

Cities and regions of art and history
Discovery tour of the region



Let us tell you the story
of the

Char O'lais
Bri O'nnais
region

Landscapes

Charolais-Brionnais country offers one charming landscape after another: From rolling hills to lush valleys, from forests to fertile pasturelands shaped by man since the 18th century.



View of the Mont Dardon, forming the southern flank of the Morvan range.



Crinoidal limestone (marine fossils), of a yellowish ochre hue, is one of the area's characteristic materials.



Natural borders

The Loire River plain traces the territory's western border. To the east, the slopes of the Monts du Charolais serve as a separation from the Clunisois and Mâconnais regions, while the relief of the Morvan and Massif Central ranges enclose the Charolais-Brionnais on its northern and southern flanks. Between plain and hilltops, at the centre of this region lies an expansive plateau with valleys formed by flowing Loire tributaries.

Impressive geological diversity

The hilly Charolais-Brionnais landform stems from a series of geological phenomena (fault lines, thrusting, collapses, erosion and deposits) altering an initially varied substratum: magmatic rocks (granite) in elevation to the north and east; sedimentary rocks (sandstone, limestone, marl and clay) on plateaus and in valleys; and carbonaceous rocks found in the coal belt between the Arroux and Bourbince Rivers. From very early on, these materials provided a resource for man and aided in developing dwellings and activities.

Rolling hillsides

To the north and east, small mountains vary in elevation from 500 to 800 m. These natural defensive sites were the scene of early human occupation, in several instances like the Mont Dardon dating back to the Iron Age. Also on the eastern side are the Butte de Suin hilltop, the Horn of Artus and Dun Mountain, all having been fortified with some constructions known to be built in Ancient times. This hilly relief served for a long time to isolate the territory, particularly from the Saône River Valley to the east, the main trade corridor between Lyon and Dijon. Today, it offers superb panoramic views.



View from atop the Dun Mountain, with its 12th-century chapel and the Mussy-sous-Dun viaduct, crossing the Mussy Valley, a tributary of the Sornin.



Site of Le Petit Fleury, on the Loire's banks in Bourbon-Lancy.



View of local area pastureland.

A region where water flows freely

France's longest river (running 1,013 km), the Loire adds identity to the territory and opens access to the west. Considered Europe's last free-flowing river, the Loire undergoes abrupt variations in both its riverbed and flow rate from one season to the next. While this natural dynamic complicates waterway navigation, it yields an amazing diversity of scenery (shores, prairies, forests and marshland), which in turn produces habitat for flora and fauna unique in Europe.

The interior of the Charolais-Brionnais region has been moulded by Loire tributaries on the river's right bank: Arroux, Arconce, Sornin and Somme. Other streams meander through the territory, like the Bourbince whose valley has carved a path to the Saône and is now used by the Canal du Centre and the Central Europe-Atlantic Highway.

Famous pastureland

The Charolais-Brionnais, most renowned for cattle farming, features a remarkably well-preserved landscape of pastureland laid out in a pristine mosaic of prairie parcels bordered by hedgerows. The area's celebrated hedges delimit property boundaries and confine herds to their designated fields, in addition to providing biological functions (habitat for protected European species of insects, birds and rodents), physical functions (soil consolidation, wind protection, water flow regulation) and landscape amenity.

In Charolais-Brionnais country, hedgerows are formed by various thorny shrubs (nettle, rose bushes, hawthorn, briar and sloe), bay trees (gooseberry, elderberry, honeysuckle) and an array of bushes. Sometimes hedgerows are planted along low dry stone walls or abut breezeblock construction of myriad sizes and shapes assembled without binder and topped by a layer of small stones leaning against one another.

A region evolving over the centuries

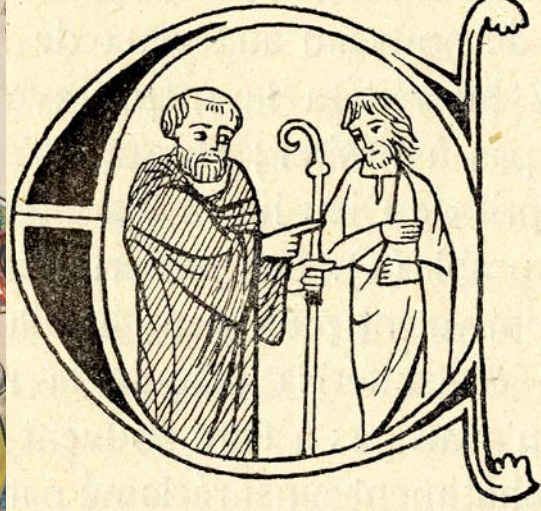
Like its landscapes, Charolais-Brionnais' history has been shaped in large part by residents, but also by its geographic position and natural advantages.



Example of Samian ware pottery produced in Quinimum (Gueugnon) around the 2nd or 3rd century AD, object on display at the Museum of Gueugnon Area Heritage.



