

## Along the lovely River Semois

**The Mighty Fortresses of the Middle Ages**

Driving, walking and cycling routes

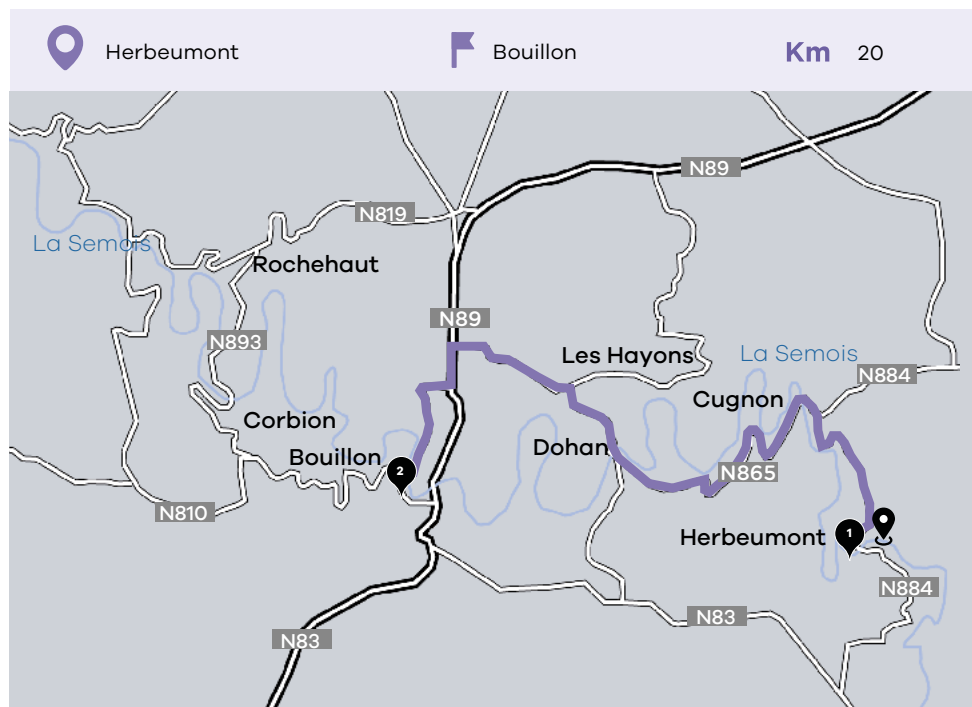


# By car



## The Mighty Fortresses of the Middle Ages along the lovely River Semois

This stunning itinerary allows you to explore Herbeumont Fortress, in the heart of the Ardennes Forest. At the end of the route you'll discover the *Château de Bouillon* (castle) casting its shadow and history on the little town for 1,000 years.



## Château d'Herbeumont

In the Ardennes, the fortresses merge with the rock: the fortress of Herbeumont is embedded in nature and is impressive in its austerity. For a long time, it remained impregnable and had the role of controlling the routes leading to the Kingdom of France; one to Sedan, the other to Carignan. Successive lords lived happily here until the 16th century. At this time, the advent of artillery forced a complete reworking of fortified castles. Herbeumont was no exception to the rule. The ramparts were converted to receive cannons, and new towers appeared. But it would only be paper tiger. The army sent by Louis XIV in 1657 quickly overcame the walls as mighty as they were. Herbeumont's fate, like that of many other fortified castles, was sealed well before its time. The ruins of the fortress, restored in 2009, make it possible to realise the might of the fortified castle back then. The ramparts still offer a magnificent panoramic view of the Semois Valley today.

Self-guided tour.

Rue du Château  
6887 Herbeumont  
+32 (0) 61 41 24 12

[www.herbeumont-tourisme.be](http://www.herbeumont-tourisme.be)



## Prieuré de Conques

Upstream from Herbeumont, the *Prieuré de Conques* (religious heritage) is nestled in an old arm of the River Semois – an idyllic place where the Cistercian monks of the *Abbaye d'Orval* (Abbey) came to establish a monastery. In the Middle Ages, the poor soil prevented any growth. Consequently, the monks exploited the surrounding forest. The community lived in peace until 1795. Fleeing the revolutionaries, the monks owed their safety to the river that they forded... After more than half a century of abandonment, the priory has become a luxury hotel.



2

## Château de Bouillon

At Bouillon, the River Semois surrounds a peninsula in one of its narrow bends: this strategic site could only arouse the lords' envy in a sort of royal keeping up with the Jones's. In the 10th century, the first fortress was constructed on the rocky spur and became a key point between the Upper and Lower Lotharingia. In the Middle Ages, the town which depended on the Principality of Liège, developed at its base. In 1672, the princely family of the La Tour d'Auvergne acquired the duchy: until the French Revolution, Bouillon was the capital of a Sovereign State, protected by the King of France. Even if the current aspect of the castle corresponds little to what it was in the 10th century, the visit is worth the trip because the mark of Duke Godfrey seems present still. From the spiral staircase leading to the knights' hall, you feel that at any moment the ghost of the leader of the First Crusade could reappear...

