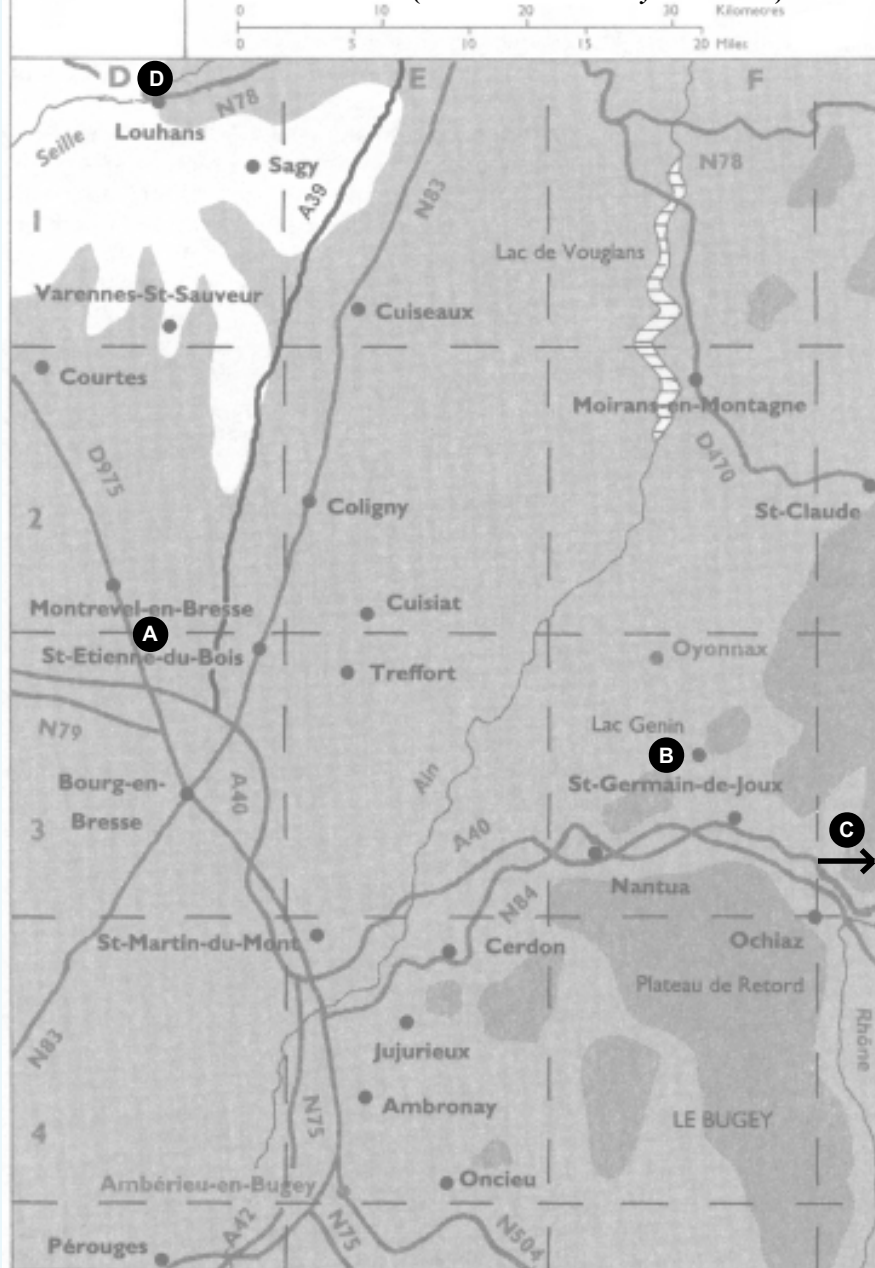


22

Bresse: *musées, cheminées sarrasines* and a boomerang.
Le Bugey: narcissi and jonquils. *Bleu de Gex* and *Morbier*.
Lac Genin emerald. (Refer also to *Valromey* on website.)



The introductory paragraph to map 21 is as valid here. Map 22 is a mixture of unassuming but intriguing country: the eastern half of La Bresse (the map's left side); the south-western flanks of the Jura; and the mountains of **Le Bugey** (F4: bottom right-hand corner).

