

BETWEEN WORK AND LEISURE

This walk takes you along the history of a mighty river which has followed its own inclinations over time. Crossing boundaries, the river Arve has undoubtedly played a forceful part in the region's historical, urban and industrial development.

For 9 km, the meandering Arve will lead you from la Jonction (the Junction) to the border between France and Switzerland. The energy of the perpetually roaring waters evoke both work and leisure, which have always attracted inhabitants and travellers to these shores. The river bed yielded gold, sand and fish, the waters powered mills, but were also used for washing or enjoyed for bathing and day-dreaming.

The tumultuous and unpredictable ways of the Arve hindered industrial development, which little by little gave way to leisure activities. As the land available in the centre of town became too scarce for sports-fields, the river banks were turned into recreation areas, and the Arve came to be associated with sporting activities. The floating trunks of the 17th century have become canoes, kayaks and rafts in the 20th century, manned by sports enthusiasts eager for excitement.

This walk crosses three municipalities of the canton of Geneva - Geneva, Carouge and Veyrier - yet you won't be aware of it for the river takes no heed of borders and territorial boundaries. It wasn't always like this. Over the centuries, Geneva, Sardinia, Spain, Savoy, France and Switzerland battled to establish their dominion over this area and change the boundaries in their favour, with the Arve at stake. Legend has it that during the night of 11 and 12 December 1602, the troops of Savoy were able to advance right up to the walls of Geneva thanks to the river, which covered their noise.

This assault, defeated thanks to the valiant resistance of the inhabitants of Geneva and annually celebrated as l'Escalade (the Scaling of the Walls), is now only a distant memory. Rather than a barrier, the Arve today is a link in the Franco-Genevan basin.

TO LEARN MORE...

- Brulhart, Armand et Erica Deuber-Pauli (1993), Ville et canton de Genève, Berne, Benteli, coll. Arts et monuments, 2e édition.
- Corboz, André (1968), Invention de Carouge : 1772-1792, Lausanne, Payot.
- Mayor, Jean-Claude (1995) Bestiaire genevois, Genève, Slatkine.
- Mayor, Jean-Claude (1986), Carouge de A à Z, Genève, Slatkine.
- Santschi, Catherine (sous la direction de) (1990), Veyrier, Veyrier, Commune de Veyrier.

FOR ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW...

- Département de l'intérieur, de l'agriculture, de l'environnement et de l'énergie (2000), L'Arve : une rivière prenant sa source dans la combe de la Balme, massif du Mont-Blanc, et se jetant dans le Rhône, Genève, DIAE, coll. Fiche-rivières, 7.
- Commune de Veyrier (1988), L'Arve, rivière : cette méconnue [exposition], Veyrier, Comité de la Mansarde.

THE PEDESTRIAN PLAN COLLECTION

This itinerary is part of the Pedestrian Plan collection of walks conceived by the Planning Office of the City of Geneva.

- Walking in Geneva
- Geneva on foot ? It's simple and quick
- From estate to estate
Geneva - Bois-de-la-Bâtie - Jardin Botanique
- From site to museum
Geneva on foot - in the heart of its heritage
- From quay to runway
Geneva on foot - between travel and nature
- From city to city
Geneva on foot - from the lake to the Arve
- Walking Downstream
Geneva on foot - nature and technology

0 100 200 400 600 800 m
scale 1:13'000



① LA JONCTION – *The Junction*

The pier prolonging the Junction peninsula used to keep the violent spate of the Arve river from pushing back the Rhône waters and damaging the machinery of the BFM – Bâtiment des Forces Motrices (Power Plant) which produced the water power used by a great number of factories.

The Sentier des Saules (Willow Walk) inaugurated in 1919 invites strollers and fishermen. The rue de la Truite (Trout street) is a reminder that fishing was already popular here at the beginning of the 13th century.



② CONTROL CENTRE OF THE TPG – *Genevan Public Transport Network*

The head office of the TPG has been located at Bachet-de-Pesay since 1990, while the central traffic control unit is located at the Junction. Of the 1300 TPG employees, 900 are conductors. The roof of the maintenance unit is a photovoltaic plant, the largest ever to be coupled with a public transport network.