Scenes from Charolais County, Great Equestrian Armorial of the Golden Fleece, decorated manuscript, Jean Lefèvre from Saint-Rémy, 15th century, National Library of France.



Hugues and Monk Robert in a raised cap on a decorated manuscript, Life of Saint Hugues, L'Huillier Dom A., Solesmes, 1888. Saint Hugues, son of Damas the First of Semur was the sixth abbot of Cluny serving from 1049 to 1109, during the height of the order's glory.

The Eduens and Romans

Except for flint specimens from Volgu, prehistoric vestiges are rare in Charolais-Brionnais. Traces of human occupation are more tangible as of 5th century BC when the territory was inhabited by Eduen people, a large tribe of Celtic descent. In 58 BC, they requested Rome's help in resisting the Helvetian invasion, leading to Julius Caesar's victory at the battle of Bibracte, which initiated the Gallic Wars. The Roman occupation proceeded by dividing the territory into agricultural estates (villas) and an urban type development where spa treatments (Bourbon-Lancy) and local crafts (Gueugnon and Colonne, since disappeared) were practiced.

From the time of lords...

Around 1140, Pierre the Venerable, Cluny's abbot, wrote: «Our land is without a king, or a duke or even a prince.» Control of Southern Burgundy lay in the hands of multiple small-time lords, squires or barons, whether direct or indirect vassals of either the Dukes of Burgundy or the Kings of France. Among these figures were the Sires of Semur, Digoine and Bourbon-Lancy. During the 13th century, the Duke tightened his grip on power by installing bailiffs, or representatives, in the towns of Charolles, Semur and Montcenis and by purchasing the Charolais countryside, where he set up a county and offered it to his granddaughter Béatrix.

... and monks

Beginning in the 10th century, a vast network of monasteries were built and dotted the territory, in exercising control over local parishes. Within this network, the nearby Cluny Abbey established its pre-eminence through priory houses founded in Bourbon-Lancy, Charlieu, Charolles and Paray-le-Monial; in Marcigny, the first Cluny monastery for women opened in 1056. Cluny's power sparked a resistance movement, led by the bishops of Autun and Mâcon, that took hold in the Saint-Rigaud Abbey (since disappeared) and the priory houses of Anzy-le-Duc and Saint-Germain-en-Brionnais.



The Mill Tower in Marcigny, a 15th-century fortified construction, today used as a museum.



Portrait of Elisabeth-Alexandrine de Bourbon-Condé, known as Mademoiselle de Sens (1705-1765), oil on canvass, painted by Jean-Marc Nattier, 18th century, Château de Versailles. Charolais' last countess, she resold the work to the Crown in 1761 in exchange for the Palaiseau plot.



Breeders participating at the agricultural competition in Charolles, beginning of the 20th century, postcard, Departmental Archives.



Digoin earthenware selection workshop, employing up to 1,700 personnel, photograph from the beginning of the 20th century, private collection.

Amidst torment surrounding the Hundred Years' War...

In 1337, the King of England declared war on the throne of France. Beginning in 1411, the conflict widened with civil war between the Armagnac and Burgundian factions, in addition to roaming armed bands under the banners «Routiers» and «Ecorcheurs». Against this tumultuous backdrop, Charolais-Brionnais held a coveted strategic border position for the Duke of Burgundy. Cities like Paray-le-Monial, Bourbon-Lancy, Marcigny and Charolles built or rebuilt their fortifications. Fortresses were erected during this period, like the La Clayette Castle built in 1380 by Philibert de Lespinasse, a loyalist to the Duke.

... and the Franco-Spanish battles

Louis XI annexed the Duchy of Burgundy in 1477 after the death of Charles the Bold. The marriage of Charles' granddaughter, Marguerite of Austria, to the future Charles VIII was intended to calm tensions between the King of France and the Habsbourg family, heirs to the Duchy. The 1493 annulment of this wedding however returned the Charolais to the Habsbourg's (who would become the royal family of Spain), and it remained their property until 1684. After the cessation of Franco-Spanish hostilities between 1635 and 1659, the county was then transferred to the Bourbon-Condé family and would be merged in 1761 back into the Kingdom of France.

A land of cattle breeders and skilled labourers

The marketing of Charolais beef cattle (used in the past as a pulling force) for its meats, on the Lyon and Paris markets, has helped open the local economy to the exterior. The famous 17-day journey made by Emiland Mathieu of Oyé and his herd to the Poissy market in 1747 serves as a poignant testimonial. The region remained specialised in cattle breeding during the 19th and 20th centuries. The north-eastern section traditionally handles calving, while the south focuses on feeding (fattening) the animals. The Charolles Agricultural Society (founded in 1880), followed by the «Herd-Book» (1887) and «Charolais Beef» AOC quality appellation (2010), sets guidelines for this activity.

