Hiking and history: The various meanings of the Cathar Trail in the South of France

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Abstract

This paper shows how a historically constructed long-distance hiking trail can have various and discordant meanings. It draws on archival and promotional material, interviews and ethnographic fieldwork and examines the original Cathar Trail agenda and hikers' contemporary practice of the trail in the South of France. This cultural heritage trail was created in the 1980s and based on historical narratives and heritage sites. Hikers, however, redefined the Cathar Trail through their motivations, trip organisation and style of travel. Their journeys generated a trail at odds with the initial Trail agenda which sought to encourage hikers to engage in time travel. In sum, then, the paper demonstrates that the meaning of a trail for the hikers is formed through their experience of journeying rather than a cultural heritage agenda.

KEYWORDS: hiking trail, history, time, landscape, South of France

Introduction

This paper reveals a divergence and discordance in meaning between hiking practices and official trail agendas. It presents a case study of the Cathar Trail, a long-distance hiking trail which was originally defined by historical narratives and heritage sites. Connecting a series of ruined castles in the South of France, this 250 kilometre trail leads from the Mediterranean coast to the west in twelve stages (see Figures 1 and 2) and traverses hills, villages and vineyards. The paper draws on archival and promotional material, historical accounts, around twenty semi-structured interviews with tourist agents in the city of Carcassonne (the administrative centre of the county) and at tourist sites along the Cathar Trail as well as participant observation during the autumn of 2013.

After presenting the Trail's official discourse of cultural heritage tourism, the paper explores how hikers experience the Trail. According to the local tourist agencies and promotional material, the Trail is generally presented as the landscape where hikers can access and experience a different time (the medieval Cathar history) by immersing themselves in the contemporary, "pristine" landscape. Hikers, however, did not consider themselves to be journeying into the past – rather, they saw themselves as travelling within

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current chronological time. Hence, their motivations, trip organisation and style of travel generated a particular trail which did not necessarily align with the initial Trail agenda. Nevertheless, in other respects the hikers' perception of Trail landscapes did corroborate and extend the designers' interpretation of the Trail, which evoked the Cathars in particular places. Hikers did travel through castle country in the sense that the fortresses were part of the terrain. Furthermore, history and heritage narratives were not excluded from the Trail since the landscape was shaped by human involvement over time.

To begin, I explain how the Cathar Trail is historically constructed by discussing the creation and official agenda of the Trail with a view to contemporary hikers' use and interpretation of the Trail.

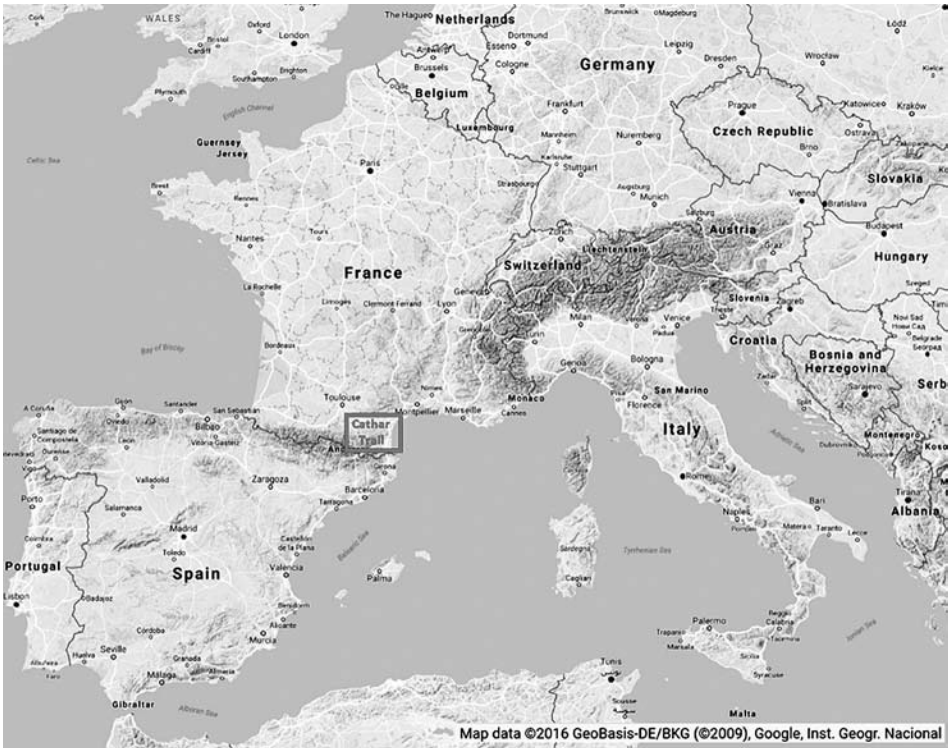
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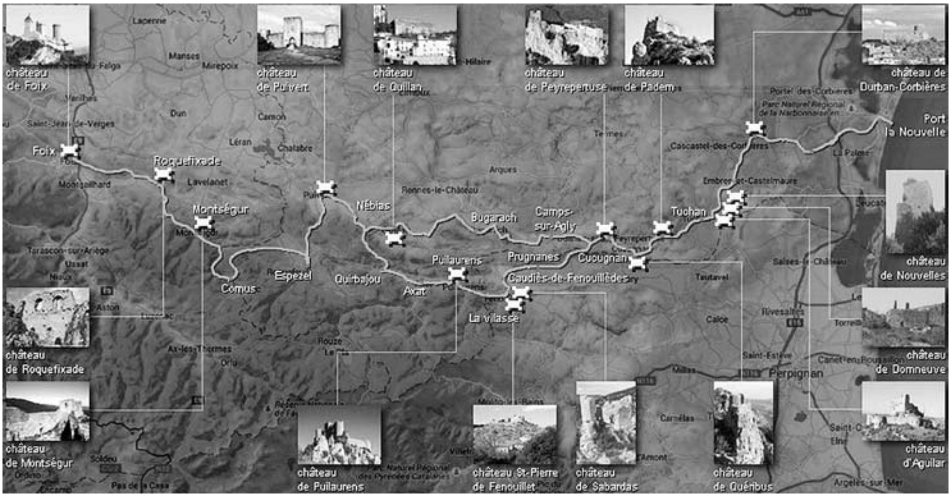
Figure 1: The geographical location of the Cathar Trail in the wider European setting. (Adapted from Google Maps 2016)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Prugnanes
Cucugnan
Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes
La Vilasse
Tuchan
Cascastel-des-Corbières
Embres-et-Castelmaure
Perpignan

Figure 2: The Cathar Trail itinerary from the sea to the town of Foix with its castle ruins along the way (Chaigneau 2015). (Courtesy of E. Chaigneau)

(Re)constructing the *Cathar* Trail

> To set foot on the Cathar Trail is to step back in time …. To take a big breath of history. Without a time machine, simply by travelling on foot. Ready, then, for the adventure? (Comité Départemental du Tourisme n.d., author's translation)

This is how the website dedicated to the Cathar Trail advertises the Trail to visitors. Promotional material and tourist guides such as the Trail website, map (Institut Géographique National and Rando Éditions 2011) and guidebook (Barthes et al. 2011 [1988]) all present the Cathar Trail as a journey in history, going back to the medieval period. The tourism committee of the *département,*[1] in which the Cathar Trail is located, advertises the Cathar Trail as a pathway to history: 'To do the Cathar Trail is to delve into a search for meaning and to listen to the lessons of history' (Conseil Général n.d. a, authors' translation). This history rests on a rich Cathar literature by nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, such as Niel (1965) and Oldenbourg (1961 [1959]), which often tends towards the mystical (Barrère et al. 2007: 295; Brenon 1994: 83–4). A religious minority known as the "Cathars" is presented as the victims of religious and military persecution during the medieval "Albigensian Crusade" and the Inquisition. Under the Catholic Church and the French king, sieges were undertaken, inhabitants massacred and Cathars burned as heretics at the stake. Historians also suggest that the Cathar martyrs, who subverted the dominant religious and political authority, are symbols of independence, tolerance and resistance and seek to attract tourists with the tragedy of their lost cause (Baier 1991;

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[1] A département is a smaller administrative division of France than "region", comparable to a county.

