



Verdaguer's route in Ordino

Mr. Cinto Verdaguer



Biography

Jacint Verdaguer, in addition to being a priest, was one of the most important writers in the Renaixença of the Catalan language. Born in Folgueroles in 1845, he was the son of a modest but not uneducated family, and he rapidly developed an interest in popular traditions. As a boarder at the seminary in Vic, where he trained for the priesthood, he became familiar with rhetoric and the classics and began writing poetry. Among his output are epic poems of a romantic type, *L'Atlàntida (Atlantis)* and *Canigó (Canigou)*, and collections of poems, *Idil·lis i cants místics (Mystic Idylls & Songs)*, *Pàtria (Homeland)*, *Montserrat*, *Flors del Calvari (Flowers of Calvary)* and *Aires del Montseny (Airs from Montseny)*. In prose he published *Excursions i viatges (Excursions and travels)*, *Dietari d'un pelegrí a Terra Santa (Diary of a Pilgrim in the Holy Land)*, a collection of short stories *Rondalles (Tales)* and a book of articles published in the press *En defensa pròpia (In my own defence)*.

The itinerary which we propose for you today is one of those which he took to write *Canigó*, subtitled *Llegenda pirenaica del temps de la Reconquesta (Pyrenean legend from the time of the Reconquest)*, when he travelled the Pyrenees, studying their history, folklore and legends. As a result *Canigó* is one of the masterpieces of Catalan literature.

General situation



Creussans lake

Tristaina lakes



Introduction

25 august 1883

Early in the morning we went up Moncalm. The climb is straight and rocky; nearly at the top is the source of, which flows from a large snowfield. Moncalm, at 3,080 metres altitude, is flat at the top; and for this reason it is known as La Plana, while a much lower, almost inaccessible part of the mountain, finishing in a point, is called Moncalm Peak. Part of Andorra is revealed, all its mountains, some of those in Pallars, the innumerable ones in the Ariège and those of Cerdanya, and Cadí, Puigmal and Canigó at the end. The panorama is sad: white rocks dazzle the eyes on all sides, marked by snowfields even whiter; with a little lake on the side of the ranges, the four of ..., to the N.E., giving the impression of being hung one above the other on the side of the mountain. We are face to face with Montareny, which in Mongarre is named the Servi mountain; La Roja, which is also seen from Aulús. These last are seen better from the peak of Estats (3,140m), which is about three quarters of an hour away, forming a fork. From there one can see the Pallars, especially Àreu, which lies at the feet of the same mountain; the hills towards Tor and Setúria.

Pica d'Estats

Montcalm



From Estats we returned to Moncalm, and we began the descent to the south; half an hour or three quarters later on the way down we crossed a snowfield, which must have been very deep, as it had a crevasse a metre wide; further down there was a small but very deep lake. From its banks we turned to the E, through a meadow of thick grass, as slippery as glass and stiffened by the rain, which made the going very difficult. It took us about two and a half hours to go down from Moncalm to the valley and, the rain not stopping, we sheltered in a shepherd's cave. At 4 we started off again, as the rain had stopped and sky had cleared on the Tolosa side. We followed the Soulcén valley, until we found the path from the pass of ..., which follows the line of a cascading stream to the top of the mountain; further up there is a hut, and from there to the summit is still a climb of half an hour.

Growing



Point 1

We arrived at the pass, the guide showed me, three or four hours below, some cultivated fields, and told me that that was the way to go, he then bid me “good bye” and I, with my case on my back, began my descent.



Point 2

Just below the pass is a little plateau; I looked there for some sign of the path, and, if there had been any, it had been completely obliterated by the hail which had been falling. I went to the west, below the plateau I saw a great precipice; I turned to the east, and, still without seeing any path anywhere, I started down, slipping and sliding on the wet grass and in danger of falling headlong. The fear of falling obliged me to take my heavy case in my hand and, dragging it on the slope and advancing step by step, I went down the difficult mountain.



W

Point 3

On the way, it was turning dark; I saw a large lake before me, but found no path by its banks. With dangerous scree here, green grass there, and darkness all around, it was becoming darker at every point. It seemed to me that the lake was hanging from a great cliff, from where it was difficult to get down, so I went back, and then turned to the W, up a hill, searching by a goat track which I saw, for a better way out. In fact I did find traces of a path which helped me to get down from the cliff, disappearing before me.



