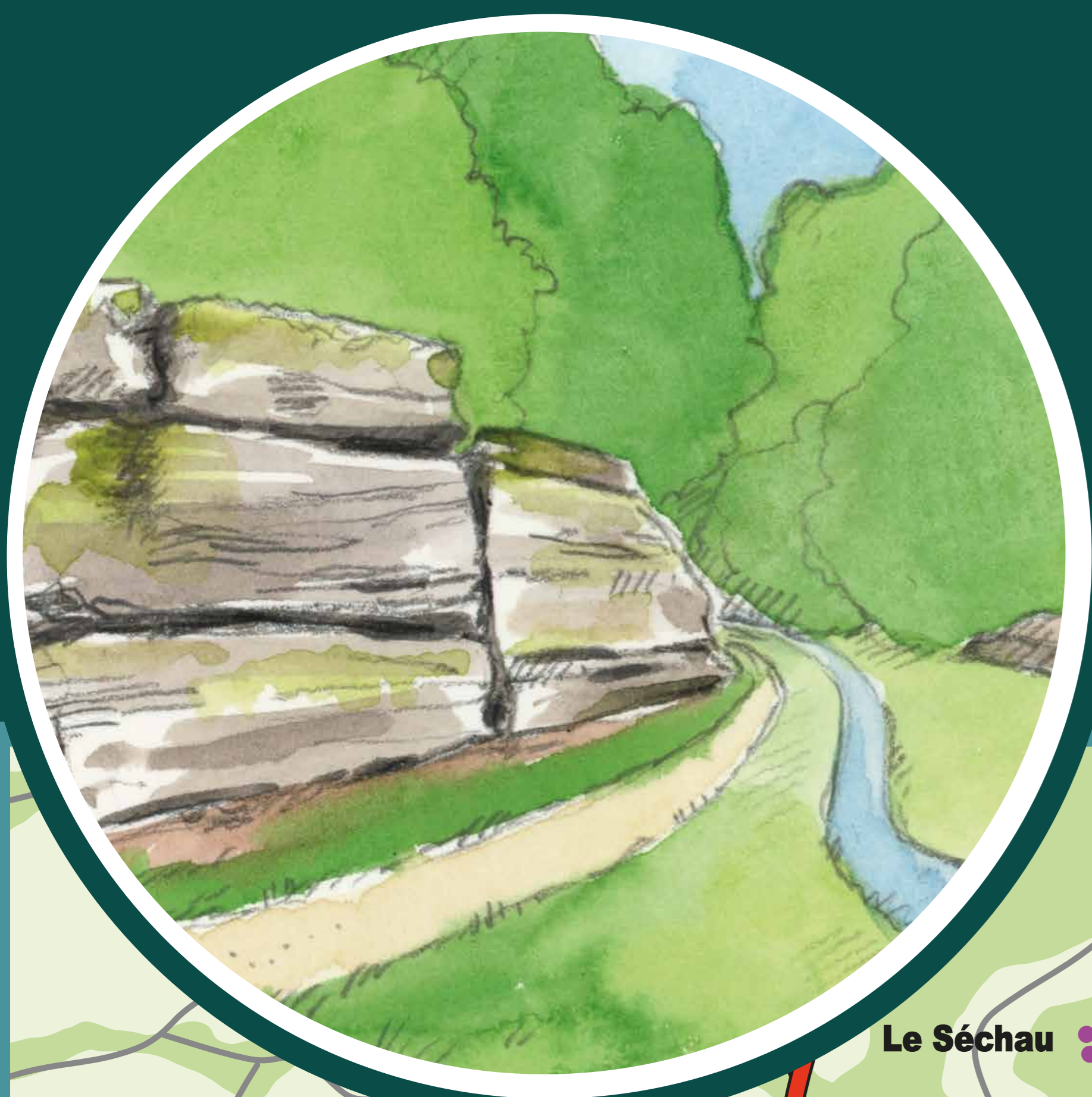


Fougerolles-Saint-Valbert

The Pierres de Roûge Trail



A trail of mysteries, nature, and memory.

It all begins in La Ramouse, one of the hamlets in Fougerolles-Saint-Valbert in the French regional natural park of Ballons des Vosges. Buried in the dust in the old family chalot (a grain store and outhouse), two children find a tattered notebook. It used to belong to their great-grandfather, Léon, a charcoal burner and storyteller who lived here long ago. His notebook is filled with enigmatic sketches, roughly-drawn maps, and snippets of stories; and it talks of a secret: the mystery of the Pierres de Roûge.

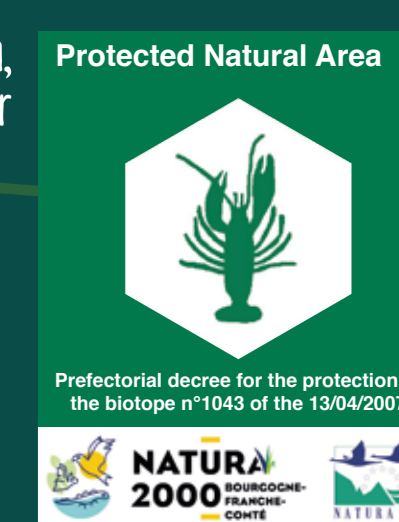
Following the hints left by their great-grandfather, the children eagerly begin looking for forgotten clues and voices from the past. Along the way, they meet astonishing characters, who all seem to know a part of the mystery.

What about you? Can you uncover the secret of the Pierres de Roûge?

This discovery trail is an invitation to explore unique natural, cultural, and historic heritage in orchards, forest, streams and sandstone. Over to you! Leaf through the notebook, follow in the footsteps of our forefathers, and cast your modern gaze over it all.

Enjoy your walk!

- 120 m
- 5 km
- 1h30
- Easy
- Trail markers



To help keep nature clean, please take your litter away with you. Do not throw cigarette butts away. Do not light fires. The trail crosses a remarkable protected natural area. Please keep to the path and respect the flora, fauna, and tranquility of the conservation area.

Fougerolles-Saint-Valbert Town Hall: 03 8 4 49 13 92 / Luxeuil-les-Bains Tourist Office, Vosges du sud: 03 84 40 06 41 / EMERGENCIES: 112

Key sites to visit nearby:
The Wildlife Park, and the Écomusée du Pays de la Cerise (Ecomuseum of the Land of Cherries) — more information from Luxeuil-les-Bains Tourist Office.



Design: Balades d'Hier et d'Aujourd'hui - 2025 / Watercolour illustrations: Maëlle Le Toquin / Character illustrations: Redpalm.

“

FOLLOW ME !

“



Les Pierres de Rouÿe



“

FOLLOW ME !

”



Les Pierres de Rouêge

The Fougerolles meadow orchards: scenic and ecological gems



50 varieties of local cherry (primarily sweet and wild cherries) are grown here using environmentally-friendly practices that also support **animal and plant biodiversity**, including nesting birds, insects, and the flora specific to fruit orchards.



Black Béchât cherries



Red Marie Jean Diaude cherries

“ Hello! I'm **Cerisaie**, daughter of the cherry orchards! I was born here in the branches of the old cherry trees. Throughout the seasons, I watch over the meadows and the fruit, and I know all their secrets... Cows graze here beneath the branches of the cherry trees, wildflowers scatter the meadows with colour, and people, animals and trees live according to the seasons

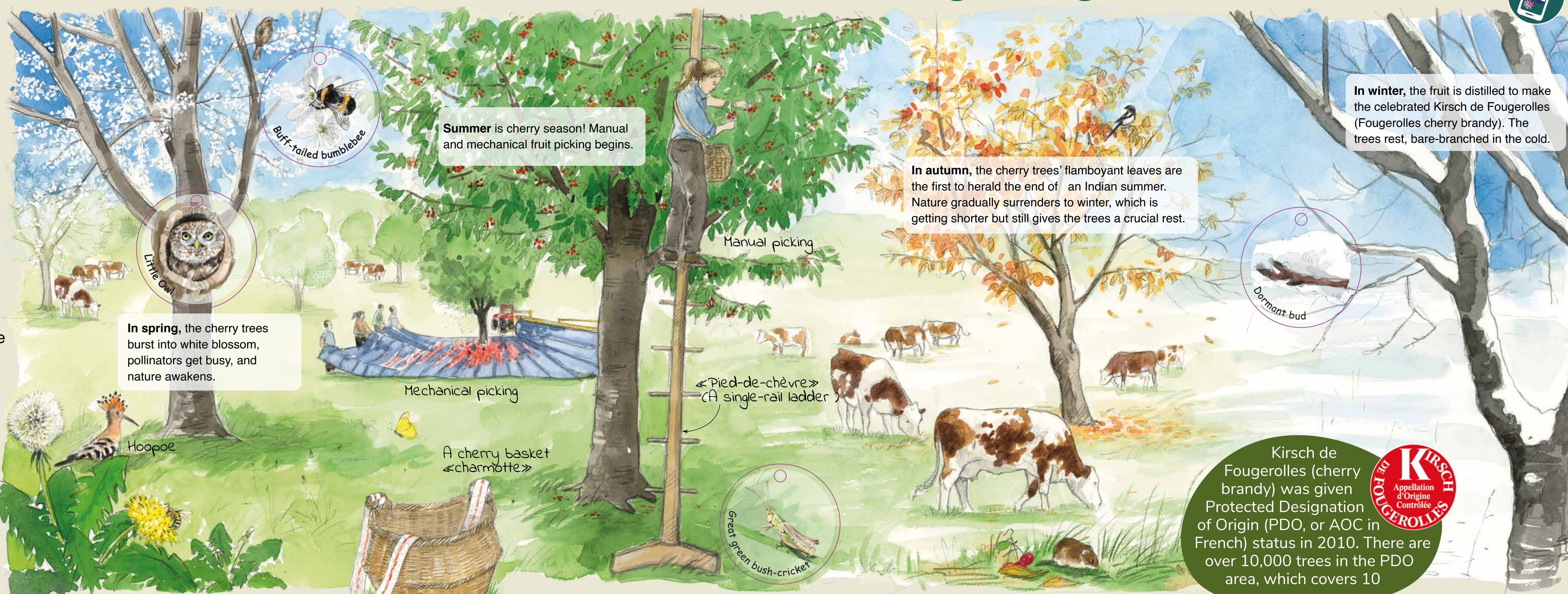
The cherry trees are planted, pruned and cared for by several tens of cherry farmers, who usually also breed cattle.



“ IN THE ORCHARD

IN THE MEADOW

→ To the next step



In spring, the cherry trees burst into white blossom, pollinators get busy, and nature awakens.

Summer is cherry season! Manual and mechanical fruit picking begins.

