To visit



Coco Chanel, or the art of distorting the truth.. about childhood

"My wonderful childhood? These words, usually spoken together, make me shudder." So said the creator of the famous "Chanel suit", and the equally famous perfume "Chanel No. 5". It is true, though, that the childhood of Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel (1883-1971) was not exactly rosy. So much so that she often chose to block it out, hiding her origins, embellishing reality, even weaving a veil of lies to hide a deep wound. While the years she spent in Courpière – her mother's birthplace between 1888 and 1893 were not the most difficult, she could never find words harsh enough to describe this period of her life. The little girl from Courpière became a hard and inflexible woman, her personality marked by her years in the Auvergne. "The last volcano in Auvergne that is not extinct", she used to say.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES OF CHARACTER IN THE LIVRADOIS FOREZ

he heritage of the Livradois-Forez Regional Nature Park is rich. It is made up of a network of towns, and big and small villages. Economic activity consists of agriculture, forestry, crafts and industry. The spatial organization of these activities goes back, for the most part, to the Middle Ages and produced, from the 14th century on, an interesting, and sometimes remarkable, urban architecture. The Parc Naturel Régional Livradois-Forez assists the communes in their efforts to revitalize those urban centres that are particularly interesting.



Château de la Barge In the 12th century, a feudal castle watched over the ford bridging the Dore river. During the Renaissance the old castle underwent major refurbishment, adding a long gallery terraces and, above all, replacing the chapel destroyed by the Protestants in 1568 with a new one, decorated with the exquisitely beautiful original stained glass windows. The 17th and 18th centuries saw extensive restructuring of the buildings, as well as the creation of a garden in the style of Le Nôtre, Gradually, the castle acquired the silhouette that we know today. It is still surrounded by a moat on three sides.

There are guided tours of the gardens and the castle chapel (1h30), from July 1st to August 25th, excluding Saturdays and Sundays, at 2 pm, 3.30 pm and 5 pm, and by appointment the rest of the year. Tel. + 33 (0)/ 73 53 14 51.

Manoir de Bélîme

Not open for visits. Also known as the "Tour du Maure" (the Moor's Tower) because Châteaubriand is said to have completed his Romance des Deux Emigrés here during a visit to the Auvergne in 1805, Manoir de Bélîme Auvergne in was originally a fortress guarding the Dore valley. This square building, flanked by a round tower housing the staircase, was built in the 15th or 16th centuries

"My sister, do you still remember the castle on the banks of the Dore, and the old Moor's Tower where the brass bell used to ring in the daybreak? Chateaubrian

Eglise de Courtesserre

Built in the 15th century, the vaults in the Eglise de Courtesserre are decorated with coats of arms that recount the local history of three seigneuries, including the Hospitaller Order of the Knights of Malta, a 17th century altarpiece and several statues dating from the 17th and 18th centuries.

ALES81

(P.DED)

USEFUL ADDRESSES

du Livradois-Forez Bureau d'information touristique de Courpière lace de la Cité administrative 53120 Courplete Tel: +33 (0)4 73 51 20 27



Biolography: Coupière « Porte du Livradois-Forez », collective work.





The Saint-Pierre institution

The Saint-Pierre institution derives from the first Jesuit school in France, founded in Billom in 1556. Converted into a school for troop children at the end of the 19th century by municipal decision, the college had to be transferred elsewhere, eventually ending up in

Courpière, a dynamic town well served by a modern communication network (railway station built in 1875). The first stone was laid in September 1884. In 1890, on completion of the chapel, the new college was finally able to open its doors.

Courpière's springs

This refers not to the Dore river, but to the mineral waters found here, several springs of which were - perhaps -already known to the Gallo-Romans. Some of these springs, such as those of Layat, were already in use from the 18th century onwards. From 1860 to 1950, waters from the Salet springs, carbonated, iron-bearing and sodium bicarbonate dominant, were sent throughout France and even to the 'colonies'

The region "aux mains d'or"

equally deserving present.

met circuits

the song says.

