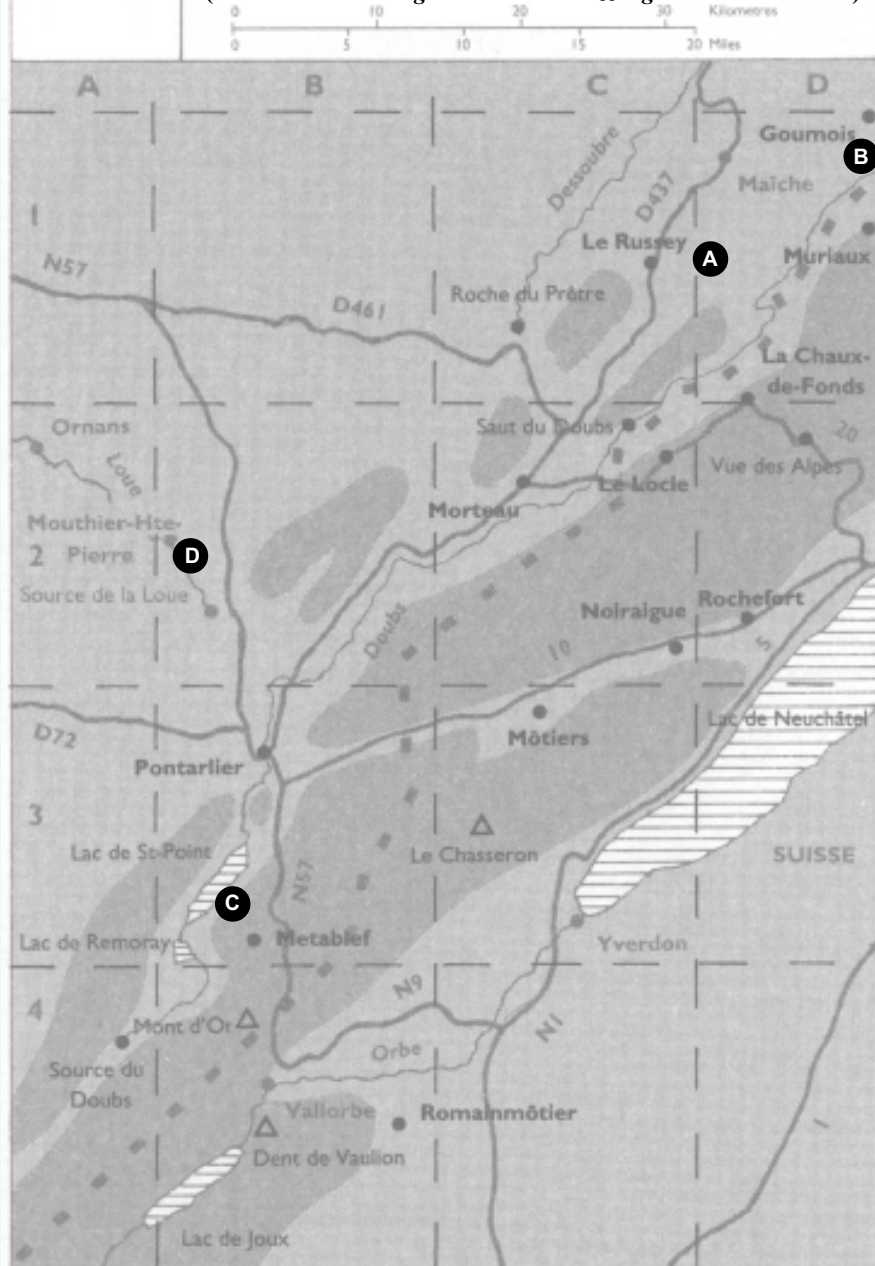


18

Doubs. Swiss Jura. Alps views, *tuyés*, bells and asphalt ham.
Source and Saut du Doubs. Jésus de Morteau. LP and CD-sized.
(Refer also to *Resurgent Jura* and *Dazzling Doubs* on website.)



This second Jura chapter includes terrain in both Switzerland and France; the border between the two countries cuts diagonally across the landscape, from the top right-hand corner to the bottom left. To enable me to describe the countless attractions more easily I have divided the chapter into three parts. I'll start in Switzerland. Then I'll cross the border and head north-east, following the **Doubs** downstream from its source (A4), looking at both sides of the French and Swiss borders. I'll finish with a brief look at one of France's most delectable small rivers, the **Dessoubre** (C1). (Another river valley, the **Loue** (A2/B2), was described in 17.) Very important: see website's *Dazzling Doubs*.

