

The evolution of equestrian tourism in France, from adventurers to connected riders: *The normalization of a transgressive activity?*

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Introduction

The equestrian tourism was born **in an informal way in France after the Second World War.**

It was the work of adventurers

The divergent born activity, following the example of the other sports of open air, **enters a process of normalization** : creation of professional training; development of comfort and security; integration of the new technologies (GPS, internet, numeric maps, etc...)



The object of this study is to **understand this cultural change in the practice and representation** of the equestrian tourism in France.

Do we observe a structural change from a divergent to a more normative activity ?

or

Do we observe, behind the integration of norms and new technologies, the persistence of transgressive behaviour, as a quest of liberty ?



Methodology:

- ❑ **Literature review**, replacing the history of the equestrian tourism in the emergence of the society of leisure;
- ❑ **Statistical data from the official authorities** allowing to estimate the evolution of the number and sociological profiles of the followers,
- ❑ **Interpretative qualitative survey (lead in 2016) with professionals:**
 - the ex-president of the FITE Hervé Delambre
 - the president of the CRTE Pays de la Loire : Colette Bourland
 - the president of the CDTE Mayenne: Daniel Chauvière
 - the president of the association "Equiliberté": Michel Bazin
 - A journalist specialized in equestrian tourism : Claude Lux
 - The director of an equestrian tourism center in Sarthe: Angélique Bralet
- ❑ **Interpretative qualitative survey (lead in 2016) with eight equestrian tourists** –via the federation and the association

I. A transgressive born activity? The emergence of equestrian tourism in France (1945-1963)

The equestrian tourism appeared in 1945', **in the context of the development of the society of tourism and leisure in France** (Bertho-Lavenir, 1999; MIT, 2002; Pickel-Chevalier, 2014, 2015).

But until 1960s, it stayed **the work of adventurers**, tired of the learning in club, practicing an equestrian tourism **on the verge of the exploit:**

- *journey from Paris to the Mayenne (300 km) by Jean Bouët-Willaumez in 1947;*
- *journey from Clermont-Ferrand to Saintes-Marie de la Mer (450km) by Christiane André in 1952, etc. (Delambre, 2004).*



This equestrian tourism was characterized **by long distances** (50 km a day or more; more than a week), **and frugal conditions** (“des-equinisation” of France **since 1930**) reminding the spirit of the last units of cavalry disappeared in the end of the war (Delambre, 2016): *sleep often under the stars, eat in a frugal way, wash in a brief way.*

This first equestrian tourism was born as a transgression from the dominant riding in club, but was nevertheless influenced by the military spirit (most of them were men, upper class, military past...)



These first equestrian tourists create a **divergent riding**, with regard to the education which they received, since globally **all of them come from a classic equitation learnt in club** (Delambre, 2004).

They generate a relative craze, that concretize in the first meeting of about sixty riders in **August 1961 in Auvergne (Puy-en-Valey)**:

Creation of the “Equirando”.



II. The progressive normalisation (1963-1987)

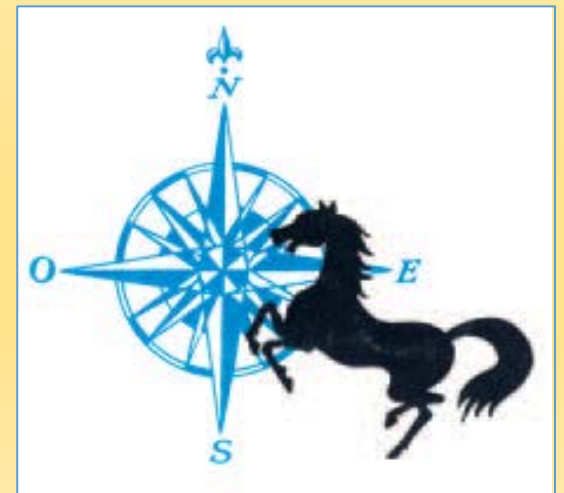
II.1. Birth of the institutions

This informal development lead the first “adventurers” **to feel a need of a structuralisation**, in order to perpetuate their activity.

In 1963, they create the ANTE (National Association of the Equestrian Tourism).

They look for a normalisation, via the support of official national instance, especially **the National Studs**

Obtained by its 1rst president : Raymond Henry (1963-1971).



The missions of the association is the organisation of professional training (travel guides at different levels); creation of trails, communication, events...

From 1963 to 1980 : Development of the national net :

- 1979 : all the regions have a **ARTE** (Regional association of equestrian tourism)
- end of 1980' : all the departments have a **ADTE**.

