

ST BASILE AND MAISONSEULE

A short walk above the pretty village of St Basile, passing the superb fortified residence of Maisonseule.

Walking time: 2 hours
Distance: 5,8km - 3.6 miles
Overall altitude difference: 150m - 490ft

St Basile 600m/1960ft

Start at the information panel in front of the Mairie. Walk uphill and at the sign turn right.

Maisonseule 3km

The path continues uphill and joins the tarred lane. Turn right towards the church.

The origins of the church date back to the 12th C. There is a lovely 15th C chapel in the left aisle which was endowed by the lords of Maisonseule.

From this point you have a magnificent overall view of the Doux valley.

Leave the church and take the path downhill. You pass by an abandoned farm (LES MARTINS), then cross a stream. At the next fork in the path, bear left and follow the brook, passing through a plantation of douglas fir and then an older chestnut wood. Continue through meadows, cross the road and take the lane opposite going downhill. Walk through the hamlet of les LAURENTS, follow the lane then, just before it drops downhill, turn left onto a stony track which brings you up to a tarred road. Cross this and continue uphill until you join the lane leading to MAISONSEULE. Follow this to the left as far as the house.

Take a moment to admire this fine feudal residence, its strategic setting and the splendid view.



Continue on the forest track. Cross a lane, then take the path to the left which skirts the wood. Where the track forks take the path to the left which drops down to the little road. Follow this downhill to return to St Basile.

At the entrance to the village, stands the war memorial. Many of the names are the same as that of the family farm (les Martins for example). The long list of those who did not return from the First World War battlefields is typical of all French villages. The effect of this loss of manpower was devastating, and marked the start of the decline of rural France.

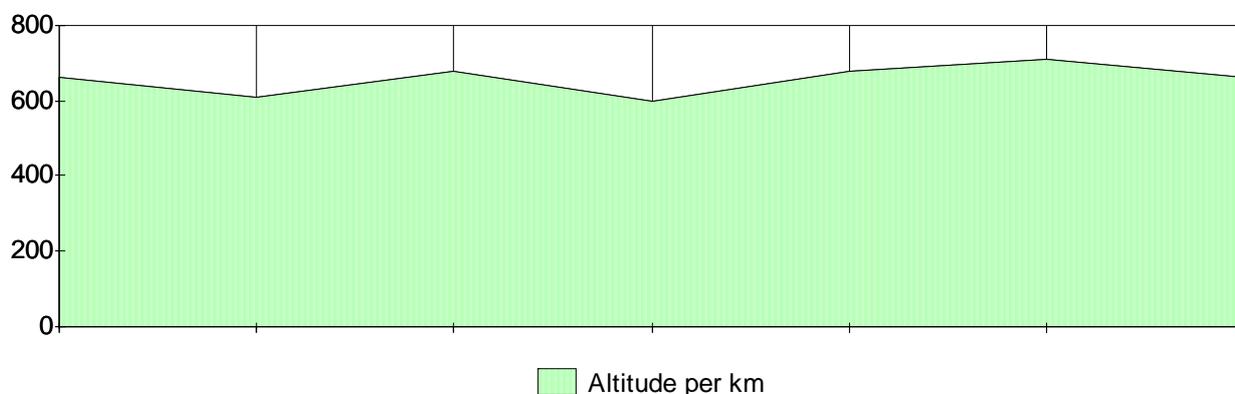
Maisonseule

The name means "solitary house", but this fine feudal manor is called a "chateau" locally. Originally an important fortified tower residence dating from the 13thC, the house occupies a splendidly dominating position with wide views over the river valleys of the Doux and the Sumène (which meet in Lamastre). The surrounding estate is well watered and the forest still yields abundant game and timber.

The primary purpose of the building was clearly defensive: its walls are 1,5m/5ft thick at their base, and remnants of the original battlements, corner towers and arrow slits are easily visible. But the scale of Maisonseule indicates that this was much more than just the residence of a local overlord. It is likely that the Counts of the Valentinois made use of the fortress to keep an eye on their territory in the Vivarais.

Maisonseule was modified and enlarged by successive generations, most notably in the mid 1600's when it was transformed into a fine residence. This involved the creation of a "piano nobile" with large high-ceilinged rooms. The double-height mullioned windows were made at this time.

Having served as a school in the 1950's and 60's Maisonseule was bought and restored by Yves Lecoq, a well-known impersonator and the creator of "Les Guignols", the French version of Spitting Image. Unfortunately it is rarely open to visitors.



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