

"The soffioni" of Larderello (Volterra)



Who has not become curious when seeing the earth steam near Volterra?

These natural events in the Larderello area (lakes, soffioni (hot steam coming naturally from the underground) and water springs) were already known to the Etruscans and Romans who used the boron salts for pharmaceutical purposes for preparing glazes.

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the waters were used for spa and pharmaceutical purposes.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, following the discovery of boric acid in the Larderello area, the first attempts at commercial exploitation were made.

In 1818, Francesco Giacomo Larderel, a salesman of French origins, founded the first industrial centre for the production of borax near Montecerboli.

In a few decades, thanks to continuous technical innovations, the borax industry became a leading-edge model in the industrial and technological panorama of Tuscany. In 1846, Grand Duke Leopold II, gave a local village the name Larderello in order to pay homage to the birthplace of the borax industry.

Some factories were built at Lustignano, Serrazzano, Monterotondo, Castel Nuovo, Sassano, and Lago. The soffioni are currently used for the production of geothermal energy.

The history of the borax industry is documented in the Museum of Geothermal Energy in Larderello (Paolina, Larderello (Info: tel. 0588 67724))