The Beaux-arts style edifice of 1900, stranded in the midst of this industrial site, first housed the Geneva Electric Tramway Company (CGTE), forefather of the TPG. The CGTE network was the most extensive in Switzerland and even linked Geneva to the region right across the border.



③ VÉLODROME 8 m1 *Cycle-Racing Track*

The 1906 World Cycling championships were held near the TPG unit. Up till 1917 a cycle-racing track, doubling as a skating rink in winter, was located where the Ecole des Métiers (Building Trades School) now stands – formerly the Gardy Factory for electrical equipment. The 400 m. racing track was inaugurated in 1896 during the National Exhibition.

The first National Exhibition was held in Zürich in 1883, and the second in Geneva. The venue stretched from the grounds of Plainpalais to the Vernets and the Queue d'Arve. It attracted no less than 2.3 million visitors with pavilions dedicated to the Fine Arts, Industry, Science, Machines, Electricity and Agriculture. The main attractions were the Swiss Village – complete with alpine garden, mountain waterfall and cows – as well as the Negro Village.



④ BOIS DE LA BÂTIE 8 m1 *Bâtie Woods*

The bridge erected over the Arve in 1873 leads you to the Bâtie Woods, a favourite local haunt with its two animal parks and the football field.

Who could guess that mushrooms (champignons de Paris) were once cultivated below this mound ? Disused gravel-pits, dug in the moraine in the 19th century, provided ideal conditions for this type of culture, started by the Parisian Armand Poitevin in 1936. Close by, under the Quidort ramp, lies the last mushroom bed still to be cultivated, in 1600 m. of underground caves where the Frenchman Jean-Claude Parmentier grows brown mushrooms and pleurotus.

- *Intersection with the walking tour « From estate to estate »*



⑤ FIRMENICH

Right in front of you rises the head office tower of Firmenich, a company specialised in food flavourings and perfumes. It started off on a modest scale in 1895, in the Servette neighbourhood, with the financial backing of Martin Naef and the ideas of the young chemist Philippe Chuit. In 1897, the two of them bought up some land at the Queue d'Arve to build a chemical plant. Fred Firmenich entered the partnership in 1900. The company was fortunate to work with the 1939 Chemistry Nobel Prize, Leopold Ruzicka (1887-1976), a Swiss chemist of Austrian origin. Firmenich currently ranks among the four world leaders in the field of perfumes and flavourings.



⑥ THÉÂTRE DU LOUP AND LA PARFUMERIE

La Parfumerie (Perfumery), a disused production unit of Firmenich, was converted into one of Geneva's cultural hot spots with very few alterations. On the other side of the street lies the lightweight modular structure of the Théâtre du Loup (Theatre of the Wolf), the least costly theatre to be built in Switzerland. Thanks to this, the independent company it houses, founded in 1978, has the advantage of working in its own premises.



⑦ QUEUE D'ARVE SPORTS CENTRE

The centre, opened in 1990, houses a cycle track (166.67 m.), bowling and skittle alleys, badminton courts, a hockey rink and artificial climbing walls.

In the 1930s plans were drawn up for a river harbour in this marshy area which became one of the most picturesque neighbourhoods of Geneva. Hard hit by the economic crisis, the unemployed, peddlers, strolling players and gypsies settled here in make-shift lodgings and caravans. Vegetable plots, rabbits and goats gave a country air to this genuine village, which even boasted its own chapel.



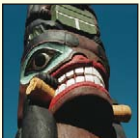
⑧ VERNETS SPORTS CENTRE

By the end of the 1930s the need for a permanent indoor sports centre came to be felt in Geneva. This was first achieved only in 1958, with an indoor skating rink under a 432 ton aluminium and steel roof – no mean technical feat. Several « ice » world championships have been held here since (hockey, figure skating and curling). The first Olympic indoor swimming pool was opened in 1966, followed in 1970 by the outdoor diving basin. Ironically, before the « sports crazed » found solace here from the bad weather, it was the site of a psychiatric asylum.



