

Climbing in Gorges du Tarn, France

Written by YDE

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France - For its sheer beauty alone, the Tarn is worthy of a climbing visit. The canyon is covered with lush vegetation and is a sight to behold during spring and autumn, when nature paints the forest in a mix of bright colours, reflected in the swirling currents of the river which cuts its way through the winding valley. I've been to the Tarn on three occasions and each time I have noticed an increasing amount of climbers. With over 500 sport routes on top quality limestone, the gorge is fast becoming one of France's premier climbing locations.

The Gorges du Tarn can be found in Southern France, situated in the department of Aveyron. It can be reached best through Millau, which is along the A75 highway and features the Millau Viaduct which crosses the gorge, and is incidentally the tallest vehicular bridge in the world. From Millau you'll want to take the D907 towards Le Rozier and follow it past Les Vignes. Between Les Vignes and La Malène is where all the main crags are situated. You can also approach from the East, but be prepared for a long and winding road. I would recommend taking the D986 from Sainte Enimie. This road winds its way above the valley and you'll get a magnificent view of the surroundings including a beautiful descent into La Malène.

There is a big parking spot underneath the sector l'Oasif, where most climbers stay. From here you can access almost all other areas on foot. The closest comparison here is to climbing in the Franken Jura. The limestone has a lot of feature, including a smattering of finger pockets. The climbing is definitely geared towards endurance, and if you're into long 30 metre routes, there is a lot here to whet your appetite. Sector l'Amphie and Tennessee are good examples with some spectacularly exposed routes that make for good photos. It's often mentioned that the Tarn is soft on grading, and I think this might have to do with the length of some of the problems. Rest assured though, you're not going to be given a free on-sight here unless you've specifically trained for these types of lengths.

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