



The Guebwiller Region
Region of art history

let us you the **Story**
of vineyard heritage



Winegrowing over the centuries

Located on the Wine Route and blessed with seven Greats Vintages, the Guebwiller region, Land of Art and History, owes much to its winegrowing past.



Former Romanesque Abbey in Murbach.

From myth to history

Germanic mythology attributes the establishment of the first vineyards to the god Odin. Wounded in the foot by a boar, he is said to have fertilized the valley giving rise to a flower for every drop of his blood spilt. Flowers covered the hills to grow brightly coloured grapes charged with divine blood.

In reality, it is thanks to Murbach Abbey that winemaking developed. Indeed, the abbots had sovereignty over the whole valley, and beyond. Guebwiller then grew thanks to this activity from the 12th century onwards.

The Abbey received a portion of the crop by way of a tax. The 'Florival' (*Florigeravallis* or Flowered Valley) was perceived by the church as ideal and fertile land. In the 11th century, Frulandus recounted: 'There is a place on the borders of Alsace and the Vosges, called Murbach, where the Lord has placed the head of the holy martyr rich in virtues, similar to the centre of the earth, embedded like a celestial pearl in a shell of gold. Some fertile hillsides spread their flanks covered by vines, making the Flowered Valley another paradise where the blood of Bacchus flows freely.'



Woodcut.

The vine is attached en quenouille or en chambrette on stakes called échelas. Wire training only appeared in the 20th century.

Renowned wines across borders

Throughout the Middle Ages, Alsatian wines had an excellent reputation, being the southernmost vintages of the Holy Roman Empire. Through transport on the Rhine and the Ill, the production was exported to Switzerland, Germany, England, the Netherlands and Italy. The Guebwiller wine was so popular that it was necessary, in the 17th century, to affix a certificate of origin (*ladtzettel*) on each barrel in order to avoid counterfeits. There was then only one blend: the *zwicker*, and the classification of wine was judged depending on soil and climate.



Bottle label. There was only one grape variety, the Traminer, whose quality varied depending on culture and climate.



View from the vineyard. The vines were grown on the other side of the valley. Postcard.

Winegrowing in the Renaissance

Soultz and Guebwiller, like other local communities involved in winemaking, enjoyed a 'renaissance' at the end of the 16th and early 17th century. It is precisely between 1525, the year of the Peasants' War, where Soultz was taken by the Rustauds, and 1632, the beginning of the Thirty Years War in Alsace, that winegrowers' Renaissance mansions were built. Bay windows, spiral staircases, dated porches... all these architectural elements were signs of prosperity. Today, the town retains at its centre the urban fabric of the 17th century. In Guebwiller, the absence of such beautiful Renaissance architecture

as found in Soultz, Riquewihr, Obernai and Barr is explained, firstly, by the excessive fragmentation of land and the heavy taxes imposed by the abbots, therefore preventing the accumulation of wealth. On the other hand, the facades of the main street were given systematic modern remodelling in the 19th century, while the back of many houses have kept their Renaissance features. Many professions revolved around winemaking: coopers, blacksmiths, merchants and gourmets... These artisans commissioned luxurious homes, the porches of which were usually decorated with their initials, along with the insignia of their profession.

New challenges

The terrible casualties of the Thirty Years War led to a lack of manpower to maintain the vines. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) initiated the annexation of Alsace to France. The Alsatian vineyards became the most northerly in the country and suffered from competition with other renowned French vineyards. During the German annexation in 1870, the vineyards regained their southerly position, but there was no law governing the quality of wine and many diluted wines were in circulation. These challenges were compounded by the appearance in the late 19th century of phylloxera, a disease which destroyed the vineyards of the region. At the end of the First

World War, the vineyards were replanted with hybrids, which were more resistant and produced a larger crop. This then led to a new wine crisis. Between 1900 and 1950, Alsatian vineyards lost half their size! A quest for quality appeared, notably by obtaining the Appellation d'Origine contrôlée (AOC) in 1962 and the name 'Alsace Grand Cru' for 25 localities in 1983, for which 4 varieties were chosen: Muscat, Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Pinot Gris. The Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins d'Alsace (CIVA), a steering committee bringing together producers and traders, was created in 1963.

Vineyard landscapes

Shaped by man, the vineyards have created the landscape of the Guebwiller region.



Terrace cropping in Guebwiller



Half-moon stones, crossed with a wooden stake, allowing the planting of one last vine right above the wall.

