



## EDITORIAL

Dear people of Montmaurin,

Montmaurin cannot be summed up in a few centuries of local history....The scientific community is unanimously agreed that there has been human habitation here for at least 400,000 years and that the mark of every period of history and prehistory is found here.

Therefore, after the legal action taken by the conservation societies "Entre Save et Seygouade" and Adaq-Vie, the village of Montmaurin must continue to take action concerning the "Quarry" case committed to by the previous council.

Along with all those opposing the Quarry, from Montmaurin and beyond, I have devoted myself for eight years to this fight to defend the area and its past against irrevocable destruction. This choice is worthless unless there are plans to preserve and enhance the Save and Seygouade valleys.

Therefore my objectives are:

- To act on behalf of the village for the preservation of its natural and archaeological heritage in partnership with, and starting from, the CMN's (National Monuments Centre) project which is of prime importance for the village ;
- To bring together groups and state services to set up global plans for the development of culture and tourism with a network over the whole area of Comminges/Haute Garonne/ Occitanie ;
- To allow researchers to resume archaeological digs necessary to bring the final objective to a conclusion: a definitive protection of the Montmaurin/Lespugue heritage.

I hope to share this objective with you. It goes beyond the interests of just Montmaurin because its history and heritage belong to everybody. All the officials from the area involved recognise that Montmaurin is a vital centre full of history and they are convinced, as am I, that the necessary dynamic had now at last been created.

Yours sincerely,

Silvia Belair, Le Maire

## An update on the development of the quarry case at village level

The steps undertaken by the conservation societies of Entre Save Seygouade and Adaq Vie which for eight years have brought the case of the quarry before all the law courts, from the Administrative Tribunal of Toulouse right up to the State Court, have in the end led to decisions which have allowed – in everyone's eyes- it to be recognised that Montmaurin, with its rich and diverse heritage, must be protected in the same way as are St Bertrand, Aurignac and Tautavel.

Our insistence on the presence of archaeological riches has, in fact, been validated by the results of the first partial archaeological analysis which had led the Bordeaux court to exclude from the quarry project a not negligible area from that first requested by the company.



The success of all the opponents, certainly only partial but symbolic, shows that our perseverance has been rewarded. What has also been rewarded and justified is the commitment of our supporters who, all along convinced of the justice of our commitment to the preservation and enhancement of our natural, historical,

archaeological, paleontological and prehistorical heritage, joined with us: those signing petitions both regional and national, associations, scientific and other learned experts, the Academie des Sciences Inscriptions Belles Lettres de Toulouse, those in charge of local, departmental and regional groups, plus important people in the world of research in archaeology, anthropology and prehistory, the press both general and specialised...

So far as the remainder of the area designated to be exploited is concerned, recourse to legal action has been exhausted. But as for the first part of this appropriated land, the regional prefect of Occitanie-Haute Garonne has asked for a complementary preventative archaeological investigation.

The prospect of this investigation being carried out gives us hope that the whole of the proposed site will be excluded from quarrying.

This is my dearest wish and what drives me as mayor to ensure that all operations are carried out properly.

For the moment I have not felt that the developer, Dragages Garonnais, wishes to cooperate with the village. At the beginning of April they even sent a land clearance team without notifying the village - owner of the land. Immediately I contacted Mme the Vice Prefect in St Gaudens to set up preparatory work prior to the arrival of archaeologists in close collaboration with the village.

We respect the law but all parties must behave in a similar way. If it is otherwise we will be exposed to disagreements like those we saw at the time of the previous preventative analysis which was done very badly. (Starting in March 2010). I shall be watchful and I rely on you all, dear inhabitants, to support me in the steps I take with transparency and responsibility.

The preceding development inspires in me a remark which I submit for you and for all those concerned in this case to reflect upon. In the preamble (page 4) of its "*Case for the request for authorisation to open a limestone quarry and to instal a crushing plant*" of January 2008 the heads of Dragages Garonnais wrote :

*"Following the difficulty of being able to restart quarrying on the Coume de Robert site (situated in the same area of land between the two rivers of Save and Seygouade) because of the presence on the site of protected caves and an important archaeological heritage, the Giuliani group (...) searched, with the cooperation of the local council (the one before us) for a new site for the extraction of limestone. After studying several sites that of the former quarry of Coume day Hourquat Garriga was chosen as being the*

*ONE OF LEAST IMPACT* (on what basis of what study was this judgment arrived at?)."

The owners of the Dragages Garonnais company admit that they had to stop quarrying on the site or near the site of archaeological richness and the need to choose the site further away "of least impact" (on what basis) and here the preventative archaeological analysis, even partial, revealed the existence of remains of a medieval development which are very important as they concern a period we still know little about. And here we are talking about an area within the proposed new quarry! Why has the wisdom of the company applied to halting the destruction of the Coume de Robert site not been applied to that of the Coume day Hourquat Garriga and Gaüsere ?.

