

LES TRAVERSÉES D'HELVIA ET BERGUISE




Helvia and Berguise are a very keen pair of explorers, always on the lookout for new adventures, thrills and discoveries.

Inquisitive Berguise flew farther afield than usual recently ... and came back with an enormous bunch of keys.

What a piece of luck, the keys open the doors to countless unknown villages !

They immediately set off in search of adventure down the corridors of time. Heritage, architecture, scenic landscapes, arts and crafts, everything will be revealed ! They can't wait to show you what they have found, so follow in their footsteps!



Helvia is a brave, fearless young woman born on the slopes of the Coiron plateau. Berguise, her faithful ally, follows her everywhere on her adventures.

She's a resourceful adventuress and has an acute sense of observation, which makes her second to none.

Berguise is a winged animal with brightly-coloured feathers and is both caring and inquisitive. Helvia and he are a loveable well-matched bubbly pair !

Good news Berguise,
the key we've chosen
has opened the door to
Saint-Vincent-de-Barrès
in feudal times.

I can see the village in
the distance. My
medieval knight's uniform
will be just perfect!

Great !
Let's go and explore
the village and its
history !



After this adventure,
you'll know all there is to
know about this old
medieval settlement.



***See you in front of the village council
offices for the beginning of our
adventure.***



Start



Finish



Water tank



The parish priest's garden



Trail

THE STOPS



1

6

2

7

3

8

4

9

5

1 - THE RED STOP



THE FORT

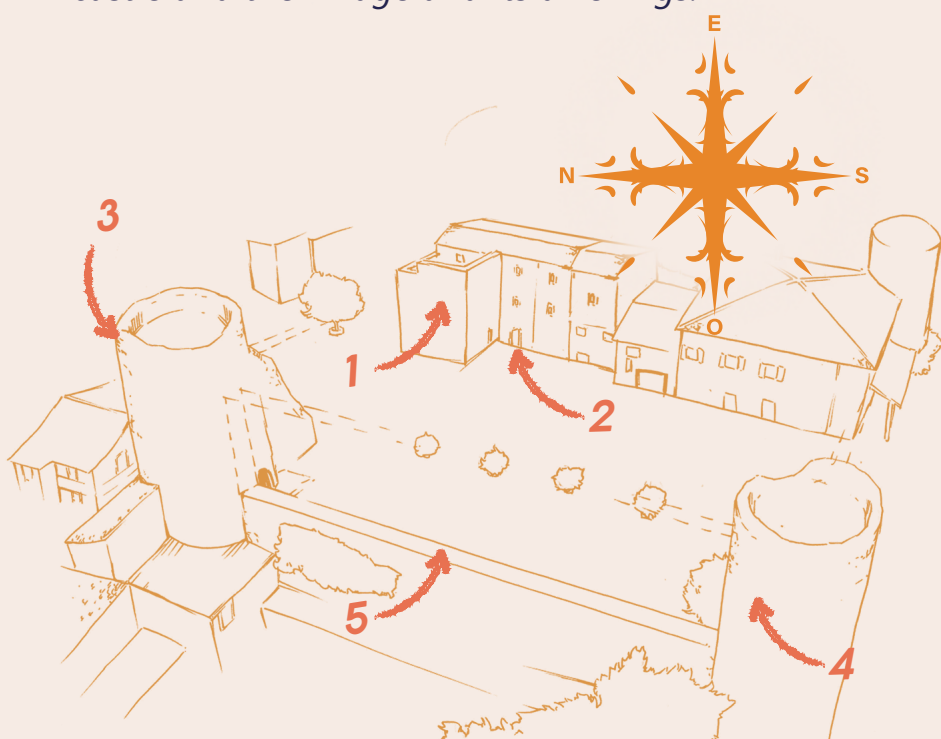
Helvia : Well here we are Berguise.

Berguise : Where are we ?

Helvia : In the old castrum of Saint Vincent de Barrès founded between the 11th and 13th centuries.

Berguise : What does « castrum » mean ?

Helvia : It's a fortified area centred around a castle and the village and its dwellings.



Helvia : Look at these towers (3+4). They are two of the four which reinforced the curtain walls around the castle courtyard at the end of the Middle Ages.

Berguise : Ah yes ! In the Middle Ages, really high walls (5) linked the buildings on the castle square : the keep (1), the so-called Prison tower (3) and the small Tournelle tower (4).

