

## 55 Favourite Fromages

The number of cheeses in France is, as noted, hard to determine. Here is a rough guide to 55 mentioned on the tour, which constitute most of my favourites. Where there are pasteurised and unpasteurised versions, I have just cited the latter. I have mentioned individual makers of specific cheeses, but not for types where there are many producers to choose from – an excellent research project for any French cheese tour. If you are reading this book in the UK or Ireland, you can buy all these and many other excellent French cheeses in person or online from Mons UK, La Fromagerie, Paxton & Whitfield, The Fine Cheese Co., J Mellis in Scotland and Sheridans in Ireland; or, of course, from many excellent local cheesemongers.

### *Les fromages frais* – fresh cheeses

*Les fromages frais* are the simplest – one might even say most primitive – family of cheeses. Some are coagulated with an acid (usually vinegar or lemon juice) rather than rennet, which leads some purists to maintain that they are not really cheeses so much as cheese by-products. Their soft texture and high moisture means they should be eaten fresh, from a day to a week or so, before a rind has had a chance to grow, resulting in a simple suite of delicate flavours with milkiness and acidity to the fore. Pair them with more delicate wines – floral whites, or jammy reds like Beaujolais, or counterintuitively, a big bold Cabernet Sauvignon; the acidity of the cheese will bring out all that ripe plumb and blackcurrant.

#### **Brousse de Rove**

Various producers in Provence

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; no rennet*

Set without rennet, this fragile cheese does not travel, and is best consumed at a day or two old. A soft, giving texture

and delicate milky-sweet flavours make this ideal for breakfast, accompanied by honey and a short black coffee, or in the evening as an aperitif drizzled with a little local olive oil. One of the many compelling reasons for visiting Provence.



**Le Broutais**

Made by Ludovic Josse and Marie-Eve Taillecours in Brittany  
*Unpasteurised sheep's milk; animal rennet*

These dinky little cheeses have a mossy aroma, a texture like fluffy clouds, and an impressive complexity that rivals the Ladus' *fromage frais* below, though with different flavours. These include white chocolate, green herbs and almonds, brightened with a gentle acidity.

**Castillon Frais**

Made by Davide and Fanette Ladu in Provence

*Unpasteurised sheep's milk; animal rennet*

Fresh cheeses tend to have simple flavours. Not so the startlingly complex Castillon Frais. The mouth-filling texture delivers white chocolate,

fenugreek, cumin or leather, depending on season, forage, and the imponderable mystery of raw-milk cheese. Rather than bought starter-culture, the Ladus use whey from the previous day, allowing the fullest expression of the *terroir* and the milk from their happy, hand-milked flock.

**Sérac**

Various producers in the Savoie  
*Unpasteurised cows' or goats' milk; no rennet*

Similar to Brousse, if a little firmer, Sérac has a sweet, cooked-milk flavour and is enjoyed in its home *pays* on toast, plain or with herbs and olive oil. Ricotta style ('re-cooked') cheeses are an example of the frugal practices of traditional cheesemakers. The whey from cheesemaking is re-heated and the remaining solids coagulated with a little acid (lemon juice or vinegar).

## *Les fromages à pâte molle et à croûte fleurie* – soft mould-ripened cheeses

Soft, mould-ripened cheeses were (after fresh cheese) the next historical stage in cheesemaking, at least in the cool, moist climate of northern Europe. If you left a fresh cheese in a cellar for a week or so, it would begin to grow a natural mould rind. The rind lowers the acidity of the paste, breaking down the firm texture into something creamy, almost liquid, with characteristic flavours of cabbage, mustard and a tinge of sulphur. The resultant creamy layer under the rind is known in English as 'the breakdown'. The bigger the breakdown, the more aged the cheese. The white colour comes from the mould *Penicillium camemberti*, while the wrinkle comes from the mould-like yeast *Geotrichum candidum*, which adds the cooked-cabbage note and ameliorates the bitterness that the former can produce. Venerated *affineur* Pierre Androuet recommends

paining Brie with 'lively' reds like Beaujolais Villages, and Camembert with more 'elegant' wines like Burgundy or Bordeaux. I find Champagne to be an infallible match, and would also suggest a good craft lager.

**Brie de Meaux**

Various producers in Seine et Marne and Meuse

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

This is the big one. Brie is both uniquely large for a soft cheese and immensely popular. Brie de Meaux is by far the best known of its style. Choose one with a rumpled rind with flecks of orange and a rich golden paste and expect flavours like cooked cabbage, mustard, pepper and a hint of barnyard, with sour cream in a younger cheese.

