

Historical walk

Start and finish

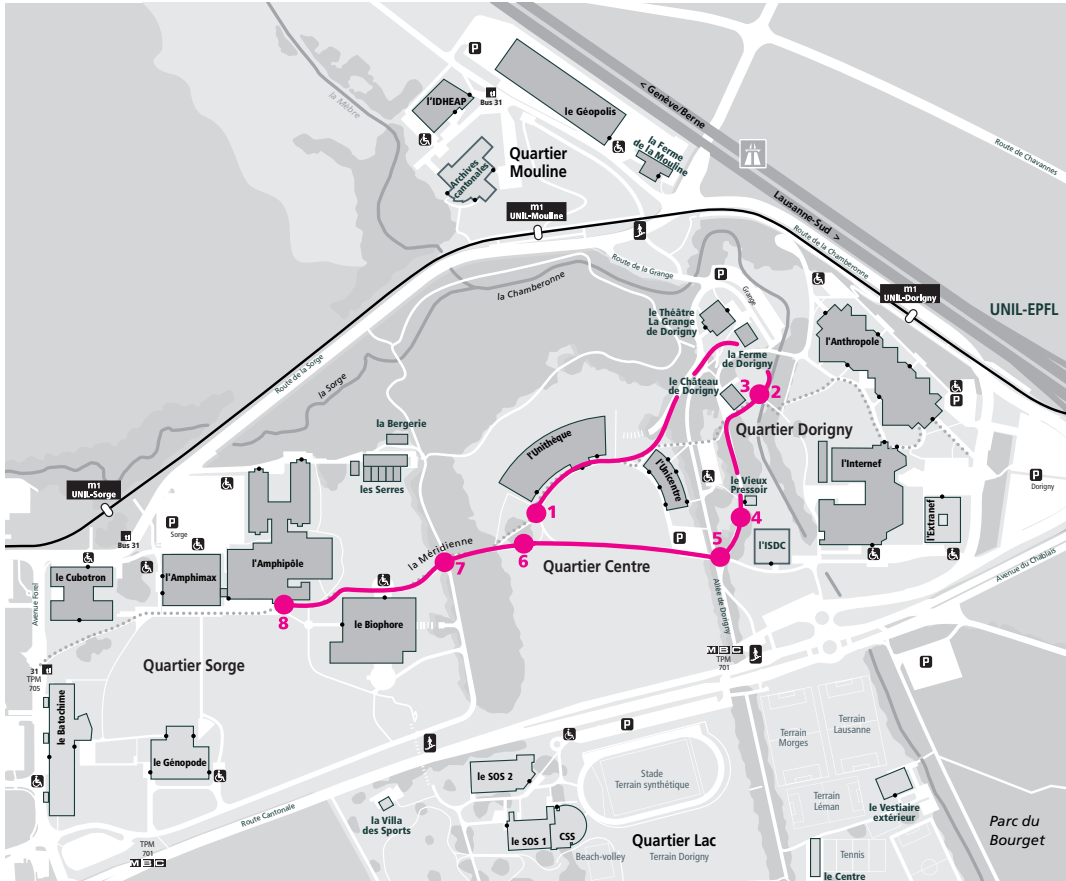
Napoleon's oak tree, at one end of the Unithèque building

Duration

1 hour, with 20 minutes actual walking

Distance

less than 1.5 km



UNIL was founded in 1537. In the 1960s, the State of Vaud purchased the land of the Dorigny estate from a well-established family, the Loys, who had owned the site since the 17th century. The construction of new buildings has not altered the original appearance of the estate, which is marked by the presence of a moraine and a river that have existed for thousands of years.



From the base of Napoleon's great oak, walk down to the stone bench situated nearby.

1.

THE MORAINÉ

Behind the Unithèque building is a fine stand of trees located on an elongated hill, which is an old glacial moraine. A moraine is a sort of crest, the result of an accumulation of materials linked to the presence of a glacier. At its apogee 25,000 years ago, the Rhône glacier attained an altitude of nearly 1,400 metres in the Lausanne region. The moraine at Dorigny was formed around 15,000 years ago and marks a stage in the glacier's slow withdrawal towards the Rhône valley. The glacier was dormant on this site long enough

to allow the materials it transported (stones of all sizes, fine materials, etc) to be deposited on the side of the glacier where Lake Geneva is today, creating this elongated hill.

From this bench, follow the covered path which runs alongside the Unithèque building. Further down, at a fork, turn left just before the Unicentre building. At the next junction, turn left. The two paths – one covered with small flagstones, the other with wood shavings – will take you to the Grange de Dorigny whose imposing roof you can now see. By this old barn, turn right to take you closer to the façade and red shutters of Dorigny

Farm. Then turn left, then right along the footpath by the side of the river (river on your left).

2.

THE RIVER

The Chamberonne, which translates etymologically as river with crayfish, flows gently through the local topography. Upstream it flows against the moraine, which it eventually circumvents before reaching the lake via a more direct route. The presence of water encouraged the Loys family to take up residence on the Dorigny estate. In 1706, a paper mill was established in the bend of the Chamberonne on the site where the Château de Dorigny stands today. It was linked to the river by a channel. Some decades

later, the paper mill was joined by a laundry (for hemp cloth) and a forge. This small-scale industrial activity was quickly abandoned in the second half of the 18th century.

