Hermitage fight - latest

21 Jul 2012 by Jancis Robinson

25 Jul - Yesterday's meeting with ISTA TIM went very well, according to Caroline Frey. The technicians seemed very amenable and had already identified three possible alternative sites for the mast. They also mentioned harnessing some new technology that would involve a much lower aerial which would eventually be camouflaged by vegetation. They plan to do more detailed feasibility studies on the three possible sites and report back next week. Fingers crossed for what looks like a satisfactory outcome. See post-meeting press release.

23 Jul - Tomorrow the president of Hermitage vignerons Michel Chapoutier, together with Caroline Frey of Paul Jaboulet Aîné and the mayor of Tain l'Hermitage, will meet representatives of the French engineering company ITAS TIM to try to persuade them to abandon plans to erect an 18-metre (54-foot) TV mast just behind the chapel on the world-famous hill of Hermitage that dominates the Rhône Valley above the town of Tain.

The landmark chapel gives its name to Hermitage La Chapelle, Jaboulet's flagship wine and is now owned by Paul Jaboulet Aîné, the northern Rhône company acquired some years ago by the Frey family who also own Ch La Lagune in Bordeaux and have an interest in Billecart-Salmon champagne.

ITAS TIM managed to secure government permission to erect the giant mast before the growers on this unique hunk of granite, whose wines have been celebrated since Roman times, even realised the mast was proposed.

The company's argument is that greater broadcast capacity is needed and that the new aerial has to be sufficiently close to a nine-metre mast erected 30 years ago not far from La Chapelle.

The Hermitage producers hope to persuade ITAS TIM to put both their masts on a different hill altogether and argue there is no shortage of possible sites nearby. It will presumably all boil down to money in the end.

The other major producer of Hermitage, arguably the greatest wine made from Syrah in the world, is Jean-Louis Chave, who has been arguing for some time that the hill of Hermitage ought to be given special world heritage site status, as Aubert de Villaine is campaigning for on behalf of the Côte d'Or and as the town of St-Émilion won some time ago. If such status were accorded this great landmark, it would be very much more difficult to desecrate it with masts and pylons.

You can sign the petition against this TV mast here.