In autumn, the cherry trees' flamboyant leaves are the first to herald the end of an Indian summer. Nature gradually surrenders to winter, which is getting shorter but still gives the trees a crucial rest.

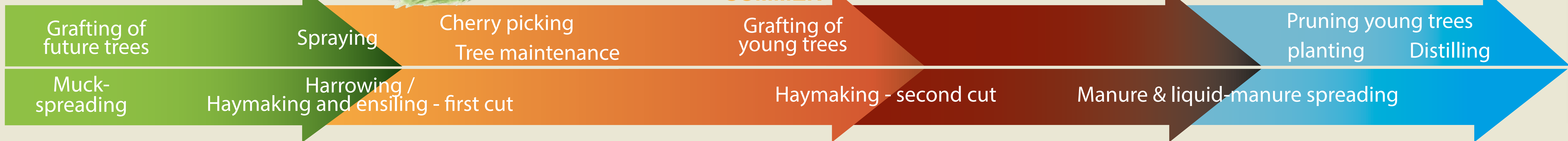
In winter, the fruit is distilled to make the celebrated Kirsch de Fougerolles (Fougerolles cherry brandy). The trees rest, bare-branched in the cold.

SPRING

SUMMER

AUTUMN

WINTER



Want to dig a bit deeper?

- The Écomusée du Pays de la Cerise (Ecomuseum of the Land of Cherries) regularly holds events, exhibitions and tours about this exceptional heritage.
- Some cherry farmers would love you to visit their cherry farms to discover their cherry-based produce: syrups, ice creams, jams, and PDO (AOC in French) cherry brandy etc.



Watch La vache et le cerisier (The cow and the cherry tree) : a film directed by Denis Gros for an exhibition at the Écomusée du Pays de la Cerise (Ecomuseum of the Land of Cherries) in 2016.



PLAY SEEK AND FIND!

Cerisaie has lost one of her earrings. Try to find it on every information panel along the trail! Have you found it in the orchard yet? It looks like a «chéqueillot». In the local Fougerolles' dialect, the word chéqueillot refers to two or three cherries attached by their peduncles or stalks!

Kirsch de Fougerolles (cherry brandy) was given Protected Designation of Origin (PDO, or AOC in French) status in 2010. There are over 10,000 trees in the PDO area, which covers 10 communes.



Les Pierres de Rouège



La Ramouse

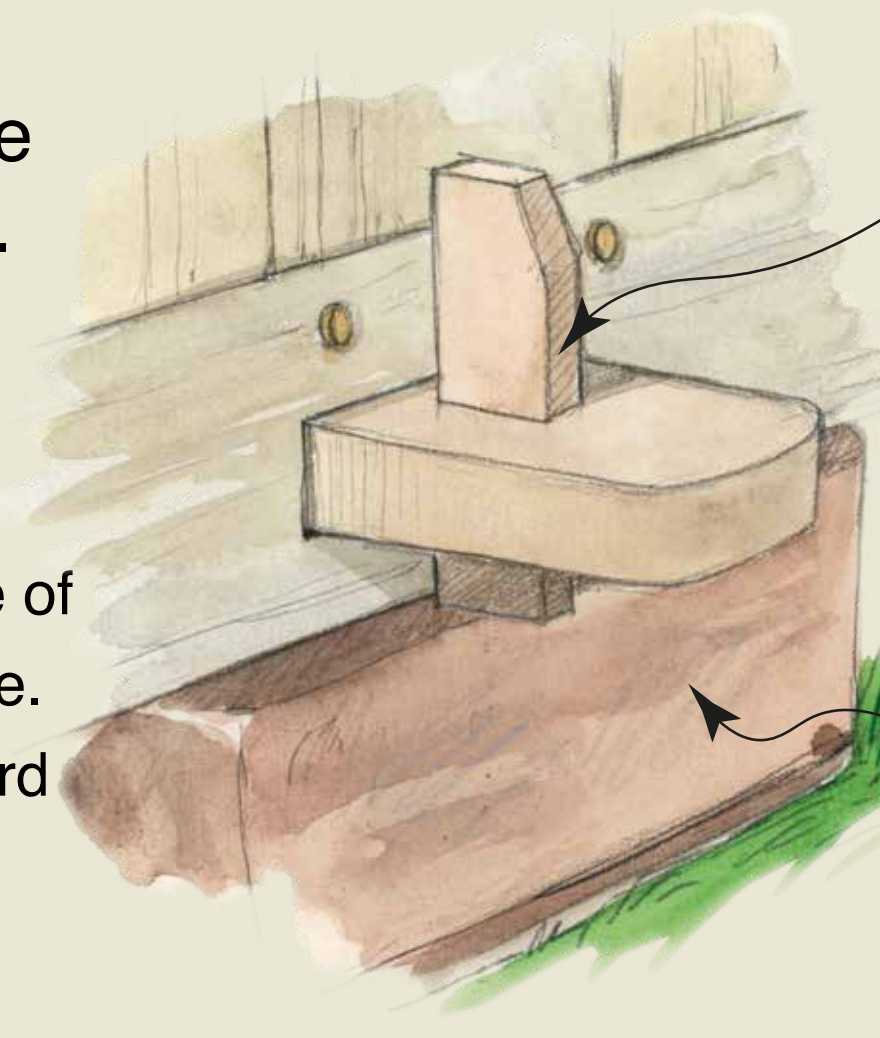
La Ramouse is one of nineteen hamlets (or areas) in Fougerolles-Saint-Valbert. Its architecture is still typical of Vôge, an area straddling the departments of Vosges and Haute-Saône.

Some farms still have a charri (a barn-porch integrated into the farm building), a wooden chalot or chèlo (a grain-store outhouse), drystone walls, and outdoor fountain-washing places.



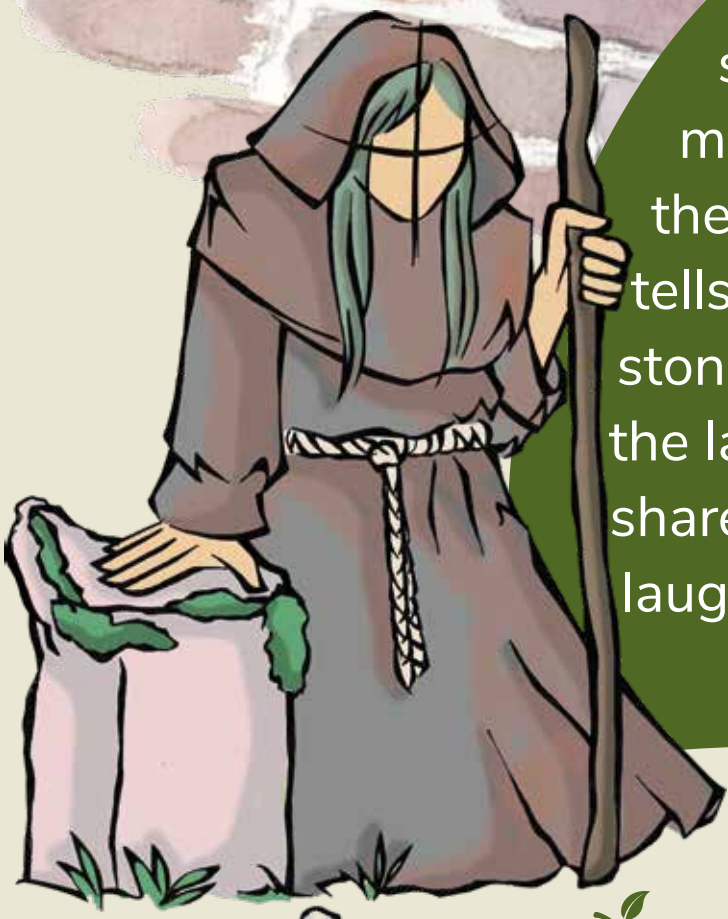
The houses are built from the pink sandstone from neighbouring quarries. The warm stone captures the light and withstands winters. The roofs are covered in sandstone flagstone shingles.

A sandstone flagstone is thin and flat piece of stone known as a lave in this part of France. The word “Lave” comes from the Celtic word lavon meaning board or plank.

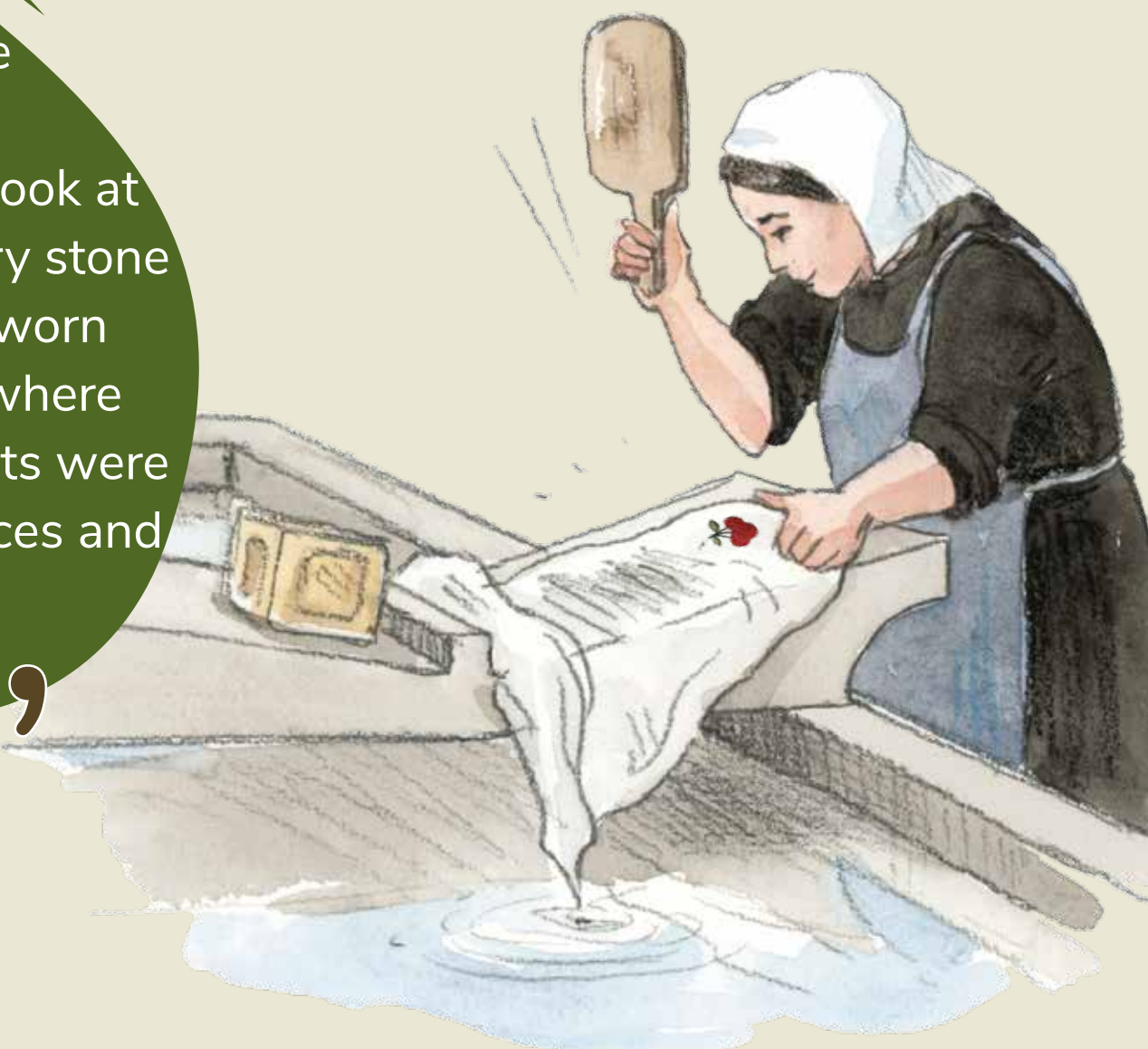


The wooden chalots can be taken apart completely because no nails or screws are used in the construction to avoid attracting lightning!

