PARIS FOOD HISTORY WALKS

Old restaurants and cafes

This walk will take you to most of Paris' oldest surviving restaurants and to the sites of some which have disappeared. It has the advantage of taking you through busy and colorful areas with a lot to see along the way. It should take about two hours, unless you decide to stop along the way.

Note that in general this tour is of the *outside* of these businesses; please bear in mind these are not museums, but working restaurants. Some are more casual than others, but most will not welcome visitors stopping in for a look around. (Several are also very expensive and require reservations.)

Only the most general directions are provided here. Most strollers today will find it easiest to use a map application to find the best route from one place to the next. Otherwise, using a good physical map should be easy enough; every metro stop displays one of these, and often a detailed map of the neighborhood as well.

To download a PDF of this walk, click here.

Start at metro Grands Boulevards. Go west to the rue de Faubourg Montmartre and a short way north to number 7.

Bouillon Chartier
7 rue de Faubourg
Montmartre

This is at the rear of a small courtyard. Even from the outside, it is quite lovely.

The Chartier brothers did not invent the Bouillons, which were created and developed into a chain by Duval in the nineteenth century. But Duval's have all closed, while some of theirs survive, including this, the original. Despite its elegant air, this and other bouillons were once popular options for budget dining.

It is about a ten minute walk south to the next restaurant. Return south to the boulevard Poissonnière, cross it and turn right.

Continue until the rue Vivienne. Turn left and walk several blocks until you pass the rue Colbert. A bit further down on the left you will find the Grand Colbert.

Le Grand Colbert

2, rue Vivienne

This was a fancy dry goods shop in the nineteenth century. By 1867, a Colbert restaurant was listed at this address. The space has had a mixed history since, but currently has (more or less restored) period décor.

A short walk south and a right on the Rue de Beaujolais will bring you to the sign for Véfour.

Le Grand Véfour

17, rue de Beaujolais

You can see part of the restaurant (and its high-priced menu) from the Rue de Beaujolais, but you will want to go into the Palais Royal to see more of it. This restaurant is descended from the Cafe de Chartres, which was one of the first businesses to open in the Palais Royal; it has a good claim to being Paris' oldest restaurant, even if it has shut down at times. Though the sumptuous décor has been restored, it gives a good idea of what an elegant restaurant looked like in the nineteenth century.

If you have never seen the Palais Royal, you might want to walk around it once before going on. Try to imagine it lined with restaurants as elegant as today's Véfour. This was the heart of fine dining in Paris at the start of the nineteenth century; later in the areacheaper formula restaurants began to take it over. It was also the center of all manner of colorful and questionable behavior for decades.

When you are done, return to where you came in and head back to the rue des Petits Champs before continuing on for several minutes past the place des Victoires to the rue de Montorgueil. (If the market is on, this will be lively.) Turn left and go north until you are by the rue Mandar. This was the original site of the Rocher de Cancale, which is now across the street, at the corner of the rue Greneta.

78 rue Montorgeuil

Au Rocher de Cancale The oyster market for the Halles market was once on the rue Montorgueil and the Rocher de Cancale was named for a place that provided some of the best oysters. It went from selling oysters to being one of the top restaurants in Paris for much of the nineteenth century.

Today it is far more casual, though the exterior has a period feel.

As you return south, note Stohrer's famous pastry shop at number 51. Continue past the rue Étienne Marcel to the Escargot. It's easy to recognize – it has a big golden snail on it.

L'Escargot This restaurant, founded in the nineteenth century, was cited in the Nineteen-Twenties as one of the top ones in Paris. In 1971, a critic called it "dusty", but it is again well-regarded (and Montorgueil pricey) today. 38, rue Montorgueil

The Escargot is one of several restaurants which survived their original reason for opening: the Halles market, which dominated this area for eight hundred years, before closing in 1969. Others ring the ghost of the old market. In the late nineteenth century, most were open all night and hosted a mixed crowd of workers from the market and upscale party-goers, many of whom had begun their nights in Montmartre before finishing them by the Halles. Women - soupeuses - laid in wait for likely-looking men who would buy them meals or drinks. Just as the "swells" were arriving, workers and market-gardeners would come in for breakfast. It was a lively if often sordid scene which has been replaced by a somewhat tamer if still fun night life.

Au Pied de Cochon 6, rue Coquillière

The "Pig's Foot" is a latecomer to the Halles restaurants, having opened in the Nineteen Forties. But like many of its predecessors it is open all-night. An earlier (and now defunct) restaurant in the area was called "The Sheep's Foot".

The short walk to the next restaurant is a little complicated, heading east for about a block, then backtracking north to the rue de la Grande Truanderie and Pharamond. Go east until the rue Mondetour, then turn left, go north until the rue de la Grande Truanderie and turn right. The restaurant is a few steps ahead on the north side.

Le Pharamond 24 rue de la Grande Truanderie

Originally, La Petite Normande. In 1884, it only listed four items on its menu: tripe, kidneys sautéed in white wine, beefsteaks, and cutlets. Though it has an elegant look today, the décor was once very simple, as befit the workers who came in early morning while fancier sorts partied (and got hustled) upstairs. Known then and now for its *tripes à la mode de Caen*.

Continue on to the rue Pierrre Lescot and turn right. Head south until you come to the Père Tranquille at left.

Au Père Tranquille 16 rue Pierre Lescot Au Père Tranquille, already noted in 1857, may be the oldest of the neighborhood restaurants. While workers stopped in at the bistro on the ground floor, partiers could see everything from jazz bands to nude dancers upstairs. Today it is more restrained and the only one of these places where

you can simply order a coffee and sit on the terrace to people watch (or take a break from this tour, for instance).

