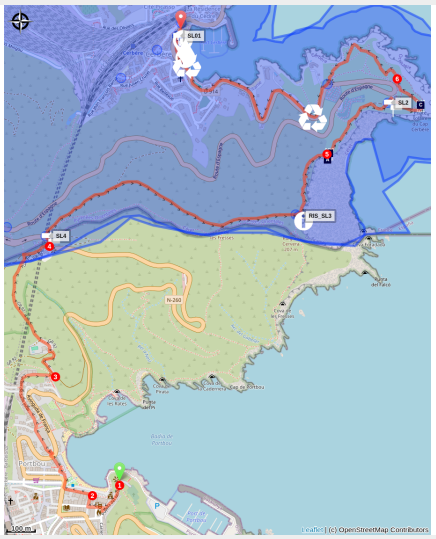
The Retirada and the Paths of Exile (From Port-Bou to Cerbère)

Côte Vermeille



(Elisabeth Coste)



In the footsteps of exiles who fled oppression during the Retirada and the war of 1939-45.

This superb hike along the border offers magnificent views of the sea, from Cap de Creus to Cap Béar, as well as the mountains and the small port villages of Port-Bou and Cerbère. Memorials along the route indicate that this path was taken by many exiles fleeing Francoist Spain or German-occupied France. A visit to the Art Deco, ocean-liner-style hotel, 'Le Belvédère du Rayon Vert,' is highly recommended.

Useful information

Practice : Hiking

Duration : 2 h 18

Length : 5.2 km

Trek ascent : 415 m

Difficulty : Medium

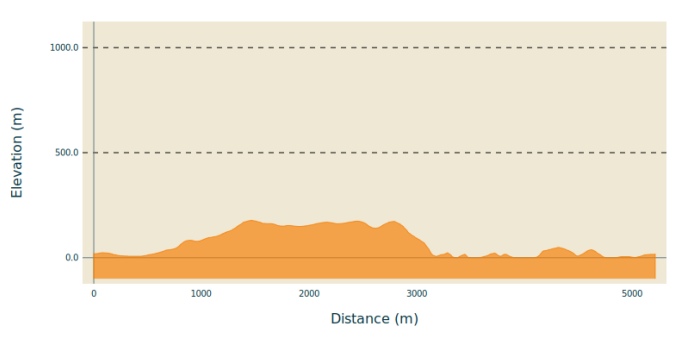
Type : Traversée

Themes : Flora, Point de vue, Histoire, Art, Littoral, Patrimoine

Trek

Departure : Walter Benjamin Memorial (Port-Bou)
Arrival : Tourist Office of Cerbère
Cities : 1. CERBERE

