



AVEYRON

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AVEYRON
VIVRE VRAI

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Aveyron, « A land of Inspiration »



A land of verdant scenery, rolling hills and rocky crags; a land unspoiled by man and unaffected by the changing patterns of modern day living. Authentic, original and undiscovered, the **Aveyron** is truly "la France profonde" at its most enchanting.

The **Aveyron** is a land of contrasts. Situated in south-west France, it lies in the foothills of the *Massif Central*, influenced by and torn between the *Massif Central* (Clermont-Ferrand), the south (Montpellier) and the south-west (Toulouse). In the

north, the landscape is mountainous, dominated by the *plateau d'Aubrac* descending to the banks of the river *Lot*. In the south, the river *Tarn* carves its way through the *plateau de Larzac*, leaving its mark in the form of the *Gorges du Tarn*. The west of the *département* is a land of undulating hills and valleys, with numerous rivers which ultimately find their way via the river **Aveyron** to the *Garonne* and the Atlantic coast at Bordeaux.

The hallmark of the **Aveyron is its authenticity**. Even the departmental capital, *Rodez*, is a relatively modest city, with an austere cathedral and an historic quarter, but no great pretensions as a tourist centre. The appeal of the *département* lies not in great showpiece attractions but in its breathtaking scenery, its cultural heritage and its renowned gastronomy. Here, you will find an imposing sense of harmony, of tranquillity, of being at one with nature. For the visitor, it offers the chance to recharge the batteries and to rediscover a sense of equilibrium, of genuine values.

This is not to say, however, that there is little to see or do in the **Aveyron**. The *Abbaye de Conques* houses an exhibition of medieval gold, one of the finest collections of the goldsmith's art in the world. *Conques* is but one of the ten villages in the **Aveyron** which have been admitted to that elite club, "Les plus beaux villages de France" (the most beautiful villages in France). *Najac*, *Belcastel*, *Sauveterre de Rouergue*, *La Couvertourade*, and *Estaing*, are among the other members of this prestigious group. But the **Aveyron** is not simply a rural museum of pretty villages and beautiful scenery; it is a vibrant *département*, proud of its traditions and its patrimony. In the south of the *département* lies the unassuming village of *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon* whose fame extends world-wide, for it is here that "the king of cheeses" is made. Close-by is the town of *Millau*, renowned centre for glove making and supplier to the leading fashion houses in Paris. *Laguiole* in the north is famous in France for its cheese and throughout the world for the *Laguiole* knife, a rural tradition, since revived, that has become a fashion icon thanks to designers such as Philippe Stark, Sonia Rykiel and Yan Pennor's.

The **Aveyron** is justifiably reputed for its gastronomy, both rustic and refined. Foie gras, charcuterie, "le stockfish" (made from dried cod), "l'aligot" (a purée of mashed potato and tome de Laguiole cheese plus a soupçon of French je ne sais quoi), gâteau à la broche... the list goes on and on. The **Aveyron** also boasts some of the finest restaurants in France, decorated with Michelin stars and other awards, of which the most notable is the *Hôtel Restaurant Michel Bras* in *Laguiole* - a veritable gastronomic experience; but then the Aveyron is an unforgettable experience just waiting to be discovered.

Among ramblers, Aveyron is a favoured destination: with **its 900 km of footpaths** which form part of the national "Grande randonnée" network, plus a myriad of others footpaths and tracks, the rambler is spoiled for choice. In this wonderful setting, nature reveals herself in all her glory and diversity; walks through the forests, walks along the river banks, botanical walks, walks on the corniche above the river Tarn, walks across the Larzac plateau, fell walking on Aubrac. Through stunningly beautiful countryside, ramblers of all ages and abilities will be enthralled by the rich

PIERRE SOULAGES AND RODEZ



*“When I return to Rodez, I feel a sense of belonging to the people of this area, to its seemingly rough yet very refined farmers.”
Pierre Soulages.*

Pierre Soulages, contemporary and internationally celebrated painter was born in Rodez in 1919, rue Combarel. He grew up in the artisan's quarter, home to the printer to the blacksmith: from this hive of activity he remembers their patience, know-how, remarkable materials and the virtues of chance.

He started exhibiting from an early age in Europe from 1948, in the 1950s in New York galleries and then within American museums. Recently in 2010, his retrospective exhibit in the Pompidou Centre attracted 500 000 visitors. He is the preferred contemporary painter of his peers.

His artistic development was heavily influenced by his childhood experiences. He freely evokes Aveyron's landscapes, the stark outlines of the trees on the limestone plateaus, his fascination for statues-menhirs at the Fenaille museum in Rodez and for Conques Abbey in Aveyron. In 1994, Soulages unveiled his extraordinary stained glass windows in the abbey. Translucent, but not transparent, they are made from a coloured glass created by the artist, capturing the light and emphasising the Romanesque architecture. Outside and inside, these windows reflect the array of soft, ever-changing colours.

The Urban Community of Grand Rodez has recently acquired his birthplace on 4 rue Combarel in Rodez. There is talk of installing an intaglio workshop and a studio for accommodating an artist or an art historian.

AN EXTRAORDINARY ARTIST AND DONATION

The artist: Soulages is now known for his interest in the colour black, using it in different ways in his paintings, in alliance with light. He also uses other pigments such as reds, browns and blues and works with large home decorating paint brushes, taking tools away from their primary function and creating new ones. He paints floors, adding and removing materials. He is one of the most famous abstract painters. In 1948, Soulages painted his first *Brous de noix* (walnut stains) on paper, producing biomorphic or sculptural compositions. In 1979, the artist invented *Outrenoir*, a large canvas, standing alone or grouped in polyptychs, painted entirely in black, smooth or shiny, striated or ridged, designed to be hung from taut cables: “Outrenoir is a reflection of another country, a different mental universe to that of the simple colour black.” The light reflected on the painted surface gives his works a presence, inciting face-to-face dialogue with the spectator. The donation: Pierre Soulages wanted a museum that is not fixed, a museum that is not dedicated solely to him, but with a variety of exhibitions. In 2005, along with his wife Colette, he made an exceptional donation of 500 pieces to the Grand Rodez Urban Community.

The works reflect the variety of techniques and materials used by the artist: paper, canvas, glass, bronze or copper, printed works (etchings, lithographs, serigraphs), the preparatory work for the stained glass in Conques, paintings on canvas and on paper (one set, including gouache, ink and his walnut stains), documentation, books, photographs,

works, especially the little displayed papers that will be shown in halls in regular rotations.

Paintings from the "earlier years", namely the small figurative landscapes dating back to the painter's youth 1934 to 1938.

21 oils on canvas, a selection of works from the 1940s – 1970s to account for his partial or full use of black. These are the first works by Pierre Soulages presented in exhibitions in France, Europe and the United States.

100 paintings on paper produced from 1946, a period that truly marks the beginning of abstract paintings and new domination of black, whose precious *Brous de noix*, which evoke the memory of the menhir statues at the Fenaille Museums. Poorly represented in public collections, these works from the years 1946-1948 are among the artist's major works, as well as the *Outrenoirs* of 1979. Paintings on paper form a unique collection using purified linear gouache in the 1970s.

His entire printed works: etchings, lithographs and serigraphs.

Brass and matrices are part of the donation to reveal each secret of the genesis of the works. The Soulages Museum is intended to be pedagogical in its presentation of the different techniques.

Three limited edition bronzes from 1975–1977, types of headstones made from copper plate engravings preserved in his studio and two pieces included in the glass of 1979 collection, somewhere between painting and sculpture.

All the preparatory work for the Conques stained glass windows, life-sized images on melamine panels which are used to set the pieces, by displacing the cut glass sheets one by one, for each bay; notes and drawings to show and describe the adventure of the Conques window from 1987 to 1994.

