A castle in the making

Deep in the forests of northern Burgundy, in a once disused quarry, a team of master-craftsmen is building a 13th-century castle from scratch using medieval technology. Quarrymen, stonemasons, woodcutters, carpenter-joiners, blacksmiths, tile makers, carters, basket makers and rope makers are working together to revive heritage craft skills and to reveal the secrets of medieval construction.

Guédelon, the ultimate in grand design

Throughout the seasons, Guédelon’s workers rise to the extraordinary challenge of building a castle from scratch. This is the only construction site of its kind in the world; visitors from across the globe have witnessed the building of the curtain walls, the raising of the Great Hall’s roof timbers, the construction of the Great Hall’s antechamber and its mural paintings, the building of the castle kitchen, the storeroom, the rib-vaulted guardrooms, the chapel and part of the crenelated wall-walk. 20 years ago Guédelon opened its gates to visitors. 20 years of construction...20 years of hardwork, of intense emotion, of collective enthusiasm, and this is only the beginning!

During this coming season, the carpenters will hoist 251 handhewn wooden beams onto the Chapel Tower and assemble the first pepperpot roof timbers at Guédelon. The masons will continue work on the twin towers of the castle’s Gatehouse.

Guédelon, illuminating the Middle Ages

It is impossible to visit medieval castles and cathedrals without wondering how these buildings were constructed, where the materials came from, how they were transported, which tools were used or how such heavy loads were hoisted. Guédelon sheds light on these mysteries of the medieval world.

Guédelon, learning from experience

At a time when environmental protection is of such concern, Guédelon provides practical lessons in sustainable building. This pioneering construction site offers information on wattle-and-daub or rubble walling, making and using limewashes and pigments, traditional terracotta roof tiles, oak shakes, flax and hemp ropes. Inspired by the past, this building site is also of great relevance to the 21st century.
Guédelon, an act of folly

An archaeological study at Saint-Fargeau Castle revealed that a medieval stone fortress was hidden within its red brick walls: the idea of building a castle from scratch was born. Before the dream could become a reality, there was much work to be done: a site had to be found, the local authorities had to be brought onboard, planning permission had to be obtained, the first members of the construction team had to be recruited. The site - in the heart of Guédelon forest - was found: a site which offered all the resources necessary for the building of a castle: a stone quarry, an oak forest, quarry sand, clay and a water supply.

Building permission was obtained in 1997 and the site opened in 1998.

Guédelon, a shared passion

Today, Guédelon employs 70 people, of whom 35 work on the building site itself. Some were already qualified; others have acquired their skills "on the job". In transforming the wood, stone and clay found on the site, the Guédelon team is reviving forgotten skills and raising the status of traditional heritage crafts. At Guédelon, the ability to talk to the visiting public about the skills used in different heritage crafts is just as important as mastering the crafts themselves.

Guédelon, be part of the adventure

Each year, around 600 people choose to play an active role in the venture and learn more about the building techniques used on site. These individuals come from a wide range of backgrounds – castle enthusiasts, complete novices eager to learn, or work-experience students – for a period of several days, they step into the shoes of a medieval master-builder. The site is overseen by Florian Renucci, the master mason. He is responsible for the day-to-day running of the site and, along with the project's managers, ensures that the work carried out is as historically, architecturally and archaeologically accurate as possible.
Guédelon, experimental archaeology in action

Our task is to recreate the construction techniques and the logistical organisation of an early 13th-century building site. We base much of our work on medieval financial records, illustrations on illuminated manuscripts, stained-glass windows and evidence from contemporary chroniclers. These sources provide us with an insight into the tools used and the building techniques employed. However, in order to ensure that our working practice matches as closely as possible that of the 13th century, the project’s founders and the master-mason insist upon the need to closely examine a number of existing castles: these 13th-century castles are the last reliable witnesses left to us by history. Once examined, photographed and measured, their evidence helps us to avoid committing unnecessary errors which would later need correcting. This way of working has allowed us to reveal some of the medieval castle-builders' fascinating secrets.

