

FOLLOW ~ THE COAST —



HIKE THRILLING TRAILS AND DISCOVER HIDDEN GEMS

The Atlantic Coast

from Knokke to San Sebastian



Lannoo

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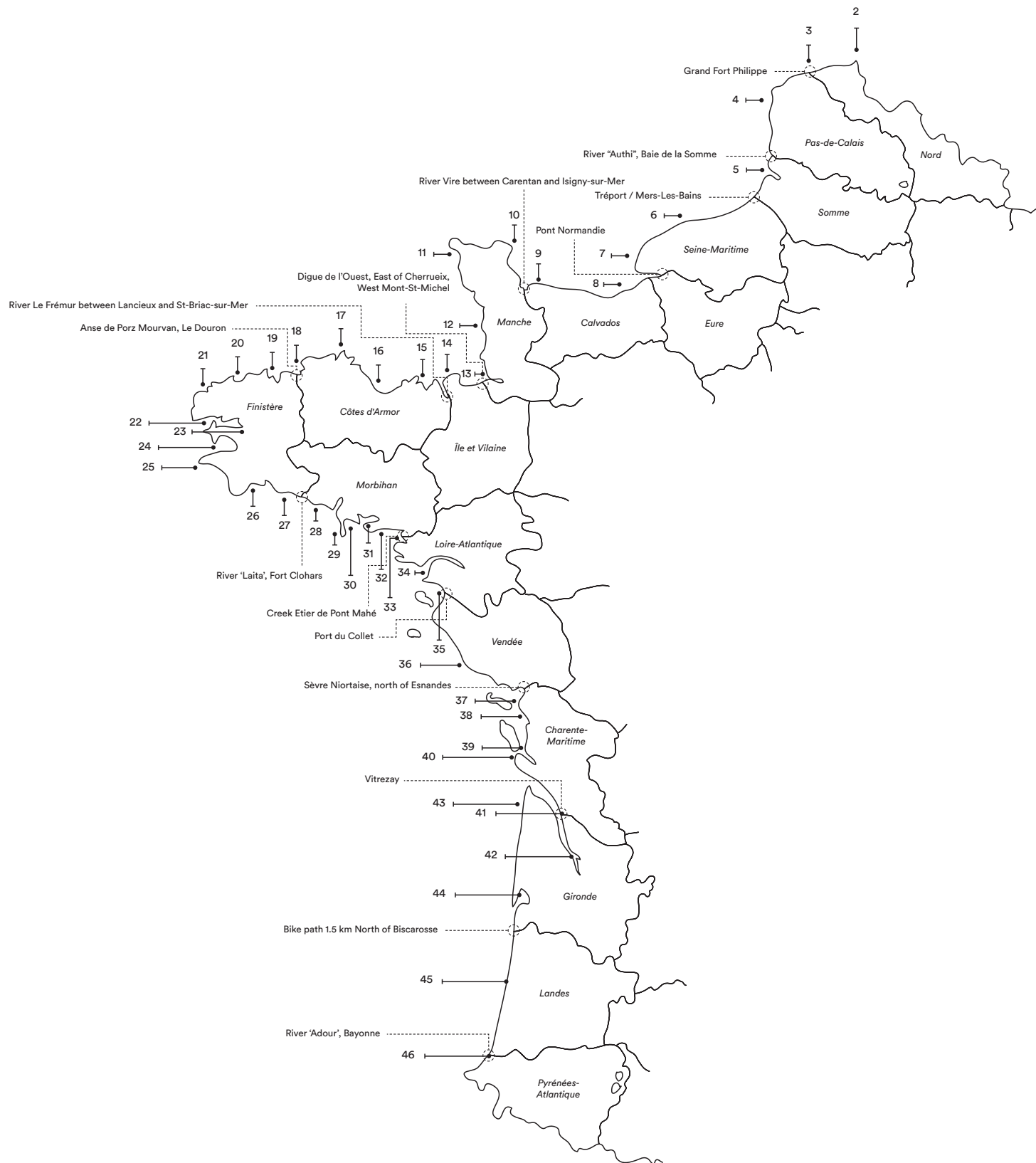
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À la carte

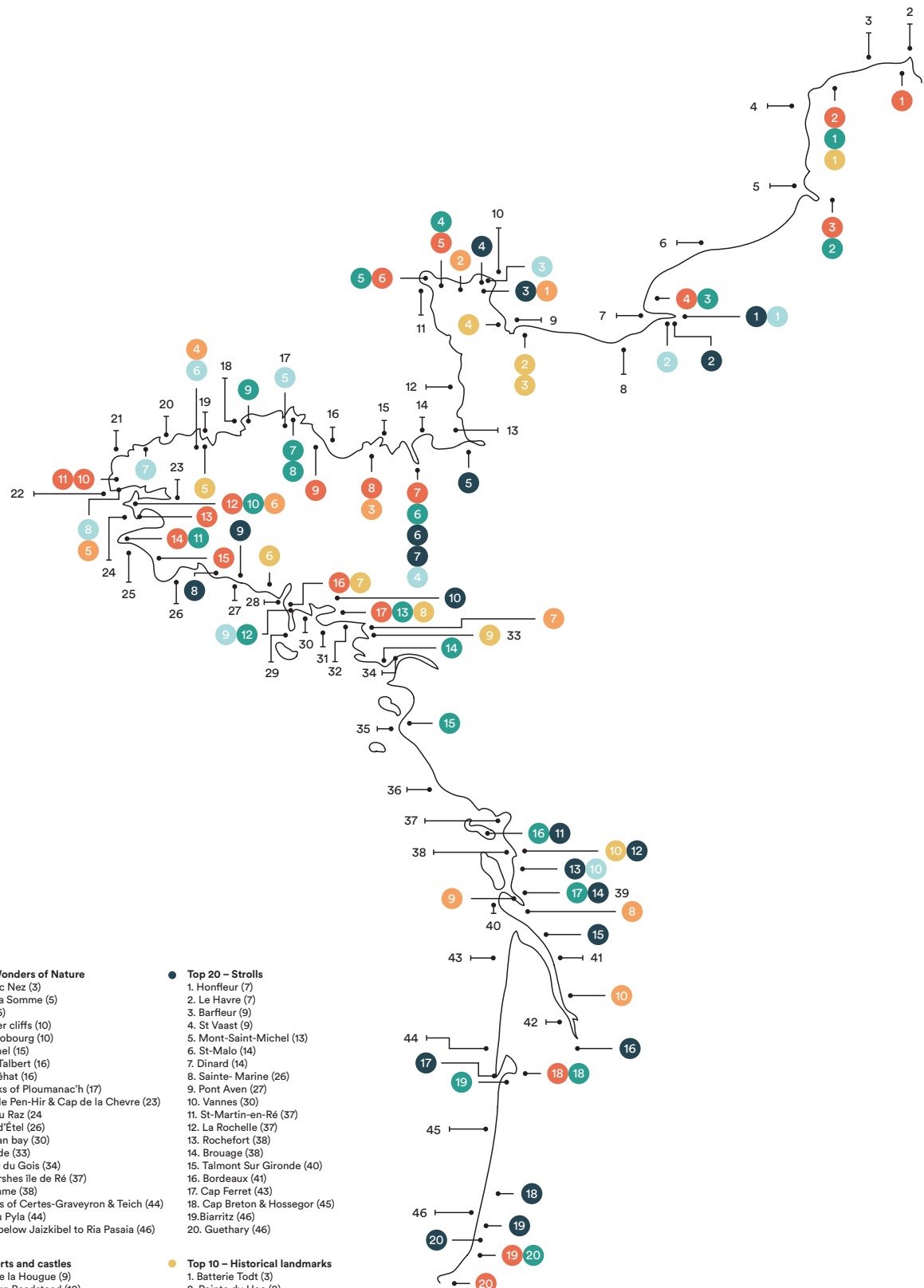
Some people love nature, other crave little tiny streets to wander.
The below menu indicates which stage has which kind of flavours for you in store.

Best-in-class Great Normal Not recommended

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Best of

Life is full of choices.
To make life easier for you, we have selected our favourite spots.



● **Top 20 – Hikes**

1. Digue du Braek (2)
2. Cap Blanc Nez (3)
3. Baie de la Somme (Maye) (4)
4. GR 21 – Vaucotte to Antifer (6)
5. Landemer (10)
6. Nez de Jobourg (10)
7. Promenade du Claire de Lune (14)
8. Round Cap Fréhel & Fort La Latte (15)
9. Pointe de Plouha (16)
10. Corsen to Kermorvan (21)
11. St. Mathieu to Bertheaume (21)
12. Toulouguet to Cap de la Chevre* (23)
13. To Pointe du Raz, North Cap Sizun (24)
14. East of Cap de la Chevre (24)
15. Pointe Feunteun Aod – Audierne (25)
16. Cote Sauvage (29)
17. Île d'Arz (30)
18. Domaine de Certes -Graveyron (44)
19. Passaia to San Sebastian (46)
20. Hondarribia to Passaia (46)

● **Top 10 – Architectural landmarks**

1. St. Joseph Church, Le Havre (7)
2. Pont de Normandie (7)
3. Phare de Gatteville (10)
4. Villa les Roches Brunes (14)
5. House between the rocks (17)
6. Île tolet (19)
7. Phare Île de Vierge (20)
8. Phare de Petit Minou (21)
9. House l'Île de Saint-Cado (28)
10. Rochefort Pont Transbordeur (38)

● **Top 20 – Wonders of Nature**

1. Cap Blanc Nez (3)
2. Baie de la Somme (5)
3. Étretat (6)
4. Landemer cliffs (10)
5. Nez de Jobourg (10)
6. Cap Fréhel (15)
7. Silon de Talbert (16)
8. Île de Bréhat (16)
9. Pink rocks of Ploumanac'h (17)
10. Pointe de Pen-Hir & Cap de la Chevre (23)
11. Pointe du Raz (24)
12. Rivière d'Étel (26)
13. Morbihan bay (30)
14. Guerande (33)
15. Passage du Gois (34)
16. Salt marshes Île de Ré (37)
17. Île Madame (38)
18. Reserves of Certes-Graveyron & Teich (44)
19. Dune du Pyla (44)
20. GR 121 below Jaizkibel to Ria Passaia (46)

● **Top 10 – Forts and castles**

1. La Tour de la Hougue (9)
2. Cherbourg Roadstead (10)
3. Fort la Latte (15)
4. Fort Taureau (19)
5. Fort de Bertheaume (21)
6. Îlot des Capucins (23)
7. Phare Île de Vierge (20)
8. Fort Louvois (39)
9. Fort Boyard (39)
10. Citadelle de Blaye (41)

● **Top 20 – Strolls**

1. Honfleur (7)
2. Le Havre (7)
3. Barfleur (9)
4. St Vaast (9)
5. Mont-Saint-Michel (13)
6. St-Malo (14)
7. Dinard (14)
8. Sainte-Marine (26)
9. Pont Aven (27)
10. Vannes (30)
11. St-Martin-en-Ré (37)
12. La Rochelle (37)
13. Rochefort (38)
14. Brouage (38)
15. Talmont Sur Gironde (40)
16. Bordeaux (41)
17. Cap Ferret (43)
18. Cap Breton & Hossegor (45)
19. Biarritz (46)
20. Guethary (46)

● **Top 10 – Historical landmarks**

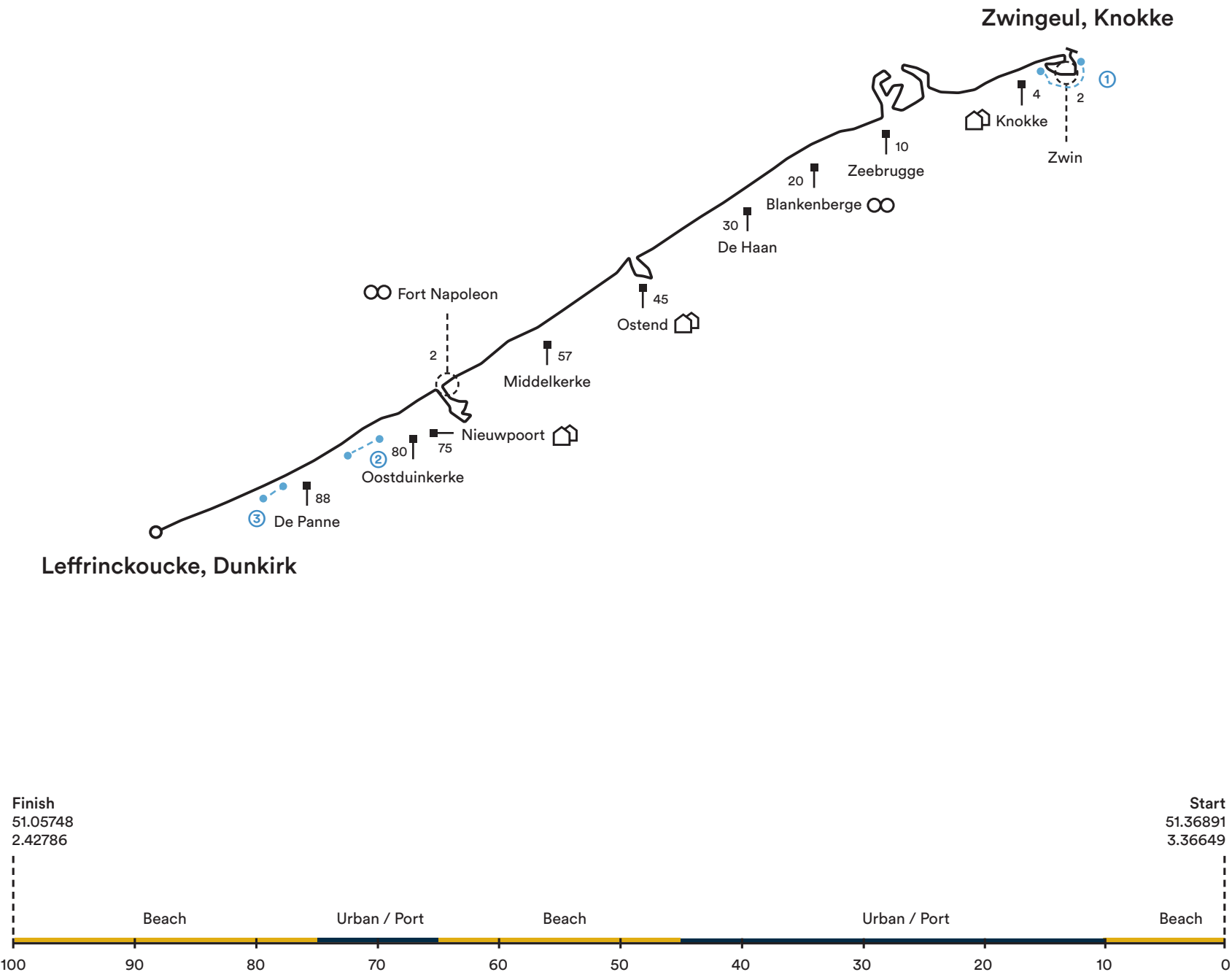
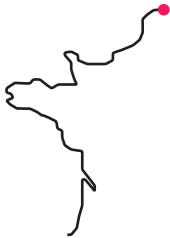
1. Batterie Todt (3)
2. Pointe du Hoc (8)
3. Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial (8)
4. Landing Beach Utah (9)
5. Cairn de Barnenez (18)
6. U boat base Lorient (28)
7. Carnac Megalithes (29)
8. Île Gavrinis (30)
9. U boat base St Nazaire (33)
10. La Rochelle U boat (38)



The Coast

Stage 1

Zwingeul, Knokke > Leffrinckoucke, Dunkirk



The apartments lining the Belgian coasts ~~~

During the first 100 km of this journey we technically touch on three countries, as we start on the Zwingel, the border between Belgium and the Netherlands, and finish in Leffrinckhoucke in France, after crossing the border just east of De Panne. This part of the coast is the most densely populated 100 km out of the total distance of 4,600 km. Belgium only has 65 km of coastline, which has to accommodate a large part of the 11 million inhabitants looking for sunshine. From the luxury and prestige in Knokke-Heist to the easy-going vibe of Blankenberge, the old royal charm of Ostend and the miles of dunes at both extremities of the coast... This leg has something to offer for everyone. The Belgian shore is a straight line of sand running from Knokke in the northeast to De Panne in the southwest, most of it dominated by apartment blocks elbowing each other for a glimpse of the sought-after sea view. Luckily, the coast is not entirely covered with high-rise buildings. In between the cities you'll find large stretches of dunes: in the nature reserves of het Zwin; east of Knokke; the Schipgatduinen with the Hoge Blekker, the highest dune on the Belgian coast; west of Oostduinkerke; and De Westhoek, which is west of De Panne. In terms of architecture, the villas in Knokke and the Anglo-Norman cottages of De Haan are more enjoyable than the blocks of concrete and glass elsewhere and are surely worth a stroll. In Ostend you'll find more majestic buildings, such as the Royal Galleries or the Wellington race track. The two major commercial ports are located in Zeebrugge and Ostend and leisure ports can be found in Nieuwpoort, Ostend and Blankenberge, which all have navettes to take you from one bank to the other. This stretch of coast also has oceans of culture in store and is home to the Beaufort art festival, with art sculptures scattered across the coast.

∞ See **Fort Napoleon** ~~~

This fort was built in 1814 at the request of Napoleon Bonaparte. Nowadays, it is home to a museum and a chic bistro.

Pier of Blankenberge ~~~

A 350 m long pier stretching into the sea, housing plenty of bars and restaurants. Blankenberge city is known for its nightlife.

🏠 Stroll **Knokke** ~~~

As one of the chicest seaside resorts on the Atlantic coast, Knokke is home to the holiday residences of the vast majority of the Belgian elite. Visit the casino, the many galleries and the stunning golf course or stroll through the Zoute, where you'll find plenty of restaurants. It's the perfect location to spot the expensive cars of the people dining out.

Ostend ~~~

Ostend is the biggest city on the Belgian coast and the former holiday destination of the royal family. Visit the Royal Galleries, the Wellington track and the James Ensor museum.

Nieuwpoort ~~~

Home to one of the biggest yacht ports in Europe, Nieuwpoort has lots of history to offer. The impressive King Albert I monument is a fitting memorial to Belgium's many losses in the First World War.

⚡ Hike ① **Nature Reserve, het Zwin** ~~~ ⚡⚡

What? – Discover this paradise for birds (and bird watchers) next to the Dutch border.

How? – Access the reserve at the end of the Zeedijk, next to the statue of the hare (51.364687, 3.347016), by either foot or bike. You'll find the nearest car park at the Zwinlaan (51.358478, 3.323339), which is 2 km from the entrance to the reserve, but during the busy summer months parking spaces are scarce. It is easier to park at the other side of the reserve on the car park at the end of the Graaf Leopold Lippensdreef, next to the border (51.358536, 3.350719). From this point you can immediately access the nature reserve and you will only have to walk 1.5 km to reach the famous hare that is situated close to the sea.

② **Nature Reserve 'Westhoek' dunes** ~~~ ⚡⚡

What? – Enjoy life in this 350-ha sandy playground. The available routes are explained at the entrance.

How? – Park your car at the end of the Schuilhavenlaan in De Panne (51.0934, 2.56552) to get to the entrance of the nature reserve.

