

A THOUSAND YEARS OLD HISTORY

At the end of the 8th century, the hermit Dadon chose to retire in this wild site. He left it a few years later after the settlement of a small community of Benedictine monks. So was the origin of the monastery of Conques early protected by the Carolingian kings. In 866 the monks were granted relics of a saint after a "furtive transfer" of bones of a young Christian girl martyred in Agen, St. Foy (St. Faith). From the numerous miracles they provided, the relics of St. Foy drew a lot of pilgrims towards the sanctuary increasing in numbers in the 11th century with the pilgrims going to Compostela. Conques became then a monastic town of main importance.

To stroll through the streets of Conques (*Concas* in Occitan) discovering its exceptional and miraculously preserved architecture, an inheritance from the Middle Ages is, in effect, like taking a journey back in time and space to the year 1000 and to the heart of one of the most beautiful natural sites of the departement.

The proposed itinerary guarantees a change of scenery every step of the way for those who find themselves following in the footsteps of thousands of Santiago de Compostela's pilgrims (*romius* in Occitan) who have been welcomed here since the 11th century.

The town developed progressively on the sunny slopes in the proximity of the roman-tesque basilica dedicated to St Foy (*santa Fe*) and the benedictine monastery, which watches over one of the richest gold and silver plated treasures of medieval Christianity.

A girdle of walls with fortified gateways and flanked with several towers delimited, and does so to this day, a network of tiny streets which led in olden times to Holy places and to the various living quarters. The economic activity, such as it was, was concentrated mostly in the faubourg (the *barry* in Occitan) with mills and tanneries in the river valley of the Ouche and Dourdou and artisans workshops were scattered here and there.

Preserved throughout times of destruction and distasteful renovations, the civil architecture of Conques is characterised by the diversity of materials used. Blue schist, red sand stone, bronze limestone come together in an amazing combination of colours punctuated by the timbers of the corbelled constructions. The slated roofs have a beauty unto themselves.

STAINED GLASS WINDOW BY PIERRE SOULAGES

Finally, since 1994, the church has been endowed with windows commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and designed by the painter Pierre Soulages.



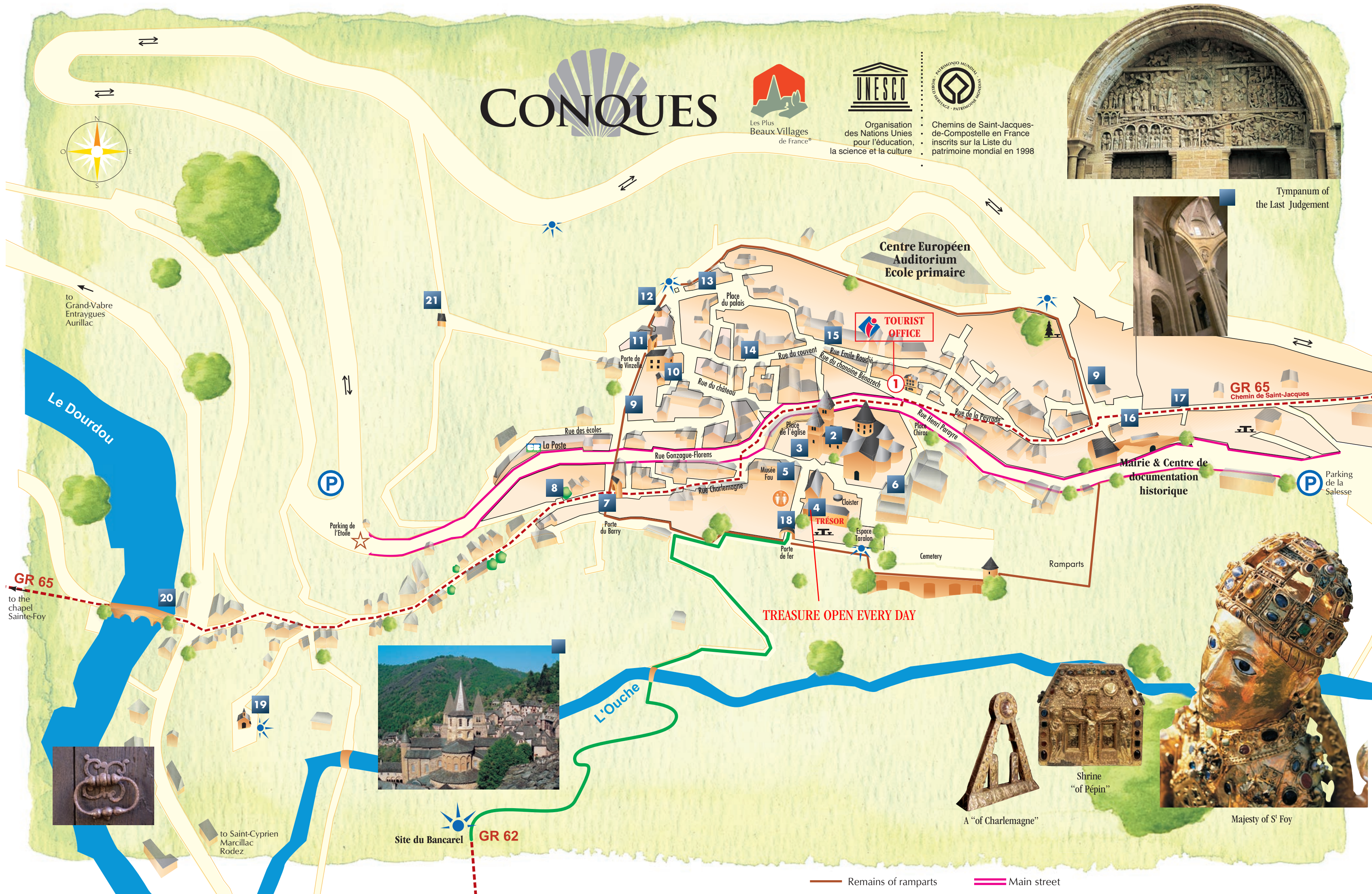
The material used by the artist is a non-coloured translucent glass which respects the variations of natural light and suggests from both the interior and the exterior of the building an exceptional continuity between walls and windows. In their own way the leaded lines of the windows participate in the modelling of a work that registers amongst the most original realisations of contemporary art.

