



Descending the Lot



Along the Water and Through Time

The LOT Valley

The source of the river is found near Bleymard in Lozère and it flows into the Garonne at Aiguillon. The Lot River valley is 270 km long, but due to the meandering of the river, the true length of the river is 471 km.

As the river enters Quercy, it cuts deeply through the jurassic limestone of the Gramat and Limigne plateaus, creating cliffs containing numerous caves that have been frequented by man since prehistoric times.

During the Middle Ages, the cliffs became home to the first fortified hills, and later numerous castles and small feudal towns (Calvignac, Cénevières, Saint-Cirq-Lapopie). The river valley widens a little after Vers, and the limestone gives way to arid and stony slopes known as the “Cévennes”, and bulging and massive hills. These massive hills previously contained vineyards, as indicated by the many low dry-stone walls that climb the hills and converge at the summits

At the foot of these hills, the Lot meanders greatly (as in Cahors) and have deposited rich alluvian deposits, where corn/maize, tobacco, and fruit is grown. Today, grapes/vines are also grown, mainly downstream from Cahors.



Navigation on the Lot

From the 13th century onwards, the Lot became a vital trade route for Quercy. The first river improvements were documented in 1216. These were dams that had a gap (le passelis) at the end to allow for the passage of ships.

Nevertheless, the Lot remained a dangerous river, with lots of rocks and frequent floods. Shipwrecks were plentiful.

Between 1664 and 1672, Colbert had the locks between Cahors and Villeneuve sur Lot constructed. During this time the river was used to transport coal from Rouergue, grains, stave wood for barrel making, hemp, tobacco, and wine to Bordeaux, where most of the boats were dismantled.

In the 19th century, the development of Decazeville (Coal) and Fumel (iron) led to a large building campaign. Between 1840 and 1865, 74 locks were constructed or reconstructed between Decazeville and Aiguillon. These are the locks that we see today with their rounded walls and characteristic buildings.

The 20 meter long, flat-bottomed barge (known as the gabarre) became the norm on the river. In 1858, 300,000 tons of freight was transported along the river. However, the construction of the Cahors-Libos and Cahors-Capdenac rail lines in 1863 and 1886, dealt a fatal blow to river traffic. In 1926 the Lot was removed from the list of navigable waterways.



Day 1 Round trip from Saint-Cirq-Lapopie to the Saint-Martin-Labouval lock



① Crégols (Left riverbank)

