

The Oratory of St Céneré



The Erve valley near Les Hallais

This pretty walk is not very long but takes you through some delightful countryside. There is an abundance of wildlife to see, with kingfishers, red squirrels, water rats, hares and woodpeckers among those creatures that have been spotted.

To start the walk, turn right out of Les Hallais, go down the hill to the river, and turn right downstream. You can begin the walk on either side of the river, enjoying the feeling of peace and seclusion between the cliffs that rise to each side.



The stepping stones

If you have decided to keep the river to your right, don't cross the river by the wooden bridge, but go through the gate, staying on the same side of the river until you come upon the little Roman bridge that has been left high and dry by the river's meanderings. Once you reach this, the stepping stones are just to your right, and you will need to use them to cross over the river in order to continue downstream with the river on your left. Continue down the river, past the big ex-water mill on the opposite bank, until you reach the road that you will use to cross the river. Follow the signs that will take you on towards the oratory along a tree-shaded path past the camp site.



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As you approach the oratory you will also find a pleasant little restaurant (Bar Crêperie Grill l'Oratoire du petit St Céneré) that will serve you something to refresh you for the rest of your walk. This is open every day from 10.00 except Mondays. The oratory of St Céneré was originated by a Benedictine missionary in 650 who chose to set up his mission by a little spring flowing into the river Erve. He lived there carrying out his works, while he dined off wild fruits and plants, drinking the fresh water from the spring. The spring is still there, feeding a well below the oratory building, and you can take a cool drink to refresh you on your walk.



Merovingian sarcophagi

For the return trip via Saulges, walk along the road up the hill to the left, then follow the signs "de la prehistoire a nos jours" into the village, noting the ancient sarcophagi in the roadside wall to your left as you pass. Once in Saulges it is worth seeking out the tourist information office next to the big church, which will give you up-to-date information about what's going on in the area.



The church of St Pierre at Saulges

The little older church of St Pierre, a few yards up the road on the left is also well worth a visit, and the big modern church on the right boasts an impressive altar. Don't forget to press the button on the wall behind the door to turn on the lights and music.

To continue back to les Hallais, take the lane that is immediately beside the Bar Tabac Restaurant "Les Grottes" (signposted to Site et Grottes) and this will bring you back via an attractive country walk, past an impressive disused lime kiln (in a dangerous state; don't go near it), to the point at which you joined the river.

Total time for this walk is about 70 minutes if done briskly and without pause, much more if you linger at the restaurants, or stop to explore the churches, tourist information and other sites in Saulges. The way is uneven and narrow in places, and as well as the stepping stones across the river, there are stiles on the way back so this walk is not suitable if you are unsteady on your feet.