We often refer to Courpière's glorious agri- Today, the factory has been converted into cultural and industrial past... Forgetting its a private business centre (PSN Guillaumont), housing twenty or so companies, some o which are industrial start-up

In the 1950s and 1960s, the favourable climatic conditions at the foot of the moun-Another asset was the town's automobile industry, boasting a number of successful tains in this region led to it being described bodywork manufacturers such as Teilhol, as France's strawberry capital. Hundreds of tons of the "Madame Moutot" variety were Gilbertas and Matussière. Major French sold all over France... and even in England. brands lost no time in making the most of this creative hive of activity, which offe-This demonstrated the innovation skills of the local farmers, who had a long tradition red the latest hi-tech solutions, including of market gardening, fruit growing and electric and unlicenced vehicles, fibreglass crop farming. Nowadays, low-altitude catbodywork, etc. Courpière was the birthplace tle breeding predominates, the meadows dotted with cows of the "Montbéliarde of the Rodeo and the Tangara, produced on site by Teilhol. breed", the milk of which is used to make Today, the Carton Manufacturing sector

persists from this golden period, so heavily the farandole of Auvergne cheeses. Many exceptional beef breeds can be seen here. impacted by globalisation and the economic crisis. Buoved by its flagship company. Celta. especially the local "Ferrandaise", currently that has a 300-strong workforce and promaking a comeback. Sustainable and organic farming is really taking off with young duction figures approaching one hundred farmers who now offer a wide range o thousand tons of corrugated cardboard, the sector offers a wide range of products with high-quality local produce for short gourincomparable response times.

For the Courpièrois, the working of raw Courpière today is still an industrial powematerials remains an ancestral passion that urges them to "work harder, work harder rhouse, with two business parks that pro-vide almost one job in three with part turning (AMD Sanderon), plastics, cutlery to forge red steel with golden hands" as and knife-making, food processing and Legacy of a flourishing, creative and ancessimilar industries (Oriane, Saga Nutrition) ... Courpière is home to 180 active craftspeople tral craft industry, during "the thirty gloand tradespeople, offering their know-how and expertise in this 3rd commune of the Livradois-Forez Regional Nature Park.

SIROP DE

RENADINE

rious years" industry blossomed, provided a wealth of highly qualified jobs. The exquisite stainless steel smithery of the Jean Couzon company lit up the town until the mid-2000s. Who hasn't seen the chiselled stainless steel basket and the cutlery set for newlyweds, famous the world over.

ILLERIE ROCHER



CROPPIERE

The Dore.

...as a transportation link

An unpredictable river prone to sudden, devastating floods, the Dore was never navigable upstream of Courpière. It was therefore from the port of La Barge, in the village of Lanaud, that a wide array of edible foodstuffs (cereals, vegetables, fruit, wine, etc.) and heavier products (peat, building materials, ores, etc.) were shippedto the Paris Basin, via the Allier, then the Loire. When the sapinières (flat-bottomed boats, as much as 24 metres in length and carrying up to 20 tons of goods) arrived at their destination - Orléans, Nantes, Saint-Nazaire - they were dismantled and used for firewood

...as a source of energy

The Dore was also used to transport large quantities of wood by floating them downriver. In the early 20th century, this flourishing industry provided a living for six sawmills in the commune of Courpière alone. An inexhaustible source of energy, the waters of the Dore were also used to run several small-scale craft industries. This spawned the development of the mills, which in the 19th and early 20th centuries played an important role in the life of Courpière. There were at least eight mills, five of which were supplied directly by the Dore, and three by tributaries. The best known is that of Las Domnas, sitting at the foot of the ramparts that overlook

Today, the Dore certainly has less of an impact on Courpière's population than it did in the past. The mills are long gone or have been repurposed; rail and road links mean that the shipping of goods by water is now obsolete. And while the river does still sometimes flood, it is with nothing like its past fury. Over time, the Dore has become calmer, more restrained. Even so, it is inextricably linked to the history of Cournière.

