



LET'S DISCOVER MEILHAN SUR GARONNE AND ITS HERITAGE



Duration of the route : 1h45



Difficulty level : easy



A 4,5km circuit / 112m slope



Blue marking



This walk, punctuated by 11 thematic signs allows you to discover the emblematic places of Meilhan sur Garonne.

You will familiarize yourself with the history of Meilhan, its topography, its fauna and its flora, its development over the centuries, but also its particular lifestyle generated by the Garonne river.

ACCESSIBILITY :

In the event of heavy rain, the signs 7, 8 and 10 can be difficult to access.



In case of a flood, access to the signs 6 and 7 is forbidden.

The signs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9 and 11, are accessible by vehicle.



To start your walk, go down the steps, cross the road and take the path called « Carreyrou ».

INTERESTING SPOTS

- 1 The tower
- 2 Road of the vieille halle
- 3 The Castle
- 4 The Tertre
- 5 The English breach
- 6 The old port
- 7 The Baqueyron
- 8 The font d'Uzas
- 9 The Lagravette Castle
- 10 The wet zone
- 11 The church

--- Short cuts
- - - Path under the canal
0 250m 500m

Conception : Georges Lot Environnement Conseil / Sports Vacances Nature
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GAME-BOOKLET

KIDS ONLY!

Available at the mairie

Monday 1:30 pm - 5pm

From Tuesday to Friday 9am - 12pm / 1:30 pm - 5pm

Saturday 9am - 12pm

This free booklet allows young adventure seekers to have fun whilst walking around !



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PAYS VAL DE GARONNE
GUYENNE GASCOGNE

Meilhan sur Garonne



THE FORTIFICATIONS OF THE VILLAGE

THE ART OF PROTECTING YOURSELF



AN INFLUENTIAL CASTELNAU



Aerial view of the Castral village

Meilhan, under the old regime, was lead by the diocese of Bazas.

The bishop was powerful and between the XI and the XII century, he gave the priory of Bazas to the monastery of La Réole, who had to favor the reorganization of the habitat.

The following century, the development of the villages was subordinated to the authority of the lords

(temporal power) and no longer from the church.

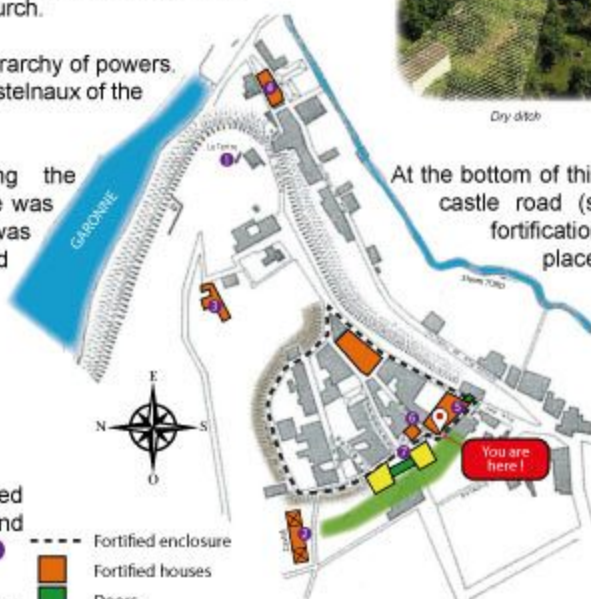
The castle became the pivot of this new hierarchy of powers. Meilhan then became one of the thirteen castelnaux of the diocese of Bazas.

The founding act took shape during the development of the enclosure : the village was bordered by wooden fence. This one was gradually replaced by stoned walls called « militaires », in the middle of the XIII century, under the leadership of Amadiou the VI d'Albret.

MEILHAN : A FORTIFIED PLACE KNOWN BY ALL

The village center was developed a hundred or so meters away from the natural headland that overlooks the plain called the Tertre. 1

The shape of this urban core is still visible on the Napoleonian cadastral plan.



- Fortified enclosure
- Fortified houses
- Doors
- Probable existence of a barbican
- Ditches

It represents roughly a square with 225 meters sides, pressed on the north side along the edge of one of the terraces of the Garonne river and overhanging the plain with a depth of 45 meters.

On the south, the plain of the Tord stream has a rugged shape, with a narrow plain and slopes that resemble cliffs.

AN IDEAL GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

These topographical elements made Meilhan a strategic place feared by all.

The west side was the most vulnerable. In the case of an attack it gave access to the plateau, which was defended by the fortifications.



Dry ditch

The center of Meilhan shows all the specifications of a castelneau, with a habitat subordinated to a castle 2

Other architectural elements like the fortified house of Bageran 3, of the Cros of the Brotherhood 4 and of the Martin 5 home completed the defensive system of the village and most specifically at the Prat door. 7

At the bottom of this door, a 40 meter wide ditch was dug, along the castle road (still visible these days, on the north area). A fortification wall more than 4 meters high and a ring road took place all the way and overlooked the ditch.

The Meilhan castle towers, situated in the north of the castelneau, improved this defense ensemble.

THE DOORS : STRATEGIC ELEMENTS OF THE FIRST ORDER

These points of passage, vital for business and trade allowed access to the heart of the town. However, in case of a siege, these points would remain vulnerable.

This is why throughout the middle ages, architects would improve these defense elements, by building towers often twinned, drawbridge, a spike strip and a weep hole.

The high tower and a part of the fortification that you can see respectively on your right side and your left side testifies of the willingness of the lords of Meilhan to protect the bourg castral as best they could.