As good a place as any to start part one is the renowned **Vue des Alpes** (D2: 1283 m). With minimum effort you can enjoy the distant panorama of the Bernese Oberland peaks and the Mont Blanc *massif*. You'll be rewarded with an even better panorama if you drive south from the main road to the hotel marked on the map, park your car and make the half hour hike to the Tête de Ran (1422 m) summit. (A new six km road tunnel has been opened under the high ridge.)

Now use the minor roads which head south-west to the Val de Travers (C2/C3). Above **Rochefort** (D2) relish the views of the **Lac de Neuchâtel** (D2/D3) and the flattish terrain beyond. One refreshing aspect is that the hill above Rochefort is covered with beech trees, a welcome change from the ubiquitous dark conifers. Just south-west from Rochefort dive down the minor road to the Champ du Moulin (D2). The views are scintillating: distant lake, beeches around you, mixed woods on the other side of the valley and, far below, the Gorges de l'Areuse. At the bottom you have various options: you can walk to your heart's content, upstream or down; you can cycle on the tarmac track laid down through the entire length of the Val de Travers; or you can catch a train from the Champ de Moulin station to **Noiraigue** (C2) and either walk back or return by the railway (or vice versa).

Next, leave route 10 at Noiraigue, cross the railway and climb to the Ferme Robert, a chalet café (981 m) at the heart of the Réserve du Creux du Van. Flora and fauna are protected and roe deer and *chamois* roam free in their natural habitat. Back in the valley seek out the Asphalt Rock Mines at La Presta (C2: cross the railway line). Until 1986 the mine had produced mastic asphalt for 113 years. There's a one km circuit in the old galleries and a small workshop explains the workings of the mine. At the adjacent café try the ham, wrapped in tin foil, cooked by heating asphalt to 220 degrees C. (Tours at 10.00, 14.00, 16.00 every day July/Aug; 14.00, 16.00 weekends Apr to June and Sept/Oct; 14.00, 16.00 Sun only rest of year.) **Môtiers** (C3) is the home of the Jean-Jacques Rousseau *musée* (the house where he lived from 1762 until 1765) and a covered market, the Hotel of the Six-Communes.

On my last visit bad weather ruined the planned climbs, my first ever, to the summits of **Le Chasseron** (C3) and the **Dent de Vaulion** (B4). The former requires a long climb of over an hour to reach the top with its famed views of the Alps; the latter's steep peak is reached more easily, your car taking you almost all the way. The panorama from the observation table is said to include the Jungfrau, Mont Blanc and even La Meije in the Massif des Ecrins (map 33: C2).

The low cloud and heavy rain didn't spoil my visit to the Romanesque abbey at **Romainmôtier** (B4): the delightful little village, with its semi-circular street, is tucked away in a hidden valley. See both the abbey and the exhibition evoking monastic life (a.m. and p.m. Apl to Oct). Another idyllic hidden valley is at Les Clées, to the immediate north: beech woods; a tower high above the hamlet; the River Orbe forcing a path through the narrow ravine; walks; and memorable, too, for our sightings of two red squirrels.

Cross into France on the D389 (A4/B4) forest road. Start part two at the **Source du Doubs**. The pouring rain paid me a rich dividend on my last visit: the resurgent source, a cave at the foot of Le Noirmont ridge, was a roaring, raving sight. Bravo to the tourist board for erecting several signs, in three languages, explaining the fabulous natural phenomenon. (Who is the diving champion?) The **Lac de Remoray** (B3) is a *réserve naturelle* where flora and fauna are protected: the Maison de La Réserve is on the east side of the D437, north of Labergement-Ste-Mairie (B3: every day p.m. only).

Shortly before the *maison*, stop at the Obertino Fonderie de Cloches (bell foundry). I treasure one of their superb bronze hand bells. Seek out, too, the Sancey Richard Fromagerie du Mont d'Or at **Metabief** (B3), north of the village. Arrive at 9.30 every day, except Sunday, and witness, from special galleries, the making of three Jura cheeses: *Comté*, a huge hard wheel; *Morbier*, an LP-sized record with an ash streak through the middle; and *Mont d'Or*, a creamy CD-sized *fromage* made only from Nov to Mar. Then drive to the 1463 m **Mont d'Or** (B4); the top is a short walk from the car park. On one October visit, at sunset, I was lucky enough to see the 100-mile-long range of the Swiss and French Alps at their best – glowing pink on the eastern horizon.