**Brie de Melun**

Various producers in Seine et Marne

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Smaller, and with more rounded edges than its siblings, Brie de Melun has a slow set, using a small amount of rennet, that might take up to twenty-four hours. The resulting texture is soft, almost liquid, with flavours that are less brassy than oceanic – salty with a hint of oyster shells.

**Brie Noir**

Various producers in Seine et Marne and Meuse

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

This is a singular cheese – rock-hard, with a stinging, mouth-burning effect. Poor-quality examples have given it a bad rep but try one from the Dongé family, who pick their ten best cheeses from every batch and mature them for

up to a year until they develop intense flavours of dried ceps, moist black earth, and a lively tingling finish.

**Brillat Savarin**

Various producers in several regions  
*Pasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*  
An industrial cheese with a pedigree, this was invented by notable *affineur* Pierre Androuet's father Henri, and named after the famed gourmet. Texture is the *raison d'être* for this cheese; it's a *triple crème* style, where extra double cream is added to the milk, and there are not enough superlatives to describe the rich indulgence of its mouthfeel. Definitely have this with Champagne.

**Camembert de Normandie**

Various producers in Normandy

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Camembert has a similar set of flavours to its larger cousin, Brie, but tends more to the peppery and sulphuric, and when well-aged is much more intense. The poet Léon-Paul Fargue extolled it as *ce fromage qui fleurit les pieds du bon Dieu* ('the cheese that smells like the feet of God'), a memorable if perhaps challenging simile.

**Coulommier**

Various producers in Seine et Marne and Meuse

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Is Coulommier a Brie? Or a thing in itself? Is it a luxurious *triple crème* made

with added cream, or a conventional whole-milk cheese? No one, even in its *pays d'origine* seems able to agree. Larger than a Camembert, smaller than a Brie de Meaux, with rumped rind and golden paste, its cooked cabbage and mustard flavours are made more indulgent in the added-cream version.

### Neufchâtel

Various producers in Normandy

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

While it might look like a heart-shaped Camembert, the Neufchâtel curd is pre-drained before moulding, creating a firmer texture and a milder flavour,

more like crisp uncooked cabbage, with a gentle acidity and a salty finish. More so than its round, more intense sibling, it pairs well with a fruity, gently sparkling Normandy cider.

### Pérail

Various producers in Aveyron

*Unpasteurised sheep's milk; animal rennet*

Pérail comes in small discs and has a brainy wrinkle to its rind, with a light cream colour. High-fat sheep's milk gives it a rich, mouth-coating texture. Milder versions are vegetal and peaty; stronger ones have a pronounced note of lanolin, reminiscent of lamb fat.

## Fromages de chèvre – goats' cheeses

Most goats' cheeses are also mould-ripened – illustrating the hazards of classification. Alongside the familiar *Penicillium camemberti* and *Geotrichum*, they often have spots or an entire covering of blue or grey-green moulds that tend to add a musty note. Many mould-ripened goats' cheeses are ashed when young, the alkaline substance lowering the acidity on the surface and encouraging the rind to form. Goats' cheeses tend to be smaller, partly because goats are smaller than cows and give less milk, and also because the fat particles in goats' milk are less robust, so the cheeses are more fragile. Well-made cheeses should not be excessively goaty. If you have been put off by a poorly made example, try a younger and milder style first and work your way up.

### Banon

Various producers in Provence

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

Wrapped in a chestnut leaf, these pretty cheeses are rennet-set, rather than relying on the acidifying action of starter culture. As a result they taste quite sweet, with a woody and tannic note

from the leaf. Older ones are liquid and spicy.

### Buchette de Manon

Various producers in Provence

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

Buchettes are so fragile that they are sold on a tiny plank, their cream rinds

set off by a scattering of *sarriette* (summer savoury), a herb that perfumes the air in central Provence and adds a subtle note to the cheese. Its lactic starter-driven set gives Buchette a hint of acidity – a pleasing counter to the cheese's sweet, milky flavour.

### Coeur de Berger

Various producers in Provence

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

These heart-shaped cheeses – all the goats' cheeses of Provence are beautiful – are decorated with a sprig of *thym sauvage*, a citrusy variety of thyme which grows wild in the region and is part of the goats' healthy varied diet, adding a pleasing lemony note.