The Service Patrimoine from the municipality of Conques-en-Rouergue is at your service for further information and guided tours (church, upper-gallery and village). Guided tours of the Treasure are possible for groups with a reservation.

Service Patrimoine de Conques
OFFICE DE TOURISME
 Le Bourg - Conques
 12320 Conques-en-Rouergue
 Tel 00.33 (0)5 65 72 85 00 - Fax 00.33 (0)5 65 72 87 03
 E-mail : tourisme@conques.fr
www.conques.fr

Opening hours Tourism Office, Treasure and Museum J.-Fau
 April to September: 9:30 am - 12:30 and 2:00 - 6:30 pm
 October-March: 10:00 am - 12:00 and 2:00 - 6:00 pm

Impression : Grapho 12, imprimeur - 05 65 65 01 12 - Crédit photos : L. Balsan / P. Lançon / R. Vignes / R. Combail / M. Réy-Robert - Textes : P. Lançon - 2016 - Commune de Conques-en-Rouergue



Tympanum of the Last Judgement



GR 65 Chemin de Saint-Jacques

Mairie & Centre de documentation historique

Parking de la Salette

TREASURE OPEN EVERY DAY



Site du Bancarel GR 62



A "of Charlemagne"



Shrine "of Pépin"



Majesty of S' Foy

Remains of ramparts Main street

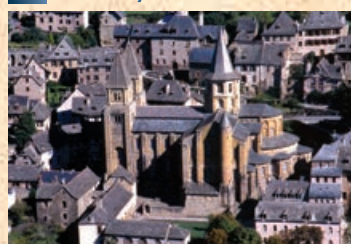
1 Tourist Office

The tourist office is set in an 18th c. bourgeoise house whose upper stories conserve a harmonious pattern of timbers under each window. The clock is a reminder that this was once



the town hall. Dating from 1843 the metal framework which supports the pinnacle and its small bell comes from the North Eastern tower of the abbey church.

2 Abbey church of St Foy



A major edifice of romanesque architecture the abbey church of Ste Foy is an imposing nave of stone which catches one unawares by its interior elevation. The galleries permit us to admire the historiated capitals and the contemporary windows of the painter Pierre Soulagès. The tympanum of the Last Judgement with its 124 figures, is one of the major works of art of the 12th century.

The fountains

Tapped since at least the 11th century, the spring water is captured in romanesque fountains found in various parts of the town. These monuments, generally well preserved, share the same principal architecture - a semi submerged stone tank covered by a barrel vault.



3 Fontaine du Plô

The Fontaine du Plô, at the doors of the church, is mentioned in the manuscript *Liber sancti Jacobi*. These waters of “*admirable virtues*” would at that time have slaked the thirst of the pilgrims.

4 The Treasure

The golden treasure is the true jewel of Conques' heritage. Housed in a room resembling a crypt, this unique set of reliquaries reminds us of the devotion to saints' relics in the medieval western world. Apart from the extraordinary and disquieting Majesty of St Foy covered in gold, precious stones, cameos and intaglios, the treasure holds a large number of reliquaries, chests and portable altars.



5 Musée Joseph Fau

The Joseph Fau museum owes its name to a former mayor of Conques. It is home to a remarkable collection most of which comes from the ancient abbey. Here the visitor will discover part of the capitals from the romanesque cloister, diverse sculptures and wood panelling (16th – 17th c.) as well as tapestries from Felletin (verdures and the life of Marie-Madeleine (17th c.).



