bushes and herbaceous plants, such as speedwell, ivy and nettles.

The poplar wood of Santes Creus, riverside woodland as it is, is home to many species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, arthropods and others.

On 10 January 2000 the PEIN (Plan for Areas of Natural Interest) of L'Albereda was approved, noting, *"The poplar wood of Santes Creus is an exceptional landscape situated on the left bank of the river Gaià, which is interesting because it preserves riverside vegetation which is highly representative of southern Catalonia. The area is characterised by levels of diversity and singularity that are found in few riverside systems in southern Catalonia"*.

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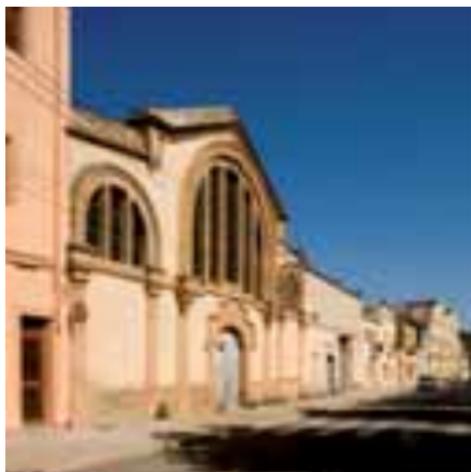
Stone bridge



Stone bridge

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Leaving the poplar wood via the road and the Carrer Pau Casals, you will come to the Pont de Pedra, or stone bridge. Half way there on the left is the old agricultural cooperative building, a work by Cèsar Martinell built in 1923 and now disused. The stone bridge occupies a strategically important site, since it links three routes, which in turn link six rural districts. The bridge was built in 1549 during the reign of abbot Jaume Valls, as recorded in an inscription on one of the pillars. It is a single-span bridge, built of ashlar masonry with a wide channel to avoid obstruction in times of heavy rainstorms.



Agricultural cooperative by Cèsar Martinell

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Wayside cross

Right beside the bridge stands the wayside cross. The base, dating from the mid-17th century, is formed by steps and is octagonal in shape. The ball, in Plateresque style, is decorated with eight recesses containing extremely worn images. The Gothic knot contains the arms of abbot Porta.



Wayside cross

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Font del Camp



Font del Camp

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Go back up the Carretera de les Pobles. After about 100 metres you come to the Font del Camp, or field spring, whose water is collected in a cistern that was formerly used to irrigate the orchards known as the *hazel field* and the *walnut field*. Both these orchards have now been built over.

Epilogue

Our walk comes to an end at the Font del Camp. As you have seen, Santes Creus is surrounded by a marvellous landscape that keeps changing throughout the year.

In the spring, still half asleep, the plants and trees are beginning to bud. The brilliant green of the vines, the half-curved leaves of the hazels, the lighter greens of the reedbeds and the olives contrast with the dark greens of the woods that surround the monastery on the banks of the Gaià.

In the summer, orioles, wood-pigeons, blackbirds and thrushes search for the first cherry trees whose fruit is turning red. On the vines, the grapes are slowly growing and the yellowish colours of the macabeu and parellada varieties mature. The more reddish garnatxa grapes and figs are ready for hungry pied flycatchers to fill their crop.

In the autumn, in comes the harvest. The leaves of the vines have been thinned out and the still sweetening grapes left after the harvest

hang from the stems waiting for some mistle thrush to make a good meal of them. In the poplar wood, the first winds stir the branches of the trees and showers of leaves in an infinite variety of colours carpet the damp ground, while the majestically airborne plumes of the canes are harbingers of the cold that is to come.

In winter, the setting sun colours the stones of the monastery blood red. In the cloisters a sepulchral silence reigns broken only by the burbling of the water in the fountains, or the startled cry of a blackbird off to roost. On very cold days the green moss of the fountain in the old cloister turns into chandeliers of icicles, emphasising, along with the cypresses, the solemnity of the setting. At the end of the winter the almond blossom reminds us that spring is round the corner.

Santes Creus and its surroundings form a complex whole that invites contemplation year after year throughout the changing seasons.



ROYAL MONASTERY OF SANTES CREUS

GUIDED TOURS FOR GROUPS

Tours with specialised guides are provided for groups and schools
 Information 977 638 329
 Reservations 695 186 873

OPENING TIMES

Tuesday to Sunday.

From 16 January until 15 March: from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. (+30 minutes) and from 3 p.m. until 5.30 p.m. (+30 minutes)

From 16 March until 15 September: from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. (+30 minutes) and from 3 p.m. until 6.30 p.m. (+30 minutes)

From 16 September until 15 January: from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. (+30 minutes) and from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m. (+30 minutes)

The ticket office closes 30 minutes before closing time.