Specialists mention the possible presence of a weep hole. It was in fact, an advanced fortification that protected the main entrance.

Everyone has their own technic

Find the location and the name of assault tactics



- A- the Trebuchet
- B- the catapult
- C- the ladder
- D- the battering ram
- E- the bell tower



City Gateway - Algues Mortes (30)



Tower of Meilhan



Diagram of the mechanism of a drawbridge counterbalanced



Fortification of the main entrance door (frame bridge) City of Carcassonne (11)

Answer : p - 5
q - 4
e - 3
o - 2
e - 1

A TOWN UNDER CONTROL

THE CONSULS HOUSE



A dress code for everyone

Can you find which clothes belong to whom ?

- A- BISHOP : I'm wearing gloves, and I'm holding a cross
- B- KNIGHT : I'm holding a sword and I'm wearing a chain mail
- C- MERCHANT : I'm wearing a purple robe and a golden hat
- D- SISTER : my hair is covered with a blue and white cloak
- E- PEASANT : I cut wheat using a sickle
- F- LORD : I'm wearing a belt and a golden brooch



THE MEILHAN FOUNDING ACT

In Meilhan, the founding act took shape during the development of the fortified enclosure.

Most of the XI and XII century villages were born from the lords willingness to bring a new kind of people.



Oath of the future citizen
Book of statutes and customs of Agen
Middle of the XIIIth century
Source : Médiathèque d'Agén

The growing number of villages was inseparable from the lordship development and the expanding economy of this period.

The lords aimed to increase their power and their wealth.

Fort Guilhem of Meilhan, first known lord, conceived the first customs chart, also called « consuetudines », that allows rights to the lords which are a source of important gain.

THE BIRTH OF BOURGEOISIE

The upper class benefitted from low tax rates in exchange of deeds and obligations demanded by the lords.

This whole codification was known as « freedom ».

As the feudal system dictated, the knights, after taking a fidelity oath to the lord, settled amongst the upper class. This explains the presence of numerous fortified houses, owned by the knights.



Pledging allegiance to the king of France
Source : bibliothèque nationale de France



Two-sided seal of Marmande
Moulding of the XIIIth century
Source : Archives départementales

THE URBAN POWER : TOOLS AT THE SERVICE OF THE TOWN

During the foundation of the urban laic government, new types of relations, tools and exchanges appeared and generated the creation of a covered market under which there were weight and measurement scales, a consul house, records, the customs safe and the town seals.

The seals allowed authentication and legitimized decision making.

THE REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE OF MEILHAN

In the second half of the XIII century or at the start of the XVI century, the people of Meilhan stood against their lord regarding certain aspects of their customs.

After a « establiment » that was decided only by consuls and aldermen, the people of Meilhan, at the beginning of the XIV century, were taken away and reduced their allowance to their lord, Amanieu VII, sire d'albret.

THE CONSULS HOUSE, A STRATEGIC PLACE

The consuls house was an important center of decisional power in the administrative, judicial, political and economical conduct of the town.



Courrèges Hotel

In Meilhan, it stood at the « Hotel Courrèges » location. It was called the « brotherhood house » and regrouped 24 aldermen 4 of which were consuls elected every year.

An oath ceremony took place in the Saint Cybard church to reinforce the legitimacy of this act.

A CLOSED CO-OPTATION SYSTEM

Each consul exercised his function for a year and couldn't be reelected before a five year period.

Starting from the XVI century, they were chosen amongst the upper class adults, legitimate sons, catholic or protestants, devoid of any prosecution. According to the co-optation policy, consuls themselves elected their successors.

During the religion wars of the XVI century the opposed catholics and protestants, it was decided that only the catholics would have the right to become first consul.

A NEW COVERED MARKET

In 1615, after obtaining the privilege of enjoying fairs and markets from Louis XIII, the official people of Meilhan decided to erect a new covered market in the heart of the town, because the old one was close to being a ruin.

In 1635, rooms were built above the public hall, they were used by consuls and aldermen for their meetings.

Today, the building doesn't allow to appreciate the original planning, as it was deeply modified over the years.



Old market hall



Public well located rue de la vieille halle

Answers
1-c
2-d
3-a
4-e
5-f
6-b

A STRATEGIC CASTLE

« WHO SEES MEILHAN, IS NOT INSIDE MEILHAN »



A ROYAL AUTHORITY CONTESTED

At the end of the IX century, under the reign of Charles le Chauve, the kingdom is overrun by pandemic, famine and invasions.

The royal authority is no longer respected by a large part of vassals. Insecurity reigns.

This period is the beginning of a generalization of private wars and territories feudalization.

A large number of free men are placed under the protection of powerful people.



City of Carcassonne

THE EMERGING OF FORTERESSES

The building of forteresses is part of the conquest strategy, ensuring the control of a territory, affirming the authority of the lord and favoring the development of a clientele of vassals.

Fortified houses like the one in Meilhan are in the center of this powerful system.

Without a castle, a lord is nothing. The castle is the symbol of his power.

An era, a castle

Find the era of each castle



1



2



3



4

THE FIRST FORTIFIED BUILDING

In the IX century, donjons appear under rudimentary forms. Mostly wooden, surrounded by numerous palissades and a ditch.

The first feudal mound are big wooden towers placed on a dirt hill.

Mounds represent a place of prestige and authority as being the only refuge for the population.

During a siege, the food stored on the ground floor allows people under attack to resist and wait until the enemy troops retreat.



