

7 CASTELL DE CONFRIDES



You know the castle at **Guadalest**, the one that appears on all the postcards and which is responsible for reducing the village to a parking lot with souvenir shops attached? Forget about it. This is the castle you want to visit.

Though barely better than a pimped up stroll, this is an extraordinarily gratifying little walk, featuring within a single square kilometre a bit of virtually everything you can expect to enjoy in the Costa Blanca mountains: scree, scrub, a scramble, crags, cliffs, vistas, a vertiginous eyrie, a pine wood, almond groves, terraces, a cherry orchard, and a castle perched on a pinnacle so improbably remote that you have to ask yourself just what they thought they were defending or, why they were so very, very scared. The short answer to that last question is - Christians.

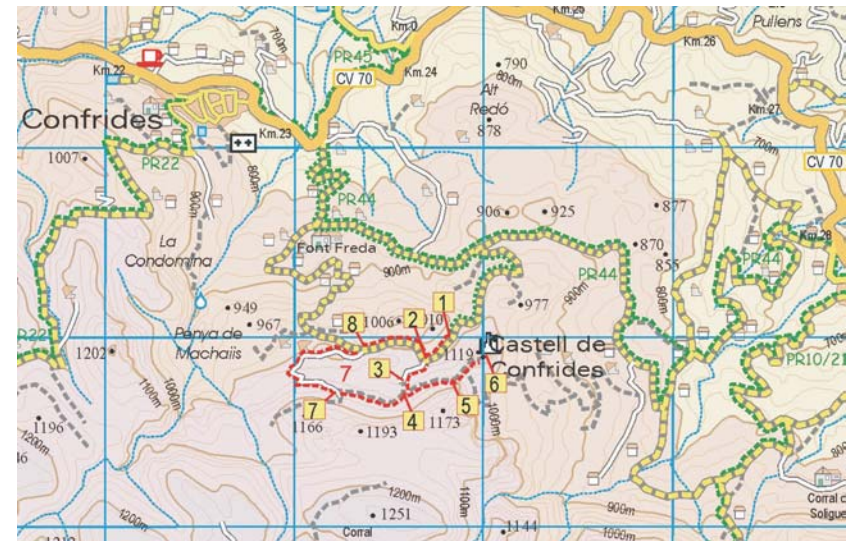
The castle's original name was 'Alfofra' after the Moorish village it protected until 1264, when it was invested by Jaume el Conqueridor, King of Aragon and Count of Barcelona, architect of the shortlived Catalan empire, and a man who, for all his prodigious learning and patronage of the arts, was sufficiently bellicose to send anybody scurrying for the hills.

As with most despoiled strongholds, the history is dispiriting, but the site is magical. Particularly lovely as the sun sets and the rocks are gilded by the golden evening light until it seems the honey-coloured lustre is a property of the stone itself rather than an embellishment borrowed from the sun's rays. Bizarrely, access to the castle is not signposted and it is studiously ignored by the road hugging **PR44** that passes just below. If you don't do anything foolish, the top is not dangerous; however, it is vertiginous. The access road is a bit abraded and pot-hole in places, but never problematically so.



Access: **Confrides** is halfway between **Benidorm** and **Alcoi** on the CV70. From the sharp bend at km23.3 of the CV70, just east of the village, we take the asphalted track climbing to the south of the road, forking right 25 metres from the road, then left in front of the **Villa Font Freda** 500 metres later. Taking the right hand fork 900 metres after that, we climb on an increasingly narrow road (watch out for the overhanging pine!) for a further 900 metres until we reach a grassy parking bay on the right of the road just below the castle ideal for a picnic spot, too.

If this is occupied, there is plenty of roadside parking further along the road.



After the walk, we can continue to the west to return to **Villa Font Freda**, though the road taken on the way up is more attractive.

From the parking bay (Wp.1 **0M**), we simply stroll up the road for 200 metres, then fork left (Wp.2) on a dirt track. 10 metres before the end of the track, we fork left again on a stony path (Wp.3 **6M**) that climbs to the south before veering back toward the castle, passing a junction with another path coming in from the right (Wp.4 **8M**). At a small col overlooking **Benifato** and the **Partagat** track (Wp.5 **12M**), we bear left, following a clear but occasionally rough path that curves round the foot of the crags then climbs steeply to the outer fortifications and the remaining wall of the keep (Wp.6 **22M**), whereupon we all burst into a chorus of 'I'm the king of the castle'; infantile, I know, but it's that sort of thrill.

We return via the same route, save that at Wp.4, to extend the basic stroll and enjoy a less skittery descent, we fork left, continuing along a contour line before climbing very briefly to join a dirt track (Wp.7 **45M**). Bearing right, we follow the track as it meanders down through almond groves, passing a ruined cabin, from where we have perhaps the best view of the castle yet., before rejoining the road (Wp.8 **57M**). All that remains is to turn right to return to the start. Oh, yes, and there's that cherry orchard I promised you - on our left as we stroll back to the car.