
Saint-Maurice, 18 September 2014

**BASILICA – ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE – ABBEY TREASURE
THE ABBEY OF SAINT-MAURICE UNVEILS ITS NEW VISITOR TRAIL**

On 21 September, the inauguration of the new visitor trail for the Abbey of Saint-Maurice cultural and heritage site will be the first event in the Abbey's Jubilee year. The trail will guide visitors from the basilica to the cloister via the archaeological site, the catacombs and the new Abbey treasure room. The trail tells visitors the story of a community that has existed for 1500 years and is thus the oldest Christian monastery still in operation in the western world. Monsignor Joseph Roudit, together with the restorers, archaeologists, historians, architects, archivists and museum specialists who designed the trail, previewed for the press the guiding principles that produced this innovative visitor route.

The Abbey of Saint-Maurice, a constant beacon in an ever-changing world, has completed three major Jubilee projects, all of which aim to make an exceptional heritage available to the public. The showcasing of the Martolet archaeological site, the new presentation of the treasure in a museum setting and the reorganization of the archives are the three large-scale projects that were finished in time for the Jubilee. Together with the basilica, they now constitute the high points of the route followed by the visitor.

It is a route that - thanks to the sober, avant-garde approach to the presentation - is dominated by light and imagery, the symbols of knowledge and faith. Lightboxes, interactive screens, models and 3D films tell an extraordinary story: that of a miraculously preserved, living religious community that bears sole witness to a spiritual and cultural activity not found anywhere else in the western Christian world. Visits mainly take place in silence while listening to a two-voice commentary punctuated by the moving singing of the abbey's canons.

The abbey contains an invaluable heritage that must constantly adjust to the waywardness of the cliff above it. Partially destroyed by falling rocks and rebuilt more than once, the abbey has been fortified and enlarged over the centuries. In order best to preserve one of the relics of its past, work began over ten years ago to cover and protect the archaeological site. Today, visitors discover the history and development of the successive sanctuaries and buildings in the Martolet courtyard under a 1,200 sq. m translucent roof that protects the ruins.

From the archaeological site the visitor moves to the catacombs and the abbey treasure. The latter is one of the most famous ecclesiastical treasures in Europe. Reorganising it called for the concerted efforts of experts in a variety of fields: restoration, preventive conservation, the history of art, history and museography. The result is a significant updating of our knowledge as well as a reminder of the need to continue the restoration of the main items of the treasure which the community has so carefully preserved. The enlargement of the treasure room offers the public exceptional accessibility whilst the optimum security and preservation of the artefacts is assured by means of 'light bubble' display cases.

Visitors then follow the trail to the cloister and finally to the new Martyr's chapel. Situated inside the basilica, the chapel is an invitation to meditate on martyrdom in today's world. It contains eight black marble steles each surmounted by a cedarwood casket containing various relics from the abbey treasure.

The opening of the cultural and heritage site to the public represents the successful achievement of the multidisciplinary work involved by the community that has been the guardian of this site for 1,500 years. It will be inaugurated on 21 September 2014, on the eve of Saint-Maurice's day. The Abbey will be pleased to open the trail to its many visitors from 23 September at 10 am.

Contacts

Monsignor Joseph Roduit (abbot)	024 486 04 04
Canon Olivier Roduit (abbey)	079 250 68 52
Canon Thomas Rödder (abbey)	024 486 04 04 (German/French spoken)
Alessandra Antonini (archaeologist)	027 322 29 24
François Wiblé (archaeologist)	027 722 65 45
Laurent Savioz (architecture)	027 322 54 91
Professor Pierre Alain Mariaux (treasure)	pierre-alain.mariaux@unine.ch
Michel Etter (museum specialist)	079 428 16 41

Further information www.abbaye-stmaurice.ch/presse