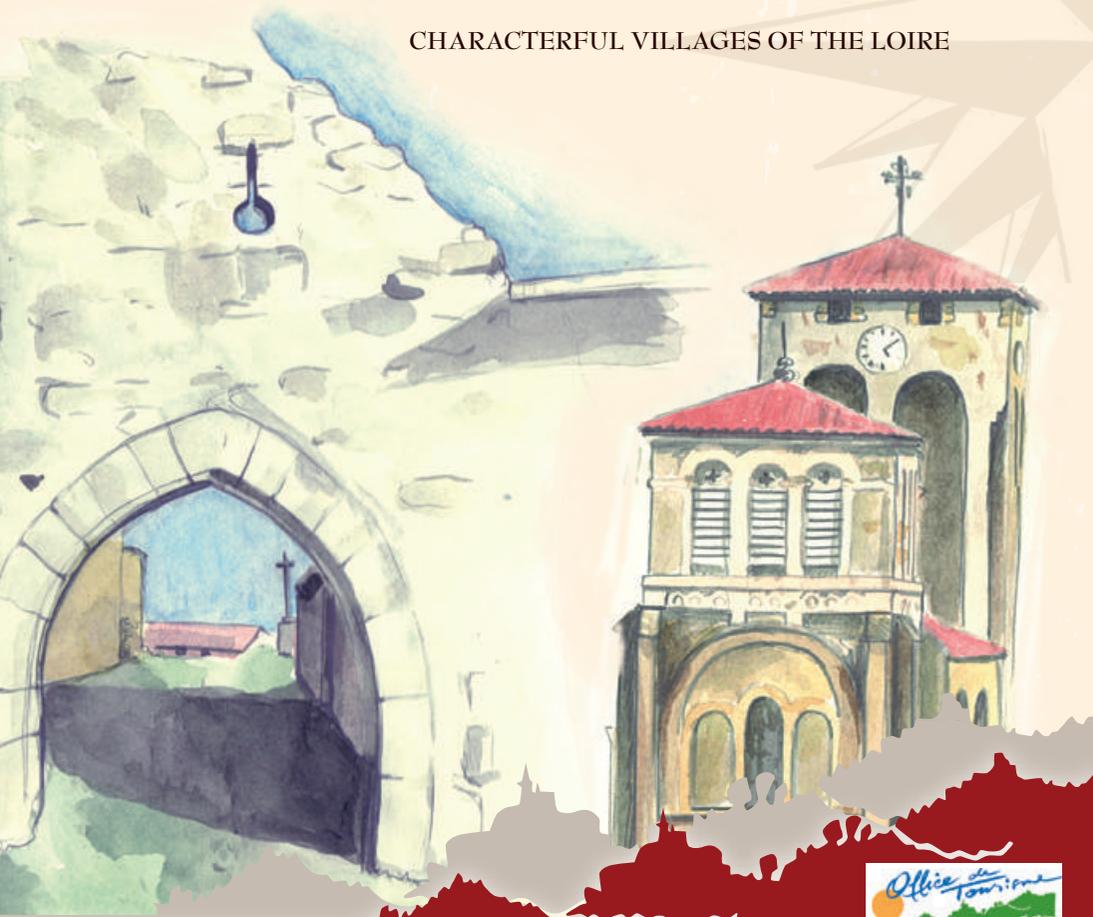


Marols Montarcher

CHARACTERFUL VILLAGES OF THE LOIRE



VISITOR GUIDE



Montarcher oratory

Montarcher

Montarcher lies between the mounts Velay, Forez and Livradois. The village dominates Andrable Valley from a lofty granite peak 1,150 metres above sea level and affords the visitor an uninterrupted 360° view from the mound of the old fort. The faraway silhouettes of Pierre-sur-Haute, the highest peak in the Forez group (1634 m), Le Velay, Les Cévennes and even Mont Blanc can be seen from the village.



Marols church

Marols

Marols is a small village steeped in history and lies 821 metres above sea level to the south of the Forez Mountains. Its western border gives way to a vast conifer forest and to the east lies the Forez Plain. The Pilat Massif is visible in the distance as are the Lyons Mountains and, on a clear day, Mont Blanc.