Development of an international net in 1975: creation of the FITE

(International Federation of Equestrian Tourism) in Dublin (France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy and Ireland).



- ❑ **1980: creation of the licence « National Equestrian Tourism »** (1981: 8000 members)
- ❑ **1984 : ANTE is officially recognised by the Ministry of Sport, Youth and Environment** as the national federation of equestrian tourism
- ❑ **1985: Creation of the TREC** (Techniques de Randonnée Equestre de Compétition), that paradoxally become a key events for ANTE and FITE



II.2. Development of private companies: from transgression to normalisation

Beside the associative equestrian tourism, appeared an economic activity.

- Henry Roque invented media communication around this embryonic phenomenon. In 1961, he travelled from the Provence to Paris (700 km!) to meet on his horse the Minister of Sport, claiming: « *M. Minister, the Equestrian Tourism in born !* »
- His activity was really transgressive, with few respect for private propriety, accommodation, comfort... and even health of the horses.

His heritage stays very controversial



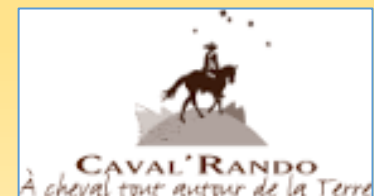
H. Roque opened the door of **private companies, created since 1970', with increasing standardisation:**

Cheval d'Aventure was set up in 1972; Rando-Cheval (1998); Cavalier du Monde (2005); D'aventure and Co(2005); Caval and Go (2009); Caval Rando (2011).

> These agencies offer all-inclusive packages for different ability levels, trying to associate “adventure”, safety, comfort and conviviality.

First conclusion :

The Equestrian Tourism in France was born **transgressive**. It has changed toward **progressive normalization** (federation, degrees, competition with rules) but staying as a **divergent activity, with strong quest for autonomy** compare to the main equestrian activity in France (club, competition).



III. The Triumph of normalisation or divergence, thanks to modernisation and new technologies? (1987-today)

III.1. Modernisation, as a support of normalisation...

1987: The « Big Bang »: creation of FFE by the association of the 3 French equestrian federations (Equestrian Sport, Tourism; Riding on Pony) –Chevalier V, 2011.

>> **ANTE become DNTE** (National Delegation of Equestrian Tourism)

It brings more visibility and power to the French federation, but Tourism, which is the smallest component (8% in 1987), **lost a part of its autonomy and freedom.**



The practices and needs of the riders have changed:

According to Hervé Delambre (2015): « *We don't ride today as we did 30 years ago. The riders want shorter trip in days and kilometres, less difficult, more comfortable, always with joviality and relax. The Spartan trip, with 50km a day with no comfort, don't seduce anymore* »

This fact is confirmed by the riders (survey 2016):

- They **ride from 15 to 25 km a day, most of time 2 days, till 6 days.**
- They **look for comfort** (comfortable hotel, good food, good quality of trail).

>> The change happened at the **dawn of the XXlth century** (according to the president of CDTE Mayenne and the director of equestrian tourism center, 2016)



According to C. Lux, this evolution joints **also the assimilation of the profiles of the FFE riders (feminisation, youth)**: « *Women usually refuse to sleep in a barn with hay or wash very little for several days. They pay more attention to themselves and the comfort of their horse*» (survey, 2016).

In 2015, the tourism membership represent 12.5% of FFE (84 230 out of 673 026))

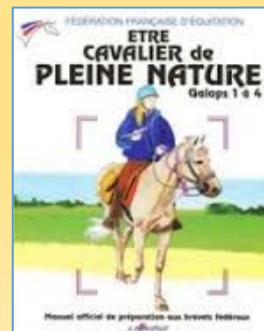
- **48% of 20 years old or less** (against 69% for the totality of licences)
- **76.5% of women** (against 82.9% for the totality of licences)
- **Essentially medium upper class** –Pickel-Chevalier, 2015.

>> DNTE follows the tendency, but staying « divergent », with less strong hegemony of women and youth.



This evolution of needs leads to the creation in 2000' of quality certifications:

- ❑ **Specific degrees** (« Galop de pleine nature ») -focus on controlling the horse while outdoors and on a knowledge about the environment
- ❑ **"Equestrian Tourism Center" labels** -high quality of welcome and choice of horses. This label today covers 300 riding schools.
- ❑ **"Horse stage" ("Cheval Etape")** label -to identify and promote high quality of accommodation which can accept horses, combining comfort, safety, appropriate food (hay, water), information on the activities and maps of local trails (Pickel-Chevalier, 2015)
- ❑ **Agreement with other national institutions** (Natural Regional Park ; ONF)



Influence of the new technologies ?

