

Visit to Solius Castle

We will depart from in front of Mas Pla, to cross the Dalmau riverbed or Montclar torrent. Next to the golf course we will go up to the Solius Castle. We level off towards the Roques Bessonnes and we will pass under Roca Ponsa and the crags around it. On the way down, we will pass via the Roca Ponsa spring and the spring at Les Monges. Further on, we will find the Solius Cistercian monastery.

ROUTE – POINTS OF INTEREST

The walk's route covers 5.6 km and takes around 2 and a half hours. We will leave from in front of Mas Pla, former country house, currently converted into a restaurant. We will take a part of the GR 92, and leave it when we cross the Dalmau Riverbed or Montclar torrent.

The path comes up next to a golf course and a little further on, next to the Santa Elena convent or Can Vicens de Solius.

We will arrive under Solius castle's esplanade where on one side there is the rock known as the Roca del Moro or Roca del Forn, where there is a small cave cut into the rock which is believed to be of prehistoric origin and which has been used as a shelter for years and seems to have been used as a crematorium a long time ago. The Solius castle spring is under this rock.

On the other side, we can see a hill standing out from among the green of the trees which is half covered and crowned by many ruined walls: this is Solius Castle. The current condition of the castle is limited to the ruins of the walls which have been eroded by the rain, wind and the passing of time. A path leads us to the castle. A fortified wall, which is the wall in the best condition, has a rounded door which gives us access to the ascending staircase; many of the stairs are cut out of the rock. Around the whole castle there are round holes which formerly were used to hold sticks and close the access to the castle. Halfway up the mountain there is a cistern or water collector made from stones and half covered by the thickness of the woods.

From the summit there is a good panoramic view of the valley Vall d'Aro.

As it is a strategic location and according to the archaeological remains found there, it was inhabited a long time before the start of historical documentation, which dates back to the 11th century. The foundations of Rock Castle, to give it its former name, date back to the aforementioned 11th century.

It was a normal room and, due to the danger of war, also a fort, as some of the people of Solius were obliged to defend it, as they belonged to the Girona guard who had to "guard this castle and personnel making barriers and barbicans". Remains of this have been found all over the rock in the form of multiple holes and clearings.

It lost importance over time as it was difficult to maintain. The owner of Can Dalmau carried out building work in 1830, in the Carlist period. The work was not done with his own money but using money which came from the Soc de Sant Baldiri.

The work was done with little solidity and has barely reached our own times. The part which remained, in the South east, was pulled down altogether by a strong *tramuntanada* (Northerly wind), on 9th September 1969. In order to perpetuate its memory, monsignor Josep Maria Cervera Berta composed a sardana entitled "El Castell de Solius".

We will go down the same way we came up, as this is the only access route to the castle and if we continue walking we will reach the Roques Bessonnes. Impressive, abrupt and steep rocks and which climbers scale on one side. It is a great pleasure to walk on these rocks contemplating the holes and the shapes which have formed in the granite over time. We link in with the path marked as a small route, which takes us to Roca Ponsa and the different surrounding crags, which are all well visited by climbers. We snake through the crags and as we drop down we find the Roca Ponsa spring, which was built by Albert Gironès in May 1992. Water comes from the spring all year round. A small bench allows us to rest and enjoy the cool water.

On the way back, we have two options: the path which goes round the dam and the Can Dalmau country house or via the Santa Elena spring and Solius monastery. The spring is currently dry. This place was very pretty and isolated at the same time as a small path takes you off to the spring. A few years ago, a track was opened up exposing this place which used to be ideal for hiding away and meditation. Following the path we will arrive at the current Solius Cistercian monastery. The slim steeple in Solius is visible from almost the whole Vall d'Aro. It is built on the remains of a former Romanic church dating from between the 10th and 12th century, which was probably very small. It was expanded later and finally around the 18th century, having been opened through the centre, the current church was built which is much more spacious, making good use of the ruins of the first one.

The base of the steeple remained intact, including the Romanic walled picture windows, to raise the whole new part between 1829 and 1830. The stone was cut in the Romanyà mountain.

The current church building, which was started in 1773, has a central nave with four lateral chapels which have neoclassical altarpieces paid for by the people. The Virgin of the Rosario and San Isidro must be highlighted. Inside the church there are sepulchral tombstones for some rectors of the parish.

The most important change within the parish of Solius is the fact that in 1967, a group of Cistercian monks established themselves there to found the new monastery. With their lives of prayer and work they continue to maintain a centre of peace, silence and spirituality in this place and in these times.

It is a very interesting place to visit. Its church, gardens and even some crib scenes which can be visited all year round. The collection started in 1970, with the Birth scene, made by Brother Gilbert Galceran, a Solius monk, who had already exhibited crib scenes in Rome, in the General House of the Cistercian Order, and in Hauterive abbey, Switzerland. Among other things, in the monastery they were dedicated to binding books and manuscripts. Following the road, we reach the cars which we left in front of Mas Pla.

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