As well as this donation there is that of 2012 made up of 14 canvas paintings, dated from 1946 to 1948, from the 1960s and a precious *Outrenoir* polyptych from 1986. The museum collection is therefore becoming essential for any organiser of retrospective exhibitions. The Rodez museum covers his entire career, from his early days to the present day.

A large collection of documents, assembled by the artist for decades composed of works, catalogues, films, records and correspondence will supply the Pierre Soulages research centre.

AN IMPORTANT ARCHITECTURAL AND LANDSCAPE PROJECT

The Soulage Museum is located in Rodez town centre in Foirail Park, a stone's throw from the cathedral. Designed by Catalan architects RCR, the museum will stretch across the northern side of the completely renovated park, in perfect harmony with its surrounding landscape. A future urban promenade, a cultural and leisure centre, the Forail – between the old town and the new districts – will be one of the major comprehensive urban development projects.

The architects have designed an imposing 6000m² building which is also respectful of its environment: low and elongated, with rectangular volumes coated with dark red Corten steel; the temporary exhibition halls; the Soulages donation and the permanent exhibition hall, connecting on a single platform; the documentation centre and the children's workshop; to the south under an awning, a large reception which is accessed from the park.

The use of steel promises different shades, nuances and surfaces. On the outside, a sombre Corten red near the walnut stain, of which Pierre Soulages appreciates its

intimacy is favoured, the tranquillity is conducive to contemplating the works; black crude steel, pickled stainless steel, Corten flooring.

The museum is organised taking into account the fragility of the collections. Ordered in functional volumes around controlled light, it includes dark and protected areas for paper works (walnut stains and engraving) as well as the five raised boxes housing paintings and the Conques stained glass, under the zenithal light.

As well as the presenting the collections, in the east of the Soulages museum there is a restaurant, the Café Bras, masterminded by the chefs Michel and Sébastien Bras. It will offer simple and affordable food, with hours to suit the museum's opening hours, but also after hours. There will also be an 80-seat conference room, a documentation centre on Pierre Soulages and art from his era and a gift shop.

THE MICHEL AND SEBASTIEN BRAS RESTAURANT



As part of the building, an imaginative restaurant is an asset. In the heart of the museum there will be a 500m² area dedicated to the cuisine of Michel and Sébastien Bras, leading French chefs paying homage to the work of Pierre Soulages. It will be called the Café Bras and will offer a menu combining "bistronomy" and gastronomy.

Michel and Sébastien Bras will offer cuisine that has grown over 40 years of practice. Proud of their Aveyron culture, Michel and

Sébastien Bras expect to **cater for your needs all day long**, during the days main culinary moments: breakfast, 10 o'clock, aperitifs, four o'clock and dinner. They will offer signature Bras cuisine, characterised by a concern with environmental-related themes. **Natural and authentic cuisine.** From the raw product, a pure product. Of course, it will focus on Aveyron cuisine, but also spiced up with **flavours from around the world, just as Pierre Soulage's brand is universal** The interior will resemble neither a cafeteria nor a brasserie. With a zinc decor, the space will be organised to encourage sharing, facilitate exchange with visitors to the museum and the town.

The never-ending perspectives of Aubrac

"An attraction, at once gentle yet difficult to resist, brings me back year after year, again and again to the exposed uplands of *Aubrac*. Everything that is strange and wonderful about the French countryside seems to me to be found there still : like a bald chunk of continent ... Austere sacramental tonsures, amongst the arborescent mane stretching into the distance; images of an almost spiritual depilation of the land which inextricably link the feelings of altitude and elevation". (Julien Gracq)



Indefinable *Aubrac*; an upland plateau, remote, wild, solitary. A vast expanse of mountain pastures and forests untouched by the depredations of man. Nature as nature intended, silent, tranquil, almost spiritual. For the visitor, the overwhelming feeling is one of serenity; here, one regains a sense of harmony, of being at one with nature. The silence is haunting, broken only by the lowing of the cattle in summer or the mating rituals of the stag in autumn, sounds borne on the wind.

Discovering *Aubrac* requires some effort. The plateau is crossed by several footpaths, originally used by the local farmers as they drove the Aubrac cattle to their summer pastures, a tradition which is celebrated annually in the form of the "*fête de la transhumance*". This makes *Aubrac* an ideal place for walking, hiking and riding. For those of a more athletic disposition, the mountain bike comes into its own here. In winter, the plateau is transformed into a vast area for cross-country skiing.

The *Aubrac* plateau is rich in flora and fauna; celebrated in the award-winning film *Microcosmos*. Rare and exotic plants are to be found such as yellow gentian, mountain balm (*calamintha grandiflora*), Siberian ligularia, or the sundew (*drosera rotundifolia*), unusual in that it is carnivorous. A botanical walk has been traced, or one can opt for a guided walk across the plateau, an enriching experience for the intellectually curious.

Aubrac is also renown for *aligot* a local speciality which owes its origins to the hospitality which the monks offered to pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. A dish held in quasireligious reverence, the ideal setting for the discovery of this culinary treasure is in one of the *burons*, which served as bothies for the herdsmen, accompanied by a generous piece of *bœuf d'Aubrac* and a glass of *Marcillac*, the local wine. Replete, relaxed, restored; as one descends from the plateau, the only remaining doubt is how soon will one be able to return.

The Lot Valley



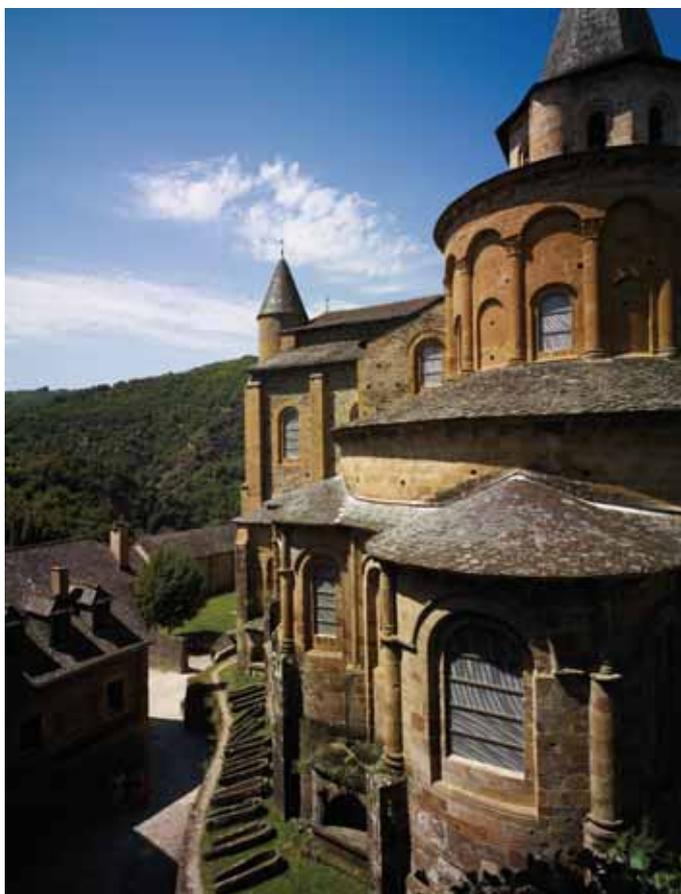
The *Lot* valley may seem like well-charted territory for British holiday-makers and yet there are reaches of the river further upstream which remain relatively undiscovered. Flowing off the *Massif Central*, the river *Lot* runs roughly east-west through the north of the *département* of the **Aveyron**, before making its way through the *département* which bears its name to join the river *Garonne* and eventually flow into the Atlantic ocean at *Bordeaux*.

