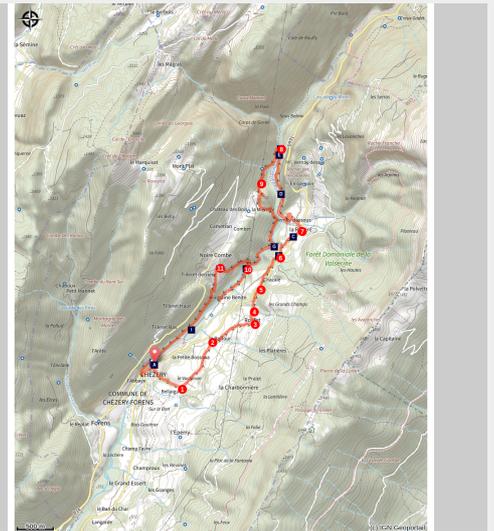


# The balconies of the Valserine

Pays de Gex - Chézery-Forens



La Valserine - PNRHJ / Samuel Delacroix (N.VERJUS)

*From the bottom of its valley overlooked by the ridges of the Jura, the Valserine, the first French river to be awarded the “wild river” label, guides hikers and brings this circuit to life, starting in Chézery-Forens, home to an old abbey.*

“In Celtic, Valserine means valley of the river. This sunken valley is an impressive manifestation of the Jura’s folded geology. Marked by the erosion of the glacier and by the digging of the river downstream, it is covered with traces left by men developing the land claimed by the forest. During a beautiful summer’s day, take a stroll in the gorge’s wildest areas.” Marc Forestier (“Que faire dans le Parc naturel régional du Haut-Jura”, What to do in the High-Jura Regional Natural Park, Dakota Edition)

## Useful information

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Practice : Hiking

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Duration : 3 h

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Length : 13.0 km

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Trek ascent : 556 m

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Difficulty : Severe

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Type : Circular

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Themes : Geology, History & heritage, Lakes, rivers and waterfalls

# Trek

Departure : Chézery-Forens

Arrival : Chézery-Forens

Markings :  PR® (Walking & hiking trail)

From the Hike Information Relay to your left when heading down the village, ascend a small road to the left (*yellow waymarking*). Head past the last houses. The path ascends into the valley of Vacheran (stream), and opens onto the **Bellaigue** plateau. Follow the stony path to your left, it will become grassy and later paved, until you reach la **Grande Bossona** (traditional houses and views over the ridges framing the valley). Head up a small road to the right, then continue left (stony path) until you come to **ROSSET** and its round fountain.

Head 40 m down the road to the left, then take a path to your left and turn right onto a trail. Exit onto a road, and follow the road to the right for 100 m. Take the trail to your left and arrive at the D 991 (cross with care). Head down the path to your left until you reach **Platelets**. The trail ascends to the right and joins up with a ridge overlooking the Valserine (belvedere; mountain pine planted at the end of the 19th century to avoid landslides). Continue left on the trail (sculptures) to enter the hamlet of **LA RIVIERE** on the edge of the D 991.

The path descends to the left and then heads immediately right and crosses over the Troubléry (torrent). Follow the road until you come to the procession of **THE SWALLOW'S' ROCK**, on the edge of the Valserine. Continue along the embankment until you reach **DEVIL'S BRIDGE**.

Cross the bridge and branch off to the left (narrow and steep trail overlooking the tumultuous waters of the Valserine, be careful!). Continue on this steep trail until you come to an intersection. Take the trail to your left towards the Thomas Mill. After a sharp bend (pay attention to the waymarking), head along the edge and exit near **la Miérette**.