McCaffrey 2002). This historical Cathar discourse pervades the contemporary take on the Cathars, even if historians such as Brenon (1994: 13) advocate being truthful to the Cathars themselves. In this vein, the Cathar Trail invites the visitor to walk in the 'footsteps of the Cathars' (Le sentier cathare 1990).

Yet, the Trail's history is more complex and distinct from both scholarly and popular accounts of Cathar history. The Trail is not mentioned by any of these accounts and only blogs by independent hiking tour operators (Caubet 2013), project drafts, letters and newspaper clippings in the district archives and a close reading of the Trail guidebook (Barthes et al. 2011) reveal the Trail's origins. Among this archival material, the first edition of the Trail's own guidebook explains that '[i]t is the term "Cathar" which gives it [the Cathar Trail] its unity, although a trail of that name has never existed historically' (Barthes et al. 1988: 13).[2] The second half of this sentence still appears in the updated guidebook (ibid.: 5) but is easily overlooked.

The tracing of the Cathar Trail's own history reveals that it is a recently constructed trail. Historians, including Hobsbawm (1983: 1) and Samuel (1994), have developed the idea that history and heritage are socially constructed through myths, fantasy and fiction for use in the present. Nature trails are set up to re-enact a connection with the past, to enable 'History on the Ground' (Samuel 1994: 187, original capitalisation). As such, the Cathar Trail is a 1980s' creation whose agenda responded to a particular socio-political context and the contemporary hiking trend (Caubet 2013). In an interview, a guide and monitor of the Trail called the Trail a "political and practical invention". It was constituted as a collaborative product between tourist agents, politicians and hiking, heritage and ethnological organisations (Comité Départemental de Randonnées 1987).[3] The technical realisation of the Trail involved organising a route and accommodation, rehabilitating paths, way-marking and publishing a guidebook (Caubet 2013). So what was the original agenda and significance of the Cathar Trail?

The Trail agenda and rationale

The former director of the *département* hiking committee explained in an interview that her team and their colleagues developed the Cathar Trail as a programme of regional development. To boost the rural economy, they made it a project of green tourism and cultural tourism. The Trail was accordingly designed to combine hiking and history (castle visits). Primarily, however, it was a hiking trail with a 'cultural theme' (Montagné 1987), i.e. the Cathars. The General Council and the tourism and hiking committees of the county, which instigated the Trail, considered walking to be a *means* of cultural and historical immersion.

Paradoxically, the Cathar Trail is based on non-Cathar castles. Interviewed tourist agents throughout agreed that the Trail was created to link a number of ruined fortresses (Figure 2 above). These are heritage sites and impressive tourist attractions which tower on rocky peaks and are generally known as "Cathar castles" (CDR 1990). They determine the Trail itinerary as sites of memorialisation of the tragic Cathar history. Archaeological digs had, however, revealed during the 1980s that the ruins were actually the remains of royal military fortresses which had been built by the enemies of the Cathars *after* the demise of the Cathars (Brenon 1995 [1988]: 269; Quehen & Dieltiens 1983: 463). So officially, in order to be more accurate, the castles are now called "castles *of* the Cathar *Country*" rather than Cathar castles. This Cathar Country is a regional programme of territorial and economic development and it draws on Cathar historians in the construction of a particular cultural heritage built around these non-Cathar vestiges (Garcia & Genieys 2005: 29).

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[2] I have translated all passages from archival material, the Trail guidebook and map and direct quotes from participants (except for the final section) from French.

[3] Subsequent references will replace "Comité Départemental de Randonnées" with the acronym "CDR".

Aware of this paradoxical situation, the Trail creators defined the trail as "Cathar" by situating it in a material and spiritual setting shaped by written Cathar histories. In a letter to a potential contributor to the Trail guidebook the former director of the hiking committee explained that:

> The progression from the sea towards Montségur [the most famous ruin on the Trail] is the way to an initiation into the life, the ideology, the environment of the Cathars. As the trail is not the reflection of a historical itinerary, we have considered it appropriate to take advantage of this itinerary to use the events and landscapes by which it is punctuated. … [A] place, a name of a village, a forest, a building will enable an evocation of the daily life of the Cathars. (Ponrouch 1986)

Hikers would engage spiritually with the Cathars by walking on paths in 'wild and grand landscapes which are steeped in history' (Sentier cathare n.d.). As historians describe, the Cathars crisscrossed the region in their day-to-day life, using secret paths and the castles which were built before the royal fortresses as refuges (Labal 1982: 69, 145, 184; Lambert 1998: 73, 141; Oldenbourg 1961: 321). So even if the Cathar Trail was not set up following an original Cathar route, it was still anchored in particular Cathar places, the designers argued.

By calling the trail "Cathar", the constructers of the Trail affirmed and promoted a sense of belonging to a particular history and to particular places. In the following sections I draw on my ethnographic fieldwork data to show how, in 2013, hikers' use and interpretation of the Trail did not accord with the official Trail objective of historical immersion. I used the "walking with" method (Lee & Ingold 2006: 82; Pink 2007: 246), a form of participant observation which involved walking and talking with about thirty-five hikers along different stretches of the Trail and which ranged from a few minutes to several days.

The time of walking rather than history

The Cathar Trail is characterised by the paradox of time travel. The General Council and the tourism and hiking committees designed the Trail to be a historical immersion through emplaced walking. Evoking a timeless landscape, the Trail was promoted as a different way of being in place from our current one where time is experienced rather than measured. Yet, in contradiction with this Trail ideology, the construction of the Trail and its use by hikers revealed the operation of contemporary chronological time, where the passing of time was carefully measured and the distance to be covered during this time was charted by their maps. The Trail was officially defined by physical progression and chronological time, but also by the passage between historical past and present through place. In contrast, hikers articulated ideas reflecting their experience of natural (vegetation and climate) rather than built heritage (see the next section). Hence, some hikers talked about journeying according to "natural rhythms", the rhythm given by a place rather than the hectic urban pace driven by appointments which hikers were assumed to bring with them. They saw their own progression as responding and corresponding to the seasons, day and night and, above all, the topography. The manager of an archaeological museum on the Trail suggested for example that a place imposes itself on the hiker. One just had to take the time to *be* there at Montségur, to listen and understand the mountain on which the ruin is located (see Figure 3).

