



Stage 21

ÉTAMPES

Paris - Champs-Élysées

143 km



Sunday July 27th

TAKE A PEEK

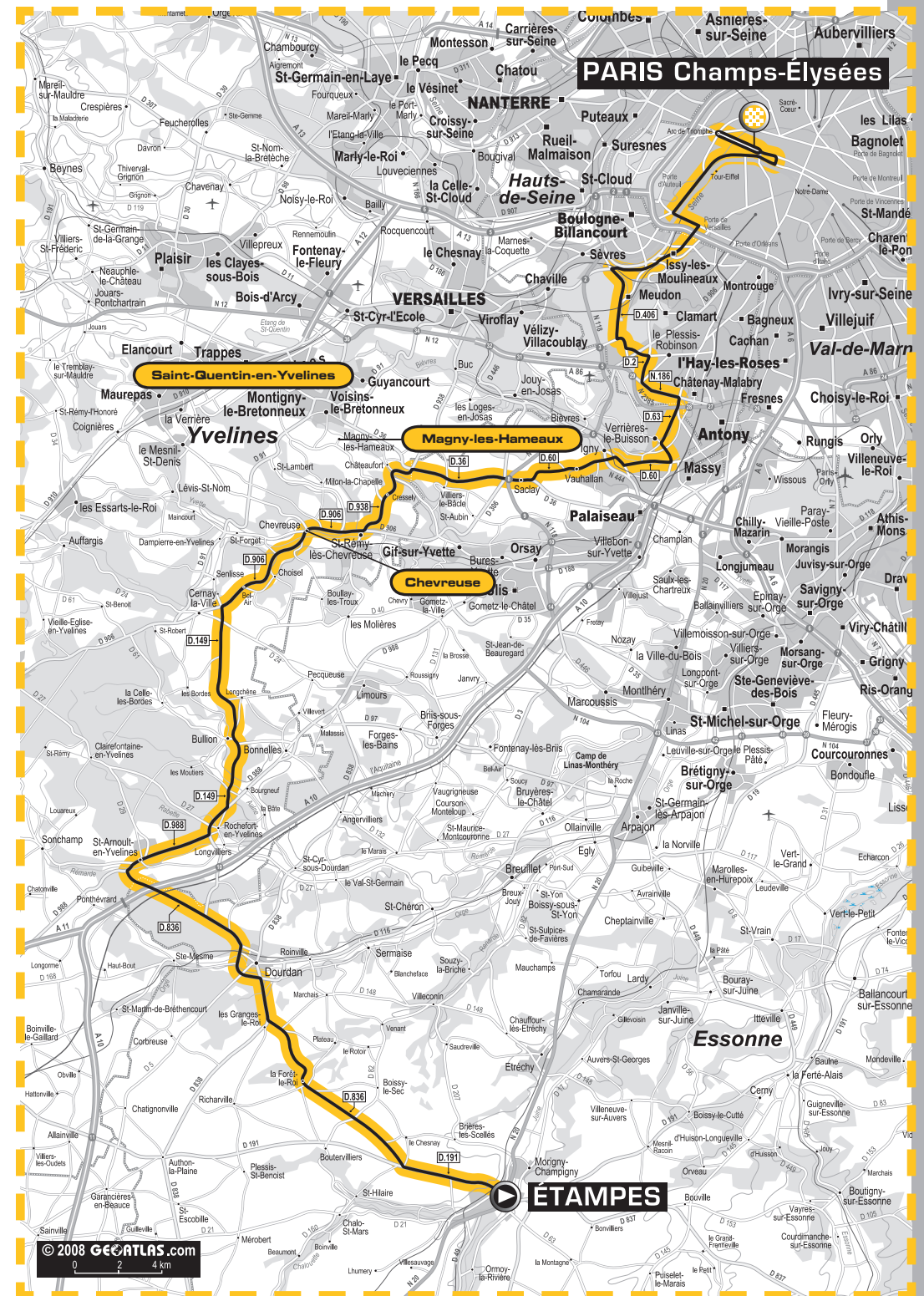
- **Etampes.** Located between the city and the countryside, “Little Venice” was for a long time the place where kings got up to their more or less clandestine capers, having settled their mistresses there.
- **Chevreuse (km 43.5).** The château de la Madeleine, frequented by the poet Jean Racine, is now in the heart of the Natural Park of the Upper Chevreuse valley.
- **Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (km 49).** This new town is especially famous for its Arcades du Lac, designed by the Argentine architect Ricardo Bofill.
- **Magny-les-Hameaux (km 49).** The former Port-Royal des Champs Abbey houses a museum retracing the history of the site.
- **Paris.** The final stretch taken by the peloton provides an insight into the historic heart of the capital.