This dune area is open to the public 24/7.

③ **Hoge Blekker, highest dune in Belgium** ~~~ ⚡⚡

What? – If you want to climb the highest dune in Belgium, this is your chance.

How? – Park your car on the car park at the Panoramalaan, not far from the crossroads with the Zeelaan (51.111556, 2.644665).

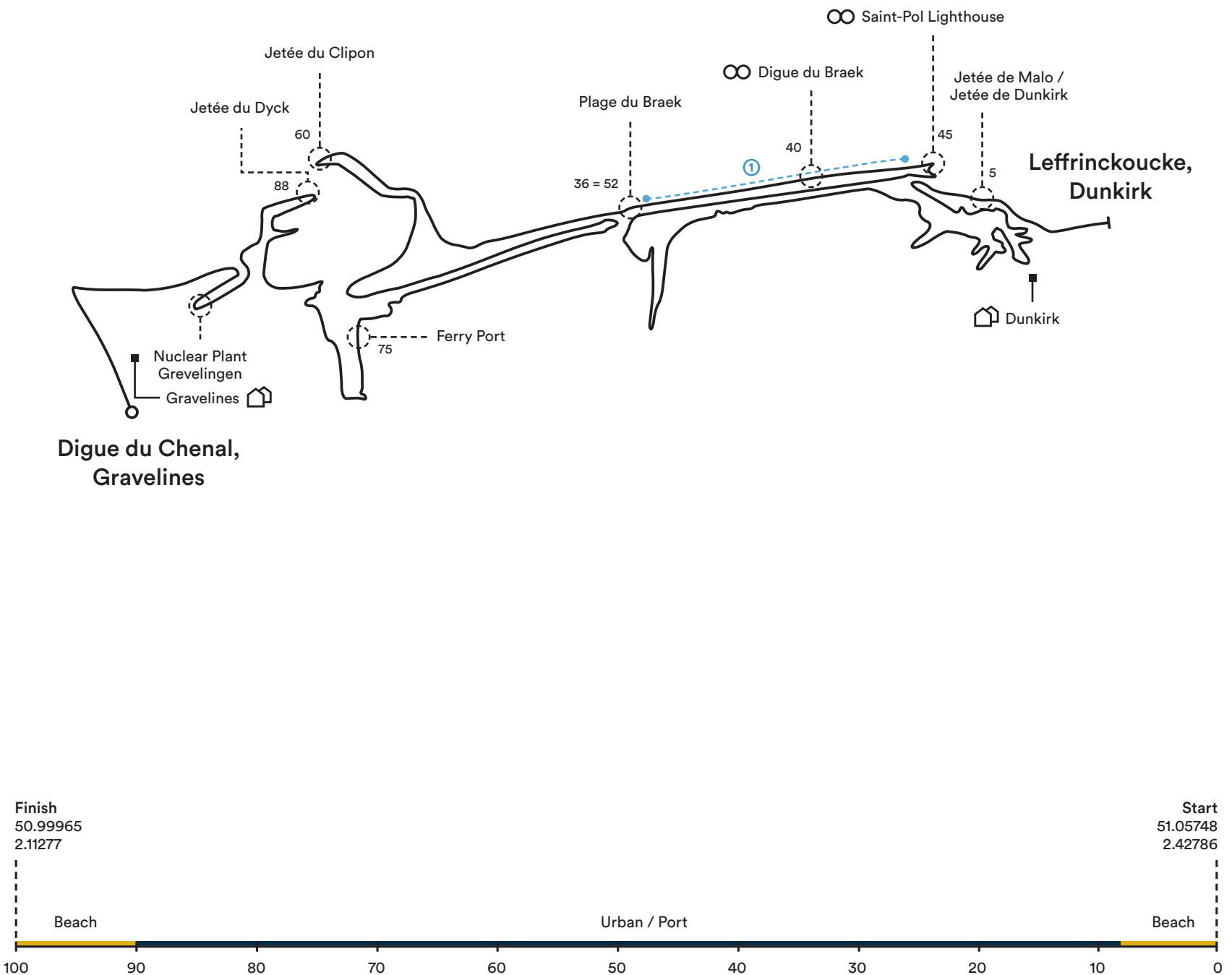
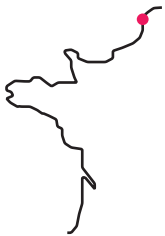
If you prefer a longer walk, you can head north towards the Doornpanne dunes and Schipgatduinen dunes between Koksijde and Oostduinkerke.

📍 **Reach** Belgium has the densest highway network in the world. All of the coastal cities, from Oostduinkerke to Knokke, are located only a few kilometres from an exit. You can find train stations in the biggest cities: Knokke, Duinbergen, Heist, Zeebrugge, Blankenberge, Ostend and De Panne. The entire coastline is accessible by the Kusttram, a tramline that runs along the coast for over 68 km with 69 stops. You can fly to Ostend or, alternatively, to either Brussels or Antwerp (both 1 hour away by car from the coast). There is a ferry service connecting Zeebrugge to the UK.




Stage 2


Leffrinckoucke, Dunkirk > Digue du Chenal, Gravelines




The spellbinding and slightly surreal industrial vibe of Dunkirk


The vast majority of this 100 km long stage is comprised of an artificial concrete coastline. You will not find idyllic beaches or remote nature here, as the Dunkirk port, the third largest in France after Marseille and Le Havre, dominates the scenery. However, the industrial, rusty look has a raw and arty feel you might like. If you do, we strongly recommend visiting Digue du Braek, a 7 km long stretch of concrete, which is both spellbinding and slightly surreal due to its inclination and absurd vastness. It is perfectly tailored to movie scenes or illegal street races. Apart from the petrochemical and metal industries and their enormous facilities, Dunkirk is well known for its historical significance during WWII. During ‘Operation Dynamo’, between 29 May and 4 June 1940, the 338,000 Allied soldiers who were surrounded by German troops were saved by a large fleet of 826 military and civil boats. This mission notably enabled the Allies to continue the war against Nazi Germany. You should definitely watch Christopher Nolan’s recent movie ‘Dunkirk’ (2017) to get an almost historically correct narrative of the mission. The Operation Dynamo museum will give you the entirely correct, unromanticised story. We finish our 100 km leg in the suburban village of Petit-Fort-Philippe, which is just outside the city of Gravelines. Gravelines is known for its ramparts, which were built in the 16th century and later improved by Vauban when the city was back under French reign.

 **See**


Digue du Braek 



A majestic and atypical sight. An inclined concrete path stretching into the distance until it ends at the Saint-Pol Lighthouse, a popular fishing place for local amateur fishermen.

 **Stroll**

Dunkirk 


With almost 100,000 inhabitants Dunkirk has the pace of a city. Its Belfort and Leughenaer tower both built in the 15th century remember a rich history.

 **Hike**


① Digue du Braek to Saint-Pol Lighthouse (7 km)  

What? – Hike along this 7 km concrete wall sitting between the sea and heavy industry.

How? – Start at Plage du Braek (51.041370, 2.254496) and walk for 7 km until you reach the Saint-Pol Lighthouse. Cars are allowed on the dyke and there is also an adjacent route, so you can easily customise your journey.

Gravelines 

Its Remparts, Casernes, Gates and Guard posts mark the historic importance of Gravelines as a frontier city.

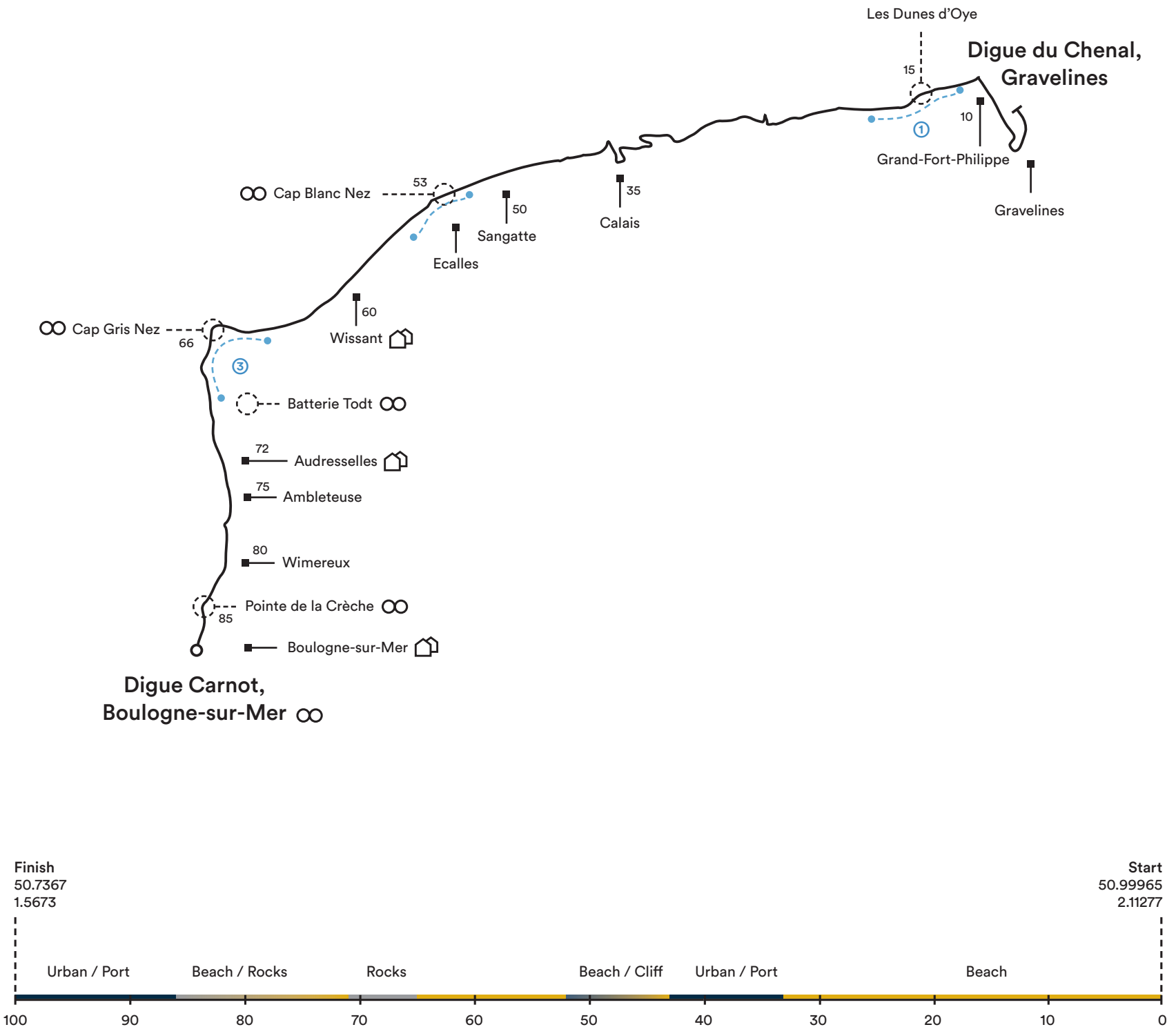
 **Reach**

Ferry service to Dover (UK). Dunkirk and Gravelines have a train station. A highway runs parallel to the beach at a distance of around 10km from the coast passing Dunkirk and Gravelines and running further South until Le Havre.



Stage 3

Digue du Chenal, Gravelines > Digue Carnot, Boulogne-sur-Mer



Les Deux Caps and the Channel

The stage of Les Deux Caps has you spoilt for choice. You'll find natural beauty neighbouring unique phenomena, such as the white wonders of Cap Blanc-Nez, and mid-sized cities playing an important cultural and economic role in today's society. Important assets are the Eurotunnel in Calais and the fishing port of Boulogne-sur-Mer, both with appealing historical centres and impressive structures, such as the Digue Carnot, to protect their heritage. History has also left its mark, as this stretch of land played an important role in both world wars. The crater-riddled coastline, a legacy of the bombing, is dotted with bunkers and forts, some of which have been turned into museums, such as the impressive Batterie Todt. This stage starts with a sandy coastline between Grand-Fort-Philippe and Calais, before it suddenly becomes rocky and wild, with the 134 m high white cliff of Cap Blanc-Nez as a highlight. From here the hinterland is hilly and demanding for adventurous cyclists. We pass Wissant, which is a true surfers' paradise, as the wind and waves are famously good in this lush green seaside town.

See Les Deux Caps

Cap Blanc-Nez and Cap Gris-Nez, officially the two closest points to England, are separated by a 16 km stretch of coastline. Cap Blanc-Nez (134 m) is white, impressive and clean. Cap Gris-Nez (48 m) is rough and rocky and also has a few bunkers that are further reminders of WWII.

Pointe de la Crèche

A rugged, impressive location where you can get a view of Boulogne-sur-Mer on the left and the coastal villages on the right. Walk down the slippery and curvy stairs towards the immense concrete wall to enjoy the best view.

Batterie Todt

Batterie Todt is a massive bunker nestled between the hills of Les Deux Caps. It was built by the Germans, first to support a possible attack on Britain, later in anticipation of an Allied landing. The bunker hosted four massive 380 mm calibre guns, capable of reaching the English coast, which is 55 km away. Nowadays it houses a museum.

What we didn't include but is definitely worth a visit: Digue Carnot, Fort Ambleteuse.

Stroll Audresselles

A pretty little fishing village built on rocks, dating back to the Middle Ages.

Wissant

Wissant is situated between Les Deux Caps and is a hotspot for water sports. The square around the church has a nice historic centre and lots of restaurants. It has lovely dunes, with little lakes left and right of the city to help you relax.

Boulogne-sur-Mer

Boulogne-sur-Mer was the first fishing port in France and home to the famous aquarium Nausicaá. This bustling fortified city has many local restaurants and some beautiful squares, such as the Jardin éphémère, within the ramparts of the perfectly preserved medieval city centre.

Calais

World famous as one end of the Channel Tunnel, the city is much more than a stopover. Go and check out the impressive UNESCO listed hôtel de ville.

Hike Les Dunes d'Oye (6.5 km)

What? – If you prefer dunes over rocks and cliffs, then this is your turf.
How? – Park at the car park at the end of Avenue du Platier, Oye-Plage (51.004207, 2.066561) and take the path through the dunes. Take a left at the first crossroads, go straight on at the second intersection and then go left at the third one (a right turn will take you to the Blockhaus). Continue along the trail across the dunes until you reach the car park at Les Hemmes d'Oye, along Impasse des Salines (50.992370, 1.986123).

Conquer Cap Blanc-Nez (3.5 km)

What? – Climb one of the most impressive and beautiful cliffs in Europe.
How? – For a quick visit it's best to park on the top of the cliff along the Sentier du Blanc-Nez (50.924379, 1.715886). If you have a bit more time, we suggest climbing the cliff on foot. You might even want to consider going back and forth, as both sides are magnificent. The best way to approach the climb is to park at the Cran d'Escalles car park, at the end of the Rue de la Mer (50.921125, 1.703478). This street also gives access to the beach, which is a fun extra stop if you have the time. A 3.5 km hike guides you over the grassy flanks and over the wooden stairs all the way to the top and back down on a path along the cliff. You'll end up at the car park next to the cemetery at Sangatte (50.940704, 1.740203) after crossing the big road. Fun fact, the Chunnel passes right below this car park and the cemetery.

Cap Gris-Nez to Wissant (8 km)

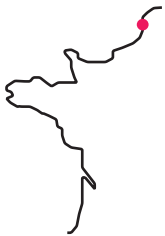
What? – Adventurous clifftop walk around Cap Gris-Nez.
How? – Park your car on Rue de la Plage in Audinghen (50.869415, 1.590576), next to the restaurant with an ocean view situated further down the road (currently La Sirène). Start the route by following Chemin des Douaniers, then changing onto Rue du Fort, which hugs the rocky coastline. After a few kilometres you'll go around Cap Gris-Nez, with its lighthouse, where you'll be as close to England as you can get. If you prefer a quick trip, you can park on Cap Gris-Nez (50.868779, 1.586722) instead of walking there. Finish at the car park in the village centre along the Rue Marin la Meslée (50.823981, 1.592162) and enjoy a bite of local seafood in one of the many restaurants.

Reach

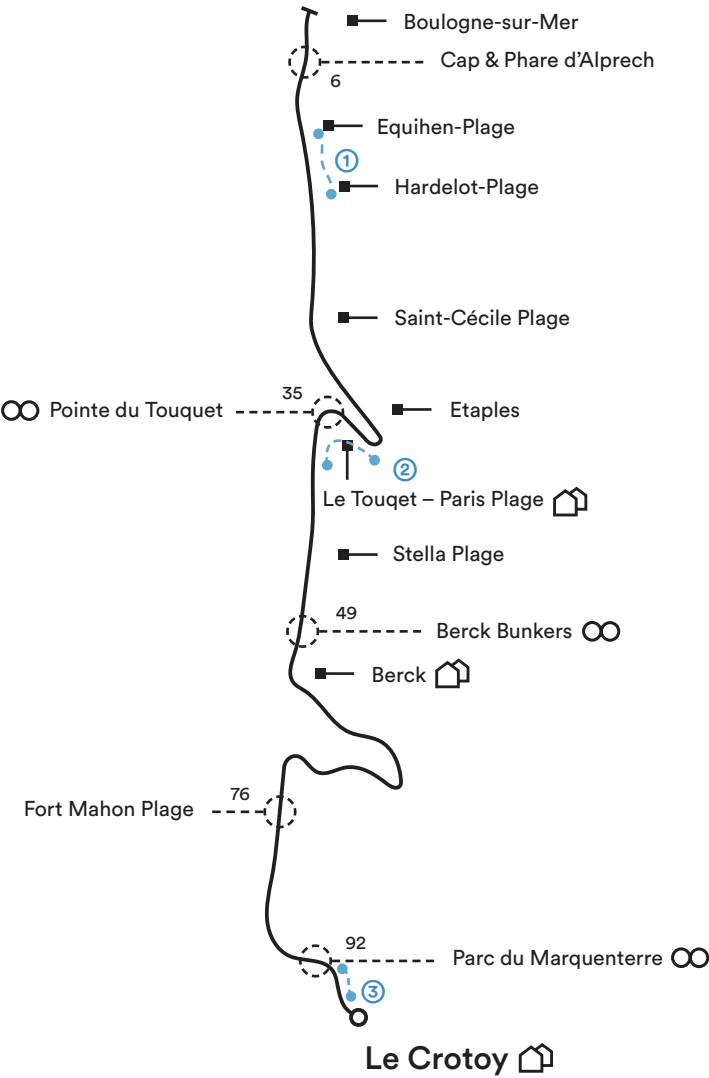
Calais is known for its ferry, connecting England via Dover to the French mainland, and for its train from London to Lille, Paris and Brussels. Both Boulogne and Calais have regular train stations and Boulogne-sur-Mer also has a ferry connection to England. The A16 highway runs parallel to the coast and provides easy access to all of the villages.