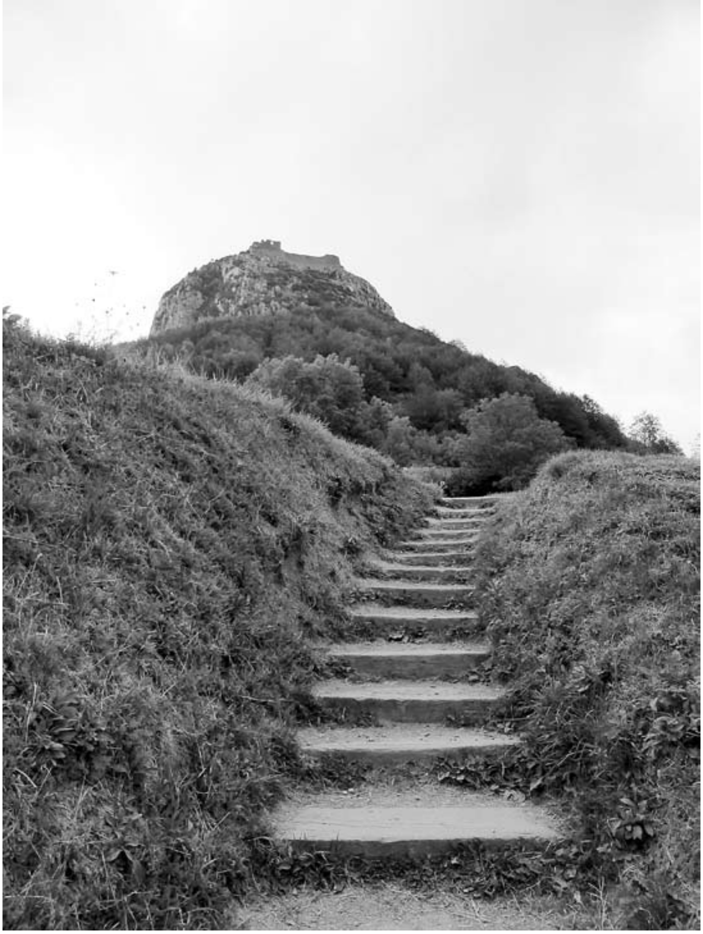

Figure 3: Taking the time for every step at Montségur?, photo by the author

Wunderlich contends that through their specific rhythms places possess unique temporalities which are ‘experiential and performative’ (2010: 56). Place, time and invested energy are interrelated through rhythm and the material, sensory and social interact (Edensor 2010: 3). Long-distance hiking thus requires and intensifies the hikers’ attuned movements to the ‘archi-textural meshwork’ (Ingold 2007: 80) of the entangled trails of movement which constitutes their environment (ibid.: 101). However, speed may equally be a factor in hikers’ journeys. In my own Trail experience, the rugged terrain, the strong winds and the ruins did indeed require time but provoked a need to prevail over them rather than open up to them. The two times I passed through Montségur I felt the time pressure most acutely, from arriving in a rush, lacking accommodation and food, while being pushed on to complete the Trail.

Public allegations of inauthenticity against the Trail and the castles (see Garcia & Genieys 2005: 29) give an insight into the slippage in understanding between activity and Trail and into the “reality” of both. On the one hand, it can be seen as a trail with constructed sites in terms of Cathar origins (see the first section of the paper). On the other hand, it is very much real for hikers who have experienced the Trail physically. A response on an American travel site protests against the allegations about the lack of authenticity: ‘I have to disagree with you, the Cathar trail very much exists, it is quite a piece of hiking, very challenging if you do it completely with all your gear on your back’ (Rif 2014). The Trail is certain to exist because it has been experienced as physically real. From the perspective of experience, hiking realises the Trail with its landscape and heritage. The hiker has experienced it authentically and so the Trail becomes authentic in itself. Aside from such “misunderstandings”, for most participants the Cathar Trail existed as a historical reality rather than a creation, even if they did not intentionally engage in its historical dimension.

What makes the Trail meaningful might be the walking in its duration rather than the Trail’s connection with historical time. An owner of a farm along the Trail reminded her guests at the communal dinner about the role of walking: former generations walked to school but nowadays “people take time out to walk”. She pointed out that, historically, walking was how everyday life was carried out (also Tilley 2012: 18, 21). It was the usual way to get to where one needed to be. In contrast, today walking is scheduled in the diaries of many middle-class Europeans. Numerous walking studies show that it has become a matter of choice, an escape from the quotidian (see for example, Amato 2004; Neillands 1995; Solnit 2001). By requiring walking, the Cathar Trail is automatically an exceptional space where the relation between time and place is enacted also through people’s rhythm of walking. ‘Movement takes time. But movement also makes time’ (Manning 2009: 17). It is an accepted notion that nowadays we are stressed and “out of time”; to walk is to slow down. Indeed, one of the Trail hostels displayed an article by the philosopher Frédéric Gros (2011), which suggested that walkers’ experience actually expanded time through the slowness, regularity and repetitiveness of walking. Hence, a day on the Trail could be experienced as longer than a work-life day through the sustained physical involvement in hiking. Here, landscape is viewed as a process, emerging through activities (see Vergunst, Whitehouse, Ellison & Árnason 2012: 4). As Tilley notes, the walker’s landscape is contingent on the body and perception (2012: 15, 16); it changes with the weather, light and season and the physical effort involved (ibid.: 17). A hiker's sense of distance or of possibilities along the way is, therefore, bodily generated.

As hikers walk along the path, they become more receptive to their environment and experience it more consciously through their bodily immersion in the landscape. A person walking in the landscape is inherently part of the lived landscape through her/his sensory and corporeal attention to her/his environment (ibid.: 17). This landscape is bodily, participatory and holistic. Ingold highlights this process of formation by differentiating between two modalities of travel and knowing: wayfaring and transport (2007: 81). In transport, passengers are routeing from point to point to become active at the destination which is a point in a static network (ibid.: 79). In wayfaring, on the other hand, 'the traveller's movement – his orientation and pace – is continually responsive to his perceptual monitoring of the environment that is revealed along the way' (ibid.: 78). Walkers' movements through the landscape are lines in a meshwork (ibid.: 101). Tilley's phenomenological (analytical) walk similarly highlights the process of knowing through embodied experience, being and becoming (2012: 30). The landscape unfolds in terms of the progression, sequences and successions of the walk. Through this ongoing formative process, walkers experience a temporality particular to the process of movement rather than a landscape as an imprint of a historical past (Vergunst, Whitehouse, Ellison & Árnason 2012: 6). Moving in a continuous present, travellers experience a temporal expansion of the present, of the 'now' of the journey (Tilley 2012: 29; Vergunst, Whitehouse, Ellison & Árnason 2012: 6).

Walking is accordingly associated with slowed time and the out-of-the-ordinary. Such a slow time is rare in the information age (Eriksen 2001). It is in living the exceptional moments of this ordinary movement that hikers share their walking experience with people across time and space, whether these are the Cathars or fellow hikers whose path they cross or who precede or succeed them along the way. If walking involves making 'one's way *through* a world-in-formation' (Ingold & Vergunst 2008: 2, original emphasis), Cathar histories developed through hikers' engagement with places. A few walkers, such as the couple from Belgium I crossed paths with on the Trail, said they discovered the Cathar history for themselves *in situ*, not before. They explained that sharing the mode of movement itself, walking in this environment and interacting with places, took them to the Cathars. To them, the Cathars walked and lived here and they were walking like the Cathars, enduring climbs and harsh weather conditions as the Cathars had before them. 'Walking, then validates the reality of the past in the present' (Legat 2008: 35), connecting place, histories and walker and blending past, present and future through its continuity and temporality (Lund 2008: 97; Vergunst 2010: 382). The landscape of the walker, according to Tilley (2012: 17), is a temporal narrative mediated by the walking body. 'Walking a landscape is thus to gather together through my body its weathers, its topographies, its people, histories, traditions and identities' (ibid.: 18). The Trail landscape is consequently temporal through its physicality. '[T]he landscape was moving' (Lund 2013: 166), inhabited by narratives of predecessors' engagements with these surroundings, made relevant through people's movement at present.

Hikers' motivations: to walk in nature

I began fieldwork intending to find out what hikers make of the complex Trail construct in practice. The Trail design explained above suggested that hikers would undertake the Cathar Trail for the tragic Cathar history and the awe-inspiring ruined fortresses. However, I observed and was told by most hikers I met that they were doing the Trail *without* visiting its heritage sites and thereby, it seemed to me at the time, without its historical basis. Contrary to the official Trail objective, they did not seem moved by the Trail's narratives of history and place. What meanings did the Cathar Trail have for these hikers in practice, then? What follows first is a brief overview of the Trail audience.