### Cornes du Diable

Made by Sandrine and Francois Borel in Provence

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

Affectionately named for the extravagant horns of the Borels' Rove goats, this sweet-tasting, fluffy-textured cheese has a scattering of pink and black peppercorns on its top adding a little heat and a rosy flavour to the finish.

### Crottin de Chavignol

Various producers in Centre-Val de

Loire

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

A cute little cheese with a controversial name, Crottin comes in a rich variety of ages and tastes. Young cheeses look like plump fluffy clouds with a moussy

texture and a gentle mineral flavour, end-stage cheeses are dark, shrunken, goaty and intense.

### La Gabarre

Made at the Ferme de Port Aubry in Nièvre

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

Uncharacteristically large for a goats' cheese, Gabarre is shaped and named for the river boats that plied the Loire before the railways. Younger cheeses have a fermented sweetness and a vinagery tang, older ones look stony and taste a bit like an old church.

### Grataron

Various producers in Savoie

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

The knobby, moist and multi-coloured rind might look a bit challenging, but this is actually quite a mild cheese. Its silky textured paste, delivers flavours of hazelnuts, earth and a gentle goaty tang, younger cheeses retain a firm acidic strip though the centre.

### Pouligny Saint-Pierre

Various producers in Centre-Val de Loire

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

These tall narrow pyramids look quite distinct from other Loire goats' cheeses. When young, they are white; when aged, they take on an orange colour with pockmarks of blue, like lichen on sandstone. The texture is dense, the flavour sweet and tangy with at times a note of tomato purée.

**Sainte-Maure de Touraine**

Various producers in Centre-Val de Loire

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

Long ashed logs with a blue grey wrinkled rind, these moussy cheeses have a straw down the centre to wick away moisture and hold them together. Their youthful acidity rounds out into creaminess with age and develops a pronounced note of walnuts.

**Selles-sur-Cher**

Various producers in Centre-Val de Loire

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

This disc-shaped cheese has a brainy, wrinkled rind in light blue-grey with

black ash edges showing through. With an aroma of mossy stone from the mould, the flavour shows zesty lemon, walnuts and earth delivered with a firm yet melting paste. Lovely – like all Loire goats' cheese – with a local white wine.

**Valençay**

Various producers in Centre-Val de Loire

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

These flat-topped pyramids also have a tightly wrinkled surface and range in colour from black and white to blue-grey. Young cheeses are delicate, fresh and zesty with a moussy texture; older ones can be quite powerful with a hot peppery finish that will last. A test for the most powerful wines of Sancerre.

in booze – fiery *marc* for Époisses, wine for some others, and many others in beer. The choice of beer is popular in northern Europe, recalling the washed-rinds' monastic heritage; the cheeses were produced by dedicated makers (often lay workers) in monasteries, which were often equally renowned for their brewing (the source of many of those strong monkish Belgian ales).

**Ami de Chambertin**

Made, in its raw-milk expression, at Fromagerie Gaugry in Burgundy

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Taller and more narrow than its more famous sister Époisses, this cheese is named for its affinity with one of the greatest of the Burgundy grand crus. The outer edge of the paste is creamy and has all the intensity and complexity of its sibling, while in younger cheeses the centre is firmer and milder with a lifting acidity.

**Chevroton**

Various producers in the Haute-Savoie

*Unpasteurised goats' milk; animal rennet*

Should Chevroton be categorised in goats' cheeses, washed-rind or pressed uncooked? That is why there are so many recovering philosophers in the world of cheese. I have decided to put it here, in part because its washiness is quite gentle and will not startle the timid palate. The texture is silky, the flavour woody and fragrant with just the merest goaty hint.

**Époisses**

Made in its raw-milk expression at Fromagerie Gaugry in Burgundy

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

This intense cheese has a glistening sunset-orange rind and a liquid, yellow paste. The flavour is smoky and animal, with notes of yeast and fresh hay; the texture is mouth-coating. It is nicely accompanied with Burgundy – a rare example of a red wine really working with a cheese – though you will need a hefty example to stand up to the powerful flavour. Strong dark ales and barley wines also make excellent partners.

**Le Galourais**

Made by Ludovic Josse and Marie-Eve Taillecoeurs in Brittany

*Unpasteurised sheep's milk; animal rennet*

This is based on Pont-l'Éveque, but in a more restrained style for the cautious Breton palate. The rind is a blushing pink under a light dusting of *Penicillium camemberti*. The texture is delightfully bouncy and the flavour delicate, with caramel, white mushrooms and the merest memory of the barnyard.