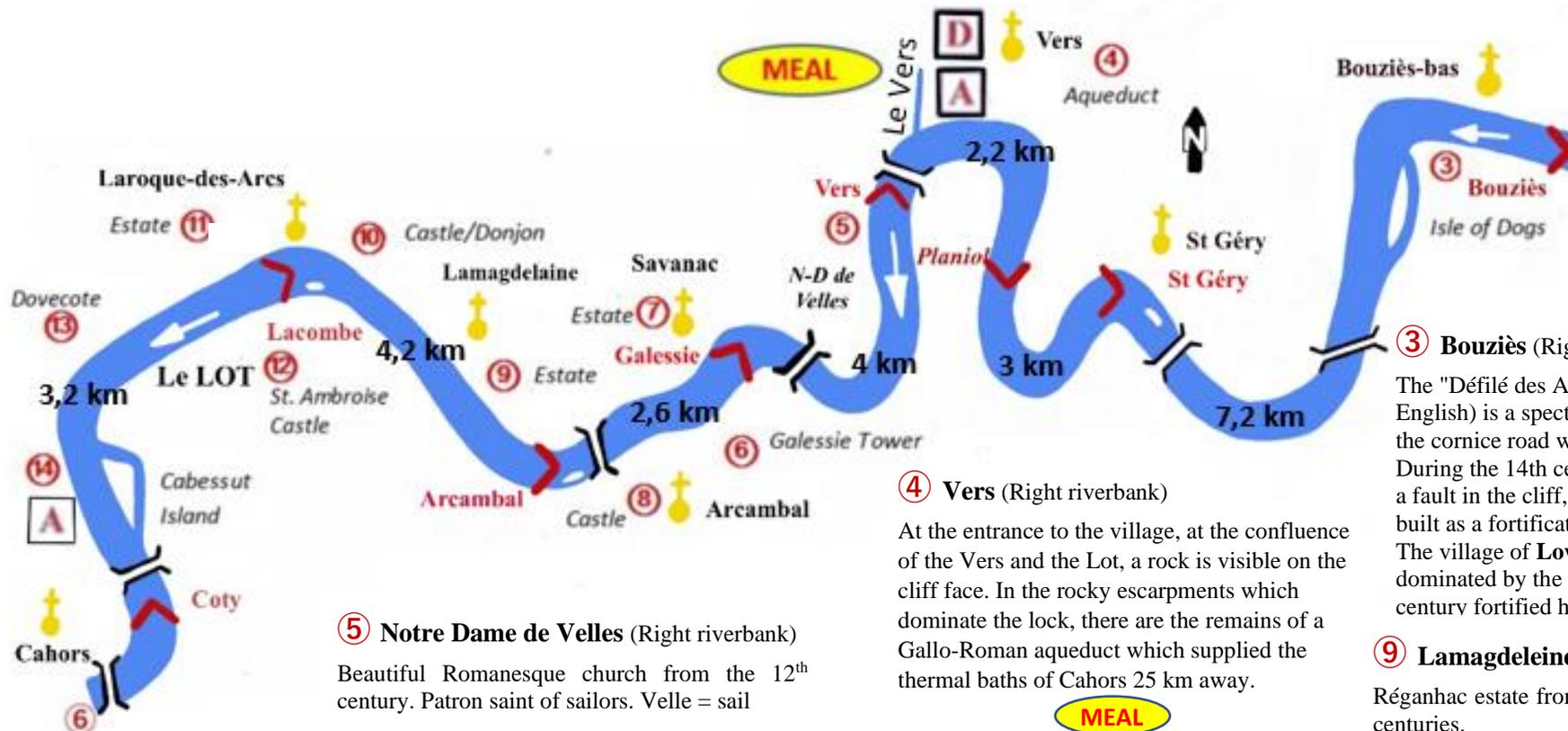
This village represents the rural architecture of the Quercy region, with its four-sloped roofs, pigeon towers/dovecotes, towers and “bolets”. Bolets are external stone staircases and landings that are covered by overhanging roof eaves supported by wooden posts or pillars.

② Saint-Cirq-Lapopie (Left riverbank)

This village, with its gothic architecture, is a major site in the Lot valley. It climbs 100 m up the cliff side and dominates the Lot. The medieval village owes its prosperity to the cauldron-makers, tanners, and wood-turners of the past who made their lives and traded here.

An imposing church from the 16th century sits below the ruins of three castles that belonged to the families who shared the lordship of the village. The village is also known for the many artists who have made their residence here, the most famous being André Breton, Foujita, and Man Ray. Next to the lock is the medieval mill of Porteroques.

Day 2 Route from Saint-Cirq-Lapopie to Cahors



⑥ Galessie Tower (Left riverbank)

Remains of an ancient knight's residence (13th - 14th century) on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Lot.

⑩ Laroque des Arcs (Right riverbank)

This is a reminder of the Gallo-Roman aqueduct destroyed in 1370. Perched on a rock, a 13th century tower overlooks a long gone castle. Above the village is the neo-Gothic Saint-Roch Chapel that was rebuilt when the present road was constructed. Under the chapel one can see the walls of an English castle.

⑤ Notre Dame de Velles (Right riverbank)

Beautiful Romanesque church from the 12th century. Patron saint of sailors. Velle = sail

⑦ Savanac (right riverbank)

13th and 14th century *Borie* at the center of the village (*Borie*: fortified farm worked with oxen or fortified country estate)

⑪ Borie de Polminhac

(Right riverbank)
13th century estate with a circular enclosure flanked by turrets and a large circular keep (donjon).

