

Historical account of navigation by the canals from Digoin to Paris

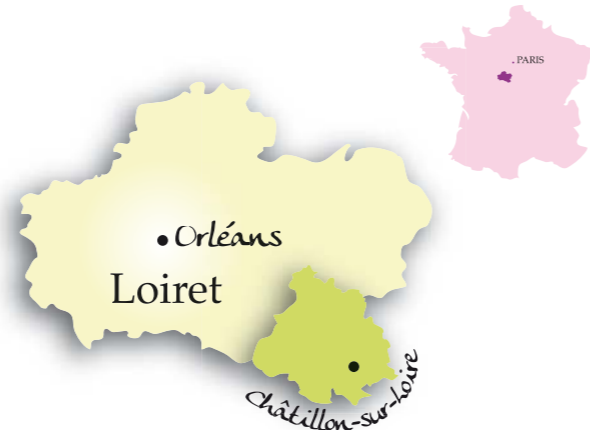
1642: the canal of Briare (canal Henry the 4th) between Briare and Montargis, allows navigation on the Loire towards Nevers and towards Orleans and Nantes.

1692: Orleans' canal allowed the junction between Montargis and Orleans.

1723: the Loing being canalized allows the junction between Montargis/Montereau and Montereau/Paris through the Seine.

1790: The centre canal, between Châlon-sur-Saône and Digoin

1827 – 1838: construction of the first canal parallel to the Loire on the left bank; as a continuation of the centre canal, it joins the canal of Briare on the right bank. It allows the link Seine/Saône.



Office de Tourisme

47, rue Franche
45360 Chatillon-sur-Loire
Tél. 02 38 31 42 88

@ : otsi.chatillonsurloire@wanadoo.fr



702 SANCERE 02 48 78 50 10 - Photos Jean PUYO - Jean-François RUEK - Jean-Benoît BONNET - Photo aérienne - photo Berger - ne pas jeter sur la voie publique



Today, the site of Mantelot, ancient Loire crossing, deserves a visit for the same reasons as the Pont-canal de Briare, its famous successor. The engineer who imagined it dealt with it as a real monument, associating harmoniously technicality of the workmanship and wild beauty of the Loire landscapes.



The river Loire

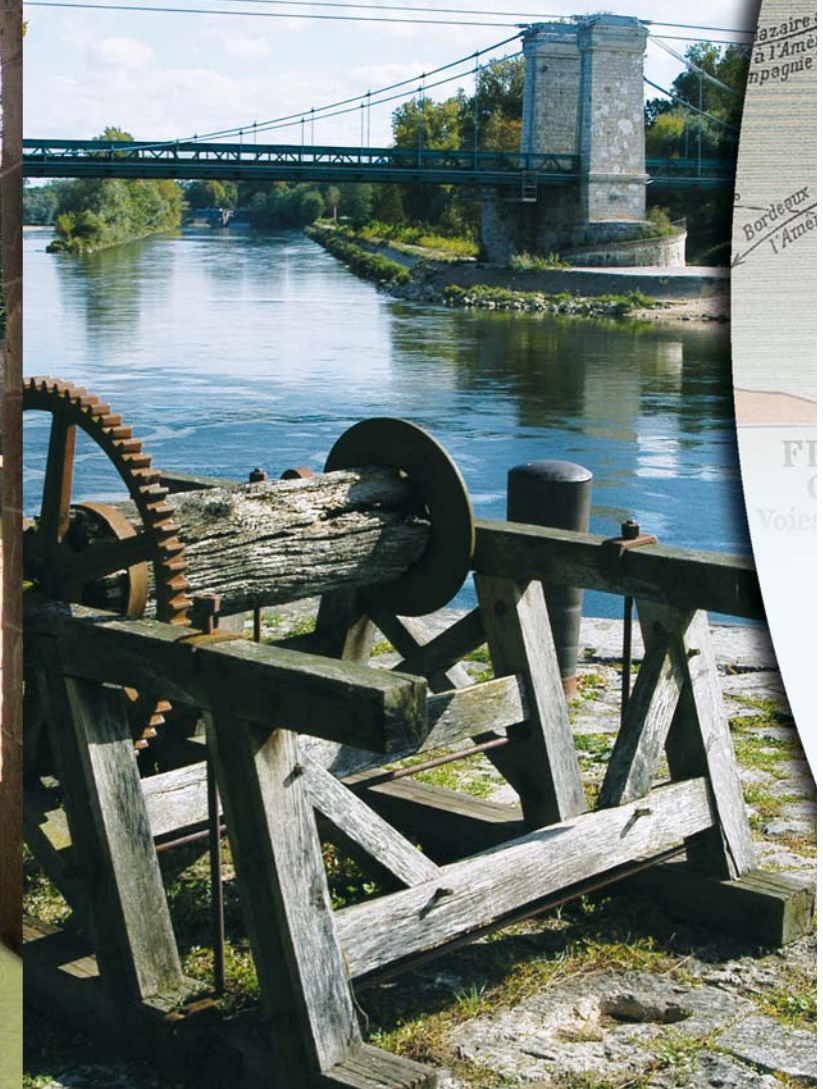
It's a wild and whimsical river, the longest of France (1012 km). Its source: it rises on the Mont Gerbier de Joncs, east of Massif Central, at the height of 1408 meters.

