

# A French Regional Natural Park Seen from the Road

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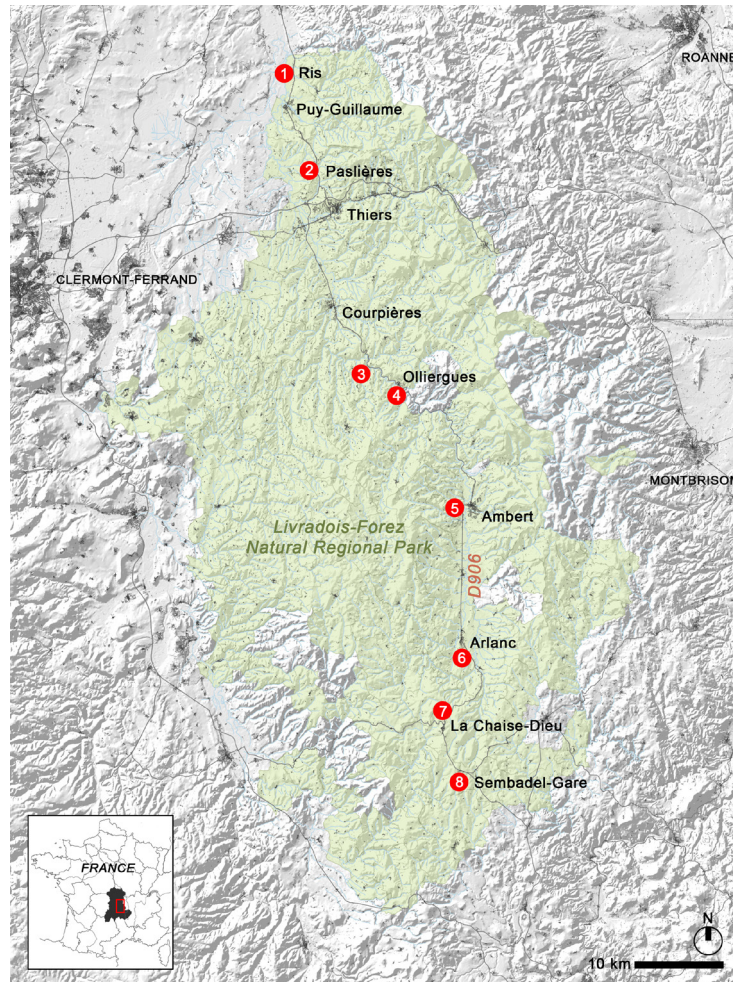
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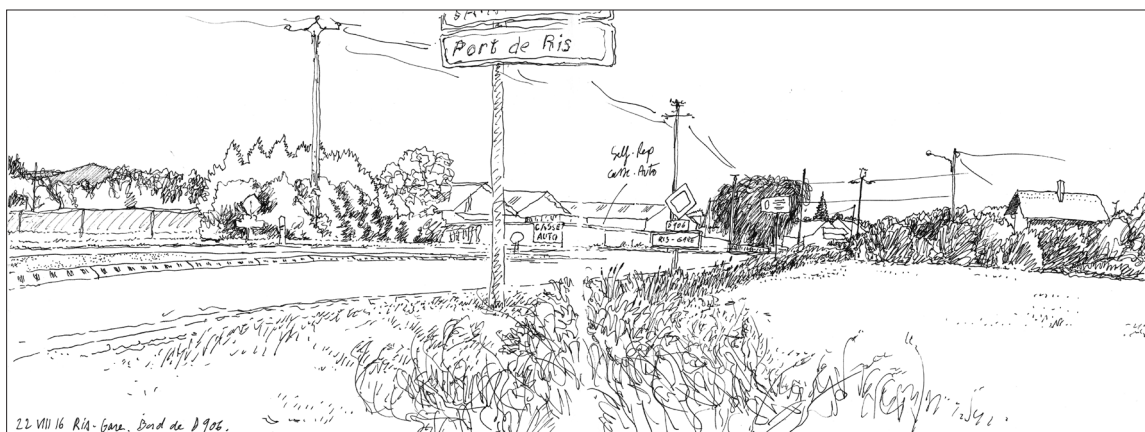
We are in the "road" era. In Western Europe, the principles of their network were defined three centuries ago. Without their efficiency, there would not have been any propagation of ideas and knowledge, no commercial harmonisation, no efficient administrative system. Roads, more than any other landmark, are one of the best instruments for a system of sovereignty, for political and social order. A paradoxical aspect of a road is that its efficiency increases when each of its imperfections disappears. Roads seem to be useful when nobody remarks them. The driving experience is oriented by a preoccupation of fluidity. Today, the old roadmap has been replaced by GPS monitoring. Tomorrow, car manufacturers promise self-guided vehicles. The road network and system is heading towards this idea. In France, the symbol of this process is the roundabout, a strange topographic object which was rapidly adopted as a unique solution in traffic management. 30.000 of them have been built at road intersections. Roads are a living passion in our society (the male society), a structuring anthropological object, a fundamental marker in our administration and planning system. Asphalt ribbons seem to impact collectively than many other fundamental elements: soil, air or water. Could roads lead us to a better approach to these essential themes? Are we prisoners of a "road way of thinking"?