The upper reaches of the river are certainly more remote but also less frequented than further downstream. This has certain advantages insofar as the many beautiful villages that line the banks of the river can be visited in peace and tranquillity. One of the peculiarities of the *Lot* is that by a twist of dyslexic magic, many of the villages are named '-d'Olt, such as *Sainte-Eulalie-d'Olt*, *SaintGeniez-d'Olt* or *Saint-Côme-d'Olt*. These beautiful medieval villages, built of local stone and roofed with traditional local slate, have hardly changed in centuries. *Sainte-Eulalie-d'Olt* and *Saint-Cômed'Olt* are both classified among the most beautiful villages in France. Because of its strategic importance as a means of communication, the tortuous path of the river is guarded by many *châteaux*, such as the *Château de Calmont*; because of its historical importance the valley is also richly endowed with romanesque churches and chapels making it an ideal region for touring, either by car or, better still, by following the path of the river by bicycle. A cycling holiday in this picturesque valley, meandering through the numerous villages, staying in local auberges and sampling the local hospitality is a most rewarding experience.

In the middle lies *Espalion*, a veritable cross-roads between the river and the ancient road north towards the *Massif Central*. A picturesque market town spanning the river, the two banks are linked by a narrow bridge, with houses which seem perched over the water. It is the gateway to *Aubrac* in the north and the *Gorges du Lot* to the west., plunging 300m down to the water's edge. *Estaing*, a little further downstream, with its imposing *château* and ancient bridge is yet another village classified as one of the most beautiful villages in France (the **Aveyron** has more than any other *département* in France), it marks the start of the gorges. Beyond lies the village of *Entraygues*, famous locally for its white wines and protected by its magnificent *château*.

Undiscovered and unspoilt, the *Lot* valley guards its secrets for those who go in search; the rewards certainly justify the little extra effort required!

The Treasures of Conques



Conques (the name derives from the Latin "concha" meaning shell) is situated in a remote creek, shaped like a shell and enclosed by steep rocky crags. It was here that the hermit Dadon chose to withdraw from the world to live a life of religious contemplation. Thus was born the Benedictine monastery, founded in the 8th century. The village rose to prominence with the acquisition in 866 of the relics of *Ste Foy*, (the legality of this 'acquisition' is still a contentious issue) and thus became an important staging post on the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostella. To glorify the relics of *Ste Foy*, the monks used the generous donations of both Carolingian emperors and the many pilgrims that passed via Conques to produce reliquaries in honour of their esteemed saint. Such was the reputation of her miracles and the generosity of the donations, the result was one of the finest collections of medieval gold in Christendom, including the '*Majesté de sainte Foy*', the only surviving reliquary of

its kind in the world and the apotheosis of the medieval goldsmith's art.

In order to welcome the many visitors and pilgrims, the monks built the *Abbaye de Conques* (1030-1130) which is a masterpiece of Romanesque art. The tympanum, depicting scenes from the last judgement, is a marvel of Romanesque sculpture, dating back to the beginning of the 12th century. More controversially, the windows of the *Abbaye*, designed by the French abstract painter Pierre Soulages and installed in 1994 are a dramatic statement of the ultra-modern, shocking or brilliant depending on your point of view.

Conques continues to attract visitors and to develop its rôle as a cultural centre. The annual festival of baroque and religious music which takes place here in the *Abbaye* attracts international musicians, their interpretations inspired by the surroundings. The « *Centre d'Art et de Civilisation Médiévale* », opened in 1988, has become a research centre for art historians and medieval historians alike, as well as the intellectually curious.

Around the monastery grew the village, houses huddled together in narrow cobbled lanes, seemingly perched one above the other. One of « *les plus beaux villages de France* », a stroll through the village transports one back to medieval times, to an époque when one had time for contemplation. One comes to realise just why Dadon chose to settle here.

The Tarn Gorges



The river *Tarn* has its source high up in the *Cévennes* region of France, and comes cascading down until it reaches the *Causses*. Here, the geological structure is predominantly limestone and the river has carved its way through, leaving its mark in the form of deep canyons. En route, as far as *le Rozier*, its tributaries are all underground rivers which emerge from the walls of the canyons and cascade into the *Tarn*. The river *Jonte* joins the *Tarn* at *le Rozier* and further downstream, the river *Dourbie* flows

into the *Tarn* at *Millau*. These three rivers, with their precipitous gorges, waterfalls and rapids, have created an area of breathtaking natural beauty.

There are three ways to discover the area; by car, on foot or by boat. By car is obviously the least strenuous and there are circuits signposted, making them easy to follow. However, this method is the least rewarding, in that one loses the immediacy of the contact with nature and a sense of scale. On foot, the experience is that much richer; one has an immediate impression of the size and scale of the canyons, the sheer power of erosion. One becomes a part of the dramatic scenery, dwarfed by it and over-awed by the majesty of nature. Some of the footpaths are suitable for a gentle stroll after lunch, others involve climbing down the rock face using pitons hammered into the rock as a makeshift ladder, so it is as well to check the degree of difficulty of your itinerary before you set out. By boat offers a totally different perspective, from the inside looking up. By boat can mean anything from a sedate pleasure cruiser with candlelit dinner on board to riding the rapids in a canoe or a rafting expedition. For this stunning scenery now serves as a backdrop for all kinds of water sports, some traditional, some extreme, all exhilarating.

High above the river, the *Causses* offer a different perspective, a barren, rocky, almost lunar landscape. Here lies the extraordinary site of *Montpellier-le-Vieux*. Not a town, as one might think, but a startling collection of rocks that were hidden from view by an impenetrable forest until 1870. The local inhabitants believed that the rocks were the ruins of a lost city where evil spirits reigned; a theory based on the fact that whenever their sheep strayed too close, they were eaten by wolves. The forest was partially cleared, the wolves disappeared and the site was discovered in 1883. With their strange assortment of shapes and forms, the rocks of *Montpellier-le-Vieux* leave an indelible impression, their strangeness giving rise to all sorts of flights of the imagination. An area of outstanding natural beauty, magnificently unspoilt, visiting *Montpellier-le-Vieux* is a unique experience.

Throughout the *Causses*, fascinating medieval villages are to be found, such as *Nant*, with its 12th century church and *St. Jean de Bruel* with its ancient bridge in the heart of the region known as the 'garden of *Aveyron*'. Wandering around these timeless villages gives you the chance to get your breath back after the strange and stunning panoramas of the gorges and rocks.

Abbaye de Sylvanès



So what does one do with a clapped out old Cistercian abbey, abandoned, dilapidated, falling into ruins? One solution is simply to let it decline into graceful senility and leave just a pile of stones as a reminder of what once was. And this was exactly the solution that had been adopted for the *Abbaye de Sylvanès*, until the arrival of a two individuals with the same vision : one, André Gouzes, a Dominican monk; the other, Michel Wolkowitsky, a man of culture.

Their idea; to restore the abbey, not simply to save the building but in order to create a multi-cultural centre for the study and practice of religious art and music, the teaching of traditional monastic skills such as calligraphy or book binding, and the pluri-disciplinary study of faith and religions. Inspired by the idea, the local *Maire, M. Emile Castan*, lent his support to the project, with the result that 20 years later, the abbey has been restored to its former glory and is now a thriving international arts centre, with a programme that runs for nine months of the year and residential facilities to accommodate the many performers, participants and spectators who annually 'make the pilgrimage' to this revered site.

A brief perusal of the programme gives an idea of the diversity and eclectic nature of the activities at the *Abbaye de Sylvanès*. To take a few random examples : a 7-day tour, comprising visits to local abbeys, monasteries and cathedrals; concerts of Russian liturgical music; a calligraphy course; a painting course specialising in Byzantine frescoes and murals; courses in Japanese floral art; Gregorian chant; Occitan dancing; a seminar on Islam; a course in Biblical Hebrew; a colloquium on "Democracy, Laicity and Religions"...