This mainly rural territory has experienced substantial industrial development. Jean-Hector de Fay, a high-ranking French military officer, had forges installed in Gueugnon as early as 1724. Ceramic plants were located in Charolles (Prost earthenware factory in 1844), Digoin (the Sarreguemines plant in 1875 after annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany), Paray-le-Monial (Charnoz, in 1877), Marcigny (Emile Henry factory in 1850) and Palinges. Mining activity was ongoing in La Chapelle-sous-Dun from 1809 until the 1960's. Moreover, Chauffailles has been a centre for the textile industry since 1740.

A wide array of noteworthy sites

From Romanesque churches to industrial facilities, from castles to rural and local heritage, Charolais-Brionnais boasts a great diversity of architectural styles.

Romanesque churches and priory houses

The term «Romanesque» first appeared in the 19th century to designate Medieval art from the 11th and 12th centuries, i.e. the period in religious architecture characterised by a desire to cover (or vault) stone edifices while enabling more light to penetrate the interior. This quest would lead to the advent of Gothic art. The basilica in Paray-le-Monial, this region's architectural masterpiece, heralded a breakthrough in building techniques with its: 21-m high single-barrel vaulted nave, raised window openings, apse with delicate supports, and light streaming in through three-storey bay openings.



Panoramic view of the Paray-le-Monial Basilica ambulatory (12th century).



Capital sculpted into the nave at the Anzy-le-Duc church (12th century).



Gothic architecture is not widespread locally, especially when observing the quality of Romanesque edifices. The few specimens, like the Sainte-Avoie Chapel in La Clayette (15th century), appeared later

Various architectural solutions have undergone experimentation. In Iguerande, the nave is darkened (devoid of windows) and covered by a barrel vault. The layout in Anzy-le-Duc is lit thanks to tall windows and rib vaults. The hosting of spiritual pilgrims, on their itinerary to pay homage to relics, has led to a number of renovations: an ambulatory and radiating chapels in Paray, the crypt in Anzy. The church in Issy-l'Évêque and the collegiate church in Semur-en-Brionnais, both more recent constructions (mid-12th century), provide a synthesis of this architectural period. On the outside, the bell tower looms large. The Anzy-le-Duc and Châteauneuf steeples are quite distinct for their multiple levels of openwork.

Several churches have gained recognition for the opulence of their sculpted decor, highlighting the tympanums and lintels above portals and atop column capitals. The naive style of the sculpture is often counterbalanced by an elaborate expressiveness. The portal lintel in Montceau-l'Étoile, showing the twelve apostles in motion, bristles with life. The tympanums on churches in Saint-Julien-de-Jonzy, Charlieu or Chassenard, featuring extremely fine detail, and the capitals at Anzy-le-Duc and Iguerande also effectively demonstrate this magnificent artistic creation.



View of the Semur-en-Brionnais dungeon



Digoine Castle (18th century).



Facade of the Paray-le-Monial town hall (around 1525).

From medieval fortresses...

The church spire is rivalled on the horizon by the great tower of the lord's castle, built on raised earth or a site that took advantage of a natural line of defence. Over 100 medieval fortified sites have been inventoried throughout the territory. A number of outstanding vestiges provide glimpses of this past glory: the Semur-en-Brionnais castle with its powerful square tower (10th-11th centuries) classified as the first type of stone dungeon built; and ruins of the 13th-century Commune castle (Martigny-le-Comte), composed of a quadrangular enclosure flanked by four corner towers.

... to residential castles

As of the 15th century, the defensive nature of castles gave way to a residential purpose. The opening of large mullion bay windows with decorative latticework reflects the search for light and comfort. Special attention was paid to the sculpted facade work, as exemplified at the Lord's residence in Montperroux (not open to the public), famous for its mouldings, pediments and masks, showcases a rare Renaissance style in Charolais-Brionnais.

As of the 17th century, nobility migrated to cities and settled into manor houses while their rural castles, occupied exclusively during hunting and harvesting seasons, became holiday residences. Among these edifices, the Chaumont Castle (16th-19th centuries) in Saint-Bonnet-de-Joux, along with those in Drée (built in the 17th century by the Dukes of Lesdiguières), Saint-Aubin-sur-Loire and Digoine (the 18th-century neoclassical work of the architect Edme Verniquet), are all remarkable specimens. The northern facade of the La Clayette Castle stands as a perfect testimonial of a marked preference for the neo-Gothic style that first appeared in the 19th century.

A selection of other noteworthy architectural achievements

The Paray-le-Monial town hall building, formerly known as the Jayet House, displays a sublime facade (1525-1528), signifying the transition between French Gothic and Italian Renaissance. An immense brick and stone structure, the Aligre Hospital in Bourbon-Lancy (19th century) provides the most interesting local example of the hospital genre. Other impressive works include the Art Deco post office in Digoine (1935) and Charolles' Maupré Viaduct, lauded for its integration into the landscape and whose innovative concrete and steel deck drew world-wide attention when inaugurated in 1987.



