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Heritage trails  
Discovery booklet

# A history of riverside life

Gennes



# Genes

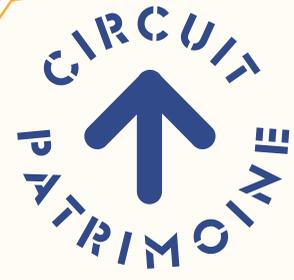
## A history of riverside life



This joint project was carried out by the Communauté de communes du Gennois and the Loire-Anjou-Touraine Regional Park.

Discover the rich heritage of the town of Genes by following the tale told by Rose, a washerwoman also known as the Amazonian.

Go to the departure point (D) and follow the signs.

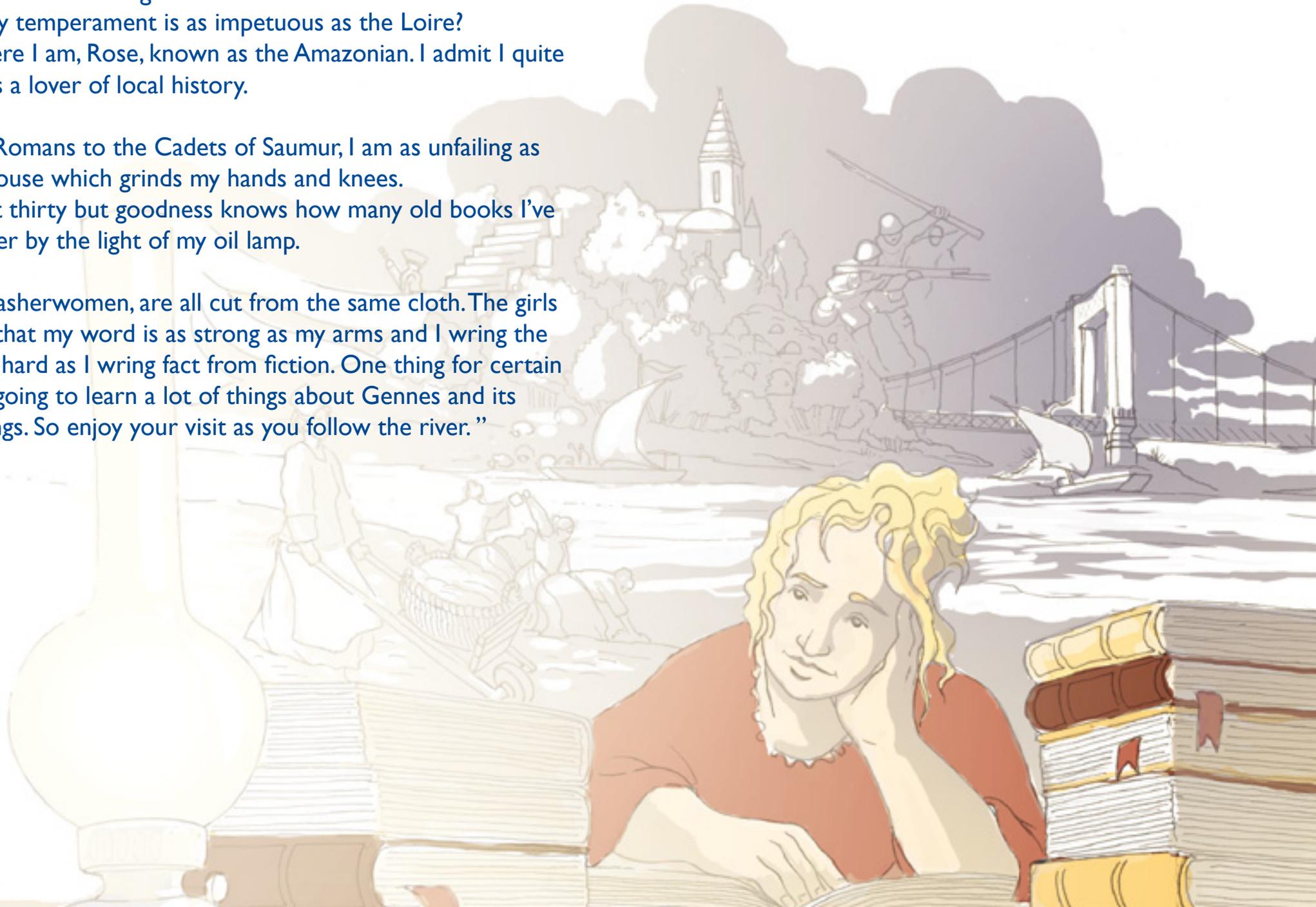


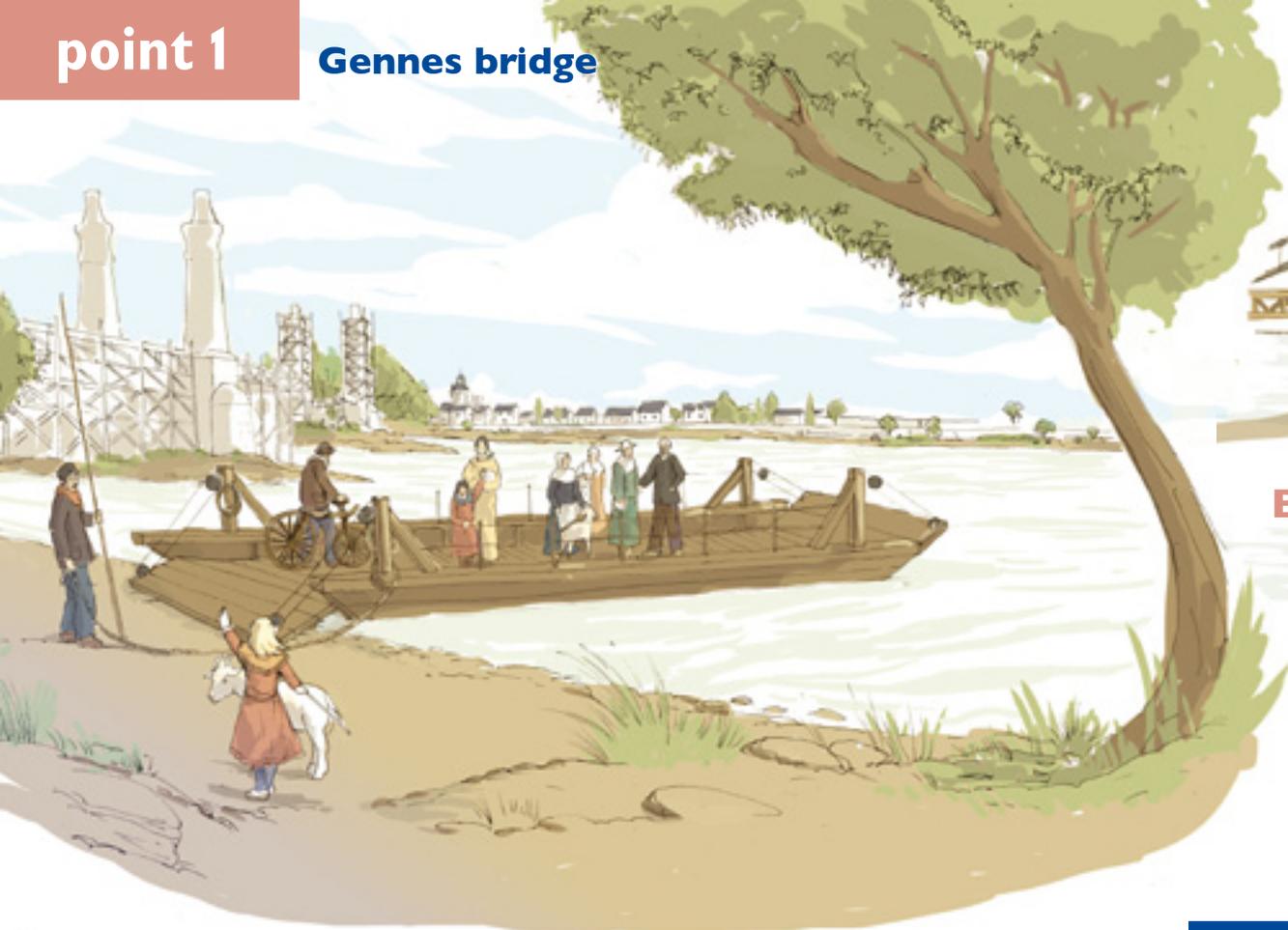
## A history of riverside life

“ Is it because I live alongside a river? And what a river! Is it because my temperament is as impetuous as the Loire? Anyway, here I am, Rose, known as the Amazonian. I admit I quite like that, as a lover of local history.

From the Romans to the Cadets of Saumur, I am as unfailing as the washhouse which grinds my hands and knees. I’m not yet thirty but goodness knows how many old books I’ve poured over by the light of my oil lamp.

We, the washerwomen, are all cut from the same cloth. The girls know it – that my word is as strong as my arms and I wring the laundry as hard as I wring fact from fiction. One thing for certain – you are going to learn a lot of things about Genes and its surroundings. So enjoy your visit as you follow the river.”





## Riverside communities

" People often say that the Loire brings people together. On the contrary! Just look at the people from the valley on the other side of the bridge over there – the vallerots as we call them. Do you know what they call us? The berlots! Doesn't sound very flattering to me - like some kind of disease. It's true that the people up on the hillside are very different from those down in the valley. Though when they built the bridge, not all that long ago, it did help bring us all together a little bit. Before 1842 the ferryboat was the only way across the river. It was nice enough when the weather was good, but when the waters rose and churned up all the debris from the bed, things could get a bit hairy. People say that in the past the young lads from either side of the river used to get into fights now and again. Nowadays those living on the north bank and those on the south get on fine together. We're complementary after all, the valley folk and the hill folk."



To avoid missing the ferry ...

Guess what period is shown on each drawing!

**1842**  
Clue: the horizontal part of this (called a deck) is made of wood.

**1932**  
Clue: Structural makeover.

**1948 – 1949**  
Clue: New version.

A .....  
B .....  
C .....