Among the castles which serve as models are Ratilly (89), La Motte-Josserand (58), Dourdan (91) and Yévre-le-Châtel (45).

Guédelon, living history

Every day, the site attempts to resolve some of the many questions still unanswered regarding 13th-century castle construction. The serious nature of the project demands the involvement of the academic world, and our work is monitored by both archaeologists and historians. Their involvement is of mutual benefit: they provide the project with invaluable information, while in turn, they have the unique opportunity to observe a team of builders at work on a medieval building site. They can study the skills employed, how tools are handled, and how the site is organised.

The Guédelon advisory committee is comprised of:
Anne Baud: archaeologist and lecturer at Lyon 2 University
Jacques Moulin: head architect at Monuments Historiques, draughted the original plans for Guédelon Castle
Nicolas Reveyron: art historian and lecturer at Lyon 2 University
Nicolas Faucherre: archaeologist, art historian and fortification specialist
Christian Corvisier: architectural historian
Frédéric Epaud: archaeologist and CNRS researcher at Tours, specialist in medieval roof timbers
A shared passion

Guédelon, passing on knowledge

Unlike other present-day building sites, Guédelon warmly welcomes members of the public. The workers demonstrate and explain, to a wide audience, the skills of our forefathers. Stone quarrying, building vaulted ceilings, blacksmithing, raising roof timbers, making fired earth tiles and using medieval lifting machinery are just some of the activities which visitors can witness at first hand during a visit to Guédelon. The workers are always on hand to talk about their craft and the castle’s progress.

Guédelon, where history comes to life

Each year, 50,000 children visit Guédelon with their schools. The site is an excellent educational resource, bringing to life the history of the Middle Ages. Guided tours are tailored to the school curriculum and according to age groups: activity trails for primary school children, and interactive guided tours for secondary school children. Pupils of all ages have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of medieval stonemasons by taking part in stone carving workshops or discovering the secrets of medieval master-builders at the draughtsmanship workshop.

Guédelon, a journey through time

In the heart of an area of outstanding natural beauty, this ever-changing site can be visited time and time again. We have a loyal following and our visitors have a deep connection with the venture; many regularly return to follow the construction’s progress. Each season, Guédelon welcomes some 300,000 visitors, including an ever-growing number of overseas visitors. Guided tours are available in French, English, German and Dutch. In just a few short years, Guédelon has become one of France’s major tourist attractions. Employing 70 people, this venture, thanks to ticket sales, gift shop and restaurant alone, is entirely self-financing.
The hydraulic flour mill

a new challenge
Guédelon’s woodsmen, carpenters, stonemasons and blacksmiths have built from scratch a working reproduction of a medieval hydraulic flour mill. This mill is the fruit of three years of collaboration with archaeologists from Inrap (the French National Institute for Preventative Archaeological Research). It is based on the archaeological remains of a 12th-century water mill found at Thervay in Jura, in the east of France.

milling our daily bread
Just as in the building of the castle, all the different crafts on site worked together to complete the mill. We have achieved our aim of producing flour with medieval techniques; it is now a daily activity at the mill. Set in a woodland clearing, just a stone’s throw from the construction site, you can now visit this working, flour-producing mill. Our baker offers you the chance to taste bread made with Guédelon-ground flour, baked in the castle’s bread oven.

a long-term partnership with Inrap
Following the success of the mill project, we renewed our collaboration with Inrap in 2015 for the building of a working lime kiln. This latest challenge has allowed us to produce our own slaked lime, the essential material in all construction during the Middle Ages, and allows the archaeologists unique insights into medieval lime production. A firing of the lime kiln lasts 3 days and 3 nights.
In 2018, the carpenters will hoist 251 handhewn wooden beams onto the 20m-high Chapel Tower and assemble the pepperpot roof timbers.

Work will continue on building the twin towers of the gatehouse, the main gate into the castle courtyard.

The masons will finish the crenelated parapet of the Pigeon-Loft Tower on the western curtain tower.
For more information

Celebrating 20 years of castle construction

A new film about the Guédelon venture

Discover or rediscover Guédelon in this stunningly beautiful new film. Yohann, our miller-guide, will lead you through the forest into the magical land of Guédelon.

