



CORK ROUTE
BAIX EMPORDÀ
SCIENTIFIC ROUTES IN GIRONA



Diputació de Girona



Ready to satisfy your infinite curiosity?

These routes through the *comarcas* (similar to counties) of Girona aim to provide an alternative to conventional tourism, offering a proposal that has the added bonus of providing scientific and sustainable knowledge. These routes have been designed based on a specific science-related theme, around which a weekend outing can be planned. There's something to explore in every comarca! Through this guide you will learn, for example, among other things, who Professor Margalef

was; how the cannons on the ships that sank in the Mediterranean are recovered and restored; the chemical process that lurks behind the making of a simple cheese; why wetlands were important to the Greeks and Romans; how long to wait before recorking an oak tree; which animal skull is the most sought-after at the Archaeological Museum of Banyoles; or where the Romans mined gold in Cerdanya. When tourism and science go hand in hand, the result is spectacular.

NOTICE:

"The Catalan Foundation for Research and Innovation does not organise the events and activities published on the website surtderecercapercatalunya.cat. These events and/or activities are organised by third parties, who are responsible for them. Regarding the routes proposed on this website, users are responsible for taking the necessary precautions and safety measures depending on the terrain in each case. The Catalan Foundation for Research and Innovation accepts no responsibility for any damage or injury that users may suffer."

Més val carrar que amb burros pelear [carrar: treure llesques de suro de les alzines]

(És preferible fer una feina dificultosa que no intentar fer raonar qui no en té la capacitat o no vol)

