Romanesque in the Pyrenees

Pallars Sobirà

The county of the Pallars Sobirà covers the area, from south to north, starting at the Gorge of Collegats up until the village of Alós d'Isil, following the course of the waters of the Noguera Pallaresa River. It is the fourth biggest comarca (roughly, a county or district) in Catalonia and it has one of the lowest population densities of the country, with its 7.400 inhabitants; 4 people per km². In this comarca we find the biggest lake of the Pyrenees, Certascan, and the highest peak in Catalonia, la Pica d'Estats, with an altitude of 3,143 m.
Most of the area in the Pallars Sobirà is protected. There are several zones including the PEIN (Natural Interest Landscape Plan of Catalonia), the **Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park**, the **Alt Pirineu Natural Park**, the **Partial Natural Reserve of Noguera Pallaresa-Collegats**, vast extensions of the **Natura 2000 Network**, the **National Hunting Reserve of Boumort**...
In terms of history, the first settlement in the Pallars goes back into **prehistory**, from which period there are many testimonies and remains, specially the megalithic monuments.
The **presence of Romans** seems, at first, to not have been very intense, as a contrast to that in the Val d'Aran. However, the most recent archaeological finds in the Pallars are starting to indicate quite the opposite.
Later, in the **medieval times** and after the dismantling of the Roman world, the high mountain communities were responsible for the exploitation of the natural resources.
After the conquest and reign of the counts of Toulouse, the House of Pallars started its dominion, which would end up being the longest in time in all the Catalan counties and which finished in 1487 with the loss of the castle of València d'Àneu and the end of Hug Roger III's power. The general crisis of the feudalism had its continuity into the **Modern Age** and in the transformation of the Pallaresan County into a marquisate with the House of Cardona.
At the same time of this nobility authority of a marquisate, several dominions existed too, but they composed a royal, superior structure, known as sotsvegueria of Pallars, which would be substituted by the corregiment de Talarn in the eighteenth century.
From the end of the **eighteenth century until 1870** there was a growth in the population which reached then the highest moment in demographic development: 20.348 inhabitants in 1860.
From 1870 and until 1910 there is a serious **crisis on the subsistence economy**, which was prevailing until that moment, at the same time that a dramatic decline in the economy and population takes place, also caused by the civil confiscation under Madoz, Minister of Finance, as well as the bad weather conditions and the outburst of the phylloxera pest in vineyards, among others. From 1910 until 1960, as a consequence of the **improvements in communication** and the building of the first hydroelectric power stations, there is a period of modernization, unfortunately interrupted by the Civil War and its aftermath. From 1960 until 1980 the county experiences a **second crisis** caused by the mechanization of work in the country and the industrialization of cities. Cities will become an alluring opportunity for Pallaresan people, a fact that will lead to a new demographic decline to the point of having only half of the population (5,247 inhabitants) remaining in the comarca.

Tourist Offices

Pallars Sobirà Tourist Office
Camí de la Cabanera, s/n. 25560 Sort
Tel. 973 621 002. www.pallarssobira.info

Esterri d'Àneu Municipal Tourist Office
C. Major, 40 bis. 25594 Esterri d'Àneu
Tel. 973 626 345. www.vallsdaneu.org

Baix Pallars Tourist Office
Baix Pallars Town Council. Gerri de la Sal
Tel. 973 662 040. http://baixpallars.ddl.net

Tavascan Tourist Office
Carretera de Tavascan, s/n. Tavascan
Tel. 973 623 079. www.tavascan.info

Llavorsí Tourist Office
Carretera de Cardós, s/n. Llavorsí
Tel. 973 622 217. http://llavorsi.ddl.net

València d'Àneu Tourist Office
Avda. Port de la Bonaigua, 9. València d'Àneu
Tel. 973 626 038. http://altaneu.ddl.net

