

The Castle in Corsavy

Not much is known about the Castle (Lo Castell) that once occupied the rock in the centre of Corsavy, but some things can be described and deduced.

It was never a grand castle in the style of Warwick or Caernavon; in style it was probably like Montferrer castle, the remains of which can still be visited (on the crest of the ridge visible from the lower parts of Corsavy).

Even in 1509 the castle in Corsavy was reported to be in ruins, and the building has since disappeared, acting as a quarry for building the houses now clustered around the castle rock.

The rock is a natural site for building a castle.

The top area is roughly 70m x 50m, with the vertical faces about 10m high on the west, north and east sides, and over 20m high on the south face where the surrounding land falls away.

The current houses cluster close to the cliff except on the more open southern face.

Some of the houses can access the top of the rock through their attics.



To see Benjamin Malassingne's drone video of the top area, click on:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LACV2LbGjWE> (1 min)

The castle had 2 natural entrances, one at the south and one at the north. Both are now private and cannot be accessed.

Key features (more details on pages 2, 3)

- A** South entrance
This is a steep track zig-zagging up the south face.
- B** North entrance
This is an arch behind the houses on the main street. It leads to a cavern (**B**) and a staircase inside the rock (**C**) exiting on the top (**D**).
- E** Walls
Some walls have recently been excavated.



More details of these features:

A The South entrance

From a private garden at the upper end of rue Barri d'Avall, near the place de l'Aire, a steep track zig-zags up the cliff.

Near the top there is an over-hanging section of stonework (perhaps the remains of a gatehouse?).

B The North entrance

On the north face, on the main street, behind the houses that have been built against the castle rock, there is a large entry arch (B).

This arch is about 5 metres high and 5 metres wide, with 'faced' edges. It is easily big enough for a man on horseback or a coach to enter into the cavern behind it.

This natural cavern is a large uneven space, about 10 m by 15 m in area and about 7 metres high.



An impression of the size of the arch behind the houses

At the right-hand (west) side of the cavern a stone stairway (somewhat damaged) still rises up inside the rock (C) to the summit of the castle (D). Presumably it arrived into the interior of the castle buildings.

Here are some stills from a video I made in 1999 (with John Taylor and Elisabeth de Wolf):



Part of the arch at the rear of the houses (B)



The wall of the cavern



The staircase (C)



The staircase near the top



The top exit hole



The exit seen from above (D). Presumably it would have been inside the castle.

To see the video itself (6 mins) click on: <https://youtu.be/K9XgJ6HOrml>

E Excavations of walls

Further north on the site, Robin Gorham (whose attic leads out on to the top of the castle rock at E) has excavated a small area to reveal a wall, running roughly at right-angles to the boundary wall.



The top of the excavated wall was a few centimetres below the soil surface. Whether these stones are part of the original castle walls, or some other structure, we don't know.

The top of the outer boundary wall appears to be of more recent origin, and with a different type of stone (as shown on these two photos:



'Arrow-slits' can be seen in the boundary wall above some houses, but whether these are original and genuine is not known. They may be relatively modern decorations, or even drainage vents.

They were already there in the 1820s when Joseph-François de Vilanova wrote about them. (see www.corsavy.co.uk) He called them 'barbacanes', a word used equally for arrow-slits and for drainage holes.

They are over a metre below the soil surface on the castle top, and since it's unlikely that that much soil has dropped on the castle top over the last 6 centuries, it's unlikely that anyone ever stood behind the slits.



So, after 6 centuries we know only a little about the castle in Corsavy. Nothing about its architecture or even its size; and almost nothing about the people who lived there. A little of its history is given at www.corsavy.co.uk

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