Altimetric profile

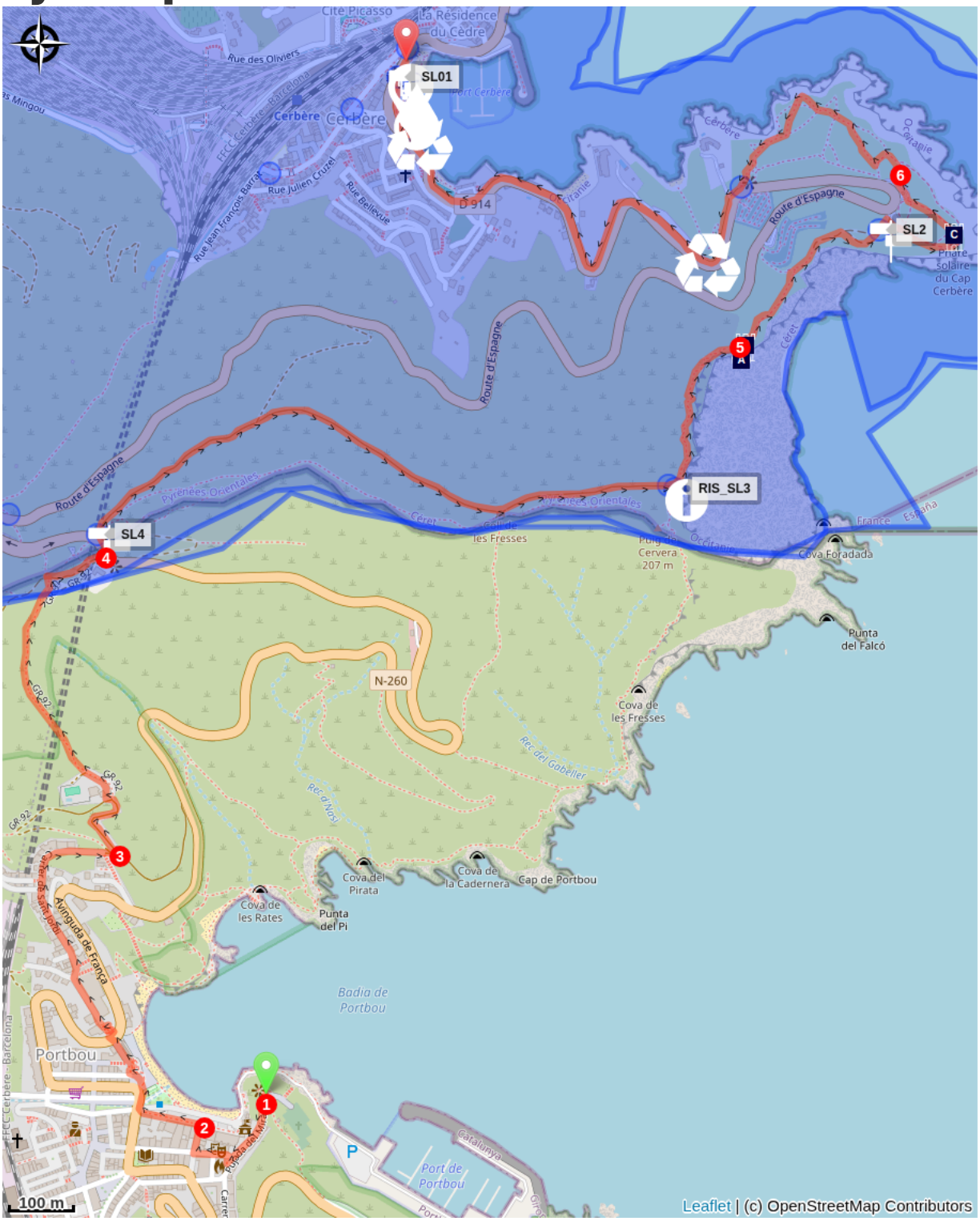


Min elevation 0 m Max elevation 178 m

Take the train from Cerbère to Port-Bou. Train schedules.
From the station, head to the Port-Bou cemetery, where the Walter Benjamin Memorial is located (feel free to enter the cemetery to visit his grave).

Face away from the sea and take the stairs to reach the Rambla on the right.
At the 'Voramar' restaurant, turn left and walk along the beach to join the GR-92 coastal trail.
At this point, turn left and follow the path to the Col des Belitres.
Cross over and continue towards the old customs officers' path.
Begin the descent to the solar lighthouse at Cap Cerbère.
Continue along the trail overlooking the sea, which then connects to the road leading to the Cerbère Tourist Office.
Head back to the train station parking lot.

On your path...



The cliffs of Cerbère (A) boundary stone n°601 (B)
Solar Lighthouse of Cap Cerbère (C)

All useful information

⚠ Advices

Bring water, hiking shoes, a windbreaker (regardless of the time of year), and a cap. Be cautious near the cliffs of Cerbère. Take your litter with you.

How to come ?

Transports

€2 bus
Train from Cerbère to Port-Bou for the outbound journey.

Access

D 914 (France), N-260 (Spain)

Advised parking

Cerbère train station parking

Environmental sensitive areas

Along your trek, you will go through sensitive areas related to the presence of a specific species or environment. In these areas, an appropriate behaviour allows to contribute to their preservation. For detailed information, specific forms are accessible for each area.

Zone Natura 2000 Directive Habitat

Sensitivity period:

Zone Natura 2000 Directive Oiseaux



Zone Natura 2000 Directive Oiseaux

Sensitivity period:

Zone Natura 2000 Directive oiseaux

On your path...



The cliffs of Cerbère (A)

The Cliffs of Cerbère are among the highest in Europe and are part of the Banyuls to Cerbère Ecological and Faunistical/Floral Natural Area (Zone Naturelle d'Intérêt Ecologique Faunistique et Floristique des Falaises de Banyuls à Cerbère). Located in the southern part of the Côte Vermeille, this protected area stretches across 7 kilometers of coastline between Banyuls-sur-Mer and Cerbère, covering 140 hectares.

This rugged coastline is oriented from north-northwest to south-southeast and is predominantly made up of schist. The cliffs are sharply cut and are followed by numerous reefs and underwater islets. Several prominent capes punctuate the coastline, including the Cap de l'Abeille, Cap Redéris, Cap de Peyrefite, and Cap Canadell, which demarcate several sandy coves. The most significant of these is Peyrefite Beach.

The summit plateaus are covered with Mediterranean vegetation, including grasslands and maquis scrubland, which are often intersected by temporary streams. This diverse and ecologically significant landscape is a haven for a wide range of plant and animal species, making it an area of great natural interest.

Attribution : Elisabeth Coste



boundary stone n°601 (B)

The boundary markers 601 and 601bis are part of the 602 boundary stones and crosses that delineate the Franco-Spanish border. These markers represent the last accessible land-based boundary points before the border reaches the Mediterranean Sea. The marker 602 is located in the Foradada Cave in the sea, between Cerbère and Port-Bou.

These boundary stones were established following the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659 and the Treaty of Bayonne in 1856, which set the current course of the border.

To reach boundary stone 601, one should follow the customs path (sentier douanier). Upon reaching the sign marking the end of the path section, continue straight ahead (following the yellow cross) rather than turning right onto the dirt track. This will bring you to the boundary stone, allowing you to experience this historical marker along the French-Spanish border.

Attribution : Camille Reynaud



Solar Lighthouse of Cap Cerbère (C)

The last lighthouse before the French-Spanish border, this structure, built in 1982, replaced the old Cerbère lighthouse, which was decommissioned in 1980. Also known as the “Solar Lighthouse” due to its power source—photovoltaic cells—it has a range of 15 nautical miles. To preserve the landscape, all external electrical wiring was excluded from the site. Don’t miss this lighthouse, recognizable by its grey stones and tall red top.

Attribution : Elisabeth Coste