THE TOUR PAYS A VISIT TO...

The contribution of Christian Binet, a comic-book artist, was especially influential in the success of the «Fluide Glacial» review in the 70s. He is best known as the writer of the cult series Les Bidochon, now totaling 18 volumes. He created the characters Robert and Raymonde in 1977 and lives right in Etampes.

“I ride my bike three times a week, just to warm up and for exercise, because, as an artist most of my day is spent sitting down. I am lucky to live in a really nice area, where we have small rolling valleys and little hills that are ideal for losing weight. I do not ride competitively, but rather for my health. The cyclists of the Tour de France, now that is a different world altogether! I could never picture myself pedalling every day for a month!

I personally love the Tour de France and its festive side. It is often mocked and portrayed as being a bit corny, although in fact, it is an event that brings together all sorts of different people. I once had the opportunity to picnic at the roadside and noticed that you could come across many people who are not even interested in cycling. I cannot think of any other popular celebration like it, at a time when sport is usually only about performance and money. The Bidochon family adore the Tour de France, it is their whole world. I have not yet been able to make them go cycling, because I have trouble drawing anything mechanical! But one of these days I am going to have a Bidochon book made elsewhere and we will definitely see them on bikes...”



ESSONNE DEPARTMENT (91)

Prefecture : **Evry**

Sub-prefectures : **Etampes and Palaiseau** .

The geographical position of Essonne is one of its main assets. Situated to the south of Paris, it maintains a keen balance between its industrialised, dynamic northern part and the green and peaceful south.

The surface area of the department is 1,819 km² (the third largest in the Ile-de-France – Paris region). It can be divided into four parts, which correspond to the former historic regions: Hurepoix to the north west, French Brie to the north east, Beauce to the south west and French Gâtinais to the south east. These regions form the basis of the Essonnienne identity, shaped by the counts of Corbeil, Etampes and Dourdan, which was the fiefdom of the Capetians.

In the 1960's, housing estates and public amenities grew in number. The phenome-

non of urban sprawl gave rise to large estates like those in Massy and Grigny and to new towns like Evry. Faced with such demographic pressure and in order to facilitate land organisation, the Seine-et-Oise department disappeared on the 10th of July 1964 to produce six new departments, including Essonne.

The department was to grow very quickly. Many projects for new towns (Les Ulis), and redevelopments (the Grande Borne district of Grigny) were launched. In 1965, Évry became the prefecture, and the SNECMA motor plant was built in Corbeil-Évry. Many people from the Ile de France region decided to move to the department, gradually making Evry the capital of Southern Paris. Today there are about 1.2 million Essoniens.

ETAMPES

Pop.: 26,000 (called *Etampoïis*)

Surface Area: 40.92 km²

Altitude : 66 m (min.) – 156 m (max.)

Rivers: the Juine, the Arche, and the Guiller-val, Filature and Filière brooks

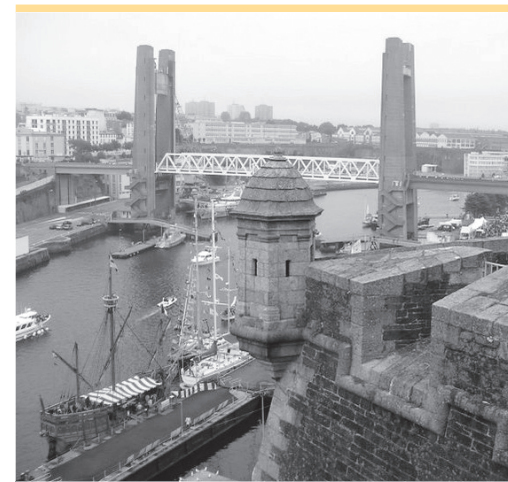
Local celebrities: Diane de Poitiers and Christian Binet.

Specialities: pavés d'Etampes (chocolates) .

Monument: Guinette Tower.

Sport : Etampes Triathlon.

Also known as "Little Venice" because of the four rivers that run through it, Etampes is the leading tourist attraction of Essonne, distinguished by having the label of "City of art and history". Built around several churches (the fortified Notre-Dame with its celebrated clock-tower and doorway, Saint-Martin with its famous Leaning Tower, Saint-Basile and Saint-Gilles), the different districts of the town form a collection of historic sites (including 26 listed buildings) recalling centuries of history at every turn. This is especially the case for the Portereaux (C16th), the Town Hall (C15th), the Maison des Piliers (C12th),



the Hotel Anne-de-Pisseleu (C16th) and the Hotel Diane-de-Poitiers (C15th). The king's mistresses were actually awarded the title "duchess of Etampes", which explains the presence of individual hotels named after them. Not forgetting the last remaining vestige of the former royal castle, the Guinette Tower, which dominates the town.