EAU MINEF

The backbone of this "granite sheathed" region, the Dore has always attracted human populations. The first human settlements here date back over 3,000 years. with this wild and impetuous river providing local populations with a means of subsistence

and natural protection.



HEN, in the 9th and 10th centuries, the Norman invasions forced the small local lords to organise the defence of their fiefdoms, it was only natural that Curta-Petra (the shortened mound), an alluvial terrace a dozen or so metres above the Dore valley - located at the point where the river became wider and calmer - was chosen as the site of the first feudal mound.

Courpière (or Cropière) came into being, enclosed within a wall of ramparts, watchtowers and ditches that could be filled with water.

PVISSED

Around 1130, Benedictine nuns established a priory in the town, part of the Order of Cluny. Using the taxes they collected from their vast domains, from the making of bread in the communal oven, from the cultivation of wine, wheat and hemp, from the mill, and also ... from the crossing of the river, they contributed to the enlargement of the church of St Martin, making it a Romanesque church with 3 naves with help from the abbots of Moutier in Thiers, who were dependent on the Order of Cluny during the episcopacy of Aymeric, Bishop of Clermont.

In 1343, the town obtained the right to administer itself - each year the inhabitants appointed four consuls - thereby entitling it to plan its urban development as it wished, to levy taxes and to maintain a garrison. In 1588, it joined the very select circle of the Bonnes Villes de Basse-Auvergne. In 1605, King Henry IV issued a letters patent granting the town the right to hold four fairs per year and one market per week. This privilege enabled the town to develop as a trading centre, a reputation for which it would become famous.

By the early 18th century, Courpière was a stopping-off point on one of the busiest roads in the region. This route – linking Clermont and Lyon - was used regularly by armed troops, and also by peddlers and merchants from all over.

Following the turmoil of the French Revolution, during which the Priory was disbanded, the nuns dispersed, and the bell tower demolished by order of Couthon, a revolutionary figure, in order to suppress a religious symbol and recover its lead, farming took over as one of the main activities in Courpière.

The town also prospered due to its increasingly important role as a trading hub. Courpière's population lived according to the rhythm of the markets, with each square having its own "specialisation"

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the development of numerous - occasionally unusual - industrial or craft activities (see p. 4), carrying the name of Courpière far beyond the region.

SPECIALITES



LIMONADERIE PIREYRE

Livradois

Forez REGIONAL



B



COURPIÈRE THE RAMPARTS

Tourist Office

There are several interesting buildings around the octagonal lava stone fountain (1819). The Tourist Office [N° 21-MH], former residence of wealthy merchants built in the 14th century, has beautiful Renaissance doors and windows including the main entrance with its flat-arched lintel. The second floor is a half-timbered construction, set on a wooden corbel, itself supported by stone consoles. On the east side of the roof, when lit by the sun, you can see two small, sculpted figures representing tanners on either side of the seated dog (see N°10) The neighbouring facades are no less interesting. Have fun counting how many Renaissance doors

and windows they each have and compare them

to discover their similarities or special features.

The facade of the presbytery [N°17 -MH] or the gothic stair tower [N°13], for instance.

The great market square

The Medieval tradition of a town hosting fairs and markets is still reflected in the old names of most of the town squares. One example is the great market square where the grain market used to he - on the site of today's Town Hall - which had itself replaced the "Priory's tithe barn". The war memorial is a testament to the heavy toll paid by the commune during the Great War.

Eqlise Saint-Martin

The Romanesque church of Saint-Martin de Courpière was built in the middle of the 12th century, on the foundations of an older religious building, using blocks of arkose and granite. The semicircular doorway consists of an archivolt decorated with a sculpted frieze (comma-shaped forms), most likely from the Carolingian period according to the writings of Canon Bayle. Go around the church to the left (Saint-Martin medieval alley) to see the "Porte des Morts" (Gate of the Dead), followed by a stunning, sculpted capital showing two naked figures (poutis) holding fruit in their hands and a third figure sitting on a truncated column

The church chevet

The church's chevet, with its central apse surrounded by two lower apsidioles, is a prime example of the Auvergne Romanesque chevet, with its multiple roof levels. The south transept has undergone modifications similar to that of its northern counterpart. Admire the capital of the truncated column, decorated with fern leaves. Then walk through the "old Benedictine courtyard".