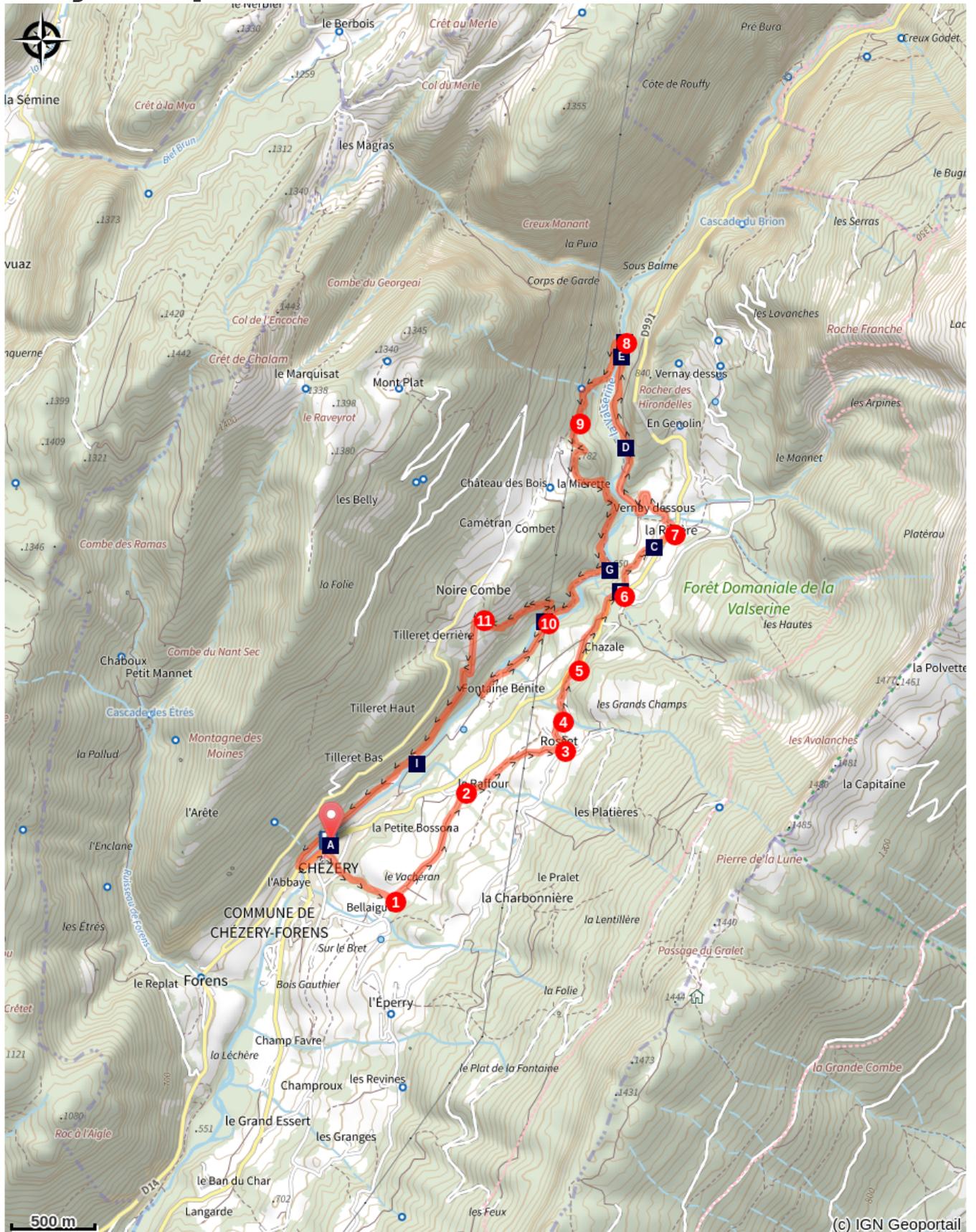
The trail descends to your left (viewpoint over the Swallows' Rock. Be careful!) and joins up with a stony trail on a balcony over the river. Arrive at the ruins of the **Thomas Mill**.

Cross the bridge and follow the path along the left bank until you come to the hamlet of **Fontaine Bénite**.

> The **Fontaine Bénite** oratory is accessible within 5 mins there-and-back to your left.