6 Chapelle du Rosaire

The “chapelle du Rosaire” or abbots chapel, once situated within the confines of the monastery buildings, is a flat chevet building consisting of three rows the construction of which dates back to 1465. Other than a wooden altar screen from the latter end of the 15th c and a later sculpture of a group figuring the crucifixion, the originality of the chapel rests in its well preserved paintings on the vaulted ceilings. Grotesque designs and religious themes (St Face, Christ's tunic, Evangelist symbols) together make a decorative and highly original iconographic collection from the beginning of the 16th century.



A fortified town

In medieval times and under the ancient regime, Conques owed its status as a town to the existence of the wall which confined it. The wall, built of schist, took the form of an irregular quadrilateral on the North South slope. Four gateways and rare flanking towers reported to be from the 13th century break up this surrounding wall whose defences were doubled in certain places by a dry moat.



7 Porte du Barry

Barrel vaulted and supported by a large revealing arch of red sandstone, the porte du Barry, also called the Cavayrie, is topped by a timber framed dwelling.



Four à pain 9

The two communal bread ovens were built outside of the ramparts in the dry moat without doubt to avoid the risk of fire. Having been restored, they are in working order.



10 Château d'Humières

Built by the family of the same name, the Château d'Humières represents a magnificent example of 15th and 16th century civil architecture. The impressive facade of the main part of the building is broken up by casement windows on three levels. One window to the North West follows the curve of the wall. The adjoining tower becomes octagonal at its highest point resembling the bell tower of the abbey church.



11 Porte de la Vinzelle

The porte de La Vinzelle with its solid square tower used to defend the gateway, is named after the nearby village overhanging the river Lot. On the village side in a niche there is a coloured wooden statue of the virgin and child (14th or 15th century).



13 Quartier du Palais

This area located on the highest point of the village was the location of a college (palais) in the 16th century. At the beginning of the 18th century, not far from here, the brotherhood of the “Penitents bleus” planned to build a chapel on this location.

Point of view



12 Tour d'enceinte



Essential to the defence on the north flank of the wall, this circular tower with its arrow slits on different levels appears less high today due to the moat having been filled in.

14 Couvent des sœurs de l'Union



The convent of the sœurs de l'Union (also called The Daughters of Work) has preserved, amongst other architectural features, its 18th century stone staircase. This small community of nuns occupied themselves mainly with the education of the young girls of Conques.

16 Séchoir à châtaignes (secadou in Occitan)

These small buildings which were used for drying chestnuts bear witness to the importance of this food supply for the local people as far back as the 15th century. In the past there were many in Conques and the surrounding countryside. Storing the chestnuts on the upper level ensured their conservation.



18 Porte de Fer



With its gable shaped lintel, the iron gate (also called the Belferi) has minor strategic importance but nevertheless allows access to the gardens and the fields opening onto the valley of the Ouche. In the road which leads there, stone grain measures from the destroyed medieval hall have been placed under a canopy as a reminder of the importance of economic exchange between the town and its lands.

19 Chapelle Saint-Roch

Perched on its rocky spur and previously dedicated to Notre Dame, the Chapelle St Roch was built on the site of the original castle of Conques. The shell of the building dates from the 15th century but the older sacristy along side remains intact, characterised by the herringbone stonework. It is worth



noting beneath the chapel a curious cavity dug out of the rock and shading two basins. From this natural platform there is a magnificent view of Conques terraced on the slope above.

Oratoire de la Capelette 21

Situated beside a small access road this shrine known locally as the Capelette is a reminder of the strong tide of devotion to the Virgin Mary in the 17th century. It appears to be a simple solid stone construction crowned by a pitched roof. In a niche beneath the low pitched gable, framed by pilasters and obscured by a grill one can make out a wooden statue of the Virgin and Child (16th century?).



15 Résidence Dadon

Situated in the Rue Emile Roudié (previously called Rue Droite or Straight Road) la residence Dadon - the municipal accomodation centre- is easily distinguished by its monumental door and its austere facade. The building has been greatly modified over the years. From the mid 18th century it was the general hospital of St Foy which, due to overcrowding in the town, took in newly born abandoned babies, the incurably ill, the old and the infirm.

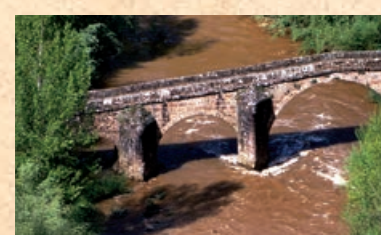


17 Fontaine de Fumouze



The fontaine de Fumouze is found at the eastern entrance of the town. The yellow limestone arch above the well makes it stand out from the others. The coping stones on either side were for the users to place their buckets on.

20 Pont “romain”



The “pont romain” called that because it was used by the *romius* (the pilgrims in Occitan) to cross the Dourdou and its sometimes temperamental waters. Of medieval origin but largely reconstructed in the 15th and 16th century, the dissymmetric bridge is composed of five full arches resting on capped pillars which are triangular shaped on the upstream side.

VISITING
THE TOWN



CONQUES

STEP BY STEP...
THROUGH THE HISTORY
OF CONQUES



AVEYRON
VIVRE VRAI



Grands Sites
Midi-Pyrénées

Conques

AVEYRON