Stage 4

Digue Carnot, Boulogne-sur-Mer > Le Crotoy

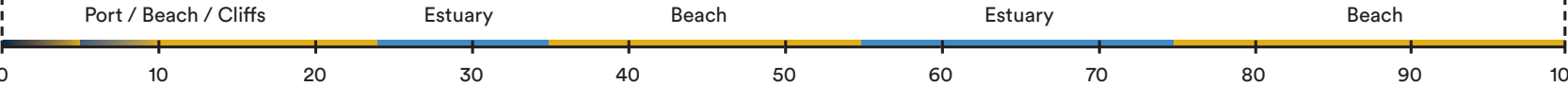


Digue Carnot, Boulogne-sur-Mer



Start
50.7367
1.5673

Finish
50.23134
1.60777



The kites, dunes and Parisians ~~~

We leave the cliffs and rocks of Les Deux Caps behind to dive into the sand and dunes of Le Touquet and Berck. Seemingly endless sandy beaches are the backdrop of this 100 km stretch, embraced by vast stretches of pine forests and dunes, such as the dunes of Écault and Mont-Saint-Frieux. The chain of endless beaches is only interrupted by estuaries finding their way to the Channel. First we encounter the river Canche, situated between the fishing port of Étaples and the fancy Le Touquet, and later the Authie estuary, situated between the popular beach resort of Berck, which is known for its colourful kites, and Fort-Mahon-Plage. The Baie de la Somme, with the must-see bird paradise of Parc de Marquenterre in the northwest, marks the end of this sandy Stage.

∞ See **Pointe du Touquet** ~~~

A sandy headland with a great view of the surrounding dunes and the Canche estuary.

Berck bunkers ~~~

These remains of the WWII Atlantikwall are nowadays the canvas for colourful graffiti paintings.

Parc du Marquenterre ~~~

One of the best places in Europe to spot birds. Visit the website to get more info about opening hours and activities.

🏠 Stroll **Le Touquet** ~~~

Chic seaside resort with bags of charm, much loved by Parisians as their favourite weekend destination.

Crotoy ~~~

Vibrant former fishing hamlet on the northern edge of Baie de la Somme.

Berck ~~~

Popular beach resort and a family favourite, famous for its colourful kite festival.

⚓ Hike **① Dunes d'Ecault to Château d'Hardelot (5 km)** ~~~ ⚓⚓

What? – Hike over beaches and dunes and through forests to finish at the formidable Hardelot Castle.

How? – Park your car at the end of Chemin de la Warenne (50.664448, 1.576328) and head down to the beach. Walk on the beach for about 1.5 km in order to find the bunkers and an entry into the dunes at Chemin des Juifs. Follow this path through the dunes until you arrive at Hardelot Castle. You will find a nearby car park along the Avenue Charlemagne in Condette (50.646088, 1.613382).

② Around Pointe du Touquet (3 km) ~~~ ⚓

What? – Follow the river Canche and go around the white-sanded Pointe du Touquet for a gorgeous view of the dunes on the other side.

How? – Park your car at the little yacht port, la Baie de Canche, at the end of Avenue de Berlin in Le Touquet (50.535968, 1.593398) and follow the river tucked away in the dunes. Circle the pointe, keeping the water on your right, and finish at the Mini-Golf du Touquet (50.527491, 1.581270).

③ Baie de la Somme (5 km) ~~~ ⚓

What? – Bathe in the grandeur of Baie de la Somme.

How? – Park your car at Parking de la Maye at the end of Rue de la Maye (50.249286, 1.593268). We recommend walking straight down to the Baie de la Somme at low tide in order to fully experience the vastness of the bay, a truly relaxing experience.

Walk alongside the dunes to head to Le Crotoy, which is 5 km away, with a car park along the Canal de la Maye (50.215146, 1.629291).

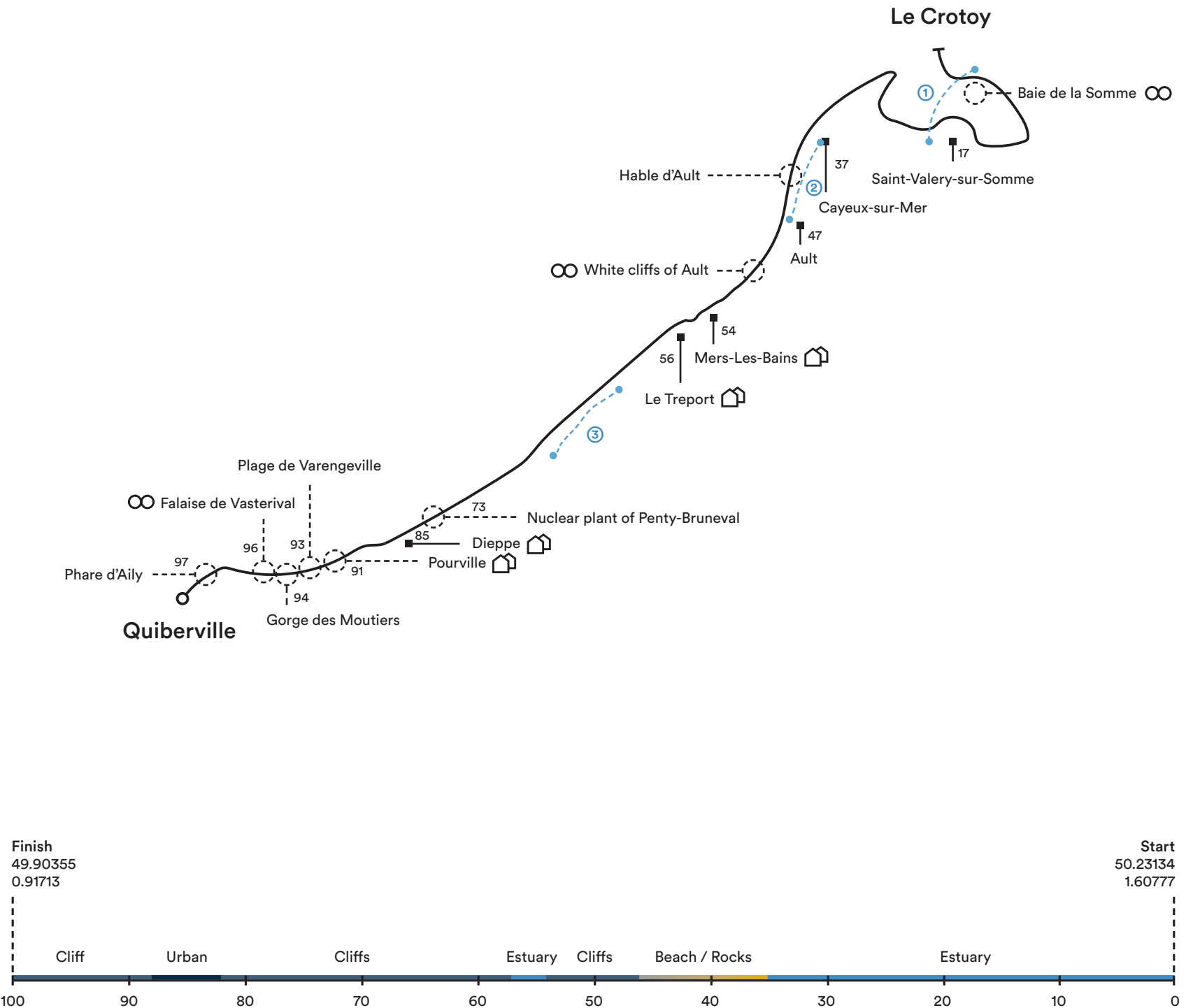
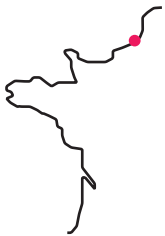
Crotoy is a great starting point for a guided tour of Baie de la Somme.

📍 Reach **There are train stations in Rue, Noyelles-sur-Mer, Berck, Étaples, Dannes Camiers (close to Sainte-Cécile Plage), Neufchâtel-Hardelot and Boulogne-sur-Mer. The A16 runs parallel to the coast.**



Stage 5

Le Crotoy > Quiberville



The Baie de la Somme and white chalk cliffs ~~~

Baie de la Somme dominates the first part of this stage, with 72 km² of wetlands full of unique flora and fauna to spot – including sheep and seals – and charming villages, such as Le Crotoy and Saint-Valery-sur-Somme, on both sides of the immense estuary. As we reach the coast, we hit shingle beaches, the charming beach cabins at Chemin des Planches in Cayeux-sur-Mer and the beautiful and peaceful Hâble d'Ault nature reserve further south. Once we arrive at Ault we witness a dramatic change of scenery, as its white chalk cliffs mirror the ones at Dover on the other side of the Channel. Mighty cliffs that hug the coastline will accompany us for the rest of this stage. At the few locations where there are no cliffs, and where rivers run into the ocean, cities emerge on the Picardy coastline. Two of the 'Three Sister' cities, Le Tréport and Mers-Les-Bains, have attractive villas and the vibrant atmosphere of a beachfront city, with no shortage of seafood restaurants. Dieppe is the biggest city in this stage. It is a true fishing port, although the access to the coast is blocked by the Penly nuclear plant. The area around Pourville-sur-Mer is peaceful and green and offers plenty of hotels and B&Bs for a pleasant overnight stay. The area between Pourville and Quiberville is beautiful, with forests atop gently rolling hills and hidden gorges between the cliffs and the beach below, such as Gorge des Moutiers and Gorge du Petit Ailly.

∞ See

Baie de la Somme ~~~

One of the most beautiful bays in the world. A paradise for hikers, with charming villages on both sides.

White cliffs of Ault ~~~

Lesser-known Dover lookalikes, flanked by the villages of Ault, Mers-les-Bains and Le Tréport.

Gorge des Moutiers and Gorge du Petit Ailly ~~~

Small canyons in the mighty cliffs between Dieppe and Quiberville, granting access to the beach. They also provide great hiking material.



Stroll **Saint-Valery-sur-Somme** ~~~

This authentic village has a gorgeous esplanade that runs alongside the Somme estuary, which is lined with 19th-century buildings. Head to Quai Blavet and Rue de la Ferté for a lively collection of shops, bars and restaurants. Enjoy a steam train ride along the Réseau des Bains de Mer to spot local wild life.

Le Tréport and Mers-les-Bains ~~~

Take the Funiculaire from Les Cordiers in order to enjoy the highly recommended view from the 108 m high chalk cliffs without having to climb the stairs. You could also take a stroll past the colourful Belle Époque villas along l'Esplanade du Général Leclerc.

Dieppe ~~~

Dieppe is one of the most important fishing ports in France and you'll notice a port vibe everywhere in the city. It's renowned for scallops; most of Paris's seafood originates from Dieppe. Visit the magnificent castle atop the hill.

△ Hike

① **Baie de la Somme** ~~~ △

What? – Experience the wonderful wetlands of one of the most beautiful bays in the world.

How? – Check Stage 4 for our first recommendation. To experience the bay to the fullest we recommend that you take a guided tour.

② **Explore the Hâble d'Ault (7.5 km)** ~~~ △

What? – Walk on white pebble roads through the rich natural reserve of Ault.

How? – Start at the Amer Sud monument (50.172138, 1.484741) and walk along the pebbled road until you reach the village of Ault on the cliffs. You can park along the street by Les Quatre Villas in Ault (50.111669, 1.456023).

③ **GR21 from Criel Plage to Penly (9 km)** ~~~ △

What? – Hike along the dramatic cliff face with a sheer drop mere metres away. This is one of the few accessible trails in the area.

How? – This stage does not offer many signposted clifftop walks. The area between Criel and Penly, however, will spoil you, as you can walk along the GR21. You can start on Rue de la Plage (50.026617, 1.308580), but there are not many places to park, so you might want to leave your car 600 m away at the beach. You'll find the start of the GR21 there and you can follow it to Penly, which will give you a sea view from start to finish. The hike will bring you back to society at Rue du Bel Air (49.981373, 1.233601).

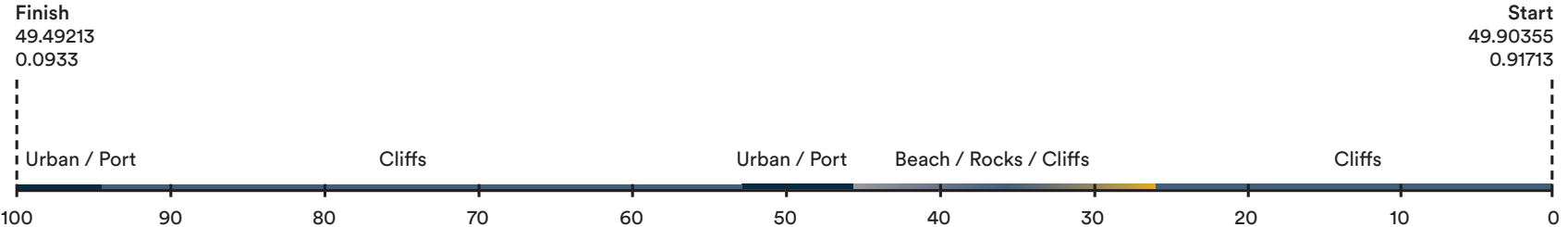
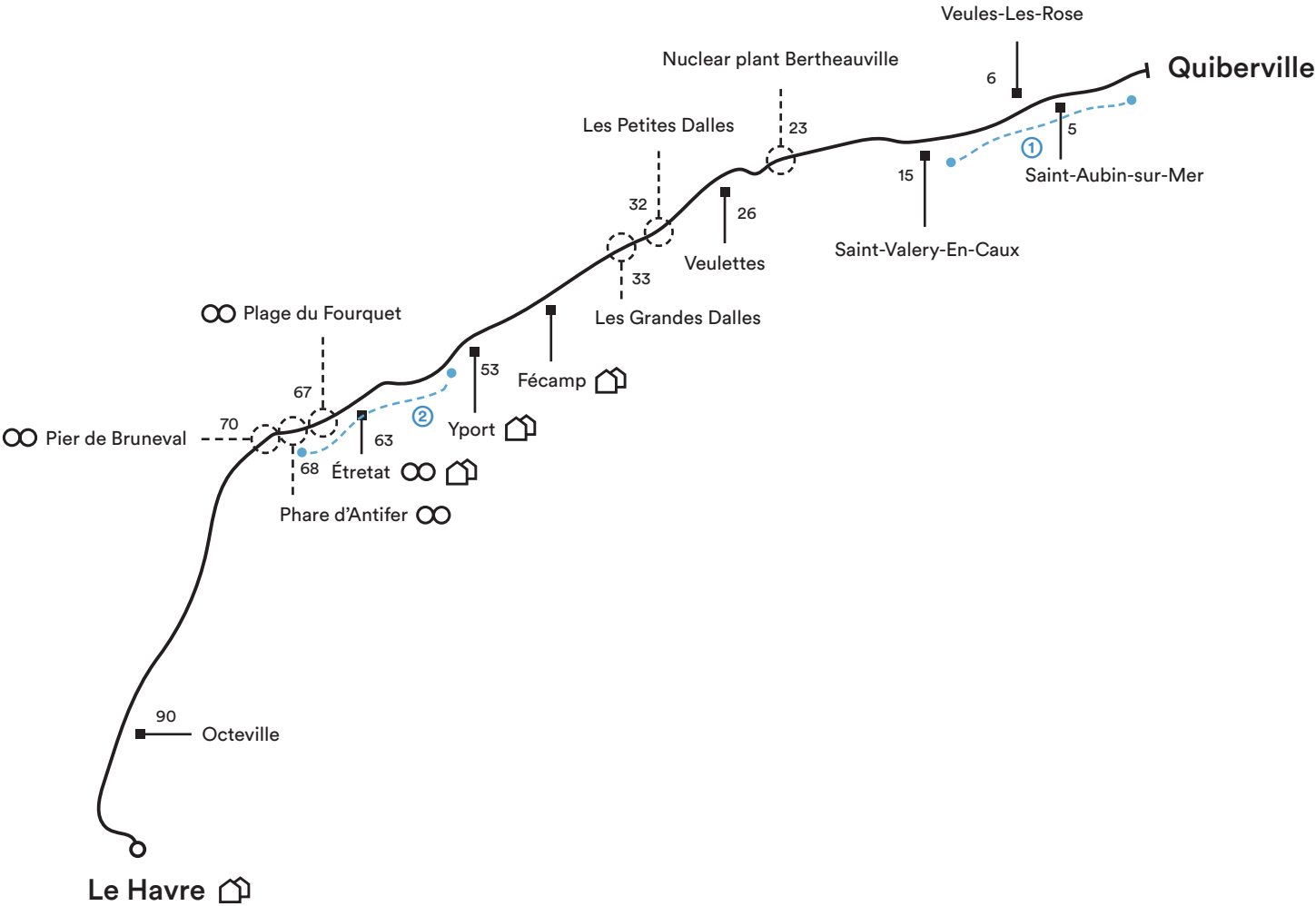
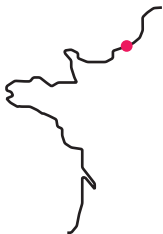


Reach An old steam train travels around Baie de la Somme, calling in at Saint-Valery-en-Somme, Cayeux-sur-Mer, Noyelles-sur-Mer and Le Crotoy. You'll find regular train stations in Le Tréport-Mers, Dieppe, Noyelles-sur-Mer and Rue, but these stations are not directly connected and you will need to take a massive detour to travel from one to the other. A ferry from Newhaven in the UK arrives in Dieppe. Also, the highway A26 runs approx. 20 km from the coast between Abbeville and Le Havre, which makes access between the cities relatively smooth.



Stage 6

Quiberville > Le Havre



The wonders of Étretat and Antifer

This entire 100 km stage runs along the Haute Normandie coast with its impressive cliffs. The first 15 km of coastline is a lesser-known shingle beach sheltered by grey cliffs between Quiberville and Saint-Valery-en-Caux. We found more of the same scenery until we got to Veulettes, the only exception being that a nuclear plant blocks the way for beach walkers. Factor this in if you plan to do a hike. The coastline running from Veulettes to Fécamp boasts more cliffs, with Cap Fagnet, a 105 m cliff that was of strategic importance during WWII, as a highlight. Fécamp is brimming with medieval heritage, as it was the residence of the dukes of Normandy until 1204. A few kilometres further south we come across Yport, an old fishing port nestled between the cliffs, and the famous Étretat, with its natural wonders, impressive golf course and charming chapel overlooking the area. The GR21 clifftop trail runs past the Antifer Lighthouse, which warns ships of the ferocious cliffs beneath, and the impressive Pier Bruneval. At the end of this stage, the cliffs fade away and the coastline turns inwards where the river Seine mounts into the Channel on the outskirts of Le Havre, a cultural and economic hotspot. Hidden between the cliffs are little beaches that are often unspoiled by mass tourism. Be sure to discover the hidden gems of Plage de Vaucottes and Plage du Fourquet.

See **Étretat rocks**

Probably the most well known and most stunning cliffs in France, with three natural arches and an offshore 'needle' standing proud for millions of visitors to witness. Hike or golf at the top of the cliff or visit the Chapel Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde for stunning views.

Phare d'Antifer and Bruneval oil jetty

About 3.5 km south along the GR21 you'll find the peaceful and stunning views of a giant lighthouse on the cliffs and a 3 km concrete pier stretching out into the Channel.

Cap Fagnet

A great viewpoint from which to oversee Fécamp, with WWII remains such as Mammut radar and a chapel protecting the fishermen sailing beyond the horizon.

Stroll **Étretat**


Apart from its natural wonders, you must explore Étretat's halles, the local market, and Le Clos Lupin, the former residence of the French writer Maurice LeBlanc. Summers can be very busy.