The castle as sketched by M. Maubourguet

THE CASTEL OF MEILHAN

The castle of Meilhan, no longer there today, occupied a crucial strategic location.

It was built in the north of the town, between the plain of the Garonne and the main entrance, represented by the Prat door.

Its two big towers were over 30 meters high and occupied a double purpose :

to identify far away enemies coming from the Garonne and to defend the plateau.

The castle secured an effective control of the Margellene path, on which stood a fortified wall and a rampart walk.

In the bottom part of one of the towers was a prison whereas in the other one was the access to an underground path.

In 1622, under Louis XIII order, the citadelle was dismantled.



Watercolour of the ruins of Meilhan castle - source unknown

THE BIRTH OF FEUDALISM

In each region, the local lords are the holders of the estate and military power.

They represent the only authority that counts in peoples eyes and become the most prominent people of this new aristocracy.

They still pretend to be the king's vassals but they are no longer the representatives of the royal power. The king, whose place on the throne is threatened, depends on those powerful vassals and no longer intervene in the principdoms in the south of the Loire river.

During the X and the XI century, a new hierarchy of powers is established. In this context, fortified castles will grow all over France.



Castral Mound



Life in a dungeon

- A- Hill forts - X
- B- fortified castle on a mound - XII
- C- fortified castle belted with ramparts - XV
- D- chateau de plaisance - XVI

Answers :
1-C 2-D 3-B 4-A



Stone Knight
Keystone of Meilhan Castle

GARONNE

A NOURISHING RIVER

Lorem ipsum



THE PEACEFUL FORCE

The Garonne river starts in the Spanish Pyrenees in the Val d'Aran. It takes its source from the mountain range Maladeta where the iced stream loses itself momentarily in the Tour du Toro before reappearing in the valley, 30km further.

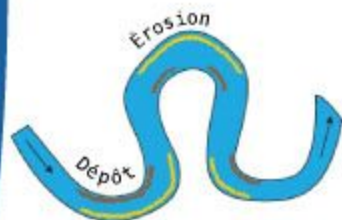
The river is then fed by big affluents located on the right bank, including the Ariège, the Tarn, The Lot and The Dordogne.

The Garonne finishes its run in one of the vastest estuary of Europe : The Gironde estuary (75km long and 12km wide, a total of 635km²).

Even if the river catchment area spreads over a big part of Aquitaine, it is the smallest of the five French rivers. Its floods can happen suddenly and impetuously.

THE SMALLEST FRENCH RIVER

The Garonne runs over 650km between its source and its estuary. Its regular flow rate measured in Mas d'Agenais is about 630m³/s and can go up to 8000m³/s during flooding episode.



The evolution of the Garonne river bed



Old Garonne arm in the Meilhan plain

On the other hand, sedimentary particules deposit on the opposite river bank. In a few years time, the two elbows of a meander can join and form, eventually, a dead arm. This phenomenon, visible in Meilhan, gets stronger during the floods.

When the water level is low, its flow rate can be reduced to 190m³/s. This period, called « étiage », usually goes from July to the end of September.

THE CREATION OF A MEANDER

The topography of the valley as it stands in Meilhan enables the creation of wide meanders : a gentle slope (24cm/km) and an alluvial plain of a width of about 5km wide.

Therefore, the landscape is sculpted by the water that streams.

In a meander, erosion forms on the concaved river bank (outside of the curve), where the current is the fastest.



Meilhan looking down the meander of the Garonne



The steamboat « Lot et Garonne » in front of the Meilhan dock in 1894

THE RIVER TRAFFIC

The business trade on the Garonne is known since the gallo-roman times. The river traffic reaches its peak around 1830.

9000 crossings per year are counted at the Lot and Garonne junction. More than 150000 tons of wine, cereals, wood, hemp, and fruits are transported by boat. However, this intense business trade depended on the river's tantrums.

The traffic was slowed down when the boats would go upstream with their cargo. The use of steam powered engines was almost absent and the ascents were done by resorting to towing. This consisted of pulling a rope between the boats mast and the bank and hitching up to horses, cattle or men to pull the embarkation.

Today, The Garonne is navigable only for cargo ships, container ships and passenger ships, from the estuary up to the Pont de Pierre in Bordeaux.

In castets-en-Dorthe (30km de Meilhan), the river traffic uses the Canal de Garonne (see sign 8), navigating was becoming dangereuse on the river. These days, fishing, boat trips or canoeing are the main activities.



The Meilhan dock in 1894

A Moving river

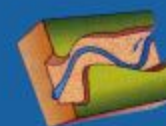
Reorganize the steps of the meander creation.



1



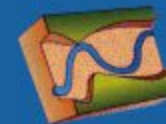
2



3



4



5

Answers : 2-4-1-3-5

THE ENGLISH BREACH

THE ART OF DEFENSE: TUNNELS, CHICANES, WALLS



AQUITAINE : A VERY SOUGHT AFTER REGION

Aliénor d'Aquitaine is rejected by the king of France Louis VII in 1152 for committing adultery.

The beautiful Alienor takes back her territories in the south west of France and gives them away to her new husband Henri II Plantagenêt, futur king of England (1154). Henri, refusing to recognize the king of France's authority, engages a fight against his lordship.

During three centuries, these rivalries go through moments of tension and conflicts, but also moments of appeasement.



Illustration of a jousting scene in the 13th century

MEILHAN UNDER SIEGE

With its strategic location, Meilhan was a coveted place. In 1345, Count Derby (representative of the English crown) besieged Meilhan. He tried to attack the town via the plateau, because of its easy and more vulnerable access.