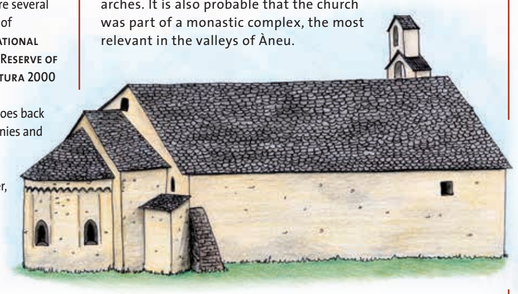
Vall de Cardós Tourist Office
Camí Comunidor, s/n. Ribera de Cardós
Tel. 973 623 239. http://vallscardos.ddl.net

Headquarters of the Parc Natural de l'Alt Pirineu
Carrer de la Riba, 1. Llavorsí
Tel. 973 622 335. www.gencat.cat/parcs

National Park of Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici
Carrer de Sant Maurici, 5. Espot
Tel. 973 624 036. www.gencat.cat/parcs

◊ Church of Santa Maria d'Àneu, in Escalarre

The church, with its large dimensions, can be found in the outskirts of Esterri d'Àneu. To get there, take the path to Escalarre and, only 800m away, there will be the crossing of Santa Maria. Continue for another 900m and you will see the temple on the right. The church has a structure of an only nave, covered in wood, on pointed arches. It is also probable that the church was part of a monastic complex, the most relevant in the valleys of Àneu.



Central apse: Lombard in decoration with arches between the lesenes (pilaster strips), and three double-thick windows.

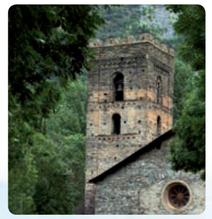
Paintings: Attributed to the workshop of the painter Master of Pedret. In the upper part, there is a representation of the Epiphany with Her Highness Maria. Among other scenes and characters, in the lower part there are two seraphs, with their three pairs of wings each, and the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel.

Plan: The structure possibly follows the forms of the fifteenth century and, according to some authors, the original was a basilical plan with three naves.

◊ Church of Santa Maria de Ribera de Cardós

It is considered to be one of the most monumental in the comarca, thanks to the medieval bell tower standing at the side of the church. The rather large size of the church and the changes it has undergone, in particular during the eighteenth century, have given the temple a special light, not very usual in Romanesque churches. In 2001, in an agreement reached in a plenary session by the administrative organisation of Consell Comarcal del Pallars Sobirà, the building was considered to be a Cultural Heritage of Local Interest.

Bell tower: The most remarkable feature of the church. Crowned with defensive elements, merlons, it divides its four sections with friezes in saw-toothed patterns.

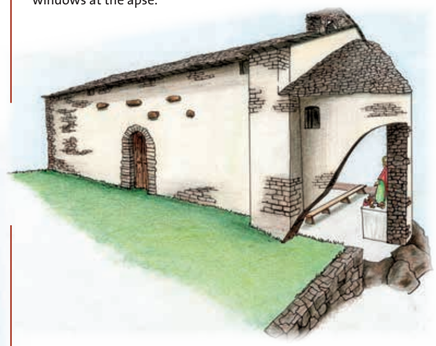


Rose window: Its geometrical decoration shows two enclosing arches. A series of triangles in relief encircle the external perimeter.

Apse chapel: Lombard ornamentation and arcading, with a double-thick window in pumice stone.

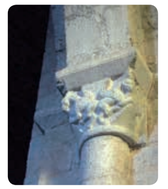
◊ Church of Santa Eulàlia d'Alendo

A magical church in the heart of the Pyrenees. Follow the local road in Tírvia to Burg and Farrera; after another 7 km you will get to Farrera, go through the village and continue along the main road towards Alendo. The church stands on a serrat, a lower but protruding part of the range of mountains. The semicircular nave and apse have a pointed chancel arch, with external supporting buttresses. At the union between the nave and the apse, on the outside, there is a bell-gable. On the southern façade, where the round-arched door is, the remains of a porch or arcade can be seen. There are two double-thick windows at the apse.