Fécamp

Fécamp is the former residence of the dukes of Normandy. Visit Palais Bénédictine, the Fisheries Museum, the Palais Ducal and the old abbey, or climb Cap Fagnet to discover its chapel and WWII remains.

Yport

A retired fishing port and famous beach resort with equally famous artist residents, including Gide and Maupassant. Hidden in a little valley between the cliffs, it's the perfect place to lose yourself, with its little alleys and authentic brick houses.

 **Reach** You can reach the stage by plane landing on Le Havre, which also hosts a TGV station with regular trains going to Fécamp and St Valéry En Caux – but they're not interconnected but connected to a central axis more inland. The same is true for the highway leading from the inland Amiens to Le Havre. A regional road connects the sea cities.

Hike **① Quiberville to Saint-Valery-en-Caux (15 km)**

What? – Trek along the shingle beach at low tide for 15 km beneath the massive towering cliffs.

How? – Beware, the pebble stones make it harder to walk. You need stable ankles and constant alertness. You can start at Quiberville, where you can fuel up before the hike with some good seafood. There are plenty of parking spaces along the Rue du Front de Mer (49.904892, 0.924861). There are a couple of spots where you can move from the beach back onto the land if you're too tired or if the tides are coming up, notably at Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer after 4 km (49.893615, 0.872859), a little gorge at the end of Rue de Beaumont in Sotteville-sur-Mer after 7.5 km (49.888511, 0.829246), or Plage de Veules-les-Roses at the 10 km mark (49.877559, 0.798715).

② Vaucottes to La Poterie-Cap-d'Antifer (13 km)

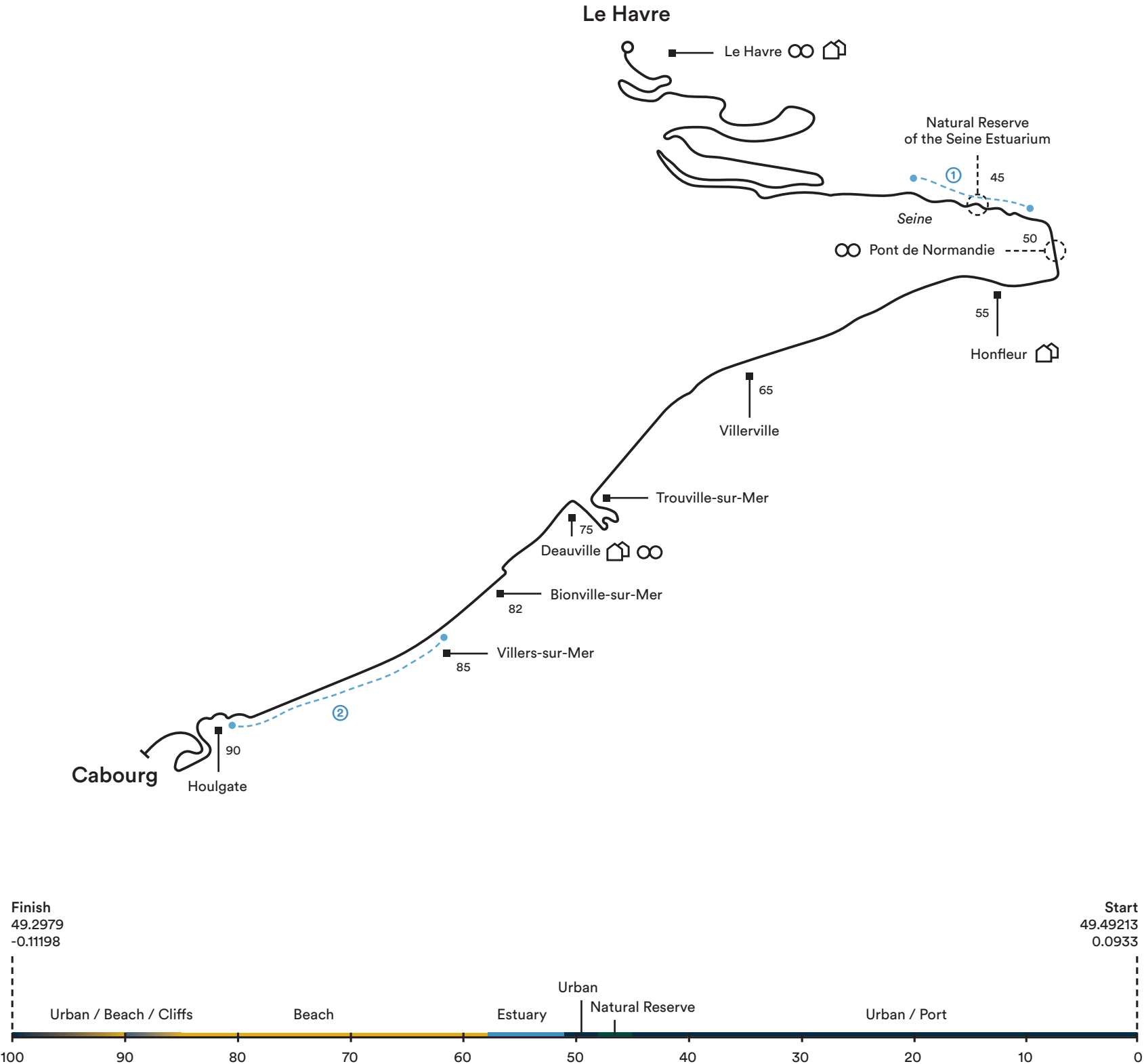
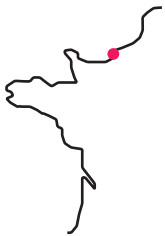
What? – Hike across some of the most stunning cliffs in the world on a trail that is only a few metres from a dazzling cliff drop.

How? – Start at the hidden Plage de Vaucottes at the end of Route de la Plage in Vattetot-sur-Mer (49.737799, 0.290970). Note that the Anglo-Norman building next to the beach is a gîte where you can stay for the night. Follow the streets up the cliff, keeping the sea on your right-hand side, until you find a walking trail called Chemin des Falaises or the GR21. A mere couple of metres separate you from massive drops all along the 6 km trail up until Chapelle Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, where you'll have a stunning view of Étretat. If you want to shorten the hike, you can park along the Avenue Damilaville (49.710852, 0.206263). Walk down the stairs, cross the bridge and climb the stairs on the other bank to find yourself next to one of the most stunning golf courses in the world.

Continue for 5 km along the beach to reach Phare d'Antifer, where you'll have a great view of the Bruneval oil jetty. Definitely take the time to climb down the steep stairs to Plage du Fourquet (49.687570, 0.168730) or the more vibrant Plage du Tilleul or Plage d'Antifer, which you can also reach by car via Rue d'Antifer (49.695386, 0.180664). Finish at the car park near Cap d'Antifer at the end of Route du Phare (49.682937, 0.164728).

Stage 7

Le Havre > Cabourg



The revival of Le Havre and the crossing of Pont de Normandie

This 100 km stage has two clearly distinct parts, the first half dominated by the city and port of Le Havre, which is not only the biggest city in Normandy but also a stunning cultural destination, both for its UNESCO recognised architecture and its Impressionist and modern art. As soon as we pass the Seine via the Pont de Normandie, the landscape changes to beach scenes, with Honfleur, ‘the village of painters’, being the first of a series of enjoyable beach resorts. From the enjoyable Villerville to the prestigious and not to be missed Deauville, finishing with the popular and classic Cabourg, it has sandy beaches galore. This is the perfect region for family tourism, with oceans of restaurants and hotels dotted between the soft green hills that give this region its favourable vibe and climate.

See **Pont de Normandie**

This cable-stayed bridge is an amazing feat of modern architecture. Crossing the Seine, the bridge is impressive in length, height and design.

St. Joseph Church, Le Havre

A prime example of post-war architecture. In addition to its stunning height and unique shape, the 12,768 pieces of coloured glass designed by Marguerite Huré are of unprecedented beauty.

Promenade des Planches, Deauville

Feel like a movie star strolling along the iconic wooden promenade in Deauville, with its famous cabins and colourful parasols.

Hike **① Estuary of the Seine (5.5 km)**

What? – Walk along an old railway line in the nature reserve, in the shadow of the port of Le Havre, which will bring you to the riverbank.

How? – As an exception we have mentioned the total distance back and forth (A to B to A – 5.5 km) as the endpoint can’t be reached by car, so you are obliged to return to your starting point.

Park your car at the small car park along the Route de L’Estuaire (49.456311, 0.222468). There are many paths to be found here, but we advise you to cross the train rails and then follow them, keeping the tracks on your right-hand side. After 1.5 km you can turn left, before going left again a bit further down in order to arrive at the banks of the river Seine. Turn back whenever you feel like it.

② Falaises des Vaches Noires (5 km)

What? – Enjoy a walk along the mixed pebble and sand beach below the Vaches Noires cliffs.

How? – This walk will take you along the only stretch of sandy beach with (medium-sized, overgrown) cliffs. Park your car along the Rue Alfred Feine (49.321985, -0.010347), as the route is barred further down. Make your way towards the beach and continue along the shore, keeping the water on your right-hand side. After 5 km of walking through remote nature and cliffs without seeing a living soul, you’ll arrive at the piers of Houlgate. Continue up to the casino and its car park, which is at the crossroads of Rue Henri Dobert and Rue d’Axbridge (49.304488, -0.074557).

For a walk on the beach, the stretch between west Honfleur and Cabourg is awash with possibilities.

Stroll **Le Havre**

The biggest city in Normandy and the birthplace of Impressionism. Visit the Volcano cultural centre with its iconic design. Stroll past the sculpture La Catène and the Place de l’Hôtel de ville, one of the biggest squares in Europe. Pay a visit to the Musée Malraux for Impressionist paintings and the Docks Vauban for some shopping.

Honfleur

A village where the Impressionists loved to set up their easels and one of the most visited Norman villages. Take a stroll along the cobbled streets full of art galleries and the docks of the Vieux Bassin to fully grasp the village’s charm.

Deauville

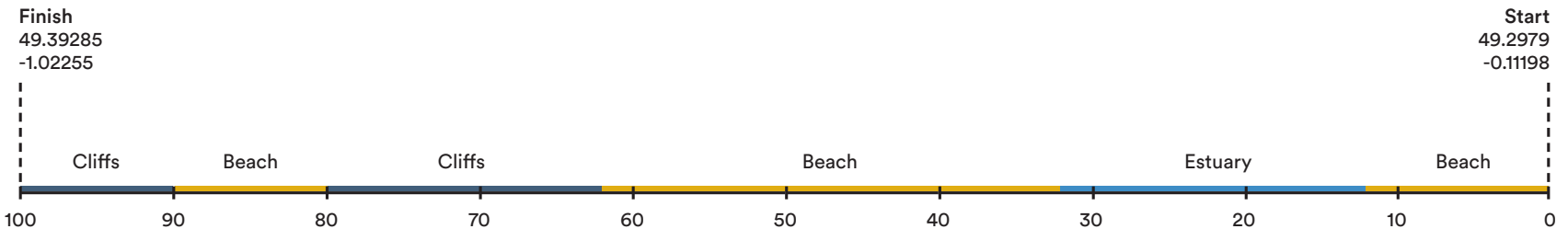
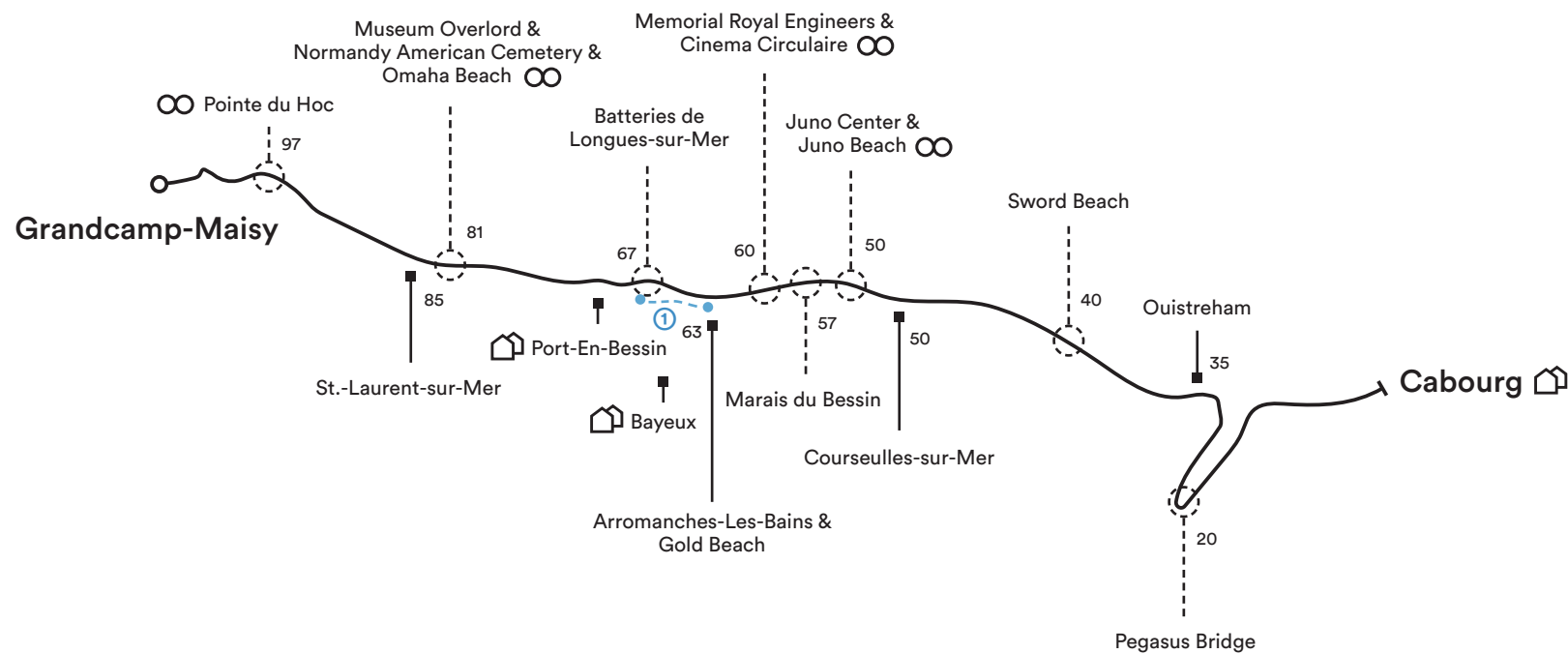
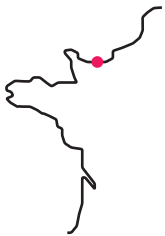
This Belle Epoque paradise is one of the most prestigious and chic resorts in France. Visit Villa Strassburger, Villa Montebello or the casino and walk along the Promenade des Planches.

What didn’t make the list but is definitely worth visiting: Cabourg with its classic casino and Pointe de Cabourg.

Reach **Fly to Deauville or Caen, located 25 km from Cabourg and 35 km from Deauville. Le Havre-Octeville has no scheduled flights anymore, only charter flights. You’ll find a train station in Le Havre and a train line runs from Cabourg to Houlgate, Villers-sur-Mers, Blonville-sur-Mer and Trouville-Deauville. A highway connects Le Havre with Caen, approximately 10 km from the coast, providing great access to the beach resorts.**

Stage 8

Cabourg > Grandcamp-Maisy



The beaches of D-day

No region in the world is as connected to a single day in history as the Normandy beaches. This stage passes by four of the five D-Day landing beaches: Sword Beach (Ouistreham), Juno Beach (Courseulles-sur-Mer), Gold Beach (Arromanches-les-Bains) and Omaha Beach (Colleville-sur-Mer), from east to west. Utah Beach (north of Sainte-Marie-du-Mont) is separated from the four others by the Carentan nature reserve and is part of Stage 9. On every beach you'll find memorials and museums, such as the Normandy American Cemetery and Pointe du Hoc, commemorating one of the most significant days in history. We have located some of these pivotal moments on the map on the following page. Contrary to what their name implies, Gold Beach and Omaha Beach were partly made up of cliffs, making the landings complicated and the toll deadly. Today they are good locations for great hikes that give a gorgeous view of the surroundings. Despite the very vivid memory of WWII that is tied to this stretch of land, the beach resorts allow for great family holidays. The city of Bayeux, a few kilometres inland, will invite you to step almost 1,000 years back in time to the feats of William the Conqueror, depicted by the famous Bayeux Tapestry.

See **Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial**


When visiting Normandy, you cannot bypass this impressive sight, with its extraordinary décor of green and white.. Pay homage to the thousands of men and women who gave their lives for our freedom. The Omaha Beach Memorial, which is 2.5 km further west, is also definitely worth a visit.

Pointe du Hoc

If there is one location that visibly shows the scars of WWII, then it's this one. The pointy rock was heavily bombarded because of its strategic position. Today, the bomb craters and bunkers give you a small sense of the fierce battle that once raged here.

Memorial Royal Engineers and Arromanches 360

This memorial to the engineers who constructed the harbour, along with the circular cinema in Arromanches, is a unique and moving way to relive the first 100 days of the Normandy landings.

 **Reach** Fly to Caen, 10 km from Ouistreham and 55 km from Grandcamp-Maisy, which is the endpoint of the stage. A highway connects Caen to Carentan via Bayeux, running parallel to the coast, providing good access to the seaside resorts. There are train stations in Bayeux and Carentan.

Stroll **Bayeux**

We cheated a bit here: Bayeux is not a seaside town. The city is located 7 km away from Gold Beach (or Arromanches-les-Bains). While the sandy coastline hosts plenty of enjoyable beach resorts, the real charm of this area is found in Bayeux, which was spared from the 1944 bombings. Bayeux is world famous for the Bayeux Tapestry, an embroidery that is 70 metres (!) long, which famously depicts the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Bayeux has even more medieval beauty in store. Stroll around the Bayeux Mill, close to the Office du Tourisme, where the river Aure crosses the city. The many charming cobbled bridges make it a scenic location in which to stop for food and drinks. Other gems are the Notre-Dame Cathedral and Le Hêtre Pleureur, one of the most remarkable trees in France.

Hike **① Gold Beach to Port-en-Bessin-Huppain (11 km)**

What? – Hike on top of the Gold Beach cliffs, past bunkers with cannons, overlooking the Mulberry Harbour.

How? – Start in Arromanches at the car park along the Rue des Frères Victor (49.340776, -0.629400) in order to climb and follow the cliffs. Beware, often there is no perfect single trail along the cliffs, as the farmed fields block access. You'll have to make some small detours to get back to the coastline. Cap Manvieux after 1 km is a great spot to have an (early) short break (49.344919, -0.640512). Here you have the closest view of the Mulberry Harbour. Five kilometres further on you'll find the series of German gun emplacements of Batterie de Longues-sur-Mer (49.343230, -0.691425), which has a car park along the D104. About 4.5 km further on you'll find Port-en-Bessin-Huppain, where you can enjoy food or drinks. The hike finishes on the right bank of the port at Port-en-Bessin-Huppain, at the car park near Rue du Castel (49.349426, -0.754687).