⑭ Club Aviron Cadurcien (right riverbank)

④ Vers (Right riverbank)

At the entrance to the village, at the confluence of the Vers and the Lot, a rock is visible on the cliff face. In the rocky escarpments which dominate the lock, there are the remains of a Gallo-Roman aqueduct which supplied the thermal baths of Cahors 25 km away.

⑧ Arcambal (Left riverbank)

The castle has a group of dwellings from various periods (14th - 15th and 17th centuries) and is flanked by round towers. Mill ruins and a lock keeper's house

⑫ Château de St Ambroise

(Left riverbank)
17th century manor house flanked by four tapered towers.

③ Bouziès (Right riverbank)

The "Défilé des Anglais" (Parade of the English) is a spectacular passage where the cornice road winds under the rock. During the 14th century, a cave located in a fault in the cliff, was blocked by a wall built as a fortification.

The village of **Lower Bouziès** is dominated by the dovecote of a 17th century fortified house.

⑨ Lamagdeleine (Right riverbank)

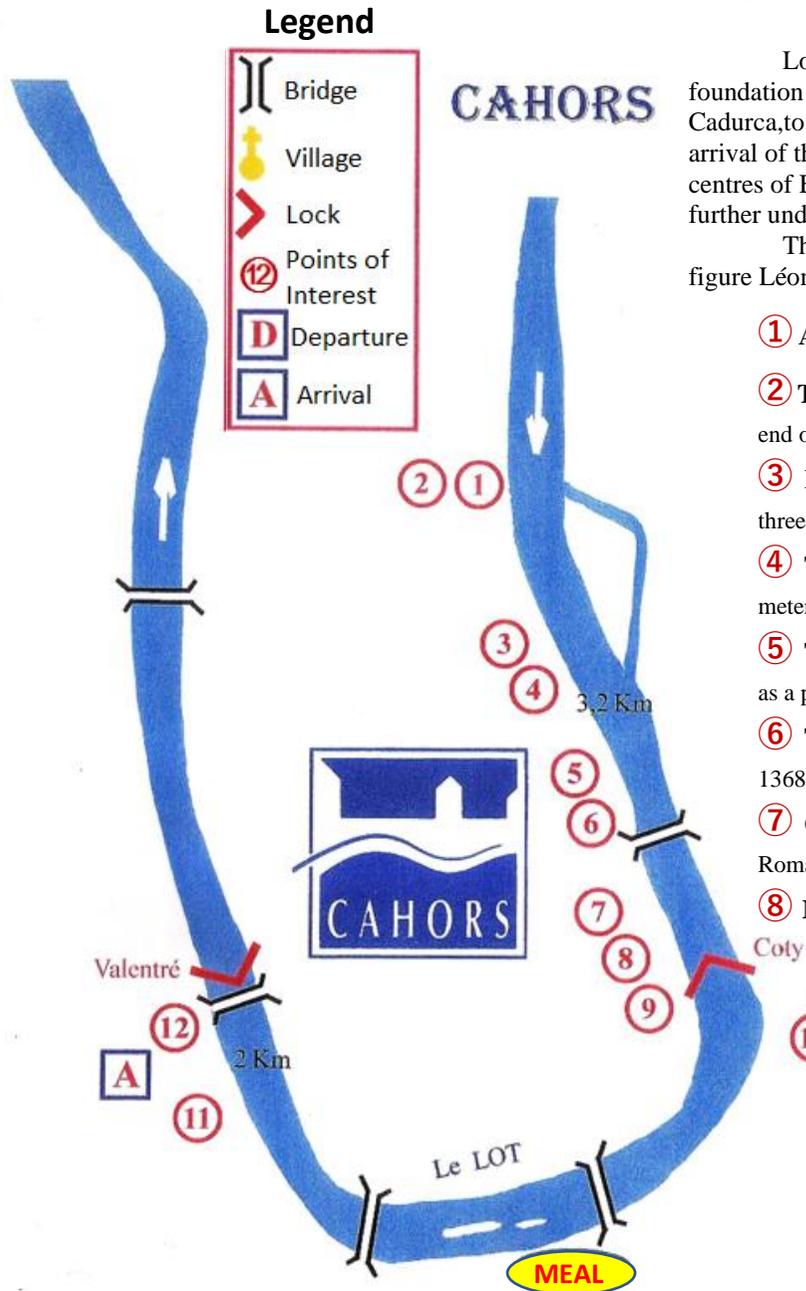
Réganhac estate from the 13th and 14th centuries.

