

Sculpture path

On the topic of local myths

Walking time 45'



FAMILLE
Destination

A different way to wander and explore.

Do you know the story of the Devil of Sofleu? Or that of the monstrous beast of Louvie?

Nendaz and its surrounding area is packed with myths and legends that were told by our ancestors, and then handed down from generation to generation. Together, these stories make up an incredibly valuable intangible cultural heritage - and we're delighted to be sharing that heritage with you today.

This trail is a fantastic way to encounter 10 sculptures that depict local legends. They can be easily accessed by even the smallest children, who will delight in imagining the incredible epic stories of the things that have happened in our mountains.

Starting at Nendaz Tourism, follow the 'Promenade des Crêtes' panels and admire the magnificent craft of the many local artists who specialise in wood sculpture. The walk will take you across fields and woodland through little-known areas of the village of Haute-Nendaz, as well as places that are closer to nature.

Keep your eyes open - and let's go!

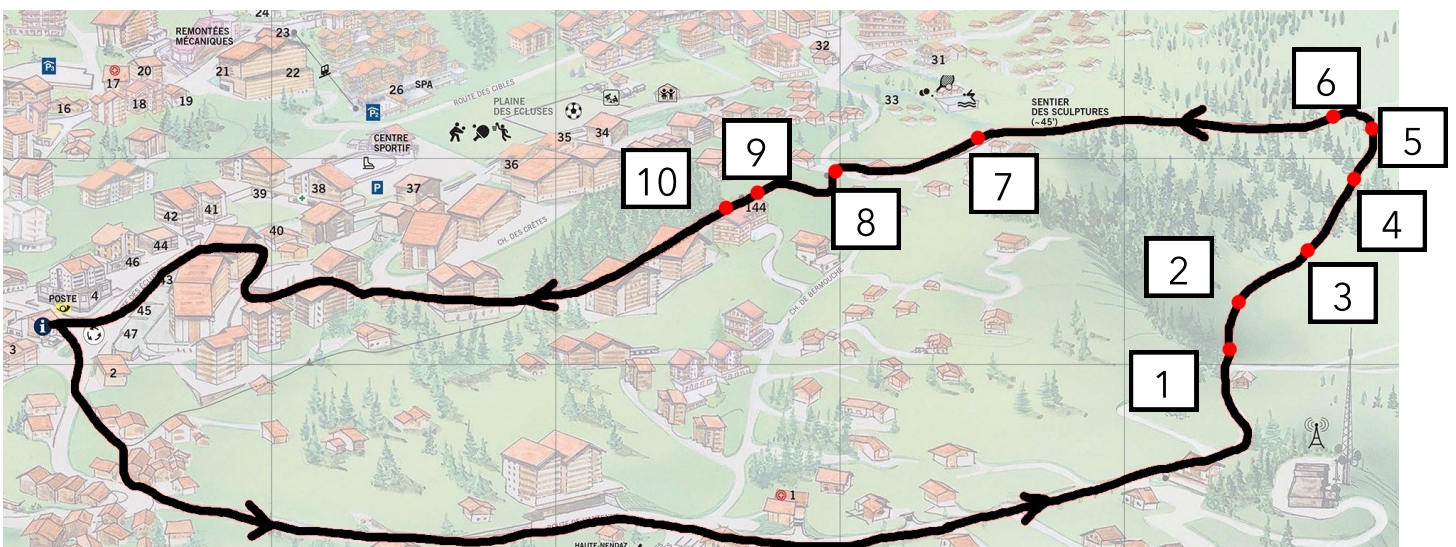
The sculptors

All the sculptures that you be able to admire along the course were created between 2022 and 2023 by two artists from the region; Nicolas Grand and Julien Fournier, both loggers.

Congratulations to them for their amazing work!

The course

1. The blackened fairy of Tsanfleuron
2. The bear of Planchouet
3. The devil of Sofleu
4. The dwarf Zachéo
5. The dahu
6. The white lamb and the shepherdess
7. The witch of Isérables
8. The legend of the stone scree of Dzerjonna
9. The Vouivre of Louvie
10. The Saint of Siviez



➡ « Promenade des Crêtes » 45'

1. The blackened fairy of Tsanfleuron

Look straight ahead, and you'll see the Quille-du-Diable rising up right there on the other side of the Rhône Valley. Read on to learn the legend of the mountain pasture of Tsanfleuron that no longer exists, but in those days was situated right behind the Quille-du-Diable. In ancient times, it is thought that the mountain pasture was called 'champ fleuri' - 'field of flowers' - hence its dialect name of Tsanfleuron, as during the summer it was a broad field carpeted over with beautiful multi-coloured flowers.