◊ Santa Maria de Gerri de la Sal

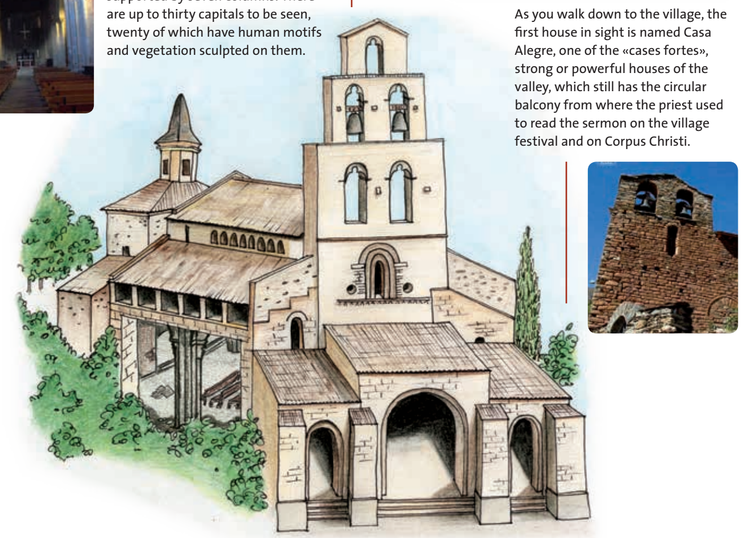
The most remarkable and outstanding church of the Pallars Sobirà. What remains of the old Benedictine abbey is the Romanesque church of the twelfth century, with a basilica plan featuring three naves and three apses, an atrium with three attached structures that shelter the door at the eastern end; also, there is a bell-gable with three different floors. Most of the alterations have been in its external features, where the most remarkable ones have been the atrium and the accessing portal, apart from the decoration of the apses and the bell-gable.



Atrium: It consists of three parts, or bodies, with columns and sculpted capitals on the external walls and on the portal walls. The portal to access the church is framed by a round arch, with three decreasing archivolts, which show sculpted decoration on the capitals of the columns at the door. Of the exterior apse, there are only visible a lateral apse and a part of the central one, both with decorated series of arches and a saw-toothed frieze supported by columns at the central apse.

Interior: It is the most interesting part, where we can see the structure of a barrel vault and some transversal, toral arches supported by pillars with columns and sculpted capitals.

Apse: The central apse has an arcade supported by seven columns. There are up to thirty capitals to be seen, twenty of which have human motifs and vegetation sculpted on them.



◊ Church of Mare de Déu de Bernui

This Pyrenean legend tells about two shepherds from Bernui who were walking through the lands of the neighbouring village, Seurí, when they found the Virgin. Both villages claimed the image and since there was no agreement reached, they decided to leave it in the hands of fate, or the will of the Virgin. They threw a càntir, a clay container for water, down the slope of the mountain. It was agreed that if it remained unbroken, the image of the Virgin would be for the people of Bernui, who trusted in her blindly; if the càntir broke, the people from Seurí would keep the image.
The miracle was when the clay container did not break as proof of the will of the Virgin who wished to remain with those who most believed in her.
In the church, the most recent discovery can be seen: some Baroque paintings which have been kept hidden under a layer of white paint. The process of restoration has brought to light those in better conditions, the circular motifs in relief on the ceiling.

As you walk down to the village, the first house in sight is named Casa Alegre, one of the «cases fortes», strong or powerful houses of the valley, which still has the circular balcony from where the priest used to read the sermon on the village festival and on Corpus Christi.

1. A walk around the church of Mare de Déu de les Neus

Itinerary: Borén - Mare de Déu de les Neus - *bordes* d'Àrreu - Àrreu - Borén
Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes
Gradient: 400 m
Distance: 3,700 km

Of special interest: Church of Sant Martí de Borén, hermitage of Mare de Déu de les Neus, bordes (summer dwelling) d'Àrreu, panoramic views, the village of Àrreu.

