



INTERPRETATION TRAIL

CITY' WATER

CITY' STONES

CITY' DISCOVERIES



These notes will guide you, stop by stop, on your visit around Durtal, giving you information about the history and economy of the town. You are advised to begin your journey at Place du Général de Gaulle at the foot of the castle, there you will find the first interpretation board.

Enjoy your walk!

Stop 2 – An Historic Castle

In 1050, the first fort was built on a promontory, strategically positioned for crossing the Loir. Four centuries later, a new castle was built on the same site. This construction was a remarkable example of transitional architecture - between the necessities of a fortress and the aesthetic requirements of the Renaissance (wide windows and dormer windows). The castle was erected on the stonework of earlier 12th and 13th century fortresses.

Southern wing (16th century): built by François de Scépeaux, Marshal of Vieilleville. A Renaissance façade; an ornate gallery with mural paintings decorating the whole length. Formerly used for holding receptions.

Eastern wing (15th century): medieval style with two towers and rampart walk.

Western wing (17th century): a rectangular pavilion in a pre-classical Louis XVIII style.

The chateau is classed as an historic monument and has undergone major restoration work. It is well worth a visit.

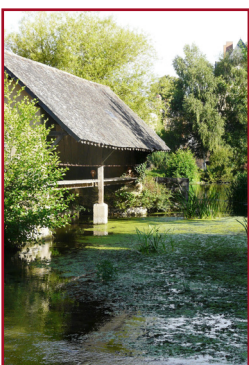


Stop 3 -Bridges that have spanned history

Durtal was created on a promontory at the crossing of two roads and a river, the Loir. From early on there was always the issue of getting across the river. From the Middle Ages, Durtal had a bridge built in wood then in stone.

Formerly located 150 metres upstream from the current bridge, it was replaced in 1750 by the five arch bridge. This is served by a main road built on a levee in case of flooding. The bridge underwent strengthening works from 1997 to 1999.

Stop 4 -The Loir, Durtal's economic artery



Besides the production of terra cotta, the economic life of Durtal owes a great deal to the driving force of the Loir.

The Little Port has been the transit point for all the products (salt, stone, lime, tiles, hemp, grains...) transported by river for as long as the Loir has been navigable. The Wash house has a moving floor that adapts to the level of the water. This operation is unique in Anjou. A single handle operates two winches which keeps the floor horizontal.

Stop 5 -Saint Léonard quarter



At the end of the 11th century a fort stood on the promontory of the north bank of the Loir, at the foot of which several houses sought protection. The lord at the time was Hubert III of Champagne who wanted to enlarge the town, and in 1096, he called upon the monks of Saint-Serge in Angers to build a new quarter south of the Loir. A chapel, monastic buildings, a kiln and a bridge were built, at first in wood. Major hydraulic works were carried out – four canals for the installation of water-mills and tanneries. A district with extensive and varied activities was created. The royal Paris to Nantes road crossed this bridge. Several hotels opened here:

L'Hôtel des Rois Mages (The Wise Men Hotel) from No. 27 – No. 41 (1530)

L'Hôtel du Plat d'Étain (The Tin Plate Hotel) at No. 40 (16th century)

The Saint Léonard quarter is still linked to the river today because of the four canals. The area has been preserved, restored and redeveloped with great care giving it great architectural value.

The Saint Marie Madeleine Chapel, opposite No. 4, is an example of 11th century stonework. Inside you will find paintings and an association which has been set up to protect the building. The Chapel has been transformed into concert and event venue and recording studio. (To visit, contact Agnès Yamakado au 06 80 68 26 88).

Stop 6 - The Loir sleeps



Its Latin name “Ledus” (bubbling) evokes the unpredictable character of the river's devastating floods up to the Middle Ages. From the 15th century, the construction of 13 successive weirs has tamed this river. But, the first goal was economic: it was necessary to improve the working of the watermills and ensure sufficient water for the whole year. The Loir has contributed to the development of the region, firstly as a means of transport by barge until 1917 thanks to locks installed in each weir, then as the driving force for all sorts of watermills, tanneries etc. At Saint Léonard,

activities were linked to the navigation of the river: boatmen, bargemen etc. (one road pays tribute to them).

The Loir covers an enormous area: 312km long with a surface of 8,270km². Today, thanks to the weirs, the water forms reservoirs so that downstream the river appears as a succession of lakes.

The Loir is a quiet, secret river which has shaped peaceful landscapes. This pleasant river has also been written about by numerous poets.

The watermill on the south bank stopped working around 1992. Upstream at Gouis, a paper mill was opened in 1820 on the north bank (hydraulic force, transport of wood pulp by barge). It closed in 1970. However, the paper making tradition continues in Durtal with a successful cardboard factory. The Gouis district is worth a detour. After the footbridge, turn right and follow the pathway along the river.