Point 4

Night had fallen now with all its darkness; I found myself below the cliff, on a steep grassy slope almost as bad as the precipice above. The patches of slippery grass followed on from the scree, where it would be easy to break a leg, or mixed stones and grass faced me with both dangers at the same time. The width of the sky told me that the valley was not as small as I had feared, and the sound of the murmuring stream, swollen with the water and the hail which had just been falling, told me that in between it and the slope there was some space. This encouraged me and, step by step, groping with the umbrella, creeping along and on all fours, I crossed the stony ground and came to the valley.



Point 5

There I yelled, whistled and shouted, with no response but that of the stream with its loud, frightening voice; I raised my eyes to heaven and it seemed to me that a star was twinkling among the heavy clouds which stretched from one peak to the other. That star gave me the feeling that it was watching me from far above, and it calmed me. “God knows you are here”, I said to myself, “and He remembers even the insect that tills the dust”. Comforted, I put myself in his divine hands, resigned to sheltering from the rain under a rock, if necessary, doing without dinner as I had done without lunch, having finished my provisions in the middle of the morning. What I did not enjoy were the dampness of the air and the earth, which ran everywhere, and the icy cold left by the hail, as well as the cold of the heights themselves. I whistled and shouted again, and nothing: the most total and cold solitude surrounded me.



Point 6

Trying to see into those palpable shadows, I threw a stone to where the stream roared strongest, which warned me that the waters suffered and were pouring over a horrible precipice. “If I cannot find the path, I shall have to spend the night here.” Again I raised my heart to God, and I began to investigate up and down along the edge of the abyss. By the light of the stars, some of which were now shining, I came to see below me the paler tones of a little path which descended daringly, like a rope ladder from a roof. I went to it and tried to go down it, not taking a step without first checking with the ferrule of the umbrella. I got down and, Oh, what luck! that little path, like a mysterious hand, went guiding me along the bank of the river past pools and torrents coming down, where I could have fallen over a loosened stone, or tripped over a tree trunk or slipped on the muddy grass.



Point 7

I walked on for a long time, dejected and with my legs bending under the weight of my case, troubled by hunger and even more by thirst, but not daring to drink water which came from hail, sweating freely and, above all, hampered by the impenetrable darkness. This was the first time that I had seen this country of Andorra, and I had no idea in which direction there would be the first houses, whether there were woodcutters in the forests, fishermen on the river or shepherds in the mountain. But, “let’s go on”, I told myself, “there, down below, there must be something”.



Point 8

And so there was; suddenly, I heard a dog barking further down, reviving in my heart the hope of finding succour. The sound of water in days of drought, the first song of the nightingale in spring, the cry of “Land ho!” after a long and tempestuous voyage, were never so sweet to my ears as that barking, which, better than a human voice would have been, seemed to say to me, “Come along, intrepid traveller, to this hospitable hut; if you are thirsty, there’s a glass of milk to drink, if you are hungry, there’s a bit of bread to eat; if you are cold, there’s a fire to warm you; if you are tired, there’s straw to sleep on.” And it was true; everything was there in the hut, and the bread from the king’s table would not have tasted so good to me as that black bread, and that straw on the bare ground was softer to me than any goose feather pillows in the richest palace.



Point 9 El Serrat

The little village of El Serrat, about which I do not know much, having seen it only in passing, and passing quickly, lies between the two branches of the west Valira, the gullies of the Rialb and the Tristayna, which takes its name and water from Tristany, three lakes which pour their waters from one to the other until the last, which sends them to the Valira. In the village, close to the road, there is a chapel dedicated to St. Peter.



Point 10 Llorts

The next day, 26 August, was Sunday; I rose at the crack of dawn to go to celebrate holy mass in Llorts, a village subordinate to Ordino.

In Llorts there is little of note; the church is plain and poor. Inside a house I saw an old table which reminded me of that of the Count of Pallars; it is wider, of extraordinary thickness, with decorative stripes. What a shame that they cut it down by five palms, as it was too long.



Point II La Cortinada

Half way from the parish is the subordinate point of La Cortinada.