They are built on sandstone platforms to insulate them from the damp and the mice!



“ I’m **Petra**, guardian of the stones. I watch over their memories. Take a long close look at the details. In this hamlet, every stone tells a story! Such as this time-worn stone from the washing place, where the laundry was done and secrets were shared—it used to ring with voices and laughter! ”



Chalots (little grain-store outhouses) were quieter but just as crucial: people used them to store their harvests and valuables and keep the mice away. You can see a chalot near the washing place

The Route des Chalots starts at the Écomusée du Pays de la Cerise (Ecomuseum of the Land of Cherries) and takes you on a 120-km signposted tour by road.

→ To the next step



The woodpecker's tenant

Look up! The hole in the tree in front of you was initially made by a woodpecker, but it is now shelters a shy resident: **Bechstein's bat**, a woodland-dwelling vesper bat. .



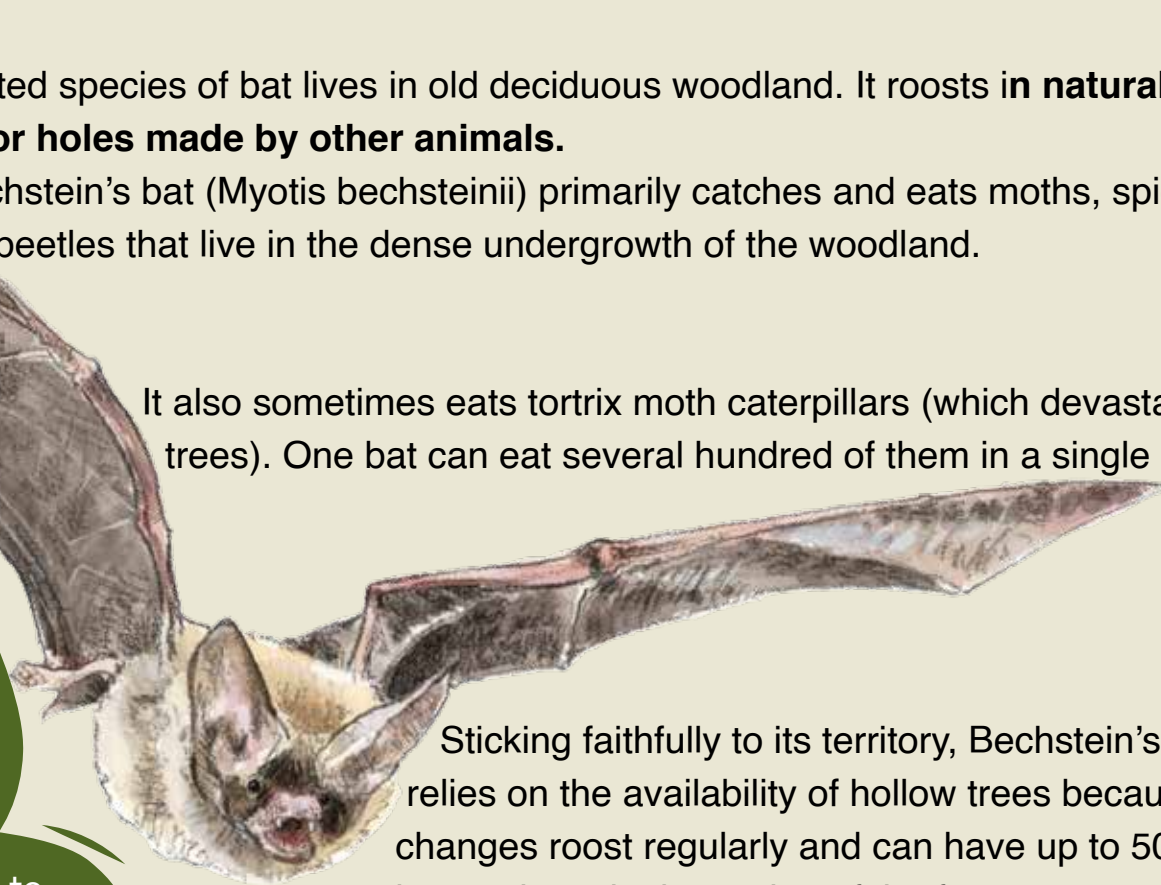
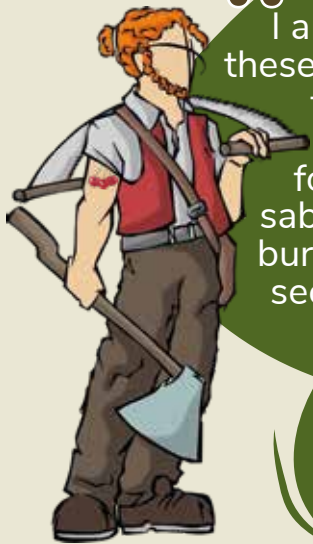
This protected species of bat lives in old deciduous woodland. It roosts in **natural tree holes or holes made by other animals.**

Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteinii*) primarily catches and eats moths, spiders, and beetles that live in the dense undergrowth of the woodland.

It also sometimes eats tortrix moth caterpillars (which devastate oak trees). One bat can eat several hundred of them in a single night!!

“ Hello!
I am **Sylvan**. I live in these woods, with the trees, the animals and the memories of the former lumberjacks, saboters and charcoal burners. I know all the secrets of the forest.”

Will you be able to spot other holes carved by the wood pecker? Keep your eyes open: some may be inhabited... ”



Sticking faithfully to its territory, Bechstein's bat relies on the availability of hollow trees because it changes roost regularly and can have up to 50 homes in a single section of the forest.

The species is under threat due to the disappearance of its habitat and the use of insect traps. To help the bats, please be as quiet as possible, especially at dusk and in winter when they hibernate.

→ To the next step



A living forest for tomorrow's world?