In addition, there is an intense cultural life (the Nuit du Jazz, the Spring festival, the Nuit du Rock and the Saint-Michel festival).

There are also opportunities to take part in numerous sporting activities, particularly at the regional leisure centre (mountain biking, tennis, skateboarding, climbing, archery and wave pool where it is possible to surf). Etampes has also hosted cycling races such as the Paris-Bourges and Paris-Nice competitions.

The town is also the birthplace of town planners Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire and Jean-Etienne Guettard and the sculptor Elias Robert, as well as the painter Louise Abbéma. The famous portrait artist Felix Giacomotti also stayed there in the 19th Century.

Although proud of its rich past, Etampes is nevertheless a city undergoing change, embracing the redevelopment of the most underprivileged districts at the top of the city. These changes are especially sensitive to the economic climate. Etampes is a community at the heart of Beauce, where agriculture remains important (for watercress) and the city, bolstered by its assets, has ambitions to create an environmental network, with farmers and companies specialising in organic produce and agri-business, right on the doorstep of Paris.

The automobile plant, which is responsible for Etampes's industrial wealth, is also undergoing a restructuring process and local groups have got together to create a European research centre for the development of new materials for use in the automobile industry.

Specialities:

Pavés d'Etampes (chocolates)

Culture:

1 Italian style theatre seating 250 - 1 art house cinema – 1 rehearsal studio called "Sud et Sonne" - 1 municipal school of music – 1 art school called "l'Atelier de la Vigne" - 1 museum in the town hall.

In January: Nuit de Jazz. In April: Nuit du Rock. In June: 3-day Festival of street arts. In September: Music Festival. In October: Blues Festival – 1 arts show.

Sport:

Etampes is the hometown of Messaoud Hammou, French karate champion 2007,

what has led to the organisation of an international competition in his sport in October. In May, a triathlon qualifier for the French championships brought together more than 400 participants.

DOURDAN - km 13.5

Pop. 9,600

Built on the banks of the Orge, Dourdan's reputation since ancient times has been founded on the pottery industry, which gave the town its coat of arms (three pots).

Situated on the route du blé (Wheat route) linking Beauce to Paris, Dourdan has played a role in almost all the wars in France's history. The hometown of Hugh Capet, it was the site of the seat of the Capetians in their struggle against the great feudal lords of the Paris region. The seat of royal power, its characteristic feature is the mighty fortress built in the heart of the city in 1200 by Philippe Auguste.

A remarkable example of military architecture and perfectly preserved, it was to be the privilege through the centuries of the important people of the kingdom: Blanche de Castille, Saint Louis, the d'Evreux family, the dukes of Berry and Sully and the d'Orléans family. In the 17th century, the town grew in beauty and expanded, due to its core of woollen mills, whose knitting machines were brought in on the initiative of a young Dourdannaïse, Marie Poussepin. In the 19th Century, Dourdan became known for its renowned publishers, whose publications shaped the image of the suburbs and seaside resorts. The standardisation of materials helped people from all social classes to choose the housing of their dreams from a catalogue.

Dourdan was the last home of a dear friend of the Tour de France, Michel Audiard.

Older people can also remember the difficult Liphard hill, used in the 1966 and 1967 Tours. Dourdan is also the hometown of the racing cyclist Jacques Cadiou, who took part in the Tour in 1967, 1968 and 1972.

YVELINES DEPARTMENT (78)Prefecture : **Versailles**Sub-prefectures : **Mantes-la-Jolie, Rambouillet and Saint-Germain-en-Laye.**

In 2008, Yvelines is celebrating forty years in existence. Like the five other departments that came out of the huge Seine-et-Oise, number 78 has changed considerably in forty years, with the development of the whole of the Ile-de-France area.

In 1968, the name of the department caused much debate. The name Yvelines was the preferred choice over the names Val de Seine, Seine-et-Beauce and Département de Versailles. The name was suggested by the poet Jehan Despert and takes its inspiration from the ancient forest region, the Yveline, the source of all the rivers of the region.

In forty years, numerous events have marked the transformation of the department: from the birth of the new town of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines to the creation of two operations of national interest (the Vallée de Seine and plateau de Versailles - Saclay), the first RER rail link at La Défense - Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the implementation of the project for a tramway between Châtillon and Viroflay, the creation of the Parly 2 regional shopping centre and the renovation of the Galerie des Glaces (Hall of Mirrors) at Versailles. By building on the tradition symbolised by its prefecture, Versailles, and the dynamism of the new towns, the department has been able to preserve its identity and its 1.35 million inhabitants benefit from it having France's 4th largest PIB (gross internal product), behind Paris, Hauts-de-Seine and Rhône.

