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VD Worth one's salt – the Bex mines

Between 200 to 60 million years ago, the present Rhône Valley was a shallow sea. The salt deposits of Bex in the Canton of Vaud are derived from the salt of this sea. A labyrinth of passages and tunnels today yields 10,000 tons of salt per year. The salt mines in Bex kept the population well supplied with salt for over three centuries and were once a symbol of power and wealth.



Salt mines in Bex

The 60-kilometre-long labyrinth in Bex lies under the hamlets of Villars, Chesières and Arveyes. A trip into the bowels of the earth gives one an idea of the hardships associated with the production of salt.

Bex was already known to have saline springs when it was ruled by French aristocrats before the 15th century. According to a local myth, the springs were first discovered at a point known as Le Fondement by a poor farmer, Jean du Bouillet, who had left his goats in the area. He found that the goats drank from two springs in the area but when he tasted the water, it was salty. Bouillet – after whom the mines are named – then boiled the brine from the springs in a cauldron, only to find a layer of salt covering the bottom of the pot when the water evaporated.

The Bex mines are known for being 'low density' in that the brine has just 300 grams of salt per litre of water. Water seeps through at least 400 metres of salt rock. It forms a subterranean lake of about 3,000 m² and 100m deep. It is estimated to contain over 50,000 tonnes of salt in suspension. Around half of the salt goes directly to the chemical industry, mainly Novartis.

On a visit to the museum and the mine, visitors see the various techniques of salt mining from the year 1684 to the present and the history of this white gold. A small mine train takes visitors into the subterranean world and to the restaurant located in the mountain at a depth of 400 meters.

from swissinfo

Who is on the 200 CH-Franc-Note?

Answer: Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, born in Lausanne VD on 24 September 1878 and educated at the University of Lausanne. He taught briefly in nearby Aubonne, and then in Weimar, Germany. In 1903, he left for Paris and remained there until World War I, with frequent trips home to Switzerland. In 1903, he published *Le petit village*, a collection of poems.



Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz

In 1914, he returned to Switzerland, where he lived a retired life devoted to his writing.

He wrote almost thirty books, and the libretto for Igor Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat*.

He died in Pully, near Lausanne on May 23, 1947.

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