

POST 4. BREAD CHAMBER AND OVEN

The bread chamber consists of two parts : one part where the dough is prepared, and the second, the oven which belongs to the community, where it is cooked. The building, originally built in 1893 by the “ Société du village “, was rebuilt in 1925.

The bread of Saint-Jean was traditionally made with rye flour and wheat, cereals grown on small plots close to the village. The grains to be ground were transported by mule to the mills at Le Martinet below Vissoie.

Bread making took place two or three times a year, usually during the winter months. The oven was heated two days before the bread was baked. The person who last used the oven, was the custodian of the leaven and was responsible for heating the oven. Each family was required to give wood, a *rètze*. For several days and nights, families came in turn, to the bread room, preparing, kneading the dough, and letting it rise. Each family had their own recipe.

It is said that the oven was at the right temperature when hair on a forearm near the vault, would start to burn after ten seconds. The vault of the oven had to be, according to local expression, “beautifully

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white”. When the correct temperature was reached, the first batch took about twenty minutes to cook, the second forty. Each family stored a hundred loaves in its grenier. Four months later, the bread was cut with an axe and had to be dipped in soup so as not to break teeth. Those whose reserve was exhausted ate polenta until the next batch of bread could be cooked, on decision by the village leaders.

The bread chamber and oven still belong to the “ Société du village “, which, in 1930, managed several jointly owned facilities. The accounts of the “ Société “ are carefully preserved in a wooden box, under the care of one of three village leaders. Leaders were elected at the general meeting, usually held in the bread room.

The “ Société du village “ operates according to very specific community regulations. Each member owns a house in the village, pays a contribution, participating in chores and duties on the properties of the “ Société “.

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Our friends want to show us a strange, rather mysterious place. Going up a few meters along the creek near the bread room, on the right, there is a barely visible cavity.