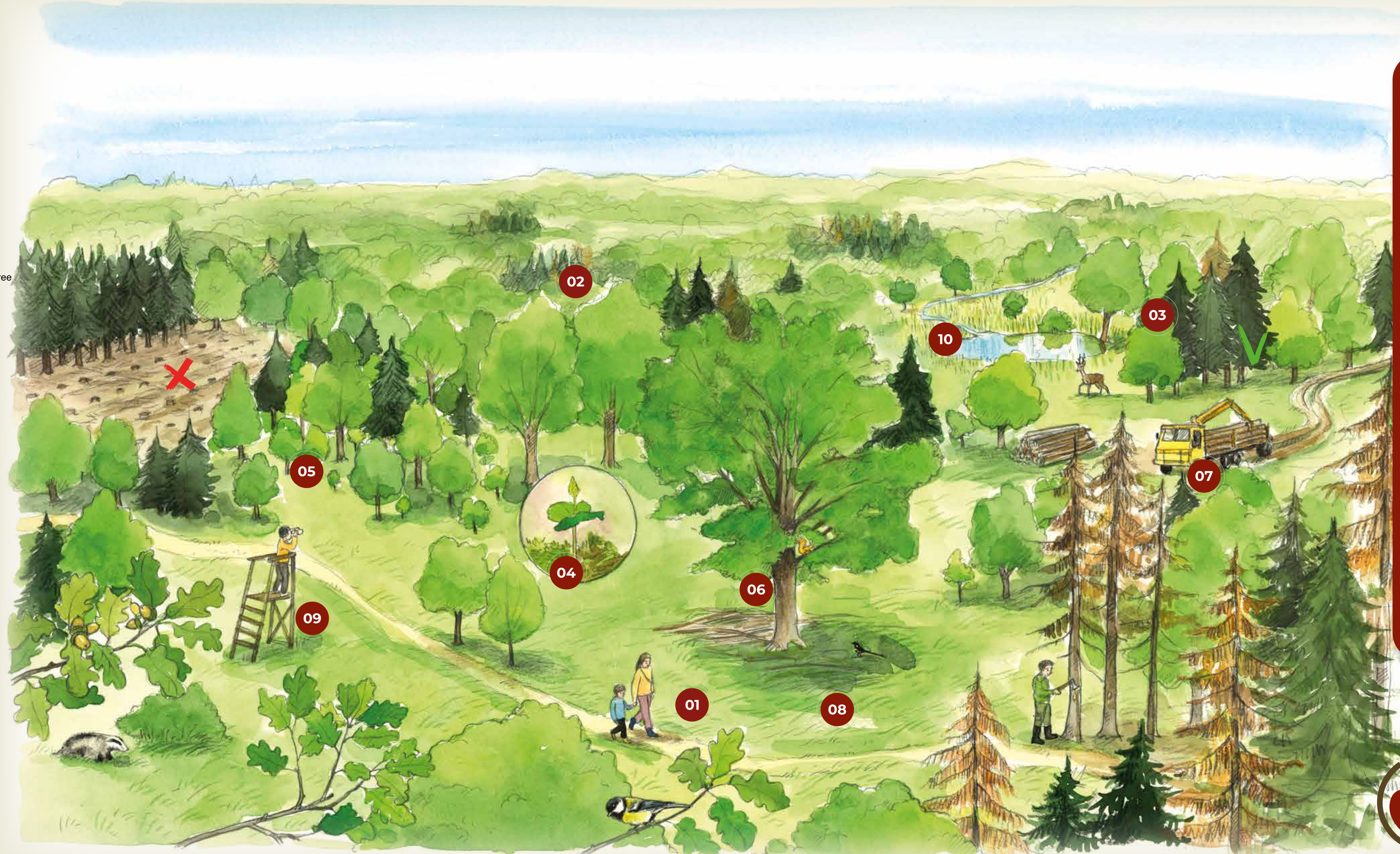
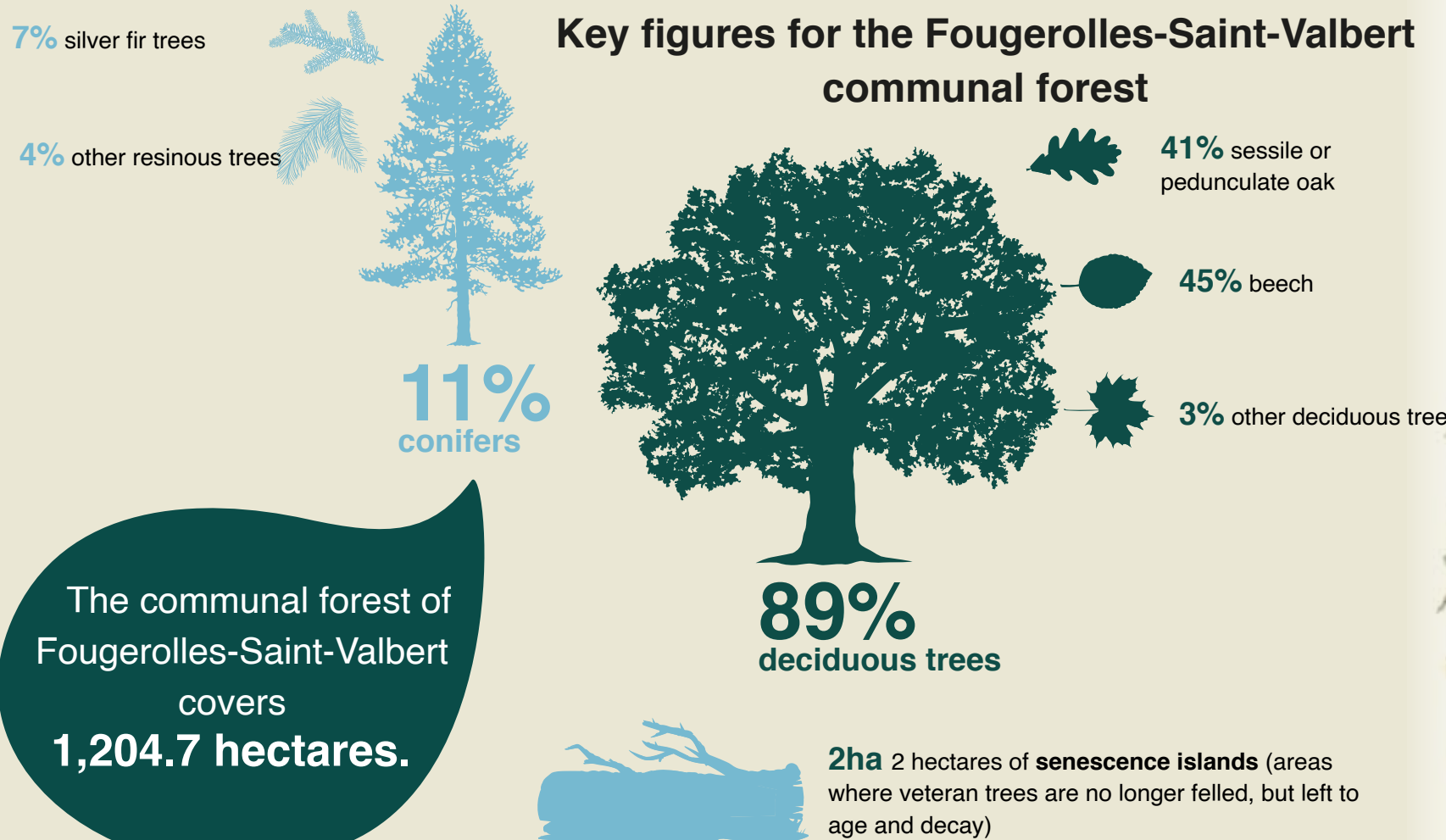


- 01 Leisure and well-being activities**
The forest is an ideal place for leisure activities, discoveries, and environmental education.
- 02 Continuous tree cover**
The ground is never bare in woodland with continuous tree cover, so there is always shade, moisture, and vegetation.
- 03 Mixed forest stands**
A forest containing a variety of species is better able to resist attacks from pests and diseases. It is more stable when withstanding wind.

- 04 Natural regeneration**
Natural self-seeding benefits from natural selection and only the most robust survive.
- 05 A mix of ages**
Areas regenerate more quickly when there are young-canopy trees in the understory, protected by larger canopy trees and ready to grow up and take over when needed.

- 06 Protecting tree habitats, old trees, and deadwood**
Protecting trees containing micro-habitats and deadwood helps maintain a functional ecosystem.
- 07 Controlled logging**
Cutting down individual mature trees, while leaving others to continue to grow.

- 08 Protecting the ground**
The forest floor is a crucial asset in the good health of the forest.
- 09 Maintaining biodiversity and balance in larger wildlife.**
- 10 Protecting our water resources and wetlandss**



Les Pierres de Rouge

“Forests play a crucial role in protecting living creatures, regulating the climate, and boosting our well-being. Single-species forest stands and even-aged forest stands are most common in our woodland. (A forest stand is a fairly uniform community of trees). History and recent events (storms, droughts, bark beetle etc.) have highlighted these types of stands' vulnerability and lack of resilience.

Can we create a woodland landscape for today, with all the assets it needs for tomorrow?”

→ To the next step **5**

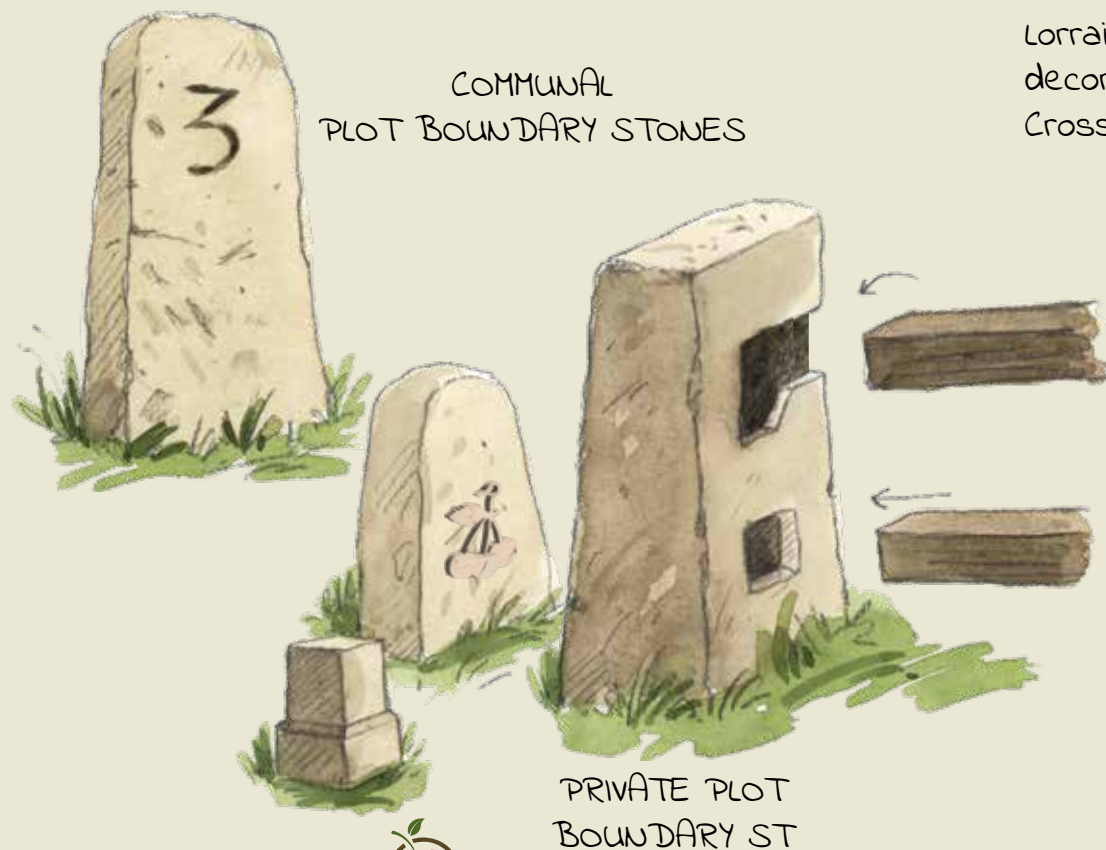
Between woods and meadows... stones with a story



On Fougerolles land, every stone driven into the ground tells a story.

These boundary stones mark the borders between two meadows or between communal and private land, or they show where an old frontier lay.

These boundary stones attest to the Dukes of Lorraine's claims to Fougerolles land before it became part of France in 1704 under King Louis XIV.



Lorraine side,
decorated with the
Cross of Lorraine



BORDER MARKERS

Burgundy side,
marked with Saint
Andrew's cross

“ Take a look at the imposing block of stone pierced by an intriguing, rudimentary hole. Might it once have barred entry to the meadow in the Pierres de Rou ge valley? Mysterious!