The hikers' social and natural environments were inseparable; as hiking was seasonal, so the Trail was seasonal. Generally, hospitality staff divided types of hikers by age and season, most hikers being from fifty years upwards. Groups and individuals, experienced hikers, come in spring and autumn (May/June and September), while young people, sometimes first-time hikers, and families arrive during the summer holidays (July/August). The latter come for outdoor activities, to hike in a four-day loop on the Cathar Trail and not for the "Cathar castles" which just serve as a subterfuge, a legitimate "cover". This suggests that history is a reputable pursuit, amateur hiking less so. Only a few are attracted by the Cathar history. The couple from Belgium, for example, identified history with books and told me that they had come for a holiday and would not have the time to look up the Cathar history on their return home. Visits to Quéribus (one of the ruins on the Trail), the guard there told me, are in summer motivated by the ruin's proximity to the sea and generally only out of season visitors reveal an interest in and knowledge of Cathar history. The seasons, the climate and weather thus affect walkers' choice of place and time. Although May and June are said to be the best months for the Trail, the exceedingly wet weather in spring 2013 had reduced the turnout of the principal hiking season. Consequently, the significance of the Trail for visitors varies according to individual motivations, the seasons and the qualities and material properties of the destination.

A hiking trail

The reason for the discrepancy between Trail practice and the castle-based Trail agenda is hikers' motivations for coming in the first place. These referred to a constructed outdoor activity with a predefined setting. Most hiker-participants chose the Cathar Trail to walk in nature, by which they meant Mediterranean vegetation and climate and the experience of close contact with rural surroundings seen as wild and different from their urban homes. They valued the fruits, herbs and flowers along the path and the catering at the hostels which used produce from the garden (see the following subsection for further details). One evening at a hostel midway along the Trail, I met a middle-aged couple from the Paris region.[4] They had seized the opportunity to combine a family visit nearby with doing this Trail which had been recommended by friends and advertised in the Paris metro. What they shared with other hikers was the desire 'to walk in nature'. They considered the Cathar castles to be “piles of stones” and Cathar history as just a “small bonus” on site. ‘The ruins are of no interest except for the architecture and the technical feat of building the castles,’ they declared. What impressed many visitors was the act of construction in these high-perched, fairly inaccessible locations, which marked the landscape to this day (see Figure 4). They were somewhat impressed by the architecture and location of the ruins, but not interested in the medieval history. For them, the Cathar Trail was a trail for hiking in nature. Here, both the hiking activity and the natural setting are culturally situated and (partly) constituted, as hikers’ journeys will be by extension. I will consider each in turn.

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[4] According to hospitality staff, thirty per cent of Trail hikers are coming from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Spain.

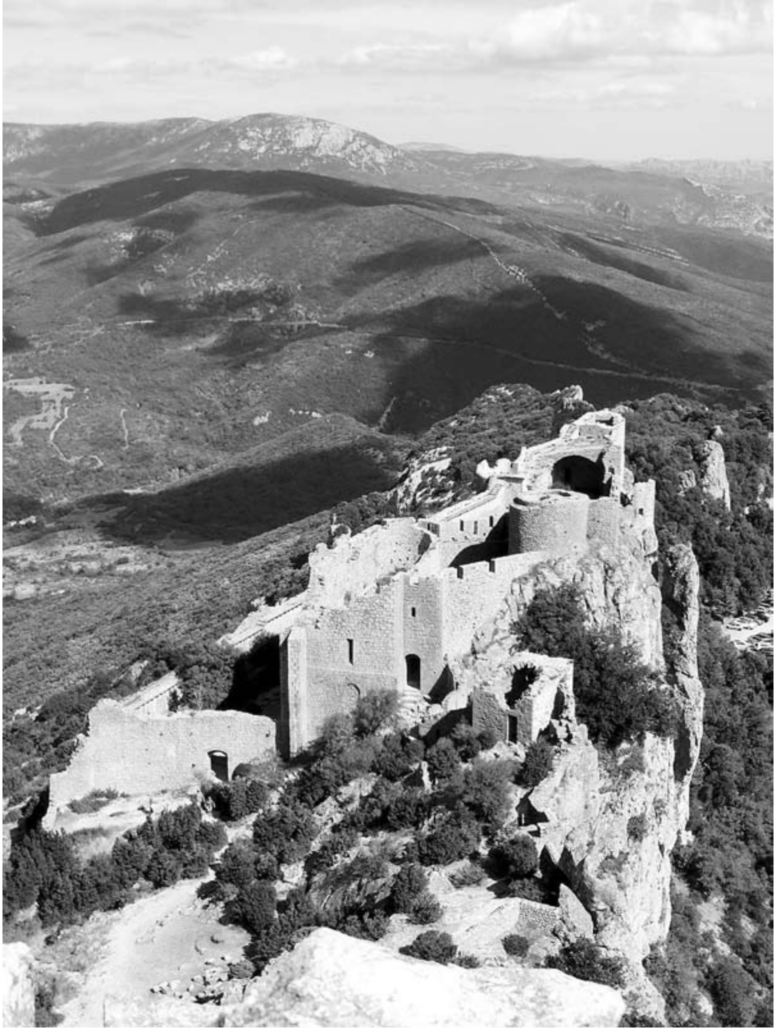

Figure 4: The ruined fortress of Peyrepertuse, one of the heritage sites along the Cathar Trail; the Trail passes the ruin below the cliff on the right, photo by the author

Besides such dismissals of the Cathar history, visitors occasionally attributed a spiritual significance to the Cathar Trail. On the way to a village midway on the Trail, I walked briefly with two middle-aged French day-walkers. Drawing on her experience of the Camino de Santiago (a popular pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela), one of them talked about the Cathar Trail as a "mythical trail" and described hiking on it as an "initiatory journey". The Trail was also advertised in similar terms by a tourist brochure (Office de Tourisme Intercommunal 2010. Discerning my scepticism, the walker conceded that the Cathar Trail might be too short for the personal development which weeks and months on the Camino engender. She added that today the Cathar Trail 'has lost its soul'. Hence, hikers' experiences on and of the Cathar Trail were articulated in relation to their experiences of other trails. Memories of previous walks and places carried over, shaping the lived present (Tilley 2012).

The standing of the Cathar Trail was shaped by the contemporary hiking trend (for the latter see Amato 2004: 268; Neillands 1995; Solnit 2001). For many hikers the Trail was one among several other hiking destinations such as the Camino de Santiago or the GR10 which connects the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea traversing the Pyrenees. A "GR" (*Grande Randonnée*) is a hiking trail which belongs to the national network of long-distance footpaths run by the French Hiking Federation (FFRandonneé 2015). In 2013, the local experts I spoke to were divided on the uncertain future of the Cathar Trail. Some expected that the Trail would become better marketed as a GR; others believed that it would lose its singularity as a standardised GR with a number like others. In the year following my fieldwork, the Cathar Trail was after all categorised as a GR and given a second name (GR367) which does not refer to the Cathars.[5] Notwithstanding such changes, the marks of past interpretations often remain on the ground. In October 2013, a weathered sign still informed hikers midway on the Trail of '[t]he Sentier Cathare: a historical hiking trail … [which] goes through the main Cathar sites (twelfth to thirteenth century).'

