



Coteaux
Béarn
Madiran
Tourisme & Loisirs

PONTACQ

A heritage along the water

Circuit : 2 km ♦ 1h30



The birth of this village began on the Ger plateau well before the year 1000 at a place called Castet, although its identity is Bigourdane. Thanks to the communication routes laid out by the Romans, Pontacq moved down the valley to its current location. The town of Pontacq developed along the Roman road linking Oloron and Lescaur to Lourdes and Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges.

Pontacq became part of the Béarn region around 1090, following the marriage of the Béarnais prince Gaston IV to Talèse, the granddaughter and heiress of Arnaud Aner, the last viscount of Montanerès. It was probably Gaston who fortified the village, with the fortifications being redeveloped in the 14th century by Gaston Fébus. The only evidence of this past are the remains of the ramparts and the tower.

In 1385, Pontacq was one of the 10 largest towns in Béarn.

Industry and ancient crafts

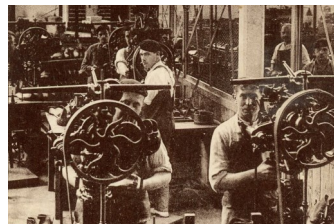
Wool weaving was very important in Pontacq. A factory office was managed by royal authority, to ensure the quality of the fabrics produced. This coarse wool called burrat, burreü, capa was used to make blankets and capes. 75 weavers were counted on the eve of the revolution and it was often the same merchants who wove and made capes.

We know that capes have been made in Pontacq since the 4th century, and that in the 12th century this wool industry was carried out at home. Pierre de Marca, a historian from Béarn, writes that the cloak of Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours, was made in Pontacq. From the 16th century onwards, they were exported to the East, as well as to Aragon and the North. Two centuries later, the intendant Lebrét stated that the Monday market in Pontacq "is fairly well supplied with capes made there and bought from the Toulouse area". This manufacture of capes developed a very important trade in Pontacq from which the great Pontacquais families of the time profited. You can still see the fine homes of these merchants as you walk through the streets of Pontacq.

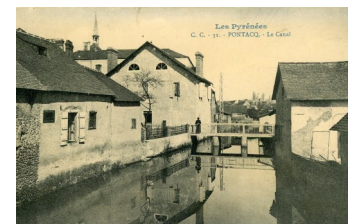
The 19th century saw the **development of the leather industry**. Pontacq became a shoe-making capital in the mid-twentieth century, with around forty craft workshops, numerous shoemakers and three tanneries.