Half-timbered house in Marcigny (on the Impasse de la boucherie).



Portrait of Louise of Lorraine (1553-1601), wife of Henri III, drawing, anonymous, 16th century, National Library of France. From 1580 to 1583, the queen spent long periods at Bourbon-Lancy to take the waters and treat her sterility. A source there was even named «the Queen's source».



Digoin canal bridge, 1832-1836.

Settlements built around castles and monasteries

During the Middle Ages, the location of a castle or monastery adjacent to communication routes often incited urban development (Charolles, Bourbon-Lancy, Paray-le-Monial and Marcigny), where a prosperous merchant class thrived. The medieval town layout has been preserved: in Paray-le-Monial and Marcigny, characteristic land use patterns have remained intact, with narrow lanes-gutters running through their centres. Marcigny is home to the most spectacular composition of half-timbered houses. These towns had been protected by fortified enclosures and still offer a few remnants following dismantling in the 18th and 19th centuries.

«Water» towns

The city of Bourbon-Lancy is known for its eclecticism. Below the castle compound, the spa district began to develop as of Gallo-Roman times around the hot water sources (approx. 50°C), recognised for their high sodium chloride content and used today to treat rheumatism and cardiovascular problems. The ancient spa (discovered from a description left by Dr. Aubery in the 17th century) was replaced by the 19th-century buildings currently onsite. The resort enjoyed its Golden Age during the 16th century when the King visited. Nowadays, some 3,000 come here annually to take the waters.

Positioned on the banks of the Loire, Bourbon-Lancy had constructed a commercial port in the hamlet of Le Fourneau. But ultimately Digoin, at the junction of three confluences, would be favoured by this location, becoming an economic and urban hub starting in the 17th century by virtue of trade routes for raw materials and farming and industrial goods produced locally. To navigate safely along the Loire, merchant sailors used flat-keeled boats, or light barges. Nonetheless, navigational difficulties along the river led to a steady decline in Loire shipping activity.

Once the Loire was no longer used commercially, Digoin benefitted from its connection with Chalon and the Saône River via the Canal du Centre, built by the engineer Emiland Gauthey from 1783 to 1793. The next expansion was aided by the trading routes created in 1838 when linking the Canal du Centre with the Roanne-to-Digoin Canal and the Loire Diversion Canal, which allowed reaching the Seine via the Canal de Briare. The Digoin canal bridge (1832-1836), an amazing structural feat, made it possible for the Diversion Canal to cross the river. Waterway trade has since been replaced by nautical tourism.



Rose window on the Paul Charnoz factory building, composed of 4,256 ceramic tiles and gold medal winner at the 1900 World's Fair, Paul Charnoz Museum.



Lime kilns in Vendenesse-lès-Charolles (CMH, in 1998) and their powerful brick chimneys (19th century).



View of Gueugnon, an industrial centre located amidst the region's pastureland.

Industrial heritage

Industry has helped forge Charolais-Brionnais' identity. The activities promoted here have been heavily tied to local resources and are responsible for the region's renown beyond its borders. Some of its output has achieved international notoriety, such as the Charnoz mosaics (award winners at the 1889 and 1900 World's Fairs), Puzenat's farm machinery (honoured in 1878 and several prizes awarded during the 1920's), earthenware from Charolles, Emile Henry cookware, and stainless steel plates produced at the Gueugnon plant (world's leading manufacturer).

Charolles should be added to this list of «water» towns. Its modern name stems from the Celtic «Kadrigel», translated as «water fortress». The ancient city, located at the confluence of the Arconce and its tributary the Semence, was encircled by water. Its houses overlooked the canal-lined rivers, and its many bridges and footbridges earned Charolles the nickname «Burgundy's little Venice».

These industrial activities have left a deep imprint on the territory. Museums Paul Charnoz in Paray-le-Monial, of ceramics in Digoin, the Charolles Priory House and Palinges' museum all showcase local ceramic objects. The Chauffailles weaving museum and Plassard's textile mill in Varennesous-Dun both have old looms for spinning and weaving on display and in working order. Puzenat machines are held in collections curated by the City of Bourbon-Lancy. In the architectural realm, the Van de Walle textile factory in Chauffailles offers a handsome illustration of the industrial «palace» with its imposing concrete and glass facade, while the lime kilns in Vendenesse-lès-Charolles and their intimidating brick chimney are among the last ones preserved in France.

The area's industrial heritage can also be observed in urban formations associated with more intense activity and an influx of labour. Beginning mid-19th century, the idea of company towns, developed according to a grid pattern and composed of single-family dwellings (often resembling row houses) or traditional multi-family residences, was being applied to meet the housing needs of factory workers. The districts of Gachères in Gueugnon, La Brierette in Digoin, Saint-Denis in Bourbon-Lancy and the PLM and Cerabati complexes in Paray-le-Monial are among the finest examples.



View of the village of Oyé.



