

## De la Préhistoire à nos Jours



The Church of St Pierre at Saulges

The trail starts at Saulges, in the church square by the tourist information office. Begin with a coffee in the bar/restaurant “Les Grottes” then before you set off, take a look inside the 9<sup>th</sup> century church of St Pierre, on the same side of the road as the bar. This is one of the oldest churches in France, built to receive the pilgrims paying homage to St Céneré, and you will find a terracotta statue of him there. It is rare for a village to host two churches, since the older one either had to be destroyed to justify a new one, or its stones were used in its construction. None the less, Vaiges has two, and you can also visit the more modern, main church in the square, see its impressive altar, and observe the signs left by its vacillations between Catholicism and Protestantism.



The stepping stones on the Erve

With the big church behind you, turn to the left down the main street, bear left, and then take the road off to the right signposted to Vaiges. Go straight on down the hill, ignoring signs to the Oratoire, etc. on your left, and at the bottom, cross the river Erve, then turn immediately right, go through the gate and proceed through the field, keeping the river directly to your right, upstream. Follow the river past the mill on the far bank, over a few stiles, as far as the stepping stones. If you like, take a small detour here, walk across the stepping stones and find the old Roman bridge left high and dry by the meanderings of the river Erve over the years.



The Canyon – Site et Grottes

Continue on to the “Site et Grottes” at the canyon, where the river valley opens out to a broad picnic and recreation area. It is well worth visiting the caves there, which are still being explored for Paleolithic artifacts and cave paintings. There is also the bar / restaurant le Canyon where you can get refreshments. The trail is signposted up the road to the left, past Les Hallais. After Les Hallais, the next set of buildings you come to is the farm “La Grande Roche”. Turn left here, up the track signposted to St Jean and Vaiges. Right at the T junction at the end, and on to the road, where you take a right then left.



The oratory of St Sylvain

At the bottom of the incline take a right and follow the track up the hill to the point at which it splits, with the left option signed to the left to St Jean. You want the right option here, up the narrow track between the fields, under the trees, up the hill, under the electric fence and into the field where you will see the oratory of St Sylvain, and can enjoy magnificent views of the surrounding countryside. You can leave this site either by the track on the left of the field where you arrived, or down the track to the right of the oratory. They both arrive at the same place, but if you're on a bike, don't let your speed build up too much as you go down the hill; there is a metal gate at the bottom.



Village well and pump at St Pierre

Go through the metal gate and on into the village of St Pierre sur Erve. Stop to look at the church, then continue on to the 12<sup>th</sup> century pedestrian footbridge over the river. Take the time to go over it and back; it was once part of the main route from Le Mans to Brittany. The wooden construction at its foot on the near side is an old washing station. People still alive can remember seeing, as children, the women of the village doing their washing here in the river. Having come back over the bridge, the trail continues to your right and then left by the old well and village pump, up the hill into the village centre. Turn left at the junction at the Mairie, and left again signposted "site et grottes". Go down the hill and partway up the other side, before you turn left at the sign.



The Hardray Mill on the Erve

This takes you down a steep slope to the river, and you take the gate to your left at the bottom, following the path of the river until you come to the bridge over. Take the bridge and turn right, going by the ancient buildings of the Hardray Mill, and leaving the area via the stile. This is now the steepest part of the trail, go up the valley side along the edge of the field, and through the gate at the top. At the end of this dirt track you will find the farm la Fortinière and a road. Take the road left down the hill and at the junction the trail is signposted to the right down the D583. Go for a bit over 1 kilometre until you see the sign to les Chopinières to the right. Take this farm track and before you get to the farm buildings, take the dirt track to your left. This will take you to the farm les Châteaux where the trail is again signposted off to the right.



The entrance to la Moinetrie

This dirt track will thread you between cultivated fields to a road at the farm la Moinetrie. The trail goes left here but you can short-circuit back to Saulges by turning right if you like. 500m on, the trail is signposted to the right down an old road that leads to the Bois Isabeau. This nature reserve marks, approximately, the halfway point of the course and is a good place to stop for lunch if you brought a picnic. Continue on the track, cross the D130 and the old road will take you on to a farm la Chevalerie at a road junction. Here the trail is signposted to the left for walkers only and to the right for bikes and horses. The left trail was fine for bikes when I took mine. From this point on, the trail is well signposted through the countryside, along farm tracks, roads and paths as far as the water mill

at Thévalles. Simply follow your current road and direction until you see any sign for the trail.



The mill de Pré

The trail descends to the mill at Thévalles which you approach first over a stile and then via a stone bridge over the river. The mill is open for visitors by means of guided tours. Turn right over the bridge to leave the mill area and follow the road uphill until you see the trail signposted off to your left. This very pretty section of the trail will lead you first to the mill de Pré, up the hill to the manor les Croisinières and down again to the old mill on the river. (watch out for the steps if you are on a bike!)



The oratory of St Céneré

Here, you are right by the oratory of St Céneré that you can visit. Or, you can choose to take a dip in the public swimming lake (in July and August) and have a meal, snack or drink in the restaurant. The final part of the trail is to climb the hill in front of you, back to Saulges.