**Langres**

Various producers in Champagne

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

A pudgy pinkish-orange cheese with a dimple in its top, Langres can conveniently hold a slug of the Marc de Bourgogne it is washed in or the Champagne of its homeland. A good starter

## Les fromages à pate molle et à croûte lavée – soft washed-rind cheeses

Washed-rinds are a divisive category of cheeses – in France as much as anywhere else – due to their pungent odour and intense flavours, which can include (euphemism is our friend here) barnyard, meaty umami, yeast and smoke. That impressive range of flavours is your reward if you can get past the initial odour, which is often more intense than the flavour itself. The flavour – and the characteristic orange, pink or tan colour of this family of cheeses – come from the washing process, the most interventionist method of *affinage* (which is great fun for the novice *affineur*, as the transformation is striking).

This is the process: young cheeses – firm and pure white – are washed in brine, the salty water discouraging any opportunistic moulds that might colonise the surface, and providing an amenable environment for a helpful bacteria to develop, *Brevibacterium linens*, or *B. linens* to its many friends. When the process is complete, the cheeses are pink, sticky and oozingly soft. Often, after their first briny wash, the cheeses are washed

cheese for the washed-rind curious, it tends to be quite mild with fruity, yeasty flavours, its liquid breakdown surrounding a firmer fresh-tasting centre.

### Livarot

Various producers in Normandy  
*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet.*

Livarot ranges in colour from light orange to terracotta and is so creamy that it has to be bound in sedge strips to hold its shape. It rivals Époisses in intensity and is salty, meaty, with hints of nuts and a spicy finish. Try it with the local apple brandy Calvados, and then have a little sleep.

### Mont d'Or / Vacherin Haute-Doubs

Various producers in the Jura and Doubs  
*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

So luxuriantly unctuous it must be encircled with a spruce band and kept in a box, this seasonal cheese makes winter worthwhile. Bake it in the box with some wine and garlic, dip bread, crudités or charcuterie in molten cheese, then finish the wine. While not stipulated in its AOC, the best

examples get their rinds washed and that's why I've put it here.

### Munster

Various producers in Alsace-Lorraine  
*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

In a crowded field, Munster is one of the most complex washed-rinds, with some flavours I have not found elsewhere, including smoky bacon and dry-roasted peanuts. The disc-shaped cheeses have an unwrinkled rind; blushing pink denotes a milder version; moist straw-yellow heralds a more intense experience. It is perfectly complemented by the Turkish delight note of a really good Gewurztraminer.

### Pont-l'Évêque

Various producers in Normandy  
*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

A square cheese, light pink with a dusting of white mould, Pont-l'Évêque has a springy paste with a scattering of small holes. Mild flavours include moist hay and hazelnuts with a light farmy note. Try a demi-sec Normandy cider with this: its sweetness contrasts with the umami note of the cheese, and the bubbles clear the palate.

## Fromages à pâte persillées – blue cheeses

French blues hold a position in the cheese world if only because the mould that gives all blue cheeses their name is called *Penicillium roqueforti*, after a cheese whose only rival in renown is Stilton. Many French varieties are quite punchy – witness the sinus-clearing qualities of a fully expressed Roquefort – but there are milder, more balanced examples that would make an excellent starting point for a French blues tour.

## 1924

Made at Fromagerie de Laqueuille, Auvergne

*Pasteurised sheep and cows' milk animal rennet*

This cheese reaches back to what Roquefort might have been like before 1925 when it got its AOC, stipulating pure sheep's milk and low temperature maturation. Warmer *affinage* encourages the rind to develop, adding savoury complexity and a biscuity note, and the cows' milk softens the aggressive sheepy heat, giving a more mellow experience.

### Bleu d'Auvergne

Made by various producers in the Auvergne

*Pasteurised cows' milk animal rennet*

Created in 1845 by Antoine Roussel, an Auvergnat whose grandfather made Roquefort, this is the Auvergne's answer to that Aveyronnais blue, in cows' milk. It is fairly mild for such a floridly blue cheese; the paste is creamy, the flavour sweet with a bitter edge and a backbone of minerality, and the finish is long with spicy heat.

### Bleu des Causses

Various producers in Aveyron and some nearby départements

*Pasteurised cows' milk animal rennet*

Before 1925 you could have called this Roquefort and not got into trouble. Also matured in limestone caves, the paste has a more golden colour from the cows' milk, the texture is a little firmer, though it will still break down in the mouth, releasing umami, spicy heat and a stony mushroomy note.