⑨ SCIENCES II 8 m1 *Faculty of Science*

Completed in stages between 1967 and 1979, this University building houses the departments of chemistry, pharmacy, biochemistry and molecular biology. A narrow stretch of greenery runs along the Arve on the other side of the street. With its polished lower part, the sculpture « L'Oeil d'Arve » (The Eye of the Arve) by the Zürich artist Arnold Goldschmied (1901-1970) illustrates the erosion caused by the waters of the river.



⑩ ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM

Over 60'000 objects and documents from the five continents are preserved in this museum housed in an old school building of 1895-1899. Scattered all over the city, the ethnographic artefacts were first gathered in 1901 by Eugène Pittard at the Villa Mon Repos by the edge of the lake. In 1977, the Museum received the extraordinary donation of 7'000 household objects collected by the hydraulics engineer, contractor, alpinist and speleologist Georges Amoudruz (1900-1975) who, as an enlightened amateur, studied the rural culture of the Rhône Alps.

The entire collection is to be housed in a new museum on Sturm square, chosen as the result of an international architecture competition held in 1997. The project « L'Esplanade des Mondes » (Esplanade of the Worlds) was the winner.



⑪ RADIO AND TELEVISION

The Swiss French-language Television tower was opened in 1973. The demonstration transmitter set up by the French Television on the Salève in 1949 functioned as a catalyst for the fledgling Swiss French-language Television before that. The first images were broadcast in 1954 thanks to the antenna rigged up on the roof of the School of Physics. The Television broadcasting studio was inaugurated there in 1955, next to the Radio studio (1938).

Radio Genève went on the air in 1925, when radio was still in its pioneering stages. Marcel-W. Suès (1899-1989), long-time chronicler of Geneva's international community, held the first-ever interview with a sportsman for the Swiss radio. This honour went to the Swiss-German Henri Suter, from Aarau, winner of the Paris-Roubaix cycling race in 1923. Squibbs, as he was known, was also the initiator of the famous howl « hououou... » during footballs games. Recent statistics have shown that radio (with 138 minutes of daily listening) and television (161 minutes) are favourite pastimes of the French-speaking Swiss.



⑫ CANTONAL ARSENAL

These one-time barracks, built in 1876, were made available to a school of recruits from Lausanne (in the canton of Vaud) during the tragic events of 9 November 1932. The young soldiers were sent out to disperse the crowd demonstrating against a right wing meeting held at the City Hall of Plainpalais. The recruits were met with paving stones and stones from the Arve, and were subsequently ordered to fire on the crowd. There were 13 dead and 70 wounded. A monument at the southern angle of the Plaine de Plainpalais (Plainpalais Grounds) commemorates the event. It has become the rallying point of the demonstrations organised every 1 May on Workers' Day.



⑬ ÉCOLE DE MÉDECINE 8 m1 *Medical School*

The opening of this monumental building in classical style was held on 1 August 1876, at the same time as the inauguration of the Medical Faculty, founded on the initiative of the scientist Carl Vogt (1817-1895). Generations of doctors have studied here, as recorded by the words « physiology », « pathology » and « anatomy » engraved on the front of the building.

Between 1880 and 1914, many citizens of the Russian Empire came to study at the University of Geneva, notably women who were specially numerous in undertaking medical studies. These so-called « Orientals » often boarded in the Plainpalais neighbourhood, hence called « Little Russia ».



⑭ PLAINE DE PLAINPALAIS 8 m1 *Plainpalais Grounds*

This peculiar plot of land is given over to market and leisure activities (French bowls, skate board, children's sports ground, as well as circuses and fun fairs), and has always served as a pleasure ground. As far back as 1637, a game of « mail », somewhat like croquet, was installed here. The Federal Shooting Contest of 1887 and the 58th Federal Gymnastics Contest of 1925 were both held here. The players of the Servette football team, founded in 1890, first practised rugby-football (the ancestor of today's football) on these grounds.

In the past this was marshy land (the etymology of Plainpalais), stretching right down to the Junction. It was cultivated as market-gardens by Protestant refugees fleeing the South of France. These so-called « plantaporêts », i.e. leek-planters, introduced unknown vegetables : artichokes, broad beans and other bean varieties, as well as an edible thistle – cardons.