② Omaha Beach to Pointe du Hoc (5.5 km)

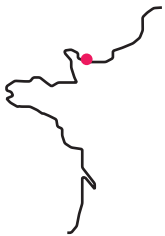
What? – Explore the clifftop walk between Omaha Beach and Pointe du Hoc, passing vast fields on your left.

How? – Start at Omaha Beach, Sector Charlie, at the car park at the end of Rue de la Percée in Vierville-sur-Mer (49.380173, -0.904331). Start hiking with the sea on your right-hand side as the beach scene transforms into cliffs. You'll pass the Batterie of Widerstandsnest 73, which offers a great view of Omaha Beach and the outline of the Gold Beach cliffs. Continue along the *sentier du littoral* between the campsite and the sea until you turn right after approx. 5 km on to Hameau Lefèvre Street (49.391934, -0.969955). There is no dedicated parking space, but you can park along the street as long as you don't block farmers' access to their fields. The street offers a great variety of B&Bs and places to stay.

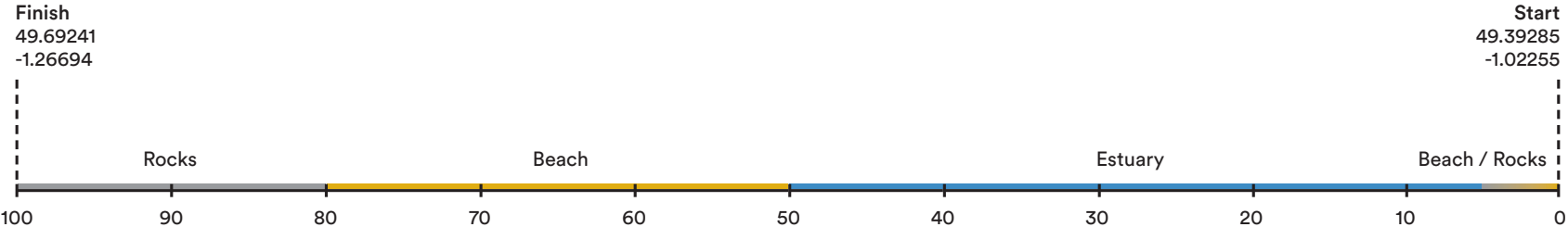
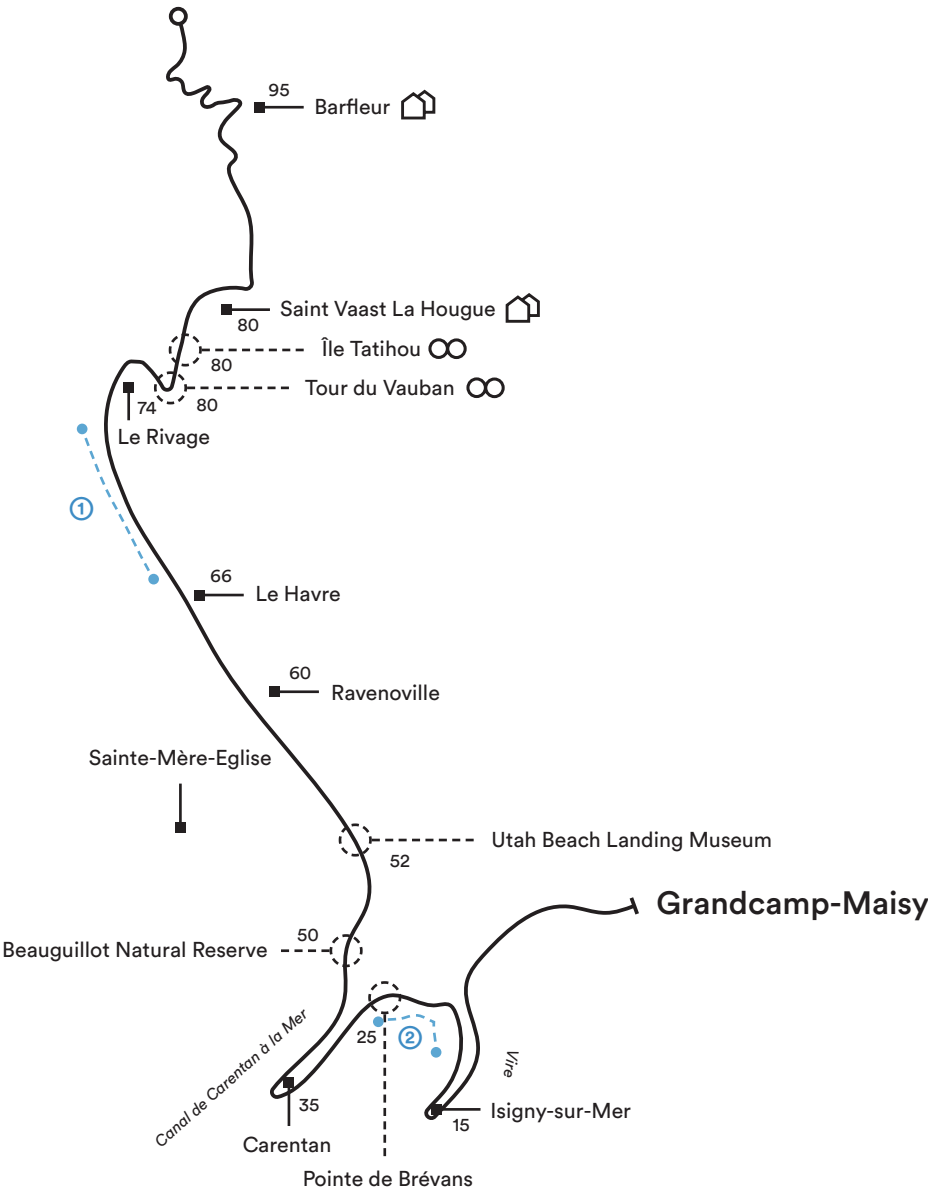


Stage 9

Grandcamp-Maisy > Phare de Gatteville



Phare de Gateville ∞



The charming villages on the east side of Cotentin

The 100 km included in this stage, running from Grandcamp-Maisy to Phare de Gatteville on the east side of the Cotentin peninsula, have a lot of variety in store. The polders and wetlands around the river Vire and the Canal de Carentan à la Mer provide inviting scenery for family-friendly trips by foot or by bike since the roads are flat and have little traffic. The coastline further to the northwest between Utah Beach and Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue stands out because of its abundance of sandy beaches and lack of tourists, as the majority travel to the other D-Day landing beaches further east. Between Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue and Gatteville, the shoreline becomes rocky again. If you want to relive some iconic history, the Utah Beach Landing Museum is a must-visit. Further north you'll find the older villages and ports of Barfleur and Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue, two of the most beautiful villages in France, both of which have played an important role in the history of Normandy. If you are looking for a culinary treat, you must try the oysters at Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue and the 'beautiful, blonde and wild' Barfleur mussels. Make sure that you get a taste of both of these local delicacies. Finally, architecture lovers shouldn't miss the Phare de Gatteville, one of the most spectacular lighthouses in the world.

See **Utah Beach landing**

A site dedicated to the Utah Beach landing. You'll easily spend half a day here, as it has a WWII themed restaurant and bar, a museum and a life-sized replica of a war vessel set in the sand.

Île Tatihou

Tatihou is a small island off the coast of Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue. Go here to see the famous fortifications, botanical garden, maritime museum and ornithological reserve. At low tide you can reach the island by foot; at high tide you can take the famous amphibious boat.

Phare de Gatteville

One of the highest and most remarkable lighthouses in the world, set in a stunning location.

Hike **① Quettehou bay (6.5 km)**

What? – Walk along the sandy road a few metres from the water of Quettehou bay with a view of the Tour Vauban and the mussel banks.

How? – Park your car on the left bank of the river Sinope, as close to the sea as possible (49.518606, -1.289671). Take the path adjacent to the sandy Hameau Simon Street. The road will change names from Hameau Simon to La Maison Rouge, Le Marais and finally Maison Mon Jacques. Finish at the church of Notre-Dame de Morsalines (49.572791, -1.311353), after you've taken a left and then a right turn coming from the beach at Morsalines.

② Left bank of the Vire to Pointe de Brévands (7.5 km)

What? – Walk across polders alongside the river Vire.


How? – Park your car at the side of the road near the crossroads of Rue des Salines and Polder du Flet (49.324131, -1.131643). Walk towards the water and keep it on your right-hand side while you continue your hike across the polders to finish at Pointe de Brévands.

Stroll **Barfleur**

Classified as one of the most beautiful villages in France, Barfleur is known for its picturesque granite houses and old church. Do not forget to sample the famous Barfleur blonde mussels.

Saint-Vaast-de-la-Hougue

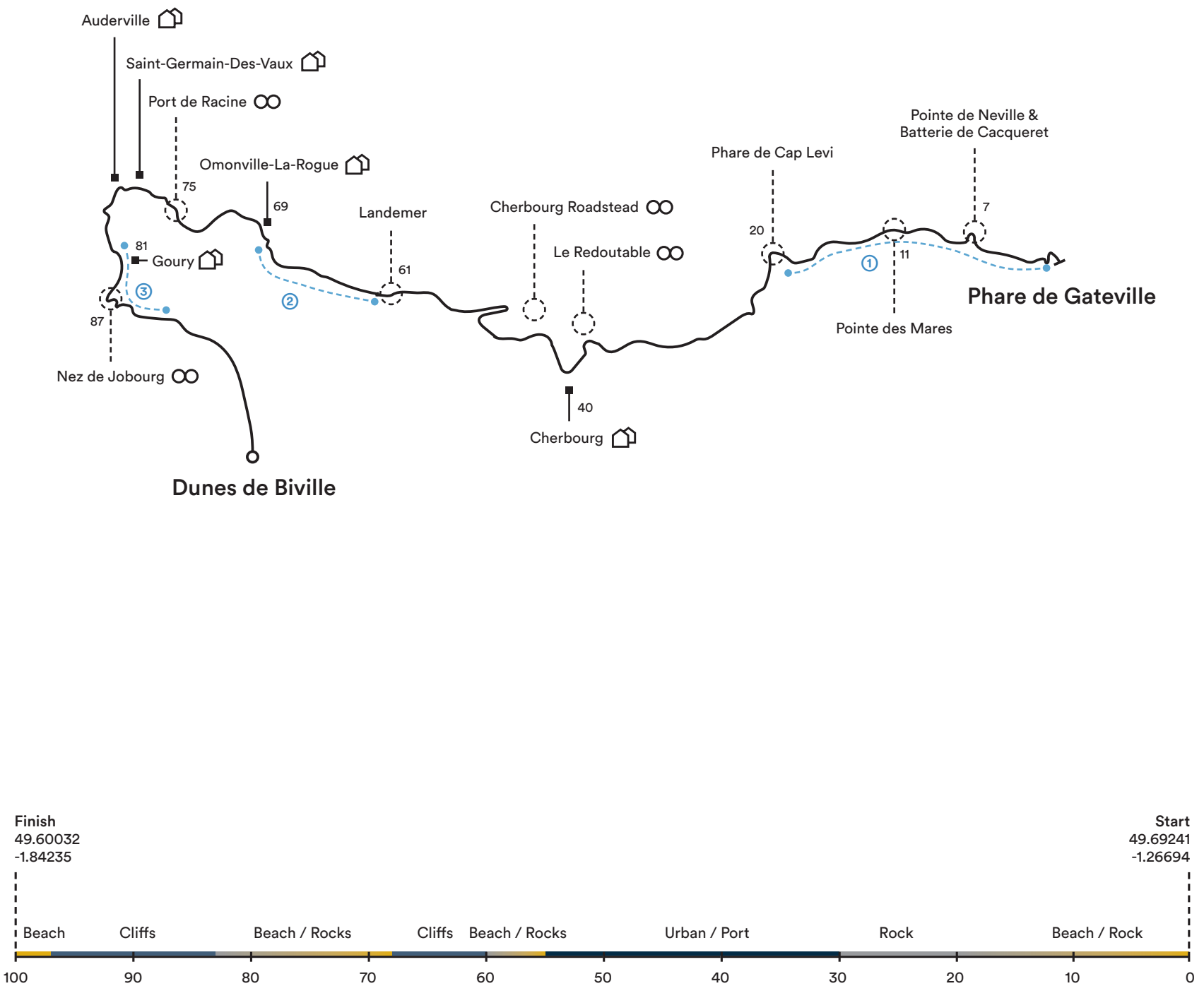
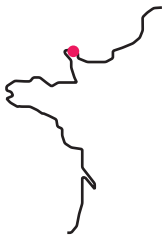
Elected in 2019 as the favourite village of the French, Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue is well known for its oysters, the Vauban ramparts and its set of towers, which are both UNESCO heritage sites.

 **Reach** The Cotentin peninsula is relatively isolated, which is often the case with peninsulas or islands. The closest train stations can be found in Carentan and Valognes. The highway follows the same trajectory as the train that connects Carentan to Cherbourg via Valognes. A regional road runs from Carentan to Saint-Vaast and Barfleur. The nearest airports are in Caen (60 km from Carentan and 100 km from Barfleur) or Cherbourg (50 km from Carentan and 30 km from Barfleur).



Stage 10

Phare de Gatteville > Dunes de Biville



Cap Hague, Cherbourg and the incredible trails in north Cotentin

One could call the north coast of the Cotentin peninsula the end of the world if it wasn't for the massive port of Cherbourg elegantly interrupting the stunning and wildly diverse nature. Throughout history, Cherbourg was of incredible military importance – both during Napoleonic times and in WWII. This can be illustrated by Cherbourg harbour, which is the largest artificial harbour in the world. This 100 km stretch covers some of the most incredible hikes on the Atlantic coast and takes us through some very different types of scenery. In the east you'll find sandy dunes around the Batterie de Caqueret, between Phare de Gatteville and Phare du Cap Levi. In the northwest the landscape is completely different, with rolling green hills and stunning blue water around the cliffs in Landemer. When approaching the impressive Nez de Jobourg, the coast becomes rockier and increasingly dusty. The northwest peak, Cape Hague, offers cute little villages that are sheltered by the beautiful green hills, such as Goury, Auderville and Saint-Germain-des-Vaux. It's an incredible area in which to fully immerse yourself in beautiful nature and find peace and silence. If you have some time to spare, don't miss Port Racine. Join the locals as they jump off one of the piers. If you're looking for hidden beaches, Anse du Culeron is greatly recommended.

- See

Roadstead of Cherbourg and Le Redoutable

Impressive offshore walls protect the port of Cherbourg, where you'll find a 128 m long retired U-boat housing a museum.
- Nez de Jobourg

A granite cliff towering 125 m above the sea, granting a view of the ocean and a glimpse of the Channel Islands.
- Port Racine

One of the little ports in this area. What it lacks in grandeur, it definitely makes up for in poetic beauty.

- Stroll

Cherbourg

Cherbourg has a military past as the main base for French submarines and it was one of the key ports during Napoleon's reign. The port was also the gateway to America, with its transatlantic harbour station being built in 1933. Don't miss Cité de la Mer, the Hauts de Capel park (which has a stunning sea view), the Ecomuseum of Cotentin or the Ravalet Castle.
- The villages surrounding le Cap de la Hague

Jobourg, Goury, Auderville, Saint-Germain-des-Vaux, Omonville-la-Rogue ... It is hard to pick one, as this area is brimming with charming villages containing little houses built out of slate and clay.

- Reach

The peninsula is fairly isolated, except for a central highway (N13) running through the middle and a train line with a station in Cherbourg. The east, towards Barfleur, is reasonably accessible by a two-lane road, but the west, towards Cap de la Hague, is poorly connected. The nearest airport is located in Cherbourg (30 km from Barfleur and 30 km from Cap de la Hague).

- Hike

① Landemer (7 km)

What?

One of the most beautiful and remote hikes in the book. Don't miss this opportunity to lose yourself in an adventure.

How?

Park your car at the car park at Le Landemer (49.683368, -1.782685). You'll find a path next to the observatory platform, where you can catch a glimpse of the rest of your hike on your left. Beware, this location is very remote and you might have virtually no phone reception. So consider taking some safety measures and letting someone know that you are taking this hike. You can exit the track at La Pissotière after 1.5 km, at le Doué du Moulin after 3.7 km, at Baie de Quervièrre after 4.7 km (where there is a car park) and at the ancient fort in Omonville-la-Rogue (49.702862, -1.832564).
- ② Nez de Jobourg (11 km)

What?

This one also fits into the category of most beautiful and remote hikes, but stands out because of its rougher and rockier character.

How?

Park your car at the car park at Baie d'Écalgrain, a popular spot for parapenters (49.690304, -1.935074). Walk along the GR, passing the hidden beach of Culeron (800 m), the Nez de Voidries with a nearby parking spot (at 2 km) and the Nez Jobourg (2.6 km). The trail is quite technical and demanding, so having a plan B for a shortcut back to society might be helpful. You can cut the hike short at 4 km near Baie de la Gravelette, where a road makes a sharp turn left up the hill. You can also park your car at 6.5 km at the car park on Route des Moulinettes (49.666161, -1.895507). If you finish the entire hike, you'll end up at Plage de Vauville, with parking facilities at the end of À Crecque (49.643038, -1.853706).
- ③ Caqueret dunes (7 km)

What?

Walk between small dunes, rocky arms stretching into the sea, local creeks and ponds and maybe spot a seal along the way.

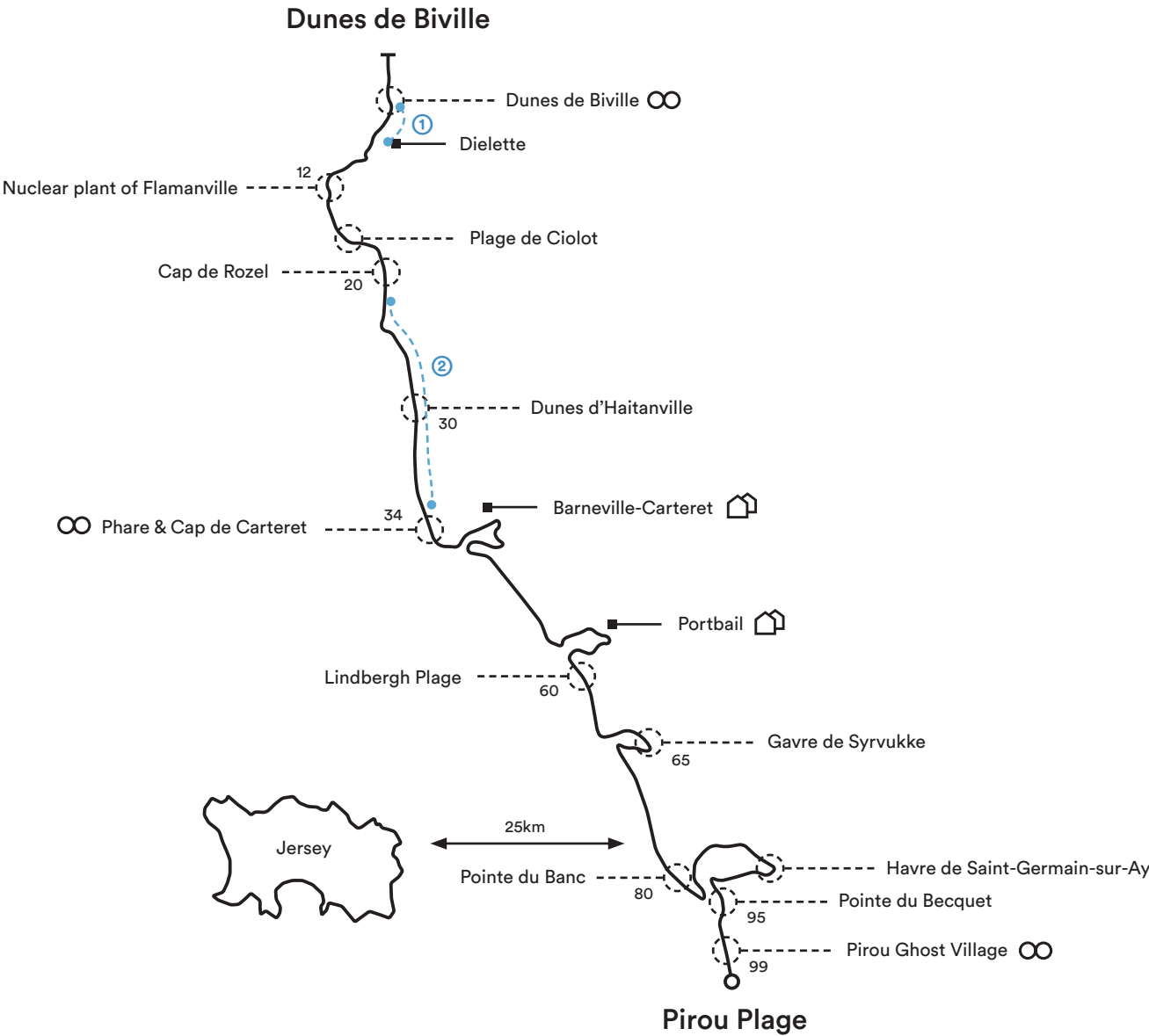
How?