The clog market

12th century. The convent and the nuns' living quarters - which still contain remnants of the old kitchen [N°4 Rue de l'Antiquité], but are not open to visitors - were built around what would later become the Place du Marché aux Sabots.

In the cul-de-sac Las Domnas (the name signifies "the Ladies", in reference to the Benedictine nuns) a covered passageway leads towards the postern (small gate) and the ramparts. While the upper part of the passageway was used to connect two buildings, it was also a clever way of avoiding taxes, since the structure (built here on a brick arch) did not rest on the ground.

Las Domnas postern and tower

Of the six or seven towers that punctuated the ramparts built to protect the city during the 14th and 15th centuries, only the imposing round tower of Las Domnas remains today. At its base, a modern granite belvedere offers wonderful views over both the park that runs along the Dore valley and a peak in the Forez: Le Grün de Chignore, Going down the staircase takes you to the park and the river; you are now at the foot of the ramparts.

At the foot of the ramparts

In the past, the Dore river was partially diverted via a "peillère", a sort of dam consisting of wooden stakes planted in the river. This channel fed a washhouse, a flour mill driven by a paddle wheel, and further on, a tannery. In 1970, the channel was filled in: all that remains of the mill today are two massive sandstone millstones, now used as "ordinary" tables in the playground.

8 Pont de Perrail

Between the old flour mill channel and the main hed of the Dore, there used to be an island. a place where the Benedictine nuns could go for walks (hence its name ile de Las Domnas) reached by a bridge and closed off by a gate (the Pont de Perrail). Given that the millstream is now only a distant memory, the presence of the gate, somewhat surreal, never fails to astonish the unsuspecting walker.

9 Bridges on the River Dore

The Dore has always been prone to sudden, violent floods; countless bridges have been des-troyed during its "overflows". Some of these were built of wood - the first dated from 1271 - but the one that was swept away during the devastating flood in 1790 was made of stone. Only one of the four arches remains, which can be seen on the left, downstream of the present bridge, built in 1854 in Volvic stone.

Rue des Tanneries

In the 13th century, under the name of Rue du Faubourg, the present-day Rue du 11 Novembre became the main road into the town. During the French Revolution, the hospital on the righ as you walk up the street [Nº 7] was converted into a school. Another old place name (Rue des Tanneries) harks back to past industries in this suburb of Courpière, where there used to be a tripe factory and a hide drying shed.

21

Porte de La Font

In the 12th century, the Porte de La Font was one of only two gateways to the fortified town (three others were opened later). All travellers coming from the "royal road" linking Lyon to Clermont-Ferrand, through the Forez, had to come through this gate. Here, they could quench their thirst and give their horses a drink at the Doz Cousteau fountain [opposite N° 18, Place de la Libération] before entering the town. From the 18th century onwards until the 1950s, the water came from the vine-covered hillsides.

Benedictine nuns settled in Courpière during the

The church of Saint-Martin

After touring Courpière, don't miss visiting the wonderful interior of the Romanesque church with its Gothic chapels, dedicated to Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours (316-397). The transpt, appear and the standard s main entrance (narthex) has a 15th-century ribbed vault. The capitals, difficult to see, are nevertheless remarkable and present a varied bestiary: lions with racked bodies and scowling muzzles, inspired by oriental art, clawing at the stone, "mermaids looking like Roman legionaries", their torsos splitting into a double tail that ends in plant-shaped flukes and wearing a heavy belt, as well as adoles-cents playing with balls, or naked Atlanteans supporting the abacus... These capitals pro-bably come from the same workshop as those of the Moutier church in Thiers, to which Saint Martin belonged. The stained glass windows were made by A. Champrobert, windows were made by A. Champrobert, an artist from Clermont-Ferrand, and date from 1883 and 1889. Note also the statue of a Romanesque Virgin in polychrome wood from the 12th or 13th century, whose oversized fingers form a protective embrace around her son, who is blessing the faithful.

