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PYRÉNÉES - MONT PERDU SPAIN & FRANCE

This outstanding mountain landscape between France and Spain, is centred on Mont Perdu, a limestone massif rising to 3,352 m. The site includes three spectacular cirque walls on the steep northern side in France and two of Europe's largest and deepest canyons on the Spanish side, all classic examples of these landforms. It is also a relic of a once widespread highland way of life now surviving only in this part of the Pyrénées, in a pastoral landscape which provides an exceptional insight into a past European society through its villages, farms, fields, upland pastures and mountain roads.

COUNTRIES

Spain and France

NAME

Pyrénées - Mont Perdu

MIXED NATURAL & CULTURAL WORLD HERITAGE TRANSBOUNDARY SERIAL SITE

1997: Inscribed on the World Heritage List under Natural Criteria vii and vii and Cultural Criteria iii, iv and v.

1999: Extended north as a Cultural Landscape to include the Commune of Gèdre in France.

STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE [pending]

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee issued the following statement at the time of inscription:

Justification for Inscription

The Committee inscribed the site under **natural criteria (vii) and (viii)**. The calcareous massif of the Mount Perdu displays classic geological land forms, including deep canyons and spectacular cirque walls. It is also an outstanding scenic landscape with meadows, lakes, caves and forests on mountain slopes. In addition, the area is of high interest to science and conservation.

Concerning cultural values, the Committee inscribed the property on the basis of **criteria (iii), (iv) and (v)**.

The Pyrénées-Mont Perdu area between France and Spain is an outstanding cultural landscape which combines scenic beauty with a socio-economic structure that has its roots in the past and illustrates a mountain way of life that has become rare in Europe.

INTERNATIONAL DESIGNATION

1977: The Ordesa-Viñamala Reserve designated a Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme (51,396 ha).

IUCN MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

Parc National des Pyrénées Occidentales
Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido

II National Park
II National Park

BIOGEOGRAPHICAL PROVINCE

Iberian Highlands (2.16.6)

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Situated in the west-central Pyrénées 45 km south of Lourdes in France, straddling the international boundary between the Department of Haut-Pyrénées in France and the Aragonese province of Huesco in Spain, at 42°38'N, 0°10'W. Comprises the eastern half of the Western Pyrenees National Park in France, and Ordesa and Monte Perdido National Park in Spain.

DATES AND HISTORY OF ESTABLISHMENT

- 1918: Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park (2,100 ha), the oldest in Spain, established by Spanish Royal Decree to protect the Spanish ibex, extinct since 2000;
- 1941: The Gavarnie, Troumouse and Estaubé *Site Classé* (Classified Reserve) established;
- 1966: The Viñamala National Hunting Reserve (51,396 ha) adjacent to the west of the Spanish park;
- 1966: Three buffer zones east and south of the Spanish National Park established, also the Los Cirkos National Hunting Reserve to its east;
- 1967: The Western Pyrenees National Park established by French Governmental decree; a buffer zone included the remaining area of the *Site Classé*;
- 1977: Viñamala Reserve designated the Ordesa-Viñamala Biosphere Reserve;
- 1982: Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park extended to 15,608 ha;
- 1988: The cooperative Mont Perdu Management Charter between France and Spain signed;
- 1988: The Spanish National Park established as a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive and received the Council of Europe Diploma category A, renewed in 1993.

LAND TENURE

In France the land is mainly owned by the communities of the Barèges and Aure valleys. In Spain it is owned by the five local municipalities of Torla, Fanlo, Tella, Bielsa and Broto. Some land is also in state and private ownership (España-France, 1997).

AREA

The site covers 30,639 ha: 20,134 ha in Spain and 10,505 ha in France:

The Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park (OMPNP):	15,608 ha
Part of the Viñamala Wildlife Sanctuary core area:	3,200 ha
A peripheral zone:	1,326 ha
Pyrénées Occidentales National Park (PNPO) eastern part:	7,451 ha
<i>Site Classé</i> of Gavarnie, Troumouse & Estaubé:	3,054 ha

ALTITUDE

From 600m to 3,352m (Mont Perdu/Monte Perdido, in Spain)