**SAINT-ARNOULT-EN-YVELINES - km 22
Pop. 5,600**

Today Saint-Arnoult is known mainly for the House of Elsa Triolet-Aragon, an old 12th century mill, where the writing couple ended their lives. Louis Aragon, who passed away in 1982 and Elsa Triolet, who died in 1970, are buried in the park. The inscription on their gravestone reads: "When, side by side, we finally become recumbent statues, the bond of our books will reunite us for better

or for worse in this future, which was both a dream and a major worry to you and me."

The town is well known by lovers of cycling, as it is the departure point of the classic Paris-Tours race.

**CHEVREUSE - km 43.5
Pop. 5,400**

The history of Chevreuse, which takes its name from goat rearing, begins with the Carolingians. In the 9th century, some of the villagers who had settled on the left bank of the river Yvette built a small abbey dedicated to Saint Saturnin. Construction of the Château de La Madeleine by Guy the First began in 1075.

Chevreuse became a town of increasing importance, whose leading industries are the cloth factory, followed by the tannery. Throughout the Middle Ages constant warring decimated the town. In 1438, there were only 28 out of the original 300 inhabitants left in Chevreuse. In order to protect themselves, they built a fortified wall.

During the religious wars, to protect the suburbs of the town, a second wall, flanked by eight turrets, was constructed. Lords and travellers were happy to stop off in Chevreuse. There were many well-kept hostleries. In 1661 Jean Racine, who was staying at the Château de La Madeleine and was bored to tears, wrote to some friends: "I go to the tavern two or three times a day".

By the end of the 19th century, the tannery having almost disappeared, Chevreuse was making a living mainly from market gardening. In the 20th century, thanks to the natural Park of the Upper Chevreuse Valley, whose administration departments are in the Château de la Madeleine, and to controlled urbanisation, the village managed to maintain its village-like character on the edge of the Parisian suburbs, which gives it a certain appeal to tourists.

Near the Château de la Madeleine there is a marble plaque inscribed with four verses that Jean Racine dedicated to Chevreuse during his stay in 1661:

"How I do enjoy these mountains
That rise to the heavens
In a graceful diadem,
To crown this beautiful scenery"

**SAINT-REMY-LES-CHEVREUSE - km 45.5
Pop. 7,700**

Known by Parisians as the end of one of the RER commuter lines, the town is named after Saint-Rémi, who was the bishop of Reims in around 458. From the RER station, travellers can admire the superb château built in 1696 by Jean Freddy de Coubertin. In 1973 Yvonne de Coubertin, niece of the founder of the modern day Olympic Games, created a foundation there to aid the arts and crafts industries. The de Coubertin estate consists of workshops and collections, such as the Jardin des bronzes (Garden of bronzes), which, since 1980, has housed bronzes from the French school of sculpture.

Saint-Rémy-les-Chevreuse was the last home of the humorist Raymond Devos, who lived there from 1963 until his death on the 15th of June 2006.

**SAINT-QUENTIN-EN-YVELINES - km 49
Pop. 146,000**

Saint-Quentin en Yvelines is one of the best examples of the success of the "new towns" concept launched in the 1970's. Built from scratch in the middle of beetroot fields in 1972, the town was recently awarded the label "Town of art and history", although it has only been in existence for 38 years. This is because in Saint-Quentin, the architecture was designed to reconcile the aesthetic with demand and functionality and because the town can lay claim to a real 20th century heritage. The extraordinary urban experiment represented by these new towns has therefore been rewarded.

Some buildings have already made their mark, such as the Arcades du Lac by the Argentine Ricardo Bofill. In addition, more than 80 public works of art line the squares, gardens and streets, all signed by international artists such as Piotr Kowalski, Marta Pan, Dani Karavan and Nissim Merkado.

The town gets its name from a place name, the lake of Saint-Quentin, whose site was chosen to become the centre of the new

town. In 2004, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines became an amalgamation of built up areas, comprising seven communes: Élancourt, Guyancourt, Magny-les-Hameaux, Montigny-le-Bretonneux, Trappes, La Verrière and Voisins-le-Bretonneux.

In 40 years, the population of the area has increased tenfold, due to the establishment of the new town. In 1962 there were about 15,000 inhabitants – mainly concentrated in Trappes – and this exceeded 145,000 in 2003.

**MAGNY-LES-HAMEAUX - km 49
Pop. 9,150**

Magny les Hameaux, a peaceful and extensive agricultural area, has always had astonishing intellectual appeal. First of all there was the attraction of the Port-Royal des Champs abbey, frequented by Boileau, Pascal, Racine and Madame de Sévigné, and whose museum can be visited to the west of the village. More recently, it became a prized place to visit for writers and painters, thanks to the presence in Magny of celebrities from the world of the arts.