”



→ To the next step





Elongated, fairly bulbous body

Short cylindrical tail



Gleaming black skin with a varying quantity of yellow markings



Large black eyes suited to night vision and twilight

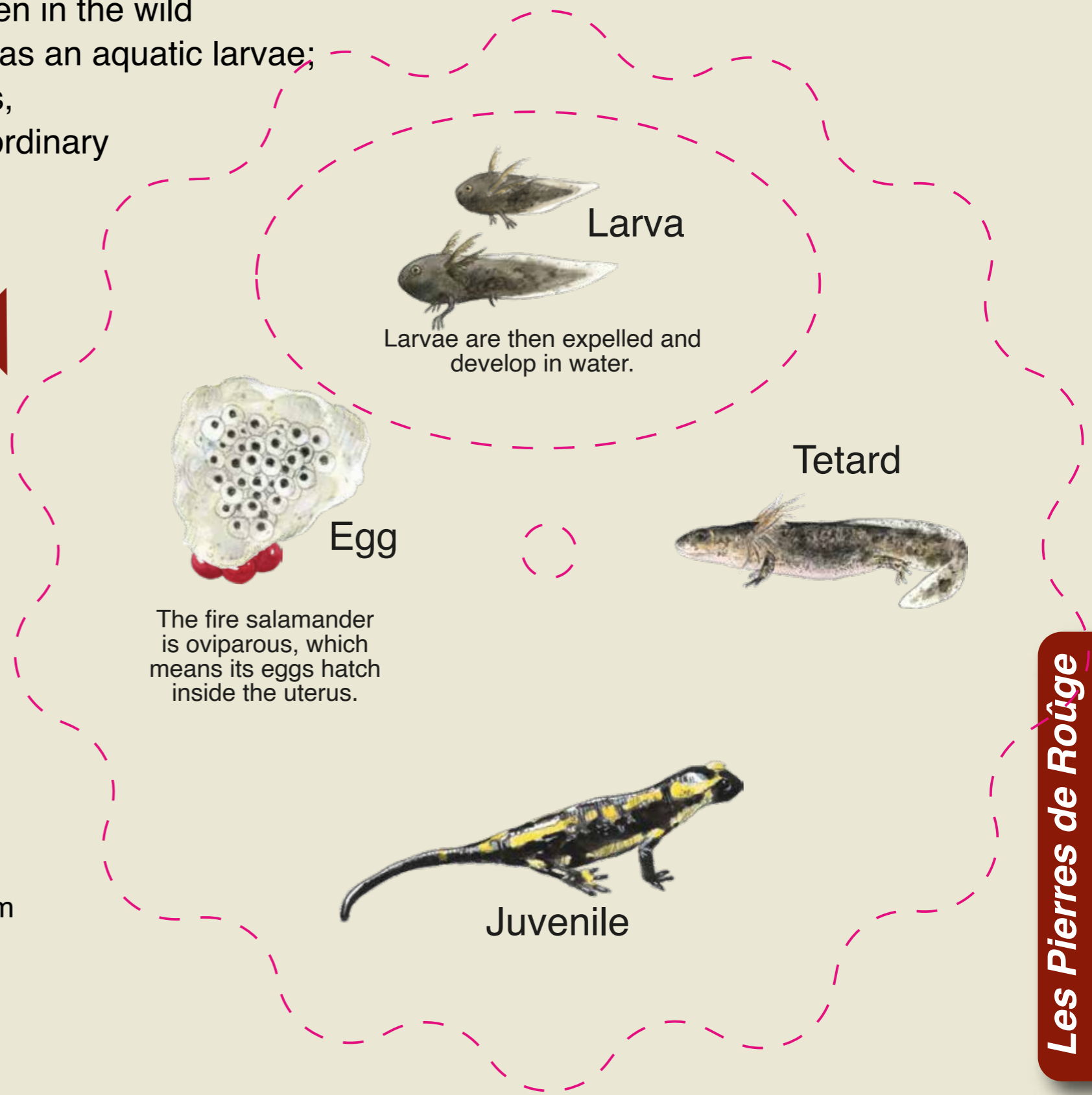
The Fire Salamander



The fire salamander is an unusual nocturnal animal belonging to the amphibian family. It has a record-breaking lifespan (the oldest known specimen in the wild lived for 20 years); and experiences two stages of life: first as an aquatic larvae; then as a solely terrestrial adult. Between its two life stages, the fire salamander undergoes a metamorphosis as extraordinary as that of a tadpole turning into a frog.

The fire salamander is a protected species because it is endangered. It is under threat due to the disappearance of many wetland and dryland environments (e.g. hedge removal and the replanting of woods with conifers), water pollution, roads, and emerging diseases that attack amphibians.

A closer look at...



“ I’m **Mileau**, child of the streams, and I know all their secrets—from frogs’ gossip to the hiding places of shrimps and salamanders.

Little streams are precious because they feed our rivers and provide a home for remarkable flora and fauna.



The source in front of you becomes a little stream that flows into the Pochattes (or Poichattes) stream near here.

The Pochattes starts as a headwater*, later coming a right-bank tributary of the Cormbeauté (which then flows into the Semouse, which flows into the Landerne and ultimately the Saône). The Cormbeauté runs through Fougerolles-Saint-Valbert commune.

*A headwater is a small source stream that begins at the very top of the river basin, often in woodland, meadowland or a mountainous area. It is the initiation point of the river network.

Forest whispers

The nuthatch can climb down tree trunks headfirst! It reduces the size of its entrance to the exact size of its own body to keep out rivals and predators (such as starlings, great spotted woodpeckers, and dormice). It does this by building the entrance up with mud, which is why it is called a “pic maçon” (mason woodpecker) in French.



twit
twit
twit



tchif tchaf
tchif tchif tchaf...



Chiffchaffs are warblers, named for their clear, rapid song, which has a chiffchaff, chiffchaff sound.



Holly leaves are very prickly to ward off animals who might want to eat them. However, in winter, birds—especially blackbirds and thrushes—love eating the red holly berries, which are a precious source of food when the world is frozen.



Blackcaps have a distinctive rich, powerful, fluting song. Its rapid cadence and bursts of sound make it easy to recognise—it sounds like a blackbird after an energy drink!

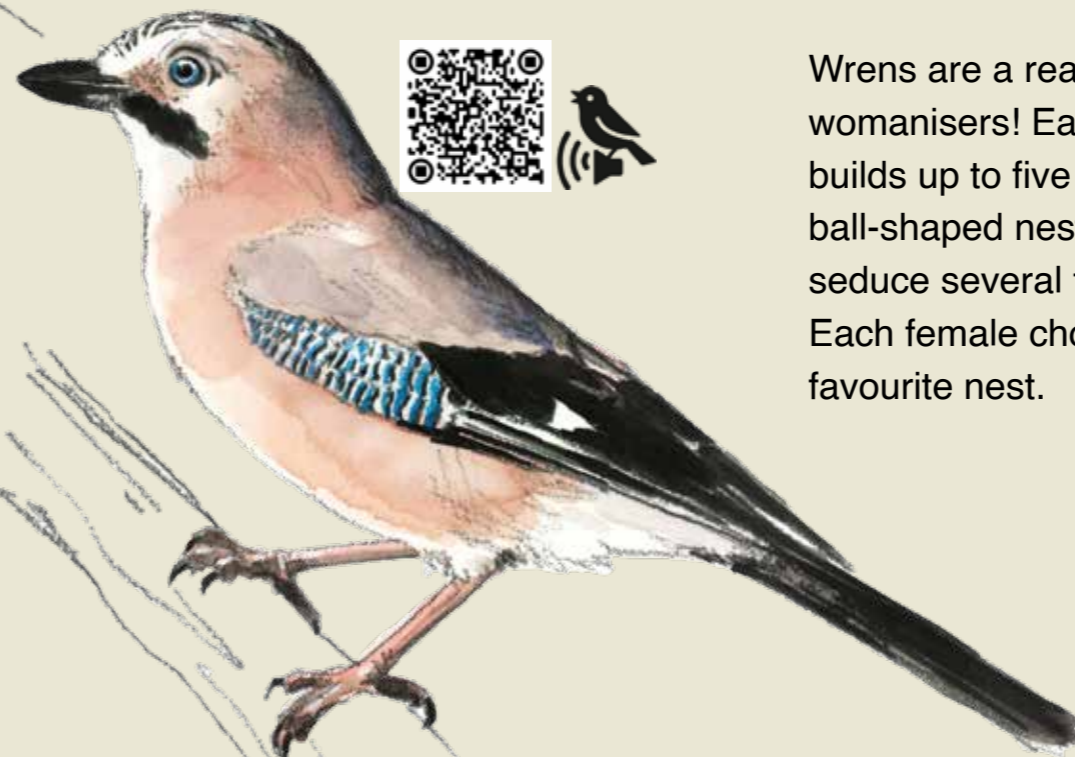


“

Here, in the forest, you can hear a thousand little secrets! The forest murmurs; birds tittle-tattle; and leaves rustle in the wind. Ssshhh! Close your eyes. Listen closely, my friends.

”

Wood anemones flower very early in the spring so they can soak up all the sunlight on the ground before the forest becomes too shady. The early wood anemone catches the light before the trees can!



Jays are the scatterbrained gardeners of the forest. They conceal thousands of acorns in different places for winter but often forget many of their hiding places—which helps trees take root and grow!



Wrens are a real womanisers! Each male builds up to five ball-shaped nests to seduce several females. Each female chooses her favourite nest.



A whole world beneath our feet

Out of sight, beneath our feet, an essential living world lies concealed in the forest floor.



This carpet of dead leaves, moss, and deadwood is called the forest floor, or duff. Nature is constantly at work here, breaking down matter with a team of lifeforms: mushrooms, insects, spiders, centipedes and millipedes, crustaceans, and the well-known earthworm.

“The forest floor, or duff, is one of the greatest treasure troves in our woodlands. When it rains, the duff absorbs the falling drops. It acts as an insulating mattress and stops the ground drying too quickly in the sun. When it freezes, the duff stops the ground cooling too quickly.”

“The forest floor shelters a multitude of little life forms. Set out on a voyage of discovery into this miniature world and take a closer look!”

All these little organisms transform the forest floor into a fertile soil, rich in nutrients. This soil nourishes the plants and trees, which then nourish the whole forest.

Les Pierres de Rouège

→ To the next step



The forest floor is, therefore, a natural workshop, crucial for keeping the forest in good health.



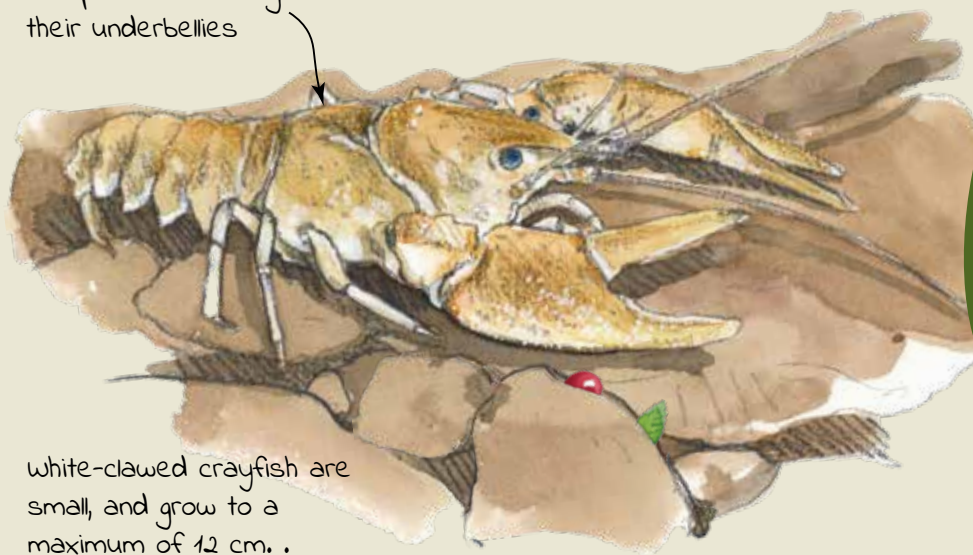
A vulnerable species: the white-clawed crayfish



A discreet stream-dweller

White-clawed crayfish prefer cool, fresh, well-oxygenated, and fast-flowing streams with gravelly or stony beds that provide many places of shelter. To protect themselves from the current and predators, they hide during the day, spending most of their time concealed beneath pebbles or in deadwood etc. When night falls, they leave their hiding places to find food.