Typical Charolais farm in Champlecy. The outbuildings (stables, hangar for hay carts) and residence were built together abutting one another and combined under the same overhanging roof.



Village life

While the first villages resulted from clustering farmers and tradesmen to better coordinate agricultural work, settlements in the Charolais-Brionnais are characterised by dispersed dwellings, consisting of isolated farmhouses. This phenomenon can be explained by the abundance of water sources, which did not convince households to cluster, and by the layout of hedge-lined pastures where homes were built in the middle of agricultural parcels. The higher-density villages, like Châteauneuf, Bois-Sainte-Marie or Semur-en-Brionnais, are in fact former medieval market towns.

The region's pattern of extensive land holdings, which was still predominant during the 19th century especially in the Charolais sector (where 50% of farmland is owned by 1% of the population), did not favour increased density. In 1850, Autun's Deputy Prefect compared the region with Ireland. Even though some types of local contracts (tenant farming, sharecropping) have remained in place between farmers and major landholders, the proportion of small and medium-sized agricultural estates has grown significantly over the last half-century.

Town hall-school buildings

Combined into parishes that depended on lordships under pre-Revolutionary rule, village communities were granted the status of municipality after the Revolution and in the 19th century built town halls, followed by public schools once the 1833 and 1878 laws were enacted. A total of 1,215 buildings, often housing both administrative and educational functions, were recorded in the department's construction archives between 1800 and 1940. Included in these entries were the neoclassical edifices in Suin, Palinges and Baron, as well as subtle neo-Gothic influences in Chassigny-sous-Dun and Saint-Vincent-Bagny, plus more atypical structures like the Briant Girls' School.

Houses and farms : A building hierarchy

A classification of rural habitat, correlated with the different social conditions, can indeed be drawn up. The leading category is the large isolated farmhouse, associated with an expansive agricultural holding, typically far from the road and only accessible by dirt path. The buildings and residence are configured around a square courtyard whose entrance is easily identified by an imposing gate. The presence of a dovecote often implies allegiance to a lordship and proximity to a castle yet at times in the 19th century would indicate the farmer's material success.



A Charolais interior, glass negative, painting (technique), M.-F. Firmin-Girard and F.-A. Vizzavona, beginning of the 20th century, Druiet-Vizzavona collection. The living room was «ground zero» for farm operations with its fireplace and the scullery (stone sink for heavy kitchen tasks).

House of a cattle farmer in Briant.

Washhouse in Bois-Sainte-Marie.

Shapes and materials

The region's geological diversity has provided a whole array of construction materials : pink granite, crinoidal limestone of a yellowish ochre hue, and a greyish sandstone. For roofing materials, flat tiles have been the dominant variety since the 19th century. Charolais-Brionnais farms most often comprise a residence and farm buildings juxtaposed under the same roof. Some even reveal influences of winegrowers' homes from southern regions: a first-floor dwelling area accessible via stone steps, roof eaves protecting the facade and supported by overhanging gables or wooden purlin timbers, openings below the overhang to ventilate the attic space.

Village farms, some of which resemble this isolated layout removed from the street by a carriage entrance, also suggest a well-to-do farming community. The farmer's house sits on a smaller parcel, with the more modest outbuildings abutting the residence and opening directly onto the street or a shared courtyard. The houses of tradesmen, with their living area on the first floor and a workshop accessible from the street, tend to be clustered. Slightly further from this composition of structures are sheds used for refuge or shelter.

Farms specialised in fattening cattle exhibit the unique feature of the dwellings being separated from outbuildings, in the style of urban manor homes: one or two floors, a symmetrically designed facade, and a four-gabled roof supported by ornate cornices. With this architectural statement, the owner was signalling his economic success. The old farm buildings, whose stone stables had been topped by a hayloft, were replaced by modern buildings to house the animals.

Ordinary village construction

The region's villages and hamlets could not have remained vibrant without elements to complement their public facilities, to nurture community life by creating social bonds whenever residents congregated. These «community» elements consist of : fountains and wells that supply villagers with water and add amenity, the washhouse as a place for women to meet and exchange, and Calvary crosses that indicate road junctions and serve as markers in the landscape. Like for rural dwellings, this more ordinary architectural heritage seldom dates beyond the 18th century.

Exciting gastronomy and exceptional know-how

This portrait of the Charolais-Brionnais would not be complete without referencing its culinary treasures, its expertise in the crafts and industry, and its strong cultural traditions.

Charolais meats

The Charolais cow is a handsome animal noted for its all-white, spot-free hide (this lack of pigmentation is a unique genetic trait), robust build, trim neckline, and well-rounded hips and rump. This breed, no doubt the most famous among beef cattle, is hailed for its fertility and maternal instinct, docility and above all its ability to adapt to extremely varied environments, all of which justify its reputation as a «rustic» breed and explain its presence throughout the world. The delicately marbled meat, loaded with vitamins and proteins, juicy and tender, tops the list of local gastronomic delights.