- *Intersection with the walking tour « from site to museum »*



⑮ UNI MAIL

This is one of the biggest university buildings in Switzerland, completed in two stages in 1992 and 1999. Some 6'000 students study the humanities and social sciences under its roof. From 1926 to 1988 the Exhibition Hall stood here and its main event was the International Motor Show. Between 1950 and 1969 one of the wings housed the Sports Hall, the first indoor sports centre in Geneva with the first artificial ice rink (1954), yearly dismantled in March for the needs of the Motor Show.



⑯ HUGO-DE-SENGER SCHOOL

The school was built in 1904-1905 and named after a Bavarian conductor and composer (1832-1892) who greatly contributed to the development of choral music in Geneva and Lausanne. The Geneva Puppet Theatre presents its marvellous productions here, inspired by stories and legends from around the world. Marcelle Moynier (1888-1980) founded the company, then called Petits Tréteaux (The Little Stage), in 1930.



⑰ CAROUGE BRIDGE

The bridge was built on Napoleon's initiative in 1808 and 1817, when Geneva was under French domination. It was widened in 1862 to make way for the « American train » connecting the place Neuve (New square) in the city of Geneva to the town of Carouge. After Paris, Liverpool and London, Geneva thus became the fourth city to benefit from horse-drawn trams.

The bridge withstood the Austrians' assault in 1814 as well as a string of bombs dropped by mistake by the RAF in 1940. It marks the symbolic border between Geneva and Carouge. That's why the sportsmen from Carouge used to wipe their feet in the middle of the bridge before going home.



⑱ NOIE-TES-PUCES – *Drown-your-Fleas*

Where does the strange name of this park come from ? Years ago, near where the Fontenette bridge now stands (1970), a huge boulder, dubbed « NTP », rose out of the waters of the Arve. Children used to dive from it, drowning their fleas in the process, hence the strange name. The huge stone was shattered during consolidation work on the banks. In his childhood memories, « Souvenirs d'un gamin de Carouge », Paul Maerky (1858-1948), a Carougeois engraver – also an accomplished oboe player, acrobat, gymnast and fencer – wrote that NTP simply means « Napoléon : Travaux Publics » (Napoleon : Public Works).

A sports ground for children and a pumping station linked to the water table of the Genevan area are to be found in this park.

- *Intersection with the walking tour « from city to city ».*



⑲ JEWISH CEMETERY OF CAROUGE

This cemetery was built in 1788 and used till the 1970s. Its 720 tombs were renovated in 1997.

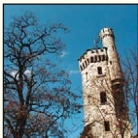
Victor-Amédée III, who was crowned King of Savoy and Sardinia in 1774, wished to turn the borough of Carouge into an economic centre able to rival the Calvinist city of Geneva and the French town of Versoix. A new town was thus « invented » (A. Corboz). To further its development, the Catholic town of Carouge opened its doors in a spirit of tolerance to freemasons, Protestants and Jews. The latter settled here in 1779, hailing from Alsace, England, Italy, the Netherlands and Hamburg. The first Jewish immigrants were cloth-merchants, mercers, shop and tradesmen, whereas their offspring turned to the industrial sector, notably watch-making.



⑳ PROMENADE DES ORPAILLEUR – *Gold-Washers Walk*

The quay was built in 1970. For centuries gold washers panned the auriferous alluvial deposits of the Arve in search of gold dust. Though this activity was never profitable, it lured many inhabitants of the Ardèche (in France) at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). With modern times, many « a brave man who preferred to take risks for gold rather than work for silver » (J.C. Mayor) was obliged to set up business in the fun fair.

The street called Passage des Tireurs de Sable recalls the harassing work of the sand draggers, who shovelled sand from the riverbed to be used by the contractors who built Geneva, before the arrival of mechanical dredgers and crushing mills in 1914.