Start at the eastern end of Anse de Gattemare (49.666161, -1.895507). You can park your car where the Chemin de Gattemare makes a curve. Finish at the car park of Pointe des Mares (49.705157, -1.381007). You can easily ramp up your hike to 15 km if you aim for Phare du Cap Levi as the finishing line. The scenery will be similar but slightly more interrupted by other hikers.



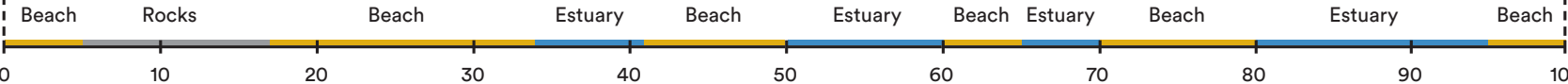
Stage 11

Dunes de Biville > Pirou Plage



Start
N 49.60032°
E -1.84235°

Finish
N 49.16551°
E -1.59857°



The dunes and endless beaches of west Cotentin

Stage 11 still has the same remoteness as its predecessor, but it exchanges its rocky surface for a mostly sandy landscape. We'll be travelling along the west side of the Cotentin peninsula, which boasts some of the longest beaches and vastest dunes of our entire journey. The hundreds of hectares of the Dunes de Biville and Dunes d'Haitainville nature reserves host 100 m high peaks and, with their multicoloured vegetation, are a feast for your eyes, making this the perfect setting for a unique hike. Closer to the water, you will find unparalleled peacefulness and solitude on the wide beaches that stretch for kilometres, with the longest one reaching a whopping 13 km between Cap du Rozel and Carteret. Further south, you'll discover the first of the havres, natural harbours where the rivers empty into the sea. There is little habitation around and, despite the incredible beaches, it seems as if few tourists have found their way here. Portbail and Carteret are the only villages worth mentioning; the first being a small village, while the latter is a small town, that owes its fame to its stunning Belle Epoque villas.

See Cap Carteret

Follow the Sentier des Douaniers around the great cape to discover a sweeping crescent of golden sand sheltered by the Haitainville dunes on the other side.

Tanks in Dunes de Biville

Find these rusty WWII remains in some of the most spectacular and remote dunes in France.

Pirou ghost village

Stroll through this abandoned beach resort with 25 houses, adorned with graffiti by local artists.

Stroll Portbail

A tiny village that is perfectly located to see the rise and fall of the tides on one of the many terraces at the foot of the two churches.

Carteret

Carteret is the largest town in this stage. Famous for its Belle Epoque villas, it's also known for the blue-white beach cabins at Plage de la Potinière and Cap de Carteret, which is close to the Sentier des Douaniers.

Reach

The west side of this large peninsula is relatively isolated from the world. However, there is a central highway (N13) running through the middle of the *presqu'île* and a train line with stations in Cherbourg, Sottevast and Valognes. The nearest airport is located in Cherbourg (15 km from Biville, 20 km from Carteret and 50 km from Pirou, as the crow flies).

Hike ① Dunes de Biville (5 km)

What? – Explore the sandy wilderness of the Biville dunes on foot.
How? – There are two big car parks in the heart of the Dunes de Biville wilderness. The northern one is close to both the beach and to Plage de Biville (49.609240, -1.841340). The most southern parking facility is only 600 m away from the Vasteville bunkers (49.599473, -1.834294). If you start from the first one, then the hike will be 2 km shorter. If you prefer to do the full hike, start at Plage de Vauville and park the car along La Mielle in La Hague (49.632546, -1.849284). Follow the street until it changes into a single trail, which is where the hike starts.

② Haitainville (12 km)

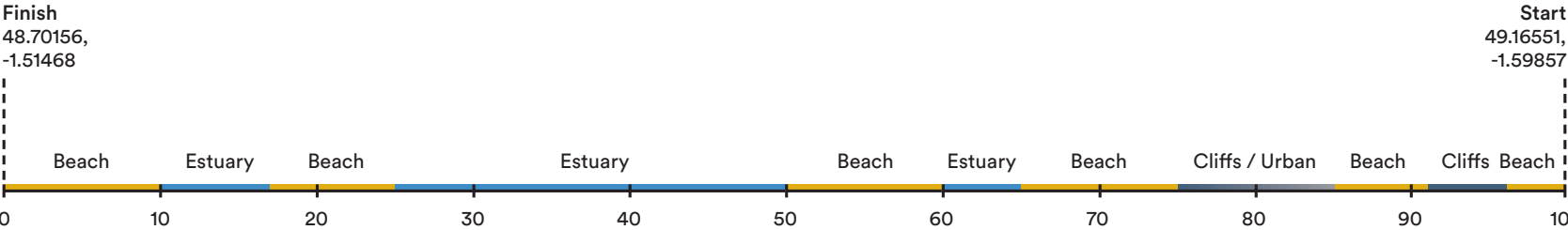
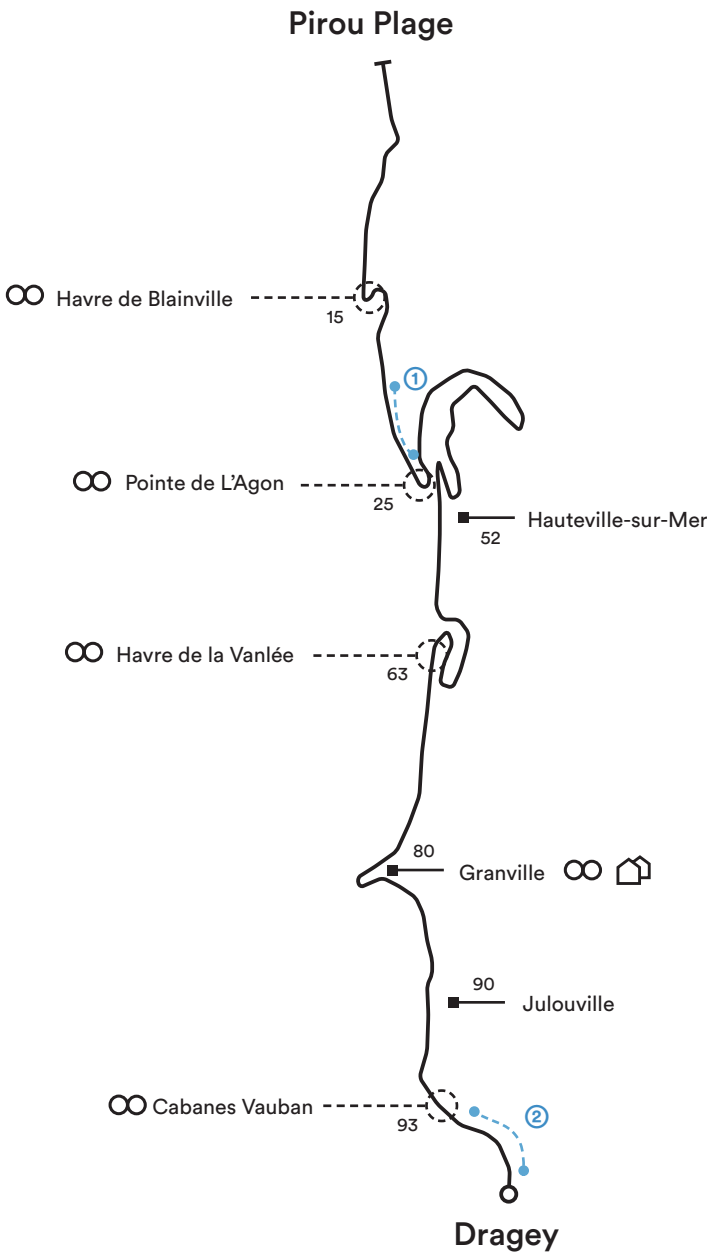
What? – A hike along the dunes or the beach following a clifly single trail and with a view of Carteret as the cherry on the top.
How? – Start at the foot of Cap du Rozel at the end of Chemin de Trompé-Souris (49.471858, -1.839244). If you opt for the beach version of this hike, after 12 km you'll end up at Plage de la Vieille Église, with its nearby parking at the end of Route de la Vieille Église (49.375665, -1.805387). If you feel ready to tackle the dunes – go for it – the kilometres and effort can sharply increase. If you want to shorten the hike, there are car parks at Route des Mieilles in Surtainville at 2.5 km (49.456345, -1.826543), at the D131 in Baubigny at 5 km (49.429452, -1.820113) or at the D242 in Haitainville at 8.5 km (49.399608, -1.820643).

As an extra – and a must in our honest opinion – you can add the Sentier des Douaniers around the Cap de Carteret to your hike. Access to the path can be found at the aforementioned parking facility.



Stage 12

Pirou Plage > Dragey



Les havres and Granville, the most fragrant town in Normandy

This stage is all about natural treasures. Don't leave the southern part of west Cotentin without exploring one of the natural harbours, which shelter the estuaries from the sea with large dune arms instead of concrete dykes. Visitors are spoilt for choice, with innumerable hiking possibilities and a great deal of wildlife to admire. Pointe d'Agon, Havre de la Vanlée and Havre de Blainville all have great walks that will whisk you away from the stresses and strains of the daily grind. After hundreds of kilometres of endless beaches and dunes, a rock formation surprisingly stretches out into the sea, marking the northern part of Mont-Saint-Michel bay. On top of the rocks sits Granville. Famous for its cod and shellfish, its Haute-Ville city centre harbours attractive houses, great museums and even the former residence of the couturier Christian Dior. You'll be treated to more beaches further south until you reach Carolles, where the Sentier des Douaniers (GR233) guides us over coastal cliffs to a great lookout point for hostile attacks. Vauban built his granite cabanes along the coastal path and they offer an awe-inspiring view of Mont-Saint-Michel.

See The havres

The natural harbours formed by sand and dunes, which protect inland estuaries, are the pinnacle of west Cotentin. Don't miss Pointe d'Agon, Havre de Blainville or Havre de la Vanlée, all of which have incredible walks amid stunning fauna and flora.

Musée Dior

This unique museum is dedicated to Christian Dior and has a beautiful garden and access to the cliffs. It is a great starting point for a walk to Haute-Ville.

Cabanes Vauban

This humble cabanes were used by guardians to spot smugglers or enemies from far away. It is a great location from which to take in the glorious view of Mont-Saint-Michel bay.

Stroll Granville

Whether you want to explore the Chausey Islands, observe rare species of birds in the nature reserves or stroll through Musée Christian Dior and its gardens, Granville is definitely worth your while. Its Haute-Ville marks the northern end of Mont-Saint-Michel bay, with its incredible houses lining the cliffs and the museums of Richard Anacréon and Vieux Granville. Succulent seafood is the order of the day, as Granville is the most important port in France for all kinds of shellfish. It is also renowned for cod, with the Marité – the last wooden cod-fishing boat – attesting to its rich past.

Reach During this stage you'll still feel the isolation of the Cotentin peninsula. However, civilisation and beach resorts are gradually popping up, with Granville being the biggest city of the stage. Granville has its own train station, but it is the only beach resort with rail access. The closest airports are either Caen or Saint-Malo, the latter offering international flights. The nearest highway is the A84 connecting Avranches (Stage 13) to Caen.

Hike ① Dunes of Pointe d'Agon (4 km)

What? – Walk on the dunes along the beach towards the lighthouse of Pointe d'Agon.

How? – Park at the crossing of Voie Communcal Charrier de la Haute and Avenue des Dunes, Agon-Coutainville (49.030868, -1.595682). Walk towards the sea, follow the beach keeping the sea on your right and march up the dunes when you find a path. Follow this all the way to the sandy point of Agon passing sheep, a monument and finally the little lighthouse. If you just want to see the lighthouse you can park a lot closer as the 'Route de la Pointe' leads all the way to the tip.

② Cabanes Vauban (5.5 km)

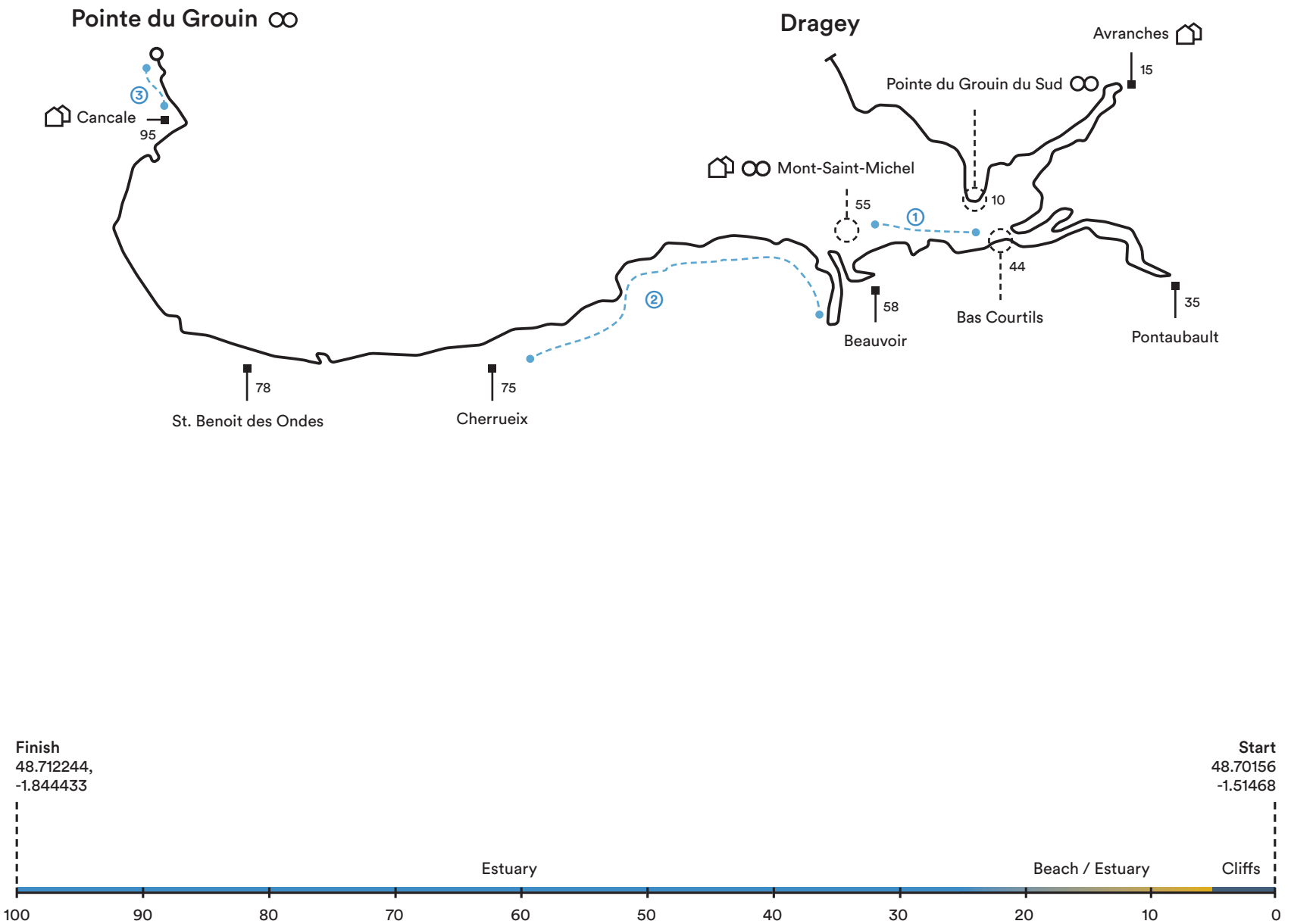
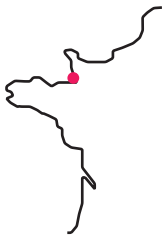
What? – Walk the cliffs along the 'Sentiers des Douaniers' passing the Cabanes Vauban and marvel at the Mont-Saint-Michel.

How? – Park your car at the 'parking des falaises' at Carolles (48.758155, -1.572185) at the end of Chemin des Pecheurs, Carolles. Where the beach turns into rock you'll find a path up, the GR 223; 5.5 km further you'll find again sand beneath your feet at the Plage de Saint-Michel where you can park your car at the crossing of Boulevard Stanislas and Rue du Moulin (48.729924, -1.528739). Along your route you'll find the three cabanes after respectively 2 and 4 km and the last one right before the end.



Stage 13

Dragey > Pointe du Grouin



The bay of Mont-Saint-Michel 〰️

No village in the world can top Mont-Saint-Michel for uniqueness: a mystically isolated village built on a granite hill with a majestic abbey towering over the bay to top it off. The silhouette of the famous village dominates this 100 km stretch of coastline from Dragey to Pointe du Grouin, the rocky finger marking the western end of the bay. The best spots from which to fully take in this wonderful bay are Avranches, a city sitting on a hill, which has marvellous churches, ramparts and gardens, and Pointe du Grouin du Sud, which is situated to the east of its bigger brother, the above-mentioned Pointe du Grouin. With its famously strong tides, the sea retreats for huge distances twice a day, revealing a seabed of wetlands. Between Plage de Dragey and Cherrueix, beach lovers will have to make do with typical riverbanks and no sand. However, west of Cherrueix, the city of the wind, you'll find occasional beaches at Hirel, Saint-Benoît-des-Ondes and Le-Vivier-sur-Mer. Further northwest you'll pass Cancale, sitting on rocky cliffs, with a stunning view of the bay and the famous oyster banks.

🕒 See Mont-Saint-Michel 〰️

This incredible little village built on a rocky island is considered to be one of the wonders of the world and it is definitely one of the most stunning sights in France. Despite the many tourists, this magical island is a must-visit.

