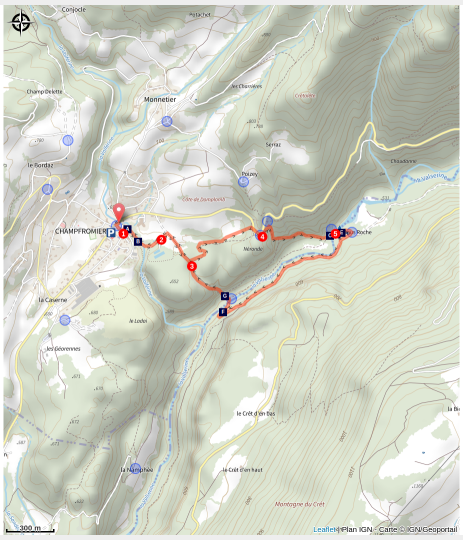
The Dragon under the Rock

Terre Valserine



Valserine ( )

From the tram bridge over the Volférine to Dragon’s bridge over the Valserine, you’re eyes will never be far from witnessing paradise, in this place that combines cliffs, gorges, rivers, works of art and landscapes.

Wild yet peaceful and characterised by the presence of water, Champfromier and its surroundings provide an exceptional environment for hiking. It is the often impetuous, sometimes tenuous waters of the Valserine that, over time, have forged these valley landscapes, surrounded by the high Jura ridges.

Useful information

Practice : Hiking

Duration : 2 h 30

Length : 4.5 km

Trek ascent : 261 m

Difficulty : Difficult

Type : Circular

Themes : History & heritage, Lakes, rivers and waterfalls

Trek

Departure : Champfromier
Arrival : Champfromier
Markings : PR® (Walking & hiking trail)

Heading down the D 14, the trail comes to the Saint-Martin washhouse in **CHAMPFROMIER - HELL'S BRIDGE.** Take "rue Neuve" to the right (yellow waymarking) before the bridge and head around the hotel to a metal barrier that you will need to open. The trail heads down into the gorges of the Volferine and crosses the torrent at the foot of a surprising stone structure. Continue along the left embankment and then take a good path through a meadow to your left. The path descends to the left and then enters the forest.

Turn left towards Domplomb. The trail, which pleasantly rises and falls through boxwood, copses and and high forests, opens out onto the D 14 near the **Domplomb tunnel**.