The **Lac de St-Point** (B3) is a long lake with numerous restful vistas. Something new is the special *sentier pédestre* (footpath) which has been laid out around the lake – with eight display boards, at various points, explaining differing aspects of the terrain covered (no bikes allowed). Further north, above a natural cleft in the Jura hills, is the imposing fortress of the Château de Joux (B3): towers, ramparts, moats and drawbridges all played a part at this strategic castle, built and rebuilt over the centuries (open Easter to October).

From **Pontarlier** (B3) to **Morteau** (C2) the Doubs is a relaxing river. Stop to have a look at the abbey at Montbenoit (B2): admire the carved choir-stalls and the pillars in the tiny cloisters. Morteau, like its Swiss counterparts, **Le Locle** (C2) and **La Chaux-de-Fonds** (D1), is a clock making centre. The Musée d'Horlogerie is housed in the 16th-century Château Pertusier with a handsome stone façade (July to Sept); Le Locle's watch museum is at the Château des Monts (p.m. only, closed Mon); and the Musée International d'Horlogerie at La Chaux is an ambitious affair (closed Mon).

On your way to Le Locle, stop at the Col des Roches (C2), a narrow gash through the limestone ridge. Here the Moulins Souterrains are an exciting, exhilarating adventure: a series of 300-year-old underground mills which once were busy active affairs (every day May to Oct). Retrace your steps. The 90-ft-high **Saut du Doubs** (C2) – literally, where the river shoots forth a cascade of foaming water – can be reached either by a road on the French side which leaves you with a longish walk to the fall; or by boat from Villers-le-Lac (C2: France) and Les Brenets (C2: Switzerland) – from Easter to October. Both alternatives make use of the winding man-made lake to the north. (Again: see *Dazzling Doubs*.)

I'll finish part two with a few varying snippets. In the French Jura you'll notice the huge chimneys which dominate most farms. Visit one: La Ferme des Guinots, south-east of the crossroads at Les Cerneux-Monnots, on the D414 from Charquemont (D1) to **Le Russey** (C1); it's the first farm on the right side of the D457. Gasp at the size of the structure, called a *tué* or *tuyé*, where hundreds of hams and sausages can be smoked in the high, dark interior. Then try a slice or two (or even lunch) of *saucisse de Morteau* (also called *Jésus de Morteau*) – a tasty pork concoction; *jambon de tuyé* – smoked ham; and *brési* – wafer-thin slices of dried beef; all washed down with Jura wine. (Now with bedrooms.)

Seek out the viewpoint, just south of **Goumois** (77:D4), where the D437A turns north-west (D1). The vista is one of the most rejuvenating in France: pure air; a pleasing panorama; distant, humming river; lush pastures; and giant duvets of trees on both sides of an immense valley. Is this not an image of eternity? Walkers and fishermen are also in heaven hereabouts; and the Doubs' white water is ideal for canoeists.

On the Swiss side visit the enterprising automobile museum at **Muriaux** (D1); open every day (p.m. only Nov to Mar). Seek out, too, the strikingly modern stained glass at the chapel, built in 1971, in Le Peuchapatte (D1), a hamlet of just 30 souls. We all know how neat and tidy the Swiss are: the changes, when you cross the border, are immediately apparent. But in the Swiss Jura even the landscape seems to be more manicured than its French counterpart.

Part three and finish with a scenic glory. Aim for a startling viewpoint, the **Roche du Prêtre** (C1). To the right is the dramatic Cirque de Consolation and, far below you, nestling under an eiderdown of tree tops, is the 17th-century Abbey of Notre Dame de Consolation. Descend to the abbey park – a wonderland of springs, grottoes, waterfalls and woodland paths. The River Dessoubre is no more than a 20-mile-long stream, flowing north to join the Doubs. As you drive the deserted roads downstream you'll pass few houses. You may smell newly-felled pine trees; you can paddle in the stream; you can taste *brési*, *saucisse* or *truite* at an *auberge*; here you can truly put all your senses to the test.