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THE LAGUIOLE CHEESE: TERROIR AND HISTORY

Written notes from Grégoire de Tours certify the existing production of a “forme de fromage” (fourme) on Aubrac plateau as early as during the 5th century. At the 12th century, monks from **Aubrac Abbey** will develop the breeding of **Aubrac cows** and settle the production rules of the cheese which is matured for months in the humid caves of the Abbey, in order to feed during the winter time the pilgrims on their way to St Jacques de Compostelle with the summer milk production.



At that time, the economy of the whole area was mostly based on Aubrac cows: Aubrac steaks are so famous and tender, Laguiole knives made of the horn of the cow, and Laguiole cheese and Aligot made of the milk of the cow.

At the end of the XIVth century, the Aubrac plateau became the centre of a vast cheese production area. The mullet travellers dispatched wine and salt from South and went back with the cheese. In 1789, the French Revolution dispossessed the abbeys of their property, customs are kept thanks to buronniers. Mazucs (buron, hold workshop in mountains) are built with stones and covered with sandstone roof.

After the French revolution in 1789, the properties of the Abbey were sold to new families that would build “**burons**” – alpage farms – with stones, on the plateau, where the **buronniers** –shepherds - would live from mid May till mid October to follow the herds and produce the cheese.

In 1883, 300 burons employ 1200 buronniers and produce 700 tonnes of Laguiole cheese.

In 1897, the mountain farmers gather in Laguiole and create a cheese trade union, which became the Syndicat of Defense in 1939, holder of guarantee label. Austerity and loneliness of buronnier provoked a production fall.

At the beginning of the XXth century, 300 burons were employing 1200 buronniers and producing 700 T of Laguiole cheese.

But then after World War II, due to the extreme and **very harsh conditions** faced by the buronniers on top on these mountains, at an **average altitude of 3000 feet**, the production decreased. In the late 50’s, there are only 55 burons remaining, manufacturing 25 tons of cheese.

In 1960, because they are passionate for their country and their traditions, because they wanted to work and live here, because they would not accept defeat, **a few young farmers decide to create a small Cheese Cooperative : “Jeune Montagne”**. It has been the adventure of a team under the banner of courage, and fidelity to a terroir. Among them, the present President of the Coop : **André Valadier**.

In 1961, the cheese is classified AOC as a guarantee for preserving the methods and know how of previous Buronniers.

Since July 28th, 2000, a new demanding decree sets the A.O.C. area production.

Today, the coop gathers 79 farmers, collects 10 millions of liters of milk, employs 30 people, and produces **700 M of Laguiole** (98 % of the production) and 700 M of Fresh Tome and Aligot.

REFLECT OF A TERROIR

The milk production for Laguiole is restricted to 40 villages based on the plateau of Aubrac, at a **minimum of 2500 feet altitude (and up to 4500 feet)**. The milk can only come from 2 species of cow: **Simmental and Aubrac**. The milk annual production of each animal is strictly limited to **a maximum of 6000 L** to preserve the richness of the milk and the welfare of the animals. Grass and hay are the basic feedings; **silage is strictly prohibited**, and **pasture is compulsory**, night and day, for 4 months during the summertime.



The cheese is made from **unskimmed and whole raw cow milk**. Once drained, pressed and matured for 20 hours at roughly 20°C, the curd has turned into “fresh white tome”. **This tome is crashed**, salted then shaped and pressed in a big mould for 48 hours, with many upside-downs by hand, and finally matured for a minimum of 4 months and a maximum of 2 years.

The white tome can also be mixed with fresh potatoes in order to produce the famous **Aligot of Aubrac**: this uses to be the dish of the poor pilgrims requesting to the monks “something” to eat (something is *aliquid* in Latin, that became aliquot, then Aligot). It became after the revolution, the main meal of the buronniers who were not allowed to eat the noble Laguiole cheese. Thanks to the Coop, this authentic dish is now used for celebration meals.