Overall, we remain faithful to our candidates' commitment at the last local council election. Appointed by the majority of you but, in addition, spurred on by the wish to protect the interests of our wider community, we wish to discuss with the authorities and state services. We are honoured by their readiness to listen and by their desire to further the legal preventative archaeological analysis, the results of which we eagerly await.

We are encouraged in that by the conclusions of the previous analysis which proved us right and obliged the Administrative Tribunal of Bordeaux to exclude a not negligible part of the original area from the quarry project.

In parallel with my vigilance concerning the quarry project I am delighted to confirm that the National Monuments Centre (CMN) has decided to make an exceptional investment in the three sites in Montmaurin under its authority and management: The Gallo-Roman Villa "Lassales", the archaeological site of Notre-Dame de la Hilliere and the former presbytery which it is restoring, including within this an interpretation centre of the Montmaurin area.

***MONTMAURIN***  
***is***  
***1 off 100 national sites***  
***Managed by the National***  
***Monuments Centre***  
***and***  
***the only CMN site in***  
***Haute-Garonne***  
***and***  
***1 of 11 CMN sites in***  
***Occitanie region***

**Planned archaeological analysis to be carried out by the INRAP** (National Institute for research in preventative archaeology)

The intervention of an INRAP team is planned from the beginning of June 2017 and will carry out an archaeological analysis of the phases 2, 3 and 4 of the site area. I consulted DRAC which replied on 10 March 2017 that " the regional archaeological service will mobilise all available means to reply and will ensure that the analysis will be done in the approved manner, according to the most effective methodologies best suited to this context".

According to the prefectural procedure for quarrying companies, the pursuit of archaeological investigations on the appropriated land of the quarry, (Coume day Hourquat Garriga and Gaüsere) is planned and the developer Dragages Garonnais must effect moderate bush clearance in order to create access for those coming from INRAP.

So far as the order for land clearance to ground level made on 10.3 2008 is concerned, I approached the Sous-Prefecture at the start of April so that this order should not be applied as it stood, that only bush clearance over a reduced area should be carried out. I obtained an undertaking to this effect.

We cannot allow land clearance to ground level in the stipulated area when the archaeological analysis might reveal sensitive areas with remains and /or prehistoric caves there too, as in the Coume de Robert/Coupe Gorge where deposits were found of prehistoric significance such as the human mandible, and other human remains (bones and teeth) confirming human occupation as well as wild life remains like that of the cave lion, machaïrodus...

We need this complementary archaeological analysis of the appropriated land for the remaining phases knowing that:

- From the first INRAP involvement in May/June 2010 medieval remains from the thirteenth century were uncovered
- The the Societe Meridionale de Speleologie and Prehistoire uncovered cavities, rock joints, rock shelters, dolines.....throughout the Save and Seygouade valleys which prove an archaeological potential similar to that of the several sites of Lespugue/Montmaurin...
- That this analysis will - we hope- bring arguments against the quarry via new discoveries.

It is definite that the concession between the village and the Dragages Garonnais developer of the Giuliani Group, signed in April 2007, will expire in April 2018. BUT THAT IS NOT ENOUGH. It is for that reason that I hope the archaeological analysis will be carried out as properly as possible in the hope that it brings with it arguments as strong as those which have allowed the protection of the medieval sites and thus the whole area will be protected.

For 8 years I have personally been fighting, along with the members of the Montmaurin society, this abhorrent project which threatened Montmaurin with the destruction of its historical riches as well as the natural riches of the Seygouade valley.

I will not give up the fight, not today or tomorrow.

We have arrived at the beginning of a more promising future for Montmaurin so that we can concentrate our efforts on the preservation of the environment and its sites and share in the enhancement of the heritage of the area as a whole. To begin with we can do this with the CMN who has a fine plan for our village centred around the gallo-roman sites and the new museum, for all of which the CMN guarantees the cost and management.

The size of this investment is out of all proportion to our current village budget.

All those combined efforts with the same aim in mind, efforts of the village, the conservation societies amongst which is the association Entre Save et Seygouade, the National Monuments Centre, the presidents of the Occitanie region and the Haute Garonne, prefecture with the sous prefecture of St Gaudens....all are committed to supporting the plans for Montmaurin and its future. What will allow us to achieve our objective is a concerted dynamic of associations, scientists and state services around Montmaurin with one main aim, to stop the opening of a quarry.

The enhancement of the culture and heritage of our village will inevitably have repercussions on the private heritage of us all.

I thank you for your support in my actions and assure you of my commitment for Montmaurin,

Silvia BELAIR

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**OPENING TIMES AT THE MAIRIE :** Tuesdays : 14.00-17.00 – Wednesdays and Fridays : 14.00-17.30

It is possible to make an appointment at other timer.

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*Versions of this newsletter in French and English are distributed and are available at the Mairie.  
They can also be found on the internet site [www.montmaurin.fr](http://www.montmaurin.fr)*

**Photographs : Jacques Sabloux – The Forests of Comminges**