


## C212-ST Auvergne lakes

There's no shortage of water in the Auvergne but paradoxically it was volcanic activity that formed its numerous lakes, thousands of years ago when the Chaîne des Puys, the volcanic domed mountain range, was still active. Lava flows dammed rivers and streams, creating great reservoirs like the Aydat and Cassière lakes. In some places, water filled hard rock craters, giving birth to lakes like Pavin and Chauvet. Finally the glaciers that covered this area after this turbulent era hollowed out the soft rock. When the planet warmed up, water remained in the hollows and the Lac de La Crégut is an example of this. Many lakes have disappeared or like the Lac de Bourdouze have been progressively transformed into peat bogs or

marshland. A magnificent circuit gives you the opportunity to discover these lakes, offering stunning landscapes and moments of complete peace and relaxation.

### Itinerary (a loop walk)

**Day 1** – Arrival at AYDAT – This small village is situated on the edge of the Lac d'Aydat, the Auvergne's largest natural lake, created when lava flows from the De la Vache and Lassolas Puys dammed the Veyre River, creating a reservoir. The lake has a small island near the north shore, called Saint Sidoine in homage to the Gallo-Roman bishop Sidoine Apollinaire who owned a villa on the lakeshore. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

**Day 2** – From AYDAT to SAINT NECTAIRE (27km). You will pass through Aydat then the villages of Phialeix and Fohet, before crossing a vast plateau covered in pasture and transected by the Gorges de la Monne. Along the way, you can admire the La Grotte covered pathway. You will go through the village of Olloix, with its church that houses a beautiful recumbent effigy. Then you will walk around the Puy d'Olloix, a volcanic cone on the plateau, and head towards St Nectaire through the hamlets of Lenteuge and Sauvagnat. Today St Nectaire is made up of two villages, St Nectaire le Haut (the High), dominated by its magnificent church, a pure example of the Romanesque Auvergne style, and St Nectaire le Bas (the Low), a spa resort with more than 40 original volcanic sources. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

**Day 3** – From ST NECTAIRE to BESSE EN CHANDESSE (23km). From the hamlet of Chautignat, you will reach Murol, situated in a picturesque site and dominated by a beautiful 13<sup>th</sup> century fortified castle. From the top of the keep, there is a very fine view over the Couze valley, the Dore Mountains and the Lac de Chambon that you will reach through the Bouves wood. This lake was formed by the Tartelet volcano blocking the Couze Chambon riverbed. It is vast, and quite shallow, with jagged shores, except on the northern side where a beach has been created. You will follow the lake's southern shore to reach the charming village of Chambon-sur-Lac then climb up onto the Saousses plateau. Then, you will head towards Cheix waterfall and the hamlet of Courbanges, through forest and fields. Finally, you will make your way down into the valley towards Besse en Chandesse, a small medieval town that still boasts ramparts and a number of old dwellings built from lava - *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*





**Day 4** – From BESSE EN CHANDESSE to COMPAINS (21 km). You will leave Besse southbound and head towards the Lac Pavin. Along the way, you will discover the Estivadoux maar, a small crater containing a peat bog. It's an ancient crater filled in by debris from the Pavin and Montchal volcanoes. The almost circular Lac Pavin was formed in the volcanic crater after its last eruption less than 7,000 years ago! If you walk around it, you will arrive at the Lac de Montcineyre across the summer pastures. A detour will allow you to admire the Lac de Bourdouze, one of the Auvergne's most beautiful lakes, formed in a glacial crater more than 12,000 years old! This lake is partially covered by a still-forming peat bog. Then you will reach the village of Compains, the end of this stage. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

**Day 5** – From COMPAINS to EGLISENEUVE D'ENTRAYGUES (26km) – You will cross the Barbe Sèche mountain, walk around a few peat bogs before reaching the hamlet of Brion Haut which is dominated by its motte. You will pass a few 'burons', or stone huts, cross a forest and some more peaty areas before reaching the village of Godivelle, framed by two lakes of different origin. The Lac d'en Haut is a crater lake, or maar, formed after a volcanic eruption. The Lac d'en Bas, on the other hand, was originally a glacial lake which, along with the Lac de Saint Ayre, a little further on, now forms a vast peat bog which is a protected natural area. You will continue your walk through the villages of Espinchal and Redondel, avoiding a few peat bogs before reaching Egliseneuve d'Entraygues, a traditional farming village, and the home of St Nectaire cheese. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