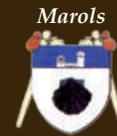
GR3 HIKING TRAIL: This major hiking trail links the Loire Estuary to its source on Mount Gerbier-des-Joncs. It follows the line of the Forez mountain group. Marols and Montarcher are 2 stopovers on this major hiking trail.



Chemin de Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle (Saint James's Way): This major hiking trail runs through Europe to the legendary Galician city of Santiago de Compostela in Northern Spain. Marols and Montarcher are stopovers on the stretches Cluny – Le Puy-en-Velay and Lyons – Le Puy-en-Velay. Saint James's Way joins the GR3 as it crosses the Forez Mountains



La Route des Balcons (The Balcons tourist Road): This tourist route can be reached from the motorway exits Les Salles/Noirétable and Andrézieux-Bouthéon. The route crosses the Forez from north to south and winds its way through magnificent countryside views and the stunning architectural heritage of the mountain group. The tourist road runs through Marols and Montarcher as it passes south of the Forez Mountains.



Montarcher



9 THE WASH-HOUSE



La Chapelle-en-Lafaye

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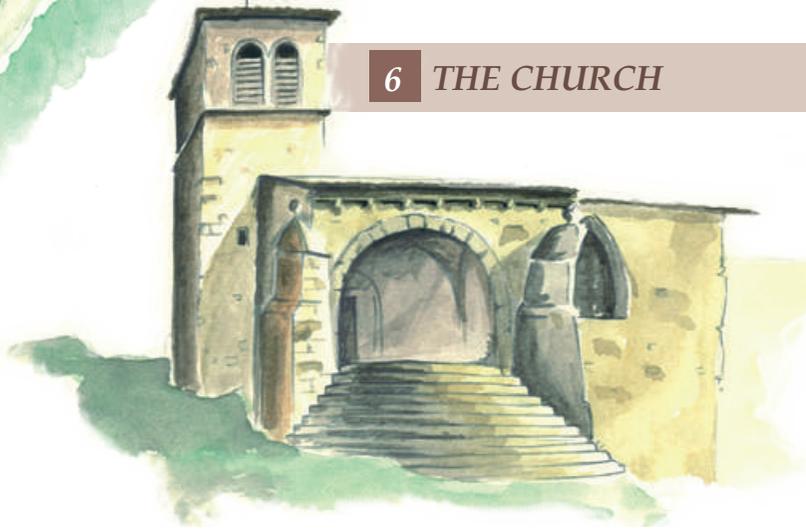
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P 1

Marols
via La Cître
and la Route
des Balcons

- P** Car park
- i** Tourist information board
- 1** Point of interest on the trail
- Starting point for the hiking trails
- Explorer trail
- The rampart walk and idea for a walk
- Chemin de Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle and GR3 hiking trail