Pointe du Grouin du Sud 〰️

The best spot from which to see Mont-Saint-Michel.

Pointe du Grouin 〰️

The unofficial start of Brittany, this is a rocky finger pointing into the sea, with Mont-Saint-Michel bay in the east and the Emerald Coast in the west. Start in Cancale to hike up here.

🏠 Stroll Avranches 〰️

A fortified city sitting on a granite hill overlooking the entire Mont-Saint-Michel bay. Discover its gardens, cobbled streets and famous churches.

Cancale 〰️

Known for its oysters, you'll find plenty of seafood restaurants around the charming port. Don't miss La Ferme Marine, a local exhibition run by a family, or La Cancalaise, a replica of an old fishing boat.

📍 Reach Mont-Saint-Michel 〰️

Mont-Saint-Michel is a magnet for millions of tourists a year, therefore travel facilities have been built to ensure that it can be reached easily. You can find train stations in Avranches and Pontorson-Mont-Saint-Michel (6 km from the bridge) and TGV stations in Dol-de-Bretagne, La Fresnais and La Gouesnière-Cancale. The nearest airport is located in Saint-Malo. There is a highway running from Caen to Avranches, moving away from the sea towards Rennes around Avranches.

⚓ Hike ① Wetlands to Mont-Saint-Michel (8.5 km) 〰️ ⚓

What? – At low tide, walk through the seabed wetlands all the way to the island, then return via the bridge. We would definitely recommend that you rely on an experienced guide.
How? – Start at La Barre in Courtils, at the corner of Rue du Mont-Saint-Michel and Route de Roche Torin (48.631012, -1.436149). A straight path will take you to the base of the hill 6 km down the road. There are no parking facilities at Mont-Saint-Michel itself, only at the car park in Beauvoir, which is 2.5 km further along (48.610742, -1.506126).

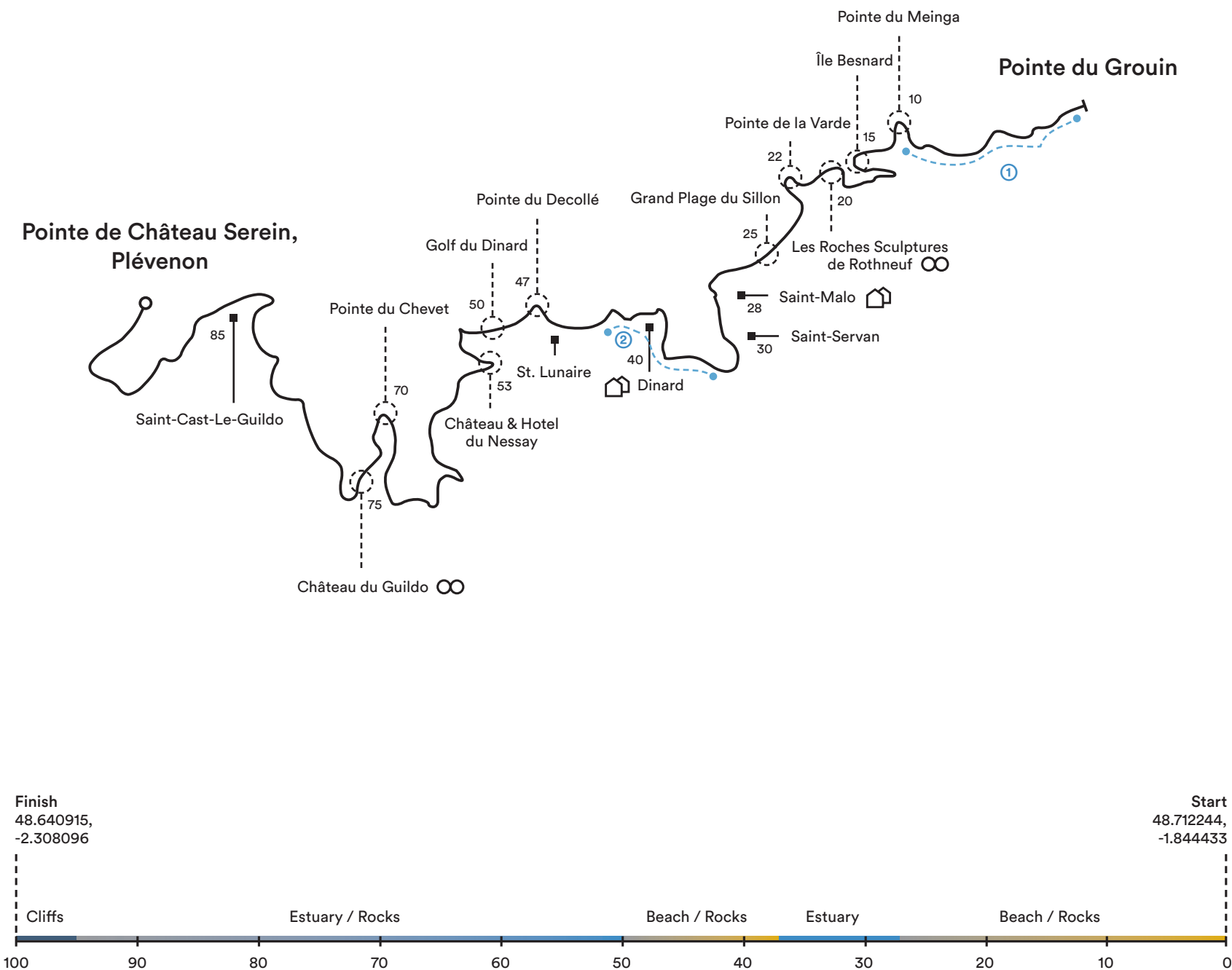
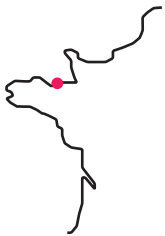
② **Digue l'Ouest to Digue de la Duchesse-Anne (15 km) 〰️**
What? – Walk 'next' to the Mont-Saint-Michel along the dam that has been protecting hundreds of fields from the floods for centuries. Meanwhile, you'll cross the border from Normandy into Brittany.
How? – Park your car at the end of the asphalt on Saint-Joseph Street (48.618095, -1.516092) and follow the trail marked with the red-white GR symbol (the path without trees that runs almost to Mont-Saint-Michel, but deviates with a sharp angle). Keep following the dam, with the fields on your left and the bay on your right, for several kilometres. When you see the Sainte-Anne chapel, you're only 3.5 km from the centre of Cherrueix, your endpoint. Finish at the car park near the beach at Rue de la Cale (48.606402, -1.710797). It's not super easy to shorten the walk; the best way would be to walk from Cherrueix to the chapel.

③ **Cancale to Pointe du Grouin (6.5 km) 〰️ ⚓⚓⚓**
What? – Enjoy an adventurous hike along the Cancale oyster banks with a view of Mont-Saint-Michel bay.
How? – Start at the car par near the monument 'À ses Enfants Morts pour la France' in Cancale (48.671663, -1.851607) or park your car along Rue des Parcs (48.671579, -1.851038). Start your hike from the monument, with an incredible view of the oyster banks. The route takes you along the Pointe de la Chaîne, with a view of the rocky island Île des Rimaux and its fort after almost 2 km, and finishes at Pointe du Grouin after 6.5 km.




Stage 14

Pointe du Grouin > Pointe de Château Serein, Plévenon



The pirates of Saint-Malo and the villas of Dinard

The Emerald Coast is dominated by two of the most famous cities on the Atlantic Ocean coastline, Dinard and Saint-Malo. Although they are only separated by a small estuary, the vibe is very different on either side of the Bassin de la Rance. Dinard is elegant and chic, with the densest collection of Belle Epoque villas we’ve ever encountered. Marvel at the impressive houses while following a concrete path that circles the rocky shores of the cities, only a few metres from the pounding waves. An exciting and slippery walk if you dare. With its big fortified walls, pirate history and little rocky islands with forts, Saint-Malo boasts a military vibe and attracts many tourists. This first full stage in Brittany is very rocky, a big contrast to the sandy west Cotentin we have just left. Instead of long beaches, you’ll now find rocky bays, little creeks and pointy peninsulas, such as the Pointe du Décolle – west of Dinard – or the Pointe du Meinga, Île Besnard and Pointe de la Varde – east of Saint-Malo.

 **See**


The main attractions are to be found in Saint-Malo and Dinard, the jewels of the Emerald Coast.

Sculptured rocks of Rothéneuf

Not far from Saint-Malo you’ll find a coastal sculpture garden with 300 sculptures carved out of the rocks. Although it is unique in its kind, the outside exhibition feels a bit like a tourist trap.

Château du Guildo


The ruins of a 12th-century castle in Créhen, overlooking the estuary.

 **Stroll Saint-Malo**

The fortified city of Saint-Malo, which is perched on a rock, is surrounded by 1.8 km long ramparts, which you can walk along from beginning to end while enjoying stunning views of the sea and the Channel Islands. Saint-Malo is also known as the Corsair City, with famous inhabitants such as the pirate Robert Surcouf and the explorer Jacques Cartier. Enjoy the picturesque cobbled streets, impressive ship-owners’ houses and a castle, which hosts the Museum of the History of the Town and the Pays Malouin. At low tide you should visit the National Fort, built according to plans made by Vauban, or Chateaubriand’s tomb on the islet of Le Grand Bé, which are situated on two of the rocky little islands just off the shore. Its ‘intra muros’, the old part of the town, is perfect for a stroll and you can make a culinary stop near Place Chateaubriand or Place du Marché aux Légumes.

Dinard

Nicknamed the ‘Nice of the north’ or the ‘Pearl of the Emerald Coast’, Dinard is one of the most prestigious resorts in France, with 407 listed Belle Epoque villas, such as Villa les Roches Dunes or Le Grand Hôtel. One of the best ways of getting a feel for the city’s character is to stroll along the Promenade du Clair de Lune and continue along the Promenade Robert Surcouf.

 **Hike**

① Pointe du Grouin to Île Besnard (15 km)


What? – Hike along the first kilometres of the gorgeous Emerald Coast from Pointe du Grouin to Île Besnard, where you’ll spot the rocks of Rothéneuf.

How? – Park at Pointe du Grouin along Pointe du Grouin Street (48.707154, -1.846531) and start walking along the west bank of the cape, following the path that hugs the coastline. Go around the Pointe du Meinga and end the route by circling the peninsula of Île Besnard. You can park your car at the car park at Plage des Chevretons (48.691313, -1.945459).

② Promenade du Claire de Lune and more (6 km)

What? – Enjoy a unique walk along the rocky shores of the city of Dinard at the foot of hundreds of magnificent Belle Epoque villas.

How? – Start at the Plage du Prieuré, where you can park at Place du Général de Gaulle (48.627771, -2.055496). The first part of the famous Promenade du Claire de Lune is a 1.3 km stretch, until you reach l’Embarcadère de l’anse du Bec-de-la-Vallée, a small bay. Continue along the Promenade Robert Surcouf, which changes into the Chemin de Ronde du Moulinet before spilling out onto the beach at Plage de l’Écluse (2.8 km). Continue on the Chemin de Ronde de la Malouine – passing the Villa les Roches Brunes (3.4 km) – until you get to Plage de Saint-Énogat (4.5 km), before taking the Corniche de la Goule aux Fées and finishing at the Plage du Port Blanc (6 km). You can park along the Rue du Sergent Boulanger (48.635920, -2.079347).

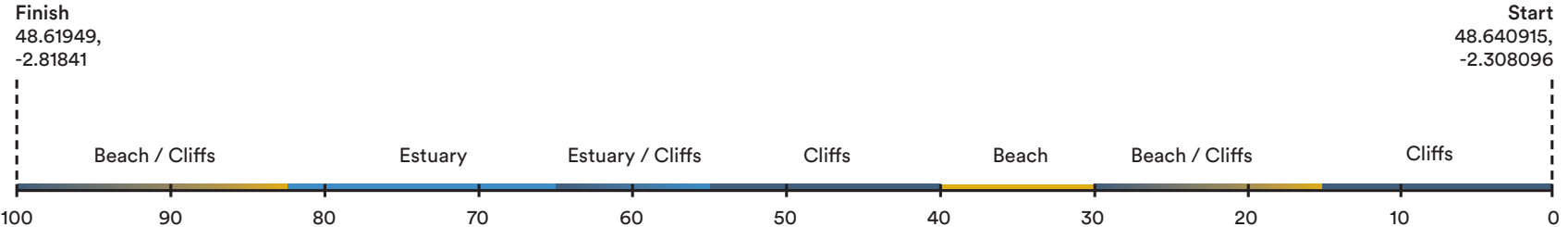
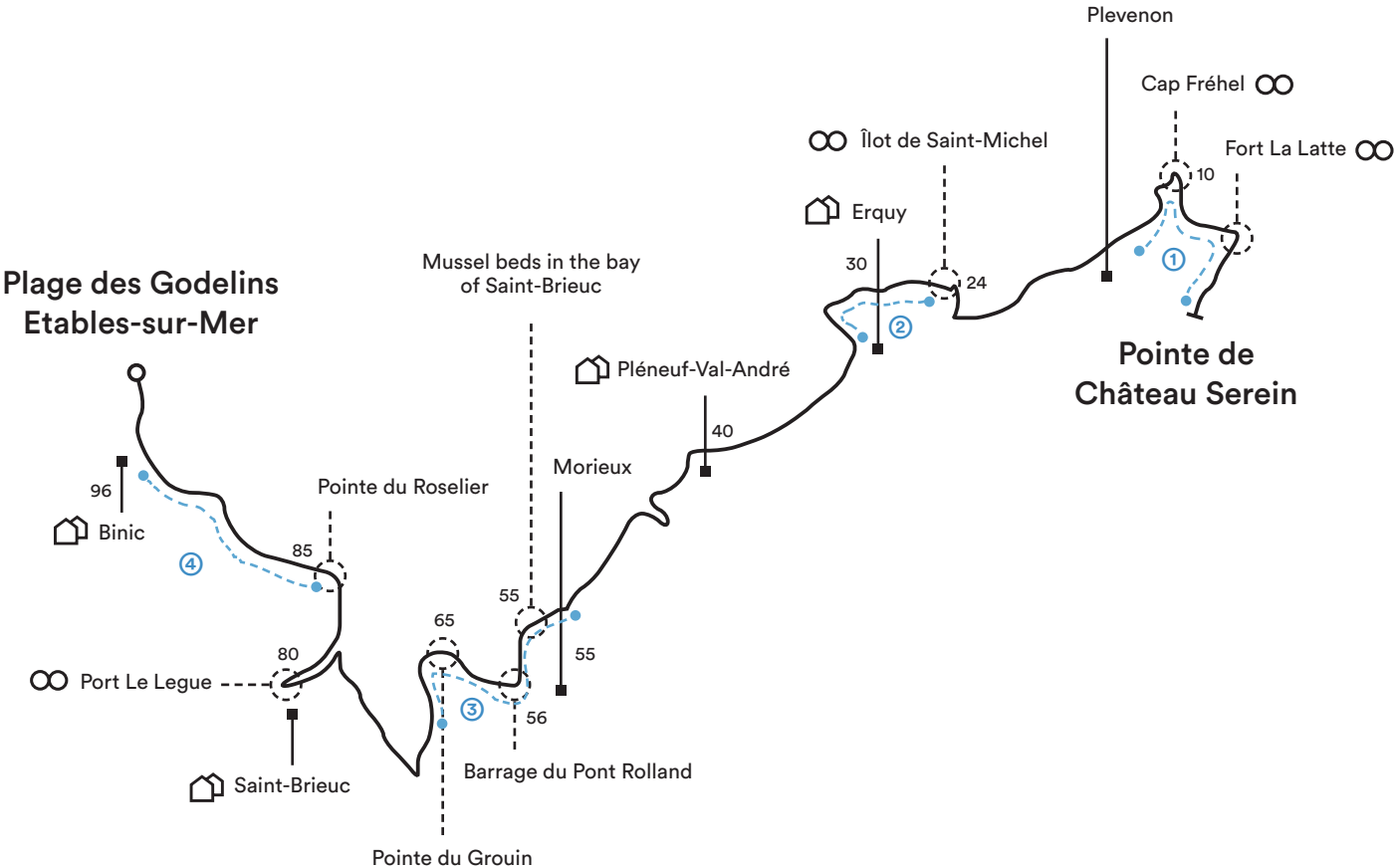
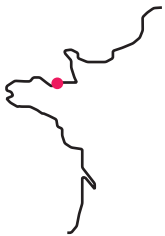
 **Reach**

The eastern part of this stage, with Saint-Malo as the central hub, is better connected, with both an airport and a train station. The part between Saint-Brieuc and Saint-Malo is harder to reach, with the nearest highway 15–20 km from the shore.



Stage 15

Pointe de Château Serein, Plévenon > Plage des Godelins, Etables-sur-Mer



The Emerald Coast of Cap Fréhel and Erquy

The wide variety of the Côtes d'Armor coast is clearly illustrated in Stage 15, with a good dose of culture, dramatic nature and culinary heritage. The monstrous vertical drops of Cap Fréhel and the fairy-tale setting of Fort La Latte mark a dramatic end to the Emerald Coast. As a stark contrast to the rocky roughness, purple and yellow vegetation adds a colourful note to the cliffs of Fréhel, and also to Cap d'Erquy, which is further west. For those who prefer soft sand between their toes rather than stone, the areas around Pléneuf-Val-André and northwest of Saint-Brieuc, past Pointe Roselier, are awash with dunes and sandy beaches. The rocky coastline hosts some of the most impressive hikes in Brittany. Food lovers must sample the king scallops of Erquy and the mussels of Saint-Brieuc – harvested in front of Pointe des Guettes – or visit the food market in Binic. When your stomach is full, there is a lot of cultural heritage to be savoured by walking down the cobbled streets that are lined with wonderfully preserved houses.



Fort La Latte

This is very likely to be the most impressive location for a castle, seemingly straight out of a storybook. Check the opening hours on the website.

Cap Fréhel

Intrinsically linked to Fort La Latte, 4 km to the west, Cap Fréhel is one of the roughest examples of a massive cliff that you'll see on the Atlantic coast. Its 70 m vertical drops above pounding water will leave you in awe.

Îlot Saint-Michel

Îlot Saint-Michel is the little sibling of the famous Mont-Saint-Michel. Go around the island at low tide and climb up to the chapel to say a little prayer.



Saint-Brieuc

Discover the local heritage of granite and half-timbered houses. Prime examples are Hôtel du Ribault, dating back to the 15th century, and the more recent mosaic façades created by the hands of Odorico. Wander through the small streets and stroll along Place Louis Guilloux or the quays of Port du Léguer. On the outskirts of town, you'll find diverse nature, with the dunes at Bon Abri, moorlands and cliff faces, such as Pointe Roselier, giving a fabulous view of the bay.

Erquy

Erquy is the city of the king scallop or Coquille Saint-Jacques, as the locals would say. Erquy's surrounding moorlands change colour from yellow in spring to purple in summer and its unique pink layered sandstone is a million years old.

Binic

Nicknamed 'the beauty mark of the Côtes d'Armor', Binic marks the entry point to the Goëlo Coast. Binic's port, sandy beaches and charming quays, such as the Quai Jean Bart, which is lined with imposing schist and granite ship-owners' houses, make this little town an attractive stopover.



