

= Pi de les Tres Branques =

Pi de les Tres Branques (Catalan pronunciation : [pi ð? lʔs tʔ?s ' bʔaʔkʔs] , " the three @-@ branched pine ") is a pine tree snag located in the countryside near the town of Berga in north @-@ central Catalonia , Spain . It has long been regarded by some Catalan nationalists as representing the unity of the three " Catalan Countries " and is the site of regular political @-@ cultural gatherings .

The tree has been dead since 1915 and is in poor structural condition , due in part to politically motivated vandalism , but there is a very similar living tree a short distance away known as Pi Jove de les Tres Branques (" the young three @-@ branched pine ") , which is regarded as its successor . Both are protected as " monumental trees " by the Catalan government .

= = Situation = =

The tree is a Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) , 25 metres (82 ft) tall , and as its name suggests , consists of three main branches or trunks rising from a common base . It is located in the centre of the Campllong plain , which measures about 2 kilometres (1 @.@ 2 mi) by 500 metres (1 @,@ 600 ft) and occupies the flat floor of a valley , surrounded by forested mountains of the Pre @-@ Pyrenees , at an altitude of 1 @,@ 294 metres (4 @,@ 245 ft) . To the south , separating the valley from Berga town , is the Serra de Queralt ridge , home to the Queralt Sanctuary religious complex , and to the north are the Rasos de Peguera mountains and ski resort . Berga is 9 kilometres (5 @.@ 6 mi) away by road .

The tree previously dominated the valley 's farmed and grazed land , due to its height and full foliage , and was visible from a long distance , as is shown in old photographs . However , much of the surrounding land has now been taken over by forest , and Pi de les Tres Branques now has many other trees in its vicinity , which , together with its current skeletal form , make it much less visible than before .

The valley is traversed by a minor road which terminates at the small settlement of Castellar del Riu at its western end . The road passes close by Pi de les Tres Branques , which is indicated by a signpost .

= = History = =

= = = Origin = = =

Although legend places the tree much earlier , it has been estimated that Pi de les Tres Branques took root between 1630 and 1632 , when the local farmhouse was built .

= = = Cultural recognition = = =

The tree had been traditionally celebrated as a symbol of the Holy Trinity , and it is still a venue for religious ceremonies . The first reference in extant records was in 1685 , when a cartographer wrote that it was known as the Tree of the Trinity . It is also recorded that in 1746 , the bishop of Solsona granted indulgences to those who prayed at the site .

In 1876 , the landowner of the site , in a letter to a local magazine denying that he was planning to sell the tree for timber , pointed out that it also represented the revolutionary ideals of liberty , equality and fraternity .

The Catalan language cultural revival of the 19th century saw a great increase in Catalan literature and culture . In 1875 , playwright Francesc Pelagi Briz published a play *Lo Pi de las Tres Brancas* , which is set in Berga and at the tree , and contains a passage suggesting that the tree was already a Catalan national symbol . However , it was the 1888 poem " *Lo Pi de les Tres Branques* " by the poet Fr Jacint Verdaguer , published in his anthology *Pàtria* , which brought the tree to widespread

attention , converting what was mainly a local religious symbol into a significant secular national symbol . In his poem , Jacint Verdaguer created the so @-@ called ' legend ' of the king @-@ child King James I of Aragon who after being released from captivity in Narbonne (France) travelled with his retinue through Catalonia back to his seat at Monzón in Aragon , supposedly spending one of the nights sleeping under Pi de les Tres Branques , and it was there that he had an inspirational dream that he was destined to rule three kingdoms , represented by the three trunks of the tree , conquering the Balearic Islands and the Kingdom of Valencia from the Moors , which in fact he later achieved .

The previous year , Verdaguer had stayed a few days in the nearby Queralt Sanctuary and visited the tree . " Lo Pi de les Tres Branques " recounts the story of James and the tree 's symbolism of the Trinity and the unity of the Catalan Countries , and expressed the wish that it be adopted as Catalonia 's national tree . The poem has remained the tree 's principal literary connection , regularly recited at gatherings there . It starts and ends with the often @-@ quoted lines " Pleguem que sia aqueix Pi / l'arbre sagrat de la pàtria . " (" We pray that this Pine will be / the sacred tree of the fatherland . ") .

It is accepted that in fact Verdaguer invented the story of James 's sojourn for his poem , since there is no record of it before then , and that the poem 's popularity created the legend .

In 1901 , when Verdaguer was presiding at the Floral Games , a traditional Catalan poetry contest , he coined the sobriquet " Guernica of Catalonia " for the tree , referring to the Tree of Guernica , an oak tree which symbolises Basque freedom . He also suggested the tree 's trunks symbolised the three major awards of the contest : country , faith , and love .

In May 1901 the landowner transferred ownership of the tree to the Catalanist Union (Unió Catalanista) , a grouping of various nationalist organisations , at their meeting in Terrassa , though the transaction was never legally registered . This new popularity coincided with the slow decay of the tree , which eventually died in 1915 .

