

The easiest point from which to begin the examination of this region is probably Clermont, the chief town of the department of Puy de Dôme. Built round a small hill on the west side of the Limagne, where that broad valley attains its greatest width, Clermont rises conspicuously above the general level of the plain (which is about 1200 feet above the sea-level), and seems to nestle at the base of the long granitic ridge that supports the chain of Puys. The hill on which the town is placed is of volcanic origin, so too are similar gentle eminences that rise above the level country towards the east; north and south, at the distance of a mile or two, are remnants of ancient lava-beds, now forming flat-topped hills; while to the west, down some of the narrow gullies that descend through the granitic ridge, currents of lava have forced their way from the volcanic vents of the Puys almost to the very site of the town. Here, then, the traveller may rest for a while, with plenty of geological interest around him if he care to ply his hammer, and with not less of varied and curious scenery if he be only in search of the novel and picturesque. Let no man, however, whether geologist or not, visit Auvergne in July, unless fully prepared to eat, drink, and be merry, with the thermometer at 82° or more in the shade.

Our first geological ramble was begun soon after sunrise. Passing through a labyrinth of lanes and byways, we succeeded in reaching the base of the hills, and began to wind upwards among the vineyards that cluster along the slopes and look down upon the rich plain of the Limagne. It was a glorious morning. A light mist hung over the valley, concealing its features as completely as if the lake which once filled it had been again restored; while some twenty miles to the eastward, on the farther side of this sheet of phantom water, rose the purple hills of the Forez