



Stage 20

CÉRILLY

Saint-Amand-Montrond

53 km



Saturday July 26th

TAKE A PEEK

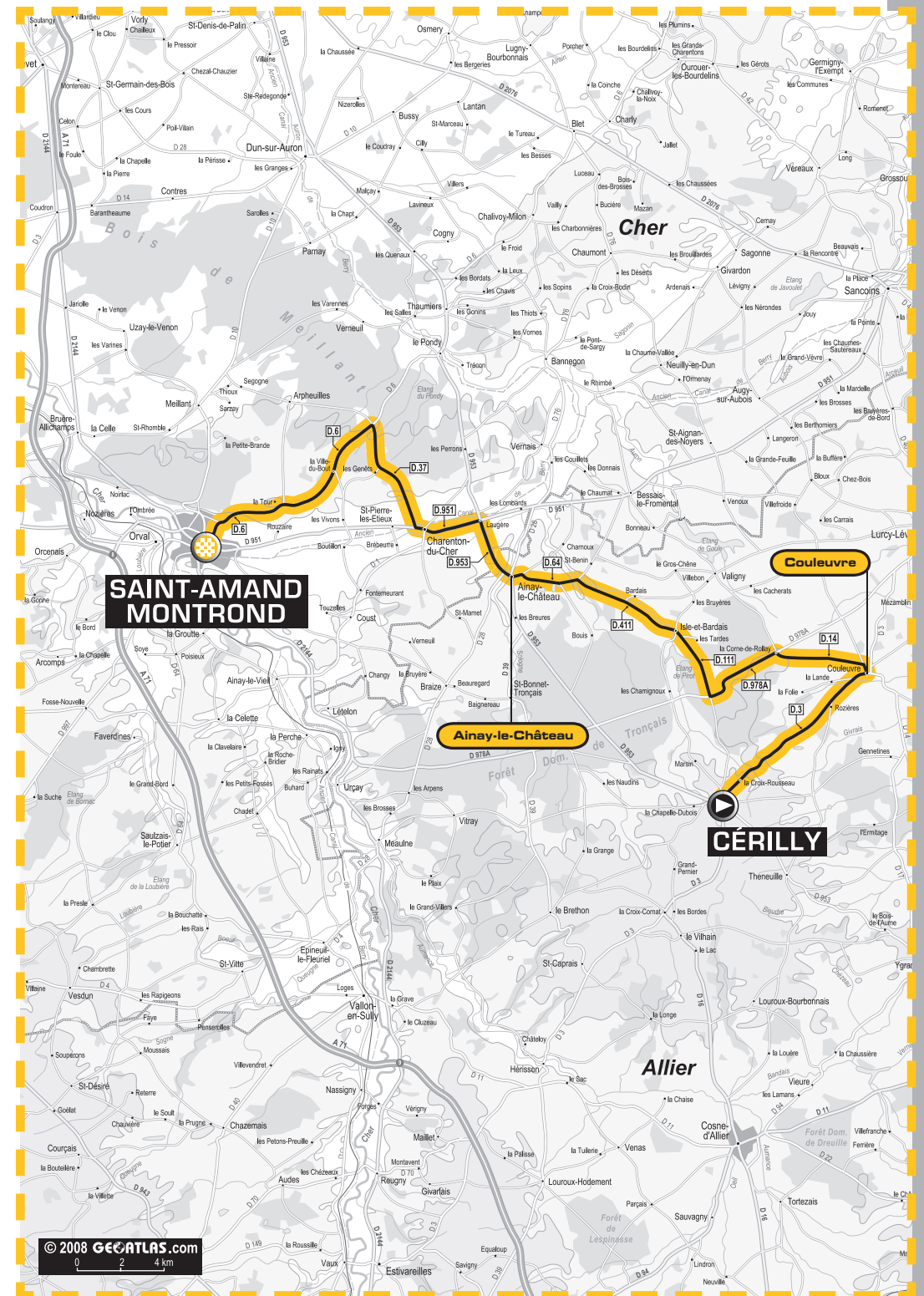
- **Cérilly.** With a population of 1,500, this commune comes under the heading of “villages” playing host to the Tour this year. It is one of the entry points to the famous forest of Tronçais, created by Colbert in the 17th Century.
- **Coulevre (km 9).** On the edge of a forest, this village makes a living partly from the porcelain industry and has a museum all about it.
- **Ainay-le-Château (30.5 km).** A large château with twenty-four towers was built in the 11th Century. Only a few ruins are left to admire today.
- **Saint-Amand-Montrond.** It was through working with and trading in gold that this town grew up in the 19th Century

THE TOUR PAYS A VISIT TO...