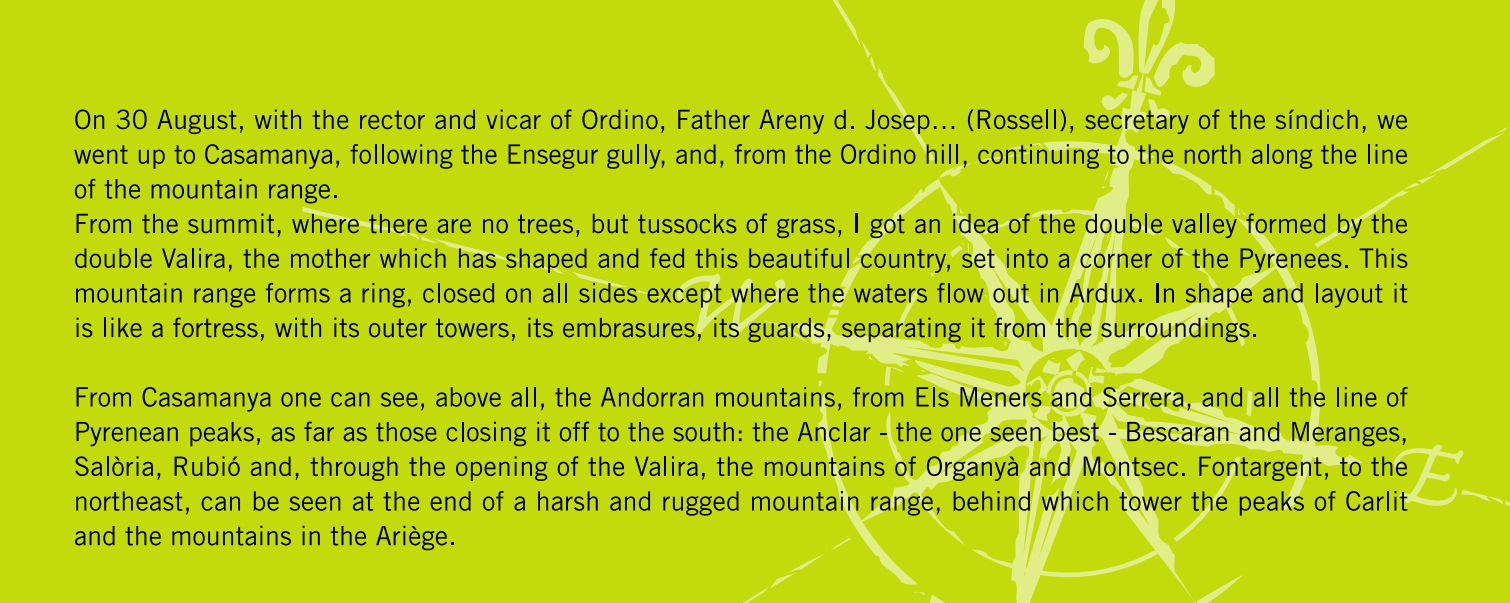
As far as Ordino, and almost to Andorra, the valley is truly beautiful: forests on the mountains, green fields where water flows on both sides of the river; when the valley widens, a little hamlet settles, crowned with cultivated land, as they call it, where you can see lines of reapers.





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route in Ordino

E Casamanya



On 30 August, with the rector and vicar of Ordino, Father Areny d. Josep... (Rossell), secretary of the síndich, we went up to Casamanya, following the Ensegur gully, and, from the Ordino hill, continuing to the north along the line of the mountain range.

From the summit, where there are no trees, but tussocks of grass, I got an idea of the double valley formed by the double Valira, the mother which has shaped and fed this beautiful country, set into a corner of the Pyrenees. This mountain range forms a ring, closed on all sides except where the waters flow out in Ardux. In shape and layout it is like a fortress, with its outer towers, its embrasures, its guards, separating it from the surroundings.

From Casamanya one can see, above all, the Andorran mountains, from Els Meners and Serrera, and all the line of Pyrenean peaks, as far as those closing it off to the south: the Anclar - the one seen best - Bescaran and Meranges, Salòria, Rubió and, through the opening of the Valira, the mountains of Organyà and Montsec. Fontargent, to the northeast, can be seen at the end of a harsh and rugged mountain range, behind which tower the peaks of Carlit and the mountains in the Ariège.

Canigó (Canigou)

(Pyrenean legend from the time of the Reconquest)

Pouring from one to other, gently murmuring,
the lakes of Tristany are more beauteous,
Puig d'Alba and Fontargent, more luminous
with their gowns of never-melting snow.
Incles and Ordino, these valleys are ever full
of harmonies, of dreams and mysteries
in the rain of light falling from the skies,
to the quiet shelter the world must know.

The fairy early leaves her nest,
but finer Queen and lady blest
in Meritxell these valleys hold.
Music gives the Valira to its plants,
from Ordino to Soldeu, harmonious,
lyre-shaped, in gentle sound it grants
sweet notes from arms of gold.

*Fragment from Canigó
Jacint Verdaguer*

Pica d'Estats

Montcalm

Creussans mountain pass

