

# Villars - Chésieres - Huémoz - Panex - Verchiez - Aigle

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I have come to **Villars** more or less regularly since 1962.

**Villars** s/Ollon is the oldest ski resort in the French speaking part of Switzerland; the absolute first being St. Moritz.

**Villars** was first mentioned as "*Plan Villard*" in 1316; the first tourist lodge was established there in 1837; alpine skiing started at the turn of the century and the first ski lift went in operation in 1936.



*View of Villars from Chésieres*

**Villars** is in the Chablais region whose history or in this case, pre-history goes back 7000 years! The region is at the top of the Geneva Lake; in fact, the word Chablais is a deformation of two Latin words "caput" and "laci" meaning head of lake.

The Chablais encompasses part of the Valais and Vaud Cantons.

Arriving the first time, almost straight from Tehran via Florimont<sup>1</sup>, **Villars** was a magical place.

- In those days **Villars** was "The IN" resort with people like Charles Aznavour, Gilbert Becaud and many others performing at "Le Sporting"<sup>2</sup>.
- The Hotel Palace<sup>3</sup> was still open and in full swing.
- The new<sup>4</sup> and at the time, one of the very few, if not only, ice-skating rinks with manmade ice in an altitude ski resort, had regular skating shows or ice hockey competitions programmed.

AND of course, **Villars**, being at the time the Swiss ice-hockey champion<sup>5</sup>, the place was packed with a super ambiance when our team had a match which we usually won!

- There was also a renowned uphill car race from Ollon to **Villars** that counted for the European championships. It drew spectators from all over Europe and even the Americas.

The competition was discontinued mainly for ecological and safety reasons after the 1971 season. I hear from my friends here that the local peasants making no or very little money from an event that went through their land also posed a strong and decisive resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time a horribly strict catholic boarding school in Geneva, for boys only!

<sup>2</sup> The IN place in those days. We bribed our way in with a small can of caviar for the owner / showman.

<sup>3</sup> It is now the Club Med.

<sup>4</sup> Inaugurated in 1961. It was a gift of the famous French supermarket chain "Felix Potin's" owners to Villars.

<sup>5</sup> Swiss champion in 1963 and 1964.

So, in those days there was plenty to brag about when returning back to school in grey, cold, windy, damp, dull, depressing and dark<sup>6</sup> Geneva, from Christmas or Easter holidays in **Villars**, tanned and wearing a wide grin.

“Yadesh-b-kheir”<sup>7</sup>.

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My friends and sports partners in **Villars**, Philippe and Myriam D started from **Villars**. I joined them in **Chésieres**, about 2 kilometers down the main road or through the forest path.

The whole outing takes about 3 hours. One starts at an altitude of 1250 meters and goes all the way down to 400 meters mainly through well-maintained paths in the forest. Much easier but harder on the knees than climbing!

The weather, so late in the season, was still very warm and we were comfortable with just T-shirts. The only thing that reminded us that we were not in the summer was the fallen leaves on the ground and the autumn colors of the landscape.



*View of the Alps from Villars*

Starting in **Villars**, one walks down for about 15 minutes to **Chésieres** by the forest path and then on to **Huémoz**, **Panex**, **Verchiez** and finally **Aigle**.

The whole way, barring a few hundred meters, is through forest paths, which in Switzerland are well maintained and signaled. No chance of getting lost; no GPS required here!

In these forests, with a little luck, one can cross paths with deers and other wild but not dangerous animals. Even that is safe in Switzerland!

We took the bus back up to **Chésieres** and **Villars**.

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<sup>6</sup> In winter it was still dark when I took the bus to school and dark again when I took it back home!

<sup>7</sup> Untranslatable nostalgic Persian expression similar to “those were the days”.

## Short description of the places we went through

### Chésieres

Written “*vers Chisiery*” in 1290, it is better exposed to the sun and better protected from cold winter winds than Villars.

The oldest chalets still in existence in **Chésieres** go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The first stagecoach service was established between Ollon and **Chésieres** in 1874

### Huémox

“*Nemo*” and then “*Huemo*” in the 13th century. It was the central village in the 19th century. It is now a village on the main Ollon-Villars road and has a choir that performs in the region!

### Panex

“*De Panaes*” in 1320, “*Pagnex*” in 1629.

**Panex** was already an active salt mining village in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The exploitation of the mines started there in 1554. The old house, which used to be a dormitory for the miners of the salt quarry, was built in 1682. It now belongs to the forestry department and in the summer, the main hall and garden are used for various receptions and gatherings.



*The “old house” in Panex*

### Verchiez

Small village of the Ollon commune. “*Verchy*” in 1835, “*Verchi*” in 1861. “*Chiex*”, “*Chiez*”, also “*Verschiex*”, “*Vers Chiez*” in 1734. It is a derivative of the old French words “*Vers*” towards and *chiés*, in the house of, or of the latin “*casis*”, plural of *casa*, house.

Quite an etymology for such a small village!



*Philippe and Myriam in Verchiez*

## Aigle

**Aigle** is the “big town” of the region. All trains stop there and it is the gateway to most of the skiing resorts of the region. The castle dates back to the 12th century. It is now a museum and some rooms are let out for weddings and receptions.



*Vineyards and castle in Aigle*

### Bibliography

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*Our Path*

### Links

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