In 1987 the Catalan regional government listed the tree as a protected " monumental tree " , one of the first three such trees (along with Pi Jove and Roure de Can Codorniu in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia) . A silhouette of Pi de les Tres Branques (while it was alive) is now used by the government as a generic logo for monumental trees .

= = = Damage and death = = =

Before its death , Pi de les Tres Branques had been attacked several times , for economic and / or political reasons .

In 1901 , Jacint Verdaguer reported that a woodcutter had recently tried to cut down one of the trunks , causing it to lean out ; damage from which the tree was unlikely to recover . It was also reported that around 1895 , cuts had been made to tap the tree for resin , and a fire lit at its base to speed the process . This and other damage prompted the Catalanist Union to erect a high stone wall around the tree in 1907 to protect against further attacks , though it was suggested that the building work also contributed to the subsequent death of the tree . By 1915 the aforementioned wall had been demolished .

In 1910 , it was reported that the tree had lost its leaves , though others suggest a date of 1913 , and it was completely dead by 1915 . Scots pines have a natural lifespan of up to over 700 years , depending on the region .

Many years later , the trunk that was damaged as reported by Verdaguer , was struck by lightning and the top half broke off . The remnant of that trunk is still supported by a small stone wall .

= = = Later damage = = =

Following its death , another three @-@ trunked tree was chosen , but it has also been attacked many times by people opposed to its political symbolism .

In 1939 , after the end of the Civil War , supporters of the victorious Franco side started an attempt to topple the tree , but were repelled by local people . It has also been subject to regular minor

damage such as anti @-@ Catalan graffiti .

However , the most serious deliberate damage happened during the night of 12 / 13 May 2014 , when the tallest trunk was sawn off at its base with a chainsaw , by unknown perpetrators . Following the vandalism , the severed trunk was stored , and it was eventually decided to re @-@ attach it with artificial supports , several steel straps connecting the trunk to the base ; this work was carried out in early July 2015 at a cost of ? 35 @,@ 000 , shared by the Catalan government and the Barcelona provincial administration .

In January 2016 , the tree was again attacked (along with Pi Jove) with a 10 cm chainsaw cut into one of the other trunks . This damage was quickly patched up with steel straps as before .

= = Pi Jove = =

Following the death of Pi de les Tres Branques , another three @-@ branched pine 300 metres (980 ft) away had been adopted as its successor . Pi Jove de les Tres Branques , or Pi de les Tres Branques II , is also hundreds of years old , but smaller at 19 metres (62 ft) tall . Its similarities to the main tree had been noticed as far back as 1810 , when the Baron of Maldà mentioned it in his diary .

At the 1921 rally at the site , following a campaign by poet @-@ politician Ventura Gassol , Pi Jove was inaugurated as the successor to the then @-@ dead main tree . Speaking at the event , Gassol invited the landowner , who was present , to donate the tree to the Commonwealth of Catalonia (a semi @-@ recognised autonomous government) , but he declined , saying that practical effort is more important than symbols .

It has since become the main attraction for younger and more radical elements of the nationalist movement . The older and younger trees are often simply called " el Pi Vell " (the old pine) and " el Pi Jove " (the young pine) respectively , to distinguish the two .

Along with Pi Vell , Pi Jove was registered as a protected " monumental tree " in 1987 .

= = = Damage = = =

Unlike Pi Vell , Pi Jove had escaped the attentions of vandals until more recently , due to its lower political profile and greater distance (200 m) from the road . In 2010 , it was discovered with a circumferential cut through the bark , in addition to apparent shotgun damage . Vandals attacked it in June 2015 , attempting to saw through one of its trunks , though it was not thought that the damage was serious enough to kill the affected trunk . As a precaution , in December 2015 arborists installed a frame to hold the three trunks together and ensure their stability . In January 2016 , deeper chainsaw cuts were discovered on the already @-@ damaged trunk which are believed harsh enough to kill the trunk altogether ; these vandals also attacked Pi Vell .

= = The annual gathering = =

Pi de les Tres Branques , as a symbol of the united Catalan Countries , or simply of Catalan self @-@ determination , has been the site of large political rallies since the turn of the 20th century , at first sporadically , but annually since 1980 .

The first record of a political assembly there was in October 1900 , when a large group of Carlist troops , led by Josep Grandia , based themselves there in preparation for their part in the failed Carlist uprising .

The first major rally was in 1904 when the Catalanist Union organised an assembly there to celebrate its acquisition of the site , on Sunday 25 September . The ceremony , and associated events in Berga the day before , attracted several hundred activists , with messages from foreign sympathisers being read out . Another rally was held in 1915 .

The next major rally was held in 1921 , on 25 July , the St. James holiday ; a key point of that event included the inauguration of Pi Jove as the intended replacement for the original tree .

