

## Walking on the balloons of the Vosges

After the press conference of 14 December 2020 ( “*We have a lock down*” ), we have to postpone our walking holiday for the time being. But of course you can always make plans! For those who are already dreaming for next spring, we can recommend the Vosges: a beautiful walking area in the northeast of France, which is easy to reach both by car and by train.

Roughly west of Epinal you can speak of the Low Vosges with hiking heights up to 500 meters. To the east, the region looks more Alpine and you can climb the Grand and Petit Ballon, of 1,424 and 1,272 meters respectively. This medium-high mountain range has an abundance of signposted hiking trails. The Club Vosgien (the oldest hiking association in France) maintains a hiking trail network of more than 4,000 kilometers. Hiking is, as so often, the best way to enjoy the beautiful views that the region has to offer. From the hills you have a view of the countless lakes and ponds, the vast forests, the colorful meadows on the slopes and the small-scale agricultural landscape.



### History

The many memorials in the Vosges are a reminder of a turbulent recent history. As a hiker, you will invariably encounter the monuments on the central square during your overnight stays in the villages and towns. These memorials recall the German-French War of 1870-1871 with the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany, the First World War of 1914-1918 and the Second World War of 1940-1945. Countless soldiers and residents have died here in all these wars. To this day, the locals maintain these monuments well and commemorate the fallen every year.

It is possible to book hiking tours to discover the places that have been important for the history of the Vosges. Search for *Tourisme de mémoire*.

### **A multi-day hiking route with many highlights**

On arrival in Munster and after purchasing a hiking map, we mapped out a five-day route, including the Col du petit Ballon (1,162m), the Grand Ballon and the Ballon d'Alsace (1,247m). The distances between the stages are always between 10 and 18 kilometers.



On the way to the **Col du petit Ballon** you will have an even more frequent experience for the first time. While walking through an open landscape with overwhelming views and seemingly slight climbs, you will notice over time that this landscape demands more from you than expected. In other words: it seems so simple but it takes a lot of energy!

From Buhl you then walk through a landscape with lots of forest over **the Grand Ballon** to Moosch. The disadvantage of this route is that you walk near the famous (or infamous) *Route des Crêtes*. This route, which can also be travelled by car, over the highest peaks of the Vosges mountains, ensures roaring engines, for "hikers" who go on the slippers, stepped out of the camper, to "climb" the Ballon. Because: that's how it's advised in the leaflets. Or, as a well-known motorcycle magazine writes: *"The bending and the many climbs and descents clear your head and the rich nature and the breathtaking views provide a soothing rest"*. Our advice: if you want to go into these mountains in peace, go hiking between mid-May and mid-June or after mid-September.

On day 3 we walk **from Moosch to Sewen**. A pleasant route of about 20 kilometers, mostly on small forest paths. Along the way we enjoy formidable views and the presence of hefty granite and sandstone rocks surrounded by lush green vegetation.

From Sewen the route continues to the **Ballon d'Alsace** via the Cascade du Rummel. The Cascade is a small but very beautiful waterfall that you can admire, as one of the many waterfalls here, via a path along the river. The Balloon is a collection of French chaos with Joan of Arc proudly on horseback at the top.