## See, feel, imagine ...

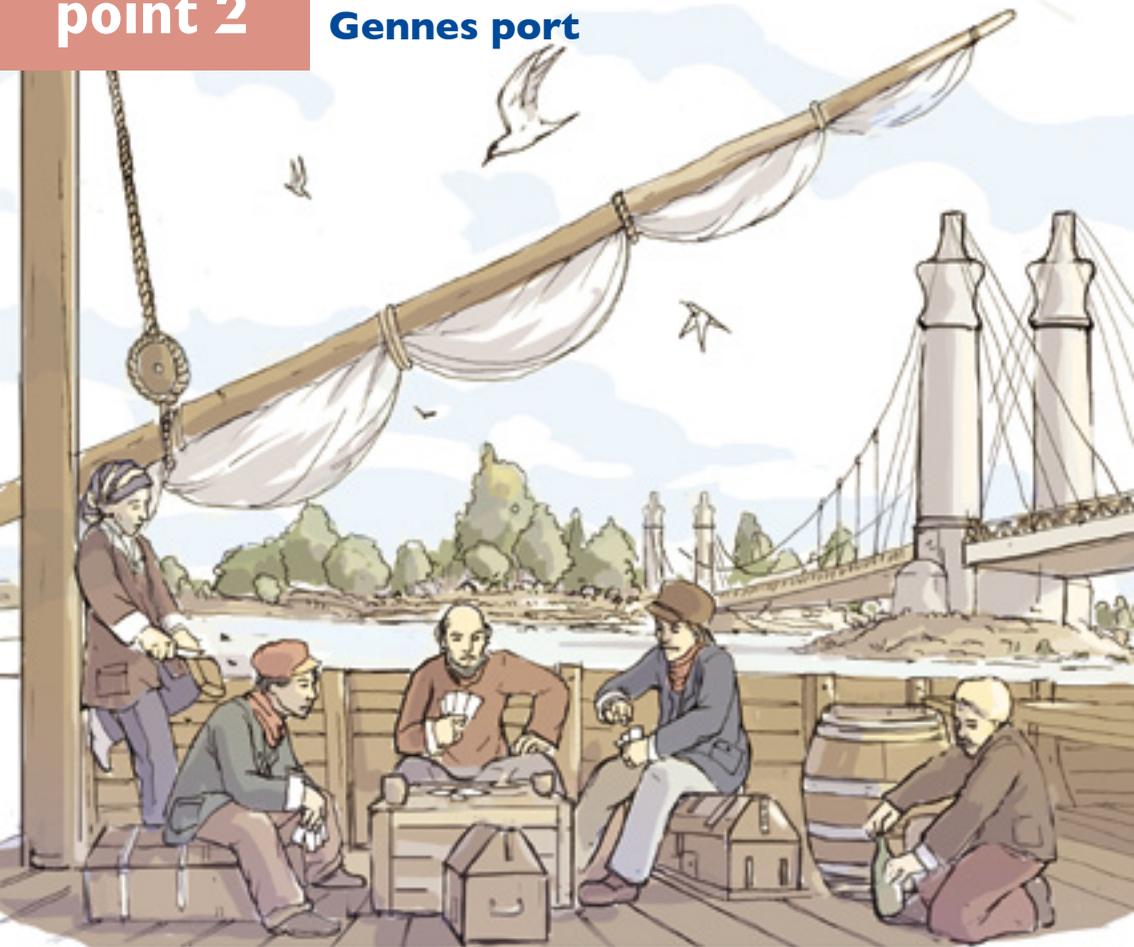
Solution p. 20

### Water resources

Look at the colour of the Loire. The river carries the alluvia and silt created by erosion. Before the levees were built, whenever the water level rose these sediments were deposited on the meadows in the valley, enriching the soil and making it suitable for growing all sorts of crops. The depth of alluvia laid down on the riverbed over time varies from place to place. In Gennes the alluvial layer is 8 metres thick!

### Loire ferrymen

- The ferry service was shut down the following day. The ferry was a large punt operated by a ferryman, and it was used to carry people and animals across the river. It was a flourishing trade up until the arrival of bridges in the 19th century. The first bridge was officially opened on 20 July 1842.



### A corporation bound together by the river

" Until recently there were many, many barges on the Loire. It was quite a sight! The arrival of the railways took the wind out of their sails a bit, but boats are still very useful for transporting heavy products such as salt, wheat, wine, wood, coal, tuffeau stone, and slate. Like any profession, the life of the boatmen was full of ups and downs –like those of the river! When the water was high they had to go and rescue the peasants who took refuge on their rooftops. When there wasn't any wind there was no way of going upstream even in a flat-bottomed barge, so they had to stay berthed and kill time by whittling laundry beaters or the the boxes for little wood heaters with their pocket knives. But if everything went well it took 8 days to sail down to Nantes and 12 days to go up to Paris. It was quite an adventure! And if the truth be told when the sun went down our lads were quite happy to play a card game called aluette, where cheating is part of the rules and involving all sorts of coded facial expressions. "



### An all-purpose bowline knot!

Do you know what this basic knot was used for? More than one answer possible.

- A - For hoisting a man up a mast.
- B - As a foothold.
- C - To moor a boat on a ring.

The boatmen used a lot of knots in their daily business. If you don't have any string on you, have a hunt around and find a length of bramble. Remove the thorns with a pen knife and then split it lengthwise. Now tie your bowline!



Solution p. 20

### See, feel, imagine ...

#### The flow of goods

The port was a hive of activity and there was not always enough space on the quays to stock all the goods, what with all the full wicker baskets, barrels of wine, salt, wheat, wood, tuffeau stone, and coal. The boatmen only passed through, calling in at the grocery store before heading off again. There were always lots of things that needed doing. A boatman needed to be able to turn his hand to most things and be a hard worker, and for the people of the period he opened up a perspective on the outside world with his travels.

#### Two banks, one conflict

In 1845 the Town Council in Gennes was in a flap. There was no way they were going to accept the enormous project of channelling off water from the Loire, to feed a port opposite, at Les Rosiers! Especially given that a railway line was about to arrive. Finally Les Rosiers had to make do with two boatslips, which were completed in 1853. It was decided to build a gently sloping stone-paved slip in Gennes.