Subsequent political developments made it difficult to hold large organised rallies at the site .

Catalan political gatherings were banned during the 1923 ? 1930 dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera , travel was difficult during the 1936 ? 1939 Spanish Civil War , and political gatherings were again banned during (and for some time after) the Franco dictatorship of 1939 ? 1975 .

It was not until 1980 , following the restoration of democracy in Spain , that the first annual gathering of the modern era took place , starting a tradition of a large gathering at the site on the third Sunday of July each year .

Attendance at the gathering has varied ; the 1980 inaugural gathering attracted 3 @, @ 000 visitors , reached a peak of 14 @, @ 000 in 1986 , but has since declined , with attendances of 2 @, @ 000 in 2001 , 1 @, @ 000 in 2012 and 1 @, @ 500 in 2014 .

It attracts Catalan nationalists of many different viewpoints , including those attending a mass , political activists from the entire nationalist spectrum left and right giving speeches , organisations hosting stands and selling political books and souvenirs , and performers of traditional Catalan cultural activities such as sardana bands and dancers , castellers (human towers) , and gegants (giant puppets) . The gathering also marks the culmination of the four @-@ day El Rebrot (" The Shoot ") musical / political festival which has been held in Berga almost every year since 2001 , organised by the Maulets / Arran left @-@ wing youth organisation .

Because of the shortage of parking at the site , shuttle buses are provided by Berga town council , who also organise catering for the crowds in the town after the event .

= = = Controversies = = =

Events at the gathering have several times resulted in controversies , and clashes between rival political factions . Following the 1981 event , the Catalan parliament president Heribert Barrera , two parliamentary deputies , and several others , faced criminal charges of " insulting the feelings and unity of the Spanish nation and distributing illegal publications " . The charges were dropped after three years . The 1986 gathering was marred by the burning of Spanish flags and harassment of moderate groups . As a result , the mainstream political parties Democratic Convergence and Republican Left stayed away from the 1987 event . In 1988 , different factions of the far @-@ left Movement for Defence of the Land (MDT) fought each other . In 1991 , MDT militants attacked youth members of Democratic Convergence and Republican Left , and in 1996 , hooded left @-@ wing militants came from their assembly at Pi Jove to attack members of Estat Català at Pi Vell . Since the events of 1996 , the authorities have increased security at the gathering , and the event has returned to a peaceful cultural atmosphere .

= = Management and development plans = =

Although both Pi Vell and Pi Jove are officially protected , they are easily accessible in an isolated wooded area , and therefore vulnerable to vandalism as well as natural hazards such as lightning and wildfire . Several proposals have been made over the years to improve the site .

Around 1990 , a private business identified the Campllong valley , with Pi de les Tres Branques as a central attraction , as one of the possible locations for a large @-@ scale Catalan @-@ identity theme park called " Identirama " . A different site was eventually selected , but the project was abandoned .

In 2003 , the Catalan parliament passed a resolution urging development of a government plan to improve the site . A government report in 2001 , re @-@ published in 2004 , included a proposal to cut down the fragile Pi Vell , leaving the stump in place along with a commemorative monument , and purchase and develop the site as a public amenity .

The attack on Pi Jove in 2010 prompted activists to complain about perceived ongoing lack of action by the authorities , and prompted the local municipality of Castellar del Riu to start work with interested parties to develop a plan to secure the site . In 2012 the mayor announced plans to take over the maintenance of the land around the two trees and develop facilities for visitors , including a car park and information panels .

In March 2015 , following the serious attack on Pi Vell ten months before , the government set up a

working group consisting of representatives of the Barcelona provincial administration , the local municipality , and the Institute of Catalan Studies , to manage the maintenance and protection of the two trees . The first result was the repair of the damaged tree in July , and in February 2016 they decided to place video security cameras at the site , watching both trees .

= = Other associated three @-@ branched pines = =

Another similarly named tree is Pi de les Tres Branques de Freixinet , located near the village of Freixinet in the municipality of Riner in central Catalonia . This tree is also protected by the Catalan government , since 1988 , but was killed in a forest fire in 1998 .

In recent times , local bodies such as the municipality of Castellar del Riu or Berga or the local branch of the Catalan National Assembly , have adopted the practice of presenting a young three @-@ branched pine tree or sapling claimed to be a descendant of Pi de les Tres Branques to other bodies , as symbols of solidarity . Early examples include presentations to the Castle of Gallifa in 1986 , and the Castle of St. Ferran in Berga in 1992 (along with a sapling of the Tree of Guernica) . The practice gained momentum following the February 2014 presentation of a young tree to the town of Folgueroles , to commemorate Jacint Verdaguer who was born there ; that tree has since been vandalised . Subsequent 2014 recipients have included Andorra la Vella , Sant Hipòlit de Voltregà , and Saldes . The Forest Museum in Sant Celoni also claims to have five descendants of Pi de les Tres Branques in its grounds .