He positioned siege machines in front of the fortified walls. Tall wooden towers were erected in order to allow crossbow men to shoot their arrows. Mangonels or trebuchets threw massive stones on the town's fortifications without causing any damages.



The defensive chicane of Meilhan

MEILHAN TAKEN OVER

The Count of Derby resorted to another tactic and tried to find a more vulnerable part of the town.

This tactic was set up in the lower part of La Roque, yet well protected by its narrow streets, its dense housing, its right angled chicane and the fortified house of the Cros.



Pateme, chicane défensive Eze-village (06)

The ditches were filled by the villains of the country, using copious amounts of wood and hay. He installed 300 archers and ordered 200 men protected by shields to go and break through the walls with iron spears.

They were able to create an opening allowing ten front men to enter.

The men broke into the heart of the town with rage forcing back the defenders towards the church and the bourg. Therefore taking over the fortress of Meilhan.

Some of the besieged took refuge in the church and according to the legend surrendered to the English. They had to join the English crown so their lives would be spared. The others were executed by sword.

The Count Derby left a small garnison and 2 English administrators, long enough for the situation to stabilize. Meilhan became French again in 1442.



« The Plantagenet's Agen Territory in 1152 »
D'après Jean Burias, Atlas historique français

THE UNDERPASS

As Claude Maubourguet and Marc Jautard described in their publication entitled « Chroniques de vies à Meilhan » an underpass went through the bourg. It played an important role in case of escape or fallback.



Meilhan tunnel entrance

One of the openings is situated near one of the castle towers. The second still visible to this day is on the south east side of the town.

This gallery is approximately 200 meters long, composed by a vaulted masonry of 2,5 meters wide and around 3 meters high.



Meilhan tunnel exit



Tunnel plan

The entrance of the tunnel was protected by two towers which were taken down permanently in 1831 because of the threat of falling on houses below.

According to a townsman, a second branch of the underground heads toward the bourg.

A weapon each

Find the name of these weapons.



- a- axe
- b- crossbow
- c- sword
- d- dagger
- e- bow
- f- club
- g- shield

Answers :
1-c 2-g 3-f 4-d 5-e 6-a 7-b

THE PORT

MEILHAN'S SECOND LUNG



AN INTENSE BUSINESS TRADE

Meilhan's geographical location favored the business trade.

The port was a simple loading and unloading dock, situated in the natural curve formed by the stream Tord and protected from the River Garonne.

The flourishing business of wine, cereals, fish, tobacco and mother-of-pearl made it necessary to build another hall in the La Roque area.

This hall was demolished in the middle of the XIX century, during the construction of the canal.

THE VERY SPECIFIC ART AND CRAFT



Mother-of-pearl buttons

Made out of seashells harvested in the Garonne, mother-of-pearl jewelry was a big part of the Meilhan economic expansion.

This craft used fresh water mussels (also called « mulettes ») which after being polished and carved, became buttons, rings and pendants.

The 3 workshops disappeared from Meilhan because of the seashell over-exploitation in the river Garonne.

This raw material, for a time, was then imported before the high cost of transport were to kill the



Abalnessucha as the ones in the Garonne

THE BRIDGE OF LA ROQUE

The bridge over the Tord stream, called the bridge of La Roque, was highlighted ever since the XII century, as a crucial structure that was the only way to connect Marcellus, Gaujac, Couthures and on a larger scale, Bordeaux and Toulouse. The canal didn't exist yet and the Garonne then ran at the foot of the cliff.

The exceptional flood of April 1770 (measured at 11,2 meters) devastated the plain and swept away boats, houses and cattle. This caused famine to the whole region.



Sailing on the Garonne

THE VIADUC AND AQUADUCT ROLES IN MEILHAN

During the construction of the canal, the technical difficulties linked to the floods of the Tord stream required particular attention.

The port topography forced the engineers to design another way of controlling the waters.

In the lower part, an aqueduct was built to direct the Tord stream waters.



Viaduc de Meilhan

On top of it, a viaduct allowed people to walk and transport goods up to the dock of the river.

In the upper part, the bed of the canal was built out of limestone.

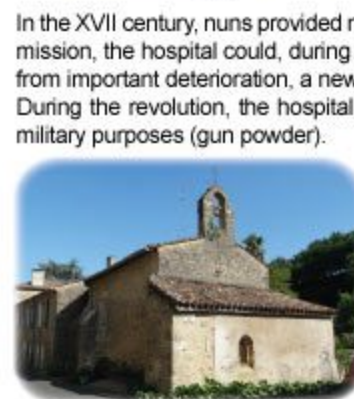


Hospice

THE HOSPICE

The hospice is one of the oldest buildings of the village. Founded at the end of the XVI century thanks to donations, it offered accommodation to poor and sick people. There was only 6 beds, 3 for men and 3 for women.

Previously called the hospital, it was, from the XVI to the XVII century, managed by one of the consuls of the town.



Hospice chapel

THE CHAPEL

A chapel, attached to the hospital was built during the first half of the XVII century and then consecrated in December 1637.

Its rectangular shape was originally vaulted. Later on, windows and doors were enlarged and vaults replaced with a ceiling. A sacristy was added in the middle of the XIX century.

The artist Giovanni Masutti intervened in this chapel in 1938, he painted or restored the fake marble ornament of the altar, the tabernacle and the pediment. He also painted a representation of Sainte Scholastique.