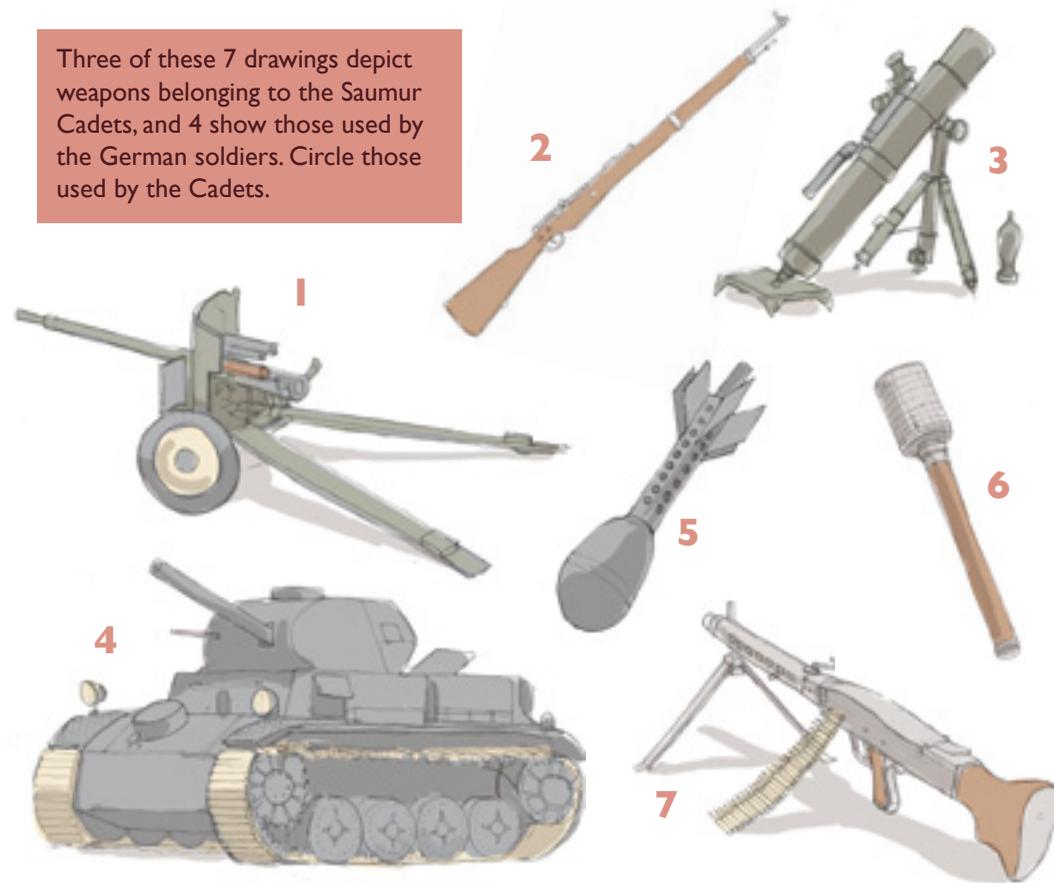


## Patriotic sacrifice

"The Amazonian is right, that's for sure, a bridge really brings out the true issues – union or hatred. A lot of water had flowed under the bridge at Gennes before, when it was decided to destroy it in an attempt to slow down the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1940 swift advance of the German Army. «Gentlemen, the situation is desperate.» It is with these words that Colonel Michon addressed the Saumur cadets, exhorting them to contain three German divisions on the right bank of the Loire. All these young soldiers were volunteers, and there were only 2200 of them against 40,000 German soldiers, who were backed up by 150 armoured vehicles and 300 pieces of artillery. Without any air support or hope – but with considerable panache – the inexperienced Cadets were obliged to pull back after three days due to lack of munitions."



Three of these 7 drawings depict weapons belonging to the Saumur Cadets, and 4 show those used by the German soldiers. Circle those used by the Cadets.



See, feel, imagine ...

Solution p. 20

### ■ Three days of carnage

It was the Germans who called the young soldiers from Saumur the "cadets", because they were so young. Jean Ferniot, a cadet who survived the fighting in June 1940, put his memories down on paper: "At dawn on 20<sup>th</sup> June I was suddenly awoken and saw branches and leaves flying around me. The barges of the German Army were trying to land fifty metres away from us. I grabbed my machine gun. But it jammed after three rounds. Overwhelmed by the German attack, I dropped back just as one of the soldiers in my unit, Courtois, collapsed, fatally wounded, just to my right. I found myself alone without any cartridges. The German soldiers were methodically spraying the bank with gunfire."

### ■ In remembrance of the heroes

The memorial was erected in 1954 in remembrance of the heroic fighting of the Cadets from the Saumur Cavalry School in June 1940. One cadet who survived reported that they only had one machine gun for thirty men. Seventeen cadets are buried at the entrance to Saint Eusèbe church. A street in Gennes was named after them in 1973.



## The double life of the hillsides

"And what if I told you that we lived in a hole!? Our hillside is full of hollows in the rock, and it wasn't only prehistoric man who took shelter in the caves. Poor people like us lived mostly in troglodytic houses, dug out of the limestone. Us troglodytes all know each other. They call us the "berlots" after all. But then why not live in the disused galleries left behind from mining the tuffeau stone, the famous soft rock used to build the rich men's châteaux? Yes, it's a bit dark and damp but at least the temperature is a stable 12°C to 14°C, summer and winter. And it's easy enough to extend your home – a few swings of your pick and there you are."



Spot the odd one out, not found in the rock cavities:



See, feel, imagine ...