㉑ CHAMPEL-LES-BAINS 8 m1 *The Champel Baths*

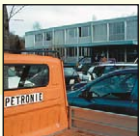
The Neo-Gothic Tower of Champel (1877) rising above the cliff to your left is the only reminder of one of the biggest hydrotherapeutic centres in Europe, opened in 1873, which benefited from the therapeutic properties of the Arve waters. Up to the First World War, the Beau-Séjour Hotel (200 rooms) catered to a cosmopolitan clientele and celebrities such as the writers Guy de Maupassant and Romain Rolland, the composer Camille Saint-Saëns, or the historian Hippolyte Taine. The Roseraie pension accommodated visitors of more modest means, such as the author Joseph Conrad. A flight of terraces connected these lodging facilities on the heights with the hydropathic establishment beside the Arve. Cold and hot baths, shower-baths, Turkish baths and fumigations were prescribed as cures for gout, neuroses, melancholy and even sterility. In 1950, the Beau-Séjour Hotel was converted into an annexe of the Cantonal Hospital. The bathing complex was torn down in 1991 and a block of flats was erected instead.



㉒ FONTENETTE SPORTS CENTRE

This centre offers football fields, bowling-greens, a children's sports ground and swimming pools, with one of the longest slides in the canton. Construction work started in 1963 and necessitated filling in the 780 m. long Fontenette canal, dug out in 1809 to power the spinning mills and other factories of Carouge.

As of 1957, following the projected industrialisation of the Acacias-Praille area, some hundred temporary workers were quartered here in 28 prefabricated lodgings. With time, 168 families of seasonal workers came to live in the Arve dale. With the construction and extension of the sports centre, the population of this real « emergency town » (J.C. Mayor) was relocated elsewhere, and a football field took over the last block of flats.



㉓ CAR AND BOAT 8 m1 *registration service*

Located here since 1964, this service is responsible for the registration of number plates and the technical control of the cars in the canton.

There are about 207'000 cars in the canton, i.e. 506 vehicles for 1000 inhabitants (1999) ! This craze is nothing new; in 1900 already, there were more bicycles in Geneva than in any other Swiss city. With a grand total of 102 cars, Geneva also ranked as the most highly motorised city of that time. The Swiss Touring Club (1896) and the Swiss Motoring Club (1898) were founded in Geneva. The city organised the first Motor Show in 1905, and even locally-made cars were exhibited.



㉔ BROCHER ISLE OR BEAVER ISLAND

The bridge of the Arve dale (1960) affords a good view of the island that once belonged to Henri Brocher, last descendant of the ancient proprietors of the hillside. This is where the last vineyards of Carouge grew, producing the wine Clos Val-d'Arve.

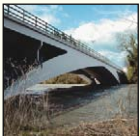
The Brocher Isle was bought by Carouge in 1971. It is also named after the beaver, Europe's largest rodent, which disappeared from Switzerland during the 19th century. The naturalist and artist Robert Hainard (1906-1999), who had enthusiastically studied beaver colonies in Sweden, suggested their reintroduction in the region in 1949. The first ones were set free in the river Versoix in 1958. In 1972, the French reintroduced them in the various streams and rivers of upper Savoy. Today, the « French » beavers have established colonies in the basin of the Arve, notably on Genevan territory around Carouge.



㉕ BOUT-DU-MONDE SPORTS CENTRE

This centre specialises in athletics, football, tennis, fencing, archery and frisbee. It is also used for school sports events, the « AtletiCAGenève » meeting and National Day celebrations of Portugal and the United States.

During the second World War, the Bout-du-Monde was a transit centre for thousands of refugees, notably Jewish children from France. The refugees who entered through the Genevan border were quarantined for medical and « political » reasons at Val-Fleuri (Flower dale), the largest refugee camp organised by the Swiss authorities. From there they were either expelled, or taken to civil work camps or other places for a temporary stay. In 1950 Val-Fleuri was converted into a retirement home which nowadays offers medical facilities.



㉖ VESSY BRIDGE

Already in Roman times a farming estate was run on the Grande-Fin peninsula. The Vecchio farm is proof that sheep-breeding and land cultivation have not entirely disappeared from the region. The idea of connecting Grande-Fin and the Bout-du-Monde thanks to a bridge was that of Francis Vecchio, son of a Piedmont immigrant who settled in Geneva in 1899. The bridge, partly financed by the Vecchio family, was built between 1935 and 1937 and put an end to the isolation of this bit of land.