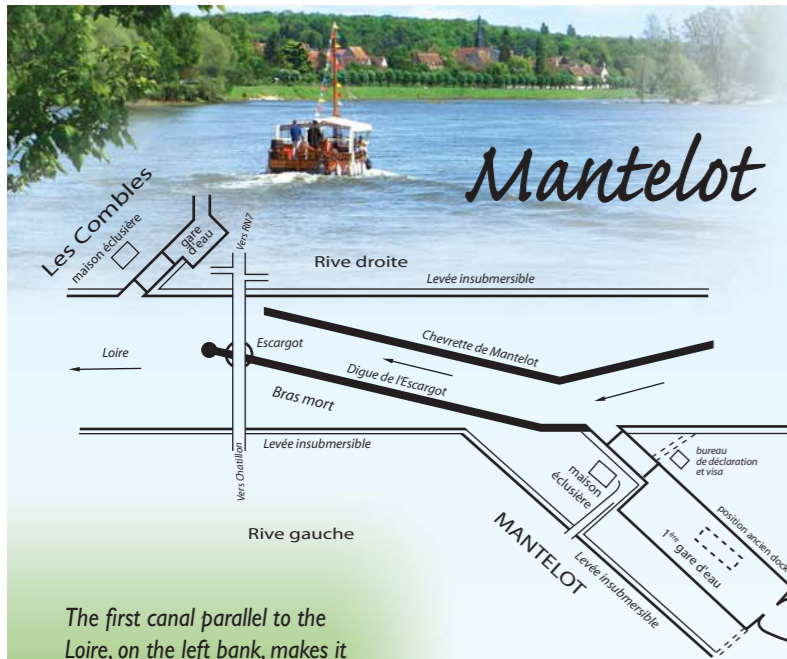
Left river tributaries: Allier (main tributary), Loiret, Beuvron, Cher, Indre and Vienne.

Right river tributaries: Maine et Loir, Sarthe, Mayenne.

Flood regulation dams: Villerest on the river Loire and Naussac 1 and 2 on the river Allier.

The towns: it crosses Nevers, Orleans, Blois, Tours, Angers, Nantes and flows into the Atlantic Ocean at St Nazaire's estuary.





Mantelot

The first canal parallel to the Loire, on the left bank, makes it still necessary to cross the Loire at Digoin and the Allier at Le Guétin through masonry canal bridges.

When the first canal parallel to the Loire arrived at Mantelot, the 600 to 700 meters wide of the river made a level passage necessary between Chatillon sur Loire on the left bank and Les Combles on the right bank; two locks apart from 1020 meters were built on these banks.

The river was canalized by the building of chevrettes and submersible dikes called "d'Ousson", "de Mantelot" and "de l'Escargot".

This canal parallel to the Loire was in service between 1838 and 1896. The building of the canal bridge over the river Loire between St Firmin sur Loire and Briare, as well as a diversion of the canal over about ten kilometres, put an end to this difficult crossing of the Loire.



Crossing manoeuvres

Before 1881, crossing manoeuvres could be easy during low water level periods or become very perilous during flooding periods.

From 1838 to 1881

Going upstream through high water level

Coming out of the lock of Les Combles, the boats going up the canals were towed along the right bank for 1200 meters, that's to say 400 meters up river from Mantelot, then they crossed the river, helped by the stream and tugging themselves up sideways with a system of two anchors thrown slantwise in turn, in order to reach the entrance of Mantelot's lock.

