

BRIEF DOSSIER FOR GUIDED TOUR

WALKING TOURS IN PAU

“Rocks and dolmens”



**Generalitat
de Catalunya**



Unió Europea
Fons europeu
de desenvolupament regional
Una manera de fer Europa

Lenght of tour: 4h
Meeting point: Church square

INTRODUCTION

This route wants to present and explain the different megalithic monuments and dry stone structures that we can find in the district of Pau. The Alt Empordà region has one of the highest concentrations of megaliths in Europe with more than a hundred examples of cave-dolmens, dolmens, menhirs, cistvaens, menhirs and even a cromlech.

Human prehistory is the period from the moment humans started to make and work with tools, about 2,8 million years ago, until the invention of scripture by the Sumer civilisation, around 3500 BC.

Megaliths are from the Neolithic or New Stone Age, the era when our ancestors stopped being nomads (around 10000 BC) and started to settle on fertile plains practising agriculture and animal husbandry. The Neolithic era arrived at the Iberian peninsula towards 4500 BC from North Africa. The first stone constructions or megaliths appeared at that moment.

STOP AT DOLMEN VINYES MORTES I (Explanation of how dolmens were built)

Basically, a dolmen is a burial site used by the same family or clan for several generations. The word dolmen comes from the Breton language, dol meaning table and men meaning stone, so that it could be translated as 'stone table', describing its shape. The dolmens in the Empordà region are made with granite or gneis (a granite-type rock) stones. First, deep holes were dug in the ground towards which the stones were hauled and erected upright. Once the side walls (stones) were standing, leaving the entrance open, the interior was filled with soil and a lateral ramp was built to pull the capstone on top of our 'stone table'. When the structure was finished, the interior was emptied and a mound was raised over the dolmen with earth. Originally, then, a dolmen had the appearance of an artificial cave since the entire stone structure was hidden under a mound of earth that covered everything but the entrance.



STOP AT DOLMEN VINYES MORTES II

(Explanation on the dolmen sites)

Dolmens were always build on higher grounds and always above the settlements. Dolmens were distributed from the foot of the mountains upwards and in more or less straight lines. The sacred burial site would be delimited with menhirs which indicated a place of sacred use. The word menhir also comes from the Breton, men meaning stone and hir upright. It is almost certain that menhirs were painted with symbols that would illustrate the specific meaning of the site, such as marking the limits of a village, indicating directions and sacred areas. The evolution of menhirs are steles, polished stone slabs engraved with symbols which are very common in the centre of the Iberian peninsula.

One of the reasons why there are so many dolmens preserved and located in the Empordà region is that many were reused later, in the Middle Ages, as shepherds' or farmers' sheds. The terracing of the mountain side with dry stone techniques for planting vines, olive trees or orchards also contributed to the conservation and restoration of dolmens, as we will see later.



Neolithic civilisations already were concerned with the afterlife, transcendence and death and therefore buried their dead in a structured and specific way: usually oriented towards one of the cardinal points, in a crouched position and along with stone tools, rudimentary jewellery and weapons. Megaliths testify to this concern with the spiritual realm.

STOP AT DOLMEN MAS MARGALL

(Explanation of burial rituals in the Neolithic era)

Speaking of rituals means speaking of religion and speaking of religion before the appearance of the first written texts is difficult. Everything is based on theories and conjectures relying on the findings of excavations. Our Neolithic ancestors already buried their dead in thoughtful and structured positions -usually oriented towards a specific cardinal point and a crouched position- and along with stone tools, rudimentary jewellery and weapons. Although their cranial capacity was inferior to ours (1250 cubic centimetres), it is evident that they already were concerned with the afterlife and the transcendence of the soul towards a spiritual world.

Ritualisation of death signified a communal activity of accompanying the families in their grief. Survival of a clan depended on its community and on the diversification of roles and tasks which were organised by the chief. Thus, losing an important warrior or sage or any other person, meant that the capacity for survival of the clan was weakened by his death and had to be commemorated by all.

There must have been a significant number of Neolithic communities in the Empordà region and judging by the number of dolmens located in different areas there seems to have been a certain cultural unity. Dolmens were used as collective burial sites and the dead were buried with personal objects that represented them: weapons, grave goods, necklaces, arrowheads and many other things. The remains of the dead have not been preserved because of the soil's acidity. These conditions, in addition to continued looting, have left us with few remnants that would help to interpret our ancestors' lives.