❑ **The NT help the riders better preparing their trip (survey 2016), such as:**

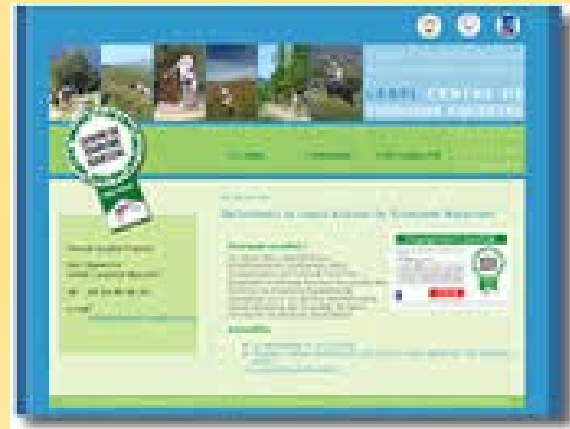
-Identification of the trails and the difficulties; downloading maps, reservation of accommodation, restaurant, services.

❑ **During the trail, they use also NT for a better orientation:**

*They use GPS, but more **as a complement of the paper maps**, than to replace them.*



DNTE website



III.2.... Or as support to stay a divergent activity, fond of freedom?

The practices of the riders have changed: modernity, labels, training, and new technologies tend to a normalisation of equestrian tourism.

>> But, behind it, they don't fundamentally change their representations and motivations, that stay:

« liberty; nature; close relation with the horses; discovering of landscape; break in the today life and work; conviviality with other riders; meeting with local population » (survey with riders, 2016)

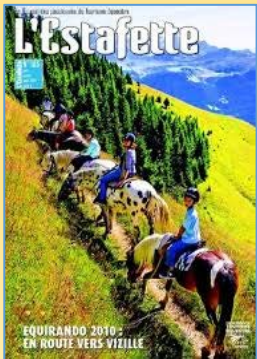
The new technologies bring them simultaneously more security and more autonomy.



The « transgressive » mentality is still alive:

In 2000 the FFE was obliged to re-establish its status to work really as a whole (Chevalier V, 2011):

- The DNTE become **CNTE** (National Comity of Equestrian Tourism).
- CNTE is part of the FFE, but **keep some authority upon its own organisation and missions** (*professional training, creation and maintain of trail, specific touristic labels, organisation of events, publication of communication such as Cheval Nature, L'Estafette...*)
- **They keep divergent center of interest and mentality**, because of their « transgressive » quest of « liberty », deeply associated to tourism -break in the daily life) (president of CRTE, president of CDTE, survey 2016.)



This « transgressive » mentality is even more evident with the creation of the association *Equiliberté* in 2002

An association composed of volunteers, that refused the integration of tourism into the FFE (in 2000)

- They work like a **federation of department and local associations** (150)
- They **refuse competition** (contrary to the TREC) and **claim independence** from any national sportive federations.
- They organise their **own trekkings and meetings**.
- Even if they are smaller (2000 members), they are present in 92 departments, and like to **challenge the CNTE**, calling themselves « *National Federation of Tourism Riders, by the Riders for the Riders*”

*In reality, they work in complementarity with CNTE (organisation of trekking, maintain of trails), since **the tourist riders usually participated to both events.***



Conclusion

This study demonstrates that, as many open air activity (Bessy and Mouton, 2004), equestrian tourism is deeply characterised **by a desire of transgression, since its birth till nowadays.**

- Its organisation (national federation, professional training, certification) and the change of needs of the riders (security and comfort) make equestrian tourism **progress toward a normalisation.**
- **But the riders**, as the leaders of the institutions, **keep a transgressive mentality**, from the dominant practices in the clubs, sports, competitions.

The quest of liberty stays very much alive, but the conception of it deeply changed, to be no more associated with risk and absence of comfort

(as most of open air activity -Pickel-Chevalier, 2015; Carter, 2006; Hall, 1992)

The new technologies participate to this double phenomena:

- They answer a quest of “normalization”, by favouring security and comfort;
- But in the same time, they reinforce autonomy and freedom, into a modern world which is no more prepared for horse trails

Equestrian tourism in France testifies of continuity, combining conservation and adaptation, between past and present society...