Created through land patent issued by King Charles VIII in 1488, the Saint-Christophe-en-Brionnais market over the course of the 19th century became the territory's largest beef cattle market. Open to non-fattened animals since 1960, this institution experienced a heyday from 1975 to 1991, during which time over 600 breeders and nearly 300 buyers would meet. An exciting place frequented by many onlookers, the market resisted subsequent crises and now enjoys renewed enthusiasm since inauguration of the auction in 2009. This weekly event was moved to Wednesday in January 2005.

Other farming products

Beef cattle is not the only source of animals bred in the region. Sheep, goats and poultry are also frequently encountered on farms. First introduced in the 16th century, Charolais goat cheese was awarded its exclusive AOC label in January 2010. Made from whole goat milk, this cheese is distinctive by its size (7 cm high, 6 cm in diameter) and its keg-like shape. Its firm yet creamy texture and smooth taste match perfectly with dark chocolate (to be tasted at Dufoux's shop in La Clayette or Pubille's in Paray-le-Monial, both rated among France's best chocolate makers).



Charolais cow.



Auction market in Saint-Christophe-en-Brionnais.



AOC certified Charolais goat cheese.



Decoration specialist at work in the Charolles earthenware factory.



The beatified Sainte Marguerite-Marie Alacoque and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, engraving, 19th century, National Library of France. Fine example of popular prints.

Ceramics

Ceramic production is still thriving in Charolles, where the workshop still produces a culinary earthenware that now enjoys widespread popularity with its unmistakable «rustic» decoration (ratcheted or serrated edge, stylised carnation patterns created in 1855) and «artistic» touch (floral bouquets and «fine-tooth comb» border designed in 1879). Since 1995, the owners have essentially been producing decorative ceramics using shades and geometric, streamlined shapes, in search of a distinctively modern look.

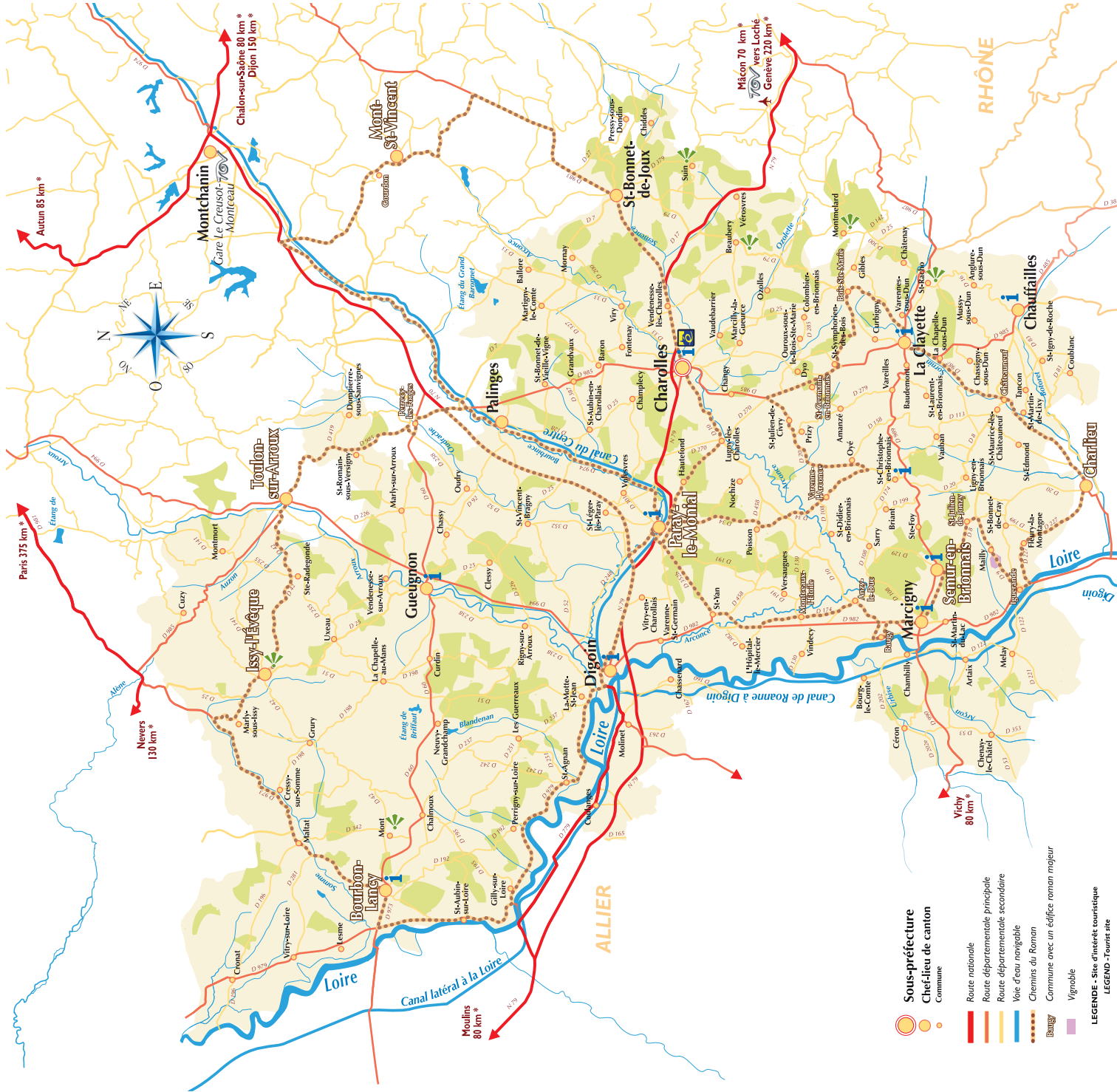
In the 1960's, the Digoïn Earthenware factory adapted its production by introducing pyroblanc, a type of varnish that protects articles from day-to-day wear. The city facilitated the installation of two new plants, both of which are still operating : «les Grès et Poteries, since renamed «Digoïn Ceramics», and the Allia company (bathroom ceramics). In Marcigny, the Emile Henry factory has been making even greater technological strides with its «Flame®» line of casseroles adapted for direct contact with the flame and launched in 2005, after 5 years of state-of-the-art research. Emile Henry's products are now sold in over 50 countries.

