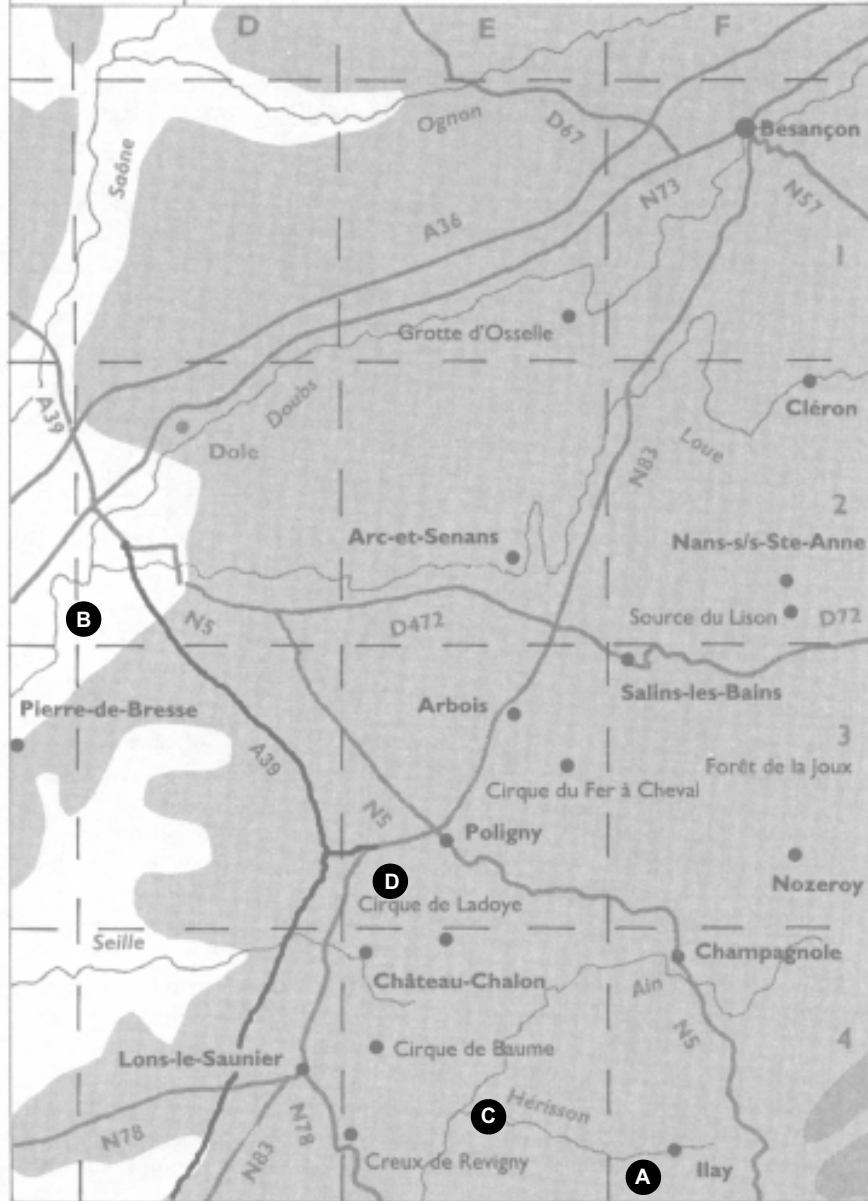


17

Jura: *cirques*, *reculées*, *sources*, *cascades* and piped brine.
Grottes galore. Gargantuan Gruyère. Kaffe Fassett designs.
 Pasteur *musée*. (Refer also to *Resurgent Jura* on website.)

0 5 10 15 20 30 Kilometres
 0 5 10 15 20 Miles



Map sheet 17 brings us to the first of three chapters where I shall enthuse about one of my favourite areas of France – the Jura. Please don't mistake the Jura mountains as a rival for the Alps: the highest peak in the range, which runs from Bâle to the Rhône, in both France and Switzerland, is a modest 5636 ft above sea-level. All the terrain on 17 is part of Franche-Comté.