So although the historical development of the Cathar Trail is not problematised in publications (see the beginning of the paper), the Trail designers have inscribed certain meanings into the terrain by guiding visitors spatially and thematically. On the ground, the Trail territorialises the historical discourse on the Cathars. In 2013, way markings and signposts identified the Trail by colour (mostly blue/yellow stripes) and Cathar Country logo and indicated certain viewpoints and sites. In its association with the land, "history" was interrelated with "nature" on the Trail. Hikers' journeys, which brought out "nature", were, to some extent, based on the Trail which itself materialised the territorialised historical discourse. By itself, the message of historical immersion was not predominant. No board explained the origin of the Cathar Trail, hardly any Trail signage depicted the Cathar history and way markings at the castles were the exception. This fairly neutral basis allowed the Trail to be flexibly defined in practice by travellers' project of adventure, as I illustrate next.

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[5] Interestingly, the 2016 editions of the Trail guidebook and map appear to reverse this prioritising of hiking over history. Newly, their covers present ruins devoid of walkers. They do not refer to the Trail being a GR, either, although the reason for the added GR designation had been better promotion.

Hikers' motivations and name for the Trail shaped each other as well as their Trail experiences. Several walked against the prescribed direction of the Trail, combined it with other trails and/or walked only part of it. For a couple from Quebec, who spent their sabbatical walking across France from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean the Trail was seen as one among various hiking trails, a convenient connector and the final segment of a longer trek. We met at a hostel one evening and laughed when they reported that, as they linked sections of trails such as the Camino and the Cathar Trail and walked against their prescribed direction, they baffled fellow travellers and locals. Such "adventure hikers", who use the Camino as a GR, were also noted by a study of the France-based Camino (CRT Midi Pyrénées, CRT Aquitaine, Qappa & BVA 2003).

One tourist office employee along the Trail broadly typified visitors according to sportiness. She reported that hikers come in for information on accommodation, food and water supply and, only occasionally, Cathar history. She indicated that hikers from France tend to be from the south since the more Catholic north resents the Cathars. In her account, visitors from Germany and England "need comfort" and come for culinary pleasures, respectively, but not to hike. Hikers from Canada, on the other hand, are drawn to the Trail out of curiosity and a desire for discovery. She also noted that young, educated, middle-class tourists coming from Catalonia do the Trail with big backpacks and from a feeling of belonging to Occitania, to a shared marginal identity (see Roquebert 2006 [1970]).

Yet, the Cathars did not mean anything to the three athletic hikers from the Catalonian city of Barcelona whom I met where both the Cathar Trail and *Chemin des Bonshommes* (The Way of the Good Men), also designated GR107, overlap. They were taking the GR107 as a cross-frontier sporting challenge to cross the Pyrenean mountain range from France into Spain. They passed by the castles, having visited them before. Over dinner at the hostel they told me that the GR107 is renowned in Catalonia.[6] They were, however, unfamiliar with its other name, *Chemin des Bonshommes*, and with the Cathars generally although the "Good Men" is another, historically more accurate, name for the Cathars (Pegg 2008: 27). The *Chemin des Bonshommes* emulates the Cathar Trail and was said by other local hiker-participants and experts to be *really* based on the Cathar traces and far more than the Cathar Trail. In these cases, hikers appropriate the Trail in their own ways and reinforce the hiking trend. The three hikers from Barcelona saw their journey along the GR107 as a physical challenge, although their sense of belonging to this territory may have also played a role since they had come there more than once. Yet overall, hikers came predominantly for the hiking activity; the functionality of a trail for individual hikers' projects overshadowed its historical name.

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[6] That many Catalonians hike across the national border may be interpreted as an endorsement of a nationally independent heritage shared across the national border. As the tourist office employee had suggested, hikers from Catalonia possibly demonstrate their belonging to a region (Occitania) with a shared history and language with Catalonia.

A nature setting

Why did hikers then choose this particular trail? Their motives responded to official representations of the region and to what the physical setting offered them, in particular a southern location, mild climate, rugged topography and Mediterranean vegetation. In keeping with official natural heritage discourses and with the romantic alliance between humans and landscape, many hikers decided on the Trail because of its appeal as one of the most pure and wild hiking destinations in France.[7] In the visitors' books at the castles and tourist offices along the Trail, visitors praise the 'unique nature' and 'the arid and authentic landscape' and the 'sunny welcome at the heart of a wild and charming region' with which visitors feel a connection. They describe the land as 'a force' which calls them back. Lund conceptualises landscapes as vibrant and animated beings by evoking, in particular, visitors' strong sense of natural forces (ice and fire) shaping the Icelandic landscape (2013: 161, 164). According to Vergunst, Whitehouse, Ellison and Árnason, landscape expresses the temporal and relational characteristics of our surroundings (2012). In the Cathar case, the sun was an important force which had shaped the landscape and continued to affect walkers' journeys. A group of walkers from Belgium told me that this region represents the sunny south (in opposition to their northern place of residence) with its luminosity and warmth. In this respect, hikers actually adopted the official heritage discourse since the Cathar Country tourism axis equally rests on the idea of the South of France as epitomising original, natural landscapes. The region invests in the promotion of its heritage (Conseil Général n.d. b). The audio guide at one of the castles narrates, for example, some of the attributes of the Cathar Country: Mediterranean civilisation, rich lands, powerful landscapes, anti-industrialisation, local culture and non-standardised tourism. With its authentic sites, it is advertised as a unique destination where time (in the form of stones), nature and human activity harmonise. One of the major French guidebooks equally presents the area as rocky and rugged, sinuous and harsh but harmonious in its luminosity, colours and climate (Gloaguen et al. 2013).

Contrasting nature and civilisation, hikers told me they came for landscapes made of vineyards and scrubland, holm oak trees, limestone and weathered rocks. These distinctively Mediterranean features are seen as resistant to time and civilisation. Travellers formed their own ideas but, overall, cultural and ecological values aligned in their imaginaries and practices. The associations of natural heritage fit in well with the historical spirit of independence of the local inhabitants as long as socio-critical scholars do not challenge this idyllic picture. Vaccaro, for instance, denounces the 'transformation of the rural landscape into a leisure supermarket for urban populations' (2006: 370), the Pyrenees serving as a resource for recreation in post-industrial capitalist society. He describes how with the development of global networks the Pyrenean landscape is commoditised, produced, marketed and consumed through ecotourism. In this view, 'Nature is translated into culture' (Vaccaro & Beltran 2007: 267). Less radical, Cummins' ethnography (2009) explores issues of land tenure, use and conservation as found in pastoralism, transhumance, tourism and ecology in the Pyrenees. These studies postulate a conflict between natural and social heritage and see travellers operating within market-oriented networks. They position nature, even if it is classified as a cultural item (see Vaccaro 2006, above), as the counterpart to society. A focus on hikers' Trail journeys, however, acknowledges individual practice *in situ* aside from classifications of society and nature which are involved in nature-based tourism.

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[7] Visitors' idea of the Trail as an untouched holiday destination was confirmed by the Trail logistics: the Trail was difficult to access and its amenities were relatively sparse and not always available. An organised hiking group I met halfway on the Trail was surprised by the lack of amenities and felt distant from civilisation.

An abundance of flora and fauna characterises the region. The Trail map states: 'All along the 250 km of the Cathar Trail you will discover unspoiled nature, preserved spaces often declared protected areas … rich in rare … fauna … and flora' (Institut Géographique National & Rando Éditions 2011). The first tourist office on the Trail prominently displays the picture of a wild boar on the outside of its building, branding the area as wild. Correspondingly, some hikers who are city-dwellers characterised the Trail as an occasionally slightly scary place due to the animals they encountered. Wild boars, for example, rummaged at night in the harvested vineyards through which the Trail passed. In autumn, the Trail is also a busy hunting area. On many Trail stages, I could hear packs of hounds, shouting and gunshots. That such encounters with "others" have an impact on hikers' journeys shows landscape to be an event which occurs in 'the physical encounter with nature' (Lund 2013: 163) in travel. The visitor travels with the landscape, with nature: 'the landscape itself reacts' (ibid. 2013: 163), emerging in different contexts. Overall, 'the landscape becomes the context and purpose of travel, as well as its process' (ibid. 2013: 163).