The footbridge: this footbridge was built in 2000. 60 metres long, it rests on two posts built into the river and supported on both river banks.



The wash house tower: the wash house is made of sandstone steps which descend towards the water, just at the foot of the tower. The tower belonged to the castle and the washerwomen were allowed to do their laundry here.

Stop 7-Marshal de Vielleville (1510 – 1571)

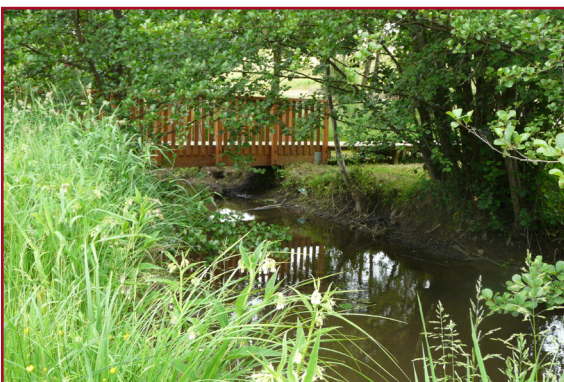


François de Scépeaux, Marshal of Vielleville was one of Durtal's great men.

Under his patronage the castle reached its peak, becoming a place prized by the royal court.

He arranged the building of the southern wing of the castle giving even more nobility to this stately home, and gave great pleasure to the kings who stayed there.

Stop 8: -The Argance canal, the lake becomes a garden



Today a stream, but a few centuries ago the Argance was a lot wider due to its alluvial valley and its mouth on the Loir.

Finished in 2009, the building of a pedestrian trail makes the Argance Valley a haven of peace in the heart of the town.



The family gardens: these family gardens are located in an old lake created by the Argance, just before its confluence, in a dip at the foot of the cliff on which the castle stands.

The Argance: this lake played a very important role in the Middle Ages for the supply of fish and for the operation of various watermills, so aiding both the Gouis priory as well as the Lord of the castle. As time went by, it started to fill in and was drained (building of a canal). The network of ditches makes this site marshy and ensures sufficient water for fertile gardens.



The game of Boule de Fort (indoor bowls): at the beginning of the pedestrian trail (Tivoli car park) we find one of Durtal's four indoor bowls clubs: Le Petit Tivoli.

Typical of Anjou, this game consists of rolling a bowl, which has a bias - one strong side and one weak side - along a curved surface to get as close as possible to the jack. To become more familiar with this sport, just open the door and join in; the atmosphere is warm and friendly.

The other clubs are Le Cercle des Terrasses (place des Terrasses), l'Union de Gouis (Gouis) and Bel Air (rue de la Rochefoucauld).

Stop 9 -The castle gates

Four gates gave access to the heart of the castle: Verron, the Primaudière, the Mail and the Echelle. Protected by Swiss soldiers during the day, they were closed at night with portcullises.

Of the four, only the Echelle has been demolished. All that remains is the staircase that runs up the side of the Notre Dame church. In the opposite direction, the huge steps of the Primaudière have given way to a road which passes under the gate leading to the Terrasses.



La Porte Verron : this gate formed the main entrance to the castle. With its two towers, it controlled the comings and goings of the horsemen and carriages.

La Porte du Mail : at the bottom of the hill leading to the Loir, this finely sculptured gate opened onto a park and an ancient stadium with a competition area and a washing fountain inside a small Greek temple (private area).

Stop 10 - the three Terraces



Built by the Marshal of Schomberg, the Terrasses provided an additional magnificence to the castle, which Louis XIII, in particular, marvelled at. But what is the origin of their name? At the historical heart of the castle, this area was the uppermost level of the three ornamental terraces which descended to the Loir. The lower terrace was the vegetable garden watered by a canal from the Loir and delimited by two small pavilions of which only one remains.

The two other terraces, each at three metres difference in height, formed an attractive garden planted with laurels, lemon and orange trees. Below the highest terrace (the only public space), lies an orangery (private access).

Today, this vast esplanade is used for holding events such as the antiques fair which takes place every year in September.

Stop 11 -Notre Dame church



Built between 1047 and 1060, as the castle chapel, the Notre Dame church is similar, in its architecture and proportions, to numerous religious buildings in the Bugeois region. Between 1863 and 1880, considerable work was carried out to enlarge it.

To support the choir, a crypt was created. This rebuilding allowed the tomb of Marshal of Vieilleville to be discovered. Anecdotally, the descendants of François de Scépeaux reclaimed his body to bury near Saint Pierre Montilmart. His heart was given to the Angers catholic university.

The Red House: neighbouring the church, it was in turn a presbytery, an orangery and the seat of a revolutionary tribunal.

Gouis

A quarter with history
to discover or rediscover