Before talking about a recent trip along a Livradois-Forez<sup>1</sup> road, I would like to make a detour. As many people before me, I've contemplated Northern American roads. Their rectitude is fascinating, as their capacity to organise and to federate human settlements. Very few houses conform to another structural order than roads. It seems that no other part of the globe has imposed geometry as a principle organizer for humanised landscape to this point, with such an ethnocentric

point of view. In Northern America, it's sometime so difficult to penetrate inside the grid system, that the common world seems to be resumed in the direct proximity of roads. This is why there is so much visual reception of the most common architectural elements and landmarks situated along the roads : gas stations, bus stations, commercial strips, general stores... and houses galleries, definitively oriented towards asphalt. We can't perceive this concept in France.



Pic1: Parsa plain (city of Persepolis). Source: Foundation of Parse, Pasargadea.



Pic2: Ris-Gare, ordinary roadscape in Park entrance.



The first reason is that many roads were moved in the peripheral areas of cities, small towns or villages. We have to disobey road signs or GPS monitoring, to re-establish the joint

presence of roads and living landscape. In France, the way of living is not totally oriented by the roads. We live behind walls, trees, hedges.



Pic3: Paslière, a view on the Thiers mountains from the road.

We reserve special places for common use : squares, courts, parks, etc. These spaces come alive at certain moments, in which they are used et inhabited for

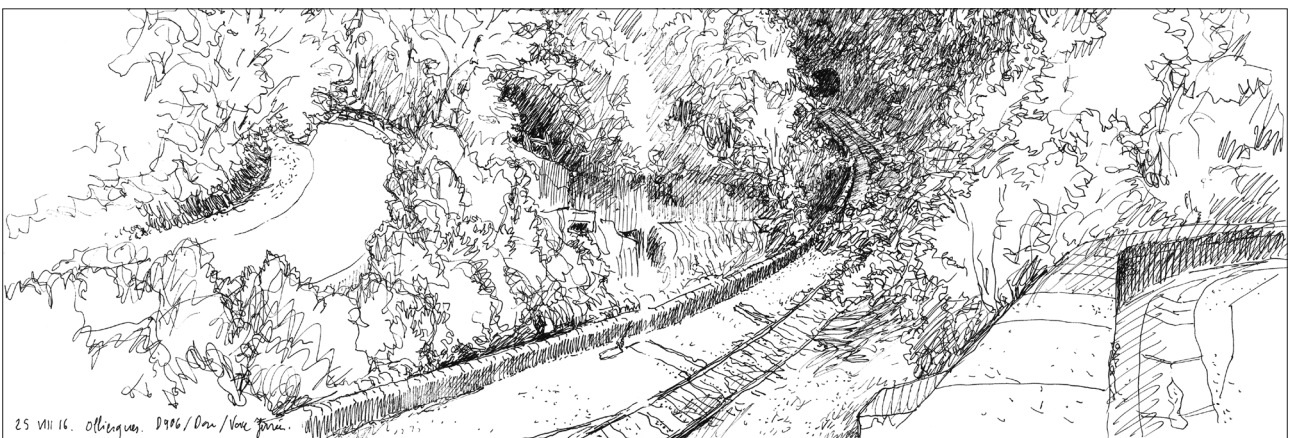
common purposes. But in recent times, many of these ordinary social links have been broken by a new peripheral road system.



