

C053-ST Chain of Puys



For more than 40 km on a north – south stretch, over one hundred volcanoes align to form what is known as the Chaîne des Puys. The youngest of these volcanoes is less than 5000 years old. Several hundred meters higher than the hard rock plateau on which they stand, these volcanoes are all different, even in their types of craters. Covered by forest and meadow, they offer vast green spaces. Towards the south, the Monts Dore stand as the remains of a volcano that was active several millions of years ago, which ice and water have eroded, giving way to magnificent deep valleys, waterfalls, lakes and the Puy de Sancy, the highest summit of the Massif Central.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival at VOLVIC. This small village is located at the entry of the Parc des Volcans d’Auvergne and on a lava flow which came out of la Nugère volcano. Volvic is famous for its natural springs, in which the water is of the highest purity and contains few minerals. The city is also known for its hard stone. Many houses, the Saint Priest Church, as well as the very unique cemetery are all made of this stone - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel.*

Day 2 - VOLVIC - ORCINES (21 km – alt. gain : 700 m). All along this walk, you will discover extinguished volcanoes whose shapes create the landscape of Auvergne. You will begin your walk through the woods, climbing the Puy de la Nugère so to descend towards the La Nugère Pass. You will continue making your way across other Puys volcanoes : Puy de Junes, Puy de la Coquille, Puy Chopine, all of them former craters. You will then walk down to the granite plateau and will pass round the Puy des Goules to join Orcines, a pleasant village located a few kilometres away from Clermont-Ferrand - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel*

Day 3 - ORCINES - LASCHAMP (20 km – alt. gain : 500 m). The day will be long but instructive, beginning with a visit of Vulcania, a resort where you will discover the fascinating world of volcanoes and earth sciences. You will then start walking. You will pass around the Puy de Come and Le Grand Suchet before climbing the Puy de Dôme, which stands 1464 meters high. The ascent is quite hard but worth the effort! The panorama from this height is outstanding and lets you discover the whole Puy Chain, more than one hundred volcanoes! This sacred mountain was coroneted by a temple dedicated to Mercury, of which only a few ruins remain and in no way represent the splendor and richness of what it once was. You will then follow an old roman path to the Ceysnat Pass and arrive in Laschamp for a well-deserved rest - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel.*

Day 4 : LASCHAMP – AYDAT LAKE (18 km – alt. gain : 300 m). You will continue your journey through the volcanoes, crossing through the forest, and passing around most of the Puys: Puy de Mercoeur, Puy de Pourcharet, Puy du Montjurer. You will admire two volcanoes with open craters: the Puy de Lassolas and the Puy de la Vache, truly one of a kind. A part of the crater was destroyed by a lava flow or an explosion. You will continue to the Puy de Vichatel and the Puy de Charmont, accessed by the la Ventouse Pass, still by way of the forest, and arrive at the Aydat Lake, a volcanic barrier lake - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2 star hotel on the lake side.*

Day 5 - AYDAT LAKE – SAINT NECTAIRE (24 km – alt. gain : 300 m). You will cross Aydat and the villages of Phialex and Fohet before crossing a big plateau covered with pastures and broken into two parts by the Gorges de la Monne. Along the way, you will discover the Allée Couverte de la Grotte. You will traverse the village of Olloix whose church holds a beautiful recumbent statue. You will pass around the Puy d’Olloix and will walk to Saint Nectaire, crossing the villages of Lenteuge and Sauvagnat. Saint Nectaire is actually the union of two villages : Saint Nectaire le Haut, dominated by a great Romanesque church, and Saint Nectaire le Bas, a spa resort with more than 40 volcanic springs *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel.*

Day 6 - SAINT NECTAIRE – BESSE EN CHANDESSE (23 km – alt. gain : 500 m). Crossing the hamlet of Chautignat, you will reach Murol, situated on a picturesque spot and dominated by a lovely 13th century fortified castle. From the top of the keep, you will have a beautiful panoramic view of the La Couze Valley, Les Monts Dore and the Chambon Lake, at which you will arrive by crossing the Bois de Bouves (Bouves Wood). You will follow the south bank of the lake to the charming village of Chambon-sur-Lac, and will walk up to the Saousses Plateau. Then, you will make your way to Le Saut du Cheix (Cheix Waterfall) and the hamlet of Courbanges, through forest and pastures. Finally, you will descend into the valley of Besse-en-Chandesse, a little medieval village which has conserved its ramparts and many old houses made of lava - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel.*



Day 7 - BESSE – SUPER BESSE (17 km – alt. gain : 550 m). You now find yourself in the Massif des Monts Dore. You will leave Besse by passing through the hamlet of Olpilière and you will cross the pasture-covered Montagne des Fraux (Fraux Mountain) to reach Pavin Lake, one of the nicest of Auvergne. Encircled by forest, it appeared after an explosion which cut in the North flank of the Puy de Montchal a huge crater that progressively filled with water. You will pass around it, following a nice, shady little path and then admire it from the top of the Puy de Montchal. Indeed, from here you will have a gorgeous panoramic view of the surrounding area and the volcanoes of Auvergne. You will then descend into the valley to walk up to Super-Besse, passing Notre-Dame-de-Vassivière and the Hermines Lake on the way - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel.*

Day 8 - SUPER BESSE – LE MONT DORE (7 hour walk – alt. gain : 600 m). By the Couhay and la Cabane Passes, you will climb to the summit of Puy de Sancy. Standing at 1885 meters, it is the highest point of the Massif Central. The panorama is gorgeous and largely worth the effort! You will continue along the crests dominating the beautiful Chaudefour Valley and across the Durbise Plateau, a vast stretch of poor grazing lands. You will then arrive at the La Croix St Robert Pass, and the Puy de l'Angle. You will now begin your descent towards the Mont Dore by passing the Grande Cascade (waterfall) and the wooded flanks of the Dordogne Valley whose source lies at the foot of Le Sancy. The Mont Dore spa-town, stretched out along the river; is your very pleasant destination for the evening. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a two-star hotel.*

Day 9 - LE MONT DORE. Tour ends after breakfast

Season

From May to October but be careful this area is very crowded in summer time and we recommend you (if you can) to come outside this period. Nevertheless this area attracts a lot of tourists and you have to reserve earlier to get the best rooms.

What's included?

- 8 nights' accommodation in 2-star hotels
- 8 breakfasts - 8 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) with the route marked on and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Emergency assistance.

Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above - Drinks - Additional meals - Entrance fees - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls,... are not included

Getting there and away

By train: Volvic is on the Clermont-Ferrand-Le Mont Dore regional line. Change at Clermont Ferrand from Paris Gare de Lyon (several trains per day). Your return will be made from Clermont-Ferrand.

By car: Volvic is accessible by the A71 motorway, (exit Volvic) And then, by route D986.

Where to park: unsupervised free car park are by the Volvic rail station.

Walk difficulty

Grade 3 - walks of between 5 and 8 hours a day with ascents up to 700 m. Some hiking experience is advisable. A reasonable level of fitness and some stamina are required for these walks. You may cover long distances in remote countryside and the terrain will be rough underfoot. In mountainous areas you will encounter somme sustained ascents and descents