

1 Le train des Pignes -The « pine nut » train

The first work on the Nice to Digne line was initiated in 1883 between Nice and Mézel, but the complex geology and rugged terrain finally led to the decision to adopt a narrow gauge track. The metric gauge track (a metre in width) enables the tracing of tighter bends and to envisage steeper inclined ramps, thus reducing the length of the route and the need for important engineering structures. However, this choice restricts the economic potential of the line and “*Nice which could have been the port of Geneva, will only be the port of Puget-Théniers*” ! according to the ironic deputy Eugène Delattre. In 1892 the sections Nice-Puget-Théniers and Digne-Saint André are opened. **But it is not until 1911 that the 151 kilometres of the line are completed.**

The « Sud France » railway network, comprising amongst others Nice- Meyrargues and Toulon-Saint Raphaël, cross Pine forests and is **nick-named the « Train de Pignes » - Pine nut train**. This evokes for some the slow locomotive which enabled passengers to get down from the train to collect pine cones, or the drivers who supposedly used these as fuel!

A visionary project

From the moment of the annexation of the Comté of Nice from France in 1860 Alphonse Beau, an engineer from Digne, conscious of an opportunity for development, imagined a railway line connecting Nice to Grenoble even though the two towns were not even linked by road. It was not until 1879 that this visionary project became part of the Freycinet Plan which aimed to equip the south-east with a public network serving all the Prefectures and Sub-Prefectures (including Puget Théniers) paying special attention to the strategic consequences.

The Railway heritage

Today it is still possible to enjoy the touristic steam train from May to October between Villars and Annot. Don't miss seeing the 19th century railway features at the station: the locomotive sheds (one of which is a classified historical monument), the wagons, the mobile crane, the turntable and signals. The former goods hall is currently being used as a venue for an organic farmer's market.