PHYSICAL FEATURES

The site extends over some 20 km of the High Pyrenees. In this part of the range, the precipitous northern slopes are carved into three sheer-walled glacial cirques with high intervening ridges cascading with waterfalls, which tower spectacularly above farmed and forested valleys. The barren less steep southern slopes are a high arid steppe deeply fissured by two of Europe's largest and deepest canyons, Ordesa and Añisclo, two deep valleys, Pineta and the gorge of Escuin, separated by three mountain spurs, and the Cirque of Soaso. The three valleys run parallel to the main range, open to oceanic influences from the west. On the ridge between is Mont Perdu, third highest peak in the Pyrenees, one of three jagged peaks formed from a 3,000m high stepped massif of folded marine limestone 50 million years old. To its north three convergent north-south valleys are separated by high crests of schistose and sandstone rock between the three cirques of Gavarnie, the most spectacular, with the highest waterfall in Europe outside Norway (423m), Estaubé, and Troumouse with the wall of Baroude. They are classic examples of the form. The name 'Perdu' was given because the peak is invisible from the north. To the southwest of the peaks is a high sandstone and schistose plateau at about 2,000m. It is a country

of fast receding glaciers: the Monte Perdido glacier shrank by 85% during the 20th century, 30% of this since 1991. But there are also many cliffs, caves, lakes, waterfalls, meadows and forests from which three rivers flow north and seven, south. Its isolation has preserved an unchanged relic of pastoral landscape once widespread in upland southern Europe now surviving only in this part of the Pyrenees.

CLIMATE

Altitude, topography and aspect significantly affect the local climate which encompasses dry karstic conditions on the summits to lush woodland at the foot of the north side and can be very changeable. The two main climatic regimes are the humid oceanic climate from the northwest and a continental sub-mediterranean climate on the south side. The average annual temperature is 5°C, the mean winter temperature in February is -1°C, the mean summer temperature in July is 12°C. Precipitation varies from 900mm to 2,000mm, the annual mean rainfall being 1600mm with an approximate seasonal distribution of: winter (16%), spring (30%), summer (22%) and autumn (32%). Snow can lie from October to April.

VEGETATION

The original forest at the lower levels was removed by burning and cutting so that the present forest, though dense, is not primary growth. At upper levels the open grasslands have been maintained free of scrub for centuries by grazing sheep. There is nevertheless a rich mosaic of vegetation in six contrasting zones within the site: sub-mediterranean, collinean, montane, subalpine, alpine and rock with scree. The submediterranean type is mostly found in valleys in the south and is dominated by holm oak *Quercus ilex rotundifolia* in rocky sites with Portuguese oak *Quercus faginea* in deep soils. The collinean vegetation is dominated by durmast oak *Quercus sessiliflora*. The montane areas to 1,700m are characterised by beech *Fagus sylvatica*, silver fir *Abies alba* and Scotch pine *Pinus sylvestris*. The subalpine vegetation above 2,300m is dominated by dwarfed black pine *Pinus uncinata* and the alpine area carries a high proportion of species endemic to the Pyrenees. The flora includes more than 1,500 species, of which 50 are Pyrenean endemics (España-Francia, 1997; but 3,500 with 200 endemics according to IUCN, 1996). It includes the endemic Pyrenean violet *Ramondia pyrenaica*, *Borderea pyrenaica* of a genus endemic to the Pyrenees, Pyrenean saxifrage *Saxifraga longifolia*, *S. iratiana*, silvery vetch *Vicia argentea*, *Antirrhinum sempervirens* and *Pinguicula longifolia*, alpenrose *Rhododendron ferrugineum*, edelweiss *Leontopodium alpinum* and rock jasmine *Androsace pyrenaica* (AMPPM, 1995).

FAUNA

The site supports many species typical of the Pyrénées, totaling 32 mammals, 171 birds, 8 reptiles and 6 amphibians. Less common mammals include Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*, marmot *Marmota marmota* (reintroduced), ermine *Mustela erminea*, wild boar *Sus scrofa*, ungulates such as roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* and Pyrenean chamois *Rupicapra pyrenaica pyrenaica* with a population estimated at 800 individuals. The Spanish ibex *Capra pyrenaica* became extinct in 2000. A very small population of brown bears *Ursus arctos* remained in the Pyrenees until the mid 1990s but the last was shot by a hunter in 2004. The Pyrenean population now consists of bears imported from Slovenia. There are also the wild cat *Felis silvestris* and the semi-aquatic insectivorous shrew-like Pyrenean desman or water-mole *Galemys pyrenaicus* (VU), which occurs at low elevations.