According to legend, a white fairy came here every evening along the same pathway in the summer, around the time that shepherds milked the cows. Sometimes, a few shepherds would shout out or whistle loudly to scare her but the fairy went along her way quietly, disappearing from view. One evening, one of the shepherds said to his friends,

- I'm going to play a joke on that white lady.

He gathered some soot and charcoal one day and put it all in a bag, and then set off towards the pathway along which the white fairy would come. Alongside the pathway was a tall pine tree, and he climbed up it with his bag - and, sure enough, along came the white fairy. Just as she passed beneath his hiding place, the shepherd tipped the contents of his knapsack all over her, and down came a heap of black dust...the white fairy was blackened! She cried out and flew over to behind the Quille-du-Diable.

But vengeance was not to be kept waiting long. Two days later, great big blocks of the rock came away from the high peaks, then tumbled down the slope and covered a huge expanse of the area which became a glacier that is now called the glacier of Tsanfleuron.

2. The bear of Planchouet

Once upon a time, there was a strong and handsome man called Nicolas who lived at Verrey. The locals referred to him as 'Coa' in their dialect. One day, he was working in the field with his father when he broke one of the notches on his pickaxe. Being the hot-headed type, his father slapped him - and that undeserved slap felt like a deep wound to the proud Coa. He put the bit of broken metal into his pocket and walked away there and then from his father, and from his work. He then ran home, grabbed a rifle and strode off, furious.

He followed the path of the mountain irrigation channel, the 'bisse', and made his way to Planchouet. After walking for an hour, he heard a raging roar that stopped him in his tracks - and then the unlucky young man spied a bear just a few metres away that was crazed with fury at having been disturbed while gathering blueberries. The bear rose up, his claws tearing through the air like blades. The beast lumbered heavily towards the petrified Nicolas. The young man raised his rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. But the huge plantigrade animal was only wounded - and the pain enraged it even further. Coa turned round and ran, the beast hot on his heels.

Coa leapt onto the roof of a large chalet, hoping to escape the monster - but had not accounted for the bear's determination, as all of a sudden the huge beast rose up onto the roof. Coa - desperate by now - remembered the bit of the pickaxe in his pocket. It was to be his final bullet. He loaded the rifle, squared up to the bear, and fired. There was a massive noise - and then peace returned to Planchouet.

Badly shaken, Coa ran back to his parents, arriving in the middle of the night. He woke his father and told him

- "I killed the bear of Planchouet!".

That earned him a fresh slap - this time for boasting. The poor young man went back to Planchouet and cut off one of the bear's paws and returned at dawn with his bloodied trophy, thereby earning the admiration of the entire village!

3. The devil of Sofleu

Up above the village of Haute-Nendaz is a green and pleasant plateau surrounded by woodland that is called Sofleu. The fields there are dense with greenery, with fragrant flowers scattered among the grass. Within these almost virgin woodlands can be found - even now - an old abandoned chalet that is gloomy and almost a ruin - but it's actually a haunted chalet, and this is its story.

The people of Valais have always loved to dance, despite it being prohibited by the Church who condemned dancing as a dangerous pastime. So people often danced over at the Sofleu chalet, and the youths of Nendaz went there on Sundays to escape the watchful eye of the priest. One Assumption Day over a century ago, a grand and finely-dressed gentleman arrived as the dance was in full swing, and asked to dance.

The young ladies of Nendaz refused the stranger a dance - maybe out of shyness, maybe out of caution. Only one bold young lady, called La Maugnette, agreed to dance with the unknown man. He took the daring lady into his arms and began to dance a sarabande with her that made the onlookers dizzy. He was certainly a mysterious figure - this was definitely no ordinary man; his red and bony face had a mocking look about it, and his clothes had a strange smell.

Among the young Nendaz people there was a young man who, full of remorse, took out of his pocket a church mass book and began to read the Gospel of St John.

The bystanders were astounded to see the grand gentleman and his dance partner throw themselves out of the open window into a whirlwind of flames - and then people realised that the mysterious dancer in fact was cloven-footed. It was Satan himself!

4. The dwarf Zachéo

The story begins with the high episcopal Lords of Sion. Zachéo, a dwarf monk originally from Anniviers, suggested to the bishop that he be sent to the heart of the Valley to evangelise among the population of barbarians.

