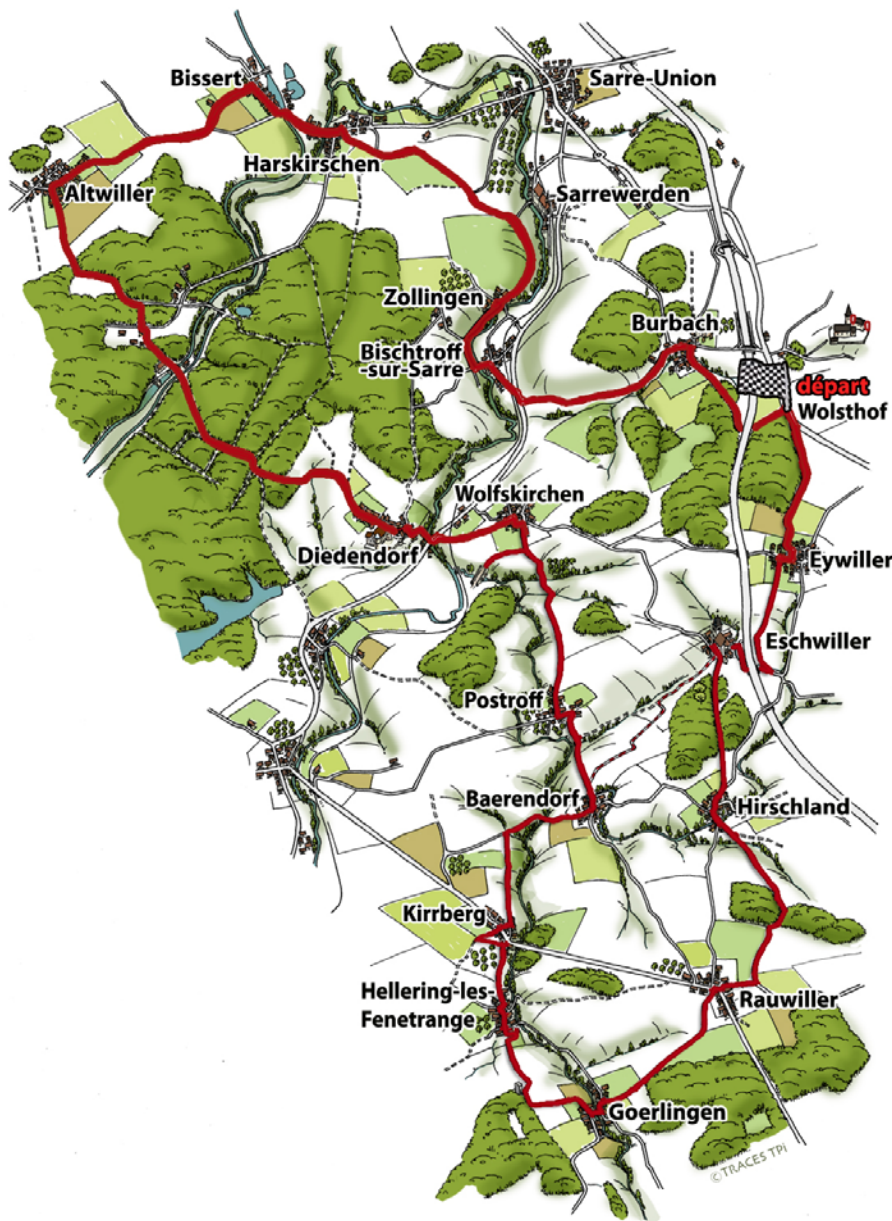


THE WELCHE VILLAGES TRAIL



The complete Huguenot village trail covers approximately 60 km.

For info, this comprises three sections:

- Northern section: 38 km
- Central section: 24 km
- Southern section: 38 km

Caution: Lorentzen is around 10 km away from the starting point (Wolsthof). The trail is not marked out and you should not take any notice of the existing signposting for bicycles.

What is *Alsace bossue*?

This is a hilly area between Alsace and Lorraine. To the east, heading towards the Alsatian plain, we find forested hills on a bed of sandstone, while to the west the plain of Lorraine features a deeper calcareous and clay soil which is used for agriculture. The gentle terrain offers sweeping views across the open landscapes.












The welke villages

Back in the 16th century, the area that you will be travelling through belonged to the Counts of Nassau-Sarrewerden who introduced the Reformation here. Open to those of a different confession, from 1559 onwards the earldom of Sarrewerden welcomed refugees from Lorraine, Belgium and northern France, who were fleeing religious persecution in the Kingdom of France and the Duchy of Lorraine. They rebuilt and repopulated seven villages which have been known ever since as the "welche villages": Rauwiller, Goerlingen, Eywiller, Burbach, Kirrberg, Diedendorf and Altwiller.

