

Into the heart of the Jura

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Gerry Savine

INTO THE HEART OF THE JURA



Looking along the Avenue Lépold-Robert from the Tour Espacité, La Chaux-de-Fonds. Photo: Gerry

The regular SBB service to La Chaux-de-Fonds climbs steadily out of Neuchâtel into the heart of the Juras. With a reversal at Chambrélien the route passes through a 3259 metre tunnel not far short of La Chaux-de-Fonds. The town is at the head of the valley to La Loc and on into France. Many of the world famous Swiss watch companies have their factories located between the towns.

La Chaux-de-Fonds is high up in the rounded mountains of the Juras and is noticeably cooler than down by the lake at Neuchâtel.

Although La Chaux-de-Fonds might not be considered an interesting town, this would be to underestimate the town's visual attraction.

At the northern end of the Avenue Lépold-Robert, about 2-300 metres from the station, is the Tourist Office where a

walking tour of the town can be obtained. The Tourist Office can't be missed as it is at the foot of Tour Espacité, a tall modern tower capped by a café and viewing gallery. The entrance to the tower is free and a fast lift takes you to the top. The views of the town and surrounding hills are quite spectacular. Returning to ground level you can't miss the Fontaine Monumentale which stands in the middle of a roundabout a few metres to the north; this will also be the end point of the walking tour.

The walking guide is a 20 page booklet with a route map and information to the sights in English, French and German. The copy for each numbered place of interest is accompanied by a small coloured photograph. Time didn't permit a complete walk. As the tour is circular it is easy to join where you like.

La Chaux-de-Fonds has many buildings

in the Art Nouveau style which are a delight to those with even the slightest interest in architecture.

The main town is set in a valley and you are soon guided uphill. The highest part of the walk is the Boisdu Petit Château which is a public park and zoo which you are free to wonder around.

The trail leads you back down into an older part of town where you will walk down the Rue du Manègo where the CJ metre gauge line runs down the road to the station. At the bottom of the hill you will cross the Rue du Grenier which is the birth place of Louis Joseph Chevrolet who was later to become the famous car manufacturer in the USA.

You are now approaching the Parc de Musées that houses the history museum, art gallery and the Musée International d'Hologerie. The modern underground museum could take up a lot of time as it tells the history of time keeping. In the park above the museum is the Carillon, a tubular bell time piece which plays a tune every quarter hour as panels of colour below the clock rotate. This museum alone is worth a visit to La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Prior to walking around the town two trains were taken to Les Brenets. After leaving the single car train at the station, the road and footpaths lead steeply downhill through the village to where the River Doubs widens out into the Lac de Brenets. By the side of the lake is the "Les Rives du Doubs" Minhotel. The restaurant that overlooks the water serves locally caught trout. The food is beautifully and



TOP: Fontaine Monumentale, La Chaux-de-Fonds

BOTTOM: Street running in La Chaux-de-Fonds

Photos: Toggenburg



TOP: The Carillon at the Musée International d'Hologerie, La Chaux-de-Fonds.
photo: Gerry Savine

TOP LEFT: Place du Marché, La Chaux-de-Fonds. Photo: Gerry Savine

BOTTOM LEFT: The boat from Les Brenets arriving at the Sautdu Doubs Waterfalls landing stage. Photo: Gerry Savine

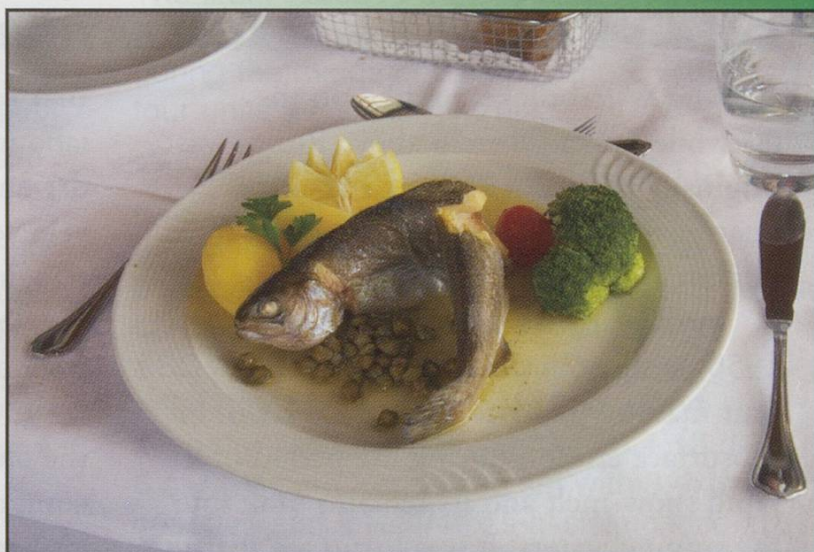
BOTTOM: Les Brenets station
photo: Toggenburg



charmingly presented and at a reasonable price. Adjacent to the hotel is a boat landing stage with trips to the Saut du Doubs Waterfall. The glass enclosed boats, which were built by the owner, take you along the lake and between wooded cliffs to a footpath to the waterfall.

The path goes alongside what has now become river rapids before the river topples over the waterfall and turns sharp right to disappear between wood covered cliffs. At the time of this visit there was a new footbridge just above the waterfall linking Switzerland to France but had yet to be opened to the public. On returning to Les Brenets landing stage you are faced with a stiff walk back up to the station; the alternative is a taxi ride up which is offered by the boat company.

If you like outdoor activities you will love this area of Switzerland.



Fresh locally caught trout beautifully presented at the "Les Rives du Doubs" Minhotel with views across the Lac de Brenets.

Photo: Toggenburg

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