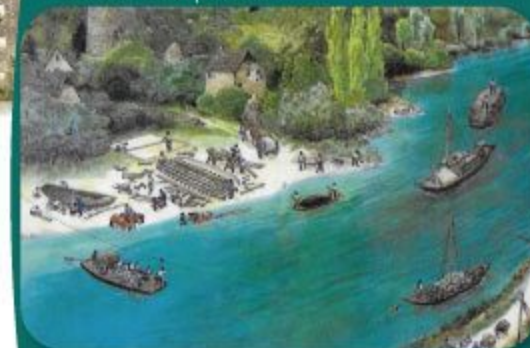
Chapel altar



Hospice chapel (Bell-tower wall)

Life around the river

Find the different profession



1



2



3



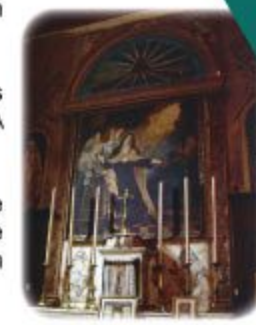
4



5

- A- ship's carpenter
- B- boatmaster
- C- pit Sawyer
- D- sand fisher
- E- ferryman

Answers :
1-C 2-E 3-B 4-D 5-A



Chapel altar

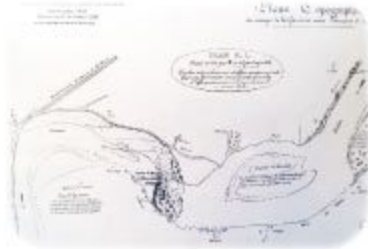
DAMMING SYSTEM

SIMPLE AND CONTROVERSIAL TECHNIQUES



CALIBRATION OF THE GARONNE

The section of the river located between the Lot junction and the Gironde department was called the « medium Garonne » section (24cm/km slope) by the geographer Pierre Desfontaines.



The river ran lazily in its alluvial plain, and was able to change track on the occasional simple flood (défluviation).

This unpredictable nature, brought the institutional deciders to put in place a plan to develop the minor bed of the Garonne.



Garonne Calibration Plans
Source : Archives départementales

AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT

Creating a unique bed was an answer to mariners and farmers expectations. This allowed mariners to get constant draught for boats to navigate whereas farmers would benefit from the protection of their property.

This large scale project was designed by Jean-Baptiste de Baudre and was realized by roads and bridges engineer Baumgarten between the years 1830 and 1845. A 180 meter channel was created.

When an island of the Garonne would attach definitely to the mainland, people at the time called it « landings ».

Starting from these projects of recalibrating the Garonne, the agricultural development in the alluvial plain became generalised.

When the farmers participated or facilitated the work, they could benefit from alluvium concessions and free use of these lands.

Harvests in this very fertile land made peasants wealthy.



Melhan overflow during a flood

DAMMING SYSTEM

Adding to the calibrating of the river, dams are built to protect cultivable land from the floods.

This means constructing grass covered hills that would measure 4 to 6 meters high and could be around 20 meters thick at the base.

The aim is to resist the most violent flood current. We call them familiarly « mattes ».

Garonne's grass covered « mattes »



Garonne's grass covered « mattes »

When there's a flood and the amount of water cannot be contained in the river minor bed, men designed overflows that allowed water to penetrate areas surrounded by « mattes » (also called compartments). The water is contained and controlled.

Alluvion deposits spread slowly all over the lands making them more fertile.

Some areas of the plain are open to the flood whereas others are closed.

Trade unions are created in order to harmonize defense systems and avoid inequalities preventing people to be advantaged by higher dams.

FLOOD WATERS DRAINAGE SYSTEM

After the flood, the extra water needs to be evacuated, in order to save the harvest and prevent cultures from drowning.

Draining too fast would provoke soil erosion, all the dirt on the ground surface would stream to the river, carried by the retiring water.

Collecting ditches allow the water to stream up to the river. Floodgates are placed at the Baqueyron level. Familiarly, we call them « shovels ». They're lift up to slowly evacuate water during the flood recede.

Men were able to adapt, transforming a vulnerability into a nourishing force.



Baqueyron spitway



Dam failure



Devastated plain after a flood

Garonne's fishes

Find the names of the fishes on the pictures :



1



2



3



4

- A- catfish
- B- carp
- C- pike
- D- perch

Answers :
1-D 2-B 3-A 4-C



People being evacuated

A PARTICULAR GEOLOGY

LA FONT D'UZAS



Geology of the Terre cliff

MEILHAN UNDER THE SEA

Alluvions deposits that we can observe on the Meilhan cliffs, go back to the end of the Tertiary period (between 12 and 5 million years, late Miocene).

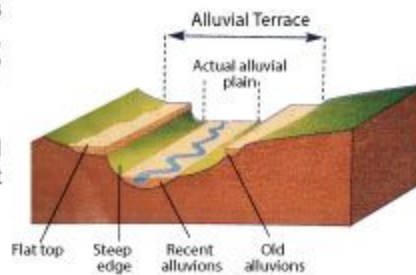
Hot tropical climates and cold ones come and go.

During the cooling period, sea retires to the west, leaving the Bazas and Bordeaux regions ; we call that marine regression.

Continental sand and clay laid on the ground. Full of iron oxide, they would sometimes have an ochre color. The first alluvial terraces of the Garonne would form. These layers would contain few fossils.

During the quaternary period, 4 ice ages succeeded one another (Wurm, Riss, Mindel, Gunz) and come back every 100 000 years.

During these episodes, the water level would go down 120 meters and the coast line would retire for over 50km.