STOP AT THE ROCK ENGRAVINGS AT MAS MARGALL

**(Explanation of rock engravings or petroglyphs
of the Neolithic)**

Petroglyphs are representations of ideograms generally engraved on rocks for specific reasons. We do not know the meaning or significance of these engravings. They are less common in the region than dolmens or menhirs and have been found only at specific sites. It is possible that near them was some temple-like structure that has not been preserved or that they were situated within a special area: some type of sacred place on the mountain, a place for astronomical observations, some kind of territorial boundary like a Neolithic landmark or a place for sacred animal sacrifices.

The engravings seem to have been made with flint stones or some other, similarly hard material such as granite or obsidian and can be differentiated clearly from later markings made with metal tools. Most commonly found motives are cups linked by gutters, accompanied by crosses, other cone-shaped incisions and humanoid representations.



STOP AT THE WHITE CROSS DOLMEN (The destruction of dolmens)

While shepherds' and farmers' use of dolmens as sheds has helped their partial or total conservation, many menhirs were destroyed or knocked over from their original site. Many slabs that were part of dolmens have been used as construction material and also have been destroyed. Many monuments have been victims of deliberate destruction or simply have collapsed on their own and through the erosion of wind and rain.

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that people became concerned with the study of local heritage, especially through the movement of the Catalan Renaissance. Historians such as Isidre Macau or Miquel Oliva Prat did extensive studies on megalithic culture in our region and helped to restore and conserve megalithic monuments. Today, organisations like Via Pirena or the very Natural Park of Cap de Creus and initiatives by culture departments of local governments contribute to the study, promulgation and conservation of these Neolithic sites. In fact, many of the dolmens we can visit today have been restored to their original form.



STOP AT THE PASSAGE TOMB AT BOSC DE LA MARGALLA

(Explanation of the evolution and ending of the use of dolmens as burial sites)

The first dolmens were rather simple structures which marked the buried ossuary inside it but later the technique was perfected and constructions became more and more complex. The evolution of dolmens was closely related to the evolution of the very society that built them. A passageway was added to later dolmens, made with lined-up slabs that led to the monument's entrance, a feature that is pretty unique to the Empordà sites. Dolmens were no longer hidden underneath a mound which had camouflaged it, but became much more visible on the 'sacred mountain'.

The Metal Age did not arrive on the Iberian peninsula until around 1200 BC, probably by the Pyrenees and introduced, as was agriculture, by waves of immigrants, this time central Europeans, who migrated towards warmer climates. Metallurgy transformed local society radically.

The dolmens' purpose was to bury the dead according to a burial ritual, but now these central European cultures introduced a new religion that practised incineration rituals. This change led to a progressive abandonment of the old religion which merged with the new one. Dolmens were, little by little, reused by the same native population.



STOP AT THE RAVINE COMA DE L'INFERN (Explanation of life in the Neolithic)

The two most important figures in a Neolithic village were the chief and the shaman. The chief was in charge of military and administrative tasks and the shaman for religious matters, but he also had notions of medicine, astronomy and astrology. Thanks to the nearby example of the "Neolithic settlement of Ca n'Isaac" we have good references on the layout and organisation of a Neolithic village.

Food was obtained collectively but with specialised tasks distributed among the members. We also know that the concept of private property did not exist and that almost all activities in the community were performed collectively. Men were in charge of hunting, fishing and trading. Both men and women must have collaborated in the important agricultural work. Women specialised in manufacturing fabrics, preparing animal hides, pottery and were also in charge of baking bread and cooking.

We have to take into account that life expectancy was around 35 years and that the birth rate could not have been very high considering hygienic and medical shortcomings of the period. The number of children was crucial because they represented both an additional labour force and the continuity of the village, therefore women really had a great responsibility in the community.

STOP AT DOLMEN BARRACA D'EN RABERT (or BURNIAUA or BARON'S DOLMEN) (Anecdotes from the Neolithic life, final conclusions)

Life in the Neolithic era and the transition towards sedentism has slowly changed the structure of our DNA, modifying our physical and cerebral features until today. One of the peculiarities of the hunter was that he needed to see well afar, while women were great collectors and manufacturers and therefore developed a better eyesight for looking at close objects.

Because men were always out for hunting, they increased their sense for orientation. Women, on the other hand, had a great ability for picking good fruit or grain from the bad or manufacturing small objects for which they always found the most beautiful minerals or shells of the prettiest clams.

Because women give birth, they have a higher pain threshold and are physically more resilient than men, while men are physically stronger and faster. Women have a higher capacity for concentration because their tasks required patience and skill rather than brute force.

Birth was very dangerous and children only had a 50% chance of survival, as did the mothers. Maybe this is the reason for kidnapping raids at the neighbouring villages: to ensure the continuity of the own community. In certain aspects, then, women were much more important for the community's survival than men.