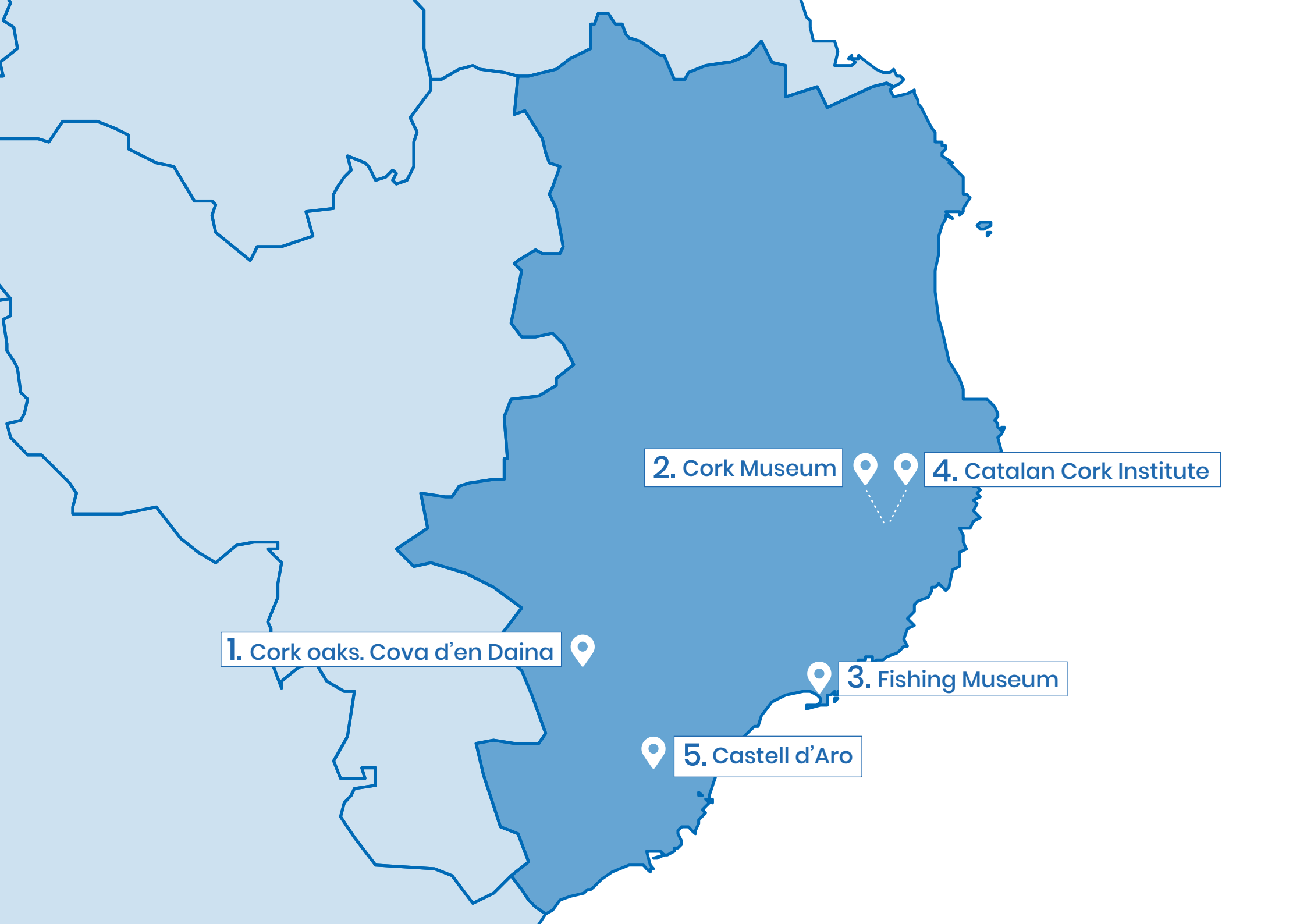
Dita popular

CORK ROUTE

BAIX EMPORDÀ

The world of Catalan cork has its epicentre in Empordà (it wasn't until 1936 that it was divided into Alt (Upper) and Baix (Lower) Empordà). This route relies on this raw material to explain how this natural resource, which abounds in the forests of Les Gavarres, has been pivotal to the development of economic activities in the area. From its first uses in fishing to the manufacture of material for 3D printers, which is in the experimental phase, cork has become a key element in a region that is now renowned for its beaches, its cuisine and its extraordinarily beautiful landscapes.

You will walk along oak forests that contain not just cork. You will learn the important role that cork plays in different fishing techniques. You will be impressed as you visit part of the world's most important cork factory, repurposed as a museum. Your curiosity will be satisfied as you learn what's behind a simple cork stopper and how the economy of cork influenced various long-gone industries, such as the railway.



1. Cork oaks. Cova d'en Daina

2. Cork Museum

4. Catalan Cork Institute

3. Fishing Museum

5. Castell d'Aro

1. Cork oaks. Daina's cave



Any point on the route is a good place to start, but this offers a natural starting point. The raw material. Oak forests are one of the symbols of Mediterranean culture, along with vineyards and olive groves. The cork is harvested from the outermost part of the bark of the cork oak, and is one of the most traditional forest products and the natural barrier that protects the trees in case of fire.

There are important oak forests all throughout the Natural Park of Les Gavarres, such as the one in Puig de Fitor. If you're willing to climb up, you will enjoy a spectacular panoramic view of the region with the sea in the background.

If you travel to Romanyà de la Selva, a municipality in Santa Cristina d'Aro, you will find a charming village, near which is a sign that marks the dolmen of the Cova d'en Daina. A path to a burial mound is surrounded by oaks, revealing how the trees have been peeled. The tree is peeled or corked carefully with a small axe. This tool cuts on one side, and on the other it is wedge-shaped, which allows it to be used as a lever to pry off the cork. There are two phases in the corking process: in the first peel, the virgin, or bornizo, cork is extracted when the tree is approximately 35 years old. After this initial corking, subsequent corkings will take place after 12–15 years. The oaks of Les Gavarres take longer to grow the cork bark than those in the south of the Peninsula. At this point you can walk a circular route and take in the beauty of the place, the cemetery containing the tomb of Mercè Rodoreda and the modernist cross of Romanyà.



2. Cork Museum



The first thing that grabs your attention is the size of the building and, therefore, the factory. The Cork Museum is located in an old cork factory in the centre of Palafrugell. The enormous dimensions of the building give some indication of this industry's importance to the town, the region and even the country. In fact, it was once the most important factory in Spain's industrial sector. There, generations and generations of the region's residents worked over the course of 100+ years.

As you go through the Cork Museum, you start to understand how the production of corks went from being a manual task that required the skill of the worker, to a mechanised and automated process. Worker documents also give you a glimpse into the migratory movements of workers who travelled to the region in the hopes of finding work.

It's all interesting, but don't miss the documentary with real images from the history of the factory and the worldwide importance it had.