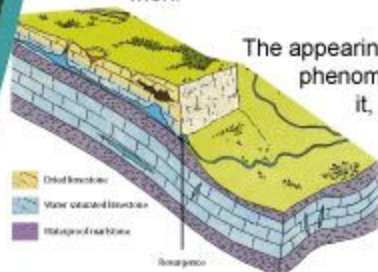
Sketch of the Creation of an alluvial terrace of the Garonne

LA FONT D'UZAS, AN ANCIENT SOURCE

This fountain is already used by the Celtic Vesate tribe. During the Gaule romanization, the fountain continues to be used.

According to Jean Maurin, a cult was held at the fountain « which would hydrate and fertilize ». A tut stone arrangement was built and restored several times. This source has never dried up.

The path leading to the Font d'Uzas from the canal was created by men.



Sketch of a resurgence formation

The appearing of this outside source is a very frequent phenomenon called resurgence. To understand it, you just have to observe the different mineral layers that deposited on each other.

THE CANAL LATERAL OF THE GARONNE

The canal project goes back to 1820.

It allowed to join the canal du midi and assured connection between the Atlantic ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.



Canal bridge in construction
Source : archives départementales

Bridge over the canal, during construction

The goal was to avoid going through the Gibraltar channel and travel 3000km.

The construction started in 1830, under the supervision of the Magendie company, and its chief engineer Jean-Baptiste de Baudre. Several thousand people were employed on different sites along the way.

It's a 193km long construction, consisting of 53 floodgates and

A DIFFICULT CONSTRUCTION

The canal lateral, in its Girondine area down to Agen, is positioned on the left side of the Garonne. It's leaned to the first alluvial terrace, to avoid being exposed to floods.



Font d'Uzas

In Agen, it takes the right side via a 250 meter long canal bridge that crosses the river.

In Meilhan, the topographic and hydrographic constraints made the construction difficult and perilous.

The engineers had to make it pass between the cliff and the river. They had to dig through the unstable rock, push back the river a few dozen meters and deal with the waters of the Tord stream that could sometimes be impetuous.

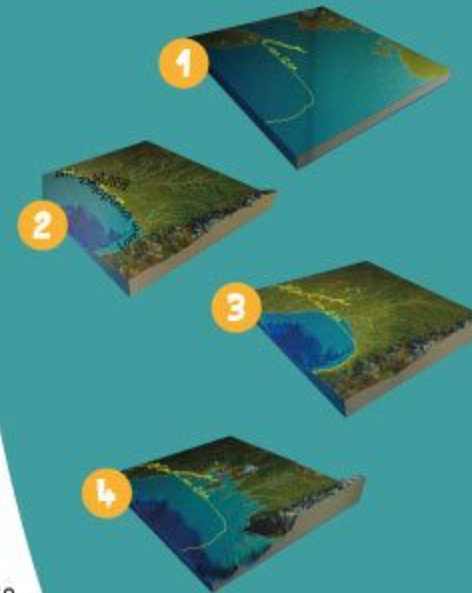
During the XIX century the canal was mainly used for the transportation of goods, but was quickly taken over by the train.

Known today as canal des deux mers (two seas canal), it's now only used for leisure purposes whereas its towing path is now a green way used by cyclists and walkers.

The Aquitaine in the past

200 million years

Put in chronological order the pictures below



- A- 3 million years
- B- 40 million years
- C- Today
- D- 204 million years

Answers :
1-D 2-C 3-A 4-B



Canal des deux mers

THE LA GRAVETTE CASTLE

INFLUENT FAMILIES RESIDENCE



A DISCRETE AND REFINED PROPERTY

The chateau de La Gravette was the property of several successive influential families.

Falsely referred to as the chateau du Cros, it was built by the Lacrosse family around 1630.

The hamlet was already called « La Gravette ». The castle was expanded at the beginning of the XIX century.

On the Napoleonic cadastral plan of 1826, standing on the 2 acres of land were a house, a stable, a garden, a vineyard and a little lake.



Contre-amiral de Lacrosse

THE ADMIRAL OF LACROSSE

Jean-Baptiste Raymond de Lacrosse, born on the 6th of September 1760 in Meilhan, was a significant figure in the towns history.

After attending the marine guards school in Rochefort as a student officer, he became lieutenant.

In 1779, he went to the Antilles aboard the frigate La Fripone with which he took over three enemy ships.

When he got back, he boarded another mission aboard the Argonaute where he once again distinguished himself. Promoted to sub-lieutenant in April 1782, he set sail for the Indian Ocean on board the Cleopatra.

Thanks to his bravery, his determination and his sense of obligation, he actively participated in chasing away 18 British vessels to which he was

confronted. He received his lieutenant vessel stripes in 1786.

Named ships captain in 1792, he set sail for the Martinique to get the young French Republic recognized.



Bataille des droits de l'homme

senior captain at 36 years old.

He turned down Bonapartes offer of marines minister. He was sent for two years as the governor of the Guadeloupe and became marine commissioner of the Havre and finally commander in chief of the national operation armada in Boulogne before concluding his career at the prefecture maritime in Rochefort.

He received the rank of commander of the Legion d'honneur and the title of baron d'Empire by Bonaparte. During the restoration, Louis XVIII made him knight of Saint-Louis for his services to his country.

Soon after his retirement in January 1816 he came to Meilhan to spend his last days on his homeland. He had a chapel made in the rock with a funeral chamber where he rested after his passing in 1829.



