



STROLL THROUGH THE HAMELTS OF SAINT SORLIN D'ARVES

- ✱ Arrêts navettes
- Chemins piétons

A stroll through the hamlets of Saint Sorlin d'Arves

Although today Saint Sorlin d'Arves has changed considerably with the advent of tourism, there are in each hamlet, old stones, old wood engravings and a variety of old buildings, silently reminding us of its long and difficult past. To help you discover them we suggest a stroll through the hamlets of our village.

Hamlet de Cluny

We are often asked if there is a link between the name of this hamlet and the famous Abbey of Cluny in Saone et Loire. Perhaps so, but nothing is certain.

The Benedictin monks from the monastery at Cluny had in the Maurienne many practising sites. Was Cluny a place of residence for Benedictin monks? "In 1040 Prince Humbert, better known as Prince Humbert the white handed, whose victorious army had ravaged the region, wishing to restore the religious purpose to the establishments that had been destroyed, gave the stronghold of Cluny to the chapter of monks of Saint Jean de Maurienne. This became independent of the episcopal land (which included the rest of the valley).

Hamlet de Revoux

To the east, below the road to Chal we can still see the ruins of houses of la Chavonnerie, taken away by an avalanche of water and mud which took place on the 20th December 1740. Nine people died including a whole family: The Thybieroz family.

Hamlet de Belluard

This hamlet similar to Malcrozet is made up of old houses with gables made in "arcosses" (plaited green alder branches) or woven straw.

Between 1902 and 1903 the Belluard school was built for the children who lived below the church hamlet.

In 1953 there were only seven pupils so the school was closed. Since then the building has been converted and a cheese factory installed (the cooperative dairy of Arves) renowned for its Beaufort cheese. One can visit and watch them making Beaufort most mornings from 9-11.30.

Hamlet de Malcrozet

On leaving the fromagerie, up on the left lies the hamlet of Malcrozet. Along the path on the left one reaches a small building of which you will see the corner stones and lintels perfectly formed in tufs. (tuf stone is a special type found locally). The door is Romanesque indicating that it was built for a religious purpose. A stone on the left is dated 1686 and one on the right is inscribed in latin "to Saint Anne mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary mother of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Continue along the path and on the right in front of the house which was burnt down in 1984, one discovers the ruins of the customs house which was abandoned during the Revolution. The office of which was then moved to the village of Le Pré where it remained until 1860. At this time the road did not actually exist (built in 1900) but it followed the original path that links the different hamlets. Saint Sorlin was a frontier village on the borders of France. (Hautes-Alpes by way of the Col de Pre Nouveaux; Isere by the Col de la Croix de Fer) The customs were having to control the movement of merchandise and keep a look out for smugglers.

Of this customs house there remains a few sections of wall and some windows with crossed bars of forged metal. You can see an old boundary stone marking the border. On one side the cross of Savoie and the other the fleur de lys.

The chapel of Saint Peter.

At the entrance to the new cemetery, on the side of the road stands the oldest building in Saint Sorlin. The chapel of Saint Peter. This chapel whose spire fell from the bell tower some fifty years ago once stood majestically alone in the meadows facing the aiguilles d'Arves. In front of the chapel in 1857 a special cross was erected.

Hamlet de l'Eglise

Previously called Les Maisons (the houses) as seen in the cadastre or register of 1585.

The former Mairie (mayor's offices) which is adjoining the old cemetery to the left of the church is very old and in a delapidated state. There is a stone on the south wall engraved with the date 1682. The Mairie moved in 1953 to a new building next to the school.

The original church was built in 1603 in exactly the same position and the same orientation as the church that stands there today, although much less grand. Measuring only 15 metres in length it can be seen as part of the existing church from the choir and part of the nave as far as the pillar found towards the side door (reserved for men) and up to the side chapels. In 1656 it was extended westward to its present size. In 1695 some of the original building had to be rebuilt.

The church inside is 32 metres long, 9 metres wide and 7.5 metres high. The tower some 27 metres. All the corners of the church and tower are hewn out of tuf stone. Tradition tells us that this stone would have come from around Pres Plans.