The *Abbaye de Sylvanès* is particularly well known for its annual festival of religious music which takes place during the summer months and attracts musicians of renown from all over the world.

Visiting the *Abbaye de Sylvanès* is an uplifting experience; the spirituality of the place is inescapable. The difficulties involved in providing a suitable venue befitting the different styles of music of different religions throughout the ages have been overcome. The challenge of creating a multi-cultural, pluri-disciplinary programme that attracts people has been met with brio. The combined vision of two very different men has resulted in a highly reputed international arts centre, thanks to their unity of purpose and the diversity of their interests.

Men and Nature

Micropolis, the City of Insects in Saint-Léons

In the heart of Aveyron, 15 minutes from the Millau Viaduct, MICROPOLIS, the City of Insects opens its doors for you to discover an extraordinary world. The spectacular multi-media presentation calls upon the 5 senses, and the entire family will enjoy the fun, attractive activities and the fascinating universe of the "People of the Grass"

What is an insect? How is their society structured? What is the relationship between plants and insects? ... and between insects and human beings? What do they see? What do they feel?

These are just a few of the intriguing questions that are addressed at MICROPOLIS, where the exhibits are alive! The adventure continues on the outside, where our newly discovered friends will take us to Carnival. In view of the Lézou hills, an outdoor promenade will take you from the roadside shows and games across the different stages of its preparation. A costume workshop, a music pavilion and a dance-party are but a few of the opportunities to have fun with the giant insects that mark the path, all to original music. The exploration doesn't stop there; now you can head down to visit the underground city, where the "Demoiselles" will show you their pond... Moving experiences to be shared by the whole family!

On-site gift shop and panoramic restaurant. Multi-lingual audio-guides available (Eng, Ger, Dut, Spa, Ita). www.micropolis-aveyron.com

Terra Olt, Saint-Parthem

Let yourself be swept along by the tales and legends which are embedded in the minds of those whose livelihoods depend on the river Lot. A voyage guided by the living memories of the Ribièreols in the romantic setting of the former convent at Saint-Parthem. Witness the cohabitation of man and nature through the ages, the river a source of food and work, of welcome and sometimes danger. Homage paid to this river that man has always tried to tame and fashion according to his needs. A fairytale spectacle, a permanent musical and visual feast. Exhibitions of the life of the river through the ages. Themed exhibitions (fishing, everyday objects and decorations etc). www.terra-olt.com

Noria, l'Espace de l'Eau Saint-Jean-du-Bruel

Noria was created at Saint-Jean-du-Bruel, on the Dourbie, within an old water mill, now restored, in association with the Parc Naturel Régional des Grands Causses. The Espace de l'Eau offers several exhibitions all centred around the theme of water, contemplative, interactive, fun, in galleries extending over 1000 m² through which the river follows its natural course (20 rooms). This exhibition centre is open to universities, as well as schools and families. Interactive panels, reconstructions of hydraulic systems, games, explaining the role of water and its importance to our ancestors, to ourselves and for the future of humanity. www.noria-maisondeleau.com

Bozouls



Geological site of Bozouls: a canyon measuring 400 metres wide and nearly 100 metres deep. This natural site hides an exceptional, ancient river bend that is of great geomorphological interest, as well as inviting to walkers and flower lovers, who will enjoy the botanical trail. The erosive action of the Dourdou River and the progressive digging of rivers make for fascinating study and teach us about the

origins of our landscapes and their particularities. Geology-oriented activities are offered during the "Festival des Sciences de la Terre" in August. www.bozouls.com

Terra Memoria, Bozouls

Discovery center presenting the Aveyron's landscapes - designed for all publics. Along with models and films, Europe's largest mural painting explains the formation and evolution of the Earth and Aveyron. To finish the visit, a special vista terrace offers dizzying views of the famous canyon of Bozouls and surrounding landscapes. www.terramemoria.fr

"Maison de l'Aubrac" in Aubrac village

Here is a new 'scenographic' space for you to discover the Aubrac, to wander its plateau, its landscapes, its men, traditions and flavors. It is an invitation to explore and travel all through the Aubrac, even into the world of gastronomy. The scenographic space is not quite a museum, not quite a show... It is rather a sound and sight experience evoking the Aubrac throughout the four seasons, through an ensemble of audio-visual projections, on large screens, audio posts and video screens. You are free to move about this unique space, and travel through its powerful images of the Aubrac, from the transhumance to the crafting of knives, gentian plant, and passing along the pilgrims' way to Santiago di Compostella. After visiting the Aubrac through images and sound, the true Aubrac opens up to you in a special exhibit space where you can learn more about specific subjects, or discover the labelcertified local products in the boutique, or its delicious snacks, created by Michel Bras.

www.maisondelaubrac.com

Pastoralia

Shop window for the activities of those involved in rearing sheep for the production of milk for Roquefort. Presentation of the production of ewe's milk. Interactive visit, ewes and lambs in the sheepfold. Visit lasts: 1 h. Tel: 05 65 98 10 23

Montpellier-le-Vieux

A mass of dolomitic rock formations overlooking the gorges of the Dourbie and the causses. A small train makes the visit easier. Duration of the visit: 2h. www.montpellierlevieux.com

Larzac



A remote, rugged, inhospitable plateau, one might be forgiven for thinking that there could not possibly be anything of interest for the tourist in this savagely beautiful national park.

But the **Aveyron** is full of surprises and thus you would be wrong -*Larzac* is supremely rich in history. In the middle of the 12th century, the Order of the Knights Templar took up

residence in *Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon*. Gradually, other medieval villages sprang up, notably ***La Cavalerie*** and ***La Couvertoirade***, bringing together the local population who lived a peaceful existence, mainly as sheep farmers. When the Order of the Knights Templar was disbanded by the Pope in 1312, the Knights of St. John took over their lands and rights. However, the unrest and insecurity caused by the 100 Years War (1338-1443) resulted in the villages, notably ***Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon***, being heavily fortified, fortifications which still stand today. Despite these fortifications, *Larzac* fell into the hands of the protestant Huguenots in the 16th century. The 17th century was a time of great prosperity which resulted in many magnificent houses being built. With the other two fortified sites, ***Viala du Pas de Jaux*** and ***Saint-Jean d'Alcas***, these five medieval villages are linked together via the tourist circuit "*Les Ramparts du Larzac*" and offer a fascinating visit to those who have a keen sense of history.

Each village is interesting in its own right. *Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon* is famous for its austere fortifications, the towers, ramparts and walls which all remain intact; *La Cavalerie*, for its imposing arched gateway and its fortified ramparts; *La Couvertoirade* for being exceptionally well preserved (it is one of the most beautiful villages in France), here one has a real sense of being in a medieval village; *Viala du Pas de Jaux* for its remarkable square tower looking out over the vast plateau de *Larzac* and *Saint-Jean d'Alcas* for its Cistercian abbey and order of its streets, most unlike other medieval villages, a testimony to the influence of the Cistercian monks. However, these villages are not simply historical relics but thriving communities; for example, *La Couvertoirade* has become a centre for artists and sculptors.

The historical importance of this area is such that in 1995, the *Conseil Général de l'Aveyron* created the "*Conservatoire Larzac Templier et Hospitalier*", a research centre for historians and archaeologists as well as the general public. The aim is to foster research into the military and religious orders of the middle ages. In addition, it organises cultural events and exhibitions, offering genuine insights into this fascinating heritage.