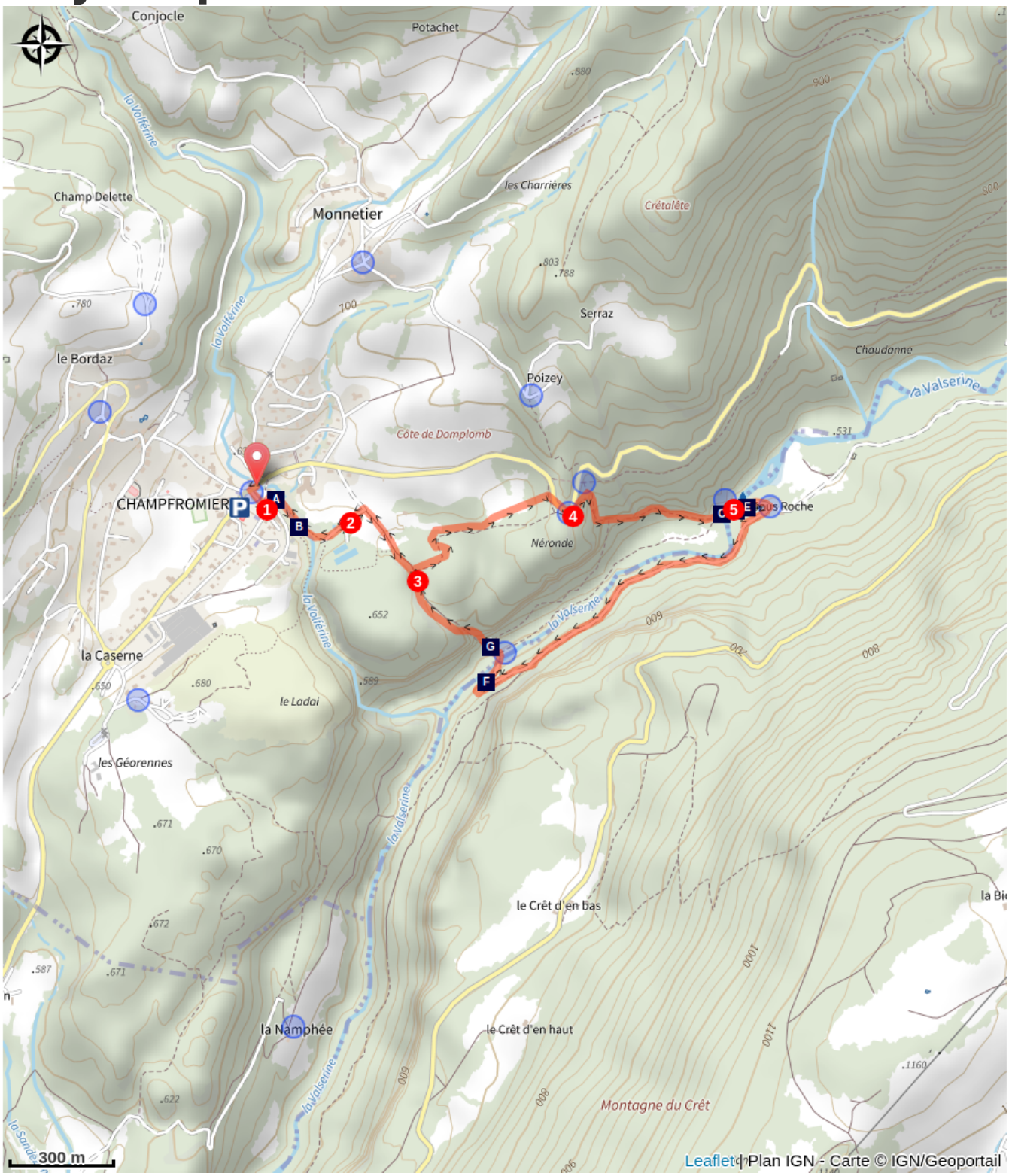
The trail turns right to descend below the road with quite a surprise along the way. You will join up with the Valserine at **DRAGON'S BRIDGE.** Take care, the path is right on the edge of the torrent. Cross the bridge observing where the fish pass, and then ascend to the right to reach **the Dragon's House**.

Follow the stony path to the right which, after a bend, comes to the bridge of **Sous Roche**.

The path crosses over the Valserine and heads up the opposite bank via a steep trail along the edge of a cliff. During high waters, sources and waterfalls gush and splatter near the trail.

Return to the village the way you came, making the most of the view over the cirque of Avalanches to the west of Champfromier, where the Volferine starts.

On your path...



The Tram bridge (A)
Old telemechanic pillar (B)
Wild river (C)
The dragon’s house and bridge (D)
Ecological continuity of the river (E)
The Sous-Roche power plant (F)
The tufa waterfall (G)

All useful information

⚠ Advices

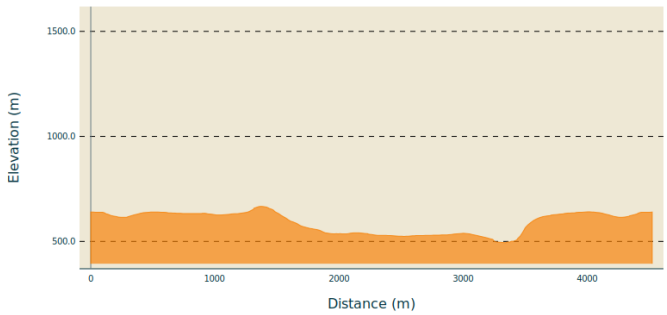
Be careful along the edge of the Valserine between Domplomb and Dragon’s Bridge.

This trail uses forest paths and private tracks. To respect owners and farmers, and for the security of wild fauna, we ask that you remain on the waymarked paths. 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 494 m
Max elevation 667 m

Transports

To visit and get about in the High-Jura, visit www.reshaut-jura.fr, the eco-mobility portal listing all means of transport within the Park.

