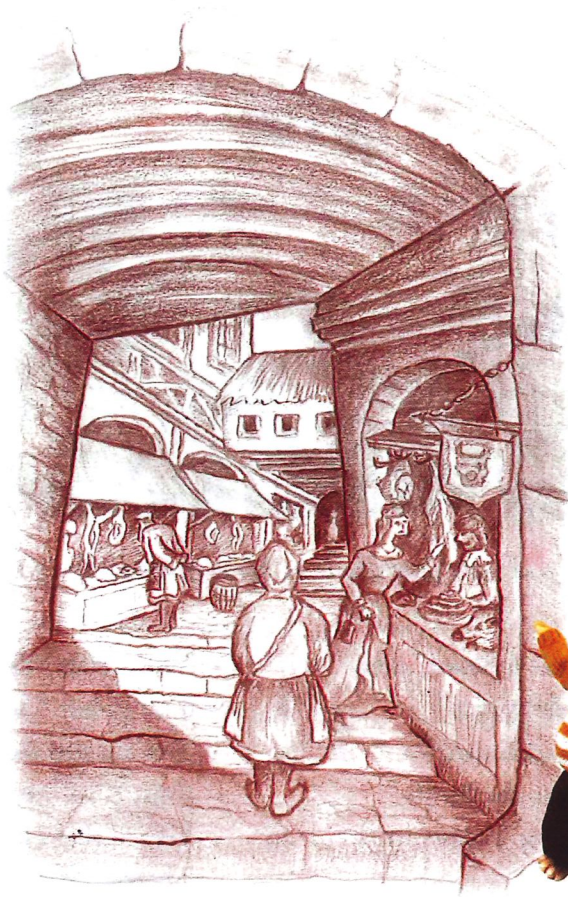


Discovery route through the town of Ax Les Thermes



For the young and not so young, 14 notice boards to help you discover the past of Ax Les Thermes just by strolling through it.



This route (1.7 km) will take you about an hour through the following sites :

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|---|
| 1 | The Couloubret and the Casino during the "Belle Epoque" | 9 | The ancient door from XVI th century |
| 2 | The church of Saint Vincent | 9 b | The bassins of Saint Jérôme place or bassins de l'Axéenne |
| 2b | The "thermes du Breilh" | 10 | Life and work in Ax les Thermes in the XVII th century |
| 3 | The bassin des Ladres in the XIV th century | 11 | The church of Saint Jérôme |
| 4 | The fountain of Coustou | 12 | The street "du Moulinas" |
| 5 | The Teich thermal baths | 13 | The fountain "du Couzillou" |
| 6 | The fountain "des neiges" | 14 | The bassin of "La Basse" |
| 7 | The street "des Escaliers" | | |
| 8 | The street "de la Boucarie" | | |

The boards include texts for children

The Couloubret and the Casino during the "Belle Epoque"

The name Ax-les-Thermes comes from the Latin "aquae" (waters); whether cold or hot they provide the backdrop to and life of the town. The town has always been a spa and some 63 springs feed several thermal baths which had their golden age during the 19th and the start of the 20th century: the "Belle époque"...

The thermal baths of the "Couloubret" take their name (couloubrou: grass snake) from the snakes which like to swim in hot springs! It was built in 1780 by Dr. Pilhes. In 1680, the Governor of Montauban underlined the "wonderful and immediate effects of the waters Ax", which attracted many celebrities, including the Duchess of Montmorency. During the restoration of the "Couloubret", in 1865, a very old intake was discovered, which the historian Félix Garrigou considered to pre-date the Romans.

The casino of Ax was opened in August 1903. As the centre of the social life of the spa, it not only attracted gambling but also operetta, theatre and poetry festivals.

Among the social elite and patients taking cures, the mountain people took an active part in the life of the town and it was at this time that professions associated with tourism and leisure

emerged, such as mountain guides or "ice porters" who climbed up into the high mountains to collect ice to chill the drinks of patients sipping on the "place du Casino"!

The station grew considerably with the arrival of the railway line at the end of the 19th century, driven by the local man Théophile Delcassé, who was then the Foreign Minister. This railway line was extended into Spain after the First World War, thanks to colossal public works and, in particular the Puymorens tunnel.

Opposite the former baths of the "Couloubret", the spa "Le Modèle" represented the renaissance of the town during the "Belle Epoque", when it was common to meet many celebrities such as the Minister Théophile Delcassé or the composer Gabriel Fauré.