When the spirit and senses need refreshing head for the gentle Jura, a land of densely-wooded limestone hills, imposing valleys, rock faces, emerald pastures, streams, rivers and lakes. Added pluses are the Jura's quaffable wines, enticing cheeses and tasty *charcuterie*. I've seen the area in all the seasons but my favourite time is October when the mellow days – if luck is with you – can be warm, dry and benevolent. Then the landscape dazzles. The primarily broadleaved forests become gigantic swathes of autumn colours, Kaffe Fassett designs of random hues and shades: bronze, saffron, old gold, ochre, russet, chilli red and copper. The bird life is amazing: buzzards, red kites, herons, peregrines, kingfishers, woodpeckers and dippers commonplace.

Two words are synonymous with the Jura: limestone and water. The Jura – a gargantuan Gruyère cheese – is riddled with limestone caves and subterranean passages. The area is renowned for resurgent streams, where water disappears underground miles away, high above the tops of the many *cirques* (amphitheatres), to reappear in caves or falls at the bottom of the steep rock faces. The *cirques* are at the end of deep wooded valleys called *reculées*. I've seen the *cirques* and *reculées* many times during the last four decades but, on my last visit, the appalling weather, for once, returned gilt-edged bonuses: the rivers, cascades and resurgent streams were at their ferocious best. I'll describe the five most important *cirques* for you – starting in the south.

View the classic **Cirque de Baume** (E4) from the belvedere at its southern end, just off the D471. Then descend to Baume-les-Messieurs, an unspoilt village in a time-warp and guarded by two massive rock walls scowling at each other above the roof tops. The 11th/15th-century abbey snoozes behind a shaded *place*. At the head of the valley a waterfall gushes out of the rock face and tumbles over mossy rocks. The **Cirque de Ladoye** (E4) is best approached from the D5 to the north; on our most recent visit the stunning wooded valley below us was an eerie sight with wisps of cloud floating among the beech trees and hovering over the emerald pastures at the bottom. The *fontaine* which emerges at the base of the rock face is a docile affair.

The **Cirque du Fer à Cheval** (E3), at the head of a wider wooded valley, is not as spectacular as the previous duo. The Grottes des Planches below the *cirque* is a superb sight after heavy rain: emerging at the foot of a black and white overhanging cliff, the volume of water can be immense and deafening near the cave's exit (the *grottes* are open every day Apl to Oct but closed Fri in Oct). At the **Source du Lison** (F2) two caves feed the river: one, the Grotte Sarrazine, is a ten-minute

walk from the car park; the thundering roar of water blasting from the base is a dramatic spectacle. Further east, the Source de la Loue (map 18: B2) can be reached by either a long, exciting hike from the D67 or from the D443 to the south – a less strenuous walk; this stepped version is not as impressive as the others. (Important: refer also to website's *Resurgent Jura*.)

Two other natural features deserve a mention. The **Creux de Revigny** (E4), south-east of **Lons-le-Saunier**, is a high cliff, pock-marked with caves, where the River Vallière emerges at the base of the rock face. The Creux Billard (F2), above the Source du Lison, is a huge gouge (*creux*) in the rock face where, after heavy rain, there's a cascade 80 metres high. The D103 descent here is gorgeous: a vista of beech woods, other valleys branching off the Lison and various moulded hills. (Detour to the Pont du Diable: a narrow bridge over a ravine with a terrific view of a densely wooded gorge to the north.)

I'll continue on the theme of water. Do not fail, under any account, to seek out the **Hérisson** Valley (E4/F4). Small the valley may be, only 20 km or so, but what an incomparable punch the Hérisson packs. There's a belvedere on the D39 to the north; view the wooded scene below you but then use the D326 from Doucier (E4) and park at the end of the lane. As you walk upstream to **Ilay** (F4) you'll pass a series of cascades; the Hérisson falls 250 metres in three km. For the lazy a 400-metre walk from the car park takes you to the best of the falls, the multi-stepped Cascade de l'Eventail. Don't bypass the Hérisson.

Note that there are several lakes in the area (E4/F4). The largest is the Lac de Chalain (E4). In summer, watersports of all kinds ensure the lake is busy; but walks on the southern banks are quiet enough. Further east, the Cascade de la Billaude (F4) is a thundering spectacle after heavy rain. (Readers speak highly of the climb to the Pic de l'Aigle (F4) with extensive views from the 993 metre-high summit.)