The Museum's exhibits are arranged into three main spaces: the Can Mario Modernist Water Tank, Cal Ganxó, and the particle board ovens in Bòbila Vella. You will be able to take a tour of the different cork production stages, from the corking of trees and transporting of the cork for processing, since over time, cork was introduced into new products, such as particle board, floats, insoles and paper, among others. The growth of the cork industry meant that the region's farmers and fishermen gradually transitioned to become corkmakers.



3. Fishing Museum



Palamós is synonymous with shrimp. And it's true that fishing has always been linked to the village, much like cork. That is why this third point on the route is useful for explaining the relationship between the sea and the mountain in the Baix Empordà region. If you go to Palamós and visit the Fishing Museum, you will see first-hand how both natural resources come together, and why you need one to get the other. Buoys, bottles, cork ropes... Before synthetic materials were developed, natural cork was prominent in nautical tools. Its insulating and buoyancy characteristics were perfect for the harsh life at sea. Therefore, this point on the route will give us some insight into how important this material was in manufacturing tools and nets, and in its application and uses in the fishing industry. Children and adults alike will be amazed with the models used to explain the different types of deep-sea fishing and the techniques used.

The Fishing Museum was created in 2002 as a centre for educating people on the fishing and maritime activity in the Costa Brava. Its permanent exhibit aims to explain the history, the present and the future of fishing from the point of view of sustainability. It has five related educational projects: Fishing Vessels, the Fish Space, Documare: documentation centre for fisheries and the sea, and the Chair of Maritime Studies of the University of Girona.

By combining fishing and cork, we can understand the efforts made by everyone in the region to preserve and shine a light on this natural heritage. The Palamós prawn is as important an asset as cork once was, which is why scientists, fishermen's associations and government agencies are developing programs to improve how this product, which bears its own quality seal and designation of origin, is managed and used.



4. Catalan Cork Institute

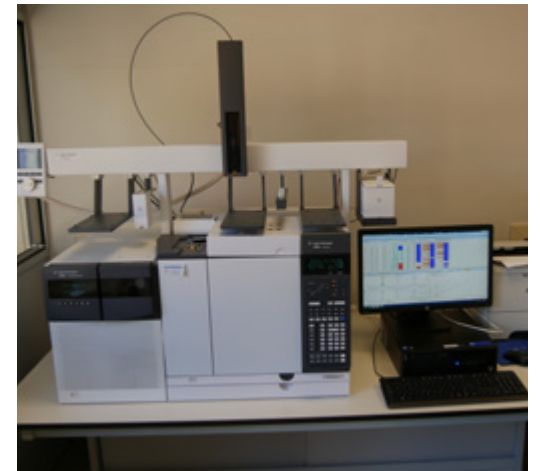
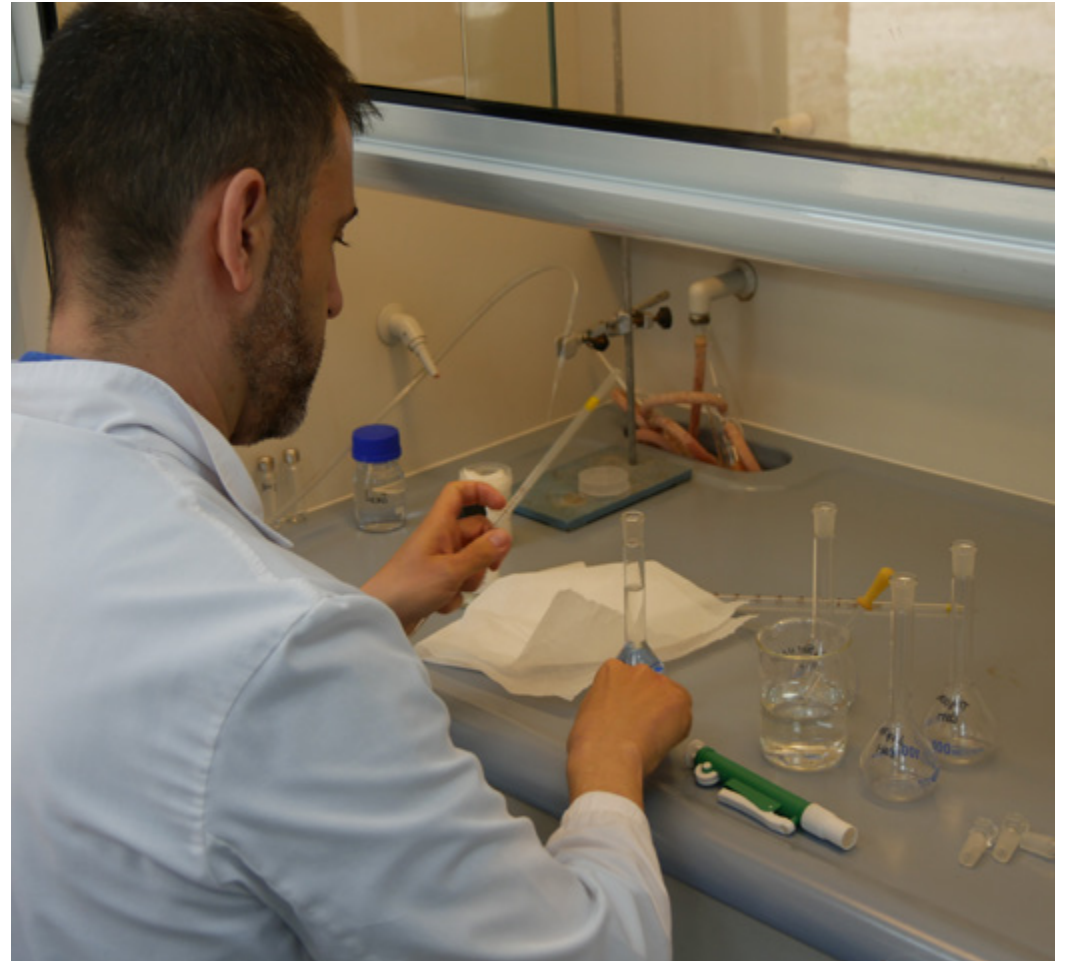