2. From village to village crossing the Medieval Bridges

Itinerary: Ribera de Cardós - Cassibrós - Ainet de Cardós - Arrós de Cardós - Bridge of Lladrós - Lladorre
Duration: 2 hours 30 minutes
Gradient: 100 m
Distance: 8,800 km

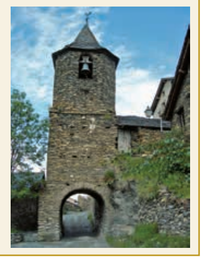
Of special interest: Bridges in the medieval style, Romanesque architecture, panoramic views, specific typology of village building.
Variation: From Arrós de Cardós, walk up to Esterri de Cardós and from there, walk down towards the Bridge of Lladrós. 45 minutes must be added to the basic itinerary.

Foto: Roger Gras

3. After the footprints of the Romanesque

Itinerary: Llavorsí - Montesclado - Mallolís - Alendo - Farrera - Glorieta - Tírvia - Llavorsí
Duration: 5 hours
Gradient: 500 m
Distance: 16,700 km

Of special interest: Romanesque churches, panoramic views, specific typology of village building.



4. The route of Pla de Corts

Itinerary: Peramea - Cortscastell - Montcortès - Bretui - Masia d'Enjaume - Peramea
Duration: 3 hours 30 minutes
Gradient: 200 m
Distance: 10,300 km

Access with a vehicle: Take the local road in Gerri de la Sal to get to Peramea. Park the car in Peramea, at the Plaça de la Font (Fountain Square).

5. Around the Valley of Àssua and the Old Path in Surp

Itinerary: Rialp - Surp - Escàs - Sorre - Llessui - Bernui - Seurí - Altron - Rialp
Duration: 6 hours
Gradient: 700 m
Distance: 10,300 km

Access with a vehicle: The itinerary starts in Rialp, cars can be parked there; panoramic views and remarkable examples of specific typology of village building.

Pallars Sobirà

Romanesque in the Pyrenees Naturally

01-2016

Pallars Sobirà
VALL DE FARFANYA
PIRINEU

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http://senders.pallarssobira.cat

CONSELL COMARCAL PALLARS SOBIRÀ

With the support of: Generalitat de Catalunya · Parc Natural de l'Alt Pirineu · Diputació de Lleida

Collaboration:

Collection of interactive guides

(Available at the Pallars Sobirà Tourist Office)

1. Romanesque churches and hermitages
2. Frescoes, paintings and carvings on wood. Romanesque heritage
3. Altarpieces

Medieval Villages

Fortified medieval village of Escaló
Fortified medieval village of Peramea
Fortified medieval village of Rialp
Fortified medieval village of Vilamur

Bridges in the Medieval Style

Alós
Borito (Lladorre)
Espot
Gerri de la Sal
Lladrós
La Torrassa
Àrreu
Cassibrós
Esterri d'Àneu
Isil
Tavascan

Hermitages

Hermitage of Sant Quirc (Alins)
Pre-Romanesque hermitage of Sant Francesc (Araós)
Hermitage of Mare de Déu de les Neus (Àrreu)
Hermitage of Santa Eulàlia d'Alendo (Farrera)
Hermitage of Santa Eulàlia de Serra (Lladorre)
Hermitage of Mare de Déu d'Arboló (Soriguera)
Pre-Romanesque hermitage of Sant Lliser (Virós)

Churches

Church of Sant Romà (Aineto)
Church of Santa Maria de la Torre (Alins)
Church of Sant Lliser (Alós d'Isil)
Church of Sant Esteve (Araós)
Church of Sant Feliu de la Força (Àreu)
Church of Sant Serni (Baiasca)
Church of Santa Maria de Besan
Church of Mare de Déu de Bernui
Church of Sant Martí (Escalarre)
Church of Santa Maria d'Àneu (Escalarre)
Church of Sant Pau (Esterri de Cardós)
Church of Santa Maria (Gerri de la Sal)
Church of Santa Maria (Ginestarre)
Church of Sant Pere del Burgal (Escaló)
Church of Sant Llorenç (Isavarre)
Church of Sant Joan (Isil)
Church of Santa Maria (Ribera de Cardós)
Church of Sant Just and Sant Pastor (Son)
Church of Sant Pere (Sorpe)
Church of Sant Iscle and Santa Victòria (Surp)
Church of Sant Pere (Tor)
Church of Sant Andreu (València d'Àneu)
Church of Mare de Déu de Medina (Vilamur)

