

THE AIN VALLEY, THE HIGH JURA AND ST CLAUDE

A day of contrasts. After a drive through the broad Ain Valley, we take a walk through the soft country around Orgelet before heading into the heart of the High Jura and the mountainous landscape around St Claude.

- 1 30 mins. Crossing the Ain at Pont de Poitte, we follow the valley southwards to Orgelet. Parking at the edge of the town we start our walk.
- 2 A circular of about 1.45 hrs takes us from the tannery district down lanes and through fields, past old mills as far as the village of Ecrille and back.
- 3 Crossing the Vouglans Lake reservoir on Pont de la Pyle, we leave the Ain. A half-hour's drive brings us to the twin lakes of Evital high in the Jura hills.
- 4 A good place to swim, picnic and, perhaps, take a walk.
- 5 A spectacularly scenic route takes us in half an hour to St Claude - a rather grotty town in the most extraordinary setting.
- 6 Driving through the town we climb to the clean little village of Chamont. Parking near the bar, a short circular walk of less than an hour takes us to the delightful cascade, Queue de Cheval.
- 7 Returning to St Claude there is an opportunity to explore the town, famous as a centre of the pipe-making industry and diamond cutting. The determined could make the hike from the bottom of the town to the Cave of St Anne, high over the town.
- 8 A direct route via Clairvaux les Lacs returns us to Lac Chalain.

THE UPPER AIN VALLEY

Ironmasters and their chateaux, a medieval castle ruin and a fortified town. Plus some gorges for good measure.

1. The rivers of the Lac Chalain region flow into the Ain. The Upper Ain is on the far side of the plateau. A 20 mins drive through the forest brings us to Chatelneuf.
2. Nearby at Rocher de la Baume (40 mins walk) we overlook the Upper Ain and its tributaries, the Saine and Lemme. Plus a large saw mills for the forest produce.
3. Dropping down to the Lemme we stop briefly at the Cascade de la Billaude before continuing to the forges at Syam.
4. Metal is still fabricated here although there is only an exhibition to tell the story of its heyday. Nearby is the site Caesar finally defeated the Gauls.
5. Leaving return car at Bourg de Sirod, we drive up a forestry road to gain height. It takes 15/20 mins to walk up to the rocky ridge above the road tunnel. Another 30 mins and we are at the ruins of a medieval castle. Another 30 mins and we reach a 12C chapel, a shaded setting ideal for a picnic. We then spend a further hour along the Ain where the water forces through gorges and cascades.
6. We drive to the source of the Ain - more impressive with an aqualung.
7. A short distance away is the fortified town of Nozeroy. This small peaceful town has a history of power. There are a couple of restaurants too.
8. Return to Chalain via Champagnole following the Ain valley.

WALKING IN THE FRENCH JURA

A programme of sightseeing trips with the emphasis on walking

To the east the plain of Burgundy meets the limestone cliffs of the Jura. They rise in a series of broken plateaux before dropping away to The Rhone and Geneva. Much of the region is densely forested and it is not easy to find interesting walks. You cannot rely on the GRs (Grands Randonees) to offer the best routes as they mostly utilise old forestry roads and miss the viewpoints. But along the western edge it is more open with dairy farms, vineyards and old towns and villages. The region abounds with lakes and rivers and there are some sensational gorges.

In May and June 2003 I worked as an Outdoor Guide for Eurocamp at the La Pergola campsite on Lac Chalain not far from Lons le Senier, south-east of Dijon.

Eurocamp had offered guided walks in the past, but only local walks from the camp itself. I suggested something more ambitious: an opportunity for people on holiday to not only visit the main sights of the region, but to walk in and out of them and so experience them in a more unusual way and see them in their greater context.

I had a hired car and was given two weeks to research a programme. I then took small groups of families and couples in convoy, each in their own cars. This meant people were independent to do all or a part of the day. Because the days were broken into several short and not-so-short walks there was something for everyone - from four year olds upwards. Often I would leave my car at one end of the walk and use it to return drivers to the other cars (I refer to this as "the return car"). So several of the walks described are only partial circulars. It is, however, possible to do all the walks with only one vehicle - on occasions it will involve a longer walk.

Because these were guided walks, the descriptions given here must be used in conjunction with a map. I used the 1:25,000 maps. It will not be difficult to see the general route we took from this scale map. Although from the descriptions given it is not possible to follow the precise route, that hardly matters. Their value will be in getting you to the nice places where you will make your own discoveries.

This selection of walks is far from exhaustive. The North and East were simply too far away to include in a week's programme. There are many other interesting places to visit but where good walks were not so apparent. However, for the visitor to the central area wanting to see the best scenery with the minimum of fuss, this will prove a useful pointer.

The outings are all based on departing from and returning to La Pergola.

THE SEILLE VALLEY – Baume les Messieurs and more.

The River Seille starts in two different blind valleys (reculees), sheltered, fertile havens curtained by cliffs. This day is sheer delight. It divides into two parts.