They have a green-brown carapace which is lighter on their underbellies



White-clawed crayfish are small, and grow to a maximum of 12 cm. .

An expert at recycling organic matter in the river

These little crayfish are omnivores and they eat plant debris (dead leaves), insect larvae, small shellfish, and sometimes carrion or small dead fish.

“

Water temperature determines development

To grow, the species needs relatively constant temperatures of between 15°C and 18°C, not exceeding 21°C in summer. In these conditions, white-clawed crayfish will grow and shed their carapaces to make new ones, allowing them to get bigger. In their first year, they shed seven times. Once they become adults, they shed just once or twice a year.

An excellent indicator of water quality

The delicate crustacean is very sensitive to organic and chemical pollution and to changes in habitat. It shelters in headwaters close to sources, where the best water quality and habitat can be found.”



➔ To the next step



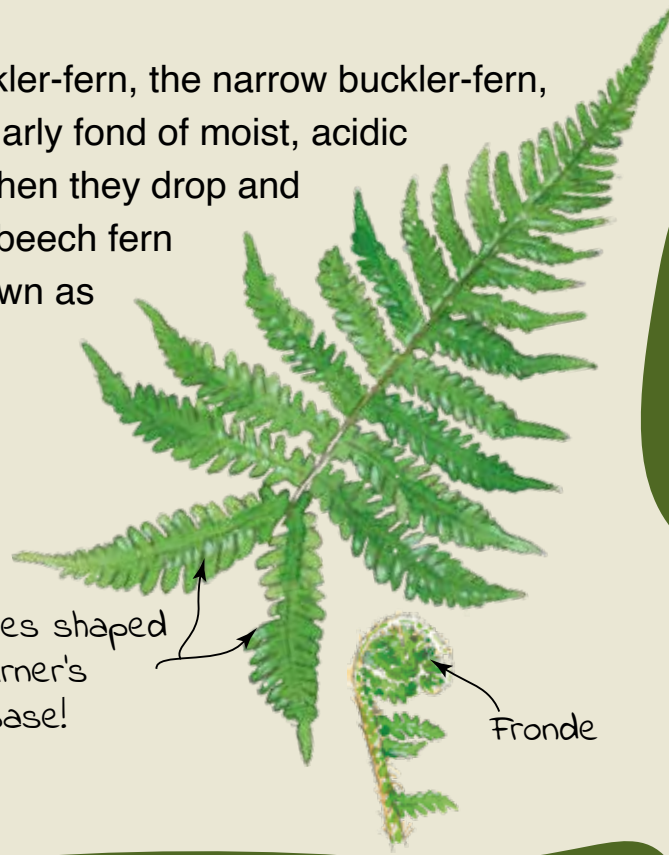
In the Haute-Saône department, they are protected by the prefectorial decree for the protection of the biotope of the 13/04/2007.

A living garden in hollows in the rocks

To escape plundering, peasants took refuge in the hollows in the Pierres de Roûge rocks during the 1634 to 1644 war and the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. Today, the same hollows provide shelter for many species of ferns and other plants.



Ferns, such as the broad buckler-fern, the narrow buckler-fern, and the male fern, are particularly fond of moist, acidic soils. Ferns nourish the soil when they drop and decay. This includes the long beech fern (*Phegopteris connectilis*), known as the “fougère à moustache”, or moustached fern, in French.



There are two leaves shaped like the charcoal burner's moustache at its base!



Le chèvrefeuille (*Lonicera periclymenum*) peut grimper très haut en s'accrochant aux arbres et aux rochers grâce à ses tiges souples. Très apprécié des chevreuils, il attire aussi papillons et abeilles avec ses fleurs parfumées.

Remote sedge (*Carex remota*) does not have large flowers. Its seeds are protected by small scales that help them float on water and allow them easily to propagate across riverbanks and boggy areas!



Marsh-marigolds (*Caltha palustris*) are perfectly suited to this area. Their roots can survive happily in water for long periods, even in saturated ground.

Their stems and leaves are strong but flexible, to help them withstand moisture and current.

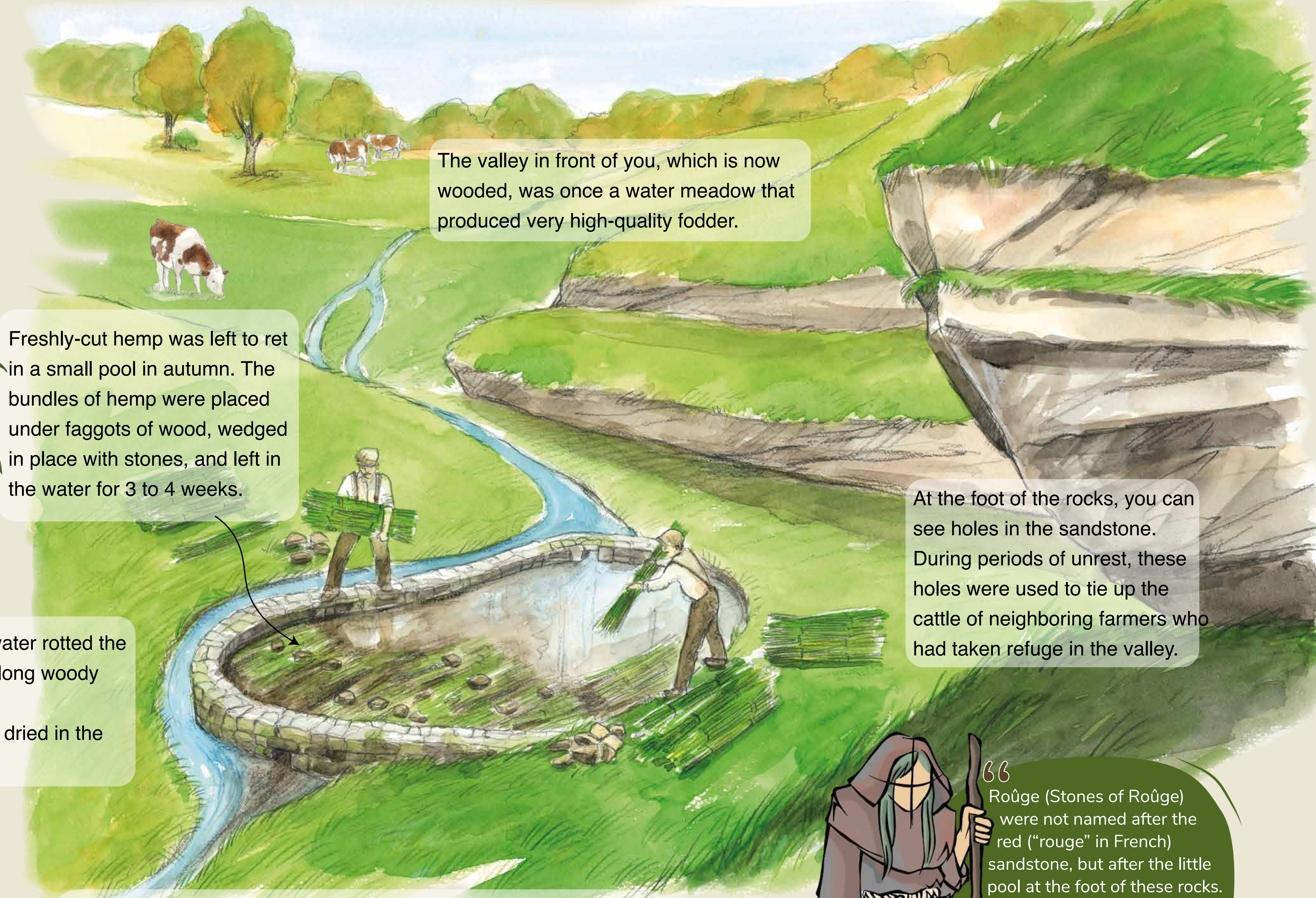


Les Pierres de Roûge

The Pierres de Roûge



Hemp was once grown in Fougerolles and many of the surrounding villages.



The valley in front of you, which is now wooded, was once a water meadow that produced very high-quality fodder.

Freshly-cut hemp was left to rot in a small pool in autumn. The bundles of hemp were placed under faggots of wood, wedged in place with stones, and left in the water for 3 to 4 weeks.

The bacteria in the water rotted the hemp, freeing up its long woody fibres. The fibres were then dried in the bread oven.

At the foot of the rocks, you can see holes in the sandstone. During periods of unrest, these holes were used to tie up the cattle of neighboring farmers who had taken refuge in the valley.

During the long winter evenings, men softened the fibres and combed them out to make tow. The women then span the tow on a wheel and wove it into hemp fabric or canvas. This tradition disappeared at the start of the 20th century.

Roûge (Stones of Roûge) were not named after the red ("rouge" in French) sandstone, but after the little pool at the foot of these rocks. It was once used to ret (soak and soften) hemp. The pool was called a "roûge" or "èn rwéj" in the local dialect.

How is hemp used now?

Nowadays, hemp fibres are used to make building materials (thermal insulation etc.); and high-quality papers in the papermaking industry.

Hemp litter, which comes from the stem, is very absorbent and can be used for mulching and animal bedding.

Hemp seeds are used as bait for fishing.



A renewable source of cellulose:

Hemp produces 4 times more cellulose than an equivalent area of trees.



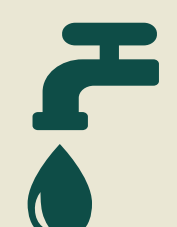
A carbon sink

One hectare of hemp absorbs as much carbon as a hectare of



An excellent recycling solution for materials

Hemp is very biodegradable.