La Gravette castle

The Lawton family

THE LAWTON FAMILY

The 21st of February 1831, Jean-Edouard Lawton purchased the chateau de le Gravette and all its furnishings from the admiral de Lacrosses son.

The Lawtons were rich Bordeaux wine merchants. Three generations of Lawtons would live at La Gravette.

Daniel, Jean-Edouards son and his children Edouard, Jeanne and Marie often reside in the chateau.

Jeanne and Marie left an artistic testimony of Meilhan, represented by a collection of remarkable charcoal drawings.

Léo Drouyn, a family friend and a founding member of the Bordeaux Arts Friends Society, was probably Jeanne and Marie's art teacher.



Marie Lawton enfant

During their numerous journeys in Meilhan, the girls drew the castle of La Gravette and the landscapes nearby.

Marie found in these landscapes what she needed to express her romantic soul.



Meilhan, the old town - charcoal - Marie Lawton

THE LA GRAVETTE CASTLE : A PLACE TO LIVE, A SCHOOL THEN A CITY HALL



1974 - Destruction of château de Gravette

before turning it into the city hall.

When the domaine was sold in 1881, the Lawton family took back the XVII century most beautiful furniture and tapestries and brought them to their castle La Cruz in Floirac.

Meilhan city hall bought the La Gravette castle and transformed it into a school

The 1883 beginning of the school year was the first in this new building and will welcome kids for the 78 following years.

In 1974, the building, deeply attacked by termites was reconstructed. Today, it hosts the city hall and the post office on the ground floor, and a flat on the first floor.

An era, a ship

Find the names of the boats below



- A- clippers
- B- galion
- C- Chinese jonque
- D- roman galley
- E- caravelle



Map of La Gravette castle
Source : Cadastre de Bartheut (1672)

Answers :
1-C-2-B-3-A-4-D-5-E

HUMID AREA - MARSH

A RICH AND FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM



A PRECISE ORGANIZATION

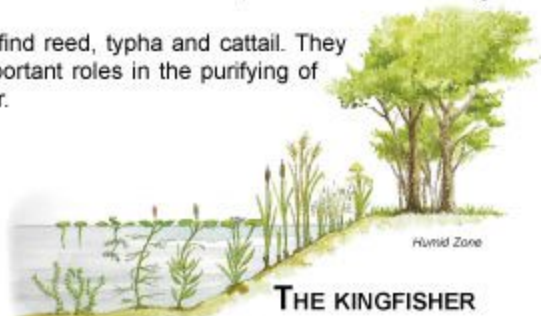
In front of you there is one of Meilhan's humid areas. This marsh is dominated by hydrophilic plants which represents a peculiar ecosystem.

The spreading of these plants isn't a coincidence. Each species develops in a deep and peculiar environment.

On the water front, there are usually low plants, strands, sedge or even marsh iris.

The largest belt of vegetation is the herbarium. These big plants, with their stems and roots under water, can reach 2 meters high.

You can find reed, typha and cattail. They have important roles in the purifying of the water.



THE KINGFISHER

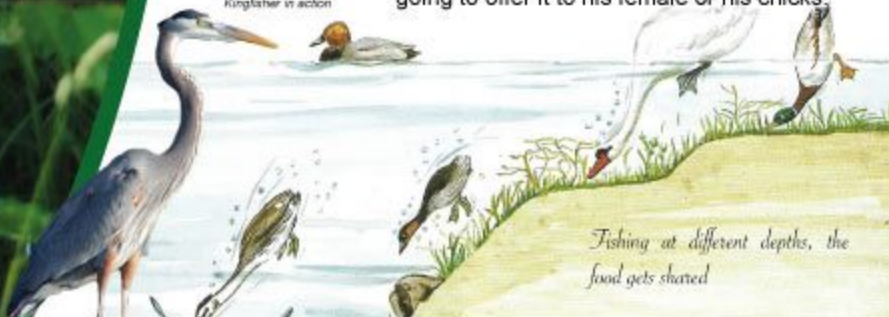
The kingfisher is a good natural indicator of the quality of the aquatic environment. It's a small bright colored bird (17cm, 40g) turquoise on its back side and orange on its front.

Its beak is pointy. It typically flies fast, hovering over water. Don't try to find its nest in a tree, it nests on the river bank.

After catching prey, if the fish's head points towards the birds gullet, that means that it's going to eat it; if the fish's head is pointing in the opposite direction, it is going to offer it to his female or his chicks.



Kingfisher in action



Fishing at different depths, the food gets shared

DRAGONFLY OR DAMSELFLIES ?

Amongst the animals that you can easily observe here, the dragonfly is certainly one of the most beautiful and most gracious. There are two types of dragonflies.



DRAGONFLIES

They are big and stocky, their big eyes are close together and their rear wings are bigger than their front wings. The flapping of their wings is very fast. Their accurate flight is deadly to their preys, because they can accelerate easily, hover and even go backwards.

DAMSELFLIES

They are small, have a long and thin body, four identical wings and their eyes are further apart. They fly slowly. When the wind is strong, their mobility is limited.

MEGANEURA - THE GIANT DRAGONFLY

Meganeura is one of the biggest insects that ever existed on Earth. Its measurements were important, around 30cm long for a 70cm magnitude. 300 million year old fossils were found in the Allier or even in England, the Aquitaine was then under water.



Meganeura - the giant dragonfly

LADYBIRD

Easily recognizable with its black spots on its red back, the ladybird is one of the most popular insects.

It's the gardener's friend, because it eats a large amount of aphides.



Its body is in three parts : a head, a thorax and an abdomen.