In addition to the quality of its waters, a spa town had to offer entertainment to attract patients; the most popular of these attractions were held in the bandstands of the "Couloubret" or the "Teich". The development of the hot springs encouraged the development of new activities, such as mountain excursions and, later, skiing.

The church of Saint Vincent

The church of Saint-Vincent is the main religious building in the town and also the oldest. It was founded in 994 in a charter by Arnaud of Carcassonne donating the town to the powerful abbey Lagrasse. Tradition has it that Saint Udaud, an Italian vandal converted to Christianity and who evangelised Spain, was martyred at Ax by the Visigoths in 452.

The church held his remains until they were

transferred to Ripoll, on the other side of the Pyrenees, in Catalonia.

This holy place, which found itself beyond the walls in the Middle Ages lies beside a site known as "ville vieille" (old town) was probably the first urban structure in Ax. Its elegant volumes include several styles from the 12th to the 13th centuries. Inside, it accommodates several paintings by the Toulouse painter Roques.

The "thermes du Breilh"

The origin of the strange name Breilh may be an old Roman word "Breilha" (to rub), the Old Provençal word "Breich" (witch) or quite simply "Breilh" (heather)!

In any event, the strange and odorous vapours of the spring may well have led people to think of a witches den. But it was on this site that in 1815, Mr. Sicre a hotel keeper decided to tap the water and open a spa.

The colonnades and the main pavilion, in the purest "spa" style of the 19th century were completed by 17 baths, showers and four drinking fountains. One of them was nicknamed "miraculous" because of its effects on the respiratory tracts. In the same way, as its competitors, the "Teich", "Couloubret" or "Modèle", it treats arthritis, rheumatism, respiratory diseases and skin diseases.

3 The "bassin des Ladres"

In the Middle Ages, the "Barri des Bains" was on the outskirts of Ax, outside the walls but with its own wall. In the XIVth century, like today, it was an important, bustling place.

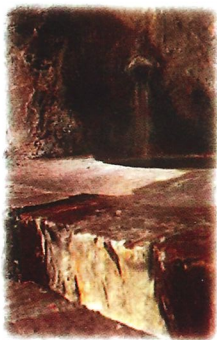
In 1241, probably to compensate for the damage inflicted by a fire, the Count of Foix accorded extensive tax privileges to the town. It only became more attractive and space between the walls became scarce; the town, was then surrounded by ramparts with several gates, including that of the "Barri des Bains".

The hot springs of Ax, access to and use of which have always been free, were used to wash wool, scald pigs and make soup, as much as to care for the body, such as the "fontaine des canons" which emerges at a temperature of 74°C.

In the Middle Ages, the "étuves" district did not have a good reputation. Beggars, prostitutes and tumblers took pride of place. Other outlaws hid there, such as the cathares, who were numerous until the start of the XIVth century!

Founded in 1260 by Count Roger IV of Foix at the request of St Louis, the hospital of Ax cared for soldiers who came back from the Crusades with leprosy. The basin was built in 1250 and access was free. It still bears the name "Bassin des Ladres" (lepers) and is fed by a spring which emerges at a temperature of 40°C.

Ax lies at the junction of the valleys and is ideally placed on the road from Toulouse to Barcelona and attracted all kinds of travellers; merchants, mule drivers, soldiers, actors and also brigands, beggars and pickpockets!



4 The fountain "du Coustou"

From these twin fountains which, during the Middle Ages were outside the city walls in the "Barri des Bains" sprang forth spring water at an average temperature of 68°C. It is one of the 63 springs listed in the town, which have a daily production of up to one and a half million litres a

day. Seven of them are hot springs (with temperatures of between 23 to 74°C), free access to which is one of the immemorial rights of the inhabitants of Ax.

The "Coustou" spring is considered to be ideal for liver infections.

5 The Teich thermal baths

In 1801, Dr. Boulié, a surgeon in Ax, decided to tap the thermal springs which sprang forth on his plot of the "Teich" on the edges of the Oriège.

The origin of the name may come from the Catalan "teix" which means yew. He built cabins and basic baths before he built a huge spa in 1834 to which he added a wooded park decorated with cascades and a kiosk.

At this time, 51 baths were supplied by the springs "l'eau bleue", "pyramide" and the six

springs of the "grotte".

The "Teich" was enlarged for commercial reasons but has retained its gateway and part of the 19th century buildings. It remains the main spa in the town and still caters for many patients, thanks not only to the quality of its waters but also its modern facilities.

The "porte d'Espagne", a vestige of the medieval fortifications of Ax, stood here until 1977.