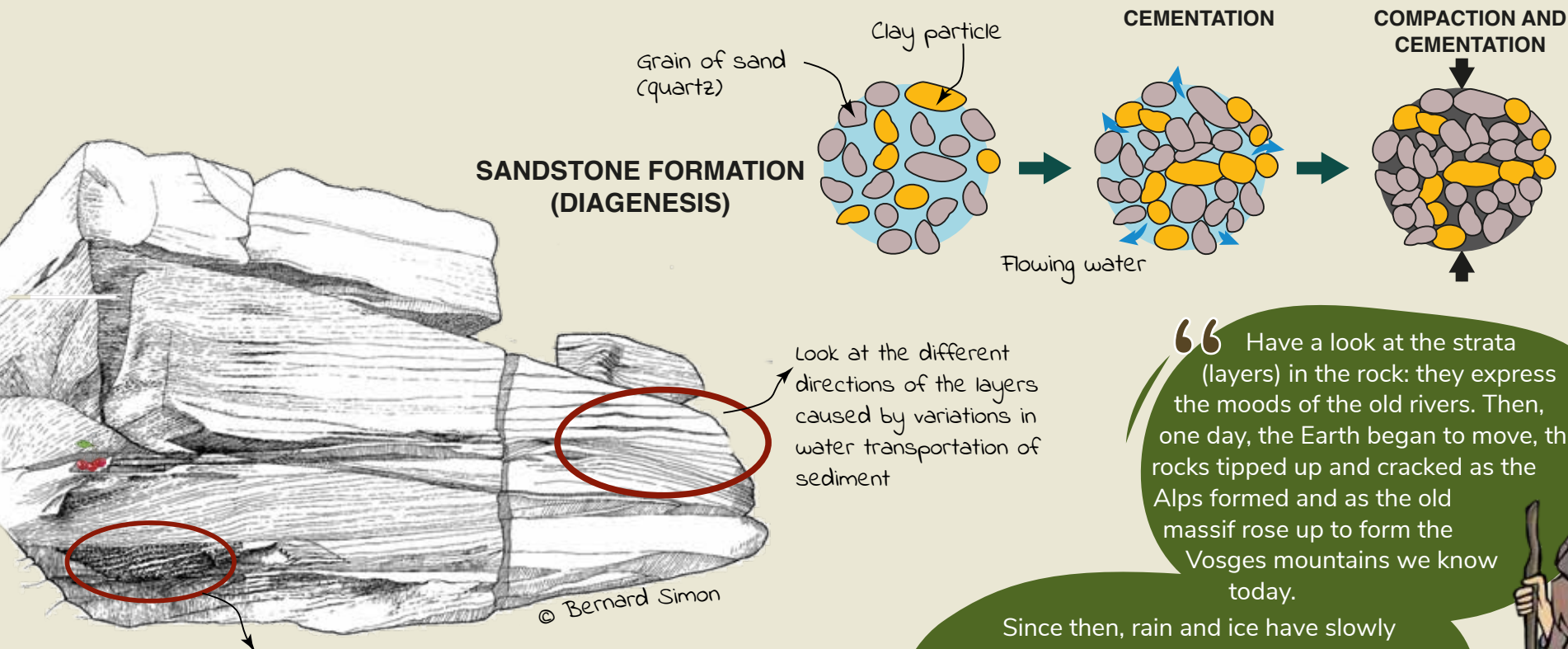
A low-maintenance crop:

hemp farming requires only very small amounts of nitrogen, very little water, and no phytosanitary products.

Les Pierres de Roûge

Sandstone used to make homes

Once upon a time, there was no forest and no village. This was a delta on the edge of a shallow sea. Gushing rivers deposited layer after layer of sand here. Over time, all those grains of quartz were pressed, compressed, and cemented together to make the hard rock we call sandstone.



In the vertical sections here, spectacular erosion has formed honeycomb sculptures. This is called alveolar erosion.

“ Have a look at the strata (layers) in the rock: they express the moods of the old rivers. Then, one day, the Earth began to move, the rocks tipped up and cracked as the Alps formed and as the old massif rose up to form the Vosges mountains we know today.

Since then, rain and ice have slowly worn the stone away, grain by grain. People have also taken the sandstone for building, grinding, and carving. Sandstone is an old friend around here. It has long been a part of many homes and many stories.”

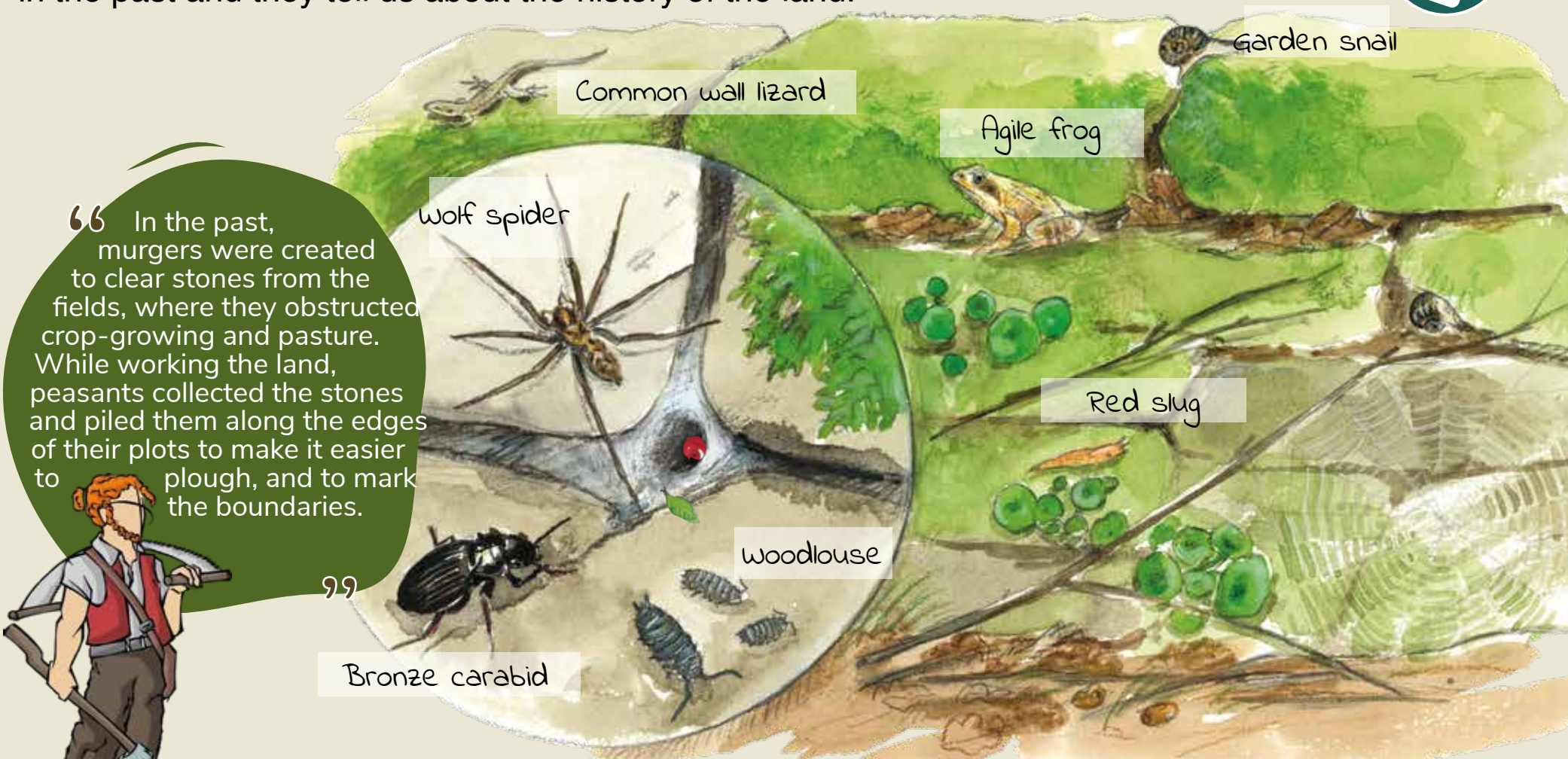


Les Pierres de Rouège

The sandstone quarried here was used to construct many buildings and farms up until the 1950s. In Fougerolles, certain types of sandstone were also used for millstones, ashlar, and flagstones.

Dry stone walls

The dry stone walls (known as murgers in French) beside the trail were made by peasants in the past and they tell us about the history of the land.



“ In the past, murgers were created to clear stones from the fields, where they obstructed crop-growing and pasture. While working the land, peasants collected the stones and piled them along the edges of their plots to make it easier to plough, and to mark the boundaries.

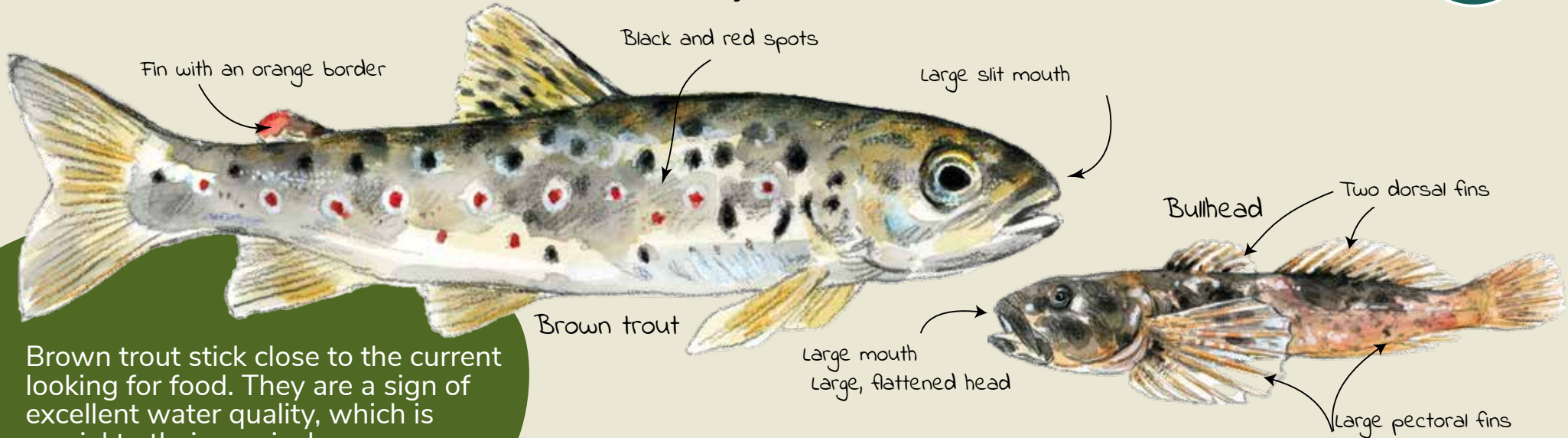


Once a sign of an open agricultural space, they are now gradually being recovered by the forest. Moss and lichens cling to the cracks and gaps between the stones, creating an ideal refuge for small, discreet fauna: insects, centipedes and millipedes, snails and even some spiders and reptiles.