I'll begin in the relatively flat La Bresse landscape. **Louhans** (D1) makes a good starting point. See the Hôtel-Dieu with its fascinating *apothicairerie* – both of which capture the atmosphere and authenticity of a hospital a century ago (March to Sept: 10.30, 14.30, 16.00 on Mon and Wed to Sat). Admire, too, the old arcaded streets and the handsome *église* clock tower. Visit the Musée de l'Imprimerie – a real newspaper printing workshop (p.m. mid May to end Sept; not Tues). The latter is one of many satellite sites of the enterprising Ecomusée de la Bresse Bourguignonne at the Château de Pierre-de-Bresse (map 17: west of D3). The museum explains the landscape, architecture, traditions, handicraft and activities of Bresse – past and present (p.m. all year).

Two other *ecomusée* sites on 22 are: La Tuilerie (tile factory) at **Varennes-St-Sauveur** (D1: a.m. July/Aug); and Le vigneron et sa vigne (the vine-grower and his vine) at the Château des Princes d'Orange in **Cuisseaux** (E1: p.m. mid May to end Sept; not Mon).

*Moulin*s (mills) played a vital part in the economy of La Bresse in times past. Here are three: the Moulin de Bourgchâteau (now an hotel), beside the Seille and just north of **Louhans** (D1: east of Chalon road) – client or not call in to see the mill machinery; the Moulin de la Croix at Ratte (D1), north-east of Louhans; and the isolated Moulin de Cornon at Romenay (102:C1). Romenay also has two museums: de la Volaille explains the importance of the famed Bresse poultry; du Terroir evokes the agricultural past of the area (p.m. July/Aug).

There are some fine houses and buildings to seek out. The 17th-century Maison du Bailli at **Sagy** (D1); see, too, the restored Bressane farm on the south exit with its small museum of mill machinery at the rear (Sat in July/Aug). Flacey-en-Bresse (E1), east of Sagy, has an especially fine 14th-century *Bourgeoise* house and Romenay has ancient 14th-century gates and a particularly evocative half-timbered *maison*.

The most appealing buildings in La Bresse are the farms with *cheminées sarrasines* (Saracen chimneys). However enigmatic the origin of the chimneys one fact is certain: they were designed and built with local materials by Bressans. There are dozens, each with a different chimney. Here are three of the best. La Ferme de la Forêt (on Michelin maps), east of **Courtes** (D2); the 17th-century farm is also a rural museum (the interior recaptures the character of the place in centuries past; p.m. mid June to mid Sept). La Ferme des Mangettes, on the west side of the N83 south of **St-Etienne-du-Bois** (D3): 16th century, half-timbered, small red bricks, chimney (p.m. July/Aug). La Ferme du Sougey, west of **Montrevel-en-Bresse** (D2: open all year). Many others are near St-Trivier (21:C2); details from the tourist office.

What else can I draw your attention to in La Bresse? One must is the Eglise de Brou, beside the N75 to the south-east of **Bourg-en-Bresse** (D3). This 16th-century Gothic church is full of treasures: admire the stained glass windows, the oak choir stalls, the chapels and tombs, the cool cloisters and, in the adjoining monastery, the Ain Museum. Another priority visit must be to the hill-top citadel of **Pérouges**, south of La Bresse (south of D4). Four hundred years ago Pérouges was a thriving community with a population of 2,000; three centuries later the village had all but fallen into ruin and had no more than 50 inhabitants. Parts of Pérouges were demolished in 1909 but, thankfully, many residents (led by Anthèlme Thibault) fought to preserve and protect the village. Walk the cobbled streets, soak up the dream-like atmosphere of the tufa stone and half-timbered houses and seek out the huge lime tree at the heart of the medieval fortified village.

Let's look now at the wooded Jura hills – a series of north to south ridges and valleys – to the immediate east of the N83 (D3 to E1). Start in **Cuiseaux** (E1). Park the car and walk the narrow streets, a medieval Aladdin's Cave. Enjoy arcades, fountains, old *portes* (gates), ramparts, *lavoir* (wash-house), the Château des Princes d'Orange, the *église* with its choir stalls, the 16th-century Maison de l'Echauguette, old houses with restored stone work and much else besides. (Ask at the tourist office for English notes on the signposted route.)