6 THE CHURCH



8

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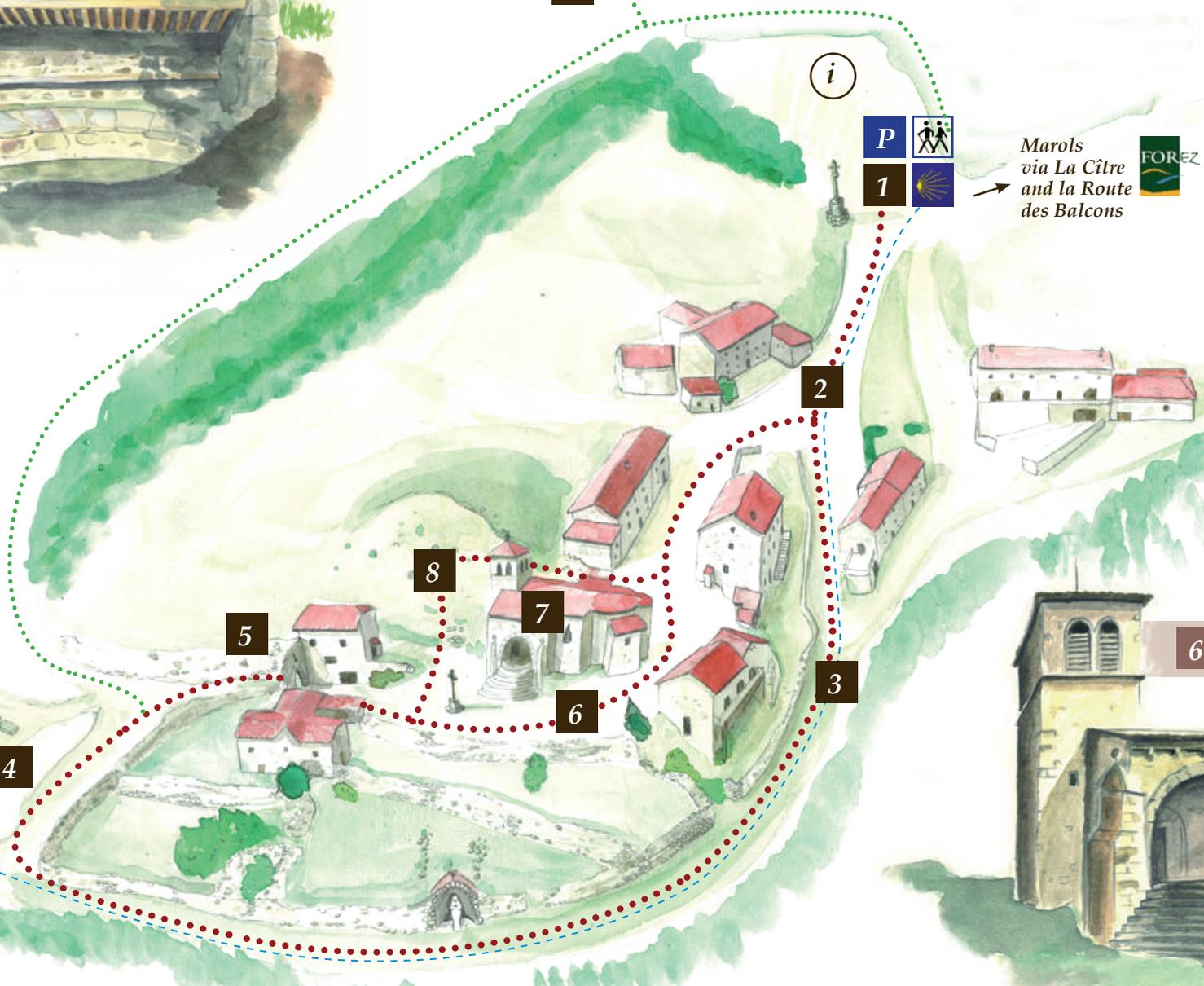
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Le Puy-en-Velay



1 *Claude Ferrier Cross*

Montarcher is home to three remarkable granite crosses, the most famous of which stands at the north entrance to the village. It is almost fourteen feet high and has an octagonal base. The name Claude Ferrier is engraved on one of its sides and the date 1497 on another. Local inhabitants used to hang a lantern on this cross when someone in the parish died. Today Claude Ferrier Cross is a listed monument.

Croix de Claude Ferrier

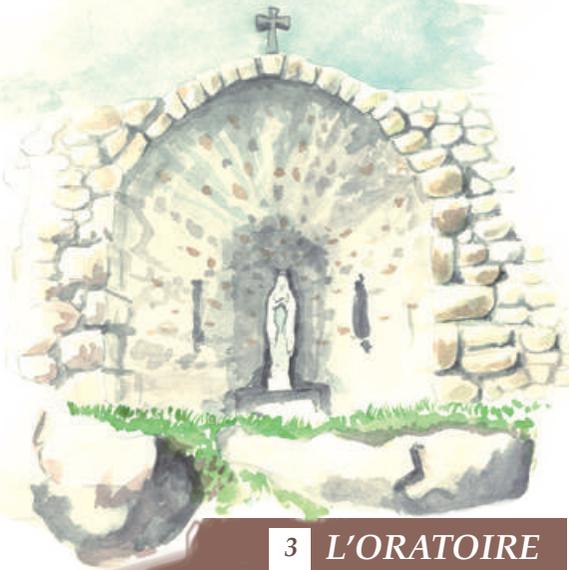


2 *Sculpted window lintel Door lintel*

Many of the houses in the parish show the construction date and the initials of an erstwhile owner sculpted into a lintel. Some homes also have a little recess above a door or between two windows of the first floor containing a statue of the Virgin or some other icon.