What does "welche" mean?

This is a German word which means "French". Any French person ending up in Germany was referred to as *welche*. Indeed, up until 1793, these villages were part of the German Holy Roman Empire. A welke village is therefore a village in which French is spoken. The Huguenots brought their customs, their faith and their language. Although they quickly learned the local German dialect, the immigrants continued to use their language. Almost 200 years later, it is by no means rare to find people still speaking French here.

	Starting point: the Wolsthof car park (on the outskirts of Berg), on road number RD 1061. To begin the trail, head down rue de la Forêt , on the left near the bus shelter, and continue as far as Eywiller .
	Travelling through Eywiller (a welche village) Once you arrive in the village, turn right twice in quick succession. Turn left into rue des Prés. Then continue straight ahead, along rue de la Bergerie, on the gravel path. Watch out for the steep downhill part and then turn right and head under the A4 towards Eschwiller.
	Travelling through Eschwiller At the crossroads after the church, turn left into rue de la Forêt, on the D655. Turn right at the small cross, after rue de l'Etang, and continue out of Eschwiller.
	Travelling through Hirschland At the stop sign, turn right into the main street (rue principale). Then turn right, heading towards Rauwiller, then left, still heading towards Rauwiller. After the bridge over the Isch, turn left into rue de la Forêt, then right after the snail farm.
	Travelling through Hirschland Forest Continue straight ahead in the forest (the middle trail), then take the gravel path on the right to leave the forest. Next, continue alongside the fields and stay on the main path. Continue straight ahead and admire the view of the Donon on your left. At the "Cédez le passage" sign, turn right and continue along the D172 until you reach Rauwiller.
	Travelling through Rauwiller (a welche village), a "Village in Bloom" Turn right at the "Cédez le passage" sign. Caution: take great care due to the heavy traffic. Next, turn left on the D40, towards Sarrebourg (rest area, Place de l'Eglise), then stay on the D40 as far as Goerlingen, continuing to take great care due to traffic.
	Travelling through Goerlingen (a welche village) Follow the D40 on your left – towards Sarrebourg – You will go under the Bruchbach bridge. Next, turn right into rue du Moulin, and good luck for the uphill part! Stay on this road and continue alongside the hedges on your left as you cycle uphill. Take the gravel path on the right at the entrance to the forest and continue along it as far as Hellingering.
	Travelling through Hellingering-lès-Fénétrange (Moselle) Watch out for the steep downhill section then turn left at the bottom. Then head left at the crossroads via the secondary road. Turn left at the municipal boundary sign and begin the uphill part heading out of Hellingering-lès-Fénétrange.
	Travelling through Kirrberg (a welche village) On the D790, on the downhill part before the intersection with the D1, turn left into chemin des amoureux after the second fire hydrant. Turn right at the small bridge, then right again in the village. Then left at the church heading towards Baerendorf on the D690. Take great care as you cross the D1.
	Travelling through Baerendorf Turn left at the chapel then left again towards Postroff.
	Travelling through Postroff On the D94, continue through the village and turn left towards the church, then turn right – towards Sarre-Union and Wolfskirchen.

	Travelling through Wolfskirchen Turn left at the "Toutes directions" sign and continue on to Diedendorf on the D55 Continue to the left, still on the D55. Turn left at the crossroads, towards Niederstinzeln and Fénétrange on the D8. <i>Caution: you'll be travelling on a very busy road. Take great care!</i> At the roundabout, take the D55 on the right, heading towards Diedendorf. This is the main street.
	Travelling through Diedendorf (a welche village) Continue straight ahead towards Altwiller. At the village, stop off at Diedendorf Castle before Bonnefontaine Forest, then the Houillères de la Sarre Canal. Continue straight ahead after the lock until you reach the hamlet of Bonnefontaine and continue through it. Take great care at the crossroads and turn left then right on the C1 toward Altwiller. Be very careful on this road.
	Travelling through Altwiller (a welche village) Turn right at the half-timbered house into rue de Harskirchen. Continue straight ahead at the cemetery on the D23. Continue straight ahead after the village, heading towards Harskirchen - Bissert. Further on, after the village, don't miss the next left: a road which is off-limits to trucks. Continue straight ahead towards the downhill section.
	Travelling through Bissert Turn right into rue des Seigneurs on the D423, then turn left onto the D23 heading towards the bridge over the Houillères de la Sarre Canal, then right heading towards Harskirchen.
	Travelling through Harskirchen Continue straight ahead on the D23 heading towards Sarre-Union. <i>You will pass in front of a remarkable STENGEL church.</i> On the uphill part, turn right into rue de Zollingen - towards Sarrewerden, then take the D96 on the right, still heading towards Sarrewerden.
	Travelling through Zollingen Continue straight ahead towards Zollingen on the D96 and go through the village. <i>You will be travelling alongside the Sarre which is on your left.</i> Stay on the D96 to the left, crossing the Sarre, towards Bischtroff-sur-Sarre.
	Travelling through Bischtroff-sur-Sarre Continue straight ahead following the "Toutes directions" sign on the D96, towards Burbach. At the roundabout, take the second exit heading towards Burbach.
	Travelling through Burbach (a welche village) Travel through Burbach. After the lime tree in front of the church, continue along the road for 100 m as far as the rhinoceros on your right where you can take a break. Then backtrack and turn left at the lime tree. Turn left at the fountain (rue de la montée) until you reach the edge of the forest.
	Back to the starting point Turn left just before the information sign. As you leave the forest, turn right then left and go through the tunnel under the motorway. Turn left after the bridge and you should have the motorway on your left. Continue alongside this. Turn right onto the gravel path just before the secondary road, to get back to your starting point .