A bull is sculpted on the top of each Laguiole cheese, and Laguiole name is printed on the sides. A good Laguiole cheese has a cylinder shape, weights around 80 Lbs; The minimum dry matter rate is 58 % by law; the rind is minimum 3 mm thick, and turns from white to light orange and even brown for older cheeses. It is a **semisoft** cheese, with light ivory colour paste, lightly perfumed, little soft, melting on the tongue, with a rustic taste.

We distinguish:

- the **Young Laguiole** : minimum 4 months matured
- the **Laguiole “affiné”** : mini 6 months matured
- the **Old Laguiole** : mini 8 months
- the **Laguiole Grand Aubrac** : made of milk **only collected during the pasture time** between September 23^d and October 13th, and milk exclusively **coming from the original local specie** of cow: the Aubrac cow. This cheese is **matured minimum 8 months**; after very cold winters and snow disappear, vegetation wakes up all of a sudden and produces a very rich pasture, with a very diverse and perfumed flora that will contribute to the taste of the milk.

Laguiole is an authentic product made in perfect hygiene conditions; **the harmony between tradition and modernity**.

And **Michel Bras**, the very famous local chef (three stars at the Michelin guide) based in Laguiole, recommends you to degustate this cheese either at the end of the meal, or as an appetizer, in a salad. He uses it as well as a cooking ingredient. We recommend the local wine **A.O.C. Marcillac**, very rustic, as a good friend for this generous personality.

ENJOY THE LAGUIOLE

The Laguiole has always been a table cheese: for long, its production has been seasonal, and took advantage of an original preservation technique. During winters, wheels were stored in the Aubrac monastery rooms where the temperature wavered from 0 to 2°C (0 to 36°F). Thus, thanks to naturally limited maturing during the 5 winter months, the cheeses were sold in South of France, in spring and summer.

The Laguiole cheese can be recognized by its characteristic shape, its 3 mm white to light orange rind, which may become amber when older, its supple light ivory-colour paste, lightly perfumed, melting and with a frank and rustic taste. The Laguiole cheese is often enjoyed at the end of a meal, and may also be enjoyed as aperitif or in salads. To enjoy it in the best conditions, we advise you to take it out of the fridge one hour before consumption.

Kind regards,

The Interval Team

BON APPETIT !



Laguiole Soufflé

Ingredient (4 p.): 100 g/3.5 oz of Laguiole AOC - 4 eggs - 40 g/1.4 oz of butter - 40 g/1.4 oz of flour - 250 g/8.8 oz of milk – salt, pepper - nutmeg

Preparation : To make the béchamel, mix the butter and the flour in a saucepan over a slow to obtain a roux, and incorporate progressively the milk. Grind the Laguiole and mix it to the béchamel, season. Separate the whites from the yolks. Add the yolks to the béchamel and mix. Remove the saucepan from fire. Beat the whites until they are stiff and incorporate them delicately to the Bechamel. Butter the tins. Fill them with the mixture and bake them in the oven previously pre-heated to 170°C/338 °F (TH. 5-6) during 25 to 30 minutes. Serve immediately after cooking.

Source: www.chazallet.com



Potatoes and Laguiole pancakes

Ingredient (2 p.): 175 g/6.1 oz of potatoes – 70 g/2.4 oz of Laguiole AOC – 30 g/ 1 oz of grated Gruyère - 35 g/1.2 oz of flour – 2 eggs – 40 g/1.4 of liquid fresh cream.

Preparation : Peel the potatoes and cook them in boiling water. Once they are cooked, cut and press them into a purée. In the purée, add the Laguiole cut in cubes, the grated Gruyère, the flour, salt, pepper and cream. In a pan, heat some olive oil. Put a tablespoon of the mixture in the pan. Flatten it with a wooden spatula. Brown the 2 sides of the pancake and watch the cooking. You can enjoy the pancakes with a lamb's lettuce and vinaigrette.

Source : <http://blog.arts-culinaires.com>