This is how, at the beginning of the 20th century André Gide, Claude Debussy, Eugène Carrière, Albert Samain and Charles Guérin came to meet at the home of the composer Raymond Bonheur. The engineer Paul Weiss, a former mayor of the commune and father of the former doyenne of the European parliament, Louise Weiss, often received Raoul Dufy and Maurice De Vlaminck into his home. At the end of the 19th century, Jean-Baptiste Corot came to Magny to visit his friend Robert Fleury.

It was also on Magny territory that the pilot Hélène Boucher was killed in 1934.

The town's stadium bears the name of Jacques Anquetil, five times winner of the Tour de France, who won the Grand Prix des Nations, held in the valley of Chevreuse, nine times

The abbey of Port-Royal des Champs

In the town of Magny there is the national museum of Port-Royal des Champs, built on the site of the old abbey, which, at the end of the 17th century, was a bastion of Jansenism and an intellectual centre with exceptional influence.

Founded in 1204, at the beginning of the 17th century the abbey became an important place for Catholic reform at the instigation of mother Angélique, who reinstated the order of saint Benoît there. In around 1635, the abbot of Saint-Cyran became the spiritual leader of the monastery and prompted the foundation of the "Petites écoles" which were to turn Port-Royal into one of the cornerstones of modern teaching.

The focal point of Jansenist thinking in France, Port-Royal emerged as a place of resistance against royal power. In 1661, Louis XIV ordered the dispersal of the Solitaires (Recluses) and the closure of the Petites écoles. But in 1969 when peace was made with the church, the abbey came into a second golden age, under the protection of the king's cousin, the duchess of Longueville. Between 1705 and 1713, the aging king looked to banish the Jansenists from his kingdom. Having been unable to reduce the number of nuns in Port-Royal, he dispersed them in 1709 and burned down their abbey two years later.

A major intellectual centre during the Grand siècle, Port-Royal held a real fascination for several generations of writers and thinkers, including Pascal, Racine, La Fontaine and Madame de Sévigné.

Of the former abbey, some buildings were preserved and reused for agricultural purposes, principally the pigeon loft and the old mill. The foundations of the abbey church were restored after the Revolution by the Duke of Luynes. A small neo-gothic chapel was ad-

ded at the end of the 19th century on the site of the cheviot, to house the first museum.

In 1651, the Solitaires of Port-Royal had an elegantly simple home built to house the "Petites écoles". At the end of the 19th century, the owners of the estate had a wing built in the same style. It was in these buildings that the museum was established from 1962 onwards.

CHÂTEAUFORT - km 50.5
Pop. 1,480

At the crossroads of the D36 and D938 roads, at the top of la Trinité hill, a sculpture in bronze of Jacques Anquetil on his cycle was erected in March 1989, after the death of the five-times winner of the Tour in November 1987. This statue was stolen, most probably to be resold for its value in bronze. It has now been replaced by a stele bearing the commemorative plaque that was underneath the statue. The memorial was erected on the old course of the Grand Prix des Nations, won by Jacques Anquetil on nine occasions.

The village of Châteaufort is closely associated with the history of aviation. On the 19th of August 1913, Adolphe Pégoud (1889-1915), a young test pilot recruited by Louis Bleriot, took off from the Borel aerodrome, situated to the north of the village and made the world's first parachute jump from an aeroplane. Left to its own devices, the aircraft carried out a few acrobatic somersaults over the Méran-taise valley before crashing to the ground.

ESSONNE DEPARTMENT (91)

SACLAY - km 57.5
Pop. 2,900

A peaceful agricultural commune, drained to provide water for the lakes of the park of Versailles, Saclay saw its fortune change after the War, with the creation of the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), one of whose research centres, the first and the most important, was established on its land.

Constructed from 1947 by the architect Auguste Perret and opened in 1952, the nuclear research centre at CEA-Saclay employs more than 4,000 permanent staff. In the 1960's, about 10,000 people worked at the centre.

The Saclay plant is dedicated in particular to research into nuclear energy, basic research and teaching, along with one of the establishments of the National Institute for Nuclear Science and Technology (INSTN).

MASSY - km 63.5
Pop. 40,900

12 km to the south of Paris, Massy, birthplace of the historian Fustel de Coulanges, and whose lords were linked to the family of the principality of Monaco, has been expanding since the start of the 20th century into a large residential suburb of the

capital, changing from a village of 1,400 inhabitants into today's town of 40,000 people.

The third largest town in Essonne and the largest in terms of economic activity, Massy has been subjected to all kinds of changes in urban development, from its first houses in the second decade of the 20th century to the large estates of the 1970's.

