

Sébastien le Preste,  
Marquis of Vauban (1633-1707)

## War engineer

Born into the lower nobility, he was enlisted by the Fronde fighters of the Prince of Condé but taken prisoner, whereupon he entered the king's service. In 1654, he laid his first successful siege, earning himself recognition. He became a military engineer in 1655 and General Commissioner of Fortifications in 1678; he travelled the length and breadth of the kingdom inspecting the borders and protecting them with fortifications, forming the king's "pré carré" \* frontier. He built or improved over 300 sites. Nine of them were designed by Vauban, including Mont-Dauphin.

## An erudite man

Having led 48 successful sieges, Vauban is also considered to be the best "city taker" of his time. His strategic and engineering talents enabled him to perfect bastion fortifications built by his predecessors. During his travels, he gained economic, social and geographical knowledge of France and wrote essays on various subjects: attacking and defending places, forestry and inland waterway navigation. Aware of the poverty of the people, in 1706 Vauban published *The Royal Tithe*, a work decrying the evils of the tax system and recommending the abolition of the privileges of the powerful, a project which was rejected by Louis XIV.

\* Explanations overleaf.

## Glossary

**Aedicule:** a small isolated building.

**Basket-handle:** a lowered semi-circular vault.

**Casemate:** fortified premises, able to withstand enemy fire.

**Dauphin:** a noble title for heirs to the French throne from 1349, when a lord sold the title of the Dauphiné region to the King of France provided that the heir of France bore the title of "Dauphin".

**Glacis:** a long open slope that attackers must cross unprotected to reach the fortifications.

**Half-moon:** a fortification placed in front of the curtain wall to protect it from the fire of attackers.

**Orgues:** large pieces of timber hanging above a passageway, which can be lowered to close it off.

**Philibert de l'Orme:** a French Renaissance architect (c. 1510-1570).

**Pré carré:** a double line of fortified towns protecting the new French frontiers against the Spanish and Dutch. It was designed by Vauban after the conquest of what is now northern France.

## Practical information

Visit takes on average: 1 hour 30 minutes

Guided tours.

Tours suitable for disabled visitors.



The Centre des monuments nationaux publishes a collection of guidebooks about French monuments, translated into several languages. Éditions du patrimoine publications are on sale in the bookshop-giftshop.

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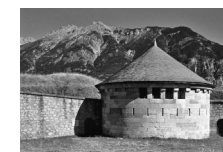


# Mont-Dauphin stronghold

A fortified village

## A Vauban stronghold

Built by Vauban on a strategic site between 1694 and 1704, Mont-Dauphin was an outpost to protect the Kingdom of France against invasions from Italy. Following the attack by Victor-Amadeus II of Savoy in 1692, Louis XIV realised that the French kingdom was lacking in



defences on the Alpine border. Commissioned by the king, Vauban chose the Plateau des Mille Vents to build Mont-Dauphin, a fortified site which he intended for a civilian population in addition to the military garrison. It was named in honour of the dauphin\*, the king's eldest son.

## A fortress that was never besieged

This stronghold was a deterrent and never actually besieged. In 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht placed the Italian border further away from the village. This put a halt to the development of the garrison and population. The site has witnessed only one case of armed conflict: an Italian bombing raid in 1940 which caused a fire. In 1966, the stronghold was listed as a historic monument.

\* Explanations overleaf.

## The pavilions

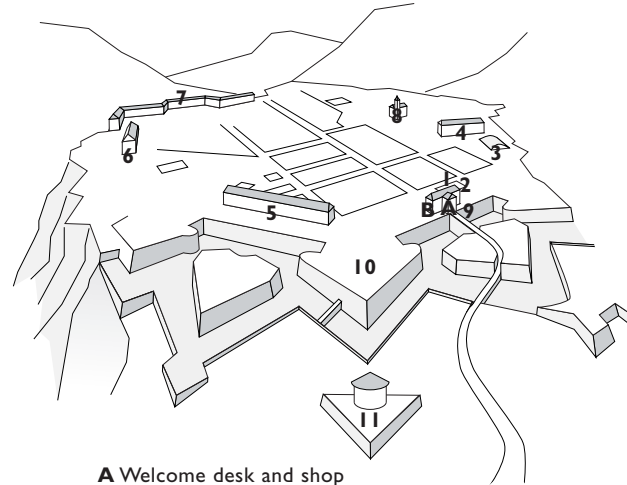
- 1 The pavillion de l'Horloge**, in a classical style, was the original governor's palace.
- 2 The Officers' pavilion** was used to accommodate the officers of the garrison. A second symmetrical pavilion, which was never built, was planned to close the eastern side of the square.

## The arsenal

- 3 The explosives depot**, built according to Vauban's plans, was built in 1695. In the 19th century the wall-walk was covered by a vault and the entire structure was covered by a thick layer of earth to make it less vulnerable to shelling.
- 4 The arms were stored in the arsenal.** The Italian bombing raid in 1940 destroyed one of the two wings. Only the north wing, built between 1751 and 1757, still stands today. The ground floor of this buttressed wing has a basket-handle\* vault. Heavy armaments were stored here, such as cannons and cannon balls. On the first floor, the upper room contained light weapons: uniforms, bayonets, swords and rifles.

## The barracks

- 5 The Campana barracks** were built at the end of the 17th century on the eastern side of the enclosure. Built according to Vauban's principles, they were made up of seven adjoining identical modules, each with an entrance and staircase leading to two dormitories on each level. The building now houses the town hall, craft workshops and apartments.



**A** Welcome desk and shop  
**B** Toilets

- 6 The Binot barracks** are a good example of how Vauban's model was adapted to the uneven terrain: the modules are offset to follow the slope. In front of the barracks, a small aedicule\* shelters the access to an underground cistern with a capacity of 1 840m<sup>3</sup>.
- 7 The Rochambeau barracks**, built between 1765 and 1785, was intended to increase the accommodation capacity of the stronghold. Originally covered with an artillery terrace, in the early 19th century outstanding barrel-vaulted roof timbers were added to make it weatherproof, following a process invented in the 16th century by Philibert de l'Orme\*. The barracks were used as a stable for the mules in the stronghold, for storage and even as an indoor parade ground.

## The church

- 8 Saint Louis church**, commissioned by Vauban in 1692, was never finished due to the lack of inhabitants in Mont-Dauphin. With an imposing elevation, it was to completely dominate the village. Only the choir was fully built. The partly-completed walls of the transept and nave were demolished in the 19th century.

## Fortifications

- 9 The Porte de Briançon** is typical of the style imposed by Vauban for the gates of his enclosures, with its triangular pediment atop an unsculpted rectangular reveal. The drawbridge is operated by a lever system. It is completed with *orgues*\*.
- 10 The stronghold system.** The medieval walls were rendered useless by 15th-century artillery. The only solution was to bury the fortifications, protecting them with mounds of earth and barring the way with large ditches. Triangular-shaped bastions, with fewer blind spots, alternate with half-moons\*, each defending the other. The curtain walls connect the bastions together, and on the outer side of the ditch a mound and covered path made up the first line of defence.
- 11 The lunette d'Arçon.** Vauban saw the need to place an outpost on the glacis\* in front of the fortification so as to deter attackers. This detached outwork was not built until the 18th century. In 1791, General d'Arçon had casemates\* and a fort tower added enabling reverse fire. This inner redoubt was linked to the ditch of the royal stronghold via a 113m-long underground passage.

\* Explanations overleaf.