Nowadays, the castle is an open book, illustrating the evolution of military art. As soon as you cross the portcullis, there is a succession of loopholes and embrasures: every element of defence is surmounted, defended by those ahead. Carved out of the rock, the Godfrey room and its Gothic vault represent the medieval aspect which the castle had originally, before being changed by Vauban, Louis XIV's military architect. In the castle grounds, the wonder continues when birds of prey appear suddenly from the ruins for a dance in the sky. This show resembles falconry, an ancestral hunting technique.

Open off-season during the week from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., on weekends from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Open from April to September, daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed in January except at weekends.

Esplanade Godefroy, 1  
6830 Bouillon  
+32 (0) 61 46 42 02  
[www.bouillon-initiative.be](http://www.bouillon-initiative.be)

## Couvent des Sépulcrines

In Bouillon, on the edge of the River Semois, an imposing white edifice stands: the old *Couvent des Sépulcrines* (religious heritage). Created by the will of Godfrey de Bouillon, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre had the aim of spreading the Christian faith in the Holy Land. In 1626, the Prince-Bishop of Liège authorised the nuns of the Holy Sepulchre to establish a subsidiary in Bouillon. After the revolutionary wave of 1790, the convent housed a brewery and an ironworks in the 20th century before being occupied today by the *Archeoscope Godefroid de Bouillon* (Museum) – a rightful return to history.



### Château de Dohan

The village was in the Middle Ages a former fiefdom, built to protect the ford. It made a profit from this ford by means of a passage tax for merchants and travellers who thereby avoided Bouillon. The stately dwelling, a legacy of this feudal era, reconstructed in the early 17th century using schist and sandstone, still proudly dominates the River Semois.

### Abbaye de Cordemois

Cross the neo-Gothic *Pont de la Poulie* (bridge) and walk alongside the magnificent course of the River Semois: it leads you to the *Abbaye de Cordemois* (abbey). As you are discovering it, the neo-Gothic style is evident and reflects the image of the *Abbaye d'Orval*, designed by the same architect, Henry Vaes. The nuns welcome daily visitors to their community. A little shop sells produce from the abbey.



### Château le Duc

It would have been the first castle erected by Godfrey's ancestors. This small fort from the Carolingian era (9th century) is worth the trip... You will have to walk along a part of the GR (Long Distance Footpath), along the length of the Grand Ruisseau from Senseruth. Other walks also start from Mogimont or Ucimont. Today, the moors cover the sleeping fortress with a blanket for eternity...



### Château des Fées

The ruins of the *Château des fées* are located on the Morthan-Bertrix road. You enter the fortress by walking along a hallway, its antechamber. The large terraced walls stimulate our imagination. In the Middle Ages, a keep measuring 18 metres high by 13 metres wide dominated this highly-strategic site. Encircled by the Munos and Monceux streams, it is today a place of contemplation.



# On foot

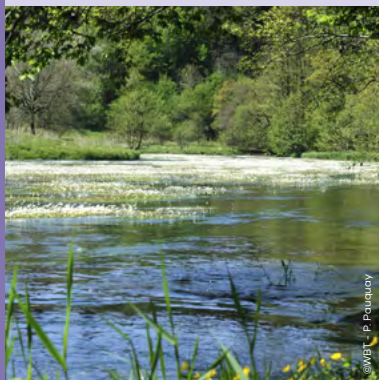


© WBT - David Smyrn

## Overlooking Bouillon

One always comes back to Bouillon... Leaving the thousand-year-old town, the image of the **Pont de la Poulie** or de Cordemois (bridge), is reflected in the pure waters of the River Semois. With its stone arches, it offers the most beautiful foregrounds of the *Château de Bouillon*. An impressive fortress, developed until the 19th century by successive owners, it remained famous due to the hero of the First Crusade, Godfrey of Bouillon...

After crossing the *Pont de la Poulie* (bridge), walk along the river Semois which flows below, strewn with long reeds of emerald green and when in season beautiful little water buttercups (crowfoot). The trail goes towards the **Abbaye de Cordemois**. The road becomes a path and then a corbelled trail. At the **Moulin de l'Epine** (Mill), nestled in its splendid isolation, find the authentic Semois, unfurling its silver trail. We leave it by climbing a donkey trail, leading to the viewpoints of the Epine and then the splendid viewpoint dominating Bouillon. It is the start of a dizzying descent towards the town of Godfrey.