6 The fountain "des neiges"

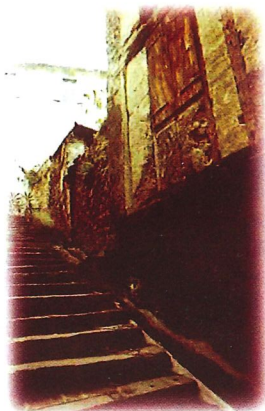
At the "fontaine des neiges", a 19th century stone line spouts hot water. This "drinking fountain" is now practically out of use for medical purposes, since the "Teich" spa is nearby, but it remains a pleasant place to relax. The river Oriège flows near it.

Its name could like the Ariège, come from the Gallic "brillant" (areg), or "Oriega" (that carries gold) !

This etymology is challenged, but one thing is

certain, the Oriège sparkles like silver!

Legend has it that the gold flakes found in the river are a gift from God to the inhabitants of Ax, who were corrupted by the Devil, who brought them temptation and avarice. God solved the problem by banishing Lucifer underground, placing the huge "roc de la Vierge" over him! Since then, the Devil struggles to get out thus making hot, sulphur charged water to spring forth from their contact with Hell.



7 The street "des Escaliers"

In former times, the "rue des escaliers" ran up to what could have been called the château of Ax, which has now disappeared.

A large number of medieval document mention the castle, which was the property of the Counts of Foix.

It probably stood in the top part of the town.

This street still has a half timbered house so typical of medieval architecture.

This house is one of the rare building that survived the fire of 1615. But the town has been ravaged by other fires in 1240, 1355, 1586 and 1880, which is hardly surprising; the materials used (wood and also "massaca" a daub based on straw) were light, and insulating but highly inflammable. Furthermore, as in all medieval towns, the houses were built cheek by jowl and fire could spread at frightening speed.

8 The street "de La Boucarie"

This dark, narrow street ran along side the walls of the castle of Ax. It is a virtually intact example of medieval urban architecture.

The anarchy of construction produced dark, narrow, winding streets with covered bridges from one house to another.

This accumulation of buildings was the result of the need to settle inside the city walls for safety but also, in Ax's case as from the 13th century, to take advantage of the tax privileges accorded by the Count of Foix.

In Old Provençal, "Boucarie" (boucario) means "boucherie" (butcher's shop).

As often in a medieval context, street names reflect the corporation which occupied it.

In this case, it is easy to imagine butchers with stalls in the street, with the benefit of the relative coolness of the place to help keep the meat but without sparing it from the flies or the dust...

9 The old door from XVIe century

Sculpted timber frames overhead, which could appear to be a walled-up window, were in fact the frame of a door inside a house.

The house was demolished in 1975 and only the doorframe remains.

Cornices with mouldings topped by two pillars with sculpted decorations representing a bust on each rising further in a cable moulding.

The history of the house and its style enable us to date this doorframe to the start of the 16th century.

The house may have been the property of a rich merchant since, at this time, trade between Toulouse and Barcelona and the prosperity of the textile industry gave Ax a certain economic ease.

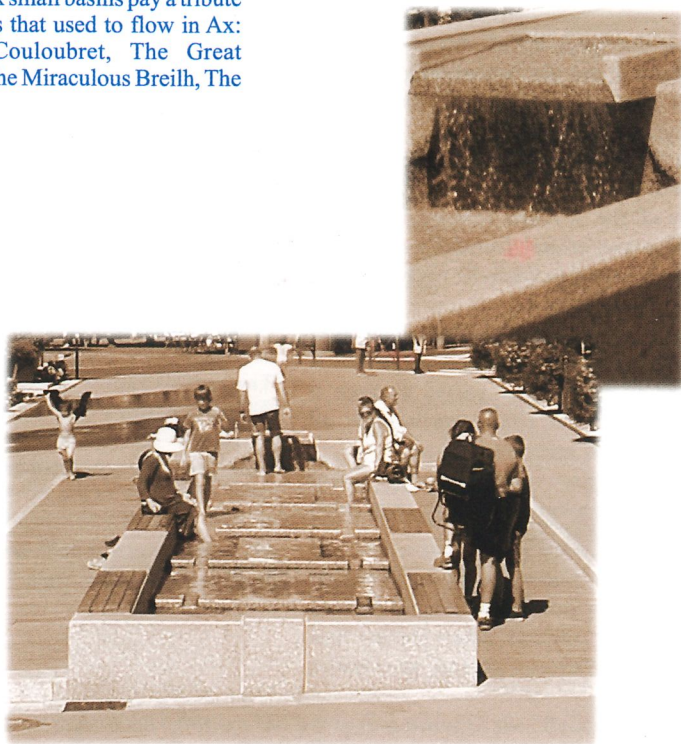
9 bis The basins of Place St Jerome also known as the “Axéenne”

Inaugurated on September 6, 2014, they were designed to support the Ax tradition of soaking feet in thermal water. Its location at the heart of the city, facing the shopping street, the St. Jerome Exhibition Chapel, the cable car station and near the thermal baths means to make spa waters more visible to the general public. It is fed by thermal water discharges and its surface is cleared of snow by reheated city water.

