

Tour de Vézelay - WEST - 50 km.

From Vézelay, on the valley of the Cure, the route goes through forests to the valley of the Yonne (and the Canal du Nivernais), with historic small towns such as Asnois and Tannay, striking churches and castles, vineyards and views. After Montceaux-le-Comte, the route leaves the valley of the Yonne and ascends gradually to the hamlet of Le Chemin, through a hilly, open landscape crowned by some wooded hilltops.

Alternatives

In between, two options are described to shorten the walk.

Waymarking

Slightly less than half the route goes along the GR654 (red-white marking). In addition, occasionally and briefly, local routes are used, the markings of which are not always properly maintained. However, with the directions and the maps below, the route is easy to find. This also applies to those parts of the route that are not marked.



Vézelay [1] – ‘Croix de la Madeleine’ [2] (7,7 km)

Vézelay, from the Sainte-Marie-Madeleine basilica: **[1]** walk down the main street (first: Rue Saint-Pierre, then: Rue Saint-Etienne). At the end: turn left. (*On your right: first Hôtel de la Poste et du Lion d’Or, then Relais du Morvan.*)

Then continue straight on, via the D957, direction Saint-Père and Avallon. (*So first ignore a road on the right, towards L’Étang and Fontenay, then a road on the left, towards Asquins and Auxerre.*)

After about 200 m, in the bend: leave the D957 and go straight on, via a dirt road. (*The Vézelay Route (variant via Nevers) and the Chemin d’Assise also follow this itinerary.*)

Marking: follow the red-white marking of the GR13 / GR654 to Saint-Père and then on.

After about 200 m: fork left and keep following this dirt road for about 1.4 km, descending, to Saint-Père. Arrive in **Saint-Père**, descending via the Chemin Saint Christophe. (The last part is asphalted.) Fork left (Rue du Moulin des Marguerites). After about 70 m: take the first road on the right (Rue Dessus les Fossés).

Alternative: a visit to the Notre-Dame church. Then take the second road to the right (Rue des Pierres). Turn left at the end (a junction with a well in the middle). The church is a little further on, on the right.

After your visit: return to the well and continue straight on. After about 50 m, the road turns left: turn right here (Chemin de la Fontaine), direction ‘Val en Sel’; past a monument to the fallen (left). At the next junction: continue straight on (you are back on our main itinerary).

Église Notre-Dame. *This church (13th-15th century) was restored in the mid-19th century by Viollet-le-Duc, the architect who also restored the basilica of Vézelay. Notre Dame became a parish church at the end of the 16th century after the previous one (Saint-Pierre) was destroyed during the Wars of Religion.*

The remains of the Saint-Pierre can still be seen, at the southern exit of the village. The remains are from the 11th and 12th centuries, but the original church was much older. Perhaps it was (also) the church of the abbey that was founded here in 863, on the site of a former Gallo-Roman villa. This abbey soon suffered from looting and destruction. In 887, during the Norman raids, the monks took refuge on the hill of what is now Vézelay. The new abbey was founded there.

At the end of Rue Dessus les Fossés: turn right, past Bed & breakfast Val en Sel (left) and then a wash house (*lavoir*, also left). The small road bends to the left. A little further on: fork right. Follow this small road for about 800 m. (*On the way, to the right, views of Vézelay.*) Then turn left onto a narrower road, uphill. (*On the way, on the right, a shelter made of 'dry' stacked stones.*) Descend on the other side. (At first a forest on your right, then vineyards). At the next fork (at a post with several markings): leave the GR13 (and the Chemin d'Assise) and turn right.

Marking: from here follow the red-white marking of the GR654.

After about 800 m (vineyards on the right, fields on the left), at the end: turn left and follow this small road to an asphalt road. Follow this to the right. After about another 800 m: turn left, onto an unpaved road, at first up, then descending, then ascending again. (*Looking back: views of the basilica of Vézelay.*) After about 1.4 km: arrive on an asphalt road. Follow it to the left, for about 200 m, to a junction near the 'Croix de la Madeleine' (a wayside cross) [2].



'Croix de la Madeleine' [2] – junction near La Vignotte (farm) [3] (5,1 km)

At the junction [2]: turn right, onto an unpaved road. After about 500 m, on a junction of five roads: continue straight on. (So, ignore two roads to the right and one road to the left.) The path descends first, then ascends. (*On the way, to the right, views of Vézelay.*)

About 750 m past the junction: arrival on an asphalt road. Follow this to the left for a moment, then turn right, onto a semi-paved road. After about 150 m, before a barrier and a sign 'Propriété Privée': turn right, onto a forest path. At the end: turn left, to return shortly afterwards on the semi-paved road that you left at the said barrier. Follow this to the right.