In 1695 wood was rare in Saint Sorlin and for the framework of the church the inhabitants of Saint Sorlin had to go to the Count d'Arves (Noble Peter Martin Salliers d'Arves) because he had a lot of wood in the forest around Saint Jean d'Arves which a storm had brought down the previous year.

The interior of the church is in the Baroque style. The altars date from 1700. They are the work of three master craftsmen and gilders from Haute Maurienne: Bernard Flanderin, Sebastion son of the late Claude Rosaz of Termignon and John son of Baptiste Simon of Bramans. The beautifully framed principal painting in the centre represents the glorification of Saint Saturnin in the presence of Saint Anne and Saint Vincent. To the right is the statue of Saint Peter and to the left the statue of Saint Paul. The centre section is flanked by two twisted columns one wound with vines the other with laurel. The columns surrounding the scenes on the right and left are entwined with roses. High above the altarpiece a second painting shows the eternal Father in the midst of angels. The columns which surround it are again twisted, wound with vines.

The front of the principal altar is in Cordoba leather similar to the altar in the south side chapel. The paintings on the main altar as well as the side chapels are by Gabriel Dufour (from the Maurienne). Two other paintings of note in the choir: To the left of the altar a painting showing Saint Anne signed by Laurent Dufour, which used to be in the central part of the altarpiece in the chapel of Malcrozet. To the right is a painting of the Blessed Falcoz.

The vaulted ceiling is in masonry but that of the nave is in "arcosses", coated in plaster and then painted. These paintings date from 1742 and are the work of an Italian Guiseppe de Dominico originally from the Suse valley. The gallery dates from 1683. It was built for the Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrement. The balustrade is decorated with 15 painted wooden panels representing Jesus surrounded by his apostles. The two panels at each end are the two penitents clothed in their white habits. On the 23rd July 1761 the church was consecrated in honour of Saint Saturnin. You are able to see the statue of Saint Saturnin on top of the facade outside the church.

The cemetery: Very old and typical, surrounding the church, with ancient pearl wreaths hanging on the walls just as they are at the former mairie, sometimes protected from the elements by small steel canopies.

The Saint Barbe oratory: At the top of the village near the stream the Saint Barbe oratory was built in 1722 but was carried away by a landslide in 1859. Then rebuilt in 1884 by the people of the hamlet. The inhabitants of the church hamlet used to celebrate the festival of Saint Barbe on the 4th of December by lighting candles in the oratory.

The museum: This mine of information is in the adjoining rooms of the former presbytery, open every Thursday in the season from 3.30 – 6.00 pm. A permanent exhibition of Savoyarde and mountain life. Including slide shows and costumes.

The hamlet consists of several old houses which little by little are being restored.

Near the bridge at the top of the stream on the right bank you can see a sundial on the façade of one of these old houses.

Hamlet de La Tour

The Oratory: There is at the entrance to the hamlet of la Tour a very old oratory of which we cannot find the date. It is built entirely of tuf. By 1984 the oratory had fallen into ruin so the local community began its restoration. It was taken down stone by stone, all of which were carefully numbered. The worst affected tufs were recut and then accurately rebuilt. The inhabitants of the hamlet offered a wooden statue of the Virgin to the abbot Combet, parish priest of Jarrier as his last work to adorn the recess of the oratory. On the 26th May 1985, Whitsunday, the blessing by Father Bochud, priest of Saint Sorlin, reunited the people of the village.

The school: In the hamlet of la Tour is the village school, facing fully south. The construction of this school in 1879 required much counselling and deliberation over its location, mainly due to the rivalry between the hamlets of la Ville and l'Eglise. So in the end it was decided to be built in la Tour. The school had 2 primary classes at that time and now is replaced by a nursery school built in 1986. The primary school has moved to la Tour in Saint Jean d'Arves combining both the villages of Saint Sorlin and Saint Jean. Hamlet de la Ville

Many typical old houses are to be found in this hamlet that history lovers will not fail to notice. You are also able to admire the Chapel of Saint Joseph on the left of the path which joins the main road leading down to the chair lifts. Built in 1672 its Baroque style portal is flanked by very pretty columns in tuf. There is a bullseye in the recess of the broken curved pediment. The frames of the doors and windows, the corners and the bell tower are all made in tuf, the stone found locally around the village.