Massy's fate is closely linked to its railway history. During the Second World War, the Massy-Palaiseau marshalling yard was a strategic railway junction. The bombardment of this infrastructure was responsible for 88 casualties and material damage throughout the whole town.

Post-war, the housing crisis raged. The establishment of large housing estates over 145 hectares of the communes of Massy-Antony caused the population to double.

The construction of the Villaine ZUP (priority housing zone) ten years later was an attempt to redress the balance of urbanisation of the town. In the 1960's and 1970's questions were raised about such rapid urban development: housing problems, lack of public facilities, the redefinition of certain industrial sites. To address the needs of this new population, many infrastructures were created: schools, a hospital, sports centres, a swimming pool, a cultural centre, crèches, grassed areas. Today, some of these facilities are national attractions, in particular the opera house.

The establishment of the TGV railway station in 1991 was a major asset for the economic development of the town.

The filmmaker and comedian Alain Chabat and television presenter Arthur both grew up in Massy.

HAUTS-DE-SEINE DEPARTMENT (92)

Prefecture : Nanterre

Sub-prefectures : Antony and Boulogne-Billancourt .

With a PIB (gross internal product) three times higher than the average French department, Hauts-de-Seine is the third "richest" region in the European Union after Paris and London. Home to the head offices of some 6,000 companies, the department also has a concentration of huge revenues. These assets are particularly evident at la Défense and also in the south west of the department, at Issy-les-Moulineaux and Boulogne, where there is a concentration of head offices of large French media companies.

Originating in 1968 from the division of the huge Seine-et-Oise department, Hauts-de-Seine, despite being the smallest department in the Paris area in terms of surface area (576 km²) is also the most populated, with over 1.5 million inhabitants.

Although the prefecture for the department is Nanterre, its most populated town is Boulogne-Billancourt, the only town in the Hauts-de-Seine department with more than 100,000 inhabitants.

CHÂTENAY-MALABRY - km 71
Pop. 30,600

The name of Châtenay-Malabry is very familiar to cyclists, as this is where the national anti-doping research centre is based, which is unfortunately responsible for confirming many positive tests for the Tour, for other cycling competitions and at other stadia.

PARIS - km 82.5
Pop. 2,300,000

Originally called Lutèce, the Ile de la Cité was occupied by the Parisii in the 3rd century B.C. Its expansion began with the construction of a Gallo-roman town (8,000 inhabitants) on the left bank of the Seine during the 1st and 2nd centuries. The next major expansion of its boundaries occurred during the reign of Philippe-Auguste in the 12th and 13th centuries, when the ramparts of Paris came to enclose the current Les Halles district and the city hall. During the 16th and 17th centuries Paris was to expand to the west, into what are to-

day the Tuileries and Concorde districts. Next came the Fermiers Généraux wall, encircling the Champs-Élysées, Champs-de-Mars, Faubourg Saint Jacques, Faubourg Saint-Antoine, Faubourg du Temple and Faubourg Montmartre (1784-1791), followed by the Thiers fortifications on the current Paris city boundaries (1841-1845). Its modernisation was undertaken by Haussmann, Belgrand and Alphand at the request of Napoleon III.

Construction of the underground network (métro) started in 1890.

Important dates

Paris, capital of the kingdom of Clovis (508). Residence of François I (1804) at Notre Dame. Execution of Louis XVI and Queen Marie-Antoinette (1793). Siege and occupation by the Prussians and La Commune revolutionary government (1871). World Exhibition, construction of the 300 m tall Eiffel Tower, later to be 320 m (1899). Start of the métro service (1900). German occupation of Paris (June 1940). Liberation of Paris (26th of August 1944). UNESCO headquarters (1946).

Great classics

Notre-Dame-de-Paris (12th-13th centuries). Louvre - Eiffel Tower- Triumphant Way (Tuileries Gardens, rue de Rivoli, place de la Concorde (formerly the place Louis XV), Champs-Élysées, Arc de Triomphe) - Quai de la Seine - Panthéon - Pompidou Centre - Beaubourg.

Don't miss

The Marais (hotels and the Place des Vosges – formerly the Place Royale) - Sainte Chapelle - Palais de Justice - Conciergerie - Carnavalet Museum - Invalides – Military School - Palais-Royal - Palais de Chaillot and Trocadéro - Saint-Sulpice church and square– Top places for art and culture: Sorbonne, named after its creator, Robert de Sorbon (1257) National Library – Institute of France - Opera - Comédie Française – Museum of Modern Art – Museum of Cluny - Orangerie – Natural History Museum - Palais de la Découverte - Conservatoire des Arts and Métiers - Manufacture des Gobelins museum – the Cité des Sciences et Géode (La Villette).