The ladybird has six legs, two antennas and four wings.

Its red with black spots wing sheaths are hard and protect two fine wings, fragile and transparent, situated just underneath.

The ladybird uses its antennas to sense shapes, to detect odors and find its food. To shred its food, it uses the two very powerful mandibles in front of the mouth. It takes shelter for the winter at the foot of a tree.

THE SALAMANDER, AN IMPORTANT ECOLOGICAL INDICATOR

With its shiny black skin dotted with light yellow patches, the smooth skinned salamander is impossible to mistake. Measuring 20 to 30cm, it is active at night and when it's raining, it feeds on insects.

Near the water, it lives under rocks or old stumps. It cannot stand the frost, therefore, it digs holes in the ground to hide and hibernate until spring.

Contrarily to the others amphibians, who lay eggs, it gives birth to little larvae that look like newts.



spotted salamander

Will you be able to recognize them ?

Combine the 3 elements of the same tree

- 1- the chestnut tree
- 2- the hombeam
- 3- the oak tree



Answers :
 ▼ - C - 1
 ★ - B - 2
 ● - A - 3

THE CHURCH

HEART OF THE VILLAGE



SAINT-CYBARD

Very early in its history, Meilhan is occupied by religious buildings.

Originally, the first place of worship is situated near the Tertre. It sits on the oriental side of the rock promontory, overlooking the plain of the Garonne.

It's dedicated to Saint-Cybard (evangelist monk) and probably goes back to the V century after Christ.



Pinnacle on top of columns at the Meilhan's church

It was the starting point of a parish of which the definitive limits took shape in the X or XI century.

Later on, in the XI and XII century, because of the troubles and rivalries that were growing, this place of worship was transformed into a fortified priory. It then became an important defensive structure of the town. Remainings of the fortified wall base are still visible.

THE WILLINGNESS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES

The Taluyers priory's example, gives an idea of the defensive role of that kind of buildings. The walls thickness and the architecture that was chosen illustrate that perfectly. Arrowslit, crossbowslit and crenelation completed the defense structure.



Priory of Taluyers (69)

During religious wars, priories sheltered the protestants. They reinforced the fortifications before they were definitely destroyed during the counter-reform led by Louis XIII in the 1620's.

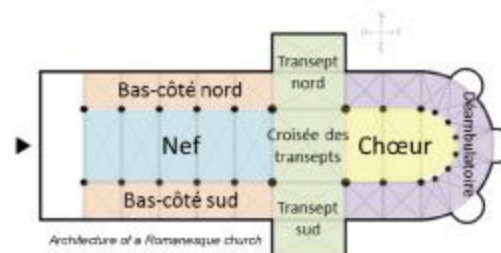
Note that the cemetery, once situated on one of the flanks, was used several times to take fidelity oaths between lords and knights, but also between lords and bourgeois.



Abbaye de Cadouin (24)



Masutti's pictorial decorations



Architecture of a Romanesque church

SAINT CYBARD FORMERLY SAINT-MICHEL

The church, as it is now, is a building built in the middle of XIX century by the Bordeaux engineer Alaux. It is inspired by Neo-roman architecture. At the time, the old Saint-Michel church that was built at the end of the XVI beginning of the XVII century, threatened to fall apart and was too dangerous for the worshippers.

The church is shaped like a latin cross, it consists of a five aisled nave and two aisles with side altars. All the vaults are ribbed and the heart is pentagonal, semi-dome shaped. After it's construction, the monument received no ornaments in particular. The heart was decorated in a Neo-gothic style. These ornaments have been preserved on the pillars and the ribs of the vault.

In the 1930s, the Italian painter Giovanni Masutti partially painted the heart with his friend and comrade Daniel Molinari.



Detail of Masutti's work

AN UNUSUAL ORIENTATION

One of the architectural peculiarities of the Saint-Cybard church rests on the location of its heart. Instead of pointing towards the east, it faces west. The main entrance opens towards the orient. There's no archive to explain why.

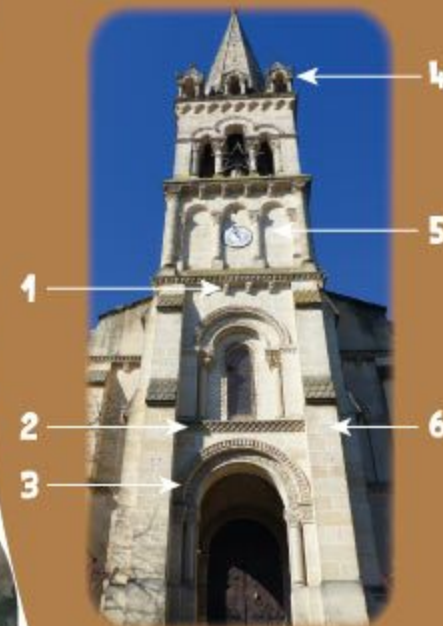
The church bell-tower is particularly tall. Its steeple rises at nearly 30 meters high. It is positioned at the entrance of the building.

The entrance presents ornamental details: columns, historiated capitals, herbal capitals. The sculptures on the capitals create extremely interesting symbolical eye catchers.

It represents a bestiary animated by extraordinary creatures that we can find in different places on this monument.

A load of details

Find the name of the different parts of the bell-tower



- A- a pinnacle
- B- a bracket
- C- a spur
- D- blinded arcades
- E- an arch
- F- a modillon

Answer :

0-9 0-9 A-4-5-D 6-C 1-2-F 3-E 4-A 5-D 6-C