



Ville & village

# Moncontour

Vienne, France

Moncontour, this is Glaz's favorite place in Vienne ! A sublime small village surrounded by swamps, bordered by dozens of old wash-house, all more charming than each other and surmounted by a dungeon.

We chose to follow the path of the wash-houses which offers a tour of the village by approaching its fauna, its flora and its history.

## On the spot

The path is very pleasant, it first follows the Dive and its wash-houses, then climbs towards the dungeon (and its viewpoint) before descending gently towards the starting point. Most of the journey is on ground way, so bring walking shoes.

Throughout your journey, you will find several illustrated panels as well as a small house where you can build toys from natural elements (go to the tourist office to get the cards).

Near the car park, a revisited Goose game allows you to end the course in a fun way !



### Depart

Parking near the church



### Time

Almost 2h



### Difficulty

Easy/Medium



### The +

A lot of sign to follow the trail



### Wheelchair

Only in the city



### Geocaching

Ok

## Table of contents

On the spot .....	1
Moncontour, where life is good .....	2
A village surrounded by swamps .....	2
Leeches and poplars.....	2
The wash-houses.....	3
The dungeon of Foulque Nerra .....	3
The hundred years war .....	3
Bloody Valley and Traitor Valley .....	4
Localisation .....	4
Useful information .....	4

## Moncontour, where life is good

The Dive Valley is very old and it is also very likely that the Celts have walk on the earth under your feet. Besides, a bronze sword was found in the swamps of Moncontour. The word "Dive" would come from the Gallic word "divae" which means "sacred". This is why you can sometimes see the path of "the divine path" which allows you to take a tour in the country of Louduns!

The village of Moncontour has seen centuries succeed as well as their battles, between the Hundred Years War and the War of Religions ... But it is also a place where life is good, rocked by the rhythm of the river. You could then hear the threshing of the washerwomen, the blades of the water mills or even the braying of the mules (you will see for what curious use a little further).

## A village surrounded by swamps

The Dive is a wild river, but that was before men realized its defensive and economic potential. Why defensive? Because this landscape is made up of marshes and peat bogs which make intrusions very complicated. The marsh was difficult to access for travelers until the 1860s, where a railroad was built. The remediation of the marshes was undertaken by local religious communities from the High Middle Ages onwards with the installation of water mills.

Many local fairs (including 6 in Moncontour) encourage the cultivation of the land, whether for peas, broad beans, hemp (for boat sails) or flax. Peat extracted from the marshes was used as fuel during the Second World War.

## Leeches and poplars

In this beautiful river you could find crayfish, which unfortunately have disappeared, but also leeches! They were picked up by walking mules in the water and collected on their legs. Leeches were widely used for medicine. It was thought that certain diseases could be due to bad humours, of which the blood is a part. It had to be removed by bleeding, or thanks to.... Leeches!

Humours theory began in ancient times and is based on the idea that our health is defined by the balance of 4 humours: blood, lymph, yellow bile and black bile.

Fun fact: you can find freshwater mussels over 20cm long in the Dive!

While strolling in Moncontour and its surroundings, we also often note the presence of poplars. Its culture develops in the marshes from the 19th century. This is a new economy which is launching, notably with plywood. There were more than 20,000 poplars in 1863, and only along the Dive!

Poplar: it can live up to 400 years and reach up to 40m in height. There are up to 35 different species that are in temperate or northern areas. They are very popular with beavers. The poplar was the first tree to be genetically modified!

## The wash-houses

As the name of the path indicates, we will see wash houses. There were no less than 80 in Moncontour! Several are still visible, nicely maintained by the current inhabitants. The fact that the Dive passes through the village has allowed almost everyone to have their own wash-house, instead of the common wash-houses that we all know. You will then see different wash-houses, from the smallest to the most sophisticated, depending on the owner's means.

One of them, at the end of the trail, even has a mechanical system that allows you to change the height of the board where you threw the laundry, in order to adapt to the height of the water. Convenient when the level of the Dive goes up or down!

You will learn a few words from the wash houses, right?

Battoué : laundry beater

Éparer : hanging up the laundry

Lavocher : wash a little each day

Patouiller : wading

## The dungeon of Foulque Nerra

After the wash-houses, we turn left and off we go for the ascent. Moncontour is surmounted by an imposing tower which dominates the landscape. This dungeon, once surrounded by a castle, is the symbol of an important place of defense where great battles will be fought.

Built around 1020 by Foulque Nerra, Count of Anjou, the stones of this dungeon will see big names succeed like Jean-sans-Terre, Philippe Auguste or Duguesclin which we will discuss later. The keep is 25 meters high and has regularly restored walls 3 meters thick.

Foulque Nerra will also build the Loudun tower. Higher (40m), it is not called a dungeon because its goal was not defensive but was used as a watchtower.

This dark and violent man built many square dungeons, fortifications and castles across his estates, such as at Loches, Montbazou, Château-Gontier and even Langeais.

He seems to be building as much, to redeem his crimes and his outbursts of violence. He also repudiated his first wife, Elisabeth de Vendôme, for not having given him a son and would have condemned her to be burned alive ...

## The hundred years war

During the Hundred Years War, Moncontour was part of Poitou, loyal to the kings of France. It was then an outpost in Loudun, an impregnable fortress whose high tower can still be seen. It was in 1371 that the English seized Moncontour, making Duguesclin rage, who swore in 1372 that he would not sleep in a bed before having hanged the Englishman who outraged him, after his defeat in 1371 !

He will keep his word and will find his bed after four days of military siege and 2 days of tough battles.

Duguesclin is the leader of the French armies. He fought ardently for Charles V known as "the Wise", then king of France (from 1364 to 1380). The English had indeed taken advantage of the unrest stirring the kingdom to relaunch the war in 1355. France was then under the reign of Charles V's father, Jean II le Bon, who was taken prisoner at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. His liberation will cost a third of France, which will be ceded to Edward III, king of the English. This is why Moncontour was in a delicate position, wedged between the Duchy of Guyenne and Anjou, then in the hands of the English!

## Bloody Valley and Traitor Valley

These dismal names are inherited from another murderous episode, which took place here on October 3, 1569.

A grandiose battle then opposed Protestants and Catholics during the third war of religions. It will cover the dry plains that surround Moncontour with thousands of bodies. Henri, Duke of Anjou then fights for his brother, King Charles IX, against Admiral Coligny who directs the Huguenots.

The Huguenots are 18,000, tired by a military siege they hold in Poitiers. Pushed by the news of the arrival of the troops of the royal army (the Catholics therefore), they leave the city and go up north to fall in front of this large army of 25,000 men. The battle was as brief as it was bloody, barely an hour and left Coligny losing, who returned to the south. There, he will raise an army and plunder Catholic villages.

The peace of the third war of religions was finally signed a year later, on August 8, 1570, between Coligny and Charles IX: the peace of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Protestant worship was then tolerated in the kingdom of France, although limited and prohibited in Paris. Protestants are also admitted to public office and the king's sister is married to the new leader of the Protestants, Henri de Navarre.

It is also said that Coligny spent one night in one of the houses in the village, opposite what is now Coligny Square. You can still see the cannonballs of this battle in some gardens of Moncontour.

## Localisation

To follow the route, park in the parking next to the church:

Place du souvenir français  
86330 Moncontour

46°52'53.3"N 0°01'02.6"W

## Useful information

[Website of the Touristic office of Moncontour](#)

[Webite of the Loudunais country](#)

[Mobile app with « Terra Aventura »](#)



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