Terrace cropping

The Guebwiller vineyards have a characteristic appearance.

Despite unfavourable topography, generations of winemakers have surpassed each other with their ingenuity to cultivate these priceless vineyards : stone stairs to move from one terrace to another, half-moon stones, crossed with a wooden stake, allowing the planting of one last vine right above the wall, planting of vines horizontally... All these efforts were driven by the search for a wine of exceptional quality thanks to a rough local terrain with poor and sandy soil.

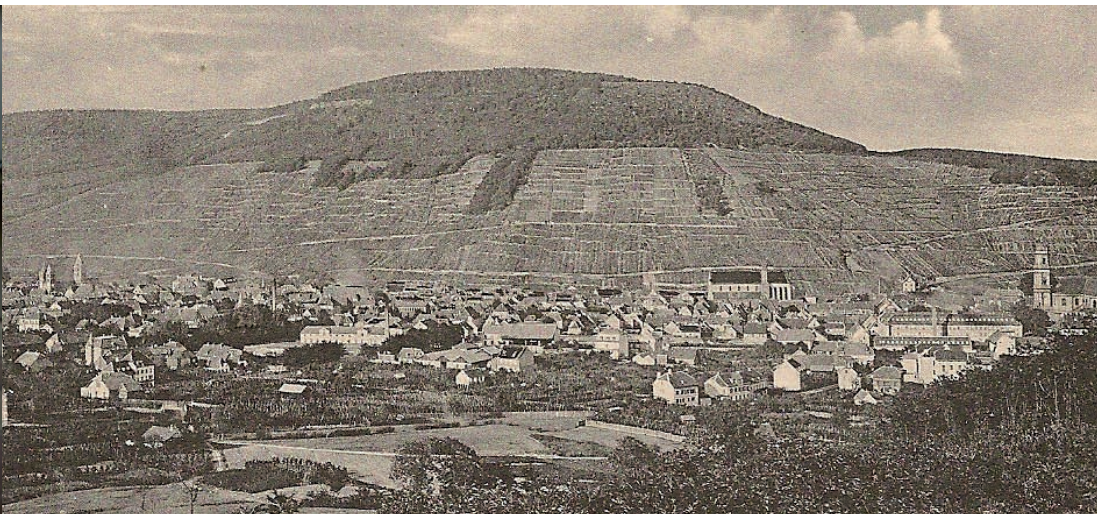
After the phylloxera crisis, Ernest Schlumberger (1885-1954) decided to replant the vineyards horizontally.

A legend shows the determination to cultivate vineyards in such an inhospitable place. Father Braun recounts : ‘There was once in Guebwiller, a man named Kuter, commonly called Kütterlé because of his small size. He was a poor winegrower, intelligent, hardworking and with a determination against all odds. With only a few vines to grow, he began, in spite of the rocks and rubble, clearing the Haut-Saering. People laughed at the sight of him perched on the rocks, some people even felt sorry for him. But Kuter was not a man to be daunted by the teasing and comments of his fellow citizens. On the contrary. People’s comments and laughter made him work harder.

From the broken rock, he extracted blocks to build walls; then he levelled them with earth to make one terrace after another, on which he planted the vines... ‘Let’s see what this vine will give!’ said the people mockingly. Soon their jokes gave way to amazement. The sun caressed the hill with its loving rays and the vine flourished in all its splendour. When Kütterlé produced his first vintage, it was quickly compared to the great wines of the surrounding vineyards. With all things considered, tasted and talked about, the jury was unanimous in proclaiming that the last one to arrive deserved to be ranked first.’



A typical winemakers' street in Soultzmatt, with a large number of porches.



The Guebwiller vineyards and their mosaic plots of vines in the early 20th century. The vines were still planted in the direction of the slope. Some terraces can be seen at the entrance of the valley. Postcard (Michel Ruh collection).

Winegrowers' villages

Through the cultivation of the vine and the wine trade, the Guebwiller region experienced significant prosperity in the 16th century.

The winegrowers' villages of the Guebwiller region still harbour many winegrowers' houses with characteristic architecture, often grouped in the centre of the community since they were built at a time when it was still expedient to live within the city walls or at least in the centre of the town.

Urban sprawl had not yet set in. The presence of these buildings gives the villages a unique character.

Evolution of the vineyard landscapes

The vineyards of the Guebwiller region have had a lasting impact on landscape planning.

Terrace cropping gives Guebwiller a unique appearance in Alsace. This method of cultivation extended to Buhl and Lautenbach. As plot sizes declined in the 20th century, only a few walls and stairs remain today.