Olivier Perrier, who was born in the village of Hérisson, went back there in the 70s to pursue the career he had started as an actor and theatre director in the city. He retrained in the distilling of whisky, which has now become a traditional Bourbonnais product.

“My idea has always been to exploit the town/country theme. By returning to the area, I wanted to create something using the culture from here and then export it elsewhere. That led me, for example, to stage a show in Paris, with a Charolais cow and a carthorse. Above all, I was able, with a few others, to create a theatrical tradition in Hérisson, and put on shows using country people. And I was delighted to see that they could be made to do exaggerated things on stage. For the adaptation of one Nordic poem, where making black pudding was treated like a ritual, I saw a 70-year old lady, who everyone in the village knew, hit a black pudding and yelling at it to “become as hard as a p...!” By bringing our company here, we also helped a lady to leave the husband who was ill-treating her and some young girls who had become crushed by their experience at school to gain self-confidence by interpreting Rabelais in its original format...”

Now the theatre is a real business in this village, and as for me, I have started to distil a whisky, of which part of the production is matured in barrels made of oak from the forest of Tronçais. This is a very important aspect for me, because it is the measure of the quality of an alcoholic drink.”



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THE DEPARTMENT OF ALLIER (03)

See stage 19

CÉRILLY

Pop.: 1,500 (called Cérillois)

Surface Area: 70.55 km²

Altitude : 228 m (min.) – 397 m (max.)

Monument: Saint-Martin-de-Cérilly Church.

In the centre of France, to the south east of the forest of Tronçais, Cérilly is one of the département of Allier's tourist stops. Populated since prehistoric times, Cérilly has always been a communication crossroads. Near the Roman church, the earth mound with its filled-in moats, dating from the 11th Century, proves that there was once a fortress here. In about the 12th Century the name Roger de Cérilly appears in a legal document of Archambault VI. In the 13th Century the seat of power was at the nearby château of La Bruyère l'Aubépin, owned by Archambault VIII, the lord of Bourbon. It was to be transferred in 1598 to Cérilly as a ruin. Decimated during the religious and The Fronde wars, the village was to become the administrative capital of the district at the time of the Revolution.

Two churches are worth visiting. Saint-Martin de Cérilly, whose strange three-storey bell tower is one of the most beautiful in the area, was erected at the start of the Roman age. At the chapelle du Bois, there is an outstanding 16th Century altarpiece in cut stone, depicting Christ on the cross, surrounded by fourteen characters carved in high relief. In the hamlet of La Breure, to the west of Cérilly, there are some preserved ruins of the château of la Bruyère-l'Aubépin, which was probably built in the middle of the 13th Century.

Cérilly also abounds with men who have left their mark on history. The naturalist François Péron (1775 – 1822) was born and died there. This famous scientist took part in the "Baudin" expedition to southern lands between 1800 and 1804. He brought back to France about 600 species of plant seeds and 100 species of rare or, until then, unknown animals. The engraver Marcellin Desboutin



(1822 – 1902) also carried out his highly talented art of painting and engraving there. Another person from the village, Charles-Louis Philippe, born in Cérilly in 1874, was a dazzling writer who died at the age of 35 and whose books describe the most humble of lifestyles ("Bubu de Montparnasse", "Marie Donadieu" and "Le Père Perdrix"). The house where he was born, now a museum, exhibits his work. His father was a clog maker in Cérilly and there is also a reconstruction of his workshop.

The economy of Cérilly is also dynamic. The village's businesses built up around the food industry but it also makes a living from forestry: some of the 11,000 hectares of the forest of Tronçais are actually on its land. The national forest of Tronçais is renowned for the quality of its oak trees. According to an estimate of the number of trees, sales of wood, organised by the ONF (National Forestry Office) every year, generate a turnover of around 8 million Euros. High quality oaks are transformed into barrel wood to be used to make top of the range casks.