Barry Square



FOURISCOT shoe factory



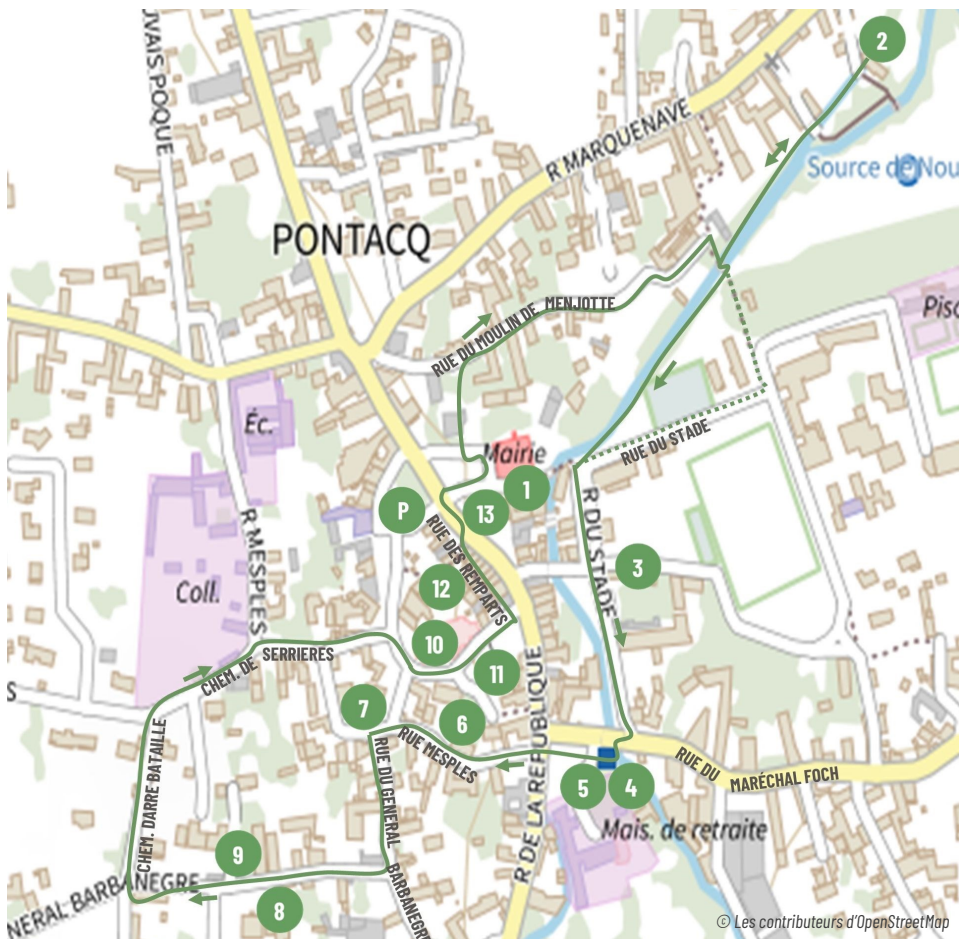
The canal

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Depart from the Town Hall car park.



1 Town Hall and Place Huningue

The town hall was built from May 1863 to May 1866 in Lourdes stone, the spire of the clock tower (with Graham system) was covered and the area around the new hall, which was impassable at the time, was connected in order to transfer the justice of the peace services there. During opening hours, the staircase takes you to the 2nd floor to discover the history of the 3 Barbanègre brothers. **A display** case showing the military effects of **General Baron d'Empire Joseph Barbanègre** (1772/1830) can be seen on the landing. In front of the town hall, **the statue** by the sculptor Marquestre (1892) reminds us that he fought as a hero at Austerlitz, Jena and Eylau. In 1805, the Emperor Napoleon appointed him Commander of the Legion of Honour, and his name was inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. **The Place Huningue** bears the name of the famous battle in which he also distinguished himself in 1815.

Enter the Maison de la santé at N° 1 (accessible to all) and cross the car park to get to rue du moulin de Menjotte.



2 Capdevieille mill

Several small streams drain the Osses valley. Canals once fed the textile and flour-making industries. Today, the mills have all but disappeared from the town. The Osses has been channelled into a channel to facilitate its flow and limit the risk of overflowing. This mill is one of the oldest in Pontacq.

The path to the mill is very pleasant in summer, as it is on the banks of the Osses and shaded. Once there, you can retrace your steps and admire the view of the Pyrenees and the Tour.



3 The former town hall and abattoir

Here was a tower used as a stairwell. It was known as the "Clock Tower". The clock was located here as early as 1615, in a room that was used as an arsenal, an archive and sometimes as a prison. The house had a bridge over the river Osses. In 1714, ashlar pillars were installed, some of which have survived to the present day. This house housed the council chamber and other rooms where the jurats dispensed justice.

On the street side, there was a town house where the council of jurats was held in 1522.

Destroyed in 1580, it was rebuilt in 1608. The date 1608 can still be seen in a stone cartouche on one of the two arches on the ground floor of this "pillared" house. This "town hall" was built of stone and covered in slate. On the ground floor, between the pillars, were spaces rented out on market days.



4 The Estibayre wash-house

The construction of washhouses began at the end of the 18th century, as the political authorities wanted to put an end to the problems of industrial pollution and epidemics. Under Napoleon III, 30% of the cost of building washhouses was subsidised. Following explanations from Mr Bergalet, the architect, the Town Council voted 399.11 francs for the construction of a washhouse at the Place d'Estibayre. Pontacq had 9 washhouses, 4 of which remain today.