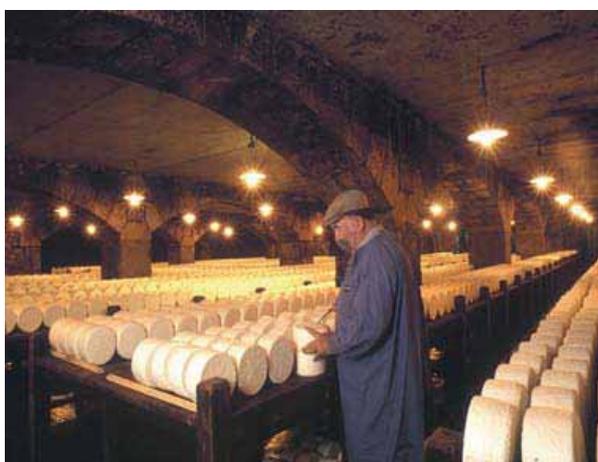
Gastronomy in Aveyron



If there is one thing the French do know how to do well, it is undeniable that they know how to cook. "*La cuisine française*" is justifiably famous throughout the world; many of its classic dishes have been exported, plagiarised, copied : imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. However, in reality one cannot talk about French cooking as a single entity; each region has its own specialities, sometimes indigenous, sometimes as a result of external influences (*choucroute*

in Alsace, for example). Some regions are blessed by nature with unfair advantages, and thus enjoy a national reputation for the quality of their regional cooking. Among the French, the *département* of **Aveyron** is renown for its gastronomy.

The **Aveyron** is an agricultural *département*, par excellence. The geographical diversity of the *département* is reflected in the variety of farming and thus in the range of local specialities. *Foie gras* reigns supreme, for nearly every farm has a few ducks. **Confit de canard, magret de canard or salade de gesiers** are to be found on many a menu throughout the *département*. *Charcuterie* is everywhere; salamis, dried sausage, local hams, patés, rillettes... The *Aubrac* breed of cattle, a hardy race, provides some of the most succulent beef in France - the cattle graze on the mountain pastures during the summer. Spring lamb, sublimely tender, comes from the south of the *département*. Game roams freely, rabbit, hare, venison and notably wild boar. The *département* is traversed by three main rivers, the *Aveyron*, the *Lot* and the *Tarn*. With their innumerable tributaries, they offer wonderful fishing for the keen angler. Trout, pike, perch, and carp are just some of the many fish found in the local rivers and which therefore enrich the local cuisine.



Roquefort, the 'king of cheeses', is exclusively *Aveyronnais*; for only here, in the village of *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon*, can this exquisite cheese be made. Made from ewes' milk, its world-wide fame explains the presence of so many sheep in the *département*. But there are also cheeses made from cows' milk, such as **Laguiole** and **Bleu des Causses**, and not forgetting the many goats' cheeses, often made on the farm by the farmer himself.

Le Foie Gras / Jacques Carles



Much has been written in the British press about the "barbaric" practice of 'force-feeding' ducks and geese to make foie gras, and, needless to say, a large proportion of what has been written is either ill-informed or inaccurate. It is certainly true that some industrial producers use methods of '*gavage*' which are frankly cruel, but that is not to say that all producers are alike. In south-west France, one can still find farmers who continue to produce foie gras by traditional methods, none more so than Jaques Carles. At his farm in

Monteils, *Aveyron*, Monsieur Carles adheres rigorously to the time-honoured practices which his family have used for generations. In defence of these practices, Monsieur Carles has opened up his farm so that one can see how real foie gras is made. He makes no attempt to hide any part of the process and is quite open to questions, even the most pertinent and searching. Ultimately, the only way to make up your own mind is to visit the farm.

A visit to Monsieur Carles' farm is an experience. Here, one is welcomed in person before starting the tour of the farm. Monsieur Carles takes you to see how the ducks are reared in the open air in preparation for '*le gavage*'. The process of '*gavage*' is demonstrated by him and one can observe the reaction of the ducks immediately afterwards. The visit continues in the spotlessly clean kitchen area where the ducks are humanely killed, plucked and prepared for the cauldron. At this stage, Monsieur Carles will relate the battles he has fought with the European bureaucracy to permit him to use traditional copper cauldrons heated over a wood fire rather than more clinical modern methods. He claims to have the only kitchens of this type in Europe which are EU approved. His exhaustive battles with bureaucracy and administration are a testimony to his vision and determination to achieve his aim of producing foie gras of the highest quality.

Having got this far, the 'proof of the pudding lies in the eating'; a tasting is *de rigueur*. This takes place in a beautifully renovated barn which now houses a superb collection of copper pots, cauldrons and other culinary utensils. Above the museum, Monsieur Carles has recently opened a restaurant where not surprisingly the menu is largely duck, featuring many local dishes such as confit de canard, salade de gesiers etc. Having been won over by Monsieur Carles' openness and honesty, seduced by his gallic charm and having sampled his wonderful products, one is free to make up one's own mind on the basis of first hand experience rather than received opinion.

P.S. Regrettably, the ducks are not available for interview!

The most beautiful villages in Aveyron



“The most beautiful villages in France” is a prestigious club of 139 villages throughout France which have been chosen for their character, their heritage and the desire of their inhabitants to protect their unique patrimony. With 10 members in this elite group, the Aveyron boasts more of “the most beautiful villages in France” than any other département.

Belcastel, simply an emotional experience.

On the banks of the river Aveyron, a picture-postcard village dominated by its 15th century château. In this unique setting, the architect Fernand Pouillon, inspired by the site, set his talents to work restoring the château.

Sainte-Eulalie d’Olt, land of traditions, an angler’s paradise.

Medieval village square, 11th century church, 15th century château, renaissance residence, millwheel which governs the pace of life in this floral village, ideal for strolling around. Visit of the town.

Saint-Côme-d’Olt, a Hospitaller village, secular by tradition...

Medieval village, belfry, fortified gateway, impressive mansions... in the footsteps of the pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela, you’ll discover a village little changed in centuries.

Sauveterre de Rouergue, 13th century royal bastide.

Half-timbered houses with corbels sculpted out of stone, ornate doorways, remains of the fortifications, moats, towers, archway... drift back in time through the ages. Night-time market, with street entertainment. Guided visits by torch-light.

Estaing, a medieval village steeped in tradition.

A remarkably pretty village in the north of Aveyron, precipitously positioned at the entrance to the Lot gorges and at the foot of the Aubrac mountains. Discover the château, the gothic bridge, the beautiful church...

Conques, twentieth century light shed on Romanesque art.

A major cultural centre, the site of Conques, an important staging post on the pilgrim way to Santiago de Compostela, remains a jewel of Romanesque art. The new windows in the abbey, designed by Pierre Soulages, are in harmony with and serve to enhance the austerity of the Romanesque setting.

Brousse le Château, at the confluence of two rivers.

Fortified chateaux dating back to the 9th-16th centuries, medieval bridge of Romanesque design, church, oratory... an exceptional site.

Najac, bathed in sunlight

The royal fortress, a masterpiece of 13th century military architecture, stands proud on a rocky outcrop at one end of the village, high above the river which loops round the château as it stands guard over the village. Tourist Office.: 05 65 29 72 05

La Couvertoirade, founded by the Templars, later to become a Hospitaller commandery

It is at the heart of Larzac, in an isolated spot, that the Templars erected this château, situated on a rock at the foot of which the medieval village was later to develop; the village is now surrounded by ramparts added by the Hospitallers in the 15th century. Mairie: 05 65 58 55 55 Reception: 05 65 58 55 59

Peyre, near Comprégnac

Located some 7 kilometres downstream from Millau, this village was literally cut from the local rock. It is remarkable in many ways, especially its volcanic tuff houses, stone alleyways and the Romanesque troglodyte church, which was fortified in the 17th century. It is a most unusual site, sculpted right into the cliffs, offering exceptional views of the Millau Viaduct, as well. OT: 05 65 60 02 42

The “Bastides” of Rouergue



At the beginning of the 13th century, the increase in population, the need for efficient husbandry and the need to consolidate the social structures led kings, bishops and lords to invest heavily in developing their lands. Thus began a period of construction lasting 150 years (1222-1373) during which 315 bastide towns were built in south-west France, all designed to a grid-like geometric pattern which insisted on straight roads and plots of land of equal size. Aveyron boasts five such towns: Najac, Sauveterre de

Rouergue, Villefranche de Rouergue, Villeneuve d’Aveyron and La Bastide l’Evêque.

