

September 8th, 2008

EXCURSION - LA SALLE DU VERDON
Slideshow presentation

Part 1: The village of La Salle du Verdon before the construction of the dam

- Agricultural village at exit of Verdon river
- River has made the canyons and caves
- Caves formed first human settlements in the area before 500.000 years
- Surrounded by mountains consisting of limestone
- Mediterranean climate: mild winters, few snowfall, dry summers
- Vegetation adapted to the terrain and climate and well preserved: lavender, olives and Juniper
- Main economic sectors in the area are agriculture, cattle and sheep farming and truffle production/collection
- People lived in harmony with their environment: no pesticides used, no pollution problems
- La Salle stems from "salas" (Latin for old fortified Roman farm)
- River floated through the village, so water was always available

Part 2: 1973-1974 - the construction of the dam, a slow death

- Due to the dam construction, the village would be inundated and 200 people were forced to leave
- Electricity company took out all vegetation in the area to be drowned, to keep the water at a high quality for drinking
- Inhabitants of La Salle du Verdon tried to recycle everything they could for reconstruction (e.g. fountain)
- to build a new house 5 times more money needed than provided by the electricity company
- Village used to consist of narrow streets, clustered around the main square, while the new village looks like the opposite
- Houses were demolished and inhabitants were prevented to come back
- Destroyed village reminded people of World War II

Part 3: 1975-2008 - the years of tourism

- The agricultural valley had become a touristic place, a lake with a beach, sailing and fishing facilities, etc.
- Facts on the dam: 54 m high, 200 m wide, 8 m thick at the bottom of the lake, 3 m thick at the top of the dam
- Facts on the lake: 40 km long, 2.5 km wide
- Only the rebuilding of the school, town hall and church were paid. The inauguration of these buildings was in 1977, so it took 1 year to destroy the village and 6 years to rebuild it
- The number of inhabitants has decreased between 1946 and 1975. After 1975 the population has increased gradually
- Tourism is seasonal, spread over 4 months in Spring-Summer, with a peak in July-August
- Tourists are concentrated next to the new village
- The village counts 200 inhabitants (mainly old and retired) during winter time and 4000 in July-August
- Seasonal tourism demands sufficient infrastructure. During winter time, little water is used compared to the 820 tons used in July. To cope with this variation, a big water basin is build. Purification is done by wind, algae and the sun

- Housing can be split into permanent houses (85), second houses (91) and rented houses (118; owned by local people and tourists)
- Laws for the lake:
 - Water law: drinking water, zone forbidden for construction = 55m from lakeside
 - Littoral law: zone forbidden for construction = 100 m from lakeside
 - Mountain law: houses should be connected to the rest of the village
- Electricity company only manages the lake itself
- Political debate has come up due to different kinds of people in the village. From the nineties, over 20 associations have been founded, which forms social links between the inhabitants
- Now is part of the Parque regional du Verdon

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