3 *Ancient ramparts*

In the 5th century BC Montarcher found itself at the crossroads between three dominant Gaulish tribes: the Segusiavi (Celts from between the Loire and the Saône), the Arverni (Celts from Auvergne) and the Vellavi (Celts from Le Velay).



3 *L'ORATOIRE*

This precarious situation led to the construction of a fortified town protected by thick stone walls and some vestiges of this remain to this day. The probable origin of the name Montarcher is the Latin *montis archerri* meaning 'archers mount' and by extension 'a lookout post'. In the Gallo-Roman period the Bolène Road, which linked Lyons to Toulouse and Bordeaux, also passed close to Montarcher. This road was brought back into service in the Middle Ages under the name The Great Way of Forez. Heading southwards, the road crossed the river Andrable a short distance from the hamlet of Egarande (a Celtic word meaning 'frontier') and continued to Usson-en-Forez and Le Puy-en-Velay.

The rampart walk passes close to the base of an old tower and, further on, a charming oratory dedicated to the Virgin.

4 *The old cemetery*

Further down the slope, the old cemetery is clear evidence of a medieval settlement around the castle.

A BRIEF HISTORY

In the 13th century the castle passed from the Counts of Forez into the hands of a wealthy family called Baffie and then later to the Saint-Bonnet and eventually the Rochebaron families.

In the 15th century the castle was abandoned by its owners because of its lack of comfort.

In 1452 Montarcher became a parish. Father Ferrier was the first person in Montarcher to maintain a register of births, marriages and deaths and his book has become one of the oldest documents of its kind in France.

In 1536 Francis I took the county of Forez for the Crown; from then on Montarcher and Le Forez were most definitely part of France...

Signature de l'abbé Ferrier

5 *The fortified gate*

Back up the slope towards the church stand the last surviving remains of the outer wall comprising a fortified gate with a lancet arch and above, a military embrasure. A small medieval village developed on the south side of the castle under the initial protection of a rampart wall and later a secondary wall. These buildings were probably used as workshops, stores and barns for animals.

6 *The church*

The church stands at the heart of the historic old village. A viewpoint indicator shows all the main points of interest such as Andrable Valley, Mount Velay, the Cévennes... and sometimes even Mont Blanc!

Another beautiful cross stands in front of the church and dates from the 17th century.

The sculpted crosspiece shows the Virgin on one side and the Christ on the other. A remarkable porch provides shelter to visitors at the entrance to the church. The porch houses a mysterious pre-Christian statuette in granite showing a mother goddess breast-feeding two children. The statuette was discovered during the restoration of the church.

7 *Inside the church*

The church was originally a simple castle chapel with a Romanesque-style chancel and a semi-domed apse.

The nave was built in the 12th century and is flanked by two chapels which were added in the 15th century. Some 17th century paintings were uncovered during restoration works in the chancel in 1935, showing flower and vase motifs in ochre tones.

The right-hand chapel contains a keystone decorated with the arms of Rochebaron (Lords of Montarcher from the 13th to the 17th century), hatchments on a black stripe, and a mural dating from the 15th century depicting a procession of angels.

Montarcher priests used to be buried in the left-hand chapel and one such headstone shows Father Claude Ferrier wearing a dalmatic tunic. The rood-screen separating the chancel from the nave was installed in the 15th or 16th century and symbolizes the creation of the world. The porch and the bell-tower date from the 16th or 17th century.

8 *The old keep*

Very little remains of the old keep except for a mound of earth and stones behind the church.