Patois and folklore

The Charolais patois belongs to the category of Franco-Provençal dialects featuring a structure akin to the Oïl language yet laced with hints of Occitan and Latin. For example, the «a» sound replaces «e», while the «ts» is used instead of «ch». Efforts to promote this dialect are championed by local celebrities like Professor Mario Rossi, who in 2004 published an Etymological and Ethnological Dictionary of Brionnais dialects, and the «Gâs du Tsarollais» music and folkloric dance group, which founded in 1935 by Joanny Furtin, a local composer and poet, has performed around the world.

The Paray-le-Monial pilgrimage

A few tales, like one by the Jesuit Jean Croiset in 1691, relate the story Marguerite-Marie Alacoque, a member of the Paray-le-Monial Visitation order of nuns, who between 1673 and 1675 witnessed three apparitions of Christ offering her his heart («from he who so loved humanity»). The sister's 1864 beatification, followed by canonisation in 1920, helped reinvigorate worship of the local Sacred Heart order during the 19th century and initiated a Paray-le-Monial pilgrimage in 1878. Each year, the city welcomes hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Several sanctuaries are visited, including the «Chapel of Apparitions» and La Colombière Chapel, specially dedicated to sister Marguerite-Marie's confessor.



- Sous-préfecture**
Chef-lieu de canton
Commune
- Route nationale
Route départementale principale
Route départementale secondaire
Voie d'eau navigable
Chemins du Roman
Commune avec un édifice roman majeur
Vignoble
Site d'intérêt touristique
Légende - Tourist site

Main sites throughout this land of artistic and historical heritage:

Anzy-le-Duc

Church and former priory house

Baugy

Church

Beaubyery

Horn of Artus and monument in honour of the Resistance

Bois-Sainte-Marie

Church and historical homes in the main village

Bourbon-Lancy

Historical district, church and Saint-Nazaire Museum (National Museum), Le Breuil Museum, Bourbon-Expo hall (Puzenat machinery), Puzenat castle and machinery, spa district and Aligre Hospital, Le Fourneau ice making machine, Le Petit Fleury nature discovery site

Charolles

Historical district, Charles the Bold Tower and Diamond Tower, Priory House Museum (National Museum), Ursulines convent (Tourist Office), church, Maison du Charolais visitors centre, Maupré Viaduct

Chassenard

Church (tympanum), Croix castle grounds (town hall)

Chassy

Church (stained glass windows)

Châteauneuf

Church, former postal-relay inn

Châtenay-sous-Dun

Exhibit at the Old Guild House

Chauvaillies

Weaving Museum, Van de Walle textile plant, castle

Coublanc

Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Oratory

Coulanges

Mortillon Castle

Curbigny

Drée Castle, church (column capitals)

Digoin

Observatoire exhibit, canal bridge, Demoiselles promenade, Ceramics Museum, Notre-Dame church, Sainte-Bernadette church

Gueugnon

Museum of Gueugnon area heritage, Symposium exhibit (stainless steel sculptures)

Hautefond

Brickyard

Iguerande

Church, museum exhibit entitled «Brionnais Reflections»

Issy-l'Évêque

Church, Montrifaut ice making machine, Mont Dardon

La Clayette

Castle, Sainte-Avoye chapel

Marcigny

Historical district, Mill Tower Museum (National Museum), horse-drawn carriage museum, Saint-Nicolas church, city hall, sculpture gardens / art exhibition centre (Rex collection)

Melay

Press exhibit area

Molinet

Two museums: «Costumes over the ages» and «Tools from Yesterday»