A discussion began once he had arrived at the valley of Anniviers, but Zachéo had broken a golden rule - it was forbidden to go into valley without having been invited. For that transgression, the leader of the people of Anniviers condemned him to die - to be hurled to the bottom of a crevasse.

Zachéo grabbed the great bible, opened it up and suggested he do a deal: he was to be thrown in only when he had read to them all of the wonderful stories in the Bible.

The months went by, and Zachéo was not worried at all - on the contrary, his calmness and peace had won him the affection of the barbarians who were in no hurry to reach the end of the book, captivated as they were by the readings of the divine word.

Eventually the beautiful stories came to an end, and Zachéo was taken up to be offered to the muffled groans of the glacier. Zachéo was thrown into the mouth of the glacier, but slid rather than fell. He had fallen into the arms of a rift that gently placed him in its depths. Zachéo went along with the course of the stream continuing towards the foot of glacier, and the amazed dwarf was then spat out under a clear blue sky and a golden yellow sun.

The surprised barbarians threw themselves at his feet, and their leader stepped forward, proclaiming:

- Jesus of Nazareth is our God and Zachéo is his grand priest!

Thus did the monk Zachéo win his wager, and soon he was invited to the valley of Anniviers to become the curate there.

5. The dahu

Many people have heard of the dahu, but few have had the chance to actually see it in the mountains. Find out more about this secretive animal that lives round here.

From a morphological point of view, the dahu is a close cousin of the chamois and the ibex - but there is one thing about the dahu that makes it really special: its legs on one side are shorter than the other, meaning that it navigates the hilly terrain where it lives with ease.

Scientists think that that is due to a remarkable adaptation to its natural environment. The dahu basically lives on steep hills all the time, and so - unlike its cousins the chamois and the ibex - the dahu gets around the mountain without bending its knees.

There are two distinct families of the dahu: one has shorter right legs (*dahus dexterus*), and so they move clockwise, while the other has shorter left legs (*dahus senesterus*) and goes anti-clockwise.

But there is one major inconvenience: the dahu cannot retrace its steps, as the shorter legs would go nowhere and the animal would definitely fall over.

Hunters have certainly cottoned on to that, and to hunt the dahu all they need to do is take a large bag. Once the hunter has spotted the dahu, they will discreetly get right behind it as close as they can and will then blow hard on a whistle, at which point the surprised dahu will turn right round! The shorter legs will not touch the ground and the dahu will fall over and roll to the bottom of the slope. The second hunter, waiting below, just has to open the bag to catch the dahu as it falls.

6. The white lamb and the shepherdess

Back in 1264, Nendaz and the castle of Brignon belonged to the Counts of Savoie, whose Lords came along to the region every year to hunt.

One day, a young horseman on a magnificent black horse came along to the mountain pasture of Bleusy. The young man was Perrod, the castle's Lord, and he addressed one of the shepherds thus:

- Among you is a shepherdess by the name of Hugonnette, go and find her. As of this day I will take her into my service.

The eighteen-year-old Hugonnette was a very pretty country girl with a fresh, rosy colour to her cheeks. She was also sweet and gentle.

- Hugonnette is my sister, answered the shepherd, her presence here is vital. You will easily find the servant you seek at Saclentse.

But the master would not hear of it, and he ordered the shepherd to go and get his sister. The young man straight away went to warn Hugonnette of the danger she faced, and sent her off to hide in the woods.

The shepherd went back to the Lord and said to him:

- My sister is not at the chalet, she must have gone down to Saclentse. You'll recognise her easily by the white lamb that follows her everywhere she goes.

So Perrod leapt onto his horse and disappeared down the path that led straight to Saclentse. In that village lived a poor girl, a humble soul, who was often seen in the morning skipping around with a white lamb. When the Lord arrived at Saclentse, he saw a white lamb behind the bushes overlooking the Printse and set about following it. The frightened lamb ran off, followed by its guardian. Perrod spurred his horse and the horse made a huge leap forward, jumping across the cliffs and falling into the abyss with his rider. Meanwhile, the young girl and her lamb crouched huddling under a rock - and neither the horse nor the rider were ever seen again.

7. The witch of Isérables

In the last century lived a very mysterious and quite mischievous woman. The 'witch', as she was known, was accused by the villagers of all kinds of wrongdoings - avalanches, landslides, animal illnesses and epidemics were all blamed on her evil spells. But the rumours went further still - it was said that the wretched soul turned into a wolf to attack sheep, roaming all the way into the mountains of Isérables, Nendaz, Bagnes, and Hérens.