Continue your path by taking a trail near the river to your right (turnstile), and return to your starting point.

# On your path...



Chézery-Forens (A)	“Following a legend” discovery trail (B)
Roche Franche (C)	“Rocher des Hirondelles” (Swallows’ Rock) (D)
The Valserine, a wild river (E)	A few bridges over the Valserine (F)
The brown trout (G)	Thomas Mill (H)
An invasive plant: Asian knotweed (I)	

# All useful information

## **Advices**

Be careful when crossing the D 911, on the steep trail after Devil's Bridge and on the viewpoint in la Miérette on the edge of the cliffs.

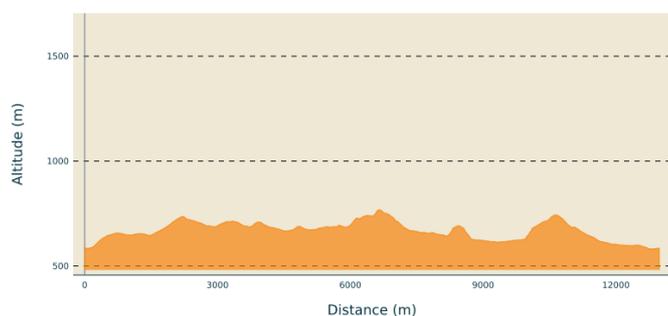
This trail passes through pastures with livestock and forest paths. To respect the owners and farmers granting you passage, and for the security of livestock and wild fauna, we ask that you remain on the waymarked paths. Use the adapted passageways to get across fencing and be sure to close gateways behind you.

Please keep your dog on a lead if you have one.

Wild flowers are beautiful, they may be rare and protected and often wilt quickly. Do not pick them! They will delight the next hikers.

In case of forest works (felling, skidding, etc.), for your safety, know when to stop and turn around.

## **Altimetric profile**



Min elevation 581 m  
Max elevation 768 m

## **Transports**

To visit and get about in the High-Jura, visit [www.reshaut-jura.fr](http://www.reshaut-jura.fr), the eco-mobility portal listing all means of transport within the Park.

## **Access**

20 km north of Bellegarde-sur-Valserine via the D 991 through Lacrans and Confort.

## **Advised parking**

In front the town hall, Grande Rue

 **Information desks**

Tourist information centre - Gex - La  
Faucille  
Tel : +33 (0)4 50 41 53 85  
<http://www.paysdegex-lafaucille.com/>

# On your path...

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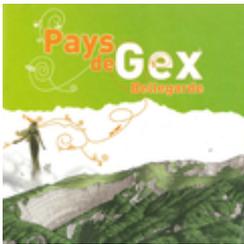
## Chézery-Forens (A)

The village of Chézery was built around the Cistercian abbey founded in 1140 by monks from Fontenay, in Burgundy. All that remains of the old abbey is the guesthouse which once provided shelter to pilgrims (now the Relais des Moines) and the parish church. The parish church was attached to the monastic church, which testimony from the time describes as being “big and beautiful”, with a nave with three aisles and six bays and a spire over the crossing of the transept. This closed off the cloister which, on the three remaining sides, served the abbot’s housing.

Opposite the conventual church was a mill, a forge, a bread oven, a garden, a reserve with carp, an infirmary, and more... In total, it is said that the whole structure had more windows than there are days in the year!

Attribution : PNRHJ / Gilles Prost

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## “Following a legend” discovery trail (B)

The “Following a legend” discovery trail, scattered throughout with many sculptures combining wood and stone, starts from the hamlet of La Rivière. It tells of this hamlet’s history, marked by the Roche France and the Troubléry stream, outstanding landscape features in this part of the valley (a booklet is available at the Chézery-Forens town hall).