The water from the basins is used to heat the floor of the Saint Jerome chapel.

The names of these six small basins pay a tribute to the ancient springs that used to flow in Ax: The Mystery of Couloubret, The Great Sulphurous Model, The Miraculous Breilh, The

Teich Pastry Water, The Orlu and Teich Wells and the Teich Viguerie. This choice is the outcome of a research work on Ax spa waters carried out by the Ax schoolchildren in order to name this little jewel.





10 Life and work in Ax les Thermes in the XVII^e century

Like most towns in the county of Foix, Ax-les-Thermes was governed by "consuls" both for the everyday running of economic affairs and certain legal rights.

At this time, the "pays d'Ax" was involved in animal husbandry and the "messeguier" had his work cut out to supervise land rights on pastures and woodland.

Herds from Ax were known to go on transhumance as far as Spain.

At the start of the XVIIth century, penitents dressed in blue and white forcefully expressed the town's attachment to Catholic traditions and the Reform little support.

Ideally located on the Toulouse-Barcelona road, Ax-les-Thermes became a commercial centre. A large number of mule trains passed through it laden with wood, leather, cloth, cereals, wine, oil or salt, but also silks, saffron or ginger...

Overpopulated and unsanitary, town was struck by several terrible epidemics and in 1632, more than 600 people died of the plague.

From wool to cloth: the raw material and the know-how of its craftsmen thrust Ax-les-Thermes to forefront of textile towns.

Much of the local economy involved wood, both for construction and charcoal.

In 1669, Froidour, Inspector Royal of Fisheries and Forestry reported that the many fires and excessive amount of pasture land had impoverished the forestry resources of the region.

Whilst it was brilliant, active town, Ax-les-Thermes also attracted the sick and infirm. Around leprosy, beggars and the unwanted came to scrounge a living and access to the town was sometimes forbidden to them.

Ax-les-Thermes was a strategic town coveted by all and sundry and was protected by ramparts. The consuls kept sergeants and watchmen.

Ax-les-Thermes was a spa town first, and entrusted its fountains to a "raccoutreur" (mender) who was responsible for their upkeep.

11 The church of Saint Jérôme

At the time of the "Contre-Réforme" to fight against the influence of Protestantism in France, many movements were started by the Catholics. Such movements included the "blue penitents" who settled in Ax in 1607.

These militants laymen wanted "a promise from heaven that France would always remain Catholic".

The town which still had 84 blue penitents

between 1824 and 1881, rang for many years to the sound processions of penitents dressed in blue gowns and hoods.

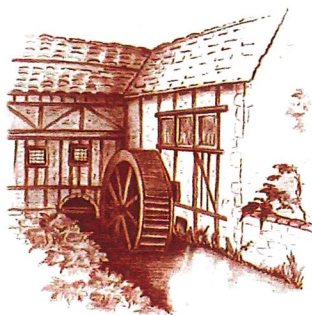
This church which has become a exhibition hall, houses woodwork of the Louis XIII style and, above all, a beautiful baroque retable dating from 1671 representing Saint Jerome and Marie Magdalene either side of Jesus. The simple, bare building is topped by a small bell tower.

12 The street "du Moulinas"

This street, as it name suggests, housed most of the town's mills and some houses have retained their millstones. In the 14th century, there were at least three mills with seven wheels. They were flour mills, since the "fulling mills" were on the Lauze. The wool, provided by the many herds in the region, was washed in spring water, fullled then woven.

The town used to have a "rue des tisserands" (weavers - now rue François Mansard).

This activity was sustained by the town's strategic position on the road between Barcelona and Toulouse, two important cities of drapers from the 12th to the 18th century. The weavers' and merchants' corporations flourished and from amongst them that most of the Cathares were recruited between the 12th and 14th centuries. Between 1296 and 1310, Ax was an important centre of this forbidden sect, thanks to the commitment of one of the town's son, the notary Pierre Authier, burned at the stake in Toulouse in 1310.



