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A Walk on the Chemin St. Jacques: Le Puy-en-Velay a Conques, France The Via Podiensis or Route de Puy

Some Trip Resources and Recipes for *Aligot*

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The wonderful 10 day (200 km) walk from Le Puy to Conques covers a small part of one of the pilgrimage routes from all parts of Europe leading to the Shrine of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain. The route from Le Puy to Conques takes the walker across the southern shoulder of the Massif Central, the central highland and the “water tower of France” where many of its major rivers originate. The route passes through near-wilderness and on rural routes between cultivated fields giving a magnificent overview of *la France profonde*. Enroute are numerous pilgrimage sites, medieval towns, and unexcelled culinary opportunities. Its destination of Conques is a Michelin 3-star attraction, a destination worthy of a journey, containing some of the greatest works of Romanesque architecture and other unexcelled medieval treasures. The route from Le Puy to Conques is truly one of the great walks of Europe and is, as yet, still not part of the major tourist itineraries.

Touristic Information for the region:

There are numerous sources of information for potential pilgrims on the route from Le Puy to Conques. It is not essential to read or speak French, especially as many web sites are translated into English. Below are a few bits of useful information for those who may be contemplating the walk.

Internet resources

France has a magnificent set of online resources for travel planning including the national tourist office's website in English which should be the first stop on a search for information:

www.FranceGuide.com

In addition local governments and Syndicats d'initiative in virtually all towns have websites and offer information, often in several languages. Most of these can be accessed through www.FranceGuide.com

One example is the website for Le Puy-en-Velay it self: <http://www.ot-lepuyenvelay.fr>

Conques also has a useful website: <http://www.conques.com/>

Services for pilgrims

A couple in Espalion offers an odd variety of services to pilgrims and has an interesting website with some really eccentric translations into English <http://www.haltpelelerin.fr/>

It is not necessary to carry a backpack, for there is a service moving luggage from one overnight stop to the next, Transbagage. Their website is only in French. <http://www.transbagages.com/default.asp>

For other services, consult the websites discussed above.

Travel Agencies

With a wide array of travel opportunities for women and offered by woman-operated businesses, Wave Journey has a good section on the Chemin and tours along it:

<http://www.wavejourney.com/caminoLePuytoConques.html>

Guided Walks

Many different travel agencies in Europe offer guided walks either in groups or individually. In the latter case, the company books the hotels and restaurants and provides detailed walking instructions and maps.

One self-guided walk is offered by the Canadian tour operator Randonnée Tours (though the particular tour does not go as far as Conques):

http://www.randonneetours.com/tours/france/chemin_st_jacques_hiking_8days_le_puy_itinerary.htm

Although their current printed catalogue does not list a walk on the Chemin, in the past Breakaway Adventures, a tour firm once located in DC and recently moved to South Carolina, has offered one. Breakaway is the US representative of several British, Australian and other tour operators and may still

offer a tour, so it is worth contacting them. While we did not use them for the Chemin St. Jacques as we made our own arrangements, we have used them elsewhere for walking tours in France, in Spain, and in central Europe and found them quite satisfactory. www.breakaway-adventures.com

If you are fluent in French, there are a number of French tour operators offering walks, both self-guided and with a guide, on the route. There are also German-language tour services.

Guide Books

The best series of guides available in English for all parts of the various routes to Santiago de Compostela are produced by the Confraternity of St. James (CSJ), a London-based organization which exists to support pilgrims to the shrine of St. James Major (St. Jacques; Santiago). In addition to its own publications, CSJ has an online bookshop with a variety of guidebooks, other titles and maps on topics related to walking various parts of the routes to the great shrine of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, the far northwestern corner of Spain. A visit to their website is a good second step in planning a walk!

www.csj.org

Aligot

A potato dish combining those tubers with cheese and crème fraîche into a creamy and spectacularly rich version of mashed potatoes is the signature dish of the cuisine along the Chemin St. Jacques, or at least along the *Via Podiensis*. One needs the vigorous exercise of a long walk to work off the calories of a serving of *aligot*, but it is a delight for pilgrims and other walkers.