You'll see few tourists once you head into the hills. Here's a typical route – one of many. Leave the N83 south of **Coligny** (E2) and head for Salavre, Verjon and Pressiat (all E2). These villages, like others to the east, are still many decades back in time: roses, lilies, flowers, vines, goats, chickens, wash-houses, churches and old houses appeal. Pressiat is rated a two-star *village fleuri* – an accolade shared with others in the Ain *département* and to the immediate west: Marboz (D2), Viriat, Attignat and St-Etienne-du-Bois (all D3).

Now press on to **Cuisiat** (E2) and the fascinating Musée du Revermont (the local *pays*). Once the village primary school, the neat and tidy building is a museum on the life of the local people during the last two centuries; I found the orchard and kitchen garden just as tempting as the interior exhibits (p.m. May to Oct). **Treffort** (E3), too, is in a time warp. Though Treffort has no official *village fleuri* tag the place is nevertheless a flower-filled picture. Between the village centre and the D52 seek out the *fromagerie*: you can see the owners making *Comté* cheese, *fromage blanc*, cream and butter and, in turn, you can buy their wares and other cheeses as well.

In the past I have driven the attractive roads alongside the River **Ain**. Gorges de l'Ain says the map (E3): inevitably there are many dams, all with snaking lakes behind them, as you head upstream. The **Lac de Vouglans** (F1/F2) is much the largest, most scenic and offers a range of watersport opportunities; the various blue dots on Michelin maps indicate swimming facilities. Something new is the fascinating Musée du Jouet at **Moirans-en-Montagne** (F2), a striking structure which tells you, with the help of hundreds of exhibits, all you need to know about

toys and how they are made (a.m./p.m. May to Sept but not Mon; a.m./p.m. Oct to Apl but not Mon, Sat p.m. and Sun a.m.).

St-Claude (east of F2) has long been a favourite of mine. 200 years ago the town prospered because of its reputation for making the world's finest pipe briars. St-Claude tumbles down from the hills to the floor of the Bienne and Tacon valleys. There's a fine Gothic cathedral (with stained-glass windows and glorious choir stalls) and a pipe museum. Make a special point of crossing, on foot, the Pont de Pierre (between town exits 1 and 4) and the Grand Pont (exit 3): views of the town, rivers, hills and older, smaller bridges below you. I have spent many happy hours, in every season, in the maze of lanes to the south of St-Claude: tranquil forested slopes and wild spring flowers galore beguile. Another new attraction is the Maison des Fromages at Les Moussières (east of F2), about 15 km south of St-Claude; learn how *Bleu de Gex*, *Comté*, *Morbier* and other cheeses are made.

Without fail head for **Lac Genin** (F3), the smallest of small lakes. An unspoilt emerald, the lake is protected by a circular couch of wooded cushions of beech, pine and spruce. During the week your only companions will be goldcrests hovering around your head like humming birds. Busier sites lie to the south-west: the lake at **Nantua** (F3) – try a cruise on a small paddle boat, the *Mississippi*; and both La Cuivrierie (where copper goods, of every kind, are made: open every day) and the *grottes* at **Cerdon** (E4: May to Sept). See, too, the huge Monument de la Résistance beside the N84, east of Cerdon.

The bottom right-hand corner of 22 is the northern half of Bugey. I shall tell you more about this mysterious *pays* in map sheet chapter 26. But I'll finish 22 by providing you with a few access options to Bugey. Two are from the north: either the D101 from **Ochiaz** (F3) or the D55 from **St-Germain-de-Joux** (F3). In early June the pastures around the Col de Bérentin (F3) resemble fields of snow; in reality gargantuan duvets of wild narcissi. A few weeks earlier vast swathes of yellow jonquils flood the same **Plateau de Retord** (F4).

Another access is from the west. Start at **St-Martin-du-Mont** (E4), south-east of Bourg-en-Bresse. Enjoy the views and, if you're a walker, study the plan of eight marked walks outside the *mairie*. Use the lane to Neuville-sur-Ain (E4); at the bridge over the Suran there's an enchanting vista of a weir and jade-shaded pool. **Jujurieux** (E4) claims to have 12 châteaux: make the detour if only to see two of the 12 – the Château de Valence and Château de Chenavel. Detour south to the old abbey church at **Ambronay** (F4) and then back into the hills for a dramatic climb to Boyeux-St-Jérôme. Continue south-east to Résinand. (Did you spot Le Boomerang, an Aussie restaurant, just north of the latter?) On through wooded hills to **Oncieu** (E4). This little working hamlet, shining with pride and character, is full of visual surprises; be sure to walk the circular lane.