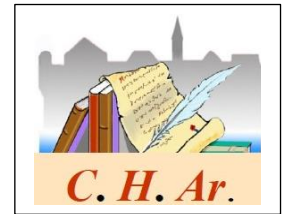




NAVARRENX



EXHIBITION of Centre d'Interprétation de Navarrenx C.I.N.

We are honoured and have pleasure to welcome your visit to our museography space. We would hope that you will keep some small memories of its contents.

When you leave, take a moment to go and see the scale model of Navarrenx that has a commentary in 5 languages, including English at the Tourist Office, on the corner of Place des Casernes.

The Stones*

- **Prehistorical cut stones** used as flint axes or various cutting tools, simple weapons ; found on the hills of Lucq, authenticated and dated by Miss Marsan, curator of the Lourdes Museum.
- **Fulgurites** (or Thunder stones) identified and so named by Palassou, are found on a narrow silica clay strip stretching from Lucq to Bugnein on a side of the hill used now by ULM Ballons/ULM and part of the motor-cross circuit of Navarrenx.

Those kinds of balls were formed when the ground was struck by lightning thus creating a concretion with a hollow heart containing iron oxide.

NB: Thunder stones are found in other places as in Brittany where lightings cuts out small vitrified stars in the granite, but fulgurite is a specificity of this little corner of the world.

* **Gypses** used for decoration

The Bastide (fortified town of the Middle-Age)

Navarrenx as a Bastide was founded in 1316 by the viscountess Marguerite-Mathilde (3rd daughter of Gaston VII Monkeyed); it became an important commercial centre after the construction of a bridge over the river (called Gave in this region).

Mr Cursente, eminent historian at the CNRS explains that contrary to most other bastides created for the purpose of development and protection of agriculture, Navarrenx with only 400 hectares and subsequently 600 hectares had little hope of agricultural expansion. The other bastides: Gan (4000ha), Garlin (1830ha) Labastide-Clairance (2339ha), Bugnein (1136ha), Vielleségure (1431ha)... could have expected more protection. Neighbouring towns such as Lucq (4877ha), Monein (8084ha), Sauveterre (1454ha) and Salies-de-Béarn (5208ha) never received any of the advantages granted to bastides by the authority of For de Morlaas: fiscal concessions, gift of land for building...

Few bastide can as we do, be proud of having a **manuscrit de sa fondation**.

The fortified town

Henri II d'Albret, viscount of Bearn, having escaped from Italy where he had been made a prisoner, dreamt of the reconquest of Navarre while ensuring an efficient defence of Bearn. Therefore he chooses Navarrenx as a base from where to launch the reconquest and with which to protect his little « kingdom ». Having admired during his battle in Italy, the new fortifications used there which were exceptionally all proof to cannon balls and allowed

visibility from all parts of the ramparts, he asked for an Italian architect by the name (or nickname) of Fabricio Siciliano and asked him to fortify Navarrenx thus creating: **the first bastide in the France of that time.**

The work started in **1538 and ended in 1545**: a true race against time. It proved necessary to destroy the larger part of the older fortification, Saint-Germain church the situated in front of the present Verny's house thus to close to the projected ramparts and the castle of which a part was integrated in the rampart near the confluent of the Larroder into the Gave (see scale model of Castle on the left following the suggested circuit).

The Green Book

Its writing goes back to the beginning of the **17th Century**. It collects **most of the important texts dealing with Navarrenx**, it covers the period up to the Revolution. A precious tool for the knowledge of our past; it has been photocopied, translated, a CD is available for sale.

The Bastioned Town (opposite the Green Book)

Two gates provided access to the Fortified Town: Saint-Antoine and Saint-Germain gates.

- **Saint-Antoine's Gate**, known as the Spanish gate (first model) was reached on a draw-bridge. Its width was made slightly bigger in the 19th Century (using the white stone from Orriule) in order to allow access to ever wider vehicles. It only survive to this day because of the enormous cost of it's demolition at the end of the 19th Century, when a breach was opened in the rampart. It was surmounted by a watch-tower covering the bridge, the river and Mousserolles.