- 1 It takes under half an hour to drive to the start of the walk, the edge of the plateau at Sermu. A "return car" is left at the viewpoint above the caves.
- 2 1.5 hrs takes us along the cliff edge and down a steep path to the Abbey.
- 3 About an hour to have a drink and explore the Abbey before
- 4 Following the little valley path to the river's source. (Half an hour without a swim, longer with).
- 5 Picnic place by the caves. Tour of the caves takes 45 mins - bring a warm top.
- 6 A 20 minute climb returns us to the top and the car(s).
- 7 A short drive, including a view stop at Grange sur Baume brings us to the other reculee, above Blois sur Seille.
- 8 A walk has been laid out through a fascinating field system in which shepherds' huts have been incorporated into the dry-stone walls.
- 9 We drive round the Cirque de Ladoye, through Blois and down the valley to Nevy where the two Seilles join. Nice stopping place on the river bridge.
- 10 Perched above the valley is Chateau Chalon to which we drive. This is a beautiful town to explore on foot for about half an hour.
- 11 The most direct route back to Lac Chalain goes close to Lons le Saunier.

LES CASCADES DU HERRISSON & THE FOUR LAKES

A day in two distinct parts. First an unusual approach to a justifiably popular place. Next a leisurely afternoon walk on easy level terrain. Pic de l'Aigle to climax.

- 1 It takes 45 mins to get to the start. We will stop at Evantail Belvedere for a great view and leave a "return car" at La Fromagerie.
- 2 Our walk begins a couple of miles from Bonlieu. Following paths close to the cliff edge it takes an hour to reach the Evantail Falls. The descent is very dramatic.
- 3 It takes an hour or two (with or without a swim) to work our way upstream, to enter the cavern, walk behind the waterfall, swim in a pool. Just beyond the snack bar we take the path to La Fromagerie. L'Eolienne is a nice bar and creperie with a botanical exhibition. And the starting place of the 4 lakes walk.
- 4 It takes about three hours to walk the Four Lakes. There is a choice of routes. Unfortunately I can't give as much detail as I'd like because I'm writing this back in Wales and my maps were all lost in a house-fire. I did this walk several times and never the same way twice. The main paths connecting the lakes are nice enough but there are all manner of other paths accessing many different points around the lakes and they are all completely walkable.
- 5 We drive to the Belvedere of the Four Lakes, an exquisite viewpoint which overlooks the day's explorations. With a "return car" left at the foot of Pic l'Aigle, the area's highest point, we are able to make a half-hour's walk between the two viewpoints.

ORNANS & THE SOURCES OF THE LISSON AND LOUE

The realist painter Gustave Courbet was born in Ornans and painted local places. We see both his paintings and the places themselves which are very impressive.

- 1 It takes less than an hour to reach the gorge at Devil's Bridge (steps lead down). On the way we pass Salins les Bains set in a deep valley between two forts. We leave a "return car" at the end of the walk and go to Nans Ste Anne.
- 2 An easy and pretty walk of half an hour along the Lisson brings us to the source.
- 3 We spend an hour exploring the great features ending with the ancient oak before returning to the cars at Nans.
- 4 Ornans is a half-hour's scenic drive away in the adjacent valley of the Loue. Nice to picnic in the town's main square, Place Courbet or by the river a mile before the town. Courbet's Birthplace museum is in a little street, which is a nice way to drive out of the town.
- 5 We drive up the Loue valley and leave a "return car" at Mouthier. Other cars are parked higher up the valley just where the road turns away from the gorge.
- 6 An easy walk of 45 mins steadily descending into the gorge leads to the source.
- 7 It takes about 90 mins to walk down this most dramatic of gorges. In places the path is quite difficult and damaged by flood, but completely worthwhile.
- 8 At Mouthier a path points up to Renedale. Our route is to drive there. A magnificent view over the Gorge and an auberge too.

THE ARBOIS DAY

Like Baume les Messieurs, Arbois is set in a beautiful reculee.

- 1 A half-hour's drive to the Sentier Karstique, a path laid out in the forest where the ground is formed of the fantastic shapes of limestone pavement.
- 2 Walking the path and peering at the shapes takes something around an hour.
- 3 A short drive brings us to Chamole on the edge of the Premier Plateau. Here is a fromagerie where quality cheese and wine from the region can be purchased.
- 4 The old road from Chamole to Poligny, the town at the centre of the local cheese industry, snakes down the cliffs. Half-way down we stop to climb up to a cave which overlooks the town and the plain beyond.
- 5 Time for a drink on the square at Poligny before
- 6 driving to Arbois, taking the wine trail through Pupillon. Leaving a "return car" at Arbois drive to Fer du Cheval at the head of the reculee to begin the walk.
- 7 An old road (no vehicles) makes an easy descent to les Planches pres d'Arbois. Nearby is La Petite Source. Follow the stream edge down to the Tufa Falls, a great place to frolic and picnic.
- 8 Use the little suspension bridge to access the path on the other side of the river to walk back to the village and La Grande Source with its show caves.
- 9 Above La Grande Source, lost in the trees, are the ruins of a medieval castle. A network of old roads laces the area. One takes us up a steep diagonal to the southern edge of the valley and follows it to a shrine from where a devotional path drops down into Arbois. Walk from Planche: 1.5 - 2 hours.
- 10 Don't miss the riverside walk through the town to the House of Louis Pasteur.