Photography Antoine Pierlot - Commentary by Yohann Mateo Albaladejo - Production Guédelon
Length : 52 minutes. French with optional English or German subtitles. 16:9 - SD    DVD ZONE: ALL ZONE

This film is available on DVD from the giftshop or online.

Guédelon, the co-operative board game: step into the shoes of Guédelon’s builders and work together to build the castle. Extract the necessary raw materials and transform them in order to keep the castle-builders supplied. Train with the master-mason and learn to improve your castle-building skills. Don’t forget to look after the visitors on site and share with them your love of Guédelon!

Designed by Xavier FAURE; illustrator: Jean-Benoît HERON; editor: ASYNCRON games; 2 to 4 players from 7 to 99 years
This co-operative game will be available from the giftshop and from our online giftshop in April 2018.

also available

Guédelon: A Castle in the Making, Maryline Martin and Florian Renucci, Ouest France
Based on the experiments on the Guédelon medieval construction site, this book reveals the secrets of medieval master-builders and sheds light on the work of the various trades associated with castle-construction.

Guédelon: How to Build a Castle, Guédelon
Guédelon: Fact File Guédelon
Guédelon, Fanatics for a Fortress, Philippe Minard, Aubanel

The Vault, documentary film, Benoît Millot: 33 mins DVD ALL ZONE
Practical information

How to find us
Guédelon is situated in the département of Yonne, in north-west Burgundy between the villages of Saint-Saveur-en-Puisaye and Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye. We are 2 hours south of Paris, 1 hour 45 minutes from Orleans, 2 hours from Dijon, 1 hour 20 minutes from Bourges.
Guédelon Route départementale 955 89520 Treigny - France
Tel: +33 3 86 45 66 66 guedelon@guedelon.fr

Opening times
The site is open from March 19th to November 4th 2018 For all our dates and opening times: www.guedelon.fr

Guided tours
Unguided or guided tours (French, English, German and Dutch speaking guides available) Beginners’ stonemaking and clay workshops available for adults and children. Events at Guédelon: firing of clay tiles, tours of the site with Guédelon’s master-mason... Event dates available on www.guedelon.fr
Entrance fee: 14 € / adult; 12 € / teen (14 to 17 yrs); 11 € / child (5 to 13 yrs)
Book tickets, guided tours and workshops on www.guedelon.fr (recommended) or on site (subject to availability).

Restaurant services available on site.

Press contacts
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For royalty-free photos of Guédelon, please contact Sarah Preston

www.guedelon.fr & the social networks Facebook YouTube Twitter Instagram
Guédelon on the BBC

Secrets of the Castle
In 2014, Guédelon was the subject of Secrets of the Castle with Ruth, Peter and Tom. This 5-part BBC documentary series, produced by the team behind the hugely successful Victorian Farm series, was broadcast before Christmas on BBC Two. The series attracted millions of viewers in the UK and has been sold to over one hundred countries worldwide.

Turning back the clock
Historian Ruth Goodman and archaeologists Peter Ginn and Tom Pinfold worked alongside the Guédelon workers for 5 months to turn the clock back to learn the skills of medieval castle builders. During their season at Guédelon they learned to build a spiral staircase, explored how castles were defended, uncovered the surprisingly colourful world of medieval interior design and helped construct a spectacular limestone window.

The world’s biggest archaeological experiment
“Guédelon is the world’s biggest experimental archaeological site – and some would say the most ambitious too. I hope the TV series we have created together does justice to their extraordinary undertaking.”

David Upshall, Executive Producer, Lion Television.

Creating a storm on Twitter
“Secrets of the Castle on iPlayer is BRILLIANT. Get it watched.”

“Secrets of the Castle was the best thing on any TV station, sat or terrestrial, all year. Please make another series or follow-up.”

“Please, @BBCTwo let us have more Secrets of the Castle! We’re dying to see what happens next at @GuedelonCastle.”