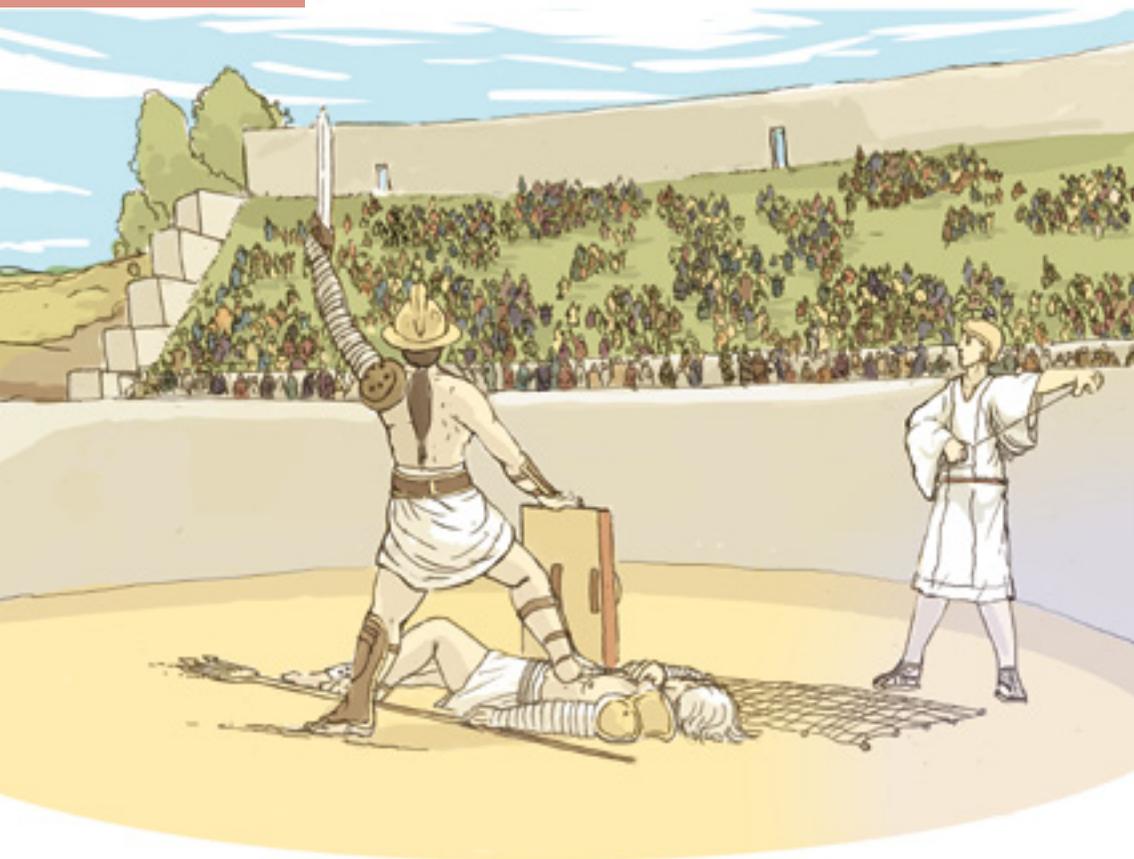
Solution p. 20

### Stone from the sea

Unlike other sorts of limestone, which are of animal origin, tuffeau stone was laid down 90 million years ago from the protective tissue enveloping seaweed in a shallow sea. Shelly sand is another sedimentary calcareous rock laid down 10 million years ago in a shallow ocean and formed of fragments of seashells. This is why you can find fish teeth and bones in it.

### Out of sight

People who live in hollows carved out of rock are called troglodytes. It is also the French name for a wren, the small bird which nests in holes in the rock. The cave dwellings were reassuring but often very rudimentary. The family normally lived in a single room, where there was some natural light, and huddled round the fire to keep off the damp. The bedroom was in the darkest part of the dwelling, separated off by curtains.