After about 1 km, at a junction (red-white marking and a yellow-blue sign 'Chemin de St Jacques de Compostelle'): turn left, onto a forest path.

After more than 1.5 km and a long descent, the path ends at the access road to the Senosse farm (left; just before, at a fork: turn right). Follow this road to the right. After about 400 m: arrive at the junction near La Vignotte farm [3].

Junction near La Vignotte [3] - Metz-le-Comte - l'Armanche (near Sardy les Forges) [5] (9,1 km)

At the junction [3] (just before it, on the right, next to a large tree: a sign 'Chemin de St Jacques de Compostelle' and the GR marking): turn left, direction 'La Vignotte'.

Alternative: an abbreviation via La Maison-Dieu and Sardy les (see p.19).

A little further: turn right, onto an unpaved road. Walk along a forest edge (left), then through a forest and then through fields (at the end: keep right), up, to the Forêt farm. The road is paved from there. A little further: turn left, onto an unpaved road, descending. A little further: cross the access road to the farm, straight on. (*In front of you, slightly to the left, you will see the hill of Metz-le-Comte.*) A little further: arrive on the D42. Cross and take the C7 to **Metz-le-Comte**.

At the end of the road, in Metz-le-Comte (*on an old Roman road*): cross the D280 and continue in more or less the same direction (Route de Vézelay, D165). Past the village square (Place de la Mairie): take the first road to the right (Rue Narcy). At the next junction: go straight on (Rue de la Chapelle). Before the chapel: leave the asphalt and take the dirt road to the left. Follow this to an asphalt road (the D510). If you want to visit the church on top of the hill (*views*), follow that road to the right.

Notre Dame de l'Assomption. *This church (12th century) was once part of a castle. It was taken by the troops of Vézelay at the end of the 16th century, during the Wars of Religion, and then destroyed.*

Open from June 1 to October 1, Monday afternoon and Wednesday morning. On other days, pick up the key from the town hall ('Mairie'). After your visit, descend the same way.

If you do not visit the church: follow the D510 to the left, about 200 m, down. Just before a larger road (Route de Vézelay, D165): take the side road to the right. After more than 300 m, at a junction, end of asphalt **[4]**: keep right.

*Alternative: you leave the GR654 here, which goes directly to Asnois **[6]**. This is described as an abbreviation on p.20.*

Follow the unpaved road for about 900 m to an asphalt road (the D280), near some trees and a wayside cross. Follow that road to the left for a moment, then turn right, onto an unpaved road, which first rises slightly, then descends. Just before a larger asphalt road (the D165): fork left, onto another unpaved road. After about 500 m, at a junction: continue straight on.

After about 1.2 km: fork right, still descending. After about 400 m: turn left, onto a narrow, unpaved road, between hedges. To the right of it flows the stream L'Armance **[5]**. *The abbreviation described below, via La Maison-Dieu and Sardy les Forges, connects here with the main itinerary.*

Abbreviation: junction near La Vignotte [3] - La Maison-Dieu - Sardy les Forges [5] (4,3 km)

At the junction near La Vignotte **[3]**: turn right and follow this asphalt road (Route de Senosse) to the D165, at the edge of the village of **La Maison-Dieu**.

Follow the D165 to the left, to the church. Just past the church and the church square, at a fork with a pump and a well, near the 'Mairie': turn right (Rue de la Poterne).

Marking: *From here, follow the blue marking of a local route.*

Follow this road - first asphalted, then unpaved - to **Sardy les Forges**, where the road is asphalted again (Rue de Montaigu).

In Sardy, at a fork with a beautiful chestnut tree in the middle: keep left and immediately afterwards turn left again, onto Rue du Lavoir (= wash house). A little further: cross the D42 and go straight on. Pass the wash house (right).

After about 150 m, at a fork: turn right, onto a narrow, unpaved road, between hedges. To the right of it flows the stream L'Armance **[5]**.

Marking: *you leave the blue marked local route here and are back on the main itinerary.*

L'Armance (near Sardy les Forges) [5] – Brèves (camping) (2,9 km)

[5] After about 200 m, the small road ends on an asphalt road (the D143). Follow this to the left. After another 200 m: turn right, onto an unpaved road, through the fields. After about 900 m: arrive on an asphalt road. Follow this to the left, more than 500 m, to the D985.

Follow the D985 to the left, for about 100 m, then enter Brèves, half right, via the Rue Colas Breugnon. After more than 100 m: turn left (Rue Traversière). At the end: turn right (Rue de la Mairie). At the junction past the town hall: follow the sign 'camping'.