Where did the welches come from?

The first Huguenot refugees came from nearby Lorraine and Champagne. Their reformed (i.e. Calvinist) religion was different from that of the county's other inhabitants who, just like their Prince, were followers of the Augsburg confession. The welche families arrived in large numbers, forming a sufficiently large community to be almost self-sufficient. They intermarried and found marriage partners in the other Huguenot villages.

Eschwiller's "Stengel" church

To put an end to the quarrels between Protestants and Catholics, who had to share the religious buildings in Alsace Bossue, in 1776 Louis XV and the Prince of Nassau-Saarbrücken signed a treaty providing for the construction of six churches. The construction programme was handled by Fridrich Joachim STENGEL, chief architect to the Court of Nassau-Saarbrücken and the results can be admired at Berg or Harskirchen among others.

Heckeland

The landscape here is undulating and typical of that traditionally used for mixed farming and rearing, with a patchwork quilt of farmland, meadows and small wooded areas. The plots are separated by large numbers of hedges, hence its name: the "hedge country".



Alsace Bossue's nicknames

The inhabitants of a number of villages in the Alsace Bossue area have been given nicknames over the years. Some of these are quite mischievous and are applied to all of the inhabitants of a given village, based on their customs, their behaviour or on time-old anecdotes.

As an example, no fewer than three nicknames are used to refer to the inhabitants of Baerendorf: "Klowe", (uncouth), or "Bäereklowe", (awkward bears) and "Katzkepp", (cat heads) referring to the bangers which the inhabitants had a habit of setting off whatever the occasion.

The "Napoleonic Oaks" in the Forest of Hirschland

At the end of the trail, you cannot fail to notice two impressive large oaks which are approximately 400 years old. Known as the "Napoleonic Oaks" they got their name thanks to their thickset appearance, reminiscent of that of the Emperor. Nearby, the forest oaks grow tightly packed together, with their slender, willowy appearance being due to their efforts to grow towards the light despite being hemmed in by their neighbours. Our two Napoleonic Oaks grew all alone, stretching out their branches towards the sunlight.



Diedendorf Castle

The castle's builder Jean Streiff von Lauenstein is the man behind the welches' arrival in the region. It was he who convinced the Count of Nassau-Saarbrücken to accept them. The Count gave him land at Diedendorf where he set about building the castle. This small fortified manor built in 1577 is typical of the architectural and ornamental style of the Alsatian Renaissance of the 16th century.

The reconstruction of the villages

When the Huguenots arrived in the spring, they found a totally dilapidated area awaiting them. The Count issued them with forest plots which they cleared in order to be able to set about building. In just a few weeks, new houses had been erected. These rebuilt villages all feature a common characteristic: their layout as "street-villages", i.e. featuring a main street along which all of the houses are built on either side as seen at Rauwiller, Kirrberg or Diedendorf.



The traditional orchards

The trees in the numerous orchards to be seen along the way are usually not treated. These include apple, plum and cherry trees, but also walnut and pear trees. These orchards are ecological biotopes. Why? Because they are home to a range of fauna and flora no longer found on intensively farmed plots using industrial agricultural methods. A thriving community found ONLY in the orchards.



Calcicole strips

Calcicole strips are comprised of trees driven out of the forest due to a lack of light and forestry management techniques. These trees extend their branches outside the forest in their quest for light. They are referred to as being "calcicole" as they are comprised of plants which like chalky soil, which is lighter and offers better filtration properties than other soils. These two factors encourage a warmer microclimate in which we find those plants which prefer a warm environment including hazelnut, hawthorn, blackthorn and ivy etc. It is even possible to find orchids here, which are rare in our regions!