As Lund (2013: 160) suggests, visitors' understandings of nature differ and their perceptions and modes of travel are related to the kinds of nature they recognise. One attraction of the Cathar Trail as a natural destination was the limited number of people on it or and around it. The Belgian couple mentioned above had chosen to come here in the off-peak season to enjoy paths which they defined as ideal for walking and observing at leisure butterflies and flowers. In their eyes, before September the area was crowded with tourists. The social travelling environment was thereby included in their sense of "natural" place: to them the Trail was more or less of a place of natural wonders (butterflies, flowers) according to different seasons and fellow travellers. So, through their choices and trip organisation, hikers contributed to the meaning of the Trail as a wild hiking destination and brought together an ideal of nature, local official discourses and the physical process of their travel. The resulting Trail landscape was consequently changing with their movement, while also being shaped in its continuation by constructed histories and memories of land and people.

This is a kind of heritage making which is shaped by the physical contingencies proper to hiking, such as time limits. It is practical (corresponding to hikers' daily needs), scripted (informed by guidebooks and other promotional and literary writings), and relational throughout. In brief, hikers were motivated by a nature setting and a fashion for the outdoors. The former differs from, but fits well with, the official heritage discourse. Below I will continue to show that such narratives of heritage can be interpreted as being realised through people hiking.

Hikers' trip organisation: holiday time

The following discussion presents hikers' journeys as performances of time. How was the Trail design, which was based on heritage sites and historical immersion, appropriated by hikers? The most striking particularity was that hikers did the Trail without actually visiting its castles. Was their experience of nature rather than of the history which the Cathar Trail officially represents, then, a consequence of their performance of time?

Hikers' journeys took place in present time. This time was first of all limited by the start and end dates of the trip. Most hiker-participants were on an individual or organised week-long holiday because their 'work time' (Adam 1995: 96) determined the time available for walking. In their walking from starting point to destination, hikers therefore travelled within current time frames with only a rare reference to historical pasts. Castle visitors, who were not necessarily hikers, were more likely to remark on time travel through their emplaced experience. In the visitors' book at Peyrepertuse (see Figure 4), for example, someone stated: 'Very beautiful journey in time'. For motorised tourists, the castles represented outings to spectacular and picturesque sites, an investment in time. Hikers, however, were on a short stint on a trail dedicated to a long history. Different kinds of time were consequently at play and, through performance, different places came into being.

On the Cathar Trail, time was a constraint for hikers as one inexperienced but fit couple made painfully clear. Being one day short, they completed two Trail stages in one day in order to fit their hike into their available holiday time. They arrived at the overnight accommodation aching but proud. They *had made* the hostel, their proclaimed destination for the day. The couple were charting time and measuring their achievement in terms of quotidian clock-driven time by covering a stretch of the way in as little time as possible. As Northcott (2008: 230) has stated, the mechanical and efficient time which characterises modern tourism determines tourists' pace. The couple's progression along the Trail was temporal as well as spatial, therefore (see also Devanne 2005). The Trail guidebook itself guides hikers' progress according to time indications (see for example Barthes et al. 2011). The estimated times given in the guidebook rely on measuring and achievement-based time. Even without the guidebook (the way most hiker-participants were travelling), the above couple performed the Trail in terms of their work-life notion and performances of time, which were antithetical to the concept of "time out".

The couple's valuation of time and place were inextricably linked. As a constraint, time shaped hikers' experiences of the Trail. The reaching of the destination counted more than the way. This is also how the Cathar Trail functioned in practice: the time constraints of the daily stages were a reality for all hikers on the Trail. The distance between villages and amenities meant that every day hikers needed to reach the next village with accommodation before nightfall. Hikers' journeying was thus more geared towards these destinations than towards the heritage sites, even if most hostels were close to the major Trail ruins since they had been part of the original Cathar Trail set-up which was based on these sites.

In this context, travel time emerges through performance and is contingent on the traveller's activity and environment (Jain 2009). Time performance here becomes trail performance: hikers performed the Trail with its landscapes through time. The above-mentioned museum manager pointed out that visitors come for holidays and consequently ignore or misread signs such as Figure 5. Interestingly, this leads visitors to expect not only road access to the castle but also the present-day village to be adjacent to the castle as the medieval Cathar village had been.[8] Indeed, I observed that the fast-moving couple introduced above did not read information panels along the way for lack of time. Focused on their progress, they talked only sparingly and did not hesitate at junctions or stop for photographs along the way. In the morning they hurried each other on to leave the hostel. Equipped with medium-sized backpacks, they kept a regular pace with long strides and few breaks.

Individuals' motivations and trip organisation thus generated a trail that was partly at odds with the designers' Trail agenda. To some extent, it consisted in the challenge experienced when moving rather than in scenic heritage sites.[9] Hikers' Trail landscapes were structured and oriented by the tension between the departure and arrival point of their hike. These landscapes were measured and timed by the length of daily stages and breaks, by the height to climb and physical ability and exertion (see Bragard 2009; Mullins 2009). That time, distance and speed were a central issue suggests that long-distance hiking landscapes differ from the landscapes of wayfaring or Tilley's type of phenomenological walk. They seem closer to Ingold's notion of destination-oriented transport where people experience the drive to reach the destination as quickly as possible, racing against the clock (2007). All in all, then, a hiking temporality is dynamic, multiple, heterogeneous and somatic (Edensor 2010). Walking became on the Cathar Trail the generating force which produced particular landscapes (see also Ness 2007). Since the Trail landscapes with their different temporalities were marked by the duration of the hiking activity, what was the position of the castles in the context of travel?

The role of the castles on the Cathar Trail

Here I return to the specificity of the Cathar Trail by exploring the role of the castles for hikers. As mentioned earlier, hikers had taken "time out" from their daily routine to tune into a vacation mode but lacked the time to visit the castles. The castles, part of the Trail in the Trail guidebook, were also dead ends and often did not fit into the rhythm of the trek. Waiting to no avail for the hostel in Montségur village to open, I briefly talked with a sporty middle-aged couple from a local city, who had come for food and to reconnect with this fondly remembered hostel. They were among the few hikers who were completing the whole Cathar Trail and they told me that 'when doing the Cathar Trail there is no time to visit the castles. For the castles you need to come back by car'. Right then, they were not heading for Montségur castle (Figure 5). Instead, they were hurrying on since they already knew the castle from a previous mountain race. Furthermore, they were camping and therefore did not rely on the hostel. Importantly, they had to be back at work in three

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[8] If archaeological traces of Cathar habitation exist today, these are to be found in the hardly visible traces of houses adjacent to the fortress rather than in the fortress itself (Brenon 1995: 258).

[9] Research on the Inca Trail in Peru has shown similarly that the physical hiking experience predominates over the visit to the heritage destination of the trail. Participants experienced a disjunction between trail experience and heritage destination (Quinlan Cutler, Carmichael & Doherty 2014: 163). Quinlan Cutler, Carmichael and Doherty conclude that physical strain marks hikers' experience and prevents historical experiences: 'the experience of Machu Picchu is eclipsed by the emotional, educational, and physical journey of reaching it' (2014: 165).