Not surprisingly, the limestone Jura has endowed the area with many grottoes and caves – all with their own versions of stalagmites and stalactites. Among the renowned caves are: the **Grotte d'Osselle** (E1: Apl to Oct); the cathedral-sized Gouffre de Poudrey (map 18: A1. Mar to Oct); the Grotte de la Glacière (18:B1. Mar to Nov); and the recently-opened Grottes des Moidons, on the D469 south of the Cirque du Fer à Cheval (E3: Apl p.m. only; all day May to Sept).

The Jura is also a land of trees – broadleaved and pines. France's best pine forest is the **Forêt de la Joux** (F3), north-east of **Champagnole** (F4). Hidden within the 6,000-acre forest is the Sapin Président, a massive pine with a circumference of four metres (a long walk from the road). (Again: see *Resurgent Jura*.) Something quite different is Mont Poupet, north of **Salins-les-Bains** (F3). The views south from the D492 and the RF (forest road) to the summit are stunning – a vista of wooded hills and valleys; there's also a lovely marked walk, with explanatory boards, starting from the D492 west of its junction with the D273.

Before I finish with some man-made sights let me tell you about a captivating river: the **Loue**. Start at the source (18:B2), mentioned earlier; then track the river downstream. Spare a few minutes at three villages, of varying size, with differing perspectives of the Loue: Mouthier-Haute-Pierre, Lods and Ornans (A2). West of the latter admire the remarkable river reflection, the Miroir de Scey, just before **Cléron** (F2). The multi-towered Château de Cléron, alongside the Loue, is an appealing scene (p.m. mid July to mid Aug).

Continue on the D103 to Lizine (F2) and then the D135 north. Do not drive past the two belvederes north of Lizine: the first, the Piquette, a five-minute walk from the road, overlooks the luminous, bowling-green waters of the Loue, hundreds of feet below the viewpoint; the other, the Moulin Sapin, is high above the River Lison.

What of the man-made attractions? Lons-le-Saunier (D4) is a bustling town; of the architectural treats the arcades and Tour de l'Horloge are the most noteworthy. **Château-Chalon** (E4) sits on a rocky seat high above the River **Seille** – with a bib of famed vineyards falling sharply away to the valley floor. In October the D5 climb to the village is especially colourful, courtesy of the dying leaves in the vineyards to the north. **Nozeroy** (F3), to the east, is a medieval, perched treat: admire the formidable tower/gate, the many stone houses, the handsome *place* with a solitary chestnut tree and the 13th/15th-century church. **Poligny** (E3) is the capital of *Comté* cheese. At the heart of the town nose out Joseph Defert's super Comté Jurafloré cheese shop; all the Jura varieties, including *Comté*, are available.

Arbois (E3) is renowned for its Pasteur connection (the family house is now a *musée*); the three-star *ville fleuri* is also the Jura wine capital. **Salins-les-Bains** (F3) is pleasant enough around the *bains*, tourist office and *musée*. Famed in times past for the production of salt by the evaporation of brine, you can visit the ancient underground workings near the tourist office. **Arc-et-Senans** (E2), to the north-west, was an 18th-century planned town, La Saline Royale (brine, piped from Salins, was evaporated there). Built by the visionary Claude Nicolas Ledoux, the site is worth a detour with its striking stone buildings, set out in a large arc, and a *musée* showing numerous scale models of the architect's work throughout France.

Another must is the Musée de la Taillanderie, south-west of **Nans-sous-Ste-Anne** (F2): an absorbing 19th-century farm workshop where all manner of tools such as scythes and axes were made, using water to provide energy; the waterwheels, ovens, hammers and bellows are fascinating (all day May to Sept; p.m. only on Sun out of season). Far to the west, at **Pierre-de-Bresse** (west of D3), is the HQ of the Ecomusée de la Bresse (see map 21, p93, and map 22) – housed in a stylish, eye-pleasing moated château with black pepper-pot towers and surrounded by a park (in part of which deer roam free). The museum evokes and explains the traditions and life of Bresse, the large area to the south of the village. Finally, if you can cope with the traffic, finish in **Besançon** (F1) – with its fine site, old town, *citadelle* and museums.