⑬ Colombier des tuileries

(Right riverbank)

Rotunda Dovecote
The dovecotes (pigeonniers or colombiers), visible from the river, are numerous throughout Quercy due to the use of dried dove droppings as fertilizer until the beginning of the 20th century. The oldest dovecote dates back to the 17th century, in a rotunda covered with a dry-stone dome.

Day 3 Route from Cahors to Cahors



Located in the meanders of the Lot and dominated by hills, **DIVONA CADURCORUM** of antiquity owes its foundation to the Chartreux spring, worshipped by the Gauls and later the Romans. The spring is said to have given the name Cadurca, to the town, then Caur, and finally it became Cahors. The golden age of the city was in the 13th century with the arrival of the Lombard merchants and bankers and then the Knights Templars. Cahors became one of the great banking centres of Europe. The Hundred Years' War and the Black Death ruined the city, which two centuries later was to suffer further under the effects of the Wars of Religion.

The most famous Cardurciens (people from Cahors) are Pope John XXII, the poet Clément Marot, and the political figure Léon Gambetta.

- ① **Aviron Cadurcien**: The club was founded in 1892 and sits at the entry of the city.
- ② **Tour St Jean (St. John's Tower)** or The Hanging Tower: 14th century crenellated tower, part of the fortifications at the northern end of the town.
- ③ **Eglise St Barthélémy (St. Barthélémy Church)**: Built in the 13th century, it has a beautiful rectangular bell tower with three rows of superimposed Romanesque windows.
- ④ **Tour Jean XXII (John XXII Tower)**: The only remnant of the palace inhabited by the brother to Pope John XXII. At 34 meters the tower is the tallest building in the city.
- ⑤ **Tour du château du Roi (King's Castle Tower)**: Built in the 14th century as a residence for Pierre Via, it was refurbished as a prison in the 17th century, and served as such until 2012. It overlooks the port of Bullier, the former boatmen's hold.
- ⑥ **Tour du collège Pelegruy (College of Pelegruy Tower)**: Hexagonal tower, remnant of the former university established in 1368.
- ⑦ **Cathédrale St Etienne (St. Etienne Cathedral)**: Built at the end of the 11th century, it is topped by two vast domes in Romanesque-Byzantine style.
- ⑧ **Maison Roaldès (House of Roaldès)**: 15th century house typical of the Quercy renaissance period.
- ⑨ **Eglise St Urcisse (St. Urcisse Church)**: constructed at the end of the XII century.
- ⑩ **Mont St CYR (Mount St. Cyr)**: At an altitude of 264m, it towers over the old parts of Cahors.
- ⑪ **Fontaine des Chartreux (Chartreux Spring)**: Spring protected by a rocky overhang. It was revered by the cadurques.
- ⑫ **Pont Valentré (Valentre Bridge)** or Devil's Bridge: It is a splendid illustration of 14th century French Military architectural style. The bridge is composed of three defensive towers creating an isolated fortress controlling the traffic on the Lot. It was never attacked.

Arrival at the end of our trip, with a closing meal at the restaurant La Chartreuse.