SERVICES FOR VISITORS TO THE MONASTERY

WC

Audiovisuals

Shop

Guided tours

Independent visits

Supplementary activities

CLOSED

- Every Monday except on 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)
- A day in August, for a local festival of variable date
- 11 September (Catalonia's National Day)
- European Heritage Days
- 13 December, local festival

INFORMATION

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 08003 Barcelona
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CODE OF CONDUCT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The walk around the monastery of Santes Creus includes a visit to the Albereda poplar wood and involves walking over public and private land which is not part of the monastery. We must therefore respect these places and their surroundings.



Camping

Camping is prohibited.



Dogs

Dogs must be kept under control. They can frighten wild animals and harm the environment. Dogs are not allowed in the monastery. Dogs' owners are responsible for any damage they may cause.



Vehicle access

Vehicle access is permitted only on forest tracks open to the public. Vehicles are not allowed in the Albereda.



Rubbish

Do not leave, or bury, any rubbish. It can harm both people and animals. Take all rubbish with you and dispose of it properly in the containers provided.



School groups

School groups are not allowed in the Albereda unless they are supervised by a teacher or monitor.



Flora and fauna

Do not uproot any plants. Do not take away, or kill, any animal. They all have their function in nature. If you would like a souvenir of your visit, it is better to take a photograph.



Fire

During the walk you will come across areas rich in vegetation which must be protected from any risk of fire, especially during the summer and dry periods.



Monuments

Climbing on the walls of the monument and on the dry stone walls is prohibited. The stone is in bad condition in places and it could be dangerous. If you are with children you must be very careful. You must not inscribe anything on the walls or write any kind of graffiti anywhere.



Flower beds and marked tracks

Do not stand on the plants growing in flower beds or off the marked tracks.



Noise

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



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THE NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

The Albereda de Santes Creus is a small wood on the left bank of the river Gaià, very close to the monastery. Its vegetation is outstandingly luxuriant, in contrast with the dryer, Mediterranean surroundings. It contains trees which require a lot of water, such as the white poplar, the small-leaved elm and the willow. Here you can see animals associated with water such as Perez's frogs, water snakes, pied wagtails and the European chub. The Albereda is a popular place for the people of Aiguamúrcia and the district to spend their leisure time, and it is a biodiversity reserve. In 2000 it was declared an Area of Natural Interest.



AP

White Poplar (*Populus alba*)

The white poplar is so called because of the dense white down on the underside of the leaves and the silvery colour of the trunks of young trees. It grows naturally at the side of water courses but is also used for ornamentation and to provide shade in gardens and avenues.



AP

Black Poplar (*Populus nigra*)

A tree so characteristic of water courses that, as many hikers know, their presence often indicates the proximity of a spring. Black poplars grow quickly and easily attain a height of thirty metres. They are also planted in rows for forestry.



AP

Small-leaved Elm (*Ulmus minor*)

The small-leaved elm grows next to rivers and intermittent streams, closer to the water than the white poplar and the black poplar. The leaves are easy to recognise being asymmetrical. In recent years it has been affected by the spread of a fungal disease, Dutch Elm Disease, which threatens to decimate its numbers in European countries.



Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)

A tree often seen to the side of rivers and in wet gullies. The flowers can be candied and the fruit is used to make sweet drinks, preserves and the famous English Pontack sauce. Care must be taken to ensure that the berries are ripe, however, because if not they can be poisonous.

Perez's frog (*Rana perezi*)

The most common frog in the country. It lives in ponds and quiet sections of rivers and streams. Its colour varies greatly from vivid green to blackish. From spring to summer the males' emit their call, or croak. They feed mainly on insects, but also on spiders and worms.



AP



AP

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)

The pied wagtail is very easy to recognise because it tends to parade on riverbanks wagging its tail up and down nervously. It feeds on insects and small spiders as it walks and can also be seen in gardens, near crops and country houses.

Water snake (*Natrix maura*)

This snake, which can reach a metre in length, lives in pools and calm waters where it feeds off amphibians and fish. It is also known as the viperine water snake because, as a defensive mechanism, it can dilate its jaws to imitate the characteristic triangular head-shape typical of the viper.



AP

European chub (*Leuciscus cephalus*)

The European chub is an autochthonous fish of the carp family that can attain a length of fifty centimetres and reach a weight of a kilo. It is very much endangered by pollution and its numbers have diminished over recent years. It is omnivorous, but when adult prefers to feed on other fish and amphibians.