Walk south from the Père Tranquille to the corner of the main complex. (The square fountain at left stands on the site of the cemetery where the original market began modestly before becoming the huge Halles.) Turn right. Walk until you reach the rue Pont Neuf.

OPTIONAL: Here you can take a detour if you want to see the (approximate) site of the first restaurant. If you're happy to use your imagination, head west to the rue de Louvre and south below the rue St. Honoré.

SITE of the first restaurant

Rue du Louvre south of Rue St. Honoré

When this part of the rue du Louvre was called the "rue des Poulies", Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau opened the first "restorer" somewhere on it, selling "restorants" (restaurants). Soon after the new establishment moved to the Hotel d'Aligre, on the western corner of the street, along the rue St. St. Honoré. The whole street has been rebuilt since and so there is no sign of either location. But every Western-style restaurant in the world ultimately descends from one steps away from where you stand.

Return east to the rue Pont Neuf.

Turn right on to the rue Pont Neuf and walk south. If the Chien Qui Fume is still open, you will come to it in a few steps.

Au Chien Qui Fume In 1899, a "Guide to the Pleasures of Paris" advised having oysters or onion soup at the "Smoking 33 rue du Pont Neuf Dog", but also warned that at three in the morning the place was lined with soupeuses waiting for a mark. The restaurant closes earlier now and has calmed down overall (if in fact it is still open – recent reports are uncertain).

Continue south until the Pont Neuf bridge. Cross it, going past the island all the way over to the opposite (Left) bank. Then turn left and go east until the next cross street. You will now be across from Lapérouse.

Lapérouse

51 quai des Grands **Augustins**

This restaurant is one of the few to preserve its cabinets particuliers (private rooms). In the nineteenth century, the poultry market (the "Valley of Misery") was on this quai. In the morning, some dealers would use the restaurant's private rooms to conduct business. But these rooms served a very different purpose when couples used them in the evening. (This was not unusual – all the best restaurants then offered cabinets particuliers.)

Go back to the end of the Pont Neuf and turn left, heading south down the rue Dauphine. When you come to a crossroads (the Carrefour de Buci), head south on the second street at left (the rue de l'Ancienne Comédie). A few steps further south will bring you to the site of the first really famous cafe in Paris.

SITE of the first

Café Procope 13 rue de l'Ancienne Comédie

While others had opened cafes in Paris in the seventeenth century, Francesco Procopio dei Coltelli's famous cafe in Paris was the first to be immensely successful. After he bought it in 1686 he decorated it elegantly, establishing a standard for the best cafes going forward. As Procope's it became a major literary hang-out and endured into the nineteenth century, becoming Zoppi's and then again Procope's. After the cafe closed in 1890, the space hosted various businesses, including, in 1928, a vegetarian restaurant.

Today a restaurant occupies the space and uses the original name. But don't even *think* about just

stopping by for a coffee.

Continue south to the boulevard St. Germain and turn right. Continue for about a block to number 142 and the Vagenende.

Vagenende

The Vagenende was once another Chartier bouillon and has retained a great deal of its early

142, boulevard St

twentieth century décor.

Germain

Continue several blocks west, just past the Saint-Germain-des-Prés church. You will now be facing the Deux-Magots cafe; just beyond it is the Cafe de Flore.

Les Deux Magots

6 place Saint-

Germain des Prés

The cafe which opened here at the end of the nineteenth century began as a fancy goods shop which had moved from another location and was named for the statues of two Chinese mandarins which can still be seen today. Its strongest claim to fame dates to the Fifties and Sixties, when it became a literary hangout (the neighborhood once hosted a number of publishers).

Café de Flore

172 boulevard St

Germain

The Flore too opened at the end of the nineteenth century, shortly before the Deux Magots. Like its

neighbor, it became a literary fixture later in the twentieth century.

Look across the Boulevard St. Germain and you will see the Brasserie Lipp. Cross over to take a better look.

Brasserie Lipp

151 Boulevard Saint-Germain

A number of brasseries (literally, "breweries"), mainly Alsatian, had opened in Paris by 1880, when Leonard Lipp opened the Brasserie des Bords du Rhin, which soon became known simply as the Brasserie Lipp. After Marcelin Cazes bought it in 1920, he made a conscious effort to develop its cultural role, establishing an important literary prize there in 1934. The brasserie has attracted not only literary but political and other important figures since.

From here, it is a slightly longer walk (15-20 minutes) to the last two sites. Luckily, you are in one of Paris' most lively and walkable areas.

Walk west on the boulevard St. Germain until the rue de Condé (if you come to the Odéon metro stop, you've gone too far). Cross to the opposite side, then turn right and walk a short way down, sticking to your left, until the first sharp turn left. You should now be on the rue Monsieur Le Prince. Continue several blocks until you cross the rue Racine. Just after that, you will find Polidor on your left.

Polidor

Prince

In the nineteenth century, creameries and dairies began to serve light food to go with their milk and 41 rue Monsieur le Cream. Some, including Polidor, became full-on restaurants. In the Twenties, Polidor also became a major literary hangout (as seen in "Midnight in Paris").

Now return to the rue Racine and turn right. Walk about three-quarters of the way to the end of the street. You will now undoubtedly notice the Bouillon Racine.

Bouillon Racine 3 rue Racine

Opened in 1906, this is yet another Chartier Bouillon. If this one looks particularly magnificent, it is because it was once the pride of the chain, known as the "Grand Bouillon". It has had a mixed history since its heyday, but now, much restored, is a glorious sight.

And so this walk ends, having taken you from one Bouillon to another. Other older restaurants are scattered through Paris, but here at its heart you have seen the bulk of them; enough to envision yourself dining in the Paris of another time.