

FIRST FARM

1 and 2. BARNES

The barns had to be well ventilated in order to preserve fodder in good condition. This is why they are never deep, have a large opening and are sometimes covered. (no 2). Before you go down to No 3, look above and behind the roof of number 2. You will see a chute - a kind of low, wide chimney down which the grapes were emptied and so fell directly into the wine press located in the cellar. This meant that the carts did not have to go down the very steep path to the yard below.

3. WINE CELLAR

To the right, inside the *casse-cou** wine-press you can see the opening of the chute through which the grapes were fed. This press was operated by a huge wooden lever. The grape juice flowed directly into a container called the "encheré" from which it was taken out in buckets and emptied into the vats where fermentation took place. In another cave the presence of a walnut oil extraction press is evidence of significant local economic activity in times past.
*(needed great physical effort and was dangerous to operate)

4. STABLE

The stable is located near the well and the drinking trough. This meant that the animals could come out and drink without having to cross the yard. The stable could hold up to three cows and a few goats. You can see a number of butter churns on display here.

5. BEDROOM

The fireplace is near the window, in the smallest corner of the room, where there is sufficient draught for a good fire. When the weather was bad the farmers could do small jobs in front of the fire taking advantage of the light from the window. Hemp wicks soaked in resin (rousines) were set on the two tiles near the fireplace. The wicks were secured by a clamp located at the base of the fireplace so that the smoke went up the chimney and not into the rest of the room.

6. DINING ROOM

This is a partial troglodyte house. Only the back wall, where the fireplace is, is solid calcareous rock. The family ate their meals here and sometimes there would be one or two beds in this room. The grain store is situated above this room because it was difficult to store grain properly in an always slightly damp cellar.

7 - CELLAR

The smallest cellar was used by the former owners to store barrels of wine. This room was a meeting place for the local population right up until the 1970s.

8. SMALL COURTYARD

This yard could be used as an enclosure to keep sheep. Flocks could not be left in the pastures overnight because fences were not very secure and there were thieves and wolves around.

THE SECOND FARM

9. WINE CELLAR

Here there is an exhibition showing how wine barrels were made. There are also exhibits describing the work carried out in the vineyard and in the making of wine. You can still see the location of the *casse-cou* winepress and the opening of the chute leading to this press.

10. OUTBUILDING

The oven was used mostly in the drying of hemp and fruit (plums, apples and pears) and for baking bread. This room could also be used as a laundry.

11. SMALL STABLE

Manure was carried to the fields by farmers on a stretcher because the pathway was too steep for a wheelbarrow.

12. VILLAGE HALL

On winter evenings people could gather here to chat and to work. There was a door leading into the room and the floor was covered in straw. People who came wore warm clothes. The body heat from 30 people seated in the room was enough to keep the temperature at 13C to 14C which would have been considered a comfortable winter temperature.



13. SMALL BARN

This small barn could be used to house a few small animals. Notice the manger and the two openings for ventilation.

14. 19th CENTURY HOME

A grain store used for cereals is located to the front, in the roof space. The bedroom alcoves are excavated out of the rock at the rear of the dwelling. The oven was always at the base of the fireplace. This allowed the smoke to come out the oven door and go directly up the chimney without polluting the room itself.

15. ROOM OF SHAFTS

This room presents 3 categories of shafts. The light shaft let light and aerate the underground areas. The two-storey well allows water to be collected from the surface and from the level below. The hoisting shaft was filled back in once the chamber was hollowed out.

16. FOSSIL ROOM

Tuffeau stone and shelly sand are rocks of marine origin. They are 90 million years old and 11 million years old respectively and made up of fossils.

17. UNDERGROUND CHAPEL

This cave, part of which was beneath the church, was originally an underground quarry. Winches were used to extract the rock through the large overhead opening. The village church was burned down during the religious wars of the 16th century and it is believed that this is when the quarry was first used as a church. There are three gothic arches, a crucifix and nooks for statues carved out of the rock. The room itself is in the shape of a cross. The line of holes along the base of the wall was used for scaffolding.

18 and 20. 20th CENTURY HOME

These were originally simple dwellings for agricultural workers and old people and were inhabited until the beginning of the 20th century. The rooms were modernised into bedroom, office and library and were used as caretaker's accommodation between 1979 and 1984.

19. TROGLODYTIC SITES AROUND THE WORLD

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The village of Rochmenier consists of 250 underground rooms, excavated out of the rock and distributed over around 40 farms. Rooms were added to meet the needs of a growing population.

The oldest habitation apparently dates from the 13th century. The village gradually expanded right up to the 19th century.

The dwellings are excavated from sandstone which contained sea shells. This rock is a kind of calcareous sand and was used by farmers to neutralise soil acidity.

During your visit you will see part of the village consisting of two farms which were abandoned towards the beginning of the 20th century and opened to the public in 1967. The exhibits, furniture, tools and photographs describe the lifestyle of the last inhabitants.

The entrance to the courtyard of the first farm is through the sandstone archway. The original entry was to the right, at the top of the yard, where you can see a large gate. This is the best place from which to get an overall perspective of this farm which dates from the end of the 17th or the beginning of the 18th century.


Everything in the village of Rochmenier is manmade. Above all this is flat ground. Here the first farmers cultivated the land. The farmers first excavated the yard – a kind of large roofless quarry – and then created the underground dwellings where the people lived, worked, sheltered their animals and kept their belongings.

Thank you for your visit, see you soon!

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*the exhibits are fragile
Help us to keep them safe for future visitors.
Treat them with respect!*