AP

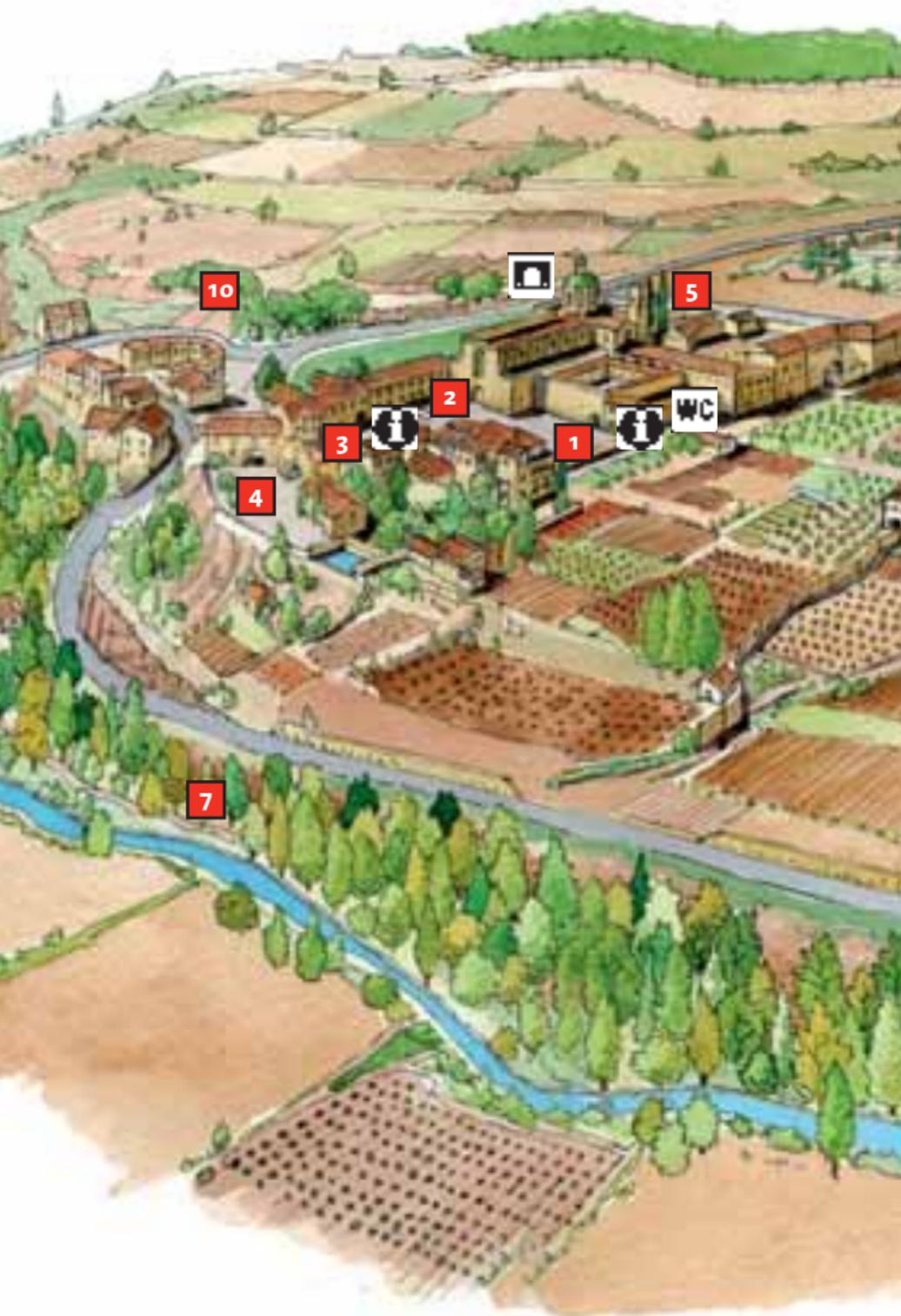
A WALK AROUND THE ROYAL MONASTERY OF SANTES CREUS

This walk takes about an hour. In general it is easy although care should be taken on the main road between points 4-5 and 9-10. Getting to the Albereda from point 6 involves walking beside the main road until you reach the main entrance on the left-hand side.



- 1** PLAÇA DE JAUME EL JUST
 - Start of the walk
 - Length: 2 minutes
 - Easy
- 2** PLAÇA DE L'ESGLÉSIA
 - Length: 1 minute from point 1
 - Easy
- 3** PLAÇA DE SANT BERNAT
 - Length: 1 minute from point 2
 - Easy
- 4** PLAÇA DE SANTA LLÚCIA
 - Length: 1 minute from point 3
 - Easy
- 5** CAMÍ DELS HORTETS
 - Length: 7 minutes from point 4
 - Easy
 - This section runs alongside the main road
- 6** MOLÍ DE BAIX AND MOLÍ DE DALT
 - Length: 15 minutes from point 5
 - Easy
 - The track is metalled
- 7** THE ALBEREDA
 - Length: 15 minutes from point 6
 - Easy
 - This section runs alongside the main road
- 8** PONT DE PEDRA
 - Length: 10 minutes from point 7
 - Easy
- 9** CREU DE TERME
 - Length: 1 minute from point 8
 - Easy
- 10** FONT DEL CAMP
 - Length: 4 minutes from point 9
 - Easy
 - This section runs alongside the main road









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WALKS

AROUND THE ROYAL MONASTERY OF SANTES CREUS

ENGLISH