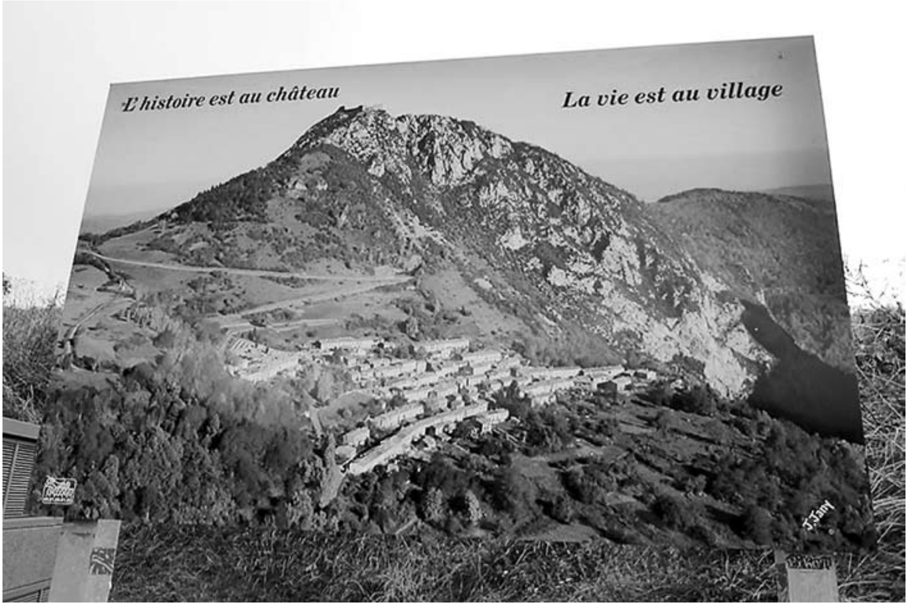

Figure 5: 'History is at the castle, life at the village'? Board at the car park halfway between the village (at the front) and the ruin of Montségur (on the mountaintop), photo by the author

days' time. They had lost time when, being tired, they took a wrong turn at a junction of the Trail several days previously.

Employees in tourist offices confirmed that hikers do not show interest in the castles. Some hikers (see the large hiking group below) agreed with tourist agents that the ruins represented "history", made from names, dates and stories which contextualise the castles and locate historical events on information panels and guided tours. Nevertheless, these hikers, separating the castles from the Trail, did not define their Trail journey as historical. One of the castle keepers was indignant at the hiking groups who use the castle car park for their cars and walk away from the ruin without visiting it.

The Cathar Trail guidebook seeks to allow hikers to adapt the trip to their personal time requirements and interests. While describing the tourist attractions, it therefore does not include site visits within each stage (CDR n.d. a). Also, the Cathar Trail idea is intended to work even when not done in its entirety: '[t]o do one or two stages of the Cathar Trail corresponds in the mind of the hiker to "having done" the Cathar Trail' (CDR n.d. b). Still, in practice, the hikers' journeying and the Trail constituents (the ruins) were incompatible. Visiting the castles was only an option for those whose cars accompanied them. For example, when I was walking along the Trail, I met a large French hiking group consisting of family and friends. A few members of this group drove every morning and evening back and forth between hostels with their three cars to hike the stage with their companions (always stationing two cars at either end of the stage).

The hikers from abroad and on an organised trek were more likely to visit the castles because they were captivated by the tragic Cathar history (of a minority massacred by the ruling powers) and were provided some transfers by car in addition to luggage transport. For a trio of tourists from Germany, their week vacation on the Trail was an exceptional episode motivated by an interest in the Cathars and organised by a travel agent. Their itinerary was determined by castles and natural highlights and now and then a transfer (by car) allowed time for a castle visit. The large hiking group mentioned above lived nearby, on the other hand, and was familiar with the heritage sites so they passed by the castles without visiting them. What was more, one of them reflected in retrospect that 'our mind does not focus on the Cathar Trail; admittedly, our steps follow a path which one has called Cathar Trail, but we do not experience it as such!' He suggested that this appraisal might be informed by their place of residence in a rural area. "Cathar" was just a name given to the Trail. It did not cover the group's sense of the Trail as a particular natural and social environment – the local heritage was apparent but not important. What they enjoyed was the changing vegetation and the convivial hiking together (see Figure 6).

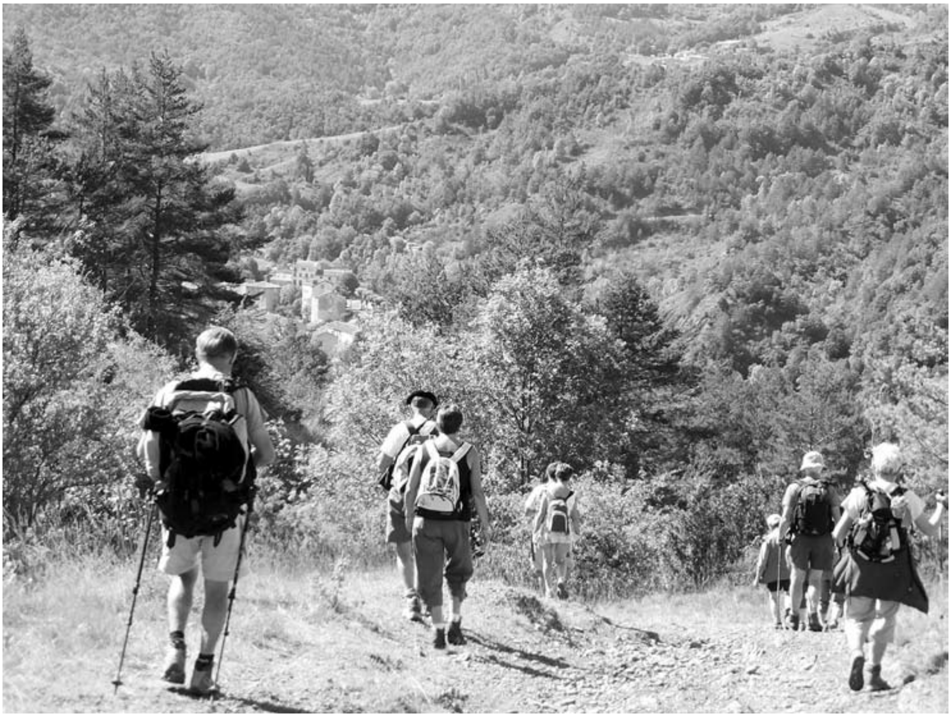

Figure 6: Walking together to the next village on the Trail, photo by the author

Still, on the last day of their weeklong hike, another member of the group insisted on visiting the last castle on their way. They then chose the castle visit *instead of* walking. Having driven to the castle, they enjoyed the visit and were pleased to have substituted a three-hour hike with the castle visit. Their email from 18 February 2014 praises the 'Beautiful Cathar building perched on an impressive promontory where the view at the top takes in the valley! Wonderful'.

Sites were embodied places which visitors experienced as situated in distinctive natural surroundings. The ruin imposed its own time on visitors through a winding access path and many steps (see Figure 3). Although visitors' time investment here was in the site, they came to know the site through the environs, through negotiating the access to the ruin and enjoying the view away from it. Once there, the castle "detour" was generally experienced as highly rewarding by walkers who were on shorter or longer excursions. Comments in visitors' books at the ruins of Quéribus and Peyrepertuse praise their stunning location and fantastic views, the castle and its access. 'Very beautiful place and magnificent castle. … Quaint path, cool view.' At Quéribus, though, the visitors' book also records hikers' dissatisfaction with the site as a hiking destination since it had no running water. In mid-summer 2013, a visitor from northern France both eulogised and criticised: 'A real enchantment for the eyes and the imagination. The only negative thing is the absence of a fountain …. Hardly bearable at more than 30°…'. Then again, another entry reads: 'Very beautiful view… the castle is a real cultural pearl. Not to be missed! The end justifies the means'. A visitor from Australia agreed that the castles and the views were worth the climb: 'Absolutely magnificent… four hours well spent. Spectacular views and history'.