Forest tourism also provides various sources of entertainment: from hiking to gathering mushrooms, visiting the impressive oaks and springs, not forgetting the mysterious and disturbing bellowing of the deer.

The cuisine is also distinctive: Charolais beef, succulent forest mushrooms and, a speciality that must be tried, Cérilly, a fresh cows' milk cheese, matured in caves.

To see:

The forest of Tronçais

Situated in the north west of the département of Allier, the forest of Tronçais is the most sparkling jewel of all French forests. Its 11, 000 hectares are legendary and mostly covered in oaks, the oldest of which date back four centuries. Amongst the most famous is the Stebing oak or Résistance Oak, with its grazed sides, reminding the walker of the scars of the occupation. The lakes and springs are like mirrors reflecting the light of the Bourbonnais sky through the canopy, whilst the fountains retell the saga of the fairies.

Business has also thrived there: created by Colbert to provide raw materials for the navy for naval construction at the time, today the forest provides equally magnificent opportunities: wood for marquetry and, in particular, for the production of barrel wood for making casks reserved for the most prestigious wine and other alcoholic beverages.

At Saint-Bonnet-Tronçais, the lake has been transformed into a leisure park. The permanently based Centre for the Introduction to the Environment of the Tronçais area has helped tourists to do more than the just the usual walks. It provides 25 electric bicycles and a certified guide to accompany them through the garden paths and lanes. They can find out where the mushrooms hide or catch a fleeting glimpse of the bellowing deer. Alas the forests are mortal too: the famous Colbert plantation is at the end of its life after 400 years of good and loyal service. Fortunately the very capable ONF is alert to this and is taking care of bringing another one to life, so as to not to damage either the exceptional beauty of the Tronçais or its amenities in any way.

To see nearby:

Maison de la Dentelle (Lace-makers') in Urcay – the Chapel of Saint-Mayeul in Brethon

Cérilly and sport

Football, judo, tennis, volleyball, gymnastics and pétanque (champions of Auvergne title-holders in doubles and singles) are all practised here. The town also hosted the Paris – Nice race, as well as the Tour de l'Avenir (Tour of the Future) in 2007. And lastly, the former cyclist Roger Walkowiak lives in the département.

Specialities:

Cérilly (fresh dried goat's cheese), mushrooms: (Bolets and Chanterelles from the forest), Charolais beef and a potato pâté.

To read:

"Chers amis de Cérilly" Jean Dausay, 2008
"Cérilly et ses environs" Georges Bodard, 2004

COULEUVRE - km 9

Pop. 650

Coulevre is a small peaceful agricultural commune in the north of the département of Allier, on the edge of the forest of Tronçais. The village is especially famous for its porcelain. Two theories exist for the origin of the name of the commune. One story goes that a grass snake (coulevre) thrown by Saint Menoux landed on the current site of the village. The other one is that, in the Middle Ages, a large population of Colliberti, peasant farmers about whom we know very little, could have given its name to the village. The site is also a place for stopovers. Charles IX and Catherine de Medici stayed there briefly in the 16th Century.

Coulevre porcelain

The first porcelain was made in Lurcy-Lévis on the eve of the Revolution. In the middle of the 19th Century, Coulevre porcelain became more popular and reached its peak in the 1930's, when it specialised in the production of items of a decorative nature. It is distinguished by its special shapes and original colour, "Coulevre red". Its manufacture thus gained worldwide fame. Its heritage was almost lost when it closed in 1985. The buyers found around 120,000 moulds, 6,000

templates and, best of all, some designs by Cocteau, which now appear on vases, plates and other porcelain ware.

Couleuvre paid tribute to its porcelain by opening a museum in May 1999. Located in a 14th Century so-called "Charles IX" house, which underwent major renovation work.