13 The fountain "du Couzillou"

The Couzillou, which emerges at a temperature of 54°C before flowing into the cold waters of the Lauze, is whitish and leaves a deposit of algae in its basin; this is due to the high content of "baregin" (or glairin), a vegetable plankton rich in trace elements and threadlike in appearance. The presence of baregin is a sign of the alkaline Ph of the water.

Gatien Marcaillou d'Aymeric

The former hotel Régina, on the other side of the bridge was the birthplace of Gatien Marcaillou d'Aymeric (1807-1855), the Ax pianist and composer, of whom Maurice Ravel said that he was the "true creator of the French waltz". He was, in any event a great success in the salons of the Second Empire and not only musically, since his best known waltz, Indiana, was inspired by his mistress at the time, a certain... George Sand !

The visit is over and to rest your sore feet try the hot spring water of the "Bassin des Ladres" which is the ideal remedy. Return there via the rue Marcaillou.

14 The Bass Basin

It was built in 1672 and is today located between the baths of Couloubret and the Casino. It is fed by the Basse and Rougeron springs.

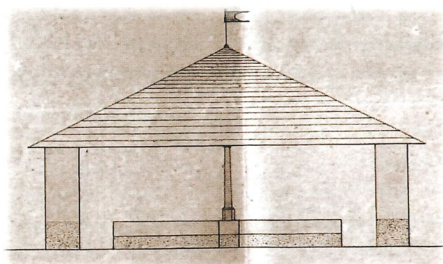
Throughout the 19th century until mid 20th century the basin was mainly used for rinsing linen because the water temperature was quite low (about 18 ° degrees C)

Pushing along their wheelbarrows, washerwomen brought there the laundry they had already washed in the Ladres basin fed by the high temperature Rossignol spring.

The long whitish filaments, called baregines or Axeine, floating on the surface are micro-organisms. These age-old filaments, so much older than dinosaurs, have microbicidal

properties and only grow in sulphurated waters between 15 ° and 45 ° C, when the water comes in contact with the oxygen (oxydation). Their therapeutic value has long been demonstrated.

Back in 1869 it had a slate roof supported by four pillars.

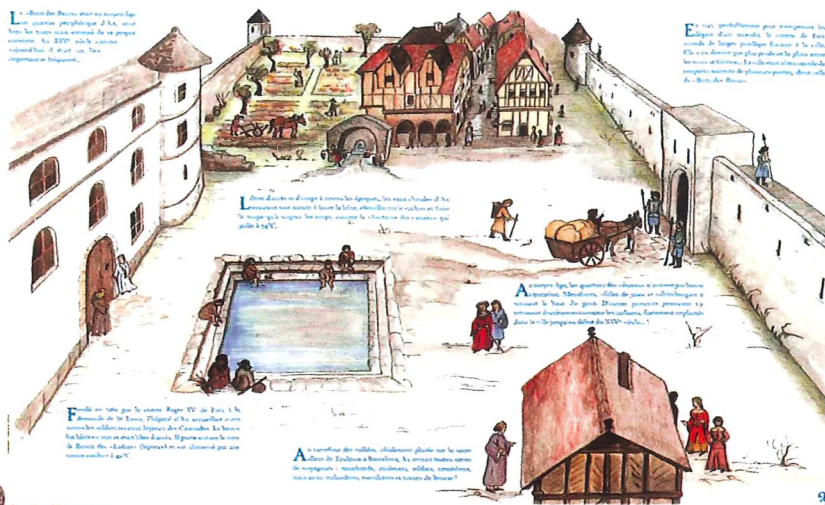


Discovery route through Ax Les Thermes

Le BASSIN des LADRES

vers le XIV^e siècle

Le Bassin des Ladres était un bain public. Les sources thermales d'Ax, avec leur eau minérale, ont été utilisées dès l'époque romaine. Au XIV^e siècle, on a reconstruit le Bassin et on y a installé des bains publics.



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En 1341, probablement pour protéger les bains d'un incendie, le comte de Foix ordonne la reconstruction du Bassin. On y a installé des bains publics et on y a installé des bains publics.

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Ax-les-Thermes

3

The third board at the "Bassin des Ladres"

This discovery route has been traced by the Municipality of Ax Les Thermes, with the participation of the French State, the Conseil Régional de Midi Pyrénées and the Conseil Général d'Ariège Pyrénées.



The municipality of Ax Les Thermes would like to thank all those who contributed to the production (text and photographs) of these boards.