The single arch with three girders planned by Robert Maillard (1872-1940) imparts an airy elegance to this avant-garde structure and, in economising construction material, strongly reduced the building costs.



㉗ VESSY SPORTS CENTRE

Though it is located on the communal territory of Veyrier, this centre of 25 hectares, opened in 1981, is administered by the Sports Department of the City of Geneva. Football and tennis are played alongside more exotic sports such as rugby, soccer, frisbee, base-ball and boomerang, while the aeronauts of the Geneva Aerostatic Group perform evolutions aloft. Some 3'000 sports enthusiasts exert themselves here each week. Families use the grassy stretches for walks and picnics, while children enjoy their own sports ground.

In 1978, 50'000 gymnasts gathered here in a festive spirit for the 69th Federal Gymnastics Contest.



㉘ ARVE WATER TREATMENT PLANT – *and Feed Pump of the Water Table*

Since 1980 the waters of the river are treated here and subsequently fed back into the water table of the Arve (or the Genevois, i.e. the Genevan region) between the Eaux-Vives neighbourhood and the village of Chancy. The quality of the water is continuously monitored 1.5 km. upstream. Twenty percent of the Canton's drinking water comes from this underground source. The French towns of Annemasse and Saint-Julien just across the border also benefit from it.



㉙ VESSY PUMPING STATION

The Centre for Sustainable Development is established in this abandoned pumping station. This pilot institution stands at the cross-roads of energy, environment and industrial heritage.

The Arve Water Society set up its second pumping station here in 1868, after one had opened at « La Machine », in the heart of the City, in 1843. A 220 m. dam helped to power the hydraulic turbines, later replaced by generators. When the pumping station's capacity was increased in 1902, it started to pump water directly from the water table. A mural by an unknown artist was painted on one of the buildings in praise of the virtues of water for hygiene, work and leisure.

- *Cross the footbridge to discover the other bank (Annexe of the Ethnography Museum)*



㉚ BOIS DES PINS 8 m1 *Pine Woods*

This meandering path opened in the 70s affords a wonderful view of Mount Salève, in nearby France, a favourite haunt with the inhabitants of Geneva.

A cogwheel train took them up there for more than half a century. The second line of the electric railway of the Salève, installed in 1894, went from Veyrier, a Genevan village, to Monnetier, a little resort on the Salève. It was powered by one of the first French electric plants installed on the Arve, at Arthaz close to Monnetier. The road and the cable car opened in 1932 put an end to the cogwheel railway.



㉛ VILLETTE WASTE WATER TREATMENT PLANT

This plant is the second most important waste water treatment plant of the 15 dotting the Canton (Aire is the first). It was put into service in 1962 and its capacity increased in 1979 and it now daily treats 15'000 cubic meters of sewage, generating five truck-loads of sewage sludge transported to Nant de Châtillon. Some of the waste is highly « undegradable »– how did an iron and a capped shell ever end up here ?



㉜ SIERNE BRIDGE

The bridge has a long and chequered history. It started out as a wooden structure spanning the Arve and the Seymaz, built in 1782 by inhabitants compelled to do forced labour. Five years later it was already unusable. A new bridge was erected in 1887 for the steam tramway between Geneva and Veyrier. Connecting the region across the French border as of 1891 and electrified in 1898, it was very popular with tourists and walkers visiting the Salève.

The area somewhat upstream on the left bank of the Arve was a busy site from the end of the 18th century : flour and tobacco mills hummed alongside tanneries, silk reeling machinery, rope manufactures, smithing hammers and washerwoman's paddles. A devastating fire hit the manufactures in 1859, but only the industrial flour mill put this hive of activity to rest.



㉝ SIERNE ESTATE

In the Middle Ages, a relatively important settlement already rose on the heights of this promontory overlooking the Arve. Because of its strategic position, Sierne was fortified as the place name makes clear, for it derives from the Latin *circinare*, i.e. to surround, to encircle. The parish, dedicated to Saint Peter, was abandoned during the Reformation.

- *Intersection with the walking tour « étangs des îles » (France) (Fiches rivières n° 7... DIAE)*