The north side, occupied in the 19th century, was abandoned to nature and urbanization.

Hugstein castle was at one time surrounded by vineyards.

Before planting in trellised rows as we do now, the vines were planted on stakes, i.e. around a stand-alone pole.

With the mechanization of winegrowing the rows of vines had to be planted further apart, thus changing the landscape. With the same objective of streamlining the operation, the plots formerly fenced with vines were now standardized.

The surface area of one single cultivated plot then grew through the spontaneous regrouping of land by owners, thus reducing the 'mosaic' effect of the plots. This was further accentuated by the gradual disappearance of some small paths on which agricultural machinery could not pass.

The Oberlinger plateau was once a vast pasture as evidenced by the stone troughs still present in the forest.

From 1830, it was heavily planted with Scots pine, Robinia and chestnut trees, especially for the manufacturing of échalas, to stake the vines, as this wood was well-known to be rot-proof. The high ground around Lautenbach and Jungholtz were also heavily planted.



Cellar window with 'witches' broom' bars, main street, Wuenheim.



In Bergholtz, property of the Principality of Murbach, there was a tithe house, also intended to collect the proceeds of the tithe.

Places of interest

Tithe cellar

Built in the early 13th century, at the same time as the Saint-Léger Church, and provided with a cellar downstairs and a loft in the upper part, it was intended to house the proceeds of the tithe. In the 12th century, Guebwiller was thriving on winemaking, under the impetus of the Prince-Abbots of Murbach. The Abbey lavished its advice to farmers in establishing vineyards to ensure the prosperity of the monastery. The abbot set the rules for wine production and monastic rigour led to the development of an exemplary vineyard and the acquisition of excellent expertise. The Prince-Abbot collected the tithe on the harvest but also on the rent of leased

land he owned. In addition, a local usage, the 'Gefürstwein', allowed the Prince-Abbot to collect a fixed amount of wine that was owed to them, in kind, during the harvest. This law changed over the centuries, but continued until the Revolution. Duties were then applied to the price of wine: the *Umgeld*, the *Böspfenning* whose arbitrary enforcement sparked a revolt by the bourgeois against the authority of the Prince-Abbot in the 15th century, and the *Masspfennig*. The prosperity of the Guebwiller vineyards participated in the wealth of the Abbey.

Cellar windows protected with 'Witches' broom' iron bars

The ground floor of the winegrowers' houses was usually occupied by cellars accessible by a double arched door. The cellar or stable windows were sometimes protected by iron bars in the shape of a witches' broom also known as '*Haxabasa*' placed vertically or horizontally. According to popular tradition, these flat iron bars equipped with barbels protected livestock and preserved the wine, preventing evil spirits from entering the barn or cellar to spoil the wine. The windows also served to bring some natural light and ventilate the cellars.



Former winemaker's house, 9 route d'Issenheim in Bergholtz.



Professional insignia of a winemaker - labourer in Orschwihr.

Emblem of the winemakers' corporation in Soultz.

Winegrowers' houses

The wine villages of the Guebwiller region (Orschwihr, Bergholtz, Bergholtz-Zell, Soultzmatt, Soultz, Wuenheim) still boast many winegrowers' houses, which feature many architectural elements such as stair turrets and bay windows. The architecture is usually designed around an inner courtyard. Access to dependent buildings and basements is through arched porches often bearing the date of construction. They are frequently emblazoned with the owner's initials and professional insignia: a mallet and two forceps for coopers, a plough for labourers and a pruning knife for winemakers. A wooden gallery allows access to rooms

on the other stories. Rich carvings adorn some houses and illustrate the affluence of their inhabitants. The windows are surrounded by richly moulded frames. The patterns on the mullions are more varied, ranging from the traditional curled up leaves to small human heads and even little naive flowers. In many cases, these houses are still home to winegrowing enterprises.