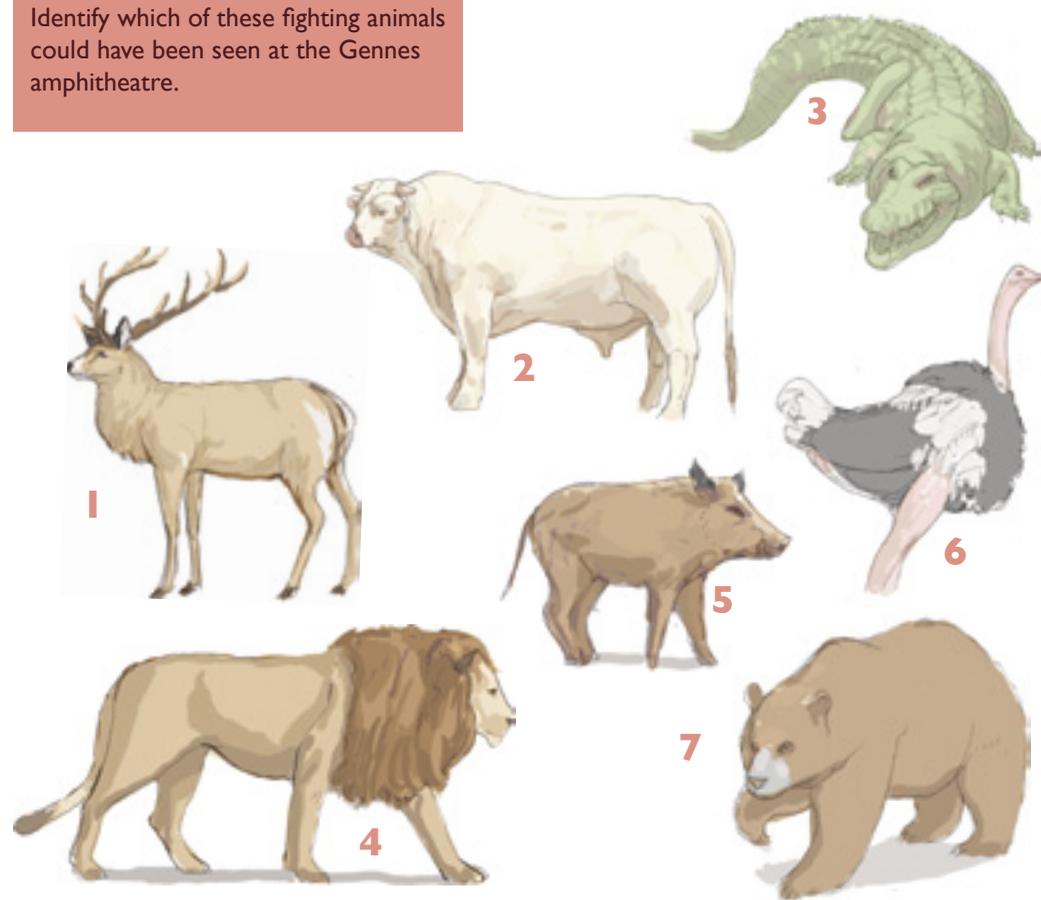


## The spectacle of death

" I'm not called the Amazonian for nothing. Do you know who the Amazons were? They were female warriors, that's what they were. That's what they used to call them. The Romans had some pretty odd ideas about entertainment. The wealthiest Romans paid to build public monuments like our amphitheatre so that the people could revel in cruel spectacles. During popular festivals the games at the circus consisted of gladiator combats, which could end in death. But then human life didn't have the same value in those days. And the Romans were pagans after all. In any case it would appear that they liked their thrills. But let's get back to our amphitheatre - or semi-amphitheatre to be correct. Sometimes there were combats between ravenous beasts. Can you imagine what it must have looked like? "



Identify which of these fighting animals could have been seen at the Genes amphitheatre.



See, feel, imagine ...

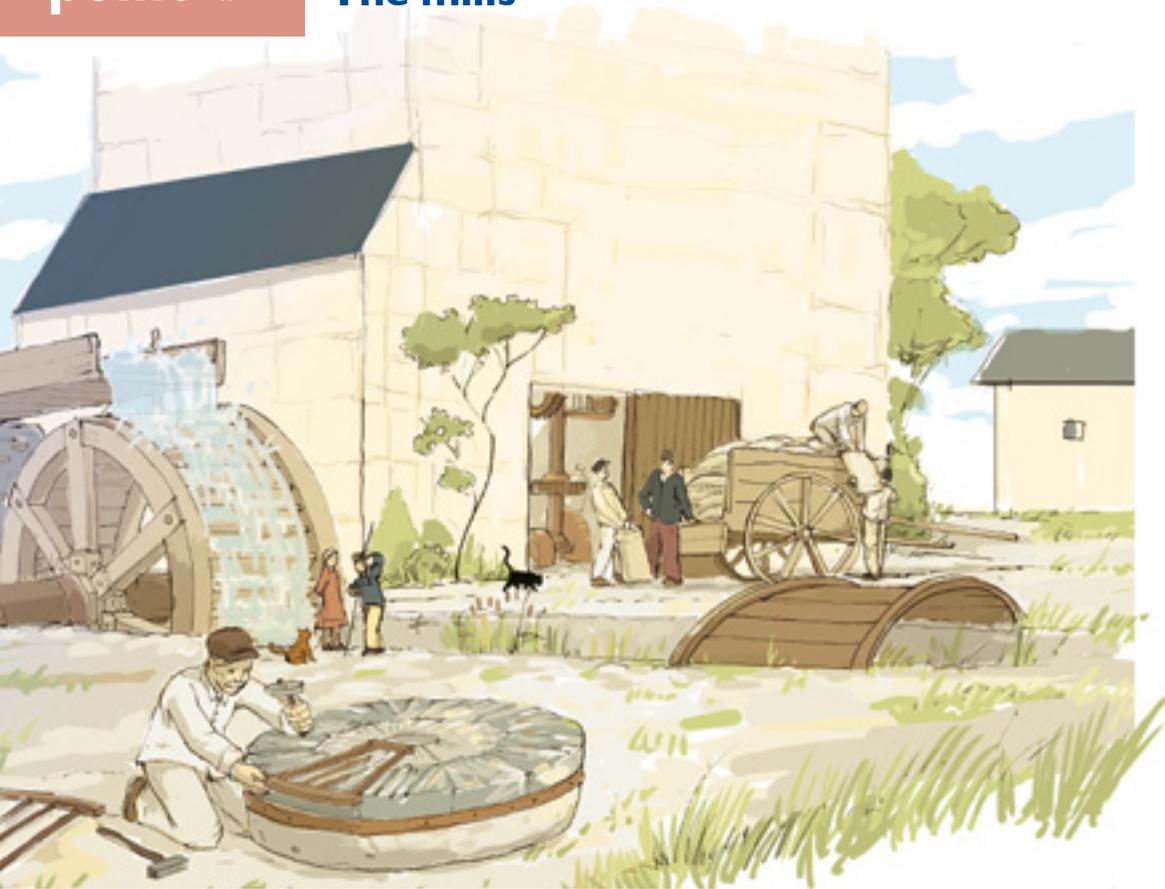
Solution p. 20

### From the aqueduct to the amphitheatre

The remains of a Gallo-Roman aqueduct have been found in Genes. In places it passed underground or was partially buried. It started at the Chapeau spring and passed in front of the Gallo-Roman amphitheatre before heading in the direction of Mardron and feeding the nymphaeum and baths. These archaeological remains date back to the 2nd century.

### What a stink!

- Let the show begin! Open your eyes – but hold your nose. The arena smells of wild beasts! Incense burners were placed amongst the public to mask the smell of the animals and there were slaves to spray the dignitaries with fine scents.
- If the vanquished gladiator was still alive he lifted up his left arm to implore mercy, in which case the organiser of the games would seek the crowd's opinion and then signal with his hand, thumbs down meant death, and thumb against index finger meant he was reprieved.