Mont

Mont summit

Montceaux-l'Étoile

Church

Mussy-sous-Dun

Viaduct

Neuvy-Grandchamp

Charolais Museum of Farm Machinery

Oyé

Chaumont Castle, Sancenay chapel, museum exhibit «The Memory of Oyé»

Palinges

Digoin Castle, church (apse and bell tower), Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions

Paray-le-Monial

Sacred Heart Basilica and cloister, the Hiéron Museum (National Museum), Paul Charnoz Museum, city hall edifice, Saint-Nicolas Tower, La Colombière Chapel

Poisson

Martigny Castle

Saint-Aubin-sur-Loire

Castle, church (frescoes)

Saint-Bonnet-de-Cray

Church (apse and bell tower)

Saint-Bonnet-de-Joux

Sabatier Archaeological Museum

Saint-Germain-en-Brionnais

Church

Saint-Julien-de-Jonzy

Church

Saint-Laurent-en-Brionnais

Church (apse and bell tower)

Saint-Maurice-les-Château-neuf

Church (bell tower)

Saint-Racho

The Montagne de Dun hilltop

Saint-Yan

Chapel (apse and bell tower)

Semur-en-Brionnais

Saint-Hugues Castle, Saint-Hilaire collegiate church, Saint-Martin-la-Vallée church, chapter house, salt loft, town hall

Suain

Suin mountaintop, church (apse and bell tower)

Uxeau

Mont Dardon summit

Vareilles

Church (apse and bell tower)

Varenne-l'Arconce

Church

Varenne-Saint-Germain

«Toto Loth» Forge Museum

Varennes-sous-Dun

Textile/spinning mill museum

Vendennes-les-Charolles

Lime kilns

Viry

Church (stained glass windows)

Credits :

Photos de couverture : carte postale, archives départementales 71 (en haut), D. Rivoire/SMPCB (en bas)

Aperam : n°24

CEP : n°14

Olivier Champagne : n°30, n°31

Gerard Cimetière : n°3, n°4, n°14

Jean-Pierre Gobillot : n°11, n°13, n°25, n°29

Mairie d'Uxeau : n°1

Musée Paul Charnoz : n°22

Office de tourisme de Paray-le-Monial : n°18

Jean-Luc Petit : n°6, n°9, n°16, n°17, n°19, n°23

Tania Rizet : n°32

RMN (Château de Versailles)/Hervé Landowski : n°10

RMN/François Vizzavona : n°27

SMPCB : n°2, n°5, n°9, n°21, n°26, n°28, n°33

Textes : A. Michel/SMPCB

Conception : H. Botti/SMPCB

Traduction : R. SACHS

Impression : Imprimerie Fuchey

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Let the Charolais-Brionnais country tell you its story, Land of art and history...

... accompanied by a guide-lecturer certified by the Ministry of Culture and Communication.

The guide greets you with knowledge of all facets relative to Charolais-Brionnais country and gives you the keys to interpret and understand the landscapes, know-how or history of this territory from one village to the next. The guide remains at your service. Guided tours provide the possibility for all to engage in friendly and spirited exchange.

The heritage coordination office

This office coordinates Charolais-Brionnais initiatives qualifying under the Art and History label. It proposes a year-round calendar of events for locals and visitors, along with field trips and instruction workshops for schoolchildren. The office is always available to help study your projects.

Should you be part of a group

The Charolais-Brionnais Artistic and Historical Heritage service proposes visits and tours all year round by appointment. Brochures with visit and tour information will be sent to you upon request.

Information / reservations available from :

Syndicat Mixte du Pays Charolais-Brionnais
14, place de l'Hôtel de Ville - 71600 PARAY-LE-MONIAL
Phone: +33 (0)3 85 25 96 36 - Fax: +33 (0)3 85 81 13 36
e-mail: contact@charolais-brionnais.fr

Charolais-Brionnais belongs to a national network of Artistic and Historical Towns and Regions

The French Ministry of Culture and Communication, Cultural Heritage Directorate, has awarded the label Towns and Regions of Artistic and Historical Interest to local authorities making special efforts to promote their heritage sites. This appellation guarantees the competence of guides-lecturers as well as coordinators responsible for presenting quality programmes. From antique vestiges to 20th-century buildings, the towns and regions so designated are recognised for staging sites to highlight their full diversity. This network currently comprises 167 towns and regions across the country eager to share their heritage.

In the vicinity

Autun, Auxerre, Dijon, Chalon-sur-Saône, Joigny, La Charité-sur-Loire, Nevers, Auxois-Morvan Region and «Cluny to Tournus» region, all recipients of the Artistic and Historical Interest label.

The prairies, especially along the Arce and Guye Rivers, are exceptionally fertile, offering large quantities of wood for chopping and once cleared leaving a layer of fine dense grass ideal for feeding our cattle.

THE ABBOT CLAUDE COURTEPÉE
General and specific description of the Duchy of Burgundy, 1774