Villefranche de Rouergue

A ‘new town’ built in the Middle Ages, Villefranche was founded in 1252 by Alphonse de Poitiers, Count of Toulouse and brother of the king Saint Louis. His plan was typical of the bastides: very regular, with streets intersecting at rightangles, converging on a central square bordered by arcades, the commercial heart of the town and today the venue for the colourful market. Guided tours of the Bastide Royale in July & August, with audio-guides available year-round at the Tourist Office. Explore the Baroque Chapelle des Pénitents Noirs and the Monastery Saint-Sauveur, open in July, August & September . Château de Graves, self-guided visits In July and August, workshops for children aged 6-12, themed around the cultural heritage.

Villeneuve d’Aveyron

Surrounding a Benedictine monastery, this town was in succession a refuge, a ducal bastide then a royal bastide at the end of the 13th century. Visit the fortified towers built to defend the town, arcades, 13th century houses, merchants’ houses built in the 14th-15th centuries, the town gateway, the church of Saint-Sépulcre 11th-14th century, part romaneseque part gothic. Rare murals depicting scenes of the pilgrim way to Santiago de Compostela. Preromaneseque church at Touloungergues, with a rare collection of Romaneseque paintings from the 11th century. In July and August, workshops for children aged 6-12, themed around the cultural heritage. 20th July: medieval fête at Villeneuve

Najac

From a small hamlet in the shadow of the domineering castle, the village grew in the 13th century along the lines of the bastides, as seen where the narrow street widens to become the village square. Visits of the bastide. In July and August, workshops for children aged 6-12, themed around the cultural heritage.

La Bastide L'Évêque Founded in 1280 by Raymond De Calmont, Bishop of Rodez, as a rival to Villefranche, the bastide is constructed on a granite plateau which overlooks the Aveyron valley, where numerous smiths beat out their copper during the middle ages. Its isolated location explains the simplicity of the layout, with the market place occupying the central square, joined by a 14th-15th century collegial.

Sauveterre de Rouergue

A medieval village classed as one of the most beautiful villages in France, Sauveterre is a magnificent 13th century royal bastide, built around the village square with its arcades and halftimbered houses and merchants' houses. Guided visits enable you to discover the history behind the development of the bastides, these medieval precursors of urban planning and development. From one bastide to another, opening doors and giving an insight into these prestigious historic monuments...

Michel & Sébastien Bras



In a *département* blessed with many fine restaurants, one man towers above the rest - Michel Bras. Yet, to meet him, you would never know; naturally a shy self-effacing person, he is to be found beavering away in his kitchen, rather than filming in the television studios or travelling the world signing copies of his latest book. In fact, it would almost be true to say that Michel fights shy of publicity, allowing his unique style of cooking to speak for itself : it speaks with polished eloquence.

The story of how Michel became interested in cooking is the stuff of legends. His father was a blacksmith in the village of *Laguiole*. As a result of rural depopulation, Michel's father found making ends meet increasingly difficult. His mother therefore decided that the only solution was for her to open a restaurant. Whilst this venture did not bring in riches untold, it did

prove to be a very valuable education for the young Michel, for it gave him an insight into the fact that even the most mundane neglected ingredients, or the periodic culinary disaster can be turned to advantage. Many of his masterpieces (the word is chosen carefully) derive their inspiration from his mother's cooking and some of them include ingredients from these early experiences, the skin off warmed milk or burnt bread being two extreme examples. But what this man can do with the skin off warmed milk defies belief.



Like his cooking, Michel himself is firmly rooted in the local tradition. When he finally outgrew the family restaurant in the centre of *Laguiole*, he had already established a reputation. Tempting offers from Paris were rejected in favour of a bold new project to create an ultra-modern hotel/restaurant perched on a remote hillside, 5km from *Laguiole* and overlooking the *plateau d'Aubrac*, a bleak, windswept mountainous region and Michel's spiritual home.

There is a magic about *Aubrac* which is inspirational; here, he finds all sorts of wild plants and herbs whose culinary qualities had long since been forgotten. His encyclopaedic knowledge and fanatical research have resulted in many a forgotten ingredient being included in his recipes; how many other chefs use borage, comfrey, goosefoot, ironwort or baldmoney? How many other chefs even know what they are? But then Michel Bras is obsessive in his search for the ultimate taste sensation and thus his cooking repertoire includes more than 350 different herbs and plants. A typical example of the results is his "*gargouillou*", a complex mixture of salads, vegetables, sprouting seeds and herbs. The exact composition varies according to the seasons, and at any one time may contain as many as 30 different ingredients. The end result is a "microcosm of nature", an artistic and culinary display of contrasting colours, textures and flavours in perfect harmony.

With 3 Michelin stars and a top score of 19:20 in Gault-Millau, he has not lacked recognition and plaudits. Nevertheless, his prices remain reasonable for a restaurant of

Roquefort



It was Henri IV, I believe, who once commented that France was completely ungovernable, on the basis that 'how could one rule over a country that produced over 400 different cheeses?' Whilst it is true that there is a quite magnificent selection of cheese in France, there is one point on which even the French are unanimous : *Roquefort* is "the king of cheeses". No other cheese can rival its powerful yet subtle aroma, its creamy yet crumbly texture and its rich complex flavour - and none tries, for

Roquefort is the undisputed "*Roi des fromages*".

The secret to *Roquefort's* success lies in the unassuming village of *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon*, deep in the heart of "*la France profonde*". For it is here, and only here, that one finds the famous 'penicillium roqueforti', the mould that impregnates the cheese whilst it lies slowly maturing in the underground cellars carved into the hillside adjacent to *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon*. Herein lies the secret which many would like to capture and reproduce but cannot. For the name "*Roquefort*" is strictly protected by its own '*Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*'; only cheeses which are matured in the cellars of *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon* and the surrounding area are entitled to use the name "*Roquefort*". This protection is and has always been very important to *Roquefort*, for even in Roman times, the tables of the Emperor Pliny were graced with *Roquefort*: during the Middle Ages, Charlemagne was another noted amateur. The history of *Roquefort* is punctuated by royal charters and decrees, all designed to protect this exquisite cheese.

All around the village of *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon*, the hills and plateaux are dotted with sheep, for this is not an area of rich farmland but of "causses", poor scrub land which would be of little agricultural use except for sheep. This has proved to be a blessing in disguise, because it is the milk from the ewes that is used to produce *Roquefort*. Today, the world-wide fame of *Roquefort* has created such a demand that the *département* of **Aveyron** has four times as many sheep as people. The milk is collected from the farms and transformed into large roundels of cheese in creameries throughout the permitted production area before being brought to the underground cellars of *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon*. Here it lies maturing on wooden slats for a minimum of three months, up to a year in certain cases. The moist, humid air circulates naturally, thanks to the natural ventilation provided by the geological structure of the cellars, encouraging the development of the green/blue veins that give *Roquefort* its marbled effect and its sublime taste. Certain individual cellars are renown for the quality and character of their cheese, such as '*les caves de Baragnade*', (produced by *La Société Roquefort*) perhaps the 'Rolls-Royce' of *Roqueforts*.