The avifauna is richer on the less visited Spanish side. It includes lammergeyer *Gypaetus barbatus* (7 individuals), in decline throughout Europe because of its dependence on pastoralism, Bonelli's eagle *Hieraëtus fasciatus*, Griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus* (EN), peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, hazel grouse *Tetrastes bonasia*, capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* (20), partridge *Perdix perdix* (50), rock ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus*, Alpine chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*, chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* (100), black woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* (30), treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, citril finch *Serinus citrinella*, wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*, northern wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, black redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus*, Alpine accentor *Prunella collaris* and white-winged snow finch *Montifringilla nivalis* (numbers from 1996 in Heath & Evans, 2000).

Reptiles include asp *Vipera aspis*, the Pyrenean rock lizard *Iberolacerta bonnali*, which is restricted to high elevations and the palmate newt *Lissotriton helveticus*. Among the amphibians, species of interest include the endemic Pyrenean brook salamander *Calitron asper* and Pyrenean frog *Rana pyrenaica*

(EN), endemic to the central and western Pyrenees. The park has a rich insect fauna, including 139 species of butterfly, one species being endemic to Ordesa, the Spanish argus *Aricia morronensis ordesiae*; and above 1,000m, the Apollo butterfly *Parnassius apollo* (VU). Some are restricted almost exclusively to this park within Spain: northern wall brown *Lasiommata petropolitana*, Glandon blue *Agriades glandon*, chestnut heath *Coenonympha glycerion*, common brassy ringlet, *Erebia cassioides*, Gavarnie ringlet, *Erebia gorgone*, false dewy ringlet, *Erebia sthenno*, mountain alcon blue *Maculinea rebeli* and mountain small white *Pieris ergane*. There are also an endemic cave-dwelling collembolan *Tricantella frigida*, found in Gavarnie cirque at 2,500m and the coleoptera *Tipnus unicolor* and *Speonomus bolivari* (AMPPM, 1995).

CONSERVATION VALUE

The spectacular site contains three classic glacial cirques and two immense canyons within a 20km stretch of the Pyrenees. The massif is a major water source and served as a refuge during glacial periods, resulting in a high degree of endemism and many locally restricted species. The Park lies within a WWF/IUCN Centre of Plant Diversity and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Remains of human settlement - stone circles, caves, and the Dolmen de Tella, a Neolithic dolmen dating from the Palaeolithic (40,000-10,000 BC) have been found in the area. Above the Cirque de Gavarnie is the Brèche de Roland, an abrupt gap in the crest associated in legend with the defeat of the warrior Roland at Roncevaux in Charlemagne's campaign against the Saracens. It became a route used by pilgrims to Compostella and by Napoleonic armies. Historically shepherds on both sides of the massif have cooperated in juridical and political agreements to permit and regulate transhumance across the crest. But this landscape of high summer pastures, terraced fields, stone shelters, farms and valley hospices has become the symbol of an ancient but declining upland pastoralism through which to interpret the past.

LOCAL HUMAN POPULATION

The local pastoral way of life has declined during the last 50 years, although trans-Pyrenean transhumant grazing still occurs, with sheep, some cattle, horses and goats from Spain being grazed on the better north-side pastures of the massif in summer. The land belongs to the local communities, not to landlords, who negotiate the transhumance. These amounted to less than 700 people in seven communities in 1997, but their numbers are gradually diminishing in number. Tourism is the only other economic activity in the nominated area (España-Francia, 1997). Close to the parks there are two villages in France and five in Spain; also several abandoned villages.

VISITORS AND VISITOR FACILITIES

During the 19th century, the northern face became a classic site for Romantic tourism and mountaineering. A total of two million tourists now visit the site each year. Two places are most visited, Torla in Spain at the park's western end, and Gavarnie village in France where a summer drama festival is held. The Cirque de Gavarnie is a very impressive mountain amphitheatre with a rock-face popular with climbers, and is the highest waterfall in France. Visitor pressure has been limited, especially, on the French side, by those using cars, to encourage pedestrian use of the protected areas instead. In general, entrance to the site is controlled by the park managers. On the French side there are visitors' centres at Gavarnie and Gèdre, and four others. Both the GR10 trail which runs the length of the Pyrenees and a high level section cross the site. On the Spanish side there are an eco-museum/visitors' centre at the Castle of Ainsa, an ethnological museum at Torla, a museum of traditional Aragonese pottery at Morillo de Tou and six information points. Camping, hiking, long-distance trekking, riding, climbing, cross-country skiing are available in the mountains, rafting, kayaking and fishing in the rivers. There are seven high altitude mountain refuges with several rough shelters on both sides of the border. Other accommodation is available in villages and hotels outside the site on both sides of the range.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND FACILITIES

The area has long been productive of useful scientific research into its geology, glaciers, flora and fauna. Two species have been of particular research interest: *Rupicapra p. pyrenaica*, and *Capra p. pyrenaica*, now extinct (AMPPM, 1995).