The green spaces of Paris

Bordered by the Bois de Boulogne to the west and the Bois de Vincennes to the east, Paris is a capital full of grassed areas, parks and gardens. A list drawn up by the Mairie, charts more than 400 gardens spread across the city's twenty arrondissements.

The most famous: Jardin des Plantes (the oldest) - Jardin Royal, open to the public in 1640, where you can see the oldest tree in the capital, a robinia, or false acacia, planted in 1635, as well as the Cedar of Lebanon planted in 1734. Champs de Mars and the Jardins du Trocadéro - Parc Monceau (1778) where Guarnerin's first parachute experiment took place in 1707 - Tuileries Gardens (1664) – Luxembourg Garden, created on the initiative of Marie de Medici in 1612 - Buttes-Chaumont (1867), one of the most varied and successful parks in Paris, which we owe to Napoleon III - Parc Montsouris laid out by Haussmann between 1868 and 1878 - Jardin du Palais Royal.

In addition to these "classics" are the more recently created parks, in particular the Parc de la Villette, the Jardin des Halles, the Parc André Citroën, the Parc Georges Brassens, the Parc de Belleville, the Parc Kellermann, the Jardin de Babylone, the Butte du Chapeau rouge (on the hill at Belleville), the Saint-Vincent natural garden and the Parc de la Turlure (Montmartre), the Jardin de l'Intendant, the Square du Temple, the Jardins du Ranelagh, the Promenade plantée (planted walk) on the viaduct and disused railway track in the 12th arrondissement and not forgetting the Jardins des Champs-Élysées and Avenue Foch (formerly Avenue du Bois), which is the capital's widest thoroughfare.

Vélib' blows out a candle

Vélib', a fusion of vélo (bicycle) and liberté (freedom), is a system of self service bicycle hire established in Paris in July 2007. 10,648 bicycles were then available at 750 locations and these figures doubled in six months until, by the end of 2007, there were more than 150,000 signed-up members and had been ten million rentals. Because of its success, there is

already talk of making a total of 50,000 bicycles available to Parisians. Since its launch, Vélib' has been rolled out in thirty communes in the Petite Couronne' (ring of three departments around Paris), with most large French and European cities having also adopted systems of self service bicycle hire.

The Tour de France and the mairie of Paris are to celebrate the first anniversary of Vélib' together. So, on the 2nd of July at 10.30, 365 members will celebrate 365 days of Vélib' by completing the last stretch of the final stage using Vélib'. Winners will be chosen at random to ride alongside celebrities from the City Hall to the Champs-Élysées and back again.

Rue de Rivoli

The central thoroughfare of Paris links le Marais (Saint-Paul) with the Place de la Concorde. The main places along the route: the City Hall (former Place de Grève), Place du Châtelet, Palais du Louvre and Place du Palais Royal (Comédie Française). Rue de Rivoli runs alongside the Tuileries Gardens. The Tuileries Palace is the former royal residence, which was built on the orders of Catherine de Medici in the 16th century on what had previously been the site of a tile (tuile) factory. On the 10th of August 1792 Revolutionaries stormed the palace and overthrew the monarchy; the Commune government set fire to the palace in 1871 and it was demolished in 1882. All that remains are the gardens, designed by Le Nôtre. The name of Rivoli commemorates the victory of Bonaparte over the Austrians on the 14th of January 1797, during his Italian campaign.

Place de la Concorde

The place de la Concorde, which Tour riders cross before embarking on the Champs-Élysées, is the largest square in Paris (84,000 m²). It is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the world because of its size, perspectives and architecture. It constitutes one of the capital's great crossroads, located between the avenue des Champs-Élysées and Rue de Rivoli, Rue Royale and the

Seine, the Tuileries Gardens and the grassed areas of the "Champs" and served since 1900 by the first line of the Métro. It was said to have been born out of a love story: the declaration of love by the people for Louis XV, the so-called "Bien-Aimé" (Well-Beloved). But his popularity had waned and the inauguration, on the 20th of June 1763 of a statue depicting him on horseback enraged his opponents. The following day, the monument was decorated with a placard: "Oh! What a beautiful statue! Oh! What a beautiful pedestal! Virtue walks, whilst vice rides a horse!" This rebellious spirit might cause people to smile, but the event foreshadowed some dark tragedies. In 1770, the firework display to celebrate the wedding of Marie-Antoinette and the regent (who would become Louis XVI) turned into tragedy, following a fire caused by a firecracker. The death toll was 133.