The Culinary Specialities of the Aveyron

The **Aveyron** is richly endowed with excellent natural ingredients which are the foundation of its enviable reputation as a gastronomic Mecca. Ironic then, that the culinary specialities for which it is best known are very much derived from the peasant tradition of cooking. However, they are none the worse for that.

Perhaps the best known is "*aligot*". In the **Aveyron**, the dish is revered with almost religious fervour. Not surprising, maybe, in that the origins of "*aligot*" are monastic, attributed to the monks who lived a solitary life on *Aubrac*. Pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela would sometimes seek shelter at the monastery; before setting off for *Conques* the following day, they were fortified with a liberal helping of "*aligot*", essentially a purée of mashed potato and *tôme fraîche de Laguiole*, the local cheese, with a bit of garlic and cream thrown in for good measure. This redoubtable dish was designed to set them up against the harsh winter climate of *Aubrac*. Utterly delicious, it has developed a cult status; no local fête would dare be without its huge dish of "*aligot*". Part of the attraction lies in the fact that the melted cheese gives the dish a 'stringiness' which makes the cooking and serving of the dish a spectacle in itself. The crowd cheers as the chef dextrously wields his spatula (more like a giant paddle) above his head, drawing up a curtain of "*aligot*" over two metres high. Serving the dish also requires a degree of skill, in that separating a single portion from a cauldron of "*aligot*" designed to feed over 100 people is no simple task, given its elasticity. However, by picking up the right amount on a spoon in one hand and then rolling it over a fork held in the other, over and over again very rapidly, gradually raising it up away from the cauldron, it can be done and is of course done with great panache and showmanship by the experts.

"*Estofinado*" is another mythical local dish. Its origins lie in the dried salt cod which came up the river *Lot* and found its way to *Decazeville*, in the north-west of the département. What starts out as a decidedly unappetising-looking piece of fish, stiff as a board, is repeatedly soaked in changes of fresh water until it is thoroughly re-hydrated and cleansed. This laborious process takes about a week. The cod is then cooked, along with potatoes, garlic, parsley, cream and chopped hard-boiled eggs. Not a dish for the faint-hearted, it forms an essential part of any traditional festive menu.

"*Gâteau à la broche*" (literally cake on a stick!) is a good example of the difficulty of translating names of dishes from one language to another (foie gras, or fat liver is another). And yet that is exactly what this is; a cake on a stick. Rather like spit-roasting, the stick is turned and the cake mixture is dribbled over it. Some sticks, most of it falls off, but the process is repeated over and over again until gradually, the cake begins to take shape. When cooked, it ends up a conical shape and is cut into thin strips which demonstrate perfectly the quirky way in which the cake was constructed.

There are many other culinary specialities which appear in the *Aveyronnais* culinary repertoire : *fouace*, *tripous*, *flône*, *pompe à l'huile*, to name but a few. For the **Aveyron** can promise a voyage of gastronomic discovery.

The Market / Villefranche de Rouergue



Villefranche de Rouergue lies to the west of the *département*, a bastide town built to a geometric pattern around a central square. A town of historic interest, it has been a cross-roads and a staging post on the pilgrim way to Santiago de Compostela since the middle ages. The town's narrow streets give it an air of intrigue and intimacy, whilst the former

prosperity of the town is confirmed by the wealth of churches and chapels. The Eglise Notre Dame, the Chapelle des Pénitents Noirs and the Chartreuse St-Sauveur are all worth a visit.

Villefranche de Rouergue might resemble any other sleepy French town, were it not for Thursday mornings. Market day in Villefranche is a sight to behold, for it is here that the local peasants congregate to sell their produce, as the seasons unfold. And it is not only farm produce that are sold in the market-place; anything that can be gathered from the woods, hedgerows or pastures and is edible finds its way to market. The market runs throughout the year, and the first sign that spring has arrived is the appearance of dandelion leaves on the stalls. These are followed rapidly by *'les responchous'*, the tips of a plant that grows in hedgerows, looks like a very thin stalk of asparagus and has a pleasantly bitter taste. Wild mushrooms, chestnuts and blackberries all follow in sequence during the year.

However there is also an abundance of home-grown fruit and vegetables, freshly picked that morning before being taken to market. Delicious goats cheeses lie temptingly on the stalls, just asking to be tasted; some as hard as bullets, destined to be macerated and softened in herbs and olive oil. Rabbits, hares, chickens, ducks and goats are all for sale, although I fear that their life expectancy is rather short. Hams, sausage and patés are everywhere, whilst on the herb stalls, the smell of fresh thyme and basil perfumes the air.

The brightly coloured sunshades give the market a festive ambience, heightened by the cacophony of noise which reaches a crescendo as the morning wears on and the pastis begins to flow. The rich mediterranean, almost Spanish accents of the locals bear witness to the fact that one is in the south of France; here the native language is Occitan, not French, and many of the elder generation still speak it. Dressed in their *'bleus de travail'* and their berets, the farmers have the most wonderfully expressive faces, gnarled, weather-beaten, epic. For this is truly *'la France profonde'* at its most authentic, most picturesque and its most enjoyable.

The Laguiole Knife



In times past, many of the local *Aveyronnais* population were forced to leave the département to seek work further afield. Many of them found jobs in the cafés and bistros of Paris, where even today the *Aveyronnais* "bistrocracy" still dominates the trade. In many instances, they left everything behind them; everything, that is, except their Laguiole knife.

The Laguiole knife was first created in 1829 by Pierre Calmels, the son of a local innkeeper. He drew his inspiration from the "navaja", a knife brought back

from Catalonia by the locals who would spend the winter months in Spain felling trees. To the curved blade, he added the handle of the local "capuchadou" knife, designed earlier by Eustache Dubois and said to be shaped in the form of a human thigh, though whose thigh is unknown. Thus was born the 'Laguiole', a hinged knife with a sprung closure.

The knife, an essential tool for working on the land, gradually evolved with the addition of an awl in 1840 and more importantly a corkscrew in 1880. At the time of the exodus to Paris, it became a symbol, an identity card and a bond of friendship amongst the 'ex-patriot' *Aveyronnais*.

During the inter-war period, production of the knife fell into abeyance and forging of the blades was transferred to Thiers. Not until the 1980's did the villagers of Laguiole wake up to the potential of this cult object. The "Association du Couteau de Laguiole" was created in 1981, to promote and protect the reputation of the knife, and in 1987, the forge of "La Société Laguiole" began producing knives that were both forged and manufactured in Laguiole. The re-launch of the knife has been an unqualified success: there are now 10 companies in Laguiole which produce their own versions of the knife, from the most traditional designs to contemporary interpretations by international designers such as Philippe Stark, Sonia Rykiel and Yan Pennor's. The knife is now a cultural icon: for some it serves as a reminder, a link with their rural past; for others, it is simply appreciated as a superb expression of the art of design, at once traditional, contemporary, timeless.

As a case study in how to create jobs in rural areas, the history of the Laguiole is classic; as an exercise in marketing, it is fascinating; as an example of a bold local initiative, it holds few peers. However, it is as an example of true craftsmanship that the Laguiole is unchallenged; the skill and dexterity of those who forge, grind and polish the knives with infinite patience is quite remarkable. The forge and workshops of the artisans who produce the knives can all be visited; after the visit, it is most unlikely that you will leave without having succumbed to the temptation to acquire your very own 'Laguiole'.

Millau

Glove making in Millau



Millau, a magnificent town on the banks of the river *Tarn*, lies in the middle of the *Gorges du Tarn*, surrounded by imposing cliffs. This dramatic setting has made it one of the most popular venues in France for aerial sports. However, its reputation goes much further back than the invention of hangliding and parasailing. For here is a town where industry and tradition go hand in glove.

