

# Secrets de village... Gonfaron

Distance: 1,1 km • Start: Place de la Victoire (car park)

Gonfaron's organisation as a burg goes back to the end of the 12th century. Three priories were combined to form a single parish, having been placed under the control of the ecclesiastical seignery of Pignans. Having been contained within its walls for many years, Gonfaron's population increased significantly in the 17th and 18th centuries. Fine houses were built to the south of the medieval quarter. Agriculture flourished. The 19th century was the golden age for cork, and the manufacture of bottle corks. Gonfaron is most famous as the land where donkeys fly, but it also displays an interesting convergence in urban design, between the huddled medieval houses and the geometric lines of the industrial era.

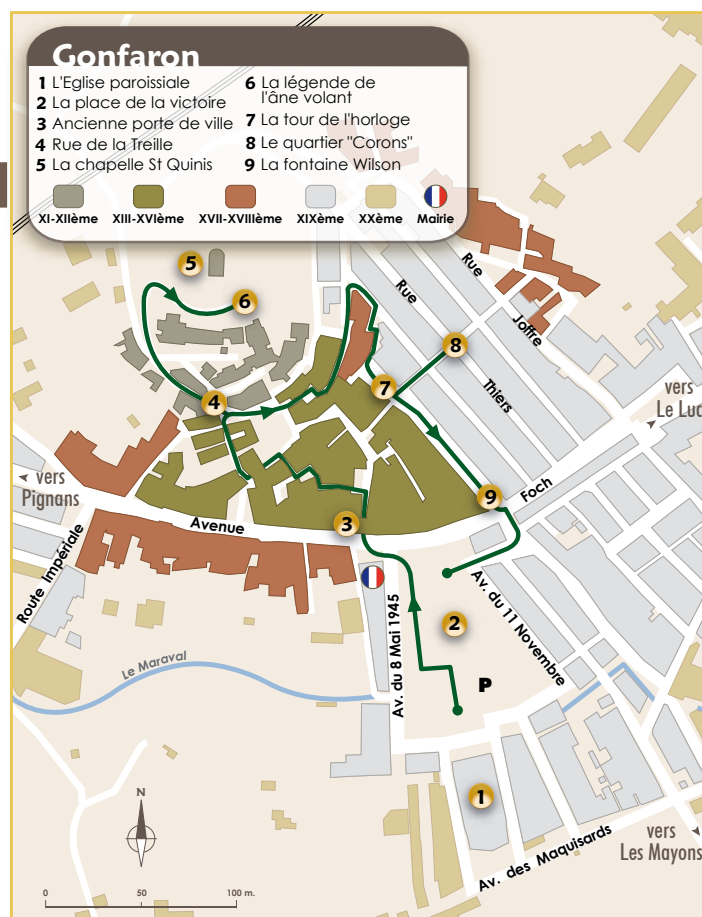
**1 L'église paroissiale:** the parish church dates from 1865, and is neo-Gothic in style. It replaced the ancient church built in the 14th century in the medieval part of the village, which no longer exists. The building consists of three naves supported by ribbed vaults. The tower is slender, which is rare in Provence. Features to be admired inside include stained glass windows and ancient statues, such as a beautifully-made pieta (a seated Virgin with downcast eyes, her hands clasped on her chest and a recumbent Christ).

**2 La place de la victoire:** at the beginning of the 19th century, the 'Grand' place' only covered the upper part of the existing square. A vast meadow to the south, known as 'pré de clastre', ran down to the bank of the Maraval river.

**3 Passage rue André Roux:** the expansion of the burg beyond the original walls between the 15th and 16th centuries meant that a new protective wall had to be built. This passage is thought to mark the location of an old gate. The route of the second wall must have followed the line of the houses bordering the departmental road which now runs through Gonfaron, with Rue Wilson at its eastern end and Rue Portail de Fabre as its western extremity.

**4 Rue de la Treille:** runs along the route of the 13th-century walls of the original castrum. The fountain set against the remains of the wall is thought to be one of the oldest in the village. It is made of hewn limestone, with two jets decorated with masks. Remnants of the rampart and fragments of doors and walls can be seen on the way up the street towards St Quinis. The original burg can only have housed a few families, with the rest of the population spread throughout the countryside in and around various priories and hamlets.

**5 La chapelle St Quinis:** this chapel was rebuilt in 1849 following landslides on the hill bearing the 1638 sanctuary. It was built on the site of the original priory that became the centre of the parish in the 12th century before being destroyed in the 16th-century Wars of Religion. St Quinis was worshipped as far back as the 6th century. Quinis came from Vaison la Romaine, and is said to have used his journeys through the countryside of Besse and Gonfaron to drive out the pagan cults inherited from the Romans, and to establish the first churches devoted to Christ. The St Quinis priory is assumed to



have replaced a sanctuary dedicated to a local deity named Gonto or Gontès, from whom Gonfaron is thought to take its name.

**6 The legend of the flying donkey:** dates back to the 17th or 18th century. On Saint Quinis' day, a procession took place across the land, and the inhabitants were asked to clear the way in front of their doorways to allow the saint's statue and its procession to pass through the narrow, sloping streets. One bad-tempered man announced that he would not clear the way, and that if the saint wanted to pass through, all he had to do was 'fly' over the heap of rubbish. He himself went up to the top of the hill on his donkey, which slipped on the crumbling slope, and tumbled down to the bottom of the ravine with its master. The inhabitants of Gonfaron believed this accident to be the saint's act of vengeance, crying 'Saint Quinis has punished him, the donkey has flown'. And so the legend was born that donkeys in Gonfaron fly from the top of the Saint Quinis chapel.

**7 La tour de l'horloge:** a belfry built in 1850 and enhanced by a wrought-iron bell tower. It is built of limestone from a quarry located to the north of the village. There is a fountain set against the foot of the tower.

**8 The 'Corons' quarter:** the geometric outline of the streets and houses represents an urban approach typical of industrial towns. The establishment of the bottle cork factories in the 19th century meant that housing had to be built for the workers. At that point an industrial quarter similar to those in northern France was created in the east of the village. In 1901, Gonfaron had ten cork workshops, employing nearly 900 workers.

**9 La fontaine Wilson:** a beautiful 19th-century fountain in hewn limestone, renovated in 2009. The water flows from a woman's head, its hair decorated with rushes.

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