**Day 6** – From SAINT GENES CHAMPESPE to EGLISENEUVE (23km). The day begins with a taxi transfer to St Genès. From the hamlet of Lasplalade, you will reach the Lac de Tact then the Lac de la Crégut. This lake, of glacial origin and fed by a number of underground springs, flows into the dammed Lac de Lastouilles where the water powers a hydro-electric plant. You will discover other nearby lakes, like the Lac de l'Îlet and the Lac des Taurons. You will leave this country of lakes, the Artense region, to reach Egliseneuve through the forest then across the vast wetlands. You will pass close to the Lac d'Esclauze, a huge peat bog where two floating islands of aquatic plants drift in the centre. *Dinner, night and breakfast in the same hotel.*

**Day 7** - From SAINT GENES CHAMPESPE to SUPER BESSE (23km). This day also begins with a taxi ride then you will walk across the fields towards the Lac de la Landie. This volcanic lake saw its shape changed by glacial erosion. Nowadays a private enclave, it's a paradise for fly fishermen who find in these exceptional surroundings a warm welcome and many salmonidae to satisfy their passion. You will continue your walk towards another volcanic lake, Lac Chauvet, where a large section of lakeshore is bordered by the Montbert forest. A few more kilometres on the flat then you will start the climb up to Super Besse, a ski resort at the foot of the Puy de Sancy. The climb isn't difficult and before reaching the man-made Hermines lake at the resort edge, you will pause close to Notre Dame de Vassivière, where twice-yearly religious processions and festivals take place. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*



**Day 8** – From SUPER BESSE to LA BOURBOULE (20km –alt. difference: +700m). No lake today but a climb up the Puy de Sancy, which at 1,885m is the highest peak in the Massif Central. You will climb up towards the Puy de la Perdrix along a wooded path, via the Croix de Seignavoux, then get to the Cabane pass before reaching the Puy de Sancy summit via a steep path. You will continue on a path that runs along the ridge towards the Pas de L'Ane, Puy Redon and Puy de la Cliegue before beginning your descent, through the forest, towards La Bourboule. Lower down you will follow the Cliegue stream and admire the Plat à Barbe and Vernière waterfalls before arriving in the spa resort nestled in the high valley of the Dordogne. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

**Day 9** – From LA BOURBOULE to ORCIVAL (25km – alt. difference: + 700m). The day begins with a climb towards Puy Gros, which looks out over the valley. Then you will follow the path across the summer pastures towards the Lac de Guéry, formed when a lava flow dammed water flowing down the Puy Gros. This lake, nestling in its backdrop of greenery, is still fed by this torrent which cascades beautifully into its waters. You will visit the Maison de la Flore (House of Flora) close to the shoreline, and the braver ones amongst you can take a trip around the Tuilière and Sanadoire rocks, two ancient volcanic stacks revealed



by glacial erosion. You will walk along the edge of the Guéry forest to reach the Lac de Servières, a small crater lake largely surrounded by a conifer forest. Finally you will make your way down towards Orcival, a small village with one of the most beautiful Romanesque churches in the Auvergne.  
*Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

**Day 10** – From ORCIVAL to AYDAT (24km). You will cross a few hamlets and a number of fields before reaching the forest and the Chaîne des Puys. You will leave the main path to climb up to the Puy de Lassolas and Puy de la Vache craters to discover their very characteristic shapes. Born from the same erupting fissure, these volcanoes erupted simultaneously, ejecting volcanic slag and an intense lava flow that gave birth to the

Cassière and Aydat lakes. You will pass along the edge of these two lakes before reaching Aydat, then the hamlet of Sauteras, the end of this walk. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

**Day 11** – AYDAT – End of the walk after breakfast.

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## Best Season

From beginning of May to middle of 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?

- 10 nights' accommodation in 2-star hotels or charming B&B
- 10 breakfasts – 10 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- Taxi transfers : Egliseneuve -Saint Geniés (x2)
- 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 – Entrance fees – Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls, are not included*

## Getting there and away

*By train:* train to Clermont Ferrand and bus to Aydat (bus timetable [http://www.puydedome.com/data/info/81169-Ligne\\_21.pdf](http://www.puydedome.com/data/info/81169-Ligne_21.pdf))

*By car:* Drive to Clermont Ferrand along A71, A75 or A89 motorway. Continue on D2089 and D90 to reach the hamlet of Sauteyras on the banks of Aydat lake.

*Where to park:* Free car parks by the first hotel hotel.

## 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. Day8 stage is grade 4 with the ascent of Puy de Sancy