The trail continues around the church and through the village.

Below the car park on the road to La Chapelle-en-Lafaye (follow the GR3 trail blazing) stands a tear-drop shaped wash-house. Recently renovated, it is an ideal place for a break.



IDEA FOR A FAMILY WALK

The rampart walk

Walk down the mound of the old keep and through the fortified gate to rejoin the pathway running along the right side of the medieval cemetery. Beautiful panoramas punctuate the trail with exceptional views of the Forez and Pierre-sur-Haute mountains as well as the village of La Chapelle-en-Lafaye at the foot of Montarcher. The path runs in a curve back to the starting point at the car park.

Country walk

2,5 km.

Follow the GR3 hiking trail towards La Chapelle-en-Lafaye and then turn left towards La Vierge. After La Vierge turn left and head back towards Montarcher.

AROUND MONTARCHER

At the foot of the peak, 1 km to the south in the hamlet called Le Peyrot, stands a third cross erected around 1630. It shows a blank coat of arms and carries two statuettes depicting Saint John the Baptist and Saint Roch.

There is however more to Montarcher than medieval heritage. In 1990 a spring-water bottling factory was discreetly set up in the pine wood 500 yards to the east of the village. The spring water is bottled in large 19-litre bottles for the professional market.

The village and the surrounding hamlets are noticeable for the architectural quality of their granite houses. Built in the local style, the houses have simple four-walled layouts, pantiled roofs and doorways with glazed transoms. Mounting-blocks and open barns can be found on some of the traditional farms.

Peyrot Cross



QUIZZ

All about Montarcher

Question 1

One of the crosses in Montarcher has a date engraved upon it: what is that date?

- a. 1397
- b. 1497
- c. 1597

Question 2

At the entrance to the village, close to a water point, a sign indicates the pilgrimage trail of Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle: what symbol does it display?

- a. an arrow
- b. a cross
- c. a scallop shell

Question 3

Opposite the church is a viewpoint indicator which allows visitors to identify surrounding points of interest: what is the local French word for a volcanic peak?

- a. suc
- b. puy
- c. col

Question 4

On a clear day you can see the highest mountain in the Alps which is called Mont Blanc: how high is it?