Li2 View over the Chignore and the Rail Station

Continuing our walk, we come across a superb view of the Avenue de la Gare, built with the arrival of the railway. Far behind the railway building, erected around 1875, you can see the imposing silhouette of the Grün de Chignore (1074 m), a mysterious place used for druidic meetings.

Porte de la Barge

The northern gateway to the town at a time when it still had fortifications - together with a water-filled moat in place of the current boulevard -, the Porte de la Barge takes its name from the boat (barge = barque) used by travellers taking the Roman road from Lyon to Bordeaux to cross the Dore. The name Barge is also that of the nearby castle, located on the opposite bank of the river.

14 The two towers

At the entrance to the Rue du 14 Juillet on your left, you will find a surprising juxtaposition in the nner courtyard; one tower sports modern designs and building materials, while a second tower is built in pure Renaissance style. Its inner stone staircase was once used to reach the rooftons and enjoy a 360° view over the Forez mountains and the Livradois hills.

Versingeterix-

The former Rue du Marché au Fil

Rue Pasteur, formerly known as "Rue du Château Morand", has some beautiful facades with Renaissance-style doors and windows. The cellar entrances (verrials) consist of basement windows in two parts, one horizontal at ground level, the other vertical against the facade, which made it easier to lower the barrels.

16 Place du Marché aux Châtaignes

room for hides.

This first tour ends at the site of **the traditional chestnut market** in Courpière. Before starting the second tour, take a moment to discover some remarkable buildings, such as this old Renaissance shop [N° 4 Rue du 14 Juillet] with its flat-arched windows, its door with an ogee lintel and its spiral staircase. At N° 16 Rue du 14 Juillet, you can see where a flat-arched shop window used to be, now filled in.

Other buildings unfortunately no longer exist, such as the wooden attic of the former tanner's house [N° 7], which once housed a vast drying

In

30 piace

Boulevarderererererere

Blaise

Pascal

Desaix

COURPIÈRE THE TOWN

17 Pharmacies

The starting point for the second tour is next to the Tourist Office. From here, note the turreted house [N*4] and its two 15th-century flat-arched bays on the ground floor, one of which is a pointed equilateral arch. Opposite [N° 2 Ru Desaix], the pharmacy occupies a half-timbered house (timbers partly obscured by plaster), with Renaissance-style doors and windows, with a gargoyle and sculpted head on the facade.

18 The Presbytery garden

12 .

13

0

2

0

Gambetta

Morts

Mairie

de

Place

10

Victoire

to the (private) Presbytery garden. From the 16th century onwards, the buildings on the right-hand side of the courtyard housed the Courpière hospital, previously located in the Rue du Faubourg.

iDeration

Pasteur

A small cul-de-sac behind the Tourist Office leads

Rue Desaix lies on the now invisible ditch that surrounded the first fortified enclosure, perhaps that of the primitive motte castrale (castle rise). Curious visitors will immediately notice some remarkable elements, such as this 15th century head and bust of Christ in grey andesite, or this niche housing a Virgin, or the cast iron pump used to draw water from a well at N° 19

19 Rue Desaix

20 Ancient ditches

The narrow Rue de l'Étoile once overlooked the ditches that protected the town's northern ramparts. In 1810, these were filled in and the flow of water replaced by that of cars. In Boulevard Vercingétorix, note the distinctive houses [N 58-40-36] with their stoops and cellar entrances Opposite [N° 39], you can see a wood sculpture of a child's head embedded in a wall facade

Fontame

Formerly known as the Marché aux Bacholles

still visible today. For instance, the vaulted doorway that opens onto the inner courtyard [N° 35] was probably the entrance to the convent. Another example, the carriage entrance gate whose key is decorated with a coat of arms (unfortunately hammered belonging to this private residence [between N°23 and N°27].