List of winegrowing enterprises available at <http://www.tourisme-guebwiller.fr>

Old winemakers' corporations

In Guebwiller, wine was the main economy of the town. Those who did not cultivate wine directly were employed in the manufacture of barrels, tools, etc. Three corporations out of seven were winemakers' corporations: *Obere Rebzunft*, *Mittlere Rebzunft* and *Niedere Rebzunft*. They met in the *Zunftstube* or stove. Corporations served as 'solidarity funds' for their members and enforced regulations that governed the work and the production of wine. But the Abbey did not allow any opposition. Opponents were hunted down and, in periods of protest, corporations were dissolved. Their leader was

appointed by the Abbey, which made corporations ineffective. In Soultz, the inhabitants were originally divided into three corporations: farmers, artisans and the nobility. From 1513, only two corporations remained: that of farmers (*Oberzunft* or *Rebleutzunft*) and artisans (*Thiergartnzunft*). The 'high tribe' of winegrowers had a grape as their emblem, while the artisans' was a unicorn in a park. The old stove of the high tribe was situated at 65 rue de Lattre de Tassigny and dates from the 16th century.



Harvest at the Cave du Vieil-Armand.

Departure on the Vineyard Footpath of Ollwiller.

The Guebwiller vineyards

Mainly owned by the Murbach Abbey before the Revolution, the sale of national assets resulted in a fragmentation of the Florival vineyards.

The phylloxera crisis, exacerbated in Alsace by the change of nationality of the region, led to the abandonment of the Guebwiller vineyards by small holders. Coming from a family of industrialists, Ernest Schlumberger tirelessly acquired abandoned plots, replanted them horizontally and transformed the whole vineyard into terraces, creating the largest domain in Alsace.

Cooperative cellars

Today, there are 17 cooperatives in Alsace, which produce 34% of the Alsatian wine. They were created from the will of winegrowers to get together at the end of the Second World War. They allow winegrowers to liberate themselves from the constraints of winemaking and storage, so they can devote themselves to the cultivation of the vine while benefiting from new technology. The 'Cave du Vieil Armand' was the last to be founded in Alsace in 1958, in a wine area particularly devastated by the conflicts of the early 20th century. Its basement houses a Winemaking museum exhibiting old tools, agricultural and winegrowing equipment.

The Vineyard Footpaths

The 47 Alsatian Vineyard Footpaths are a great way to discover the vineyard. Dotted with numerous information panels, each footpath aims at revealing the winemaker's work, the art of wine in Alsace and the characteristics of each variety. Across the Guebwiller region, you can discover the Vineyard Footpaths of Wuenheim, Orschwihr and Soultzmatt.

Please note : All Vineyard Footpaths are closed during the grape harvest (1 month before and during the harvest)

The Wine Route

The Alsace Wine Route is the oldest Wine Route in France. It was opened in 1953 and extends from Thann to Marlenheim over more than 170km. Created from a tourism development policy, at the initiative of the Union of Wine growers and merchants and tourism committees of Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin, it crosses Alsace from north to south. The Alsace Wine Route can count 7 communes in the Guebwiller region : Soultzmatt, Orschwihr, Bergholtz-Zell, Bergholtz, Guebwiller, Soultz and Wuenheim.

An intangible heritage

Winegrowing is based on traditional techniques that follow the liturgical calendar and have been perfected over the centuries.

An ancestral calendar

Before the Revolution, the calendar was based on religious celebrations, organized the life of the winemaking community and set the work pattern for the year. Before St. George's day, April 23rd, the vines had to be pruned, tied and hoed.

Pruning was done by men, at first with a pruning knife and then, in early 20th century, with secateurs. Women were responsible for binding and forming bundles of branches. The whole vineyard community participated in the work. Before the start of summer, marked by St. John's day on June 24th, hoeing needed to be completed.

Women once bound the vines by hand. Today, the use of binding has been reduced in favour of a wire trellising system. It is no longer necessary for women to bind the shoots with wicker, which is however still currently used, but only to be passed through the wire trellising. The second hoeing had to be undertaken before August 24th, Saint Bartholomew's day. Respecting this calendar was not enough to ensure a good harvest and many popular traditions complemented it: blessing the vineyards, rogations, the processions of St. Mark and St. Mary were the main traditions. Winemakers also followed the almanac, respecting the astrological and lunar calendar.

The use of horses

In the era of mechanization, many plots are harvested using machines. Creating quality vintages requires manual harvesting. In the vineyards of Guebwiller, topographical constraints require the continued use of ploughing horses (Comtois breed), which are very calm, not too sensitive to heights and with a high pulling power. In winemakers' families, knowledge has always been transmitted verbally and 'on the job'.



Harvest scene. Photograph (Odile Kritter collection).