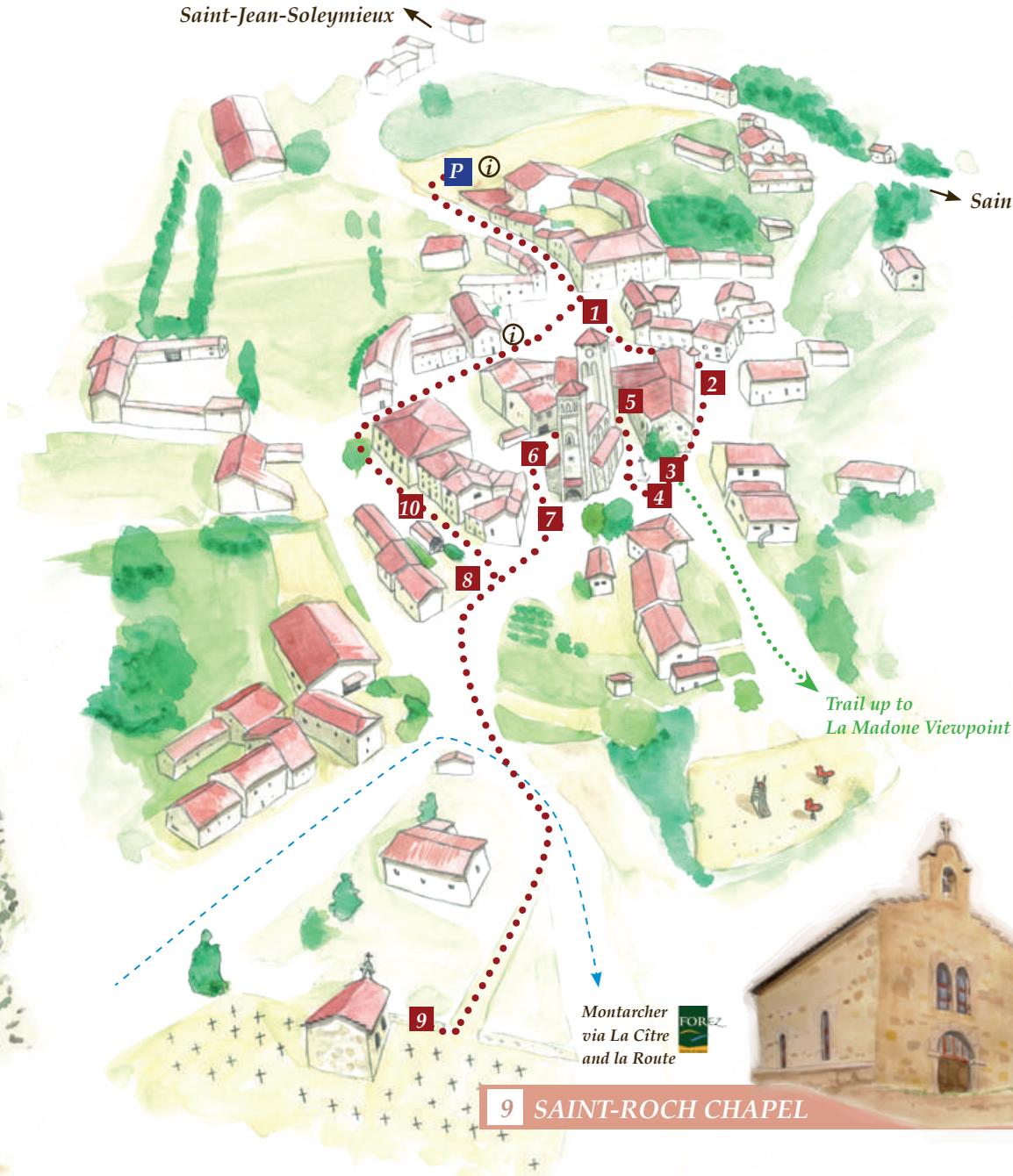
- a. 3,807 mètres
- b. 4,610 mètres
- c. 4,810 mètres

Answers: 1b - 2c - 3a - 4c

Saint-Jean-Soleymieux ↖

↗ Saint-Bonnet-le-Château

- P** Car park
- 1** Point of interest on the trail
-  Starting point for the hiking trails
- i** Tourist office
Tourist information board
-  Explorer trail
-  Walkway and idea for a walk
-  Chemin de Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle



4 THE ARGNATS CROSS



9 SAINT-ROCH CHAPEL



Montarcher
via La Cître
and la Route

A BRIEF HISTORY

Marols takes its name from a combination of Celtic words meaning 'a large clearing' (*maros* 'large' and *ialo* 'clearing'). The village developed in the Middle Ages thanks to its advantageous position close to an ancient Roman military road, the Bolène Way, which linked Lyons with Toulouse via Feurs and was still being used by medieval merchants and pilgrims on their way to Le Puy-en-Velay and Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle. Plentiful woods, fertile farmland, lush pastures and willing workmen made Marols an attractive site for the Benedictine monks of Saint-Romain-le-Puy to build, under the authority of the Abbot of Ainay, their little priory in the 12th century.

Marols Priory was a modest affair. The monks spent their time working the land and praying for mankind's salvation. After a period of prosperity the priory fell into decline around AD 1280.

In the following years Marols entered a sombre period marked by the Black Death and the famine, disease and insecurity which resulted from the Hundred Years' War.

The first chapel was of modest size, a single nave in the Romanesque style, and run by a chaplain and perhaps a couple of monks. The principal preoccupations of the little priory were to develop local agricultural resources and a simple religious environment. The village began to take shape in this period.

The 12th and 13th centuries were prosperous. The 14th century was however blighted by the Black Death which ravaged the district of Saint-Bonnet-le-Château (in 1348) and various other troubles caused by the kings of England and France locking horns in the Hundred Years' War. It was during this period that the village and the church were fortified to protect their inhabitants from marauders.