23 Coco Chanel's house

Change to the other side of the road and another era: the house at the corner of Rue Chamerlat [N°18] and Rue Desaix is where Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel spent her early childhood (see p. 4).

26 Porte Jehan du Lac

For many years, the Rue de la République (formerly Grande-Rue) was one of the main thoroughfares in Courpière. When coming from Billom, it was accessed via the gate known as the Porte Jehan du Lac (also called the Porte de Mauzun), During the Middle Ages, Courpière had only two gates: the Porte de Lafon and the Porte aux Anes, demolished in the second half of the 18th century and of which only the jamb sections remain. Later, three other gates were built: Porte Jehan du Lac at the beginning of Rue de la République, Porte des Minimes at the beginning of Rue Chamerlat and Porte de La Barge at the beginning of Rue du 14 Juillet

27 Winegrower's house

Former house of a wealthy market gardener-farmerwinegrower [N°15 Boulevard Gambetta]. The vat room, farm and garden all faced the rear [Impasse de Creux-de-Bel]. The buried, vaulted cellar, built of local stone, occupies two thirds of the pavement at the front. The skylights are brick built.

28 Former Tour des Hôtes At the corner of Boulevard Gambetta [N° 2].

almost under the roof, there is a stone extending well above the small Renaissance-style window. This is part of the remains of the old square tower, known as the "Tour des Hôtes", once part of the town's ramparts. Below the balcony of the previous building [N° 4], note a sculpted head that may date from the 13th century, but which is obviously added on. Opposite, to the south of the Place de la Victoire, is the former courtyard of the public girls' school, built in the late 1920s, at the same time as the primary and nursery schools. At one time, the Chemin des Ânes leading to Las Domnas used to pass under the entrance stairs, now covered with earth.

29 The hide dryer

The Place Blaise-Pascal (a mathematician, physicist and philosopher born in Clermont - 1623-1662 begins as a street. Unfortunately, the adjacent alley on the right does not leave enough space to see the half-timbered and corbelled house, the upper floor of which houses an attic with open wood slats that was once used as a drying shed for hides. This is the last example of this type of architecture since the destruction of the tanner's drying shed (see item 17).

24 Medieval houses

-15.

The last house in Rue Chamerlat [Nº2] has kent its Medieval character: a flambovant Gothic oger door leading to a spiral staircase, with a turret rising above roof level, bearing witness to the social standing of its former owner. The house at the end of the street [N° 9 Rue de a République] once belonged to a rich merchant Its two facades (one facing Rue de la République the other facing Place Blaise-Pascal) are timber framed and corbelled. The top floor was added

Note the strange "homed" sculpture above the main entrance of a building [N° 13 Rue de la Républiquel.

25 Maison Goyon

"Maison Goyon" [N°15] was the home of a family who "provided" the town of Courpière and the canton with a bailiff, mayor, general councillor, in addition to lawyers, priests and other justices of the peace. This building, the roof of which has a triple row of genoise cornices, once housed the private boys' school Sainte-Marie. earlier (see item 25)

31 Rue du Coq-Gaulois

Courpière. At N° 5, you can admire the distinctive architectural feature of this building and its spiral staircase, separate from the house. The openings in the turret have ogee lintels. The main building has several beautiful openings, including those on the ground floor that form an arcade

30 Place Blaise-Pascal This is where the pottery market was once held. You can see one of the town's few Renaissancestyle windows with still-intact mullions [Nº 12]. and an attic pulley [N° 10] used to carry wood and grain up to the attic space. The beautiful half-timbered house was described

This second tour ends in the oldest street in

Done

in the 19th century.



are the two jamb sections, embedded in the corners of more recent houses. On the other side of the Boulevard, there is a fountain which, it is said, never runs dry,

(named after the Mayor of Courpière who guided the town's destiny for thirty-three years and

during the Third Republic). Visitors can have fur

looking for traces of this religious past in each

facade or in the architectural elements that are

The beginning of Rue Chamerlat is the site of one



21 Porte des Minimes

10 The former Couvent des Minimes occupied a large part of the area to the right of Rue Chamerlat