Right in front of Bòbila Vella, which is part of the Cork Museum complex, you will see a building that once housed the labourers and the stables of the factory's owners. Now it is the headquarters of the Catalan Cork Institute, whose mission is to promote the Catalan cork industry through research, innovation and communication.

Once you make an appointment (required), you'll be invited to learn about the cork industry by visiting a working factory. You will then learn the importance that the quality of the cork has on the wine industry, and you will take part in a cork tasting to understand the organoleptic qualities it confers to the wine.

During the visit to the facilities, the staff will explain how important it is to properly analyse the cork before using it as a wine stopper, and the risk of not doing so. The Catalan Cork Institute, together with the Association of Cork Entrepreneurs (AECORK), is endorsing the "Tap de Finca" project to promote cork from Gavarres, which undergoes quality controls from the time it is harvested, extracted and prepared, until it passes through the factory and is sent on to the winery.

If you run your hand over the walls at the entrance, you will feel its roughness beneath your fingers. It's plaster that contains cork, which helps to insulate the building.



5. Castell d'Aro



The cork industry involved the entire region. Just as it provided the perfect excuse for the port of Palamós to reinvent itself and thus optimise the management of cork goods, the arrival of the railway to Baix Empordà was necessary for the cork entrepreneurs of Sant Feliu de Guíxols and of Baix Empordà. And so, in 1892, the railway that linked Sant Feliu de Guíxols and Girona was opened, and it remained operational until 1969, providing passenger and freight service. After the decline of the cork industry and with the growth of tourism, passengers began to take the train to Font Picant, where there was a spa, or to the beaches of Sant Pol and Platja d'Aro.

In Castell d'Aro, the old capital of Platja d'Aro, the former station is now a waypoint on the green route, which was once the railway line. If you go there on a Sunday, you can watch scale trains rolling on one of seven unique modelling circuits in Catalonia. It's sure to delight the little ones.

The old line is 39.7 km long, with a gentle slope from Girona to Sant Feliu de Guíxols (15 m), before reaching the highest point in Cassà de la Selva (136 m). Following the path of the old narrow-gauge line from Girona to Sant Feliu, now turned into a green route for hiking and mountain biking, you can visit two regions - Gironès and Baix Empordà - from the Ter basin to the Ridaura valley, passing through the lowlands of la Selva. The line, popularly known as Feliuet or Carrilet, was the first train on the Spanish mainland to use a narrow gauge to facilitate the construction of a winding path that was mathematically calculated on the ground. It has 82 curves, no tunnels and just four metal bridges and one dry stone bridge.