Visitors consistently experienced the sites through looking out from them rather than through focusing on the remaining walls of the fortresses. Here a parallel could be drawn between the experience of contemporary visitors and of former (historic) occupants, both looking out from a commanding point of view (see Wylie 2009). Similarly, people's visiting practices at Hadrian's Wall (England) are interpreted as corresponding to the embodied experience of the Roman soldier: 'visitors re-garrison the Wall, hold the strategic high ground and command the view to the north' (Witcher cited in Witcher, Tolia-Kelly & Hingley 2010: 121). The surroundings of the Cathar Trail, even the distant hills and valleys, forests and settlements, were part of the site visit through people's views, gathered into an overview which was contingent on their position and perspective. These were the most enjoyed moments of the visit, the site being a gateway to other places.

Hikers' landscapes: castles within nature

A final aspect of hikers' journeys along the Cathar Trail coincides to a certain extent with the initial rationale of the Trail. Instead of attributing the Trail's name to the castles, the creators defined the Trail as a spiritual journey through landscapes and places which evoke the Cathars. In practice, the meaning of the Trail was even less bound to places since the majority of hiker-participants did not enter the castle bounds and hence did not look out from the castle. Still, hikers were looking out, too, but from along the Trail rather than from the castles, which resulted in a more continuous and open appraisal of landscape. Hikers' Cathar Trail did not rely on individual site visits but made sense to hikers in integration with its surroundings as they went along. While the Cathars were mostly not explicit in hikers' agendas, hikers' perception of "nature" included the ruins. As one participant said, 'the castles and the landscapes, they form a whole. The fortress merges with the cliff, the natural place.' A journalist describes how these ruins which represent history have become landscape: fossilised time (see Roquebert & Soula 1994 [1966]: 12). The Cathars have become part of the landscape, a landscape which comprises the Trail's official history, its historical development (its political management in the terrain) and which unfolds in hiking.

These multiple histories contribute to the Trail landscape and its complex heritage which lives from people's values of nature and historicity. In the perception of a professional long-distance walker whom I met at a hostel in Carcassonne, the Cathar castles provided a scenic setting for the Trail, including both nature and a fascinating history. They were not only associated with crowns and cultural pearls but also, metaphorically, with an animal habitat. She describes how she looked up from the valley and saw the hills '[s]ome of them crowned with castle ruins …. The castles were almost impossibly glued to the crest like birds' nests' (German Tourist 2013). Figure 7 illustrates how the ruins on the Trail are incorporated in a landscape of hills and vineyards. In the Cathar case, constructed heritage sites were part of hikers' perceptions of walking in nature.

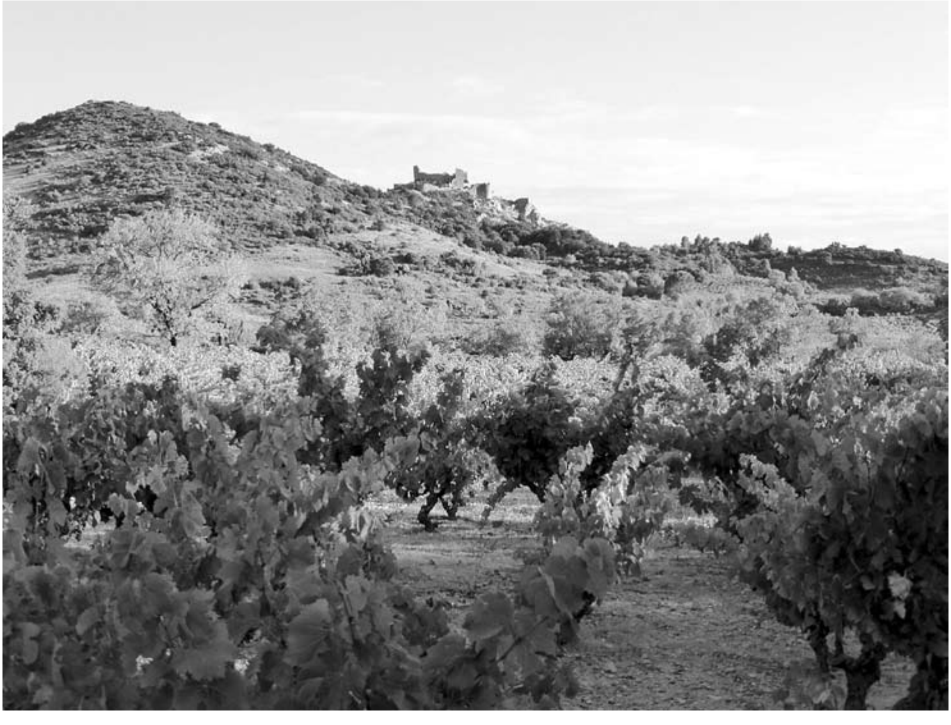

Figure 7: Vines with Aguilar castle in the background. The Trail leads through vineyards towards the ruin, photo by the author

Conclusion

This examination of the Cathar Trail, its original agenda and its contemporary practice, has shown that the Trail has various meanings. It is a commercial and political project based on written Cathar histories and historically constructed sites. Official meanings are manifest through Trail signage such as promotional websites and the Trail guidebook which define the Trail as "Cathar". Yet, contemporary hikers follow the Trail itinerary but, by and large, not the original Trail agenda. They come for the natural characteristics of the region and do not visit the castles which had been the fundamental building blocks of the Trail. Rather than just complying with the official heritage narrative, they perform a landscape that involves their individual practices of nature together with Cathar histories and Trail histories.

This landscape is formed through people's active engagement with landscape in the physical walking process. Hikers know the Trail in terms of their hiking. Their travel practices perform and produce multiple interlaced Trail temporalities, walking rhythms and clock-time. Since walking is a slow pursuit with the potential for discovery but also limited in time, hikers usually consider and experience castle visits as events separate from the Trail. They invest in the hiking progression rather than in particular places. The latter, according to the Trail design, would take them into the past. The hikers' investment in time, however, fuels a present adventure in wild terrain. In this way, the Cathar Trail is continuously in process, in the making. Its meanings are dynamic and multiple, formed by individual projects. Today, the Cathar Trail lives principally from and through hikers' journeying.

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Povzetek

Vsebina članka osvetluje različne in pogosto nasprotujoče si pomene zgodovinsko ustvarjene pohodne poti nekdanjih katarov v južni Franciji, ki je bila leta 1980 imenovana kot del "kulturne dediščine". Skozi analizo arhivskega in promocijskega gradiva, intervjuje ter drugega etnografskega gradiva, članek raziskuje zgodovinsko in turistično opomenjanje katarske poti, ki ga sopostavlja ob izkušnje omenjene poti različnih pohodnikov. Le ti, skozi osebne motivacije in neposredne izkušnje hoje ponovno osmišljajo in opredeljujejo pomen katarskih poti. Slednji je v marsikaterih pogledih povsem drugačen od "uradnega" pomena poti, ki je zapisan v zgodovinskih virih in predstavljen v turističnih vodnikih. Vsebina članka pojasnuje, kako je pomen poti oblikovan skozi senzorne izkušnje pohodnikov in ne toliko skozi agendo kulturne dediščine, ki skuša omenjene poti uradno "vpisati" v zgodovino časa.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: pohodna pot, zgodovina, čas, krajina, južna Francija

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