Situated in the south of the *département* of the *Aveyron*, the town of *Millau* owes its reputation to its glove-making industry, which dates back as far as the 12th century. Why should a small town in the middle of "*la France profonde*" become one of the leading centres for glove manufacturing in the world, I hear you ask. The answer lies not far away, in the nearby village of *Roquefort-sur-Soulzon*, renowned world-wide for its inimitable cheese, made from ewes' milk. The demand for this famous cheese, even as far back as Roman times, meant that it was expedient to



slaughter the lambs at a very young age, in order to ensure a plentiful supply of ewes' milk. This resulted in a large quantity of lambskin of very high quality, tender, supple and ideally suited to the making of gloves of the highest quality.

The first mention of this industry in the local archives dates back to 1193, where a certain Pierre Raymond is recorded as having owned a tannery. Despite various setbacks, due to causes as diverse as religious wars (16th-17th centuries), changes in materials (19th century) and industrial disputes (19th-20th centuries), glove making in *Millau* developed through the centuries to become an important aspect of the local economy, even unto the present day.

The industry reached its apogee in 1963, when the town employed over 1,000 people in the industry and treated nearly 5,000,000 skins. Since then, there has been a decline in the fortunes of glove making. Nevertheless, whilst it is true that well bred young ladies no longer consider it essential to wear gloves on formal occasions, there remains a demand for the gloves of high quality and therefore the industry, although reduced in size, continues to flourish.

The principal reason why the gloves of *Millau* are still in demand is their unrivalled quality. Even today, the fashion houses in Paris are well aware that in order to ensure gloves that match their exacting standards, the only manufacturers worth approaching are based in *Millau*. The list of clients is impressive; Pierre Cardin, Chanel, Chloë, Christian Dior, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Hermès, Charles Jourdan, Kenzo, Karl Lagerfeld, Lanvin, Thierry Mugler, Nina Ricci, Yves Saint-Laurent, Ungarro, and Gianni Versace are among the many famous names who insist on the quality of the "*Peaux de Millau*", a label set up to protect the

The Millau Viaduct a World Record Breaker

Designed by the English architect, Lord Norman Foster, the Millau Viaduct cost some 310 million Euros and is financed and constructed by the Eiffage group as part of a 75-year chartered concession.

An exceptional piece of civil engineering

This bridge sets world records for height, with masts reaching 340 meters (higher than the Eiffel Tower). The Millau Viaduct is multi-span, cablestayed, 2,460 meters long, and provides 2 driving lanes in each direction, skipping over the Tarn Valley touching down at only 9 points. It fits very nicely into the surrounding countryside, thus meeting the requirements of the architect and the local communities. To meet these requirements, however, highly advanced technologies were employed, including a streamlined steel bridge-deck supported by cable-stays and resting upon 7 very slim piers constructed with high-grade concrete. It climbs a gentle slope of 3% from north to south, and has a slight curve on-plan.



Environmentally Friendly Technological Solutions

The Viaduct's trajectory respects the area's major natural sites and the exceptional landscapes of the confluence of the Dourbie and Tarn valleys, whilst providing convenient access to the greater Millau area. Apart from the aesthetic and environmental concerns associated with the project, the technology used to build the steel bridge-deck and concrete piers has several advantages. The first of these is quite simply the lightness of the streamlined bridge deck, which allows for a lighter support structure, as well. The construction method was also beneficial. The factory pre-production of certain parts of the deck reduced the volume of material that had to be worked on-site, something which never would have been possible with an all-concrete structure. Less equipment, less construction material, fewer trucks going back and forth clogging up traffic... in all, it added up to less disturbance to the life of the local population. A wastewater treatment system was even put in place so as to avoid soil pollution. General worksite waste was another issue taken into account by the quality assurance program throughout the construction phase. These same concerns are represented in the very design of the viaduct, with several permanent systems in place for the recuperation and treatment of rainwater and road-surface residues.

Standing up to all Tests

The Viaduct was designed to meet the highest standards, in terms of longevity and resistance to seismic events and the most extreme of meteorological conditions. It was built to work perfectly for the next century and beyond.

Traveller Comfort and Safety

The Millau Viaduct is equipped with safety barriers built to withstand truck impacts, transparent windscreens 3-meters in height and emergency lanes for the travellers' greater comfort and safety. In case of a breakdown or accident, emergency phones are positioned every 400m. Excepting serious accidents or exceptional wind forces, the Viaduct is open 24 hours a day. In addition to national weather information sources, the Viaduct's information centre has its own weather forecasting system.

The Millau Viaduct in Numbers

The bridge will be operated under a 75-years concession contract with the Eiffage group. It was built to specifications requiring perfect operation for a minimum of 120 years. Representing an investment of some 320 million Euros (2.1 billion French Francs) the project was financed with Eiffage's own funds.

Maximum height, measured from the top of the masts: 343m (Eiffel Tower: 320.75m)

Height of bridge-deck relative to the river Tarn: 270m

Overall length: 2,460m Spans

8 individual spans, with 6 measuring 342m and 2 measuring 204m, resting on 7 piers and suspended by cablestays fixed to 7 masts rising 90m each.

The tallest concrete pier measures

240m from the bottom of the bridge-deck. **The decks contain some 36,000 tons of steel** (7 times the Eiffel Tower).

The piers and abutments contain some

85,000 cubic meters of concrete, 50,000 of which are high-grade concrete (equal or superior to B60, for a sum total of over 250,000 tons of concrete).

Concrete pier section area:

-at the foundation top 200m²

-under the deck bearings: 30m²

Slope: approximately 3% (climbing to the south)

Tollhouse: 18 lanes covered by a roof created using BSI concrete technology and 'Ceracem' (cold-moulded ceramic concrete), patented by Eiffage Construction.

Workers present on the work site:

500 (Eiffage figures).

A Door Opening to the South

The Millau Viaduct is the last link in the "Mériidienne" (A75), a free motorway linking Clermont-Ferrand to Béziers and Narbonne. The Méridienne is now the shortest, least encumbered and the least expensive route between Paris, the Mediterranean and Spain.

A Tourist Motorway Located in the Heart of France

This new artery crosses the magnificent landscapes of the Auvergne, the Margeride, the Aubrac, and the Grands Causses. Buttressed to the north by the Causse Rouge and to the south by the Causse du Larzac, the Millau Viaduct crosses the Tarn Gorges, one of France's greatest natural tourist attractions. It is located near the famous Roquefort Caves, the Templar and Hospitaler Commanderie villages of south Aveyron and the Cistercian abbey of Sylvanès. A few kilometres farther south, one reaches the Pas de l'Escalette and the shelves of the beautiful Mediterranean valley that lead, via Montpellier or Béziers, to the beaches of the Languedoc.

One of France's newest and most exciting monuments

The exceptional dimensions of the Millau Viaduct, the aesthetic decisions of architect Norman Foster and, of course, the natural grandeur of the Aveyronnais landscape and the Gorges du Tarn which surround it, all come together and make the region even more attractive to tourists. All of France's great works of civil engineering, such as the bridges of Normandy and Tancarville, or the Marémotrice factory of the Rance, today make up a group of major destinations for individuals and groups of tourists. The visiting statistics at their welcome centres are proof of this. The recent increase in technological tourism is undeniable, so much so that major industrial sites are now opening up to the general public. The Millau Viaduct is far more than a simple work of civil engineering used by hurried travellers. Many people take the time to stop and look from a rest area upstream of the Millau tollhouse. As with its prestigious ancestor, the Pont du Gard, or a more recent work such as the Garabit Viaduct (the founding work of the Eiffel company, an affiliate of the Eiffage group and active participant in the viaduct project), the Millau Viaduct has also become a major stop amongst France's major technological and historic sites.



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