Pic4: D906 across Lower Livradois hills and Dore Valley.

Rural areas (like Livradois-Forez, in the Central mountains of France) have not been affected by this movement. They appear sometimes as poor, deserted regions : but they are still rich of potential social relationships. The stakes, for a rural

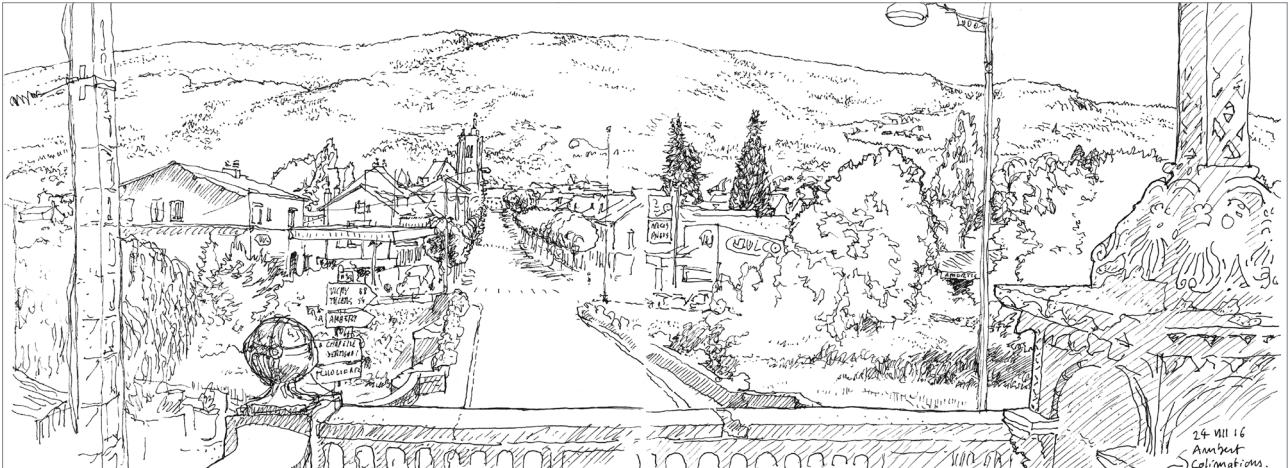
territory are not to think that this vast modification comes along with a feeling of resignation, or failure. It's rather a chosen pathway, by a region which is different, which has something to offer even today through this difference.



Pic5: Proximity of Road, river and train in the Dore Valley.

Roads are often directly mediating the region. In this sense, roads can be thought of as technical objects as well as cultural objects. Their design and maintenance remain often reserved to engineers and technicians. But roads give a visual access to the main landscapes, and their prominent structures. Landscape architects can

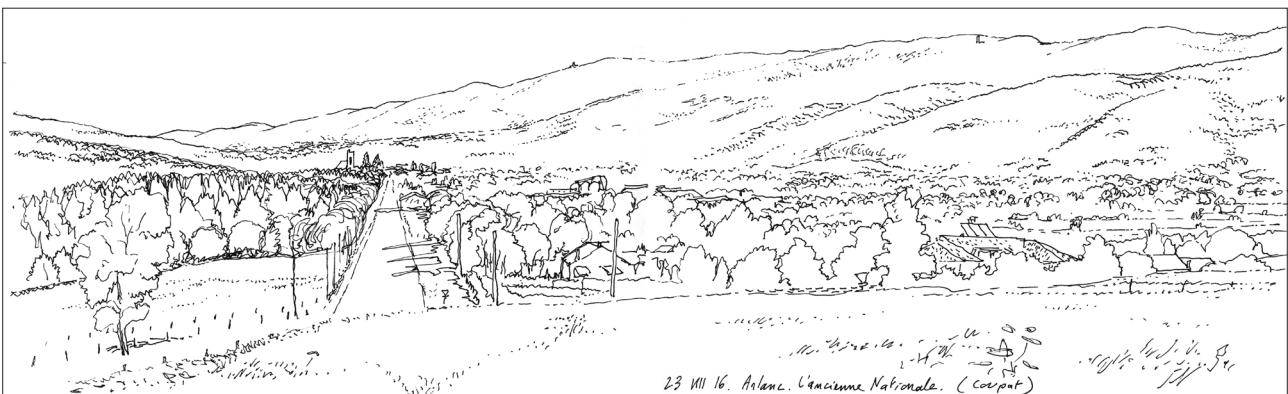
reveal these structures, and provide assistance to technical staff to define the best meeting points between roads and landscapes. They can also help to define where the « roadscape » has to stop, to avoid dissolution of the cultural and vernacular landscape in a « mid-landscape », which could take place... anywhere.