## The gold of the Avort stream

"We don't have any gold here in Gennes, but we do have the Avort! Just imagine, it only flows for six kilometres before joining the Loire but it was used to power no fewer than nine mills. Just around the corner from here, on the Market Square is the Grand Moulin which, as its name indicates, was the most productive. It dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. For a long time it belonged to the Saint Maur monastery, before passing through the hands of several lords who rented it out to various millers.

Although the 20<sup>th</sup> century sounded the death knell for many mills, the Grand Moulin continued to operate as a flour mill up until 1976. The last owner, an engineer and miller called Louis Hubault, then installed a turbine to produce electricity. The only mill in Gennes still to produce stoneground flour is the Sarré mill."

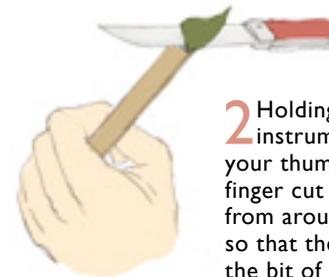


## Playing the " jhau " !

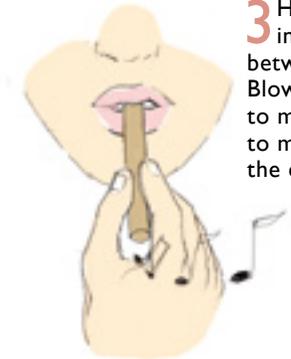
Find a piece of wood along the river banks - willow, ash, poplar, or whatever. It needs to be about six inches long. Find yourself a little ivy leaf. You now have everything you need to make a little musical instrument, known as the jhau.



Using a sharp penknife, make an incision in the wood and insert the ivy leaf (avoiding the central vein).



2 Holding the instrument between your thumb and index finger cut away the leaf from around the wood so that there is only the bit of ivy leaf left inside.



3 Hold the instrument between your lips. Blow across the gap to make a tune. Try to make the sound of the cock and the hen.

## See, feel, imagine ...

### A word about mill races

When there was not enough water in a river to turn a water wheel, it needed to be diverted in order to create a sufficient drop to drive a bucket wheel (not a paddlewheel which was used when there was a lot of water). This was the technique used on the Avort stream. Here you are by the mill race of the Grand Moulin, which rejoins the natural course of the Avort a bit further on before flowing into the Loire.

### A fountain for goddesses

Starting in 1882 excavations were undertaken which revealed a little semicircular wall from a Gallo-Roman nymphaeum. Fragments of a column and a woman's arm in white marble were found amongst the ruins, along with several coins and fragments of ceramic. This fountain dates from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and was a sanctuary dedicated to nymphs, who were water divinities. The ruins are situated in the pretty Mardron estate, not far from where you are now.



## A corporation of women

"We might chatter a lot but here it's the laundry that does most of the talking! You only have to see the quality of the cloth to know how poor or wealthy the person who wears it is. There's no room for men in the washhouse. They bring their laundry in a wheelbarrow and then off they go. Us washerwomen know everything that goes on in the village just by looking at the stains on the clothes. It's true that we don't always talk proper and that we enjoy a good squabble, but that doesn't mean to say that us burly-armed washerwomen don't have our rules and hierarchy. We might not all be perfect Christians all of the time, but we observe enough of the rules of the church not to be in the Good Lord's bad books. On some days - there is no doing any washing."



## Pass the soap!

Here are two recipes for natural soaps which have stood the test of time



### Soapwort, a plant detergent

Soak 100 g of soapwort root pieces in 1.5 l of water for 12 h .  
 Simmer the mixture over a low heat for 15 min. Filter and set aside.  
 Boil the roots for a further 5 min in 0.5 l of water.  
 Filter and mix with the reserved liquid. Shake it to make it foam.



### Ash soap

Sieve 2 glasses of wood ash then dilute it in a litre of water for at least 24 hours, stirring from time to time. Filter this mixture using a funnel through a coffee filter and several tea-towels. You can then use this liquid as a soap. The soda and potassium in the ash saponify any grease and make it more soluble in water.

## See, feel, imagine ...

### ■ A therapeutic spring ?

The Chapeau spring in Gennes is said to have therapeutic qualities that help cure colic and stomach pains. In the past young mothers used to immerse their newborns in the waters of the fountain so as to fortify them and give them some of the water to drink to help prevent colic.

### ■ Hard water

The washerwomen found that the water of the Avort was hard, and they used to complain that it gave them premature rheumatism. They noted a big difference between the waters from the aqueduct, those of the fountain, and especially those of the Loire.

### ■ Airing your dirty laundry in public

The washhouse was a place where women could talk freely, just as men did in the cafe. It is worth remembering that women were still subject to their husband's authority, and only obtained the right to vote in 1944.



## When faith brings people together

"Washerwomen are not the only ones to gossip. Look at all those parishioners standing there outside the church. They talk just as much as we do, even if of higher things! Faith is something that unites us all, rich or poor, young or old, fisherman, boatman or soldier. It transcends our community - come hell or high water. Like a beacon to the sailor, this church is our earthly anchor. It was founded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and we dedicated it to Saint Vétérin, though we don't know very much about him if the truth be told. Apparently he was a disciple of Saint Martin, who was far more illustrious. Did you know that it was the Romans who made Christianity a State religion at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century? And as the Good Lord knows, faith can move mountains!"



Saint Martin, Saint Nicholas, and Saint Clement are shown in a scene taken from their life. Find which image goes with which Saint.

