

[vc_row][vc_column][vc_column_text]By Dan Friesen on August 9, 2016

The Loire Valley is now pretty much behind us. We just arrived late into our hotel in the Chartres area, setting us up for a visit to the famous cathedral here tomorrow.



Roger prepping his wheels to start the day - nearly 7 hours in the saddle

But what I am really excited about is the walk we recently discovered along the Loire River through an area of troglodytes. “Troglo-what” you may say, and yes, I thought the word vaguely familiar and have discovered that in French, it has to do with caves, in this case man-made caves. The English connotation is tied to ancient groups of people who were cave dwellers, but in French it doesn’t seem to have that connotation with the ancient past.



Picturesque dwellings

People have been quarrying the soft tufa stone out of the hillside of the Loire area for centuries. It makes excellent building material and is still a typical look for buildings through this region of France - it's a lovely white limestone look.



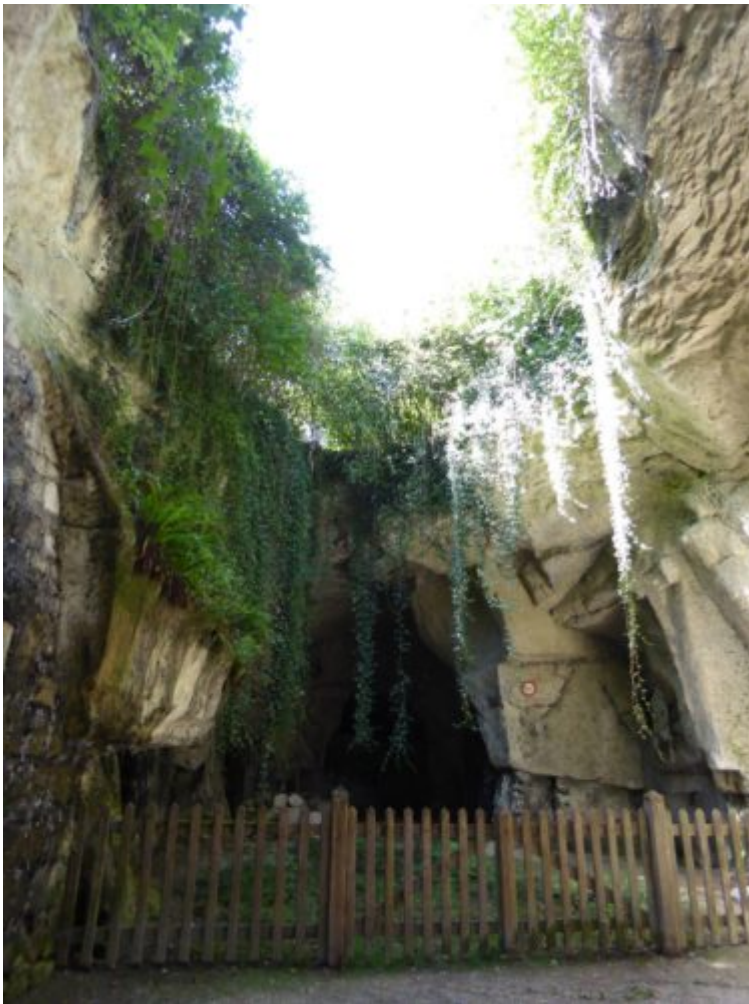
Dolmen burying stones are common in the area, but I think this gardener built his own for show - I like it!

What was left behind after the stone was removed are a massive network of caves put to use in a variety of ways. Our walk winds in amongst these troglodyte areas, into some of the caves themselves and past entire villages built against the tufa cliffs with rooms extending inside the cliffs.



Love butterfly bushes, but the butterflies here love them for a different reason. I've never seen butterfly bushes so well used by their namesakes.

The walk ends up being about 10 km in length with a delightful variety of village scenes, vineyards (the Loire area produces about one third of France's wine), river overlooks, and the fascinating journey through the caves.



Tufa stone

We cheated a bit on the planning and rented a couple of bikes, mainly because this is a linear walk - finishing in a different place than it starts - and getting back to our car would have been quite a hike.



A popular bike system winds through the caves

We spent today hunting for hotel bases in the Loire, quite a challenge because the lovely smaller hotels are too small for our group, and we prefer to avoid the larger chain hotels as much as possible. We have a few good prospects and are looking forward to connecting you with the spirit of the Loire

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