One autumn day, the wolf ventured into an alpine pasture at Bagnes and was shot by a hunter, resulting in a wound that the hunter assumed would be fatal - but in fact the wolf was only wounded on the right flank and somehow managed to get onto the easy and winding pathways back to the valley of Isérables.

Winter came along. The hunter was also a tailor, and as tailors were rare at Isérables he was in the habit of staying there for quite a long time until he had clothed the entire village. As it happened, one day a woman that he had seen before and who had appeared to be lame since the previous autumn came along to see him. As was customary, he lodged at her house and then they gradually fell in love and got married.

The woman complained of extreme pain in the right leg right from the first night and held the husband responsible for it, while he protested his innocence in vain. One morning though, the tailor found upon waking up that instead of a woman laying his arms there was a wolf - with a badly scarred wound on the right flank. Only then did he realise that he had married the witch of Isérables!

8. The legend of the stone scree of Dzerjonna

Haute-Nendaz was once upon a time a happy, comfortable place thanks to the prosperity that was a result of the cultivation of its fertile fields. The country people there were charitable, and distributed the fruits of the earth to the poor.

Lucifer was jealous, however, and did not like these people who were not sending him his allocation of deceased souls to his hellfires. So the swindling Lucifer decided to strike the brave people by rolling the stones that formed a rock on the sides of Tracouet onto the fields.

His minions, all in close formation, proceeded to do his dirty work and roared with the effort of doing so, raging as they went. The noise alerted the villagers, and they set about ringing the 'Metsotta' - the bell of the chapel of Saint-Michel - to summon the assistance of the village's patron saint. The crystalline sound of the bell disturbed the devil's minions, and they became disorganised.

- Pull! - ordered those that were pushing.

- Push! - ordered that were pulling.

Everyone was worn out and exhausted - and the stone were not moving. Eventually they were abandoned in a stack on a sloping ledge in the middle of the pine forest, and became a stretch of stones - the 'Lapey de Dzerjonne '. Saint Michael had won against Lucifer and his cohorts!

9. The Vouivre of Louvie

In years gone by, the people of Nendaz controlled the alpine pasture of Louvie that was situated between the Massif of Mont-Fort and the glaciers of the Grand-Désert. Eventually, though, they abandoned their use of the pasture land because of the many animal losses they experienced every year as a result of a monstrous beast called the Vouivre.

The people of Bagnes, who were keen on that pasture land, resolved to get it for themselves. But right at the entry point to the green small valley, the Vouivre always got in the way of the boldest men. So one day the people took along a young bull, fed it milk for seven years, and then built it a powerful iron armour.

The day came when the bull was to face the Vouivre. The enormous monster, with its cat head and serpent tail, awaited the assailant. Then a piercing whistle was heard with notes that were lower than a fearful bellowing. The Vouivre and the bull were in each other's grip. After a long battle, the bull killed the animal as it sank its horns into the monster's heart, cutting it into a thousand pieces.

Ever since then, the municipality of Bagnes has used and benefited from the pasture land of Louvie - but the victor was never able to savour his victory. As soon as his armour had been ripped off he fell down dead, no doubt with the emotion of it, and not a trace of any wound could be seen on his body.

10. The Saint of Siviez

At Siviez is a large flat stone on which you'll find the imprint of two knees sunk into the stone. People say that these are the traces of the Saint of Siviez. Find out more about his legend!

A long time ago, a solitary and mysterious man lived in this secluded spot far from any settlement. He never left his hideaway - not even to attend Sunday mass. Villagers were of the view that this was a serious deficiency, notwithstanding the distance, and denounced him to the parish priest who summoned him to his residence to remind him of what was expected of him.

One Sunday morning, the hermit went to visit the man of the cloth, who straight away explained to him why he had been summoned. Just then, a sunray pierced the room in which the two men were talking. The hermit took off his heavy coat and threw it onto the sun ray that then became solid and held up the coat. The hermit turned to the astonished priest and motioned him to do likewise - but the coat belonging to the man of the church fell to the ground.

The priest discarded his scruples upon seeing this, and - imbued with great respect for the man in his presence - begged the man his pardon, and the hermit then returned to his mountain and resumed his life of contemplation.

The years went by, and then one joyous spring day the parish church bells began to ring of their own accord, without anyone doing anything. The good priest instantly thought: It's the Saint, whose life over there has come to an end. He went to the hermit's cave, together with a few other men - and there on a beautiful bed adorned with flowers was the Saint sleeping his final sleep, surrounded by two altar candles lit by the angels of the Sky.