Going upstream through low water level

Boats crossed the river between Les Combles and l'Escargot, for about 60 meters, probably by using the two anchors system, and then they were towed from the Escargot dike to Mantelot's sluice. The draught horses caught up with the boats by following the bridge across the Loire and the Escargot slope.

In any case, when going upstream, boats had to turn around in the Combles's boat station and present themselves backwards at the exit of this sluice, so as to be helped across with the current after backing up in the Loire.

Going downstream through high or low water levels

At the exit of Mantelot's lock; boats slid into a channel materialised by two dikes which traces can still be seen in the axis of the lock; then they crossed the river with the stream, ahead of the bridge, probably by utilizing the two anchors slipping system to present it selves in front of Les Combles's lock.

These crossings could last for two to four hours when going downstream, from three to six hours going upstream, according to the water height, the different kind of boats and the freight.

The average number of crossings was about 4000 a year, the average number of shipwrecks about 10. After the bringing into commission of the tugboat, crossings reached the number of 9000 a year.

From 1881 to 1896

The crossing had been made easier thanks to the bringing into commission of a boat called "Le Progrès", kind of a tugboat of 26 meters by 5 meters, equipped with a steam winch which cable, anchored on the earth platform on the left bank of Mantelot's lock, allowed it to pull or retain itself.

In 1896, the putting into service of Briare's canal bridge and the opening of a diversion of the canal over about ten kilometres between "hameau de l'Etang" and "Briare" put an end to this very difficult Loire crossing.



A unique site

The site spreading from Châtillon's bridge until the lock of La Folie, in the middle of which one is located Mantelot, has been registered on the inventory of the Historical Buildings on June 14th, 1978. It's a place where it's nice to stroll.

The link between the old and the new canal is made at the "hameau de l'Etang", upstream of Mantelot.

The sluice of Mantelot is set up, as well as Les Combles' one, in a 45° angle opposite the river's bed in order to avoid water to sweep into it during a flood. It's fitted out with four pairs of doors hooked two by two in the opposite direction in order to guard against the ebbing of high water. Outside the aft gates, one can see the last remnants of the functioning of doors named "guarding doors" meant for the defence of the canals works during floods (these doors still exist at the lock of Les Combles).

The lockkeeper's house

It's the twin of the one at "Les Combles": square, with a level and half a level under the roof, vaulted cellars, brick made "oculi" and half moon shaped openings. It was meant for lockkeeper's housing, it sheltered the harbour master's office as well as the toll and the insurers for the crossings. Opposite, on the other side of the lock, the annex building used to be the "declaration and visa office" as testifies the wooden sign on the Loire side wall.

The water stations

Some boats, the "sapines", were built to withstand the travel downstream and didn't go back; they were dismantled at the arrival for the wood recovery. This important downstream trade - thus meaning a longer wait at Mantelot - explains the difference of size between the docks of Mantelot (able to accommodate 150 boats) and Les Combles. The small dock of Les Rabuteleires, located upstream of Mantelot's boat station, has probably been hollowed out later on to palliate the insufficiency of the first one.

The warehouse

In 1843, merchants and forwarding agents obtain the authorization to build, on the west side of the water station, a warehouse (34 meters by 15.60 meters) meant to shelter the perishable merchandises. In 1853, the Company being in liquidation, the warehouse is sold to the town of Châteauneuf sur Loire who will use it as a grain market. It is still implanted in the town centre, wears the name of "halle St Pierre" and is listed by the additional inventory of the Historical Buildings since 1990 (it is recognizable at its white pillars).

The centenary flooding on Mantelot's scale

The flooding level is engraved on the lower part of the lockkeepers' house wall and on the sluice's masonry.

- 1846 – 6.60 meters
- 1856 – 6.74 meters
- 1866 – 6.70 meters

Châtillon's suspension bridge

1838 – 1841: first suspension bridge, with a wooden deck, partly destroyed by 1846's flooding, repaired, and then destroyed again during 1856's flooding; it withstands 1866's flooding.
1870: it's partly destroyed during this war.
1930 – 1931: a new bridge is built: 350 meters
1940: it's the war; it's destroyed by the Frenchmen in order to prevent The Germans from crossing the Loire.
1950: the bridge is put into service again.

To allow men and draught animals to cross the bridge, it includes around one of the pillars, a helicoids slope allowing to join the dike of "L'Escargot" from where started the towing towards Mantelot's lock.