5 The Estibayre house, now the Saint Frai home

The estate is already listed in the general inventory of the houses of the Viscounty of Bearn in 1385 by order of Gaston Fébus. It was initially the birthplace of the oldest noble Pontacquoise family, the d'Estibayre family. It changed owners several times before being bought by Mme Poque, who donated it to the nuns of Saint Frai de Tarbes. The adjoining chapel was built on the model of Empress Eugénie's chapel in Biarritz.



6 The Bugnès house, a former lay abbey

Lay abbeys were founded in the Middle Ages, mainly in Béarn and Bigorre. The principle of the foundation was the creation of a parish by a lord, sometimes very small, or even by a large peasant, in order to collect tithes and maintain a church.

The following inscription can be seen on the door (not visible from the street): IHS MAJD METRE 1646. The first three letters stand for Iesus Hominium Salvator (Jesus the Saviour of Mankind).



7 The Rey house

Pierre Rey was certainly born in this house in 1803. He was a notary and town councillor in Pontacq. In his will, he bequeathed 3,000 francs to the commune's poor.

The features of this beautiful manor house suggest that it dates from the 18th century.



8 Barbanègre House

This house belonged to the Barbanègre family, one of the oldest noble families in Pontacq. The family enjoyed great honour. Paul, the father, a wealthy merchant, held municipal office for many years. Of their 14 children, 3 joined Napoleon I's army, including Joseph, the most famous.

A commemorative plaque in memory of the 3 brothers can be seen in the Pontacq cemetery.



9 The castle of the lord of Pontacq

This residence was built just before the French Revolution by Messire Ignace de Livron, the last Lord of Pontacq, a descendant of the Abbadie de Livron family of lay abbots.

Louis XV's barter: in 1771, the Baron de Livron gave up 56 acres of Senonches wood, in exchange for which his Majesty the King ceded him the seigneurie of Pontacq, despite the protests of the town's jurats, who then lost the power to administer themselves freely and their right of entry to the States of Bearn!



10 Saint-laurent church

It was built on the site of an ecclesia dating from the Carolingian era (7th to 10th century). Initially placed under the protection of St Peter, it was consecrated to St Lawrence in 1511. Much altered over the centuries, a side door near the tower remains, a remnant of the Gothic church. Stained glass windows by the famous Mauméjean workshops. Several 19th century paintings are listed as objects, including two depicting the martyrdom of Saint Laurent.



11 The Tower and its ramparts

Crowned with machicolations and pierced with loopholes, the tower rises above the remains of an enclosure of rolled pebbles embedded in mortar. It dates from the 14th century. The 16th century saw the addition of a dome topped by a bell tower. It is in fact a gateway that opened onto the defensive wall. Listed as a Historic Monument.

Before passing through the fortified gateway, there is a medieval alleyway on your right that is still paved (be careful not to slip). Go back the way you came, pass under the gate and immediately take the Rue des Remparts on your left, a reminder of the old fortifications. At the end of the passage, on your left, look up to see a stone engraved with a horseshoe, marking the home of the former blacksmith.



12 Place du Barry and the Pontacquoise goose

Le Barry was fortified. It was entered through gates, of which there were 5, along with the old tower. In the 17th century, the houses were aligned and built according to the same model, with the first floor projecting forward, supported on the street by wooden pillars, thus forming a wide covered gallery intended to shelter the stalls of the fairground merchants. In addition, there was a fountain with an abundant and pure source, which is probably the reason why Pontacq was founded. Today, this square is home to the statue of the Pontacq goose, which adorns the town's coat of arms. This proud animal watches over the danger coming from neighbouring Bigorre.

Housing

The grandeur of many of the houses bears witness to the prosperity of Pontacq and the region in the 18th and 19th centuries. The portals are magnificent in their scale and ornamentation. The composition of the facades is imbued with classicism, with symmetry, central bays treated as a forebody, and Tuscan or Ionic pilasters. Most of the decoration is on the door, often a cartouche carved in fine-grained white limestone.

Pontacq today

Today, the town has a population of almost 3,000. With its wealth of craftsmen, shops and associations, Pontacq, the administrative centre of the canton, is a dynamic town, proud of its historical and economic past. It looks to the future with confidence and hopes to remain a privileged place to live for many years to come.