Romain Rolland. *Romain Rolland, author and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature 1915, is buried in Brèves. He is known for his call for peace and reconciliation, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. ("Above the Battle"; September 1914.) The numerous war memorials, also along our route, are silent witnesses to the fact that Rolland was a man shouting in the desert for a long time. In fact, many saw him primarily as a traitor. From 1937 to 1944 Rolland lived in Vézelay, where he died. You can find his grave in the cemetery next to the church, near the D985. (More than 500 m past the turn off of our route to Rue Colas Breugnon, named after a book by Rolland.)*

Brèves (camping) - Asnois (bridge at Canal du Nivernais) [6] (3,2 km)

From Brèves village square: follow the D185 direction Asnois. First cross the Yonne, then the Canal du Nivernais. Immediately after the Canal: turn left (*picnic area*) and follow the cycle route along the canal, direction Asnois.

At the next bridge (about 2 km past the picnic area): leave the cycle route (and the canal) and turn right, up, to **Asnois [6]**.

The abbreviation described below, via the GR654 from Metz-le-Comte, connects here with the main itinerary.



Abbreviation: junction past Metz-le-Comte [4] - Asnois (bridge at Canal du Nivernais) [6] (2,7 km)

Marking: for this abbreviation, follow the red-white marking of the GR564.

At the junction past Metz-le-Comte [4]: turn left, onto an unpaved road, descending through fields. After more than 500 m: arrive on an asphalt road. Follow it to the right, about 300 m. Then turn left, onto an unpaved road.

Marking: in 2019, the red-white marking was missing at this point, but there was a yellow-blue marking of the Vézelay (pilgrimage) Route (variant via Bourges), which comes from the other side and follows the same itinerary from here, to Asnois.

After about 600 m, the road bends right. More than 200 m further: turn left and descend to the D985. Cross it, more or less straight on and keep descending, via an asphalt road. Cross the Yonne first, then the Canal du Nivernais [6]. Then you are back on our main itinerary.



Canal du Nivernais. At the end of the 16th century there were already plans for a canal between the Loire and the Seine. They came out again two centuries later when Paris urgently needed firewood. So, not only wood from the Morvan but also from forests near the Loire could be transported. Construction lasted from 1784 to 1841, when the firewood trade was already threatened by the rapid rise of coal. The canal is 174 km long, from Decize (Loire) to Auxerre (Yonne, which merges more than 100 km further with the Seine). Due to the height differences, there are, among other, three tunnels and 116 locks. In addition, there are many facilities to maintain the water level, such as the aqueduct of Montreuillon and some reservoirs. (Not on our route.) The canal is now used for pleasure craft.

Asnois (bridge at Canal du Nivernais) [6] – Tannay [7] (5,0 km)

Marking: from here you follow the red-white marking of the GR654, to Tannay.

[6] In Asnois: continue more or less straight on, still uphill. On the village square: straight on, via the Grande Rue / D185 (direction Ouagne). After about 100 m: turn left (*the Vézelay Route goes straight on*), following the sign ‘Église’ to the church of Saint Loup, located in a small valley. (*On the way, to the left: views over the valley of the Yonne.*)

Asnois. Just before the village square, you pass a ‘brocante’ (second-hand shop, left), in and around the former chapel of Sainte Barbe (15th century), which was sold during the Revolution. There was a priory around the church of Saint Loup (13th century). It was destroyed during the Wars of Religion.

Just before the church: turn left and follow a green sign ‘Canal du Nivernais (..) 800 m’, via an unpaved



road that goes around the church in a wide bend and then descends further to the Canal (ignore small roads to the left and right). At the canal: follow this to the right. (*This is again the cycle route you left just before Asnois.*)

At the next bridge: leave the cycle route and turn right, via the D165 (direction Tannay). Immediately after the railroad crossing: turn left, onto a dirt road, up, to **Tannay [7]**. There you arrive again on the D165: follow it to the left, to the church square.

(*At the junction before the church: turn left for the pilgrim's hostel, about 100 m, no. 17.*)

Marking: here you leave the GR654, which turns right. We don't come across this GR anymore.