Monasteries

Remains of Sant Pere del Burgal (Escaló)
Remains of Santa Maria de Gerri (Gerri de la Sal)

Original Frescoes

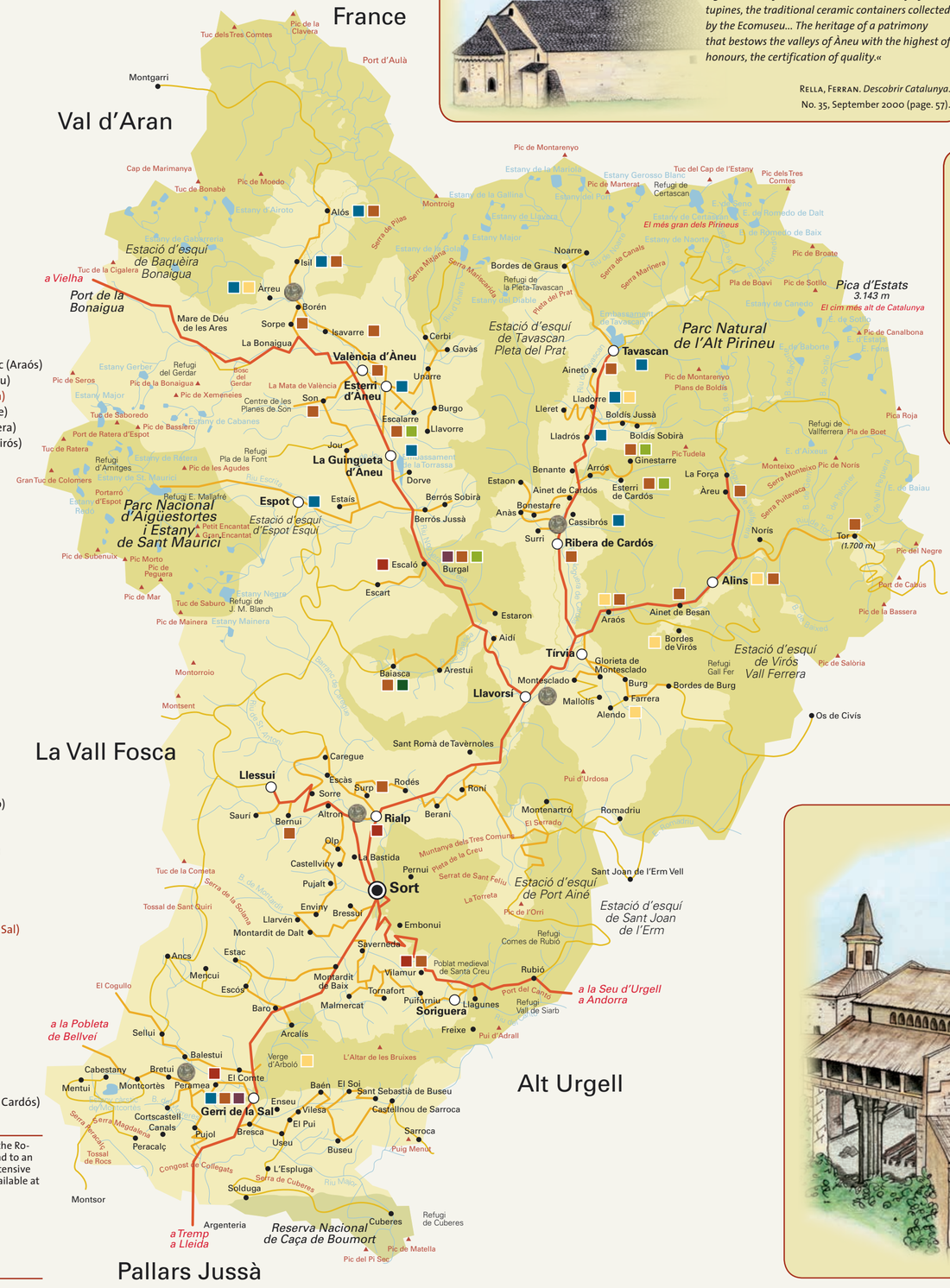
Church of Sant Serni (Baiasca)