- ..... saint Martin
- ..... saint Nicholas
- ..... saint Clement



See, feel, imagine ...

### Sharing the bath !

The aqueduct carried the water from the nymphaeum to the Gallo-Roman baths near Saint Vétérin church. These public baths were composed of a hot room called the caldarium, a warm area called the tepidarium, and a cold pool or frigidarium.



Solution p. 20

### Chattering and gossiping

The church entrance is partially covered by a rustic porch which was added in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to protect the faithful from the westerly winds. However it also fulfilled another function, as it was here that people gathered to chatter after mass, hence it was known as the caquetteiro, or gossiping place !

# Quiz Answers

## point 1

In July 1842 the first suspension bridge was opened with a wooden deck. The ferryboat went out of service.



B : 1842

In 1932 the deck, which had already received metal joists in 1909, was replaced by an asphalted deck in reinforced concrete. The pylons were linked together with a metal frame.



A : 1932



C : 1948 - 1949

## point 2

Answers : A and C.

## point 3

The weapons used by the Cadets : 2 - one musket per person, 7- machine guns, 1- 25mm canons, 3- mortars.



The weapons used by the first division of the German cavalry : 4 - tanks, 5 - shells, 6 - grenades.



## point 4

The barn owl lives, as its name indicates, in the roof-space of large buildings, in bell towers, farmhouse attics, and of course barns.



## point 5

The others were more frequently found in the great Roman amphitheatres.



## point 8

**saint Martin**  
A 4th-century soldier known for having shared his cloak with a poor man at the city gate of Amiens. He founded the first monastery in Western Europe, near Poitiers.



**saint Nicholas**  
According to legend, Saint Nicholas saved three children from a butcher who wanted to kill them. Another version claims that he brought them back to life.



**saint Clement**  
Pope Clement began to attract suspicion due to the number of miracles he performed, and so was thrown in the sea, which parted to reveal his body. Since then Saint Clement has been the patron saint of sailors.



## Your next steps to find out more about the heritage in Gennes

The Communauté de communes du Gennois (Gennes district combined municipalities) has a host of treasures to discover, with its Gallo-Roman remains, châteaux, religious monuments, troglodytic dwellings, washhouses, mills, vineyards, and varied countryside.

The area around Gennes is notable for having the largest number of megaliths in the Anjou region. You will find many of them along the routes of the walks. The Magdeleine Dolman is easy to find, being the closest to Gennes, in the direction of Doué-la-Fontaine.

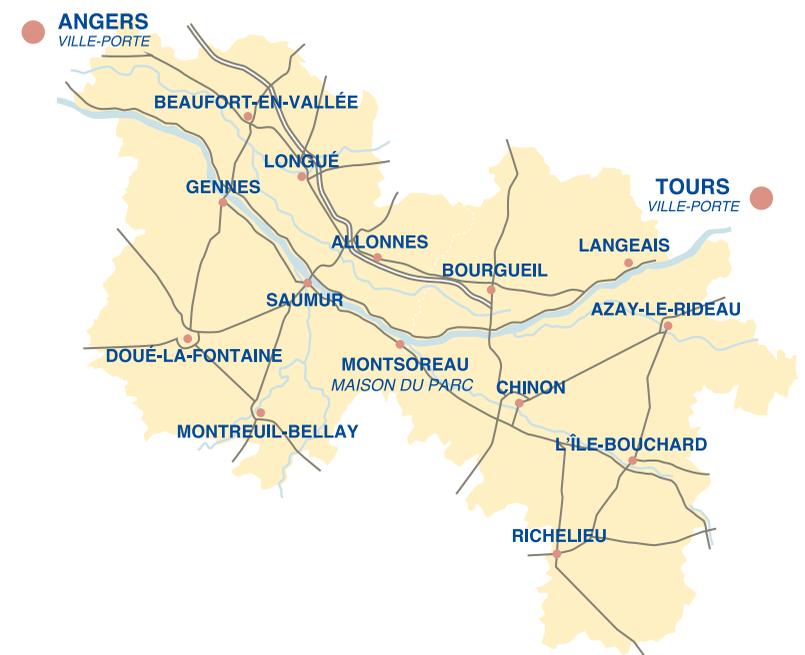
You might like to complete your visit by discovering the heritage trails around Le Thoureil and Chênehutte-Trèves-Cunault, which have been designated Petites Cités de Caractère (small towns of character) – a fine way to appreciate the history and charm of these villages on the banks of the Loire. Please contact the Gennes Tourist Information Centre for further information.

**Tourist Information Centre**  
Tél. 02 41 51 84 14  
officedetourisme@cc-gennois.fr  
www.cc-gennois.fr



The Communauté de communes du Gennois is composed of 10 municipalities: Ambillou-Château, Chemellier, Chênehutte-Trèves-Cunault, Coutures, Gennes, Grézillé, Louerre, Noyant-la-Plaine, Saint-Georges-des-Sept-Voies, and Le Thoureil.

## Loire-Anjou-Touraine regional natural park



THE HERITAGE TRAILS

## How to use them ?

The **discovery booklet** guides you from station to station, providing an understanding of the landscapes crossed and fragments of the history of the area through a tale woven round an **iconic character**.

**Go to the departure point (D) and follow the signs**

Gennes

### A history of riverside life

The babble of Rose's voice is as constant as that of the stream feeding the washhouse where she wrings laundry likes she wrings fact from fiction.

This sturdy 19th-century washerwoman will be your guide to all the hidden corners of Gennes. As you follow the riverside trail you will discover the village's history and heritage, from the Romans through to the boatmen and the Saumur Cadets.

**Prix : €1**



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