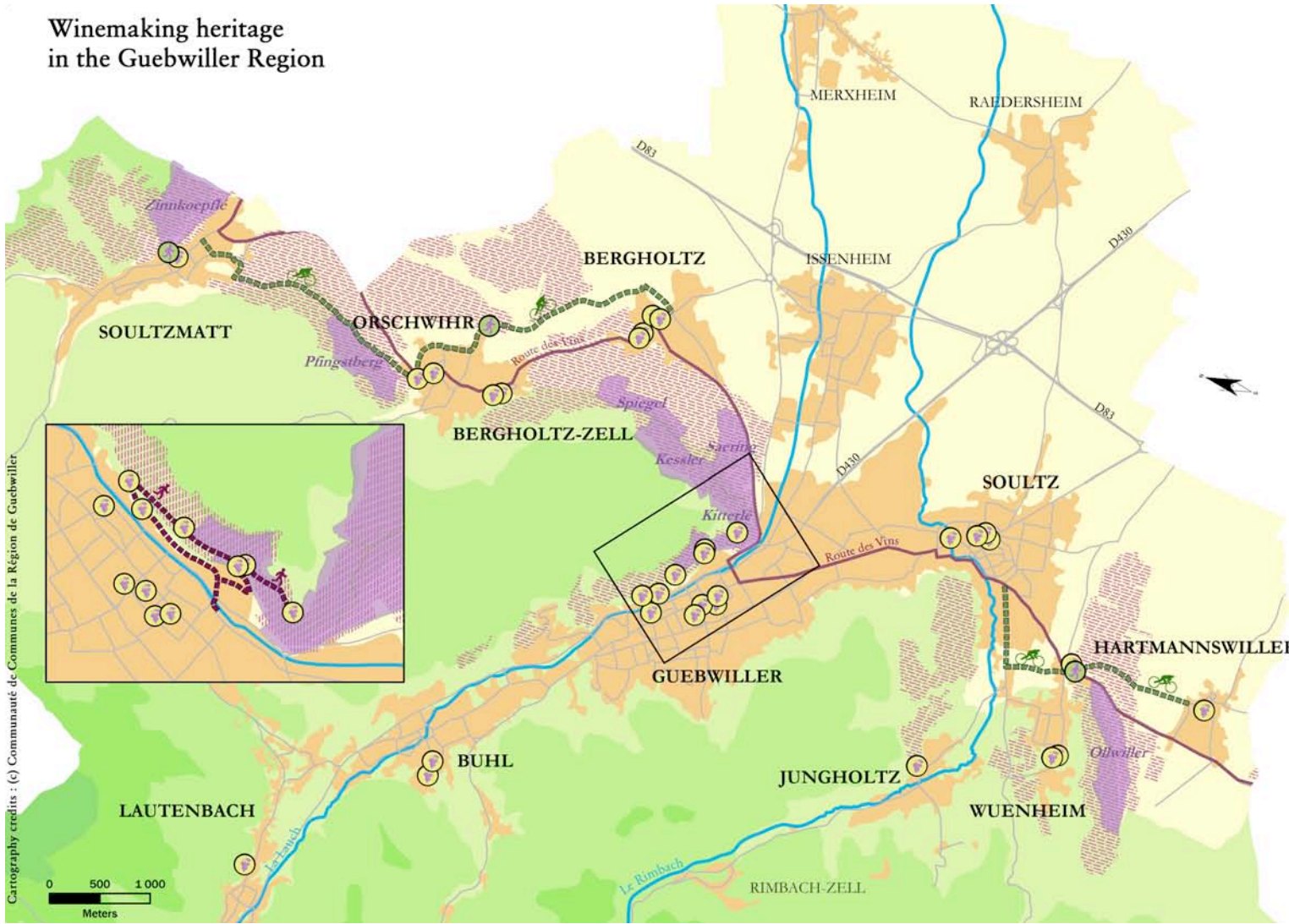


The basement of Cave du Vieil-Armand houses a Winemaking museum, with old agricultural tools and machinery.



Scene showing women pruning the vine with secateurs, replacing the traditional pruning knife after the First World War. Photograph (Property of Domaines Schlumberger).