Helvia : Exactly ! You couldn't see any of this lovely scenery. It was really well-hidden. On the castle square, opposite you there's a complex of several adjoining buildings. To the left, there's the mighty limestone-built keep. The adjoining buildings to the south (2) are not as old. They were built of white limestone and black basalt.

Berguise : Oh look, there's a coat of arms above the gate (2) ! Which lord of Saint Vincent de Barrès did it belong to ?

Helvia : The lion is the crest of the Chambaud family who were lords here in the 16th and 17th centuries. Berguise, do you like the view ?

Berguise : Yes I love it !

Helvia : Patience ... we'll learn more about it later.

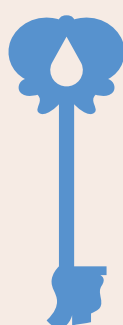
Dear reader : do you know what that little half-moon-shaped opening halfway up the west wall of the keep is ? (8)

It's a sink drain, well fancy that !



see you at the water tank.

2 - THE WATER TANK AND BLUE STOP

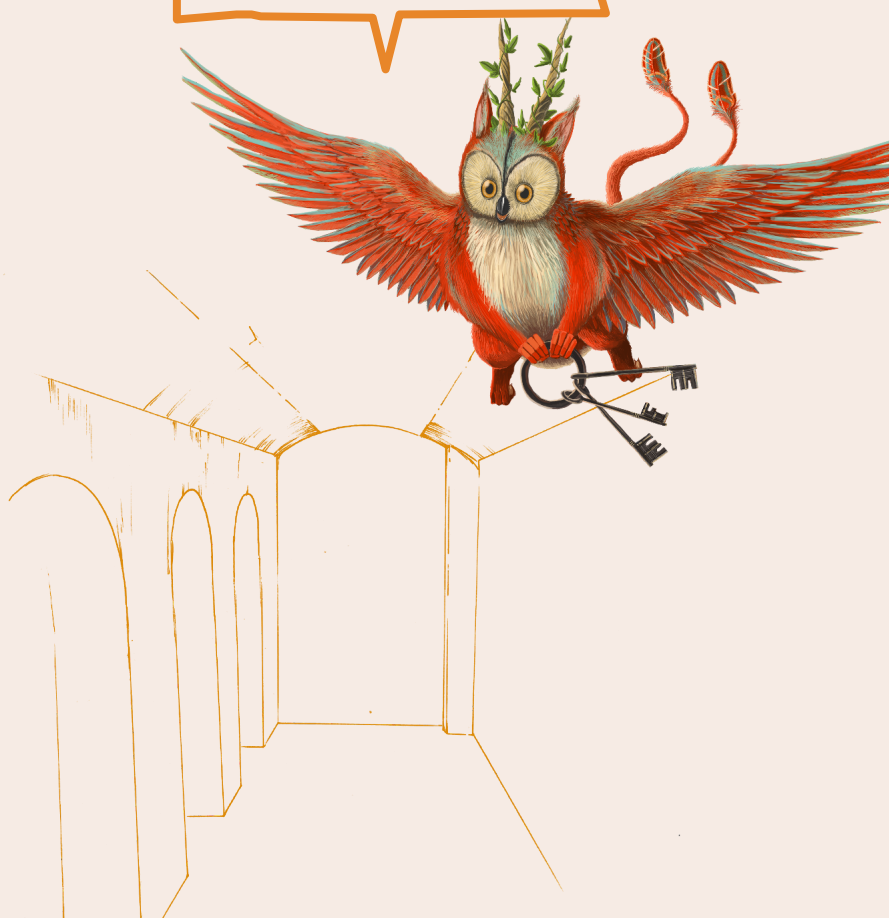


THE 19TH-CENTURY WATER TANK

Berguise : *How did people go on for water before the 19th-century ?*

Helvia : *As from medieval times, there were no doubt one or several wells and water tanks which collected rainwater inside the fortified village.*

Just imagine, that 42 cubic-metre tank lies hidden here under your feet ! It meant the whole village had a constant supply of water.