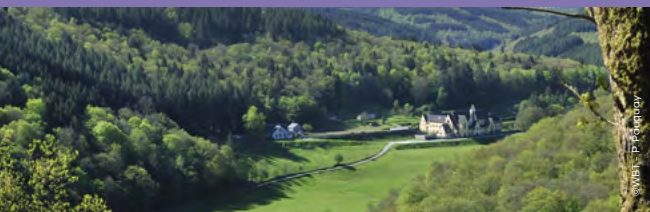
© WBT - P. Paquay

### Starting Point

At the Pont de la Poulie (bridge),  
Boulevard Vauban, 6830  
Bouillon.

### Car Park

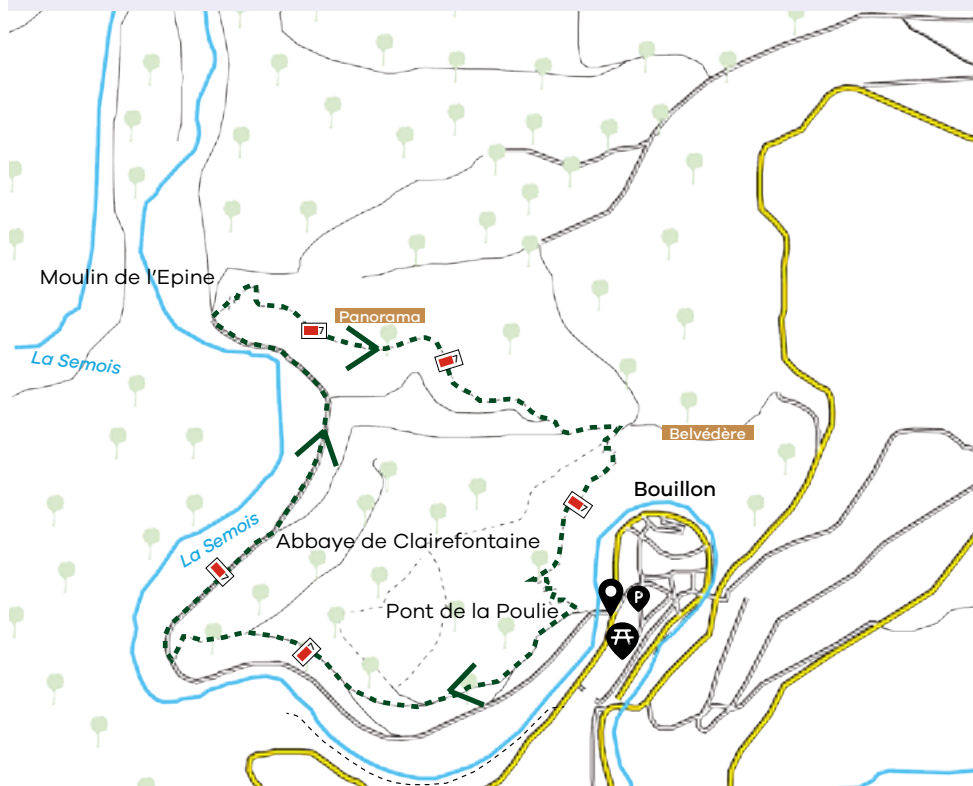
Place des Champs Prévost or at  
the Hotel Porte de France.



© WBT - P. Paquay

**Km****7****2H30****MARKINGS**

Red rectangle n°7

**DIFFICULTY**

View and download the route on [visitwallonia.be](https://www.visitwallonia.be)

### Tip

Wear hiking shoes with good ankle support. The descent from the viewpoint is steep.

### Difficulty

Walking shoes are essential for climbing up the sloping trails of this quite physical hike.

### Gradient gain



# By bike



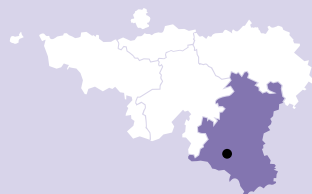
© WBT - P. Poulain

## In Herbeumont Forest

Start on the disused line of the Bertrix-Herbeumont-Muno railway which was constructed from 1902 to 1914. This did not have any level crossing but only tunnels and viaducts. A line which was actually used by the Germans during the First World War to resupply their troops up to Verdun...

Today, you will discover a pleasant ride, the **Voie des Pierres qui Parlent** (Way of the Talking Stones) to ride on. Throughout the ride, information boards inform you of the wealth of the Bertrix region from the extraction of slate. From Fumay in France to Martelange in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, a long vein of schist brought fortune and misfortune on all those who extracted this slate from the bowels of the earth. The slate quarry, the *Morépire*, has preserved the memories of these men, or *Scailletons* who went down below to break stone, with pickaxes and dynamite.