ISLE-ET-BARDAIS - km 21.5
Pop. 325

On the edge of the Forest of Tronçais, Isle-et-Bardais is a commune in the canton of Cérilly. Seven prehistoric villages were discovered there in 1982, along with about twenty ancient settlements. They prove just how long the site has been occupied. The collection of remains shows a high concentration of ancient dwellings and major activity dating back to Neolithic times. Historically, the forest has been very thoroughly exploited. It was only able to expand after the fall of Gallo-Roman civilisation; the current commune, however, came to exist through the merging of two parishes in 1844.

The Etang de Pirot leisure park

This leisure park is situated in the heart of the forest of Tronçais and boasts a 78-hectare water park with supervised bathing, fishing with permits, windsurfing, a 13-hole mini-golf course and tennis.

AINAY-LE-CHÂTEAU - km 30.5
Pop. 1,200

Ainay-le-Château, an important village in the Middle Ages, on the border between Berry and Bourbonnais, was not exempt from the conventions of "border" villages: it had to protect and defend itself. A large château with twenty-four towers and four gates,

surrounded by deep moats was therefore built in the 11th Century. The Hundred Years war and religious wars practically destroyed it. The village didn't escape the wrath of the Fronde either. However, visitors can still see interesting ruins of the walled city's ramparts and moats. The home town of a few famous people, Ainay is the birthplace of the Nobel prize for medicine, the architect André Wolf, the inventor of "singular art", Alain Bourbonnais and the former racing cyclist Paul Guignard. The village has also preserved other souvenirs, such as the tannery, the sailed windmills along the river Sologne and, more recently, those trades linked to the forest and the manufacture of porcelain, which have been its everyday activities for a long time.

To see nearby:

Hérisson

Today, this village with its own unique atmosphere, stretches along the Aumance and is dominated by the ruins of its château. It is the setting for a music festival and theatrical events. Many amateur painters come here and set up their easels on the riverbanks and are reminded that the painter Harpignies (1819-1916), who was captivated by the place, created the School of Hérisson there. History unfolds itself in the lanes that snake at the foot of the ancient fortress of the Dukes of Bourbon, which had remained impregnable until the 17th Century.

Bourbon whisky

Mr. Balthazar's distillery produces the original Auvergne whisky made from maize, barley and rye and Christened "hedgheg" – English for hérisson – as it is made in Hérisson, a village in Allier.

DEPARTMENT OF CHER (18)

Prefecture : **Bourges**

Sub-prefectures : **Saint-Amand-Montrond and Vierzon.**

Formed from the former province of Le Berry, Cher bears the marks of over two millennia of history, demonstrated in its exceptional architectural heritage: with Bourges, Noirlac, Ainay-le-Vieil, and Meillant the-

re are so many places to explore along the Jacques Cœur Road. Bourges, a Gallic town conquered by Caesar, still has many ruins from the Roman age. Reincorporated into the royal kingdom in 1100, the town became

a strategically important place. The cathedral of Saint-Etienne, started in 1195, confirmed the king of France's eminence over his Plantagenet rival's domains. It has been listed as a UNESCO world heritage site since 1992.

In Cher, nature plays an important part, with the marshlands of Bourges, like living, breathing organs of greenery in the heart of the town and not forgetting several remarkable gardens: Apremont-sur-Allier, Ainay-le-Vieil, Prieuré d'Orsan, Villiers and the Près Fichaux de Bourges.

For its part, the Vineyard Route in the heart of France is a chance to discover the wines from the five appellations: Sancerre, Menetou-Salon, Quincy, Reuilly and Château-meillant. Lets not forget the famous "Crottin de Chavignol", a Sancerre goats' cheese of Appellation d'Origine Controlée, and other "gastronomic delights", Sablé biscuits from Nançay, Croquet biscuits from Chârost or Baugy and the not to be missed soft-centred sweets called Forestines. On a cultural level, the famous "Printemps" (Spring-time) of Bourges and also the international screenwriters Festival or Noirlac's "vocal art gathering" are worth noting.

Cycling for everyone

Since the spring of 2008, the Sancerre region has linked up with the Loire à Vélo (Loire by bicycle) network. Loire à Vélo is a project that was born in 1995. Its aim is to clear the banks of the Loire for bicycle use, thus linking up Saint Brévin-les-Pins in the Loire Atlantique département with Cuffy in Cher. An 800 km route crosses the 2 regions (the Pays de la Loire and Centre) and 6 départements (Cher, Loiret, Loir-et-Cher, Indre et Loire, Maine et Loire and Loire Atlantique). Loire à Vélo has the potential to become one of the most frequented French cycle routes.