[Wikipedia](#) has a good entry:

Aligot

Aligot is a dish traditionally made in the south of Auvergne (Aveyron, Cantal and Lozère) region of France made of melted Tomme cheese blended into mashed potatoes, often with some garlic. Other cheeses—usually not fully ripe—can be substituted for Tomme cheese. The dish is ready when it develops a smooth, elastic texture. In France, sometimes a large amount is made in a huge pot and is sold fresh to those who would like to buy it at the market. This dish was originally made from bread by monks who prepared it for the pilgrims on the way to Santiago de Compostela, but potatoes were substituted after their introduction to France, because they allowed a more

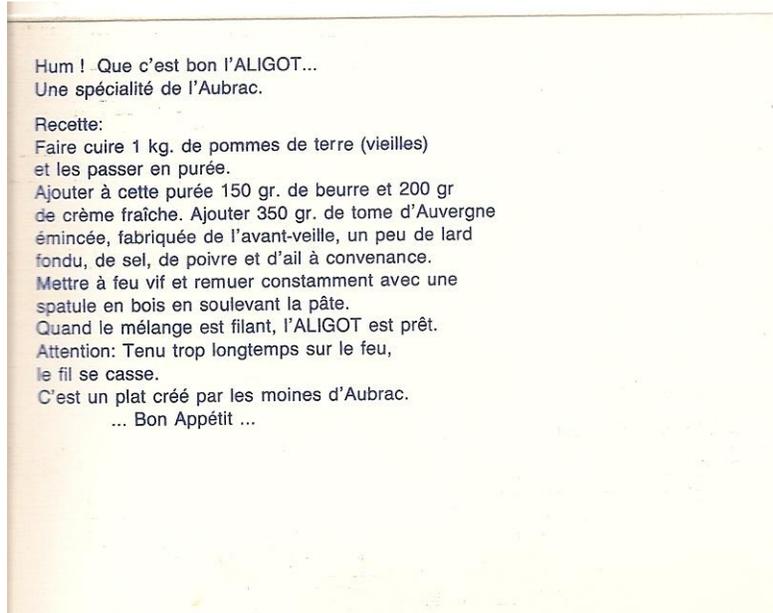


desirable consistency

References

Aligot in *Larousse Gastronomique*, US edition. [ISBN 0517570327](#)

A recipe in French from *Les Recettes de nos Grands-Meres*



And one in English from About.com

Aligot Recipe

By [Rebecca Franklin](#), About.com Guide



Aligot isn't so much a side dish as it is a work of art. Humble potatoes and cheese are beaten together with crème fraîche until they form silky, smooth ribbons of pureed potato. It's a deliciously hearty recipe, and it's tempting to eat it all by itself, in the dead of winter, for its sheer comfort value. Try to hold out, though, and accompany it with a rich steak for a luxurious meal. Once you do, it will be hard to go back to regular mashed potatoes.

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 35 minutes

Total Time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 4 tablespoons butter (1/2 stick)
- 2 cups crème fraîche (substitute equal parts sour cream and heavy cream)
- 1 clove garlic, crushed but kept intact
- 3 cups grated Cantal cheese (substitute good-quality sharp cheddar)

Preparation:

Boil the potatoes for 20 minutes, until they turn tender and drain them. Mash them with a potato masher and vigorously mix in the salt, pepper, and butter for about 2 to 3 minutes, until the potatoes fluff up a bit. Set them aside in the pan for a moment.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, bring the crème fraîche and garlic to just steaming. Remove the garlic and pour the steaming crème fraîche into the mashed potatoes and transfer the pan of potatoes to the stovetop over low heat. Using a sturdy wooden spoon, beat the crème fraîche into potatoes.

Raise the heat to medium and beat in the cheese, 1/2 cup at a time. Continue beating the mixture over the heat until it forms a smooth, velvety texture, about 10 minutes. Pour onto warm plates and serve immediately.

This aligot recipe makes 6 to 8 servings.