Winemaking heritage in the Guebwiller Region



Cartography credits : (c) Communauté de Communes de la Région de Guebwiller

Bergholtz :

- Fountain (7°14'43,8"E 47°55'08,3"N)
- Tithe house, 19 rue de Bergholtz-Zell (7°14'40"E 47°55'09,3"N)
- Winemakers' house, 10 rue de l'Eglise (7°14'52,1"E 47°55'07"N)
- Winemakers' house, 9 route d'Issenheim (7°14'51,4"E 47°55'04,3"N)

Bergholtz-Zell :

- Winemakers' house, 17 rue des Suisses (7°13'57,9"E 47°55'47,7"N)
- Cooper's insignia, 16 rue de l'Eglise (7°13'56,3"E 47°55'50,3"N)

Buhl :

- Winemakers' house, 4 place de l'Eglise (7°10'52,4"E 47°55'40,1"N)
- View of the old vineyard (7°10'58,6"E 47°55'40,6"N)

Guebwiller :

- Town centre :**
- Winemakers' house, 10 rue des Chanoines (7°12'46"E 47°54'23,9"N)
- Winemakers' house, 41 rue de la République (7°12'44,2"E 47°54'28,5"N)
- Tithe cellar (7°12'34,4"E 47°54'43,6"N)
- Former location of a corporation (7°12'38,4"E 47°54'29,8"N)
- Cooper's house, 3 rue Stockhausen (7°12'49,9"E 47°54'24,1"N)

Walking path :

- Use of half-moon stones (7°12'44,4"E 47°54'42,4"N)
- The Guebwiller vineyards (7°12'41,3"E 47°54'48,1"N)
- Vineyard landscapes (7°12'54,6"E 47°54'39,2"N)
- Kitterlé (7°13'10,5"E 47°54'31,7"N)
- The Great Vintages (7°13'22,2"E 47°54'24,5"N)
- Terrace cropping (7°13'09,9"E 47°54'31,5"N)

Hartmannswiller :

- Trottsstein (7°12'55"E 47°51'43,4"N)

Jungholtz :

- Dry stone wall (7°11'55,3"E 47°53'09"N)

Lautenbach :

- Old vineyard (7°9'52,7"E 47°56'29,1"N)

Orschwihr :

- Trottsstein (7°13'55,3"E 47°56'14,5"N)
- Winemakers' houses (7°13'56,6"E 47°56'03,4"N)
- Vineyard Footpath, rue du Bollenberg (7°14'27"E 47°55'57"N)

Soultz :

- Winemakers' house, rue du Temple (7°13'48,6"E 47°53'04,2"N)
- Winemakers' house, 8 rue des Ouvriers (7°13'51,3E 47°53'05,8"N)
- Winemakers' house, 3 rue du Moulin (7°13'44,8" 47°53'16,3"N)
- Place Sainte-Claire 1605 (7°13'47,8"E 47°53'07,8"N)
- Cave du Vieil Armand (7°12'59,2"E 47°52'28,5"N)

Soultzmatt :

- Winemakers' houses, place d'Or (7°14'27"E 47°57'36,7"N)
 - Vineyard Footpath, Mairie (7°14'23,4"E 47°57'40,4"N)
- Wuenheim :**
- Winemakers' house, 134 rue Principale (7°12'16,7"E 47°52'25,5"N)
 - Vineyard Footpath (7°12'59,2"E 47°52'28,5"N)

- Vineyard
- Great Vintage
- Stopping point
- Cycle path
- Walking path
- Start of Vineyard Footpath



Learn the story of the **region of Guebwiller** – a region of art and history...

...Discover a region of art and history in the company of a guide-lecturer approved by the **Ministry of Culture**.

The guide is your host. He is fully familiar with all aspects of the region of Guebwiller, and will carefully explain everything you need to know to understand the landscape, and learn more about the development of the region through its various towns and villages. The guide is there to help you. Please feel free to ask any questions.

The heritage services department

brings together various initiatives of the region of Guebwiller – a region of art and history.

It runs guided tours for residents of the region of Guebwiller and the schools throughout the year and provides research services for all types of projects.

Information, reservations

Communauté de Communes de la Région de Guebwiller

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The **region of Guebwiller** belongs to the national network of Towns and Regions of art and history.

The architecture and heritage department of the Ministry of Culture and Communication awards the "Towns and Regions of art and history" title to local authorities who have made a special effort to enhance and promote their heritage. This title guarantees the skills of the guide-lecturers and heritage officers, in addition to the high quality of their activities. From ancient ruins to 20th century architecture, these towns and villages show the sheer diversity of France's heritage at its best. Today, this network of 166 towns and regions offers you a wealth of knowledge and know-how to be enjoyed right across the country.

Nearby

The Val d'Argent and Mulhouse are officially a Town or Region of art and history.

Greetings, oh Florival (Florigera vallis), you almost rival
paradise, with your bountiful hills and your sloping
vineyards canopied by the branches of the grapevines.

FRULANDUS / 11th century monk