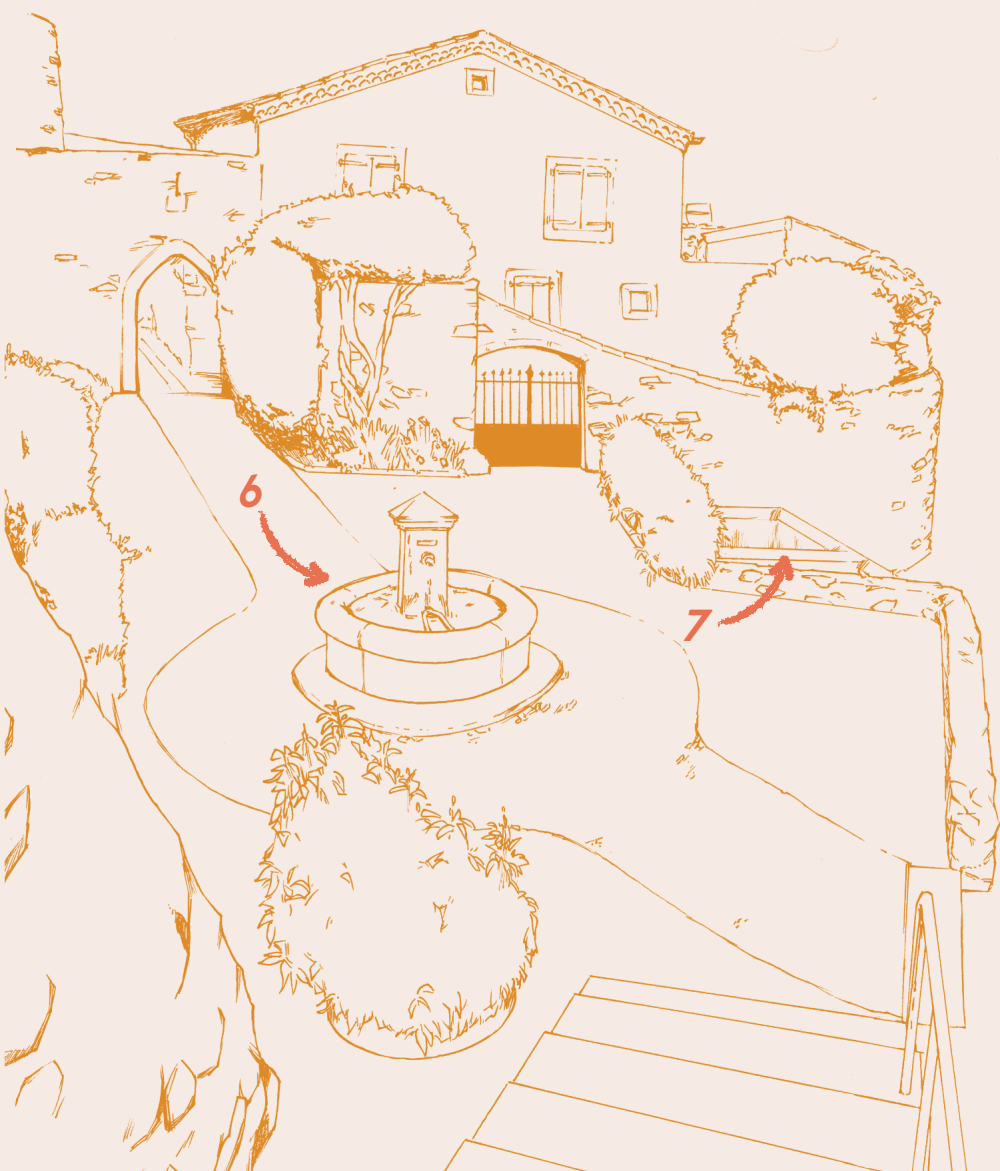
WATER

Helvia : *We're standing on the fountain square Berguise ! Water was a key issue ! It was in fact very difficult to supply the village with water, perched as it is on the top of a limestone bluff.*

Berguise : *Really ?*

Helvia : *Yes, it did make the provision of water difficult. In the 19th century, three important features were built which made life easier for the villagers :*

- a fountain (6) spouting water from a spring in the Barrès forest.
- a wash-house with several basins (7) where the washerwomen came and did their laundry. The basket-weaver still uses it today to soak her wicker
- and the water tank we saw earlier.



See you at stop n° 3 in front of the Horsemen's gate.

3 - THE BROWN STOP

THE CRESTS

Helvia : Just look at this gateway Berguise ! It leads into the village. They made it so high to let riders through on horseback.