CHARENTON-DU-CHER - km 36
Pop. 1,100

Charenton comes from Carentomagos, a town of Gallic origin. We had to wait for the Merovingiens, though, to find any archaeological traces, as well as for the founding of

a ladies' abbey, due to a disciple of Saint Colomban in 620. The only visible trace is the sarcophagus of Saint Chalan (on display at the museum of Berry in Bourges), who was without doubt the spiritual guide of this small community.

A deep, wide moat surrounds the town, which is entered through 3 gates: one to the west towards Saint-Amand, another to the south towards the Saint Priest bridge and the third called the Poterne (Postern) towards Ainay le Château. Of these great works of the 11th Century, the ramparts, tower and postern remain visible. The fortified château has totally disappeared. It was in ruins by the end of the 16th Century.

ARPHEUILLES - km 42
Pop. 329

Situated in the south of the département, 35 kilometres from Bourges, the commune of Arpheuilles spreads across 2 villages: the village centre and Segogne (S'Gougne to the older folk).

In 1213, "Arfolium" was quoted as an isolated parish in the middle of the woods, belonging to the Abbey of Déois. Even today, woodland and forest cover about 70% of the land of this rural commune - in other words, about 3,250 hectares. The forest of the commune of Arpheuilles itself extends over 116 hectares and work is in progress to extend it even further by replanting 154 hectares.

These woods and lakes are the domain of hunters and fishermen alike. There are many walks to discover, in particular the famous Roman way with the strange name of "Pavé de Juchevache" (Cobblestone of Juchevache). The famous Jacques Cœur road is nearby, as well as the renaissance château of Meillant, one of the area's most beautiful masterpieces.

SAINT-AMAND-MONTROND

Pop.: 12,000 (called *Saint-Amondois* or *Amandins*)

Surface Area: 20.17 km²

Altitude : 148 m (min.) – 312 m (max.)

Famous person: Maurice Papon.

Monument: The Abbey of Noirlac.

Industry: Amandis.



Saint-Amand-Montrond seems to have been around since prehistoric times. Traces of Magdalenian, Celtic and later Gallo-Roman ruins have also been found there. In the 7th Century, a small village grew up around Saint-Amand. It wasn't until the 12th Century that a proper town began to take shape with its feudal mound. A stone's throw away, a second town grew up in the 13th Century: Montrond with its powerful fortress. The two towns were to become unified some centuries later, after having been ravaged by the Fronde and its famines and epidemics. It wasn't until the 19th Century that the town began to grow again with the industrial revolution and, for Saint Amand-Montrond, its gold industry.

The love affair between gold and Saint-Amand began in 1888 when a Parisian jewellery-maker decided to open his workshop there. Even today, this industry is ubiquitous in trades as diverse as the bullion foundry or jeweller's shops. About 5 tonnes of gold is processed each year, which represents 10% of the French market, making the town the third largest centre for gold after Paris and Lyon. Through their skills, more than 350 craftsmen help to keep about ten local businesses going.

In 2006, the town was named "The National Centre for Jewellery". It is currently developing into a hub for luxury, where businesses converge: not just jewellers' shops and workshops but also leather goods, porcelain, metalwork and fashion.

To see:

In 2000, the pyramid-shaped "Cité de l'Or" (Golden City) was opened. It is a tourist, cultural and business complex boasting an entertainments auditorium, an exhibition

hall and various services for businesses. Its museum tells the story of gold, its uses and transformations, from extraction up to the finished piece of jewellery.

Printing represents the second local speciality. This increasingly active sector is prospering thanks to the dynamism and innovation of the two principal printing works, Bussière and Clerc. It was only natural that the town should be awarded the label "Ville et métiers d'art" (Arts and Crafts City) in 1996.