In the 15th century the Benedictine monks from Ainay Abbey were replaced by the canons of Saint-Just from Lyons, a noble religious order whose lofty authority sowed discontent among the inhabitants of Marols. In the 16th century, during the Wars of Religion, Protestant troops under the direction of Baron des Adrets razed the village.

THE FORTIFICATIONS

Today the only visible remains in the village are a rampart gate, a small pepperbox tower and a fortified tower built to protect the church during the Hundred Years' War in the 14th and 15th centuries. This impressive defensive architecture is testament to the Church's power at that time.

A drawing of Marols by Guillaume Revel, in an armorial commissioned by the Duke of Bourbon around 1450, clearly shows the layout of the village at the end of the Middle Ages. There was a rampart on the eastern side, defended by two round towers and a gate surmounted by a brattice, and a few houses huddled around the church.

1 The fortified gate

The entrance to the old village is through a gate in the rampart. The passage leads to a strong defensive tower at the foot of the church's chevet and, further on, to the church itself.

La porte fortifiée



2 The pepperbox tower

A little pepperbox tower stands 30 yards to the left of the fortified gate.

3 The postern

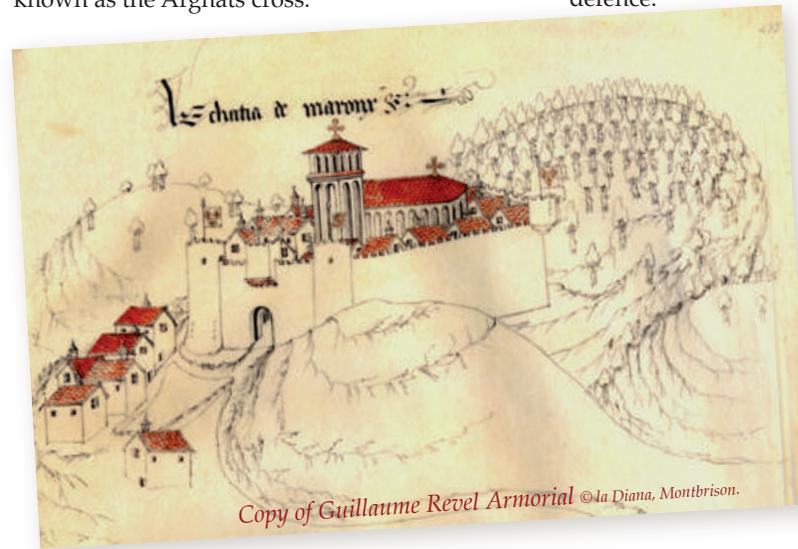
50 yards further on is a small passage on the right which pierces the rampart: the Marols postern. It is a small ogival opening which leads to the church square via a small buried staircase. Built in granite, the work is finely crafted.



The postern

4 The Argnats cross

In front of the church, in the square on the right, stands a particularly interesting stone cross. It is unusual because of the hemispheres sculpted into its crosspiece. Sufferers of certain illnesses, such as furunculosis and the plague, came to touch the cross in the hope of a miraculous cure. The cross features an octagonal crosspiece with four hemispheres or billets on each point and is known as the Argnats cross.



The word argnat comes from the local patois for 'boil' or 'furuncle'. This Romanesque billet motif is very old. The centre of the cross does not show a Christ figure but instead a lozenge. Billets and lozenges were common motifs in medieval Ireland and were probably exported by the country's missionaries in their efforts to Christianize Western Europe.

Another cross standing closer to the church displays the date '1685' followed by three initials. A figure sculpted into the lower part of the shaft is probably Saint Peter.

5 The fortified tower

The fortified church tower is easy to recognize because of its machicolation. On the arms of Guillaume Revel, the little flags showing fleur-de-lis and the windvanes on the church indicate that Marols was once governed by both a representative of the Count of Forez and the Church. Today the defensive tower retains its machicolation or openings in the parapet through which could be dropped stones and other objects on to an enemy force. The heavy construction is buttressed for additional strength. More machicolation in the shape of three large arches set upon pillars can be seen on the outside walls of the nave. This system is more a demonstration of resistance rather than an effective means of defence.