A little before Saint-Médard, the itinerary enters the forest. Immense it encases like treasure superb beeches and **a stream from fairytales** – the Antrogne. A magnificent descent leads you to the River Semois on the banks. Look out for a glimpse of large white herons flying above the Semois. Or in a whirlpool of water, a big ball of fur: with beaver like smudges like an impressionist that an impressionist artist would have placed, white flowers licking the surface of the river illuminate one of most beautiful scenes that can be admired in the Ardennes.



© WBT - Caroline Rais-Point de vue sur La Semois

### Starting Point

From the old esplanade of the train station (Avenue René Demarteau, 6887 Herbeumont), follow the Pre-RAVeL.

### Car Park

Avenue René Demarteau or Place de l'Eglise (church square).

Km

22

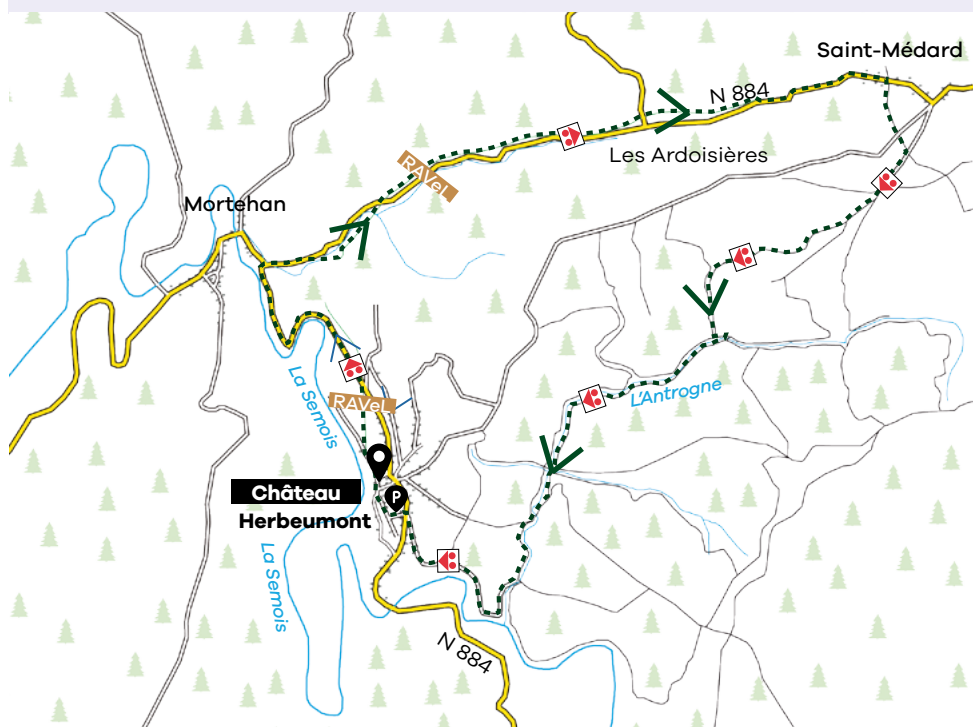


2H00



HYBRID BIKE

DIFFICULTY



View and download the route on [visitwallonia.be](https://www.visitwallonia.be)

### Type of Route

RAVeL, routes de campagne et chemins forestiers.

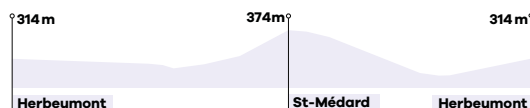
### Markings

Follow the VTT (mountain bike) markings and the red triangles and circles. Markings are lacking in places. Bring our map with you.

### Difficulty


22 km (13 miles). A trekking or mountain bike is essential for cycling on the forest tracks that you will encounter after Saint-Médard.

### Gradient gain



Follow us

 [whybelgium](#)

 [BelgianTouristOfficeWallonia](#)



## **VISITWallonia.be**

### **The Ultimate Belgian Getaway**

**This brochure is published by Wallonia Belgium Tourism (WBT) Company Number: 0888.366.085.**

Rue du Marché aux Herbes, 25-27 – 1000 Brussels (Head Office) / Avenue Comte de Smet de Nayer, 14 – 5000 Namur (Operational Department) Chief Editor: Etienne Claude, WBT Director General. • Coordination and Publishing: A.Robert • Design and Layout: Lielens. • Cover Photo: © WBT - DavidSamyn - © WBT - David Samyn • All information, contained in this brochure has been compiled with maximum attention to current facts and details, correct at the time of publishing. This brochure is not contractual and the editor cannot be held responsible. Any errors and involuntary omissions or subsequent modifications are not the responsibility of Wallonia Belgium Tourism.