Berguise : If you shut your eyes, you can almost hear the clatter of the horses' hooves on the cobbles ! I don't suppose enemy riders were welcome. See how the gate was defended by the walls, towers and that embrasure or cannon loophole up there !

Helvia : That's right, those features helped the lord and his men to defend the village's inhabitants. Incidentally, just look below the loop hole, you can see where a crest would have been placed indicating who this stronghold belonged to !

You can't see the crest's detail today, but it could have been :

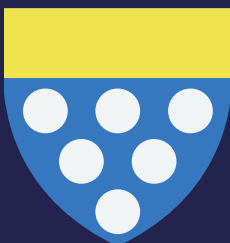
- 1 – the Barrès family's
- 2 – the Comte de Valentinois'
- 3 – the Chambaud family's

What do you think ?

1



2



3



Continue down the street, then turn right into the alley full of « olde shoppes ».

4 - THE BLACK STOP

A COVERED PASSAGEWAY

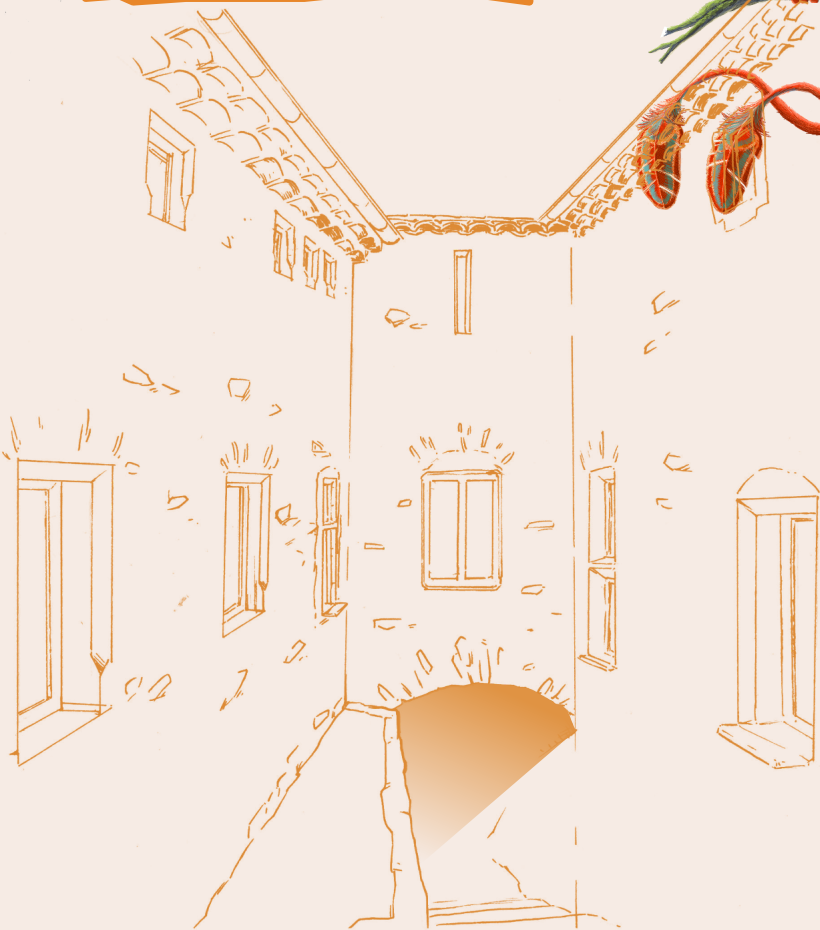
Berguise : *Look Helvia ! A secret passage !*

Helvia : *No Berguise, it's just a covered passageway, that's all. There are several of them in the village today including five within the walls.*



Look carefully !

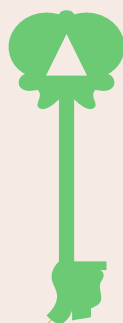
At the end of the street where the pink stop is, there's an info panel just before you get to the next covered passageway (on the right). That tells you where they all are !



**Walk into the alley with the
« olde shoppes ».**

5 - THE GREEN STOP

THE OLDE SHOPPES



Berguise : *Here are the olde shoppes !*

Helvia : *Yes vendors sold their wares from these very characteristic old shops. This one dates from the late Middle Ages. The wares were displayed on trestles or the inner window shutter. The shopkeepers and craftsmen worked under the watchful eye of passers-by who could judge the quality of their workmanship ...*

Berguise : *...and pick and choose what they wanted !*

Helvia : *That's right Berguise. Maybe the French expression « trier sur le volet » comes from there.*

Berguise : *Look Helvia ! These shops look much more recent !*

Helvia : *Yes indeed, designers and crafts people have set up their workshops in this street and the whole village.*



Carry on to the small square.