6 The church (outside)

This Romanesque church dates from the 12th century and was extended in the 15th, 16th and 18th centuries. Restoration works were completed in 1973. The sober great door of the church was added in the 16th century.

7 The church (inside)

The interior of the church shows a surprising homogeneity despite the various periods of construction. The entrance is surmounted by a gallery.

Towards the chancel and close to the altar, the main features of note are two Romanesque capitals resting on small columns either side of the chancel. The sculptures depict figures which have not as yet been identified. Perhaps they represent priests on one side and the Christ on the other. They undoubtedly date from the original Romanesque church.

Inside the church the nave shows the different stages in its construction with the original round vaults giving way to ogival vaults in the first span and in the side chapels. The wide variety of Romanesque and Gothic elements on the walls and pillars are testament to the succession of works undertaken on the church over the years. The chancel lies under the defensive tower and is very simple in design. It is separated from the nave by the rood-screen in wrought iron showing the Christ on the Cross. The decorative details dating from the 16th and 17th centuries (human faces, rosettes garlanded with leaves...) show that the craftsmen of that period had definitively broken away from the medieval model of decoration.

Several tombstones on the floor are reminders of a time when it was possible to buy one's burial plot inside the church as a more prestigious alternative to the outdoor cemetery.

8 Traditional houses

Marols has retained many of its traditional houses which are typical of the style found in the Forez region. Many of them were farms. Built in local granite, the houses comprise a simple layout wherein the house proper, the stable and the barn share the same roof. The Asphodèle house, situated on the upper end of the church square on the corner of the street which leads to the mayor's office, is a perfect example of a mountain dwelling.

The traditional houses were perfectly designed for the harsh climate of the Forez Mountains. Windows only pierce the sunniest sides of the houses. The west and north facing sides are exposed to the cold winds and rain and rarely have windows. Traditionally, windows are made up of six panes. The higher up the windows, the smaller they are. The front door was often surmounted by a glazed transom below the lintel to let in more sunlight to the ground floor. Many properties are decorated, with a statue placed in a recess or perhaps a sculpted lintel above a door or window, depending on the taste and imagination of the owner.

9 Saint Roch chapel

Many chapels in the Forez region are dedicated to the healing Saint Roch who was thought to protect inhabitants from the plague and various other diseases affecting humans and animals. Most of them were built in thanks to the saint in the middle of the 17th century at a time when the plague was finally banished from the region of Forez. The coat of arms – comprising an anchor, a pilgrim's staff, a scallop shell and a cross – indicates that the chapel was previously dedicated to Saint James.

10 The pilgrim's rest

This building was formerly the covered playground of the boys' school. It dates from the beginning of the 20th century. Today pilgrims and hikers use the rest to shelter from the rain, for picnicking and so on.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Pas-du-Bon-Dieu crossroads

In the Gallo-Roman period the Bolène road, which linked Lyons to Toulouse and eventually Bordeaux, crossed another important Roman road which linked Vienne to Clermont-Ferrand. At this spot a large stone showing a footprint of supposedly divine origin is the source of the name given to the crossroads, literally 'god step crossroads'.

IDEA FOR A FAMILY WALK

Follow the trail to La Madone viewpoint and enjoy the exceptional panorama of the village and Forez Plain below.
Less than 800 yards' walk.



The pepperbox tower

QUIZZ

All about Marols

Question 1

Name the four architectural remains which indicate that Marols was once fortified?

Question 2

What special feature do the local traditional houses share?

- a. they don't have windows
- b. they combine house, stable and barn under one roof
- c. they don't have upper floors

Question 3

What action did medieval people believe could cure them of the plague?

- Answers :
- 1. : Rampart gate, pepperbox tower, remains of a surrounding wall and the defensive tower with machicolation
 - 2. b
 - 3. Touching the billets of the Argnats cross.

The district of Saint-Bonnet-le-Château is situated in the region of Forez, which has been designated a «Land of art and history» by the french ministry of culture since 1998.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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