On your right is a house with a white façade, the Château de Dorigny.

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3.

THE CHÂTEAU DE DORIGNY AND ITS FARM BUILDINGS

The Loys family acquired the Dorigny estate in the 17th century. After setting up a small-scale industrial activity (paper mill, forge, laundry, etc), Etienne-François-Louis set about constructing the Château de Dorigny in the 1770s. As soon as work was complete, the house was lived in by this family. The farm buildings were important, as the estate had a primarily agricultural function. Indeed Etienne's nephew Jean-Samuel conducted many experiments in agronomy here from the start of the 19th century, particularly into fallow land and crop rotation. The present-day farm and barn (Grange de Dorigny) were built during the 19th century after a fire that destroyed the old buildings. In 1910, Marguerite left Dorigny. She was the last descendant of the Loys family to have lived at the Château. Afterwards the house was rented out, most notably to the family of the Aga Khan. It is said that his son Ali spent his holidays here in the early 1950s with his wife, the famous actress Rita Hayworth. Apocryphal though the tale may be, their daughter Yasmine was nonetheless born in December 1949... in Lausanne.

At the end of the path, turn right to walk along one side of the Château. At the pedestrian crossing, turn left. A little higher on your left is a small house with a faded pink facade.

4.

THE OLD WINEPRESS

This house was built in 1823. Over the years it served successively as a press for fruit and nuts, then as a winepress for the Bois-de-Vaux estate. Lastly, upping the alcohol content somewhat, it was also used as a distillery. Today this building is home to the Office of Equal Opportunities.

At the end of the tarred path, turn right and cross the lane bordered by plane trees.

5.

THE AVENUE OF PLANE TREES

This avenue is one of the most attractive in the region, with more than a hundred trees bordering the lane which leads to the lake. The plane trees are growing freely and have been able to develop without being cut back or pruned. This gives the surroundings a genuinely natural feel. Drawings show the presence of an avenue of trees on this site leading to the lake as early as the start of

the 19th century. However, there is nothing to indicate that this avenue consisted initially of plane trees, since in February 1879 it was completely uprooted by a hurricane. It therefore had to be replanted in its entirety, and we know that plane trees were chosen at that time. The oldest specimens, located on the other side of the cantonal main road leading to the lake, date for sure from that period. They are well over 60 feet tall. Others are more recent, for example near the car park, where in the 1980s new trees took the place of more venerable specimens showing signs of weakness.

Leave this tree-lined avenue by continuing straight ahead along the gently climbing path which brings you back to Napoleon's oak.

6.

NAPOLEON'S OAK TREE

Well before construction on UNIL buildings started in the 1970s, this oak tree was a landmark of the Dorigny estate. It is said to have been planted in 1800 to commemorate the passage of Napoleon Bonaparte and 40,000 men on their way to Italy on 12 May that year. Dendrochronological research places the exact date at 1778. It was therefore planted in Dorigny when it was 22 years old. When it was planted in Dorigny in 1800, this oak tree had a trunk diameter of 15cm at a height of 130cm, compared to 160cm today at the same height. The current circumference of the trunk is nearly 7 metres at a height of 1 metre. And that's not the end of the story, since trees continue to grow until they die. En route to Italy, Napoleon is said to have sat on the stone bench at the foot of the tree in Yverne. The commune made a gift of the bench to UNIL in 1985. To stabilise the tree, 120 metres of guy ropes were installed at the start of the 2000s. This system, changed in 2012, is a so-called static system.

Walk straight ahead up the pebble path, then continue straight on. At the crossroads where the trees and shrubs end, go straight on.

7.

PLANS FOR OLYMPIA AND AN INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT

In 1911, Baron de Coubertin and the Olympic Committee launched a competition for a modern day Olympia which could be held on a permanent site. Some years later, Alphonse Laverrière, a famous architect whose previous work included the renovation of Lausanne

railway station and later the Bel-Air tower, drafted the project tersely entitled "Olympia" which was to extend over a part of the present-day campus. This project never came to fruition, and was followed by another failed initiative some decades later. Indeed in the 1940s, the creation of an intercontinental airport was considered on the current site of the EPFL; the imagined runway was to have extended as far as the Unithèque building. Politicians of the time were clearly in favour of this project which in their view would give Lausanne an international dimension that Blécherette airport - deemed too small - was unable to provide. In 1946, the people of the canton of Vaud had to decide. They rejected the project for fear of the noise pollution that would have been generated by aircraft.

Continue straight on to the Amphipôle building.

8.

THE FIRST BUILDINGS TO BE CONSTRUCTED ON CAMPUS

When it purchased the Dorigny estate, the State of Vaud made the bold decision to situate the University outside the town, counting on large increases in the future population of students. The choice proved well-founded, since from a total of 2,000 students at the end of the 1960s, the student population in 2015 had risen to 14,300. At the time of the first buildings - particularly the Amphipôle, which opened in 1970 when the repercussions of May 68 were still being felt - the communes on whose territory the campus was situated made clear their determination that no student accommodation should be available on the site.

Retrace your steps to Napoleon's steadfast oak tree.