6 - THE PINK STOP

SILKWORMS

Helvia : *Have you noticed the covered terrace on the front of that house ? It's called a « couradou » and is a very typical feature around here.*

Berguise : *What were they used for ?*

Helvia : *For « decocooning ». In other words, the cocoons of silkworms were removed from the mulberry twigs they were attached to and boiled here. Silkworm rearing was widespread in this area.*

Berguise : *Ah now I get it ! When I spread my wings and flew up high I noticed there were lots of mulberry trees dotted around the countryside !*

Helvia : *Yes, there were hundreds of them in the 19th century. Silkworms were raised either in nurseries or simply at home. They were fed exclusively on mulberry leaves. They were raised for about 4 weeks until they wove their cocoon as they pupated. The cocoons were collected, boiled and unwound, then the thread was spun and twisted (at the throwing mill) before being woven into silk cloth (at the weaving mill).*

Berguise : *What a long process to make silk cloth !*



Observe bien !
Sur une des façades de cette placette se trouve l'évacuation d'un évier. L'as-tu trouvé ?
Je te donne un indice :
tu la trouveras en-dessous d'une petite ouverture qui permettait d'éclairer l'intérieur du bâtiment.



Carry on past the covered passageway to the panoramic viewpoint.

7 - THE CORAL STOP



INVERSION OF RELIEF

Helvia : *What a fantastic view Berguise ! It tells us so much about the village, its history and its buildings.*

Berguise : *Really ? It's magic Helvia !*

Helvia : *Haha ! That's the magic of nature my friend ! Look carefully... You can sense the powerful force of nature everywhere : mountains, valleys, greenery. Before our eyes, there is a rather unusual geological phenomenon :*

« inverted relief ».

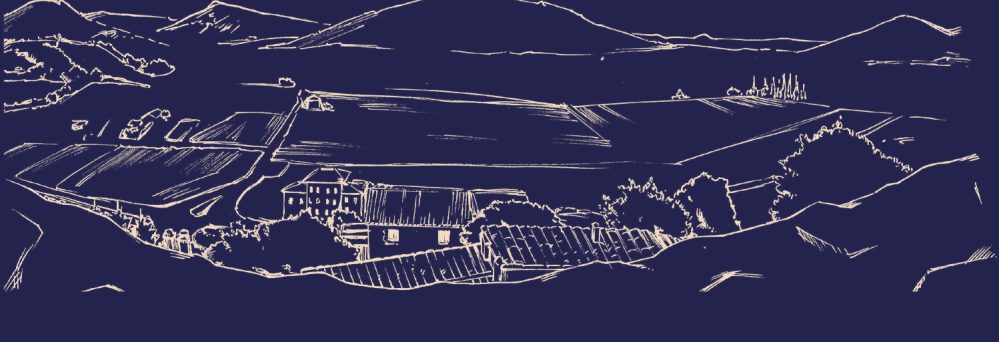
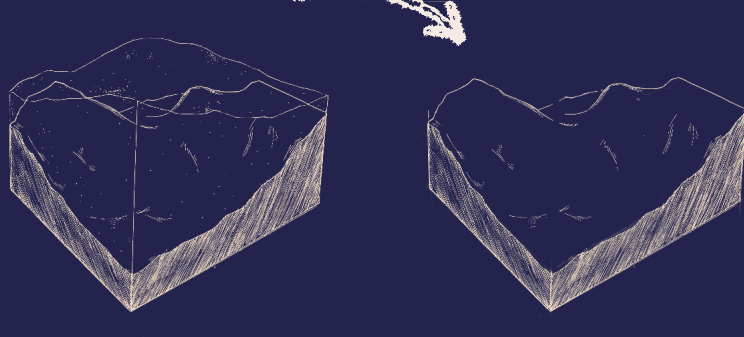
Berguise : *What ?*

Helvia : *Inverted relief. Over 150 million years ago, the sea covered the whole of this territory. Sedimentary deposits built up on the seafloor for several millions of years. When the sea level dropped, hills and valleys appeared in its place.*

