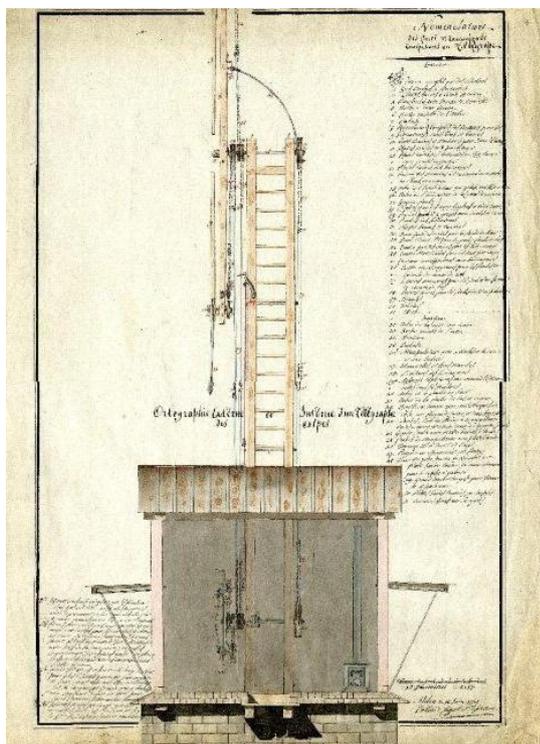


The CHAPPE Telegraph post (visual signalling) in St André.

In July 1793, Claude Chappe invented the first visual signaling link in the world, over some 26 kms, in the area of Paris. His demonstration was so brilliant that he was immediately commissioned for the construction of the Lille-Paris line, 200kms long and equipped with 22 posts. That line became operational in August 1794.

A Chappe line is made up of a succession of posts erected every 10kms and consisting of a small house accommodating the staff who operate the signalling device. Each post has 2 telescopes (which can magnify from 30 to 60 times), thus allowing to read the signals sent by the 2 neighbouring posts.



These posts are built either at the top of mounds, hills, headlands or on high buildings such as towers, public buildings or even churches whose bell-towers have been altered or flattened.

In the Alps, the posts are raised according to the plans of the Engineer Cattaneo, as shown opposite:

A stone basement, a workroom with a wooden structure and a 7.7m high mast, at the top of which a jointed mechanism revolves, operated by qualified people called “stationnaires” with the help of pulley cables and cranks.

On both sides of the workroom, we can see the 2 wooden boxes that hold and protect the telescopes. The jointed mechanisms can adopt 92 different positions corresponding to the 92 first numbers.

They are linked to a vocabulary list containing 8464 words put in alphabetical order and they

allow to send words, confidentially, between the ends of the line which can be 1000 kms far from each other. Sending a message such a distance only required 6 to 7 hours, whereas it would take the mail coach about one week. In a very short time, many more lines were created from Paris, as shown on the map below.

Lignes télégraphiques entre 1793 et 1852



The construction of the Lyon-Turin line was ordered by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1805. The post of St-André located at “le Plan de l’Ours” stands on this line and worked from 1807 to 1814.

In France, Chappe telegraphy reached its peak in 1845. The national web then counted 535 posts along 5000 kms of lines. But shortly, the Morse telegraph took the place of the Chappe visual signalling system.



Our association, “St-André mills and heritage» discovered the ruins of the post at le Plan de l’Ours in 2003 (pict “before) in 2006, we started digging (pict “after”). 12m3 were excavated by hand and revealed a paved room half buried, with roughcast walls. A door and 3 steps lead inside.

In 2007, in agreement with St-André council, the restoration of the site was planned over 3 years.

It was to be by financed by the council , the “Conseil General of Savoy and the French state.”

The path leading to the site was to be made accessible by the council of St-André, the masonry and wooden structure being made by local firms.

The welded parts were provided by a class from Tarare technical school.



The steel axis, their bronze landing and the jointed larch arms were made by volunteers who also assembled the different parts in an assembly shop, which represents over 2850 hours of work.

The council was in charge of the transport of the completed mechanism a well as of its positioning into the wooden roof (see picture below).

Thus restored, the visual signaling post works as it did in 1807 and has been open to the public since 2010. There are guided visits in July and August.

In 2013, the post was equipped with a telescope dating back from that period together with a copy of the vocabulary used in 1807.

The coding and decoding of messages can be simulated as well as their display when they came through that post

Enjoy your visit