Attribution : PNRHJ / Pays de Gex

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## Roche Franche (C)

South of the Reculet ridge, which reaches 1718 m in altitude, the High-Jura mountain range is cut through by a large depression that opens onto the valley of the Valserine. This type of erosion that affects a mountain’s summit or side is called a “combe”. The mountain’s structure shows a superposition of different limestone and marlstone layers, built up over tens of millions of years during the Jurassic period (-175 Mya to -145 Mya). At the foot of the cliffs, screes and landslides fill the heart of the combe, where erosion is still taking place.

Attribution : PNRHJ / Gilles Prost



## “Rocher des Hirondelles” (Swallows’ Rock) (D)

The “Rocher des Hirondelles” (Swallows’ Rock) is an impressive limestone cliff with an airy shape on the edge of the Valsérine. Here, the river has made a deep cut into the limestone and shaped this valley in the middle of the Mijoux-Chézery valley. This rock may well be named after the Eurasian crag martin, a master of flying on the hunt for insects, and a species that loves to nest in this type of cliff. This species, which was quite widespread in the Jura during the 19th century, has returned to the Massif since the 1980s.

Attribution : Catherine Devaux

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## The Valsérine, a wild river (E)

In 2013, the Valsérine became the first river in Europe to receive the “Wild river site” label. This label recognises the high quality of aquatic environments, and the little impact that human activity has had on the waterway and its catchment area. Created with the aim of protecting the less than 2% of rivers of exceptional quality and to eliminate the few black spots, this label led to a river agreement being signed in 2015. The morphological restoration of the waterway, the prevention of pollution by fuel tanks, the cleaning of illegal dumping and the fight against invasive plants are some of the main actions taken.

Attribution : PNRHJ / Gilles Prost

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## A few bridges over the Valsérine (F)

As result of man’s pressing need to trade and travel, around forty structures bridge the distance over the Valsérine and its small tributaries. Of these forty structures, some provide a wonderful opportunity to discover the valley and its landscapes. Just upstream from Mijoux, the natural bridge of La Giboulette is a limestone archway that was dug out by an adjacent stream. Downstream from Lélex, one of the oldest bridges - the Rouffy bridge - will allow hikers to follow the river at the bottom of the valley. Under Montanges, the Moulin des Pierres bridge was built as a tramway crossing in 1909 and overlooks the gorges: the view is dizzying! Finally, just before Bellegarde, you can still visit the old “Pont des Oules”, which was initially merely a limestone slab placed straight across the Valsérine waterfall, and which was used by the Helvetii in 58 B.C.

Attribution : PNRHJ / Janin Jaouen

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## The brown trout (G)

The brown trout is a fish that is entirely suited to the Jura's rivers, with their fresh and torrential waters. It has a slender fusiform body that is perfectly adapted to fast swimming. It feeds on the larvae of aquatic insects but also on small fish (including other trout!)

However, this species is very sensitive to the quality of water and to the artificialisation of waterways, which often goes hand in hand with the destruction of spawning grounds, caches and feeding grounds. Obstacles to the movement of trout also hinders the development of their numbers.

Attribution : PNRHJ / Pierre Durllet

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## Thomas Mill (H)

These ruins overcome by vegetation were once the vital core of a subsistence economy. It was to this mill, operated by the waters of the Valserine river, that the surrounding farms brought their grain. Thomas mill would turn barley and wheat into flour. The miller would keep twenty per cent of the production as payment for his work. Nearby, a sawmill complemented this activity.

Attribution : PNRHJ / Gilles Prost

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## An invasive plant: Asian knotweed (I)

As part of the wild river agreement, the Park and its partners are attempting to eliminate a tenacious invasive plant known as Asian knotweed. Every month, Asian knotweed plants are ripped out and taken to a special compost heap. Salt is scattered over its roots to attack the rhizomes that allow it to spread. The presence of Asian knotweed on the riverside is the result of the introduction of infested soil during landscaping works and of the re-mobilisation of rhizomes during floods. Never throw a piece of Asian knotweed root into water or on land, as it could grow back again.

Attribution : PNRHJ / Samuel Delacroix

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