MANAGEMENT

The Parks have been managed to a high standard by the *Direction de la Nature et des Paysages* and the *Organismo Autónomo Parques Nacionales* of the of the French and Spanish Ministries of the Environment. The Mont Perdu Joint Steering Committee and Charter between the two countries provides for a model cooperative management committee and regulations, not yet finalized. The conservation plan is oriented towards limiting road construction and vehicle use. The agro-pastoralism practiced by local communities is the key means of sustaining the historic quality of the property and could be managed more actively. Hunting has been banned since 1979 which has allowed the wildlife to thrive, although the shepherds still perceived the native bear as a pest to be eliminated and it has now disappeared. Other programs include the management of the large numbers of visitors to the site. In France a management plan was approved in 1990, to be reviewed in 1997; in Spain the *Plan Rector de Uso y Gestión del Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido*, was approved in 1995 by Royal Decree. (España-Francia, 1997). The NGO the Association de Mont Perdu Patrimoine Mondiale promotes better management and awareness of the site. It is chaired by French and Spanish village mayors alternately.

MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS

An estimated two million tourists visit the site each year, bringing the inevitable litter and erosion. The mitigation of this impact is a main aim of management. According to reports in the IUCN Bear Specialist Group Newsletter, restrictions of hunting and limitations on motorised vehicles have not been welcomed by local people and hunters. The property would benefit from coordinated planning, implementation and monitoring by both state parties to maintain the increasingly fragile pastoral economy. Although in 1988 a cooperative charter was signed between representatives of the two sides, transboundary management has not been consistently effective. IUCN noted the site lacked a common management vision: on the French side there is no defined management structure, on the Spanish side, there is a lack of integration with the management structures of the National Park.

The annual week-long Gavarnie drama festival brings heavy road traffic and parking congestion into the scenic heart of the site, compromising its unique quality. Requests on six occasions by the World Heritage Committee for its removal as originally undertaken, from a location which the State Party had itself termed an “unacceptable desecration” continue to have no effect since the State Party considers its impacts do not have a significant impact on the integrity of the site. The property would benefit from coordinated planning, implementation and monitoring by both state parties to maintain the increasingly fragile pastoral economy. However, depending on the decision of the commune of Gèdre, the intrusive road to Troumouse may be barred to traffic except for busses and authorized users (UNESCO, 2010).

STAFF

The French National Park has a Director and a Deputy Director managing 7 technical staff (scientific, development, grazing and communication), 7 administrative staff and 34 rangers in charge of patrolling and guiding. The Spanish National Park has a Conservation Director managing a staff of two senior technicians (Deputy Director and Head of Conservation), 4 administrative staff and 12 rangers (España-Francia, 1997)

BUDGET

The budget for each national park in 1997, excluding personnel, was approximately: PNPO: 14 millions FF (US\$2,222,000); PNOMP: 300 millions Pts (US\$2,413,790). Additional funding is provided to the local municipalities by the state in Spain and by the state and regional governments in France to implement conservation measures in the buffer zone (España-Francia, 1997).

LOCAL ADDRESSES

Ministère de l'Environnement - Direction de la Nature et des Paysages. 20, avenue de Ségur. 75007 Paris, France.

Parc National Français des Pyrénées Occidentales. 59, rue de Pau. 65000 Tarbes, France.

Ministerio de Medio Ambiente - Organismo Autónomo Parques Nacionales. Gran Vía de San Francisco, 4. 28071 Madrid, Spain.

Consejería de Agricultura y Medio Ambiente. Gobierno de Aragón. Edificio Pignatelli. 50071 Zaragoza. Spain.

Parque Nacional de Ordesa y Monte Perdido, Plaza de Cervantes, 5, 22071 - Huesca, Spain

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DATE

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