The Revolution was to make even more casualties. Place Louis XV, immediately renamed Place de la Revolution in 1792 (on the 11th of August of that same year, the statue of the former king was destroyed) could equally have been called "Place Rouge" (Red Square). More than 1,300 people were to perish on the scaffold during the first six months of the terrifying year of 1793.

Amongst the victims of the guillotine (named after its inventor, Doctor Guillotin), erected on the 21st of January for the execution of Louis XVI, are not only the King, Queen Marie-Antoinette and the chief revolutionaries: Danton, Camille Desmoulins and Robespierre, but also the Countess of Barry, a mistress of Louis XV, Charlotte Corday, who had murdered Marat, the chemist Lavoisier, and Madame Roland, whose last words were "Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!"

The name "Place de la Concorde", a symbol of reconciliation and hope, was adopted by the Directory in the latter years of the 18th century, and under the reign of Louis-Philippe in 1836, an obelisk was erected. This non-political monument had been a gift from the viceroy of Egypt, Mehmet Ali to Charles X in 1829. The 33 century-old vestige of the temple at Luxor, 23 metres tall, and weighing 220 tonnes did not reach Paris until four years later. At the time of Napoléon III and

Baron Haussmann, the place de la Concorde was to find its definitive look thanks to Jacques Hittorff, a French architect originally from Germany (born in 1792 in Cologne), who designed the two fountains and altered the general layout. This remarkable example of 18th century style constitutes a masterpiece of balance and elegance, borne out by the Hotel de Crillon and the Hotel de la Marine, which are flanked by the Hotel Talleyrand and the American Embassy. We could not tell the history of this prestigious square, without mentioning the riot of the 6th of February 1934, a confrontation between left and right wing parties that was left seven dead and many injured.

Champs-Élysées

On the site of the "Champs", there was once pastureland bordering the Rouvray Forest (now the Bois de Boulogne). In the 16th century, Marie de Medici had a path built as an extension of "her" Tuileries Gardens. Widened by Le Nôtre in 1676 and planted with trees, this royal road was extended to the Bois de Boulogne in the 18th century by two construction managers, d'Antin and Marigny, the brother of the Marquise de Pompadour, who designed the roundabout...in the shape of a star.

Lined with open-air dance halls and gambling parlours, the Champs-Élysées, was for a long time the haunt of scoundrels and crooks. But in 1776 the Le Doyen restaurant became the meeting place for the rich and famous and the Champs came under the influence of the neighbouring Faubourg Saint-Honoré district. That is when beautiful houses and individual hotels began to spring up there.

The days of the Revolution had an impact on the history of the avenue. On the 5th of October 1789 the people of Paris used it to go to Versailles and, after the Treaty of Tilsitt, a huge banquet was held there by the Mairie of Paris to honour the 10,000 soldiers of the Imperial Guard. Great events that have taken place on the Champs-Élysées include the return of Napoleon's remains in 1840, Victor Hugo's state funeral in 1885, the 1918 victory parade and, last of all, the triumphant arrival of General de Gaulle in 1944: a crowning moment that could help people forget recent painful times.

Despite its magnitude, the 71m wide avenue des Champs-Élysées is not the capital's largest thoroughfare (avenue Foch is 120m), but it is surely the most prestigious. Although accessible to all levels of society, "the most beautiful avenue in the world", to use the accepted expression, is an outstanding business centre with its luxury shops, huge theatres (the Lido and cinemas showing exclusives), its galleries exhibiting "Parisian chic" and its world-famous restaurants. It has recently undergone renovation and is the site of the Paris Tourist Office's headquarters. Since the demolition of the pink racetrack at the Parc des Princes, the Tour de France has found an appropriate new setting. We are reminded, by the way, that the Champs-Élysées hosted the bicycle show in 1894.

Bibliography and literature

Faced with the impossible task of listing all works that mention Paris, here is our selection to be completed, according on taste:

"Notre Dame de Paris" and "Les Misérables", Victor Hugo
 "Scènes de la vie parisienne", Balzac
 "Les mystères de Paris", Eugène Sue
 "Paris au XXème siècle", Jules Verne
 "Quarante ans de Paris", Alphonse Daudet
 "Journal", Edmond and Jules de Goncourt
 "Le ventre de Paris", Emile Zola
 "Journal", Jules Renard
 "Ouvert la nuit", Paul Morand
 "Remontons mes Champs-Élysées", Sacha Guitry
 "Les mariés de la Tour Eiffel", Jean Cocteau
 "Zazie dans le metro", Raymond Queneau
 "Paris au mois d'août", René Fallet
 "Monsieur Jadis", Antoine Blondin
 "Les combattants du petit bonheur", Alphonse Boudard
 "Contes et nouvelles", Marcel Aymé
 "Paris, une porte derrière la Bretagne", Philippe Le Guillou