Les Pierres de Rouège

The Pochattes Stream

In the Pochattes stream (Poichattes stream in the local dialect), which meanders through the heart of this conservation area, a vibrant system of life lurks beneath the surface.



Brown trout stick close to the current looking for food. They are a sign of excellent water quality, which is crucial to their survival.

The common bullhead hides in pebbles and areas of clear water. The discreet little fish likes to conceal itself at the bottom to avoid predators.

In this fragile environment, each species has its place in the food chain. Stonefly and dragonfly larvae feed on small morsels of organic debris or micro-organisms. They are eaten by fish, such as the bullhead or brown trout. The brown trout sits at the top of the food chain and eats aquatic insects and sometimes bullheads. The stream's equilibrium relies on a network of interactions that ensures the survival of all inhabitants.

“ Aquatic larvae, including stonefly and dragonfly larvae, live under stones and in decaying leaves. These insects spend the first part of their life in water and then become adults and fly away. Very sensitive to pollution, their presence is also an excellent sign of a healthy stream. ”

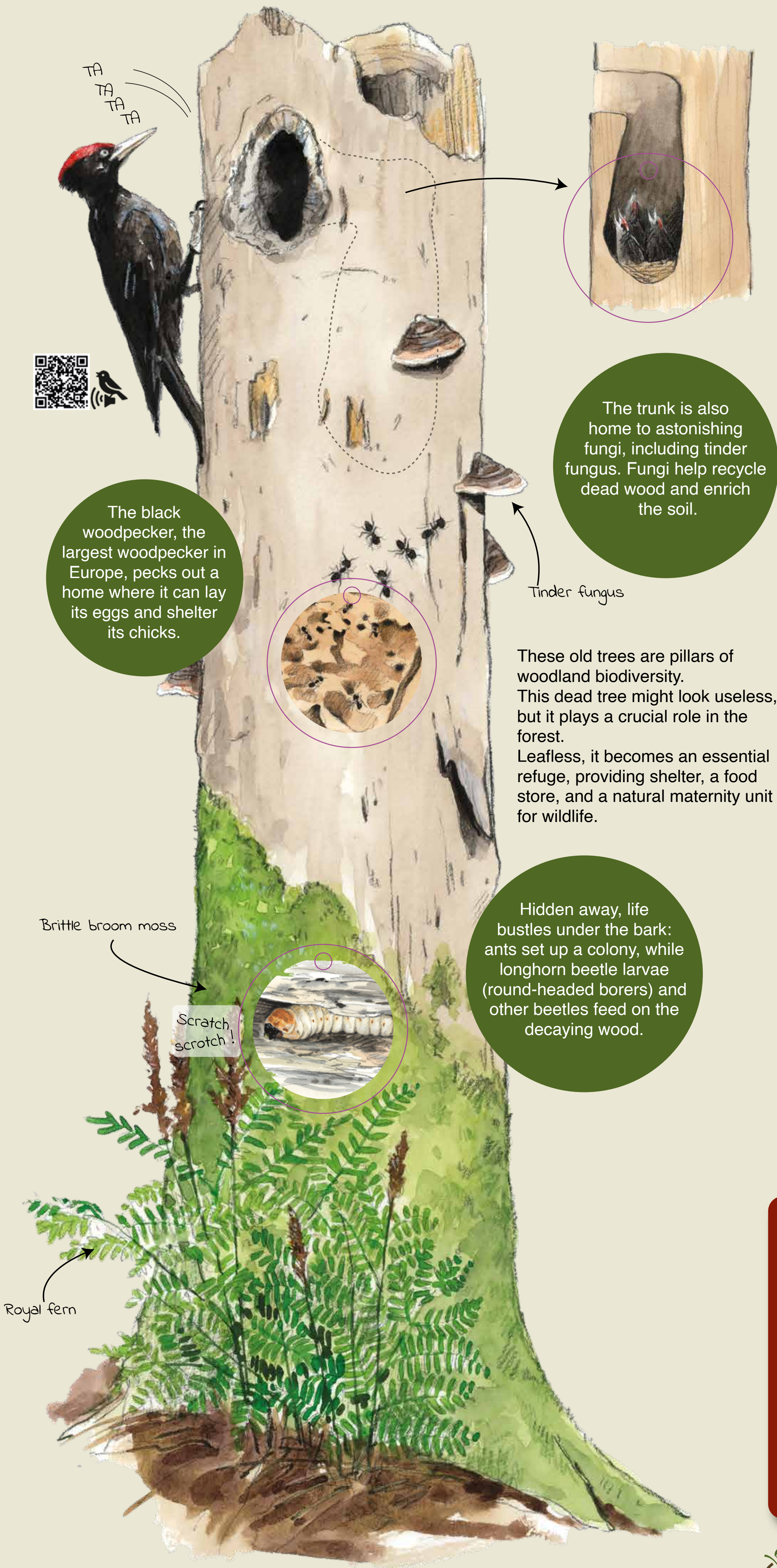


← To the next step

15

”

A dead tree: a wellspring of life



The black woodpecker, the largest woodpecker in Europe, pecks out a home where it can lay its eggs and shelter its chicks.

The trunk is also home to astonishing fungi, including tinder fungus. Fungi help recycle dead wood and enrich the soil.

These old trees are pillars of woodland biodiversity. This dead tree might look useless, but it plays a crucial role in the forest. Leafless, it becomes an essential refuge, providing shelter, a food store, and a natural maternity unit for wildlife.

Hidden away, life bustles under the bark: ants set up a colony, while longhorn beetle larvae (round-headed borers) and other beetles feed on the decaying wood.

Scratch, scratch!

Brittle broom moss
Royal fern

Visions of the Fougerolles landscape

Extensive farming, which respects natural balance, has kept the landscape here authentic. Crop-livestock farms continue to shape the area, guaranteeing rich, diverse landscapes, and nurturing a strong connection between inhabitants and the environment.

Cherry trees regularly need to be replaced to stay productive: a regional programme in the 2010s replaced a large proportion of the Fougerolles orchards, planting over 2500 trees. Farmers currently fell a number of cherry trees in their meadow orchards every year, and then replant, perpetuating the heritage and traditions for which this land is renowned.



“How delightful to be here! What a fantastic view of Fougerolles-Saint-Valbert and the surrounding area! The colours change with the season. I particularly love the dazzling light of spring, when deep shadows contrast with the brilliance of orchards in blossom.”

An upside-down world

To experience the world upside down, simply turn your back to the landscape, stand with your legs wide apart, bend over and look out between your knees! Can you see how different everything is? Have a look at all the little details you did not notice before.



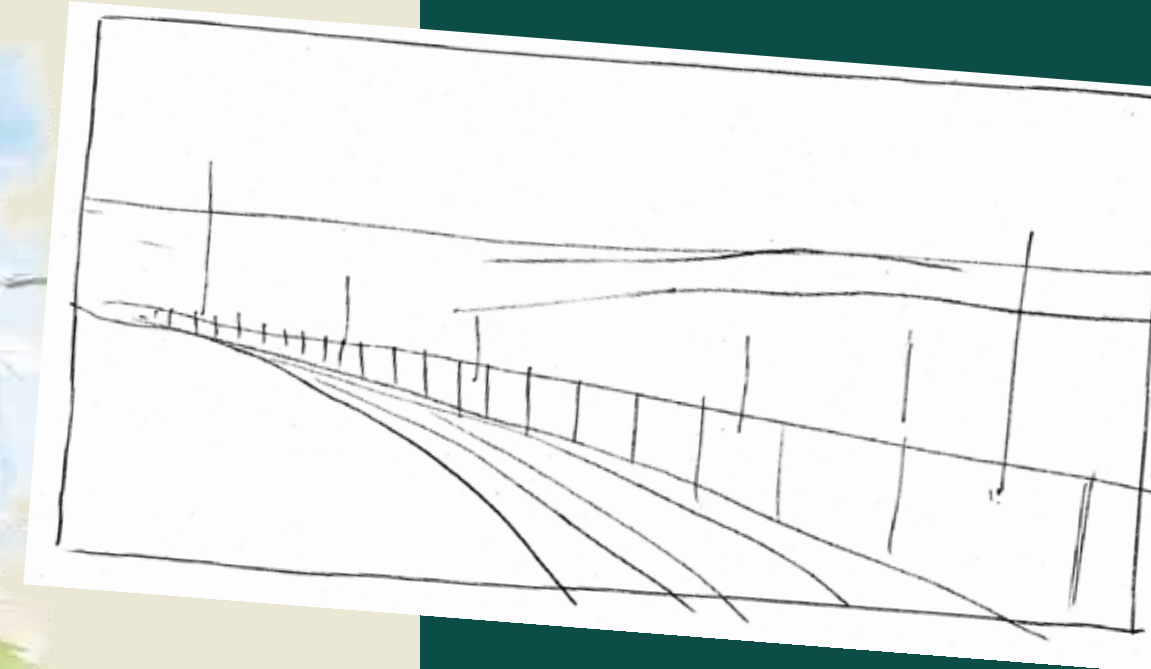
Listen to the landscape

Make yourself comfortable, close your eyes, and focus on the sounds. Listen from left to right, and then to close-up and then far-off sounds. Are there any identical sounds? Are there softer sounds and harsher sounds? Is nature making the sounds? (wind in the trees, birdsong, insects buzzing etc.) Can you hear man-made sounds (tractors and cars etc.)?



Look and draw

Step 1: Draw the background (the elements that are very far away)



Plot the converging lines (lines that seem to move towards each other) in the landscape. Start with the horizon (the line separating the sky and the ground) which represents the background. Draw some curved lines to suggest the path and the line of park fenceposts which follows it: they will act as reference points and give the drawing depth.

TIP: the further away it is, the smaller and fainter it is!

Step 2: Add the middle ground (the middle of the picture)



Finish the scene by adding in the middle-ground elements—trees and bushes—while respecting the scale.

Here, the middle-ground elements are located between the horizon and the fence posts. They will add structure and realism to your landscape.

TIP: Middle-ground elements will be bigger than background features but smaller than foreground elements.

Step 3: Work on the foreground and details (the things closest to you)



In this final step, accentuate the foreground by adding texture to the ground, grass, and fenceposts.

Make the contrasts stronger and outline the shape of the trees and fields in the background. This will give your drawing depth and make it more alive by clearly layering the three sections of the space.

TIP: closer items should be bigger and clearer!

Colour in!

You can add colour to your landscape using nature itself! Try rubbing the flowers, earth, grass, leaves, and moss etc. on your paper.

↑ Your trail is nearly over. There is just 1 km left to return to La Ramouse hamlet. Petra, Sylvan, Cerisaie and Mileau loved spending time with you and helping you discover everything!