Between Saint-Antoine and Saint-Germain Gates, the "demi-lune (half-moon) Gate (see central model) leads to the only work built outside the walls (bet. 1569-1626) the "demi-lune". It is built on a lower level than the ramparts, for this exposed it to gunfire in case the enemies took it. Unfortunately the stone facings were removed to help in the construction of water conducts and the power plant near the bridge at the end of the 19th Century. Circa 1854, the "demi-lune" was linked to the fortification by walls equipped with gates and arrow-slits. Later in 1890, during the unfortunate work carried out, the space between the half-moon and the gate was filled in with earth. As for the gate, it consist in a vaulted passage, which allow to reach the half-moon through a bridge. On either side of the gate a vaulted room was built for the ammunition hold.

- **Saint-Germain's Gate**, known as the French Gate (see third model) was pulled down at the end of the 19th Century, because it created a bottle-neck in the road which endangered life of children going to school, if they met horse-carts at the same time. The dormant bridge was buried because its width was less than 4.60m. Apart from the dormant bridge on the water, the gate was also equipped with a draw-bridge.

The Antique Tools

Tools such as these, served in the construction of the walled town.

The Quine (the cane of the Master), **the cord of 13 knots**, **the conveyer belt** made and still used with such precision up to the 20th Century. We see the results in our ancient buildings.

The Navy

The two ships exhibited here show the height of the masts in relation to the size of the vessels. To satisfy these specifications it was therefore necessary to dispose of timbers of exceptional size; those trees had to reach 40 to 50 metres o, length and robust enough to take the weight of the sails. The pines found in our local forests of Ossau, Issaux and Portalet in the Aspe Valley were most suited. The trees were felled during winter when the sap is

dormant and were « floated » when the river was filled in abundance by the melting snow. Pulled by oxen to the port of Lees-Athas, **raft** were built with timbers and pilots would float them down **to the port of Navarrenx**, where other pilots coming from Bayonne would take over at Bayonne docks, the masts would be fitted on the newly built vessels. The original team of river men would go back to base by foot of course, clogs over their shoulder thus making them last longer, the sheppards leaving l'Arribère for the high Aspe Valley did exactly the same a few decades ago.

These operations lasted during the time of Louis XIV and Louis XV and many accidents would have taken place when loading and unloading at the « chemin de la mature » and danger with taking the rafts on difficult dykes... but the tale is never told.

The « Little train »

Known locally as the « **tram** », due to its similarity and using same type of rails levelled with the road, sections of the rails remained for many years until the 1960's and sometimes longer and some of the rails might still be present under the tarmac.

Lots of funny stories were told about the train: travellers would leave for the station only after they'd heard its hoot two stations before (even « la gare », the station). Cows ruminating on the railway had to be moved away by the driver in order to continue his way. The time of a journey could vary... The little train changed life until the **31 décembre 1931**, in these rural parts. It was then possible to bring building material and equipment unavailable when no road transport existed in the country.

Pilgrimage at St James de Compostella

The two figurines exhibited give an idea of the attire and equipment of pilgrims of Compostella during the middle-age.

Today, **twelve to fifteen thousand pilgrims** travel through Navarrenx and fortunately have the benefit of better equipment.

Salmon fishing

Salmon fishing has known a surfeit of salmon; it was so often eaten that workers/servants requested that they be served salmon not more than twice a week. The photo souvenirs of our Navarrenx fishermen show their hours of glory, also their hours of misery during tens of years where overfishing by net in the Adour estuary took place, where there was pollution from town and agriculture and where the badly managed dams almost caused the disappearance of the particular type of local salmon of 8 to 10kg, and reduced to a minimum those salmon of small size.

But we witness now **a renewal** of this local type of salmon, due to the efforts of the « Société de Pêche », local authorities, farmers, and all those persons who understand the prestige that this renewal brings. There remains all the same the problem of controlling the predators of « alevins » (fry) and of « tocans », such as cormorants, mink and otter.

The superb collection of flies unique in its way, is a subject of amazement for those who visit, and equally amazing are all the accessories of fishing, rods, reels, nets...



<http://bearndesgaves.fr/char/>