### **Back by bus.**

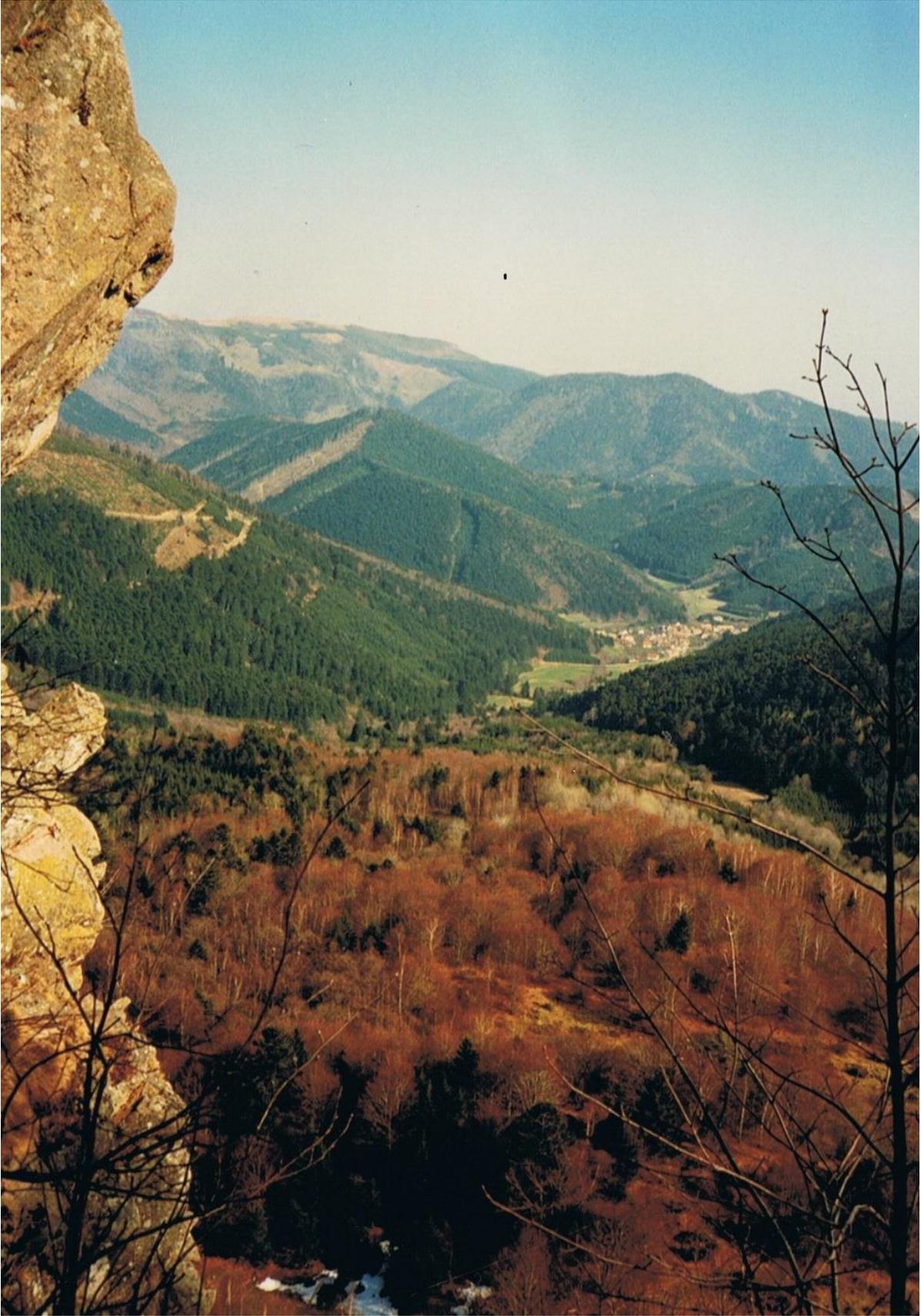
We spend the night in Hotel du Sommet. There was a kind of carnival atmosphere here, but the wine was excellent.

The next day it was only descending to St. Maurice s. Moselle. But yes... then came the bus to Munster... That means: a few hours of bumping to the car in Munster. The latter was no fun and with a little more and better preparation, a better end point must be found.

## **General hiking tips**

- There are plenty of opportunities for accommodation in the stage places. Gîtes, Chambres d'Hôtes, hotels and (small) campsites. Provide an alternative. The website states that one is open from April, it may just be that it has suddenly become May.
- The topographical hiking maps of IGN - Institut Géographique National - are excellent.
- The markings along the way are reasonable. Don't expect quality like the German neighbours.
- Leave the beautiful Arnica flowers! There are fewer and fewer of them.
- Gastronomically you can get your money's worth in the Vosges : quiches, trout prepared in Riesling, munk cheeses, sauerkraut... *un repas marcaire, peut être?*





Moosch-Sewen



**Snow on height in early spring**



**Ballon d'Alsace and Jeanne d' Arc on top**



**Petit Ballon**