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# La Chaux-de-Fonds/Le Locle environs

## La Brévine - Swiss Siberia

The distinguishing features of La Brévine's high valley are its impressive scenery and climatic extremes: It is known as "Switzerland's Siberia" on account of its harsh and damp winter climate. Winter temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius are not unusual! The lowest temperature in Switzerland was recorded here in 1987: Minus 41.8 degrees Celsius.

The valley of La Brévine is an Eldorado for snowshoe trekking and cross-country skiing. Nearby Les Sagnettes has year-round glacial caves at an altitude of a mere 1100 metres.

The reason for the extreme cold winters in La Brévine, according to La Brévine's amateur weatherman, Marcel Blondeau: "The valley is shaped like a big basin, which traps the cold. There has to be a minimum of 50 centimetres

of snow to take the temperature down to minus 30 or 40 degrees Celsius. Temperatures fall continuously during the night, and in the morning the rising sun pushes all the cold air into the valley".

In 1985, temperatures remained between minus 39 and minus 41 degrees Celsius for a whole week.

By Tanja Latham-Zurbruegg



La Brévine, Neuchâtel Jura  
www.myswitzerland.com

## Col-de-Roches cave mills

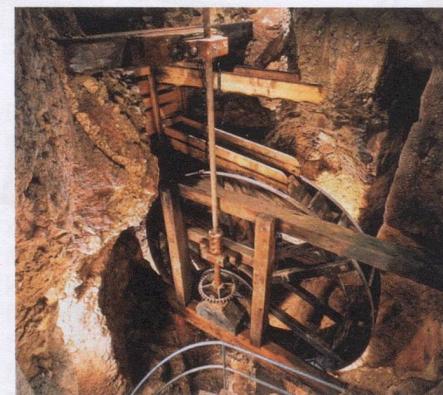
In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the valley west of Le Locle was covered by a large swamp. The small river that crossed it, the Bied, flowed so slowly that it was impossible for any mills to be placed there. In 1652, three millers asked permission to use the Bied where it plunges as a waterfall into the underground caves of the Col-des-Roches. They developed the cave and put up two water wheels, a mill and a "rebatté" (a kind of mill). Over the years, they dug further into the cave to create the space for five water wheels to drive other mills, amongst them a saw-mill, a "rebatté" and an oil-mill.

Underground channels conducted the water from one water wheel to the next, while a series of passages and steps enabled access to them for maintenance purposes. It was a real underground factory that the owner, unfortunately ruined, had to sell in 1690. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were around six other owners of the Col-des-Roches mills and they all agreed to reduce the number of wheels. Thus, in 1730, there were four mills and by 1780, only three remained.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Georges Eberle changed the old machines into industrial mills. He built a big edifice, including a machine to clean the wheat and conveyor belts for moving bags.

Ten years later, he replaced one of the water wheels with a turbine. The last remaining wheel serviced a saw-mill. In 1898, the two hundred year old mills closed. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a local slaughterhouse used the cave as a dumping-ground for waste meat and dirty water. When it closed in 1966, the cave was severely polluted. In 1973, a small group of speleology lovers (scientists who study caves) began to clean the dirty cave and to rebuild part of the mills. Thanks to their efforts, the underground mills of the Col-des-Roches reopened as a museum in 1987.

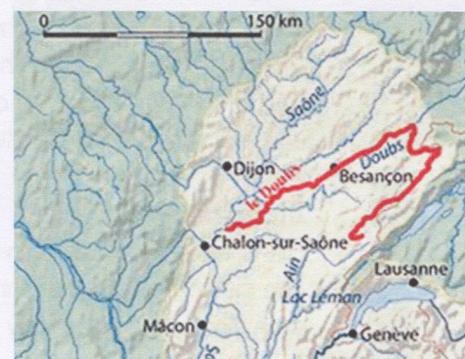
By Tanja Latham-Zurbruegg



Col-des-Roches cave mills  
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## River Doubs

The Doubs is a 453 km long river in western Switzerland and eastern France, eventually joining the Saône in France. Its source is a mighty karst spring near Mouthe in the western Jura mountains. "Karst" describes the limestone geology of the Jura mountains: Porous limestone which water can transform into major underground cave systems and rivers.



Doubs River course  
www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Le\_Doubs\_(carte).jpg

The Doubs derives its name from the Latin word "Dubius" (uncertain), to describe its rather unusual inverted U-shape and its widely varying nature, changing at once from torrent, to quiet canal, to lake. The spring and junction with the Saône are only 90 km apart.

First, the river flows northeast for about 40km roughly along the French-Swiss border, passing both nearby Le Locle and La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Near Montbéliard it turns southwest, until it flows into the river Saône in Verdun-sur-le-Doubs, approx. 20km northeast of Chalon-sur-Saône. On its way, the river partially disappears into the limestone rocks.

Contributed by Melissa Lanz



Kayaking on the Doubs River  
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