## Bleu de Gex Haut Jura

Made by five producers in Haut-Jura  
*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet.*

Made in fat broad wheels about 35 centimetres across, with a light tan rind dusted with white mould, this blue is also a pressed, un-cooked style. Its springy texture has restrained, light blueing, making this an excellent starter cheese for the blue-shy. Its lactic, mushroomy flavours are set off nicely with a slight bitterness.

## Fourme d'Ambert

Various producers in the Auvergne

*Pasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Coming in tall cylinders with an excitingly pink and sticky rind, the blue in this cheese presents, like Roquefort, in deep pockets rather than veins. This is a much more approachable cheese than its fiery Aveyronnais cousin, though; the paste is rich and creamy, the flavour mineral, salty-sweet and biscuity, overall a bit like salted caramel.

## Roquefort

Various producers in Aveyron

*Unpasteurised sheep's milk; animal rennet*

A heavy hitter for its history, reputation and character – not bad for a cheese with a *terroir* of one village. The glistening ivory paste heralds a melting fondant texture, the deep caves of blue – reminiscent of the caves in Mount Combalou – contribute to the savoury flavour and the fiery heat of this authoritative cheese.

## Fromages à pâte pressée – pressed cheeses

Pressed cheeses are a broad church that includes the washed-rind Raclette, the mould-rinded Saint Nectaire and the positively liquid Reblochon (itself a sort of washed-rind/mould-ripened hybrid), as well as some cheeses that anglophone mongers might refer to as semi-soft, like Salers or the various *tommes*. This is why the collective noun for a group of cheesemongers is an 'argument'. Just to keep you on your toes, the milk may be heated for making these cheeses, but to a lower temperature than for the cooked-curd family. The curd is pressed before moulding (as for Salers), or while draining in the moulds; some cheeses, like Reblochon, are pressed lightly, which contributes to their softer texture.

### Cantal

Various producers in the Auvergne and Aveyron

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Especially when young, Cantal is the most approachable of a trio of similar cheeses (the others being Laguiole and Salers) made in the Auvergne and neighbouring Aveyron. Coming in imposing 40-kilo cylinders, pale yellow in its youth, it darkens to a burnished tan with age, the flavour ripening from buttery sweet milk to woody, with a cowy note and a tingling finish.

### Le Darley

Made by Benoît Darley and his team in Brittany

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Developed in the first, 1980s flowering of Brittany's cheese *naissance*, Darley is a washed-rind, pressed for a firmer texture. The rind is pleasingly striated with a tan-orange colour which leaches into the springy, holey paste. Washing adds a savoury note to the rich buttery centre.

### Le Hirel

Made by Benoît Darley and his team in Brittany

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

With its rounded edges and greyish rind the Darleys' *tomme* looks like an ancient stone artefact – fitting for a region so rich in prehistoric remains. The paste is supple with a scattering of holes, the flavour light and refreshing. A version flavoured with roast fenugreek tastes of dark chocolate and curry.

### Laguiole

Made by seven producers in Aveyron

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

This Aveyronnais cheese is a little taller and thinner than the rounded drums of its Auvergnat cousins, Cantal and Salers, though the flavour profile is all but identical. Like them it was traditionally made in a *buron* (mountain shelter). A single *buronnier* remains – Buron de la Treille – making Laguiole on the Aubrac plain. If you go at the right time of year you can pay them a visit.

### Morbier

Various producers in the Jura, Doubs and Ain

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

The distinctive thing about Morbier is the thin line of ash that runs through its centre. Cheesemakers with small herds would make a small amount of curd from one milking, cover it with a protective layer of ash and then layer the next lot of curd on top. With a springy-textured curd at any age, young cheeses are comfortingly delicate, older ones are more funky.

### Ossau-Iraty

Various producers in the Pyrenees

*Unpasteurised sheep's milk; animal rennet*

You might be forgiven for thinking this is a hard cheese, although the texture is quite supple. Younger cheeses, particularly those produced on the *estives* (summer pastures) are more gentle, with floral notes; older ones more sheepy with an intriguing note of salmon paste. Enjoy Ossau with a floral white wine or a soft fruity red.

### Raclette

Various producers in many regions of France

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Originally Alpine, and with French and Swiss versions, generic Raclette can be made anywhere including Brittany, home of the Dubois family's Claudette la Raclette. The cheese really comes into its own in the eponymous dish in which the melted surface is scraped over potatoes and gherkins. This brings

out the funkier aspect of the cheese; eaten *au naturel*, it is more delicate.

