

Margalef

(UTMX: 312025 – UTM Y: 4572975 – H: 379 m)



The Village

Margalef is situated in the northwesternmost part of the region of El Priorat on the right-hand side of the Montsant river valley. The area's main economic activity is olive and peach growing. The name Margalef comes from Arabic. The village has a number of Art Nouveau houses and a church dedicated to Saint Michael the Archangel. It is an 18th-century Neoclassical building that, despite a fire in 1936, preserves some remains of mural paintings. The church is in a square which contains the **Perxe**, a long arcade with crushed stone where the town's oldest houses are found. Don't miss a walk down **Carrer de les Covetes**; one side is entirely made of rock, which supports the street above.

Places of Interest

About 3.5 km outside the village is **Saint Saviour's chapel**, built in the 16th century in a huge rock shelter. The top of a Civil War bomb was used to make the bell, as can still be seen today. The whole village celebrates Saint Saviour's Day, on 6 August, with a festival. Along the track that leads to the chapel is a sign to **Ximet Cave**, a particularly beautiful spot.

Margalef has a rich archaeological heritage in caves and rock shelter that take us back to the last hunter-gatherers that lived here between 14,000 and 8,000 years ago. Noteworthy is the **Taverna Cave**, and **Filador rock shelter**, the site of digs since the 1930s, where a fragment of the Chelonii was found, a species that is back in the Montsant area today thanks to a project to reintroduce the Hermann's tortoise.

The Margalef reservoir, close to the village, was completed in 1990. It has a recreation area. From there you can hike to the Racó dels Pèlics and Pont Natural, a natural arch.



Rambling, Climbing and Fishing in Margalef

A number of different activities can be done in and around Margalef. A Park signposted walk (M3) leaves the village and climbs up Taverna cliff to the **Racó del Teix**, where there is a yew tree that was granted official protection in 1992. To help visitors learn more about the **flora** along the banks of the River Montsant, an adapted walk has been created that passes by the remains of two old flour mills and connects the reservoir and the village. Another walk, "Margalef Landscapes: Sant Salvador Cliff", has been created in connection with the oil mill. The walk goes to Cova del Ximet (Ximet's Cave), as well as Mas del Morera and other structures that made use of running water. They are a testament to the different ways of life in this area and the use of its resources.

The Margalef escarpments and cliffs attract a great many enthusiasts of **rock climbing**, a sport which, like other Park activities, should be practised while following Park regulations. In order to guarantee that tourism develops in a sustainable way in the village and surrounding areas, the Town Council created two welcome areas with parking for caravans, restrooms and showers: one near the entrance to the village and the other near the reservoir. The Park created camping and parking areas for motor vehicles and signposted them.

The Montsant Fishing Club also organizes training programmes and excursions on good **fishing** practices in the River Montsant. (Margalef Town Council: +34 977 81 91 67)



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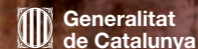


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Montsant Oil and Productive Economy Interpretation Centre Margalef Oil Mill



Parc Natural de la Serra de Montsant

Introduction

This oil mill was built in 1933 by Miquel Franch, a most enterprising man. The mill started operation at a time of great social conflict, class struggle and ideological confrontation. Three years later, in 1936, civil war broke out in Spain. The mill continued to produce oil until the end of the nineteen fifties. Following a hard frost, many olive trees died, leaving the region in a depression. This led people to leave and head for the cities. Even so, oil has become increasingly prominent and today is one of the main sources of economy in the Montsant Natural Park region.

Work in the fields

The growing season starts with pruning around March. Other jobs are tilling, grass cutting, removing shoots from stumps and treatment. The altitude of the lands of Montsant protects the olive trees from disease. Thanks to this, quality organic olive oil can be produced. The harvest takes place at the beginning of November and carries on into December and most of January. It is hard work, the days are cold and windy; sometimes, it even snows. The process is starting to be mechanised, but it is almost all done by hand. The tarps are spread at the feet of the trees; the picker climbs up a ladder and combs the branches with a rake to make the olives fall onto the tarp. From there, they are put in a basket and then a sack. In the past, before being taken to the mill, the olives went through a picking machine to remove the leaves.

The olive washer

Olives arrived at the mill needed washing. Some were picked up from the ground and were mixed with earth and leaves. The olives went from a hopper into a spinning drum which rinsed the olives and carried them to the millstone. In 1933, this ingenious device was an example of advanced technology.

The agricultural landscape

In the mid-19th century, Montsant was covered in forest. The main crops grown were grapes and olives. Pulses, cereals, almonds, vegetables and anything the inhabitants needed to survive were also grown here. The region's beeswax and honey were well known and highly valued. Today, the olive is the main crop grown, along with grapes, nuts—mainly almonds—and fruits, mostly peaches and cherries.

The pressure pump

This device created the pressure necessary to operate the press. Formerly, *lliura* presses were used, so-called because they comprised a huge beam and a cylindrical stone counterweight, or *lliura*, in Catalan. They were slow and bulky and required many people to operate them. At the end of the 19th century they were replaced with hydraulic presses that used a pump to generate the necessary pressure to operate. These pumps worked at very high pressure and constantly needed readjusting, with special tools and wrenches.

Grinding

The olives fell onto the millstone and were slowly squashed by two stone discs that revolved around the main axis. The process generally lasted around an hour and half and it was usual to add a drop of hot water to help release the oil from the olives. The paste was shovelled up and spread on flat esparto discs, called *cofins*. Once full, the *cofins* were piled up, a process known as *fer el peu*.

Pressing

The pile was lifted onto a cart on rails and transported to the press. Then the discs were flattened under great pressure for hours. As the pressure increased, the oil oozed down the pile and ran along channels to decanting basins or pools.

The pools

Water is denser than oil, therefore the oil floats. This is the secret behind the pools: while the water remains, the oil flows from pool to pool, leaving impurities behind. The oil in the last pool is clean. It is then pumped to the tanks or vats.

The miller

During the harvest, the mill ran day and night. And the miller lived there. He had a table, a chair and a bed. He noted of the amount of olives that arrived every day. Notice his little laboratory where he carried out quality control, yet another sign that this mill was ahead of its time.

Weighing

Although it may sound strange, olives were measured in litres and oil was weighed in kilos on a scale. First the container, a pitcher or drum, was weighed and then it was filled with oil. This system was later replaced with pumps, but today it is compulsory for all oil to be packaged and labelled before leaving the mill. The olives were measured in a type of pot with handles called a double decalitre which held about 20 litres. Four doubles made a *quartera*, that is, 80 litres, which correspond to a sack. Today the term *quartera* survives, although the unit of measure used is the kilo. One *quartera* is equal to around 50 kilos of olives.

Toast

A warm atmosphere helped the oil to separate from the olive paste. This forge fed a rudimentary heating system. The pleasant temperature in the winter and the number of people that came and went made the mill a meeting place. It was customary to *fer la rosta*, that is, toast a slice of bread in the forge and dip it in the fresh oil from the last pool.

Storage

The oil tanks or vats were covered with glazed ceramic tiles, as this made them impervious and made cleaning easier. The oil was kept there for a few days before shipment. Storage was and is essential to maintain quality. Oil changes over the course of the year. Freshly pressed, it is very green with a fruity taste, and then it turns yellow and loses flavour. Oil should be stored in a cool dark place to remain in good condition. If it has not been previously filtered, it must be decanted to separate out natural sediments.

Transport

Most of the oil produced in the mill was for own consumption. It was sold in bulk and the miller would loan the pitchers to customers. The pitchers of oil were transported by pack animal and emptied into earthenware jugs or cans kept in the coolest, darkest parts of the house.