Tannay [7] – Lys – Montceaux-le-Comte [8] (9,1 km)

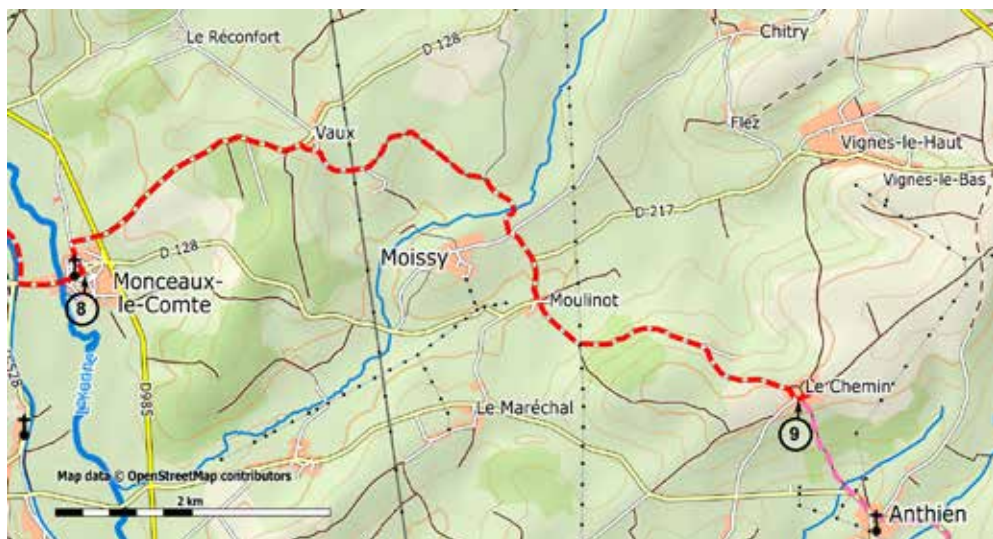
[7] Walk right around the church, then take the second street on the right and shortly after the first street on the left (Rue de Lys). At the next junction: straight on (Chemin de Pignol). This asphalt road winds through meadows and goes twice through a small valley.

After about 1.3 km: arrive on a larger asphalt road. Follow this to the right.

In the hamlet of **Pignol**, fork left, descending, passing a wash house, then up again. At the next junction (the access road to Lys castle is on the left): continue straight on, direction **Lys**, along a wall of the estate. The road then bends to the left, along the wall. (*On the estate, left: a beautiful tree-lined road to the church of Lys. Behind it: views to Tannay.*) Pass the church on the right and continue in the same direction, descending.

Just before **Saint-Didier**: arrival on the D213. Follow it to the left (direction Flez-Cuzy). After about 60 m, at a fork: leave the D213 and turn right (Rue Pierre Serveau). After about 50 m, at a fork (well in the middle): turn left, up (Rue du Pignon). Church of **Saint-Didier**. (*Behind it: view over the Yonne valley.*) At the junction before the church: turn right, up (Rue de la Roche). At the end: turn left, up. (So, ignore a 'dead end' sign). Continue for about 1 km. (In the forest, the asphalt ends, and the road is unpaved). At a fork: follow the yellow marking of a local route to the left, via a small road that descends in a straight line to the Canal du Nivernais. (Just before the canal: cross a railway line. The local route turns left here.) Cross the canal and follow it to the right, to the bridge of the D128. Follow the D128 to the left, to **Montceaux-le-Comte**. About 150 m past the bridge over the Yonne, there is a grocery store (right, 'Alimentation Générale / Tabac', now closed) [8].





Montceaux-le-Comte [8] – Le Chemin [9] (7,7 km)

At the grocery store [8]: turn left (Rue du Commerce) and follow the sign 'Auberge du Centre'. Pass the Auberge and go straight on. At a junction: keep right. After about 30 m: fork left (Rue de la République). After about 50 m, at a wayside cross: turn right (Chemin de Sermizelles), slightly up, to the D985. Cross it straight on and continue via the D128, direction Saizy, up, for about 2 km, to the first houses of the hamlet of Vaux (*On the way: views to the left*).

In Vaux: take the first road on the right, direction La Grange des Bois (farm). After more than 150 m, at a T-junction (with a well on the left): turn right again. After about 400 m, well before the farm, near a stone wall: turn left, onto an unpaved road that bends right after about 300 m. Following this road to a junction with asphalt roads. Cross straight on and continue, for more than 200 m, descending to the D217. Follow the D217 to the right, to Moulinot.

In Moulinot: leave the D217 and turn half left, up, direction Anthien (the C9). The road continues to climb, about 2 km (ignore the turn off to Echon), to the hamlet of **Le Chemin**, (*On the way: views to the left.*) At the end: turn left. (*More than 100 m further on is the pilgrims' hostel L'Esprit du Chemin.*) [9].

Croix du Chemin. Just after the last junction you will pass a stone wayside cross (right). The cross was made in 1760 by a local stonemason. When his client could not pay, he donated it to the village. The cross is on the old Roman road from Autun to Sens.

The story goes that during the Revolution two gendarmes from Corbigny were ordered to take down the cross. The men worked in the fields, but the gendarmes were met by the women, armed with sticks. The women forced them to kneel before the cross.

In 1984, the cross was classified as a historical monument. It urgently needs to be restored. ◀