### Reblochon

Various producers in the Savoie

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

A rose-pink cheese with a delicate flavour and a silky liquid texture, Reblochon is the starring ingredient in *tartiflette*, where it is melted whole over potatoes which have been cooked with cream and *lardons*. One wonders how the French maintain their reputation for svelteness.

### Saint-Nectaire

Various producers in the Auvergne.

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

This cheese has a thick grey-pink rind with a lovely aroma of cool moist cellar, the result of a couple of briny washes before an extended period of cellaring on rye straw. The creamy paste is thick and heavy with a clean yoghurt flavour and hints of walnuts.

### Salers Tradition

Made by eight producers in the Auvergne

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Sister to Cantal, Salers Tradition tends to be more characterful in later life. Its milk comes from a single local breed, the characterful Salers cow, and cheeses are only made from pasture-fed milk in a limited season. Aged cheeses are dark and pitted like ancient weathered rock, and their flavour is immense – woody, earthy, sour and farmyardy with a stinging finish.

**Tomme Alpage**

Various producers in the Savoie

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

I'm going to corral a few Alpine *tommes* under one heading here, including the AOC *Tomme de Savoie*, *Tomme des Bauges* and *Tomme de Montagne*. They all have quite thick grey-brown rinds which impart a churchy note with undertones of wood and earth to the more acidic yoghurt paste whose texture can range from springy to chalky.

**Tomme de Berbis**

Made by Ludovic Josse and Marie-Eve Taillecoeurs in Brittany

*Unpasteurised sheep's milk; animal rennet*

Made to an Ossau-Iraty recipe, with a twist: the addition of *B. linens*, the

washed-rind bacteria adding a little funk. In place of Ossau's dense uniform texture is a more supple paste with a scattering of holes, probably arising from the Breton *terroir*. The flavour is savoury with a note of white chocolate.

**Tomme de Marie**

Made by the Dubois family in Brittany

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

With its grey mould rind, disc shape, and the hint of breakdown around the buttery yellow paste, this cheese looks a lot like a traditional Welsh *Caerphilly*, which seems appropriate given their shared Celtic heritage. The flavour is delicate with a pleasing contrast between the fresh crumbly mineral centre and the creamier cabbagey layer just under the rind.

**Beaufort**

Various producers in Savoie

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

A truly mighty cheese, Beauforts weigh in at 45 kilos or more, with distinctive concave sides. Winter cheeses are a pale white colour; Beaufort *d'été* (summer) and Beaufort *d'alpage* (made on the highest fields) are a richer yellow, from the flowery pastures. Younger and higher-altitude cheeses are flowery and sweet, older and more wintery cheeses have a biting intensity and a dark savoury note of organ meats.

**Comté**

Various producers in the Jura

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

These tan-coloured broad wheels with their round edges are the most familiar

sight in any French cheesemonger: Comté is one of the most popular cheeses across the country. It's easy to see why. With a range of flavours from sweet, creamy and floral in a younger cheese through to funky, meaty and roasted in older ones there is something to please everyone.

**Emmental**

Various producers in eastern France (and across the border in Switzerland)

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

Emmentals are even more massive than a Beaufort – larger ones can weigh up to 130 kilos. The paste has an amusingly rubbery texture and is full of the large holes beloved of cartoonists. These are the sign of carbon-dioxide-producing propionic bacteria, also responsible for the cheese's bulging shape and its sweet nutty flavour.

## Fromages à pate pressée et cuite – pressed cooked cheeses

The curd for this family of cheeses is cut into small particles the size of rice grains to encourage moisture loss. The key step is that the curd is heated to at least 50°C, expelling more whey, which is why these cheeses are so durable and long-keeping. The heat is also responsible for the flexible texture and sweet nutty flavours so characteristic of mountain cheeses. The closest British category would be hard cheese, but then the curd for Cheddar, which we would consider part of that family, is only heated to around 36°C. Cheese is complicated.

**Abundance**

Various producers in Haute Savoie

*Unpasteurised cows' milk; animal rennet*

An orange-brown wheel with concave sides weighing in at around ten kilos,

these look like miniature versions of their 45 kilo cousin Beaufort. The paste has the same suppleness as the larger cheese, but the savoury umami flavour is less intense and cut with fruits and cooked milk with a hint of hazelnuts.