Saint-Amand-Montrond lies between the Cher and Marmande rivers and the Berry Canal in the heart of the Boischaut green-belt. Listed amongst the most beautiful detours in France, the town of Saint-Amand-Montrond is a stop-over town along the Jacques Cœur road, situated in Berry in the centre of France and made its mark in 2005 by being awarded a 4th flower for the quality of its environment. Note the opening in summer 2008 of a balneotherapy centre, called the "centre balnéoludique" ("balneo-entertainment centre"), near the Cité de l'Or (swimming pool, beauty treatments, fitness centre, baths, toboggans, relaxation etc.) in the middle of the countryside.

On an architectural level, the streets of Saint-Amand combine the gentleness of a meander with the delights of discovery. The individual buildings full of history, remains of Gallo-Roman foundations, as well as the distinctive houses are all souvenirs of the villages that

went into creating the town. The town nurses her history at the foot of her fortress and plans her future looking up at the apex of a pyramid.

To see:**Saint-Vic museum**

By turns a town house belonging to the abbots of Noirlac, a convent and a prison, this building, nestled at the bottom of some public gardens, houses all the Saint-Amand-Montrond museum collections since 1938. People have thumbed through the book of Saint-Amand from Palaeolithic times up until the second world war, passing through the Gallo-Roman era, the 11th, 12th and 15th Centuries and the popular tradition. On a tour you will find some rare pieces illustrating the rich past of this part of Berry.

Fortress of Montrond

A major monument of the Saint-Amand people, in the 17th Century the fortress occupied the whole limestone hillock, dominating the town and the confluence of two rivers, the Cher and the Marmande. A powerful circular keep, surrounded by ramparts at ground level, defended the first stone château, in evidence since the beginning of the 13th Century and set right at the summit of the hill. Radically altered and enlarged at the beginning of the 15th Century by Charles d'Albret, Montrond was in its heyday after 1606, when, in a very dilapidated state, it was bought by the duke of Sully, Maximilien de Béthune. The château was finally abandoned in the 18th Century and left as a pile of stones. Rejuvenation of the site started 30 years ago, through the actions of a heritage protection association.

Saint-Amand and culture

Saint-Amand-Montrond is also known for its appetite for culture: its "Journées du livre" (book days) in May, the "La Rue est vers l'Art" (Road to Art) festival organised at the beginning of July and dedicated to the arts of street theatre, painting, dance and music, and the "Affouages" international folk dancing festival in August.

Not forgetting a local theatre company called "Clindor". This association has 80 regular members. Pierre Allart is its director.

Every two years, a show is put on by this light-hearted amateur company somewhere in the town. Since 1998, Clindor has presented *Les beaux messieurs de Bois-Doré*, *Le colonel Chabert*, *La reine Margot* and *La farce de maître Pathelin*.

To visit:

The school of Le Grand Meaulnes in Epineuil-le-Fleuriel

The setting for part of Alain-Fournier's novel, it is a reference to the school of the *Ille République*. The former boys' school where Alain-Fournier lived from 1891 to 1898 with his parents, who were teachers, is now a writers' house, open to the public. The school desks and blackboards and cards and books of the time, as well as the studious atmosphere, are all there to be explored.

The novel takes much of its inspiration from Alain-Fournier's childhood in Epineuil-le-Fleuriel, a village that he would never leave and which he was to describe in detail under the name of Sainte-Agathe.

Saint-Amand and sport

In 2006 Saint-Amand-Montrond was named the most sporting town in the Centre region. Its 3,469 registered club-members benefit from excellent facilities. The town has a cycling stadium and a club for junior cycling hopefuls. It has also played host to numerous races: Ladies' Berry Classic, Ladies' Coupe de France, the National Junior Trophy, Ladies' Trophée d'Or, stages of the Paris-Nice and Paris-Corrèze races and regional track championships. And lastly, Alain Mimoun lived in Saint-Amand.

Specialities:

Potato pâté- cakes: "la pyramide" and "le merle blanc" (chocolate)

To read:

"Le Grand Meaulnes", Alain Fournier
 "Histoire de la bijouterie à Saint-Amand-Montrond", Pierre Mezinzi, 2002
 "Saint-Amand-Montrond, témoignages et récits", Jean Laumonier and Maurice Sugnot, 1996