This chapel was founded by a man named Gilbert Didier who asked the rector to be named by him and then by his successors. The housing for the rector was to be built adjoining the Chapel.

A little further down to the right on the corner of two paths a low and long building can be found, this is the village oven, built in 1665 where the people of Saint Sorlin kneaded and cooked their month's supply of bread. They supplied their own wood to heat the oven and some of the ashes from the wood planings were even used as washing powder! Read in the museum about payment for the use of the oven in 1882. Each family possessed a piece of wood with their initials engraved to mark their bread. Whoever forgot to bring their piece of wood had their bread marked with the oven key. The oven was used regularly right up until the second world war.

Hamlet du Pré

Again one can see several old houses and a little mill by the side of the stream. The hamlet du Pré did not have a chapel but worshiped Saint Mary Madeleine. On the 25th of July mass was always celebrated at the Cross of Buissiard (no longer in existence) and the priest would bless the flocks.

Hamlet des Choseaux

The stream marks the boundary between the hamlets of Choseaux and Pierre Aigue. Close to the ski slopes this hamlet has a lot of development: old restored houses, new builds, hostels. These all have sprung up over the last few years.

Hamlet de Pierre Aigue

This hamlet has also been developed with tourism in mind. At the end of the last century it had its own school, now restored (Le Sovaje) which takes numerous school skiing trips. The Chapel of Saint John Baptiste was founded in 1672 by John Baptiste Bernard. The Saint John Baptiste association ensures its restoration. A plaster cross built in 1840 had to be moved elsewhere to allow for the building of the road.



Access to the hamlets of Vachers and Prés Plans is not secured winter.

Hamlet des Vachers

Now an abandoned village. Although several years ago two houses were restored for holiday homes. Nevertheless it used to be well populated with its own school built in 1897. Served by a footpath (starting from the hamlet of Pré) the hamlet was isolated in the middle of copses of maple and aspen. Before the school was built teaching was performed in a stable like the one described by Louis Eugene Roche in "La Maurienne par les instituteurs" (1904) { Maurienne from the teachers eyes}. The hamlet of Vachers was burnt down by the Germans in 1944. That is why you can only find so much as ruins. After the war the owners rebuilt their homes in a less isolated spot. You are able to see pretty corner stones, lintels etc amongst the ruins. At the entrance to the hamlet is a cross dated 1784.



Access to the hamlets of Prés Plans is not secured in winter

Hamlet des Prés Plans

This hamlet is the most distant, found at the bottom of the Arvan valley. One gets there by the little road which leaves Choseaux in the direction of hotel de la Balme. Narrow but suitable for vehicles in summer but impassable in winter for risk of avalanche and crossing ski runs.

This hamlet is today uninhabited but in the last century was completely selfsufficient. It had its own mill, oven and chapel. Isolated in winter with a thick blanket of snow covering the path and at risk of avalanche. Some houses have collapsed, others that were well maintained by their owners remain outwardly in good rustic condition, with corner stones and lintels still in position. Indicating the strength of the stone coming from the subsoil of Prés Plans.

The chapel of Prés Plans is again in the Baroque style both externally and internally. The altar piece is by Gabriel Dufour, the altar front is in Cordoba leather, the vaulted ceiling decorated in paintings. The portal is flanked by columns and a straight broken pediment are all in tuf stone.

People used to come on a pilgrimage to the Chapel of Prés Plans even from Besse en Oisans by way of the Col des Pres Nouveaux.

So we have made our way through the hamlets of Saint Sorlin giving you a little insight into our history.

Literature collected by Renee Flamand for protection of the heritage and the cultural traditions of Saint Sorlin.