Berguise : *Was there a lot of volcanic activity here ?*

Helvia : *Yes, around 8 - 6 million years ago.*

Berguise : *That's amazing !*



Helvia : *Look at the mountain on the right opposite us : it's called Andance mountain and is 552 metres high. It was formed during that period of vulcanism. In fact it's a crater ! And lava filled the surrounding valleys. Then 6 million years later, the softer rocks we call sedimentary summits were eroded by the elements and eventually became valleys !*

Berguise : *You mean like the valleys of the Payre, Lavezon and Rieutord ?*

Helvia : *That's right ! As a result, the Coiron massif, which was originally on the valley floor, became a dominant basalt plateau !*

Berguise : *Thanks to your explanations, I have now understood something important ! In the Middle Ages, men used local materials to build their fortifications and dwellings. That's why the walls are both white limestone and black basalt.*

Helvia : *That's it ! They adapted and used what they had at hand.*

Berguise : *Well, the landscape has definitely changed !*

Helvia : *There's one more thing I'd like to show you. In the distance, you can see an industrial plant where a special substance called diatomite is quarried on Andance mountain!*

Berguise : *Diatomite ?*

Helvia : *Yes, it's a very lightweight sedimentary rock formed by the accumulation of fossilized microscopic algae called diatoms. It is used as a filtration aid in the food industry and swimming pools. It is the largest deposit of diatomite in France !*

Berguise : *Wow ! It's an amazing thing, diatomite !*

Helvia : *What's even better is that it ensures excellent preservation of fossils such as leaves, insects, fish and vertebrates. There are hundreds of fossils everywhere on the site.*



Walk down towards the Gentry's gate on the right. Use the steps and go right to the bottom.

8 - THE DARK BLUE STOP



THE GENTRY'S GATE

Berguise : Look Helvia, another covered passageway !

Helvia : This one is really interesting. It has a bend in it and leads to the main entrance in the fortifications known as « the Gentry's gate ». Let's go there via this passageway.

Berguise : Superb ! It must have been really difficult and exhausting trying to get to the centre of the village in full armour via this gate.

Helvia : Yes, this passage was part of the defences. It would definitely slow down any enemies wanting to enter the village. Finally, this gate was reinforced by two 2.5 metre wooden bars which were slid into place in the cavities in the wall. Look at the wall, Berguise ; I'm sure you will find them !



Berguise : There are traces of a coat of arms above the gate !

Helvia : Yes there are, but it has been weathered so much that we can't tell which family it belonged to.

Berguise : There's still a lot we don't know.

Helvia : That's true ! Let's take this covered passageway back up to the church !



Turn round and go back up to the church.

9 - THE GREY STOP



THE CHURCH

Helvia : *We're standing in front of Saint Vincent de Barrès's church !*

Berguise : *Is it very old then ?*

Helvia : *No, it was rebuilt in 1687. The very first church here was mentioned around 1020. A very old manuscript called a cartulary indicates there was a church in the village. Then an edifice was built here before being abandoned and later ruined during the wars of religion.*

Berguise : *Wars of religion ?*

Helvia : *Yes, conflicts opposed Catholics and Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries.*

Berguise : *So was Saint-Vincent-de-Barrès Catholic or Protestant ?*

Helvia : *At first it was Catholic then became Protestant in 1574. A Protestant garrison was set up here (in the present-day restaurant) to defend it. In 1583, only two Catholic families remained. Then in 1627, Catholics took the village over again.*

Berguise : *Wasn't there a « temple » (a Protestant meeting house) here then ?*

Helvia : *Well we don't know. However the present-day church was rebuilt on the foundations of the older one. The graveyard which originally surrounded it was relocated in the 19th century.*

Berguise : *I see. Can we go inside the church ?*

Helvia : *Of course we can ! Come on in : there are some beautiful statues in polychrome wood.*

Explore the church for the
polychrome wooden statues.
How many can you see ?

There are three.



Helvia : *Well there we are Berguise ! Our tour is over !*

Berguise : *Already ? There were so many beautiful things to see in Saint-Vincent-de-Barrès. I'm really looking forward to some new adventures !*

Helvia : *So am I ! Let's go, there are so many more villages to explore ! Where will the bunch of keys take us next ? And to what period in history ?*

EXPLORE OUR VILLAGES WITH HELVIA AND BERGUISE

LES TRAVERSÉES D'HELVIA ET BERGUISE

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