Reproductions of Frescoes

Church of Santa Maria d'Àneu (Escalarre)
Church of Sant Pere del Burgal (Escaló)
Church of Santa Maria (Ginestarre)
Church of Sant Pau and Sant Pere (Esterri de Cardós)

NOTICE: This is only a representative selection of the Romanesque in the comarca (what would correspond to an English county) of the Pallars Sobirà. For more extensive information, there are some further resources available at the Pallars Sobirà Tourist Office.

Starting point for the recommended routes


France
Val d'Aran
La Vall Fosca
Alt Urgell
Pallars Jussà
Pica d'Estats
3.143 m
El cim més alt de Catalunya
El més gran dels Pirineus
Parc Natural de l'Alt Pirineu
Parc Nacional d'Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici
Reserva Nacional de Caça de Boumort
Estació d'esquí de Baqueira Bonaigua
Estació d'esquí de Tavascan Pleta del Prat
Estació d'esquí d'Espot Esquí
Estació d'esquí de Port Ainé
Estació d'esquí de Virós Vall Ferrera
Estació d'esquí de Sant Joan de l'Erm
Port de la Bonaigua
Port de Ratera d'Espot
Pla de Boavi
Pla de Boet
Pla de Beret
Pla de Sotllo
Pla de Broate
Pla de la Font
Pla de les Agudes
Pla de Montanyenyo
Plans de Boldís
Pleta del Prat
Pleta de la Creu
Pleta de la Pieta-Tavascan
Pleta del Diable
Pleta del Prat
Pleta Roja
Pic de Montarenyo
Pic de Marterat
Pic de Broate
Pic de Sotllo
Pic de Canalbona
Pic de Montanyenyo
Pic de Boldís
Pic de Monteixo
Pic de Noris
Pic de Tudela
Pic de Salòria
Pic de la Bassera
Pic de Port de Cavallers
Pic de Subenuix
Pic de Morto
Pic de Peguera
Pic de Mar
Pic de Mainera
Pic de Moedo
Pic de Bonabè
Pic de Seros
Pic de la Bonaigua
Pic de Xemeneies
Pic de Bassiero
Pic de la Clavera
Pic de Marimanya
Pic de Saboredo
Pic de l'Orri
Pic de Baiau
Pic de Matella
Pic del Pi Sec
Pic del Negre
Pic dels Tres Comtes
Tuc de la Cigalera
Tuc de la Cometa
Tuc de Ratera
Tuc de Saburo
Tuc de Saboredo
Tuc de Bonabè
Tuc dels Tres Comtes
Tuc del Cap de l'Estany
Gran Tuc de Colomers
Port d'Aulà
Port de Cavallers
Port de Caldes
Port de Ratera d'Espot
Portarró d'Espot
Portarró d'Estany Gelat
Port del Comte
Montroig
Montorroio
Montsent
Montsor
Estany de Gabarreres
Estany d'Airoto
Estany de la Gallina
Estany de Llauset
Estany Major
Estany Gerber
Estany de Cabanes
Estany de Rèdera
Estany de St. Maurici
Estany Negre
Estany Mainera
Estany Gerosso Blanc
Estany del Port
Estany de Romedo de Dalt
Estany de Romedo de Baix
Estany de Cavallers
Estany de Baborte
Estany de Naorta
Estany de Sotllo
Estany de Tavascan
Estany de Llauset
Estany de Llong
Estany de Mar
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Estany de Saburo
Estany de Subenuix
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