Pic6: Main entrance of the city of Ambert.

These drawings were traced along the main road across the Livradois-Forez mountain range in France, while beginning work on a Landscape Plan for this area . They try to describe the relationship between roads and

landscapes, between roads and inhabited dwellings, to produce a story of a cultural landscape seen by the road... like a draft for a large scale project.

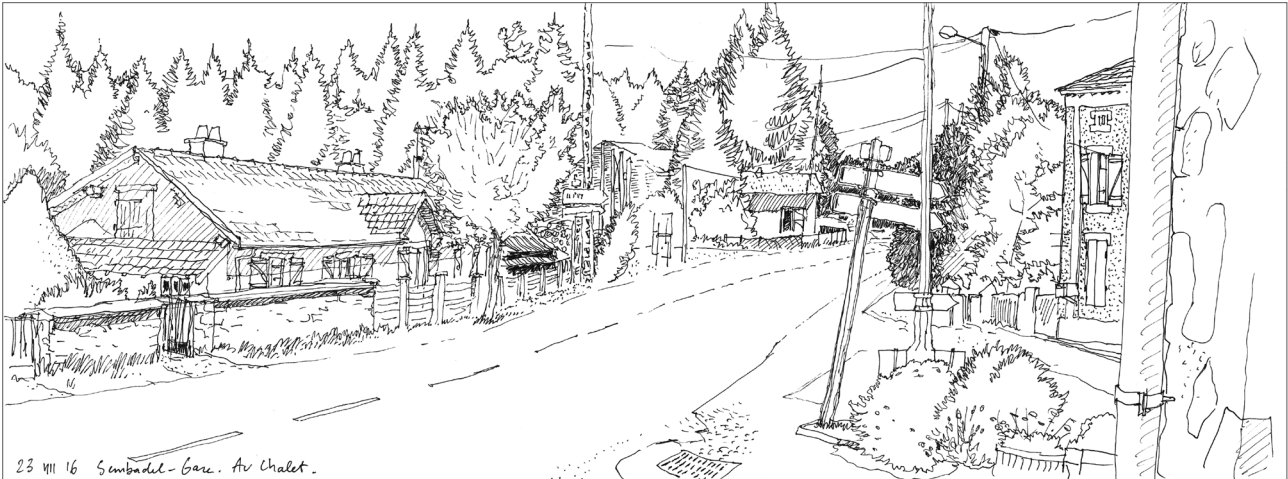


Pic7: The road in the plain of Arlanc, straight line in the landscape.



Pic8. Hierarchy of roads : a small intersection near La Chaise-Dieu.





Pic9. The road across the village : Sembadel-Gare. Drawings by Alexis Pernet.

## Endnotes

1. Livradois-Forez is a Regional Natural Park situated in central mountains of France. “A Regional Natural Park is an inhabited rural area that is nationally recognised for its valuable local heritage and landscape, but also for its fragility. Such parks lean on extensive sustainable development plans allowing the protection and promotion
2. of their resources” (Regional Natural Park French Federation). In partnership with the Livradois-Forez Regional Natural Park, 1 Pas de côté Landscape architects Workshop and Pierre Enjelvin (photographer). Landscape Plan will be developed along 2017.