Access

15 km north of Bellegarde-sur-Valserine via the D 1084, then, at Trébillet, take the D 14 through Montanges.

Advised parking

In front the town hall

Information desks

Tourist information centre - Terre Valserine
71 rue de la République, 01200 Valserhône
Tel : +33 (0)4 50 48 48 68
https://www.terrevalserhone-tourisme.fr

On your path...

The Tram bridge (A)

Comprised of four arches, with one measuring eighteen metres and three other smaller ones, the Tram bridge crosses the Volferine river near the new Pont d’Enfer (Hell’s bridge). On the old tram line that linked Bellegarde-sur-Valserine to Chézery-Forens, it is one of the three bridges built for the tramway’s passage after that of Bellegarde and the Pont du Moulin des Pierres, which overlooks the gorges from 65 metres high with a range of 80 metres.

Attribution :

Old telemechanic pillar (B)

Telemechanism is a principle that rapidly declined with the emergence of electricity. The pillars are remnants of a time during which an abundance of ideas on technical improvements flourished. These cut-stone pyramid-shaped pillars provided support to one or more wheels, built into the upper part. The cables ran from the pulley, driven by the turbine (located further downstream), before running around the pillar’s wheels and reaching the grain mill wheel, which in turn activated the grinding wheel by a series of gears.

Attribution : Gilles Prost - PNRHJ

Wild river (C)

The Valserine is the first French river to be labelled a “Wild River”, a label that less than 1% of French rivers are able to claim... From its source to its end in Bellegarde (46 km), its condition close to a natural state makes this river a jewel of nature. Many emblematic species are present: the yellow-bellied toad, large populations of brown trout in a good condition of preservation, all completely natural...

Since 2015, a wild river contract leads actions to ensure the free circulation of fish and sediments, to rehabilitate wetlands near waterways, to eradicate invasive plants, to eliminate former riverside landfills, etc.

Find out more:

http://www.rivieres-sauvages.fr/

http://www.parc-haut-jura.fr/fr/site-habitant/gestion-environnement/zones-humides-rivieres/valserine-riviere-sauvage.263-280-1104__1623.php
Attribution : Gilles Prost - PNRHJ

The dragon’s house and bridge (D)

Between this succession of high walls, Dragon’s bridge, built in 1891, only has a few metres to span to cross the river. A customs guard house was installed on the right bank to monitor the passage towards the duty-free zone in the Pays de Gex, delineated by the Valserine. On the other bank, a shop offered colonial goods and products from the duty-free zone up until 1921.

The inhabitants of Champfromier tell of how their parents or grand-parents would walk to the Dragon’s farm, where duty-free coffee was sold. The game was to hide illicit products under the women’s skirts, away from customs officials. Smuggler’s tales are now part of local folklore.
Attribution : Janin Jaouen - PNRHJ

Ecological continuity of the river (E)

The Sous-roche dam upstream from the Dragon’s bridge was installed between the two world wars on the Valserine, straddling the municipalities of Chézery-Forens and Champfromier, to use the water’s hydroelectric power. A fish pass positioned on the left embankment allows trout to cross the obstacle. However, the structure limits the circulation of sediments dragged along by the river. Under the Wild River contract, solutions are being studied to improve the transportation of sediments, which is vital for the proper operation of the river.

Attribution : Janin Jaouen - PNRHJ

The Sous-Roche power plant (F)

The electrical equipment for the tramway line was entrusted to the company Thomson-Houston. It was the first tramway in the Ain to be completely electric as from its construction. The plant required the construction of a dam, a 900-meter supply line, a steel and concrete penstock that fed, after a 40-meter drop, its two direct-current generators. The plant is still in use; it is automatically controlled from the Génissiat dam. The first storey, with access from the side of the building, was reserved for the housing of power plant guards.

The tufa waterfall (G)

Taking care to stay on the path, through the trees, you will see a tufa waterfall. Upstream, during its underground travels, the water from this rivulet has dissolved part of the limestone. In open air, on contact with carbon dioxide (CO2), the limestone transported by the water settles on and calcifies the moss and other debris forming this curious rock with the treacherous appearance of a sponge or of volcanic rock.

Attribution : Samuel Delacroix