

Short History of Our Lady's Sanctuary in Rigaud and the famous "Potato field"



The “Potato Field” of Rigaud



Next to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes there is spread over a large area piles of round, worn down stones, which appear to be laid out with symmetry. The largest mass of these stones, because of its appearance to tilled land, looks like a field of potatoes, from which the legend of the Devil’s Garden arose. Today, after the commercial mining of the stones in the 1930s, the fields have lost their astonishing plateau formation, leaving gaping holes where vegetation continues to encroach every year. There remain, however, a little further towards the west and the south, fields of smaller stones. Trees have begun to take root but certain aspects of the celebrated “potato field” of the past remain. But the origin of the “potato field” is claimed by both folklore and science ...

These stone deposits of course have nothing to do with the Sanctuary in Rigaud and devotion to Our Lady, yet a good number of pilgrims and tourists are still intrigued and wish to

see the fields for themselves. What follows are the principal legends still recounted concerning the “potato field”, as well as the more credible scientific explanation.

The Legends



Illustration of the period

According to the legend of the Devil’s Garden, long ago a local farmer was unafraid to work in his fields on the Lord’s Day because he did not believe in God. Passersby warned that he should not work on Sunday but he shouted back nothing but blasphemies. Then one lovely Sunday, while he was working his land, punishment fell upon him. Lightening struck, tore open the ground and the farmer and all his cattle were swallowed up alive. The devil led his follower down into his dark kingdom and his potato fields were turned into fields of stone.

Even today, we can still occasionally imagine finding remnants of a plow, or potatoes ... of stone.

Another legend, though less well-known, is that of the field of fairies. According to an elderly lady, a native of Rigaud, when she was a young girl, on a sunny Sunday morning she found herself in what was known as the field of fairies. She could hear the fairies singing a beautiful melody which sounded to her like “La Belle Rose”, a song she knew long ago. She was unable to understand the words because the fairies were singing in a strange language. Could it have been Latin or some other foreign language?

Or could the stones have become musical when they were struck by the sun's rays, something observed for centuries. The phenomena could be explained as follows: Sandstone, although extremely hard expands and as it breaks apart, when touched by the morning dew and the sun, makes strange sounds.

With a bit of good will and lots of imagination, we too can compare these sounds to a melody that we know well...

The Scientific Explanation

Geological studies carried out many years ago sought to explain the accumulation of the fields of stone on the Rigaud mountain. In the Ice Age glaciers covered North America and tore huge blocks of rock from the Rigaud mountain. The friction and constant movement of the glacier crushed the blocks into smaller pieces and the flow of ice water polished the stones and carried the debris far away. At the end of the Ice Age, following the flooding then the receding of the *Champlain Sea*, the polished rocks were left on the side of the mountain as fields of stone and are still seen centuries later.

The current dimensions of the basin that is left, being a superficial area of approximately ten arpents, reveals the extent

of the glacier's work over hundreds of years. The sides of the trench reveal a depth of about 20 feet, with a succession of stone beds, the largest blocks of stone lying at the bottom of the trench and several inches deep of small round stones lying at the top.

In addition to this natural phenomenon, first named the "potato field" in an 1832 publication, the Rigaud mountain offers many points of interest for professional as well as amateur explorers or simply as a tourist attraction. One of the mountain's summits is dominated by a huge cross of iron, which replaced an old wooden cross dating back to 1844.