Reach

With train stations in Paimpol (next stage) and Saint-Brieuc, train access is reasonable. The highway only has an exit at Saint-Brieuc, but the two-lane roads along the shore connect Saint-Malo with Erquy, Saint-Brieuc, Pordic and, finally, Binic. The airports that are closest to Saint-Brieuc are Saint-Malo (50 km), Rennes and Lorient (both 100 km).



Hike

The GR34 runs from the beginning to the end of this stage, so you can enjoy the Sentier des Douaniers for most of it and get your fill of Mother Nature. We have picked the best parts for you.

① Pointe de Château Serein to Cap Fréhel (10 km)

What? – Go around the massive Cap Fréhel, the biggest cliff on the Emerald Coast, and take a sneak peek at Fort La Latte.

How? – Start at Plage de Château Serein (48.641412, -2.309050), leaving the D117 at (48.641761, -2.318224). The GR34 runs along the bay of the Fresnaye, reaching Fort La Latte after 4 km, but you can only access this during limited opening hours. About 5 km further on you'll hit the soaring cliffs of Cap Fréhel with its moorlands, allowing a formidable view of the wild and windswept surroundings. The GR goes around the entire cap over the cliffs that plummet down into the roaring water of the Atlantic Ocean.

② Around Cap Erquy (5.5 km)

What? – Go around the beautiful Cap Erquy, hopping from beach to beach and ending with a view of the King Scallops port, Erquy.

How? – Start at Plage du Guen, at the end of Avenue Léon Hamonet (48.647528, -2.453737), finishing at the car park near the beach along Rue du Port (48.636393, -2.468795). You can make this a loop hike by parking at the intersection of Rue de Lourtuais (48.641474, -2.471228) and Rue de Plaine Garenne, which is a 1.7 km walk from Plage Guen and less than 1 km from the beach.

③ Mussel bay, Pointe des Guettes (17 km)

What? – Walk along the cliffs with a view of 93 km of mussel poles. In the summer it might be a smelly hike.

How? – Go from Grève du Vauglin in Planguenoual (48.565205, -2.587716) to the Grèves d'Hillion in Hillion (48.513799, -2.675512). You can shorten your walk by stopping at Ruisseau des Coulées after 2.5 km, at Chapelle Saint-Maurice at the end of Hameau de Saint-Maurice (48.529811, -2.633166) after 6.5 km, at Barrage du Pont Rolland at 8 km or at Plage de Lermot after 12 km.

④ Pointe Roselier to Binic (12 km)

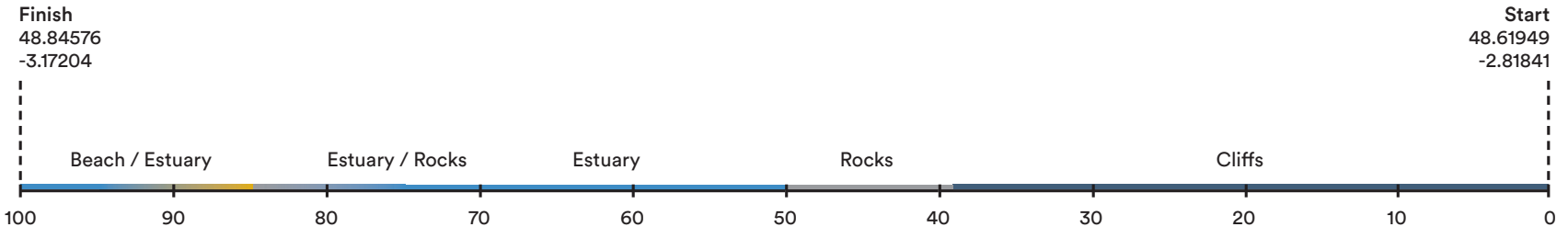
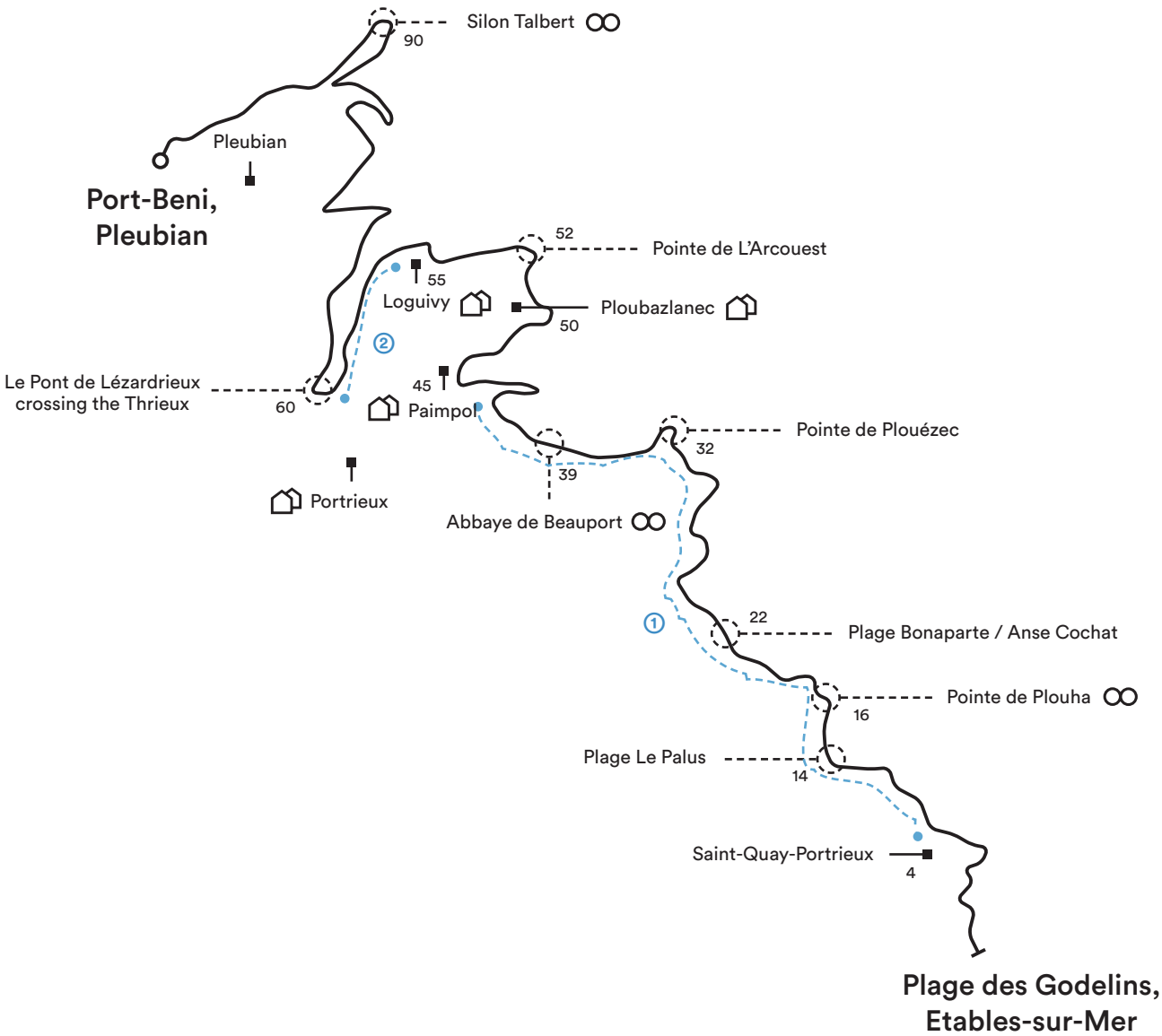
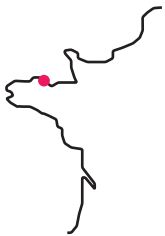
What? – Start with a wonderful view of Saint-Brieuc bay and go around Pointe de Pordic and Pointe de Bréhin to finish at the docks in Binic.

How? – Park at the end of Rue du Roselier in Plénin (48.554200, -2.716532). Take a moment to enjoy the view of the bay, then go westwards following the GR34 along the cliffs to reach the Plage des Rosaires after 2.5 km. Mount the cliffs again after 2.5 km of beach and find yourself on the last beach of the day after 10.5 km of hiking. After 12 km you'll end up at the car park along the Boulevard Clemenceau (48.599475, -2.824923). The Quai Jean Bart, with its gorgeous houses, sits at the other end of the port and might be worth the extra 2 km walk.



Stage 16

Plage des Godelins, Etables-sur-Mer > Port-Beni, Pleubian



The cliffs of the Goëlo coast and the wonders of nature in Bréhat and Sillon de Talbert

This 100 km leg is split into two distinct parts. The first part is the Goëlo Coast, stretching from Binic – west of Saint-Brieuc bay – to Pointe de l’Arcouest, a few kilometres north of Paimpol. This section treats you to some of the steepest and highest cliffs in Brittany, with Pointe de Plouha as a green covered highlight and with the GR34 running along its ferocious flanks. The port city of Paimpol surprises, with gems such as Plage Bonaparte and the Abbaye de Beauport. The exotic paradise of Île de Bréhat lies just off the coast near Pointe de l’Arcouest and looks like a beautiful beacon in the ocean. The second part of this stage is marked by the estuaries of the Trieux and the Jaudy, two rivers cutting deep into the Breton mainland forming fjord-like scenery. This area is home to the cities of Pontrieux and Tréguier.

See Sillon de Talbert

A unique sandbank stretching 3.5 km into the ocean. This is a geological phenomenon that has been formed by adjacent streams.

Pointe de Plouha

The highest cliff in Brittany, hosting a clifftop hike of many dozens of kilometres along the GR34.

Abbaye de Beauport

The ruins of an 11th-century abbey, with beautiful gardens and a plunging view of the bay below.

Stroll Pontrieux

Pontrieux is not technically a seaside town, as it is located 17 km from the mouth of the Trieux. The dry harbour is called ‘The Little Venice of Trégor’ because of its 50 private washhouses decorated with flowers that line the riverbanks. Discover them all during a boat trip along the river or take the steam train towards Paimpol.

Paimpol

Sample the fresh oysters and king scallops in Paimpol amid the charming streets and half-timbered houses.

Loguivy-sur-Mer

Taste the catch of the day by enjoying lobster on the docks of this picturesque little port at the mouth of the Trieux.

Hike

The GR34 runs from the beginning to the end of this stage, so you can enjoy the Sentier des Douaniers for most of it and get your fill of Mother Nature. We have picked the best parts for you.

① Around Pointe de Plouha (27 km)

What? – One of the most spectacular hikes in the book. Follow the GR34 along the highest cliffs in Brittany, finishing at Beauport Abbey. How? – Start north of Saint-Quay-Portrieux at Chapelle Saint-Marc at the end of Rue de Saint-Marc in Trévenuec (48.666814, -2.854744). This long hike can be split into segments. After 3.5 km you’ll find the Plage du Palus, which has parking facilities. You’ll hit Pointe de Plouha at 5.5 km, which has a car park nearby, the hidden port of Gwin Zégat at 7.5 km, Port Moguer at 8.5 km and Plage Bonaparte at 10.5 km. At 12.5 km you’ll come across Pointe de la Tour jutting out into the ocean. You’ll find Anse de Bréhec and Plage de Bréhec at 13.5 km, Pointe de Kerlite at 18.5 km, Pointe de Plouézec, with a stunning view of the oyster banks and little fishing boats, and finally the mythical Abbaye de Beauport, where you can park at 48.768099, -3.021260. This is a short 4 km coastline walk from Paimpol.

② The east bank of the Trieux (7 km)

What? – Follow the river and enjoy the fjord-like surroundings along the Trieux. How? – Start at Plage de Roc’h Hir and park along Rue de Roc’h Hir in Ploubazlanec (48.821558, -3.066131). Follow the river Trieux southwards, keeping the water on your right-hand side, until you hit Route de Kergrist after 6.5 km. Take a right to discover the fabulous bridge of Pont de Lézardrieux 500 m further down, along with a great view of the estuary (48.779784, -3.103120).

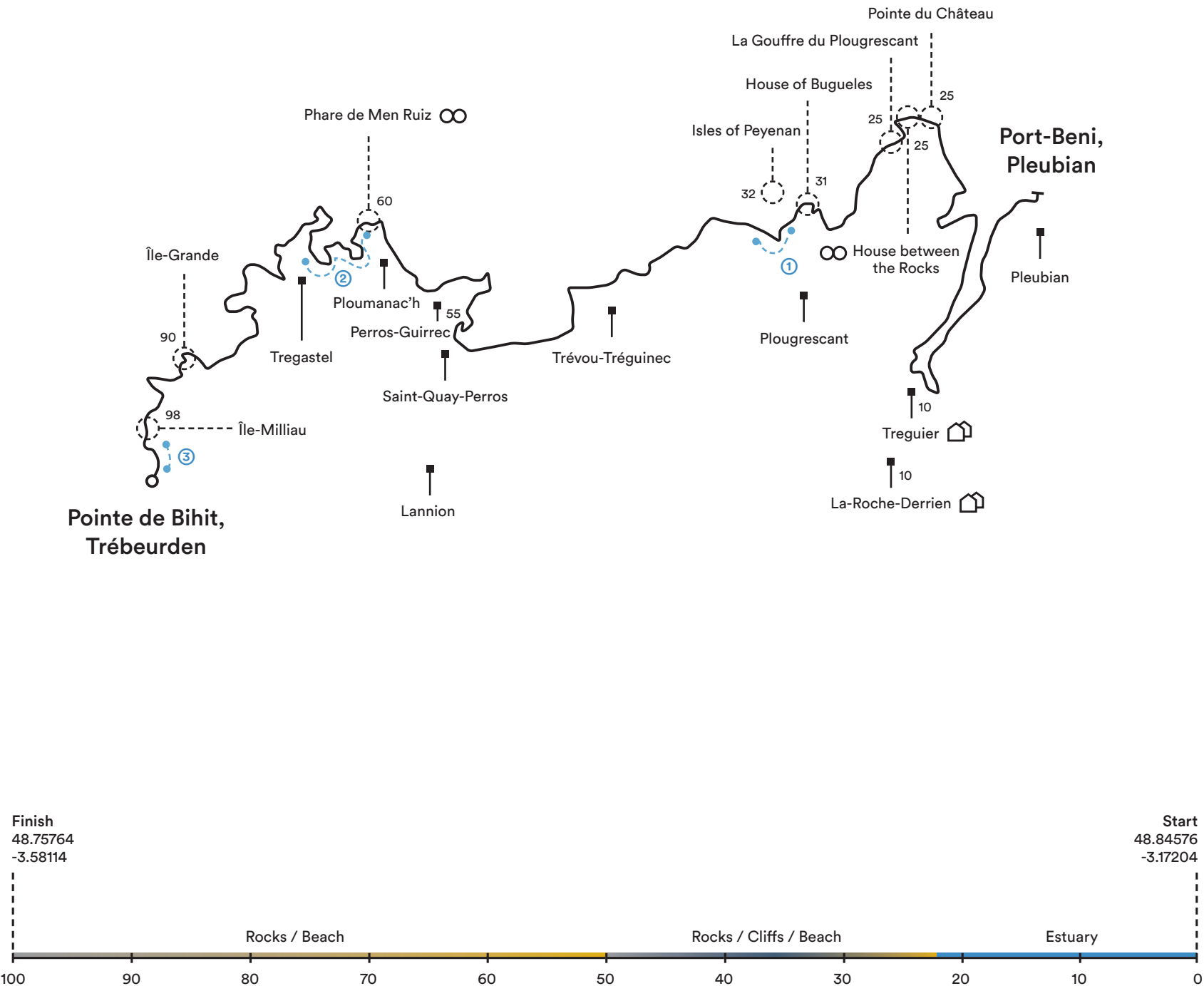
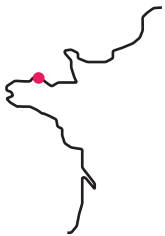
Reach

With a train line running parallel to the Trieux and train stations in Paimpol and Pontrieux, the area around Trieux is very accessible. There are no highways around, but fairly good roads run from Paimpol to Pointe d’Arcouest, which gives you access to Île de Bréhat and the area towards Lézardrieux, where you’ll cross the Trieux to continue to Tréguier. Île de Bréhat can be accessed via boat from Paimpol, Pointe d’Arcouest or Pontrieux.



Stage 17

Port-Beni, Pleubian > Pointe de Bihit, Trébeurden



The rocky boulders of Ploumanac’h and Plougrescant

Crossing the river Jaudy at the charming city of Tréguier, we will be entering the area of Plougrescant, the most northern part of Brittany. The northern tip harbours hidden treasures, such as the stunning Gouffre de Plougrescant and the unique House between Two Rocks. The coastline from Plougrescant to Trévou-Tréguinec seems to unveil a whole new world at every low tide, as hundreds of little islands connect to become fields of rock, such as the Îles de Plévenon. From Perros-Guirec to Trébeurden, the Pink Granite Coast reveals a series of remarkable coves and curves, with fine sandy beaches sheltered by pines, mirroring a chain of islands and islets. The rocky surroundings, moulded by centuries of wind and water, will surprise all of your senses. Rocks as big as houses, in a pink rosé wine hue, are scattered across the shore. These have an extra-terrestrial feel, as if they have been carved out of the planet Mars. However, the highlight of this area is the the Men Ruz Lighthouse at Ploumanac’h. In the west, the islets and peninsulas of Île-Grande, Île Milliau and Pointe de Bihit are worth the detour.

See Ploumanac’h

Pink is the way to go. Oddly formed isles and rocks in a unique pink shade adorn this area. To top it off, the local Men Ruz Lighthouse is constructed out of local pink rock, which blends in perfectly with the scenery.

House between the Rocks and Gouffre de Plougrescant

Admire one of the cutest houses in France, which is squeezed between two massive rocks, and hear the orchestra of the wind in La Gouffre. Don't miss the view of the bay at Pointe du Château, Brittany's most northern point.

Îles de Plévenan

A group of small islands that only reveal at low tide that they are connected to each other.

Stroll Roche-Derrien

Built in the 11th century on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Jaudy estuary, the town has an important trade history that is reflected in the many colourful half-timbered houses lining the narrow streets. Roche-Derrien is one of the oldest ports in northern France.

Tréguier

Tréguier, the birthplace of the patron saint of lawyers, offers more half-timbered houses and a charming abbey.

Reach Lannion

Lannion is the biggest city in the area, which we'll visit in Stage 18. It is also the closest train station you'll find to this area. Trébeurden and Perros-Guirec are reasonably well connected by road to Lannion, which in turn is accessible from Tréguier and Paimpol further east. Brest would be the nearest airport.

Hike Îles de Penvénan and Buguelès (5 km)

What? – Grab your boots and walk from island to island. It is best to do this at low tide.

How? – Park your car at the end of Rue Castel Coz (48.839051, -3.284018). There are two clusters of islands to visit. In the east you'll find Île de Balanec, Île Ozac'h and the crescent-shaped beach between Énez Illiec and Énez Inic. The western cluster has a path passing by the small Île de Coz Castel and Île du Millieu and ends on Île Saint-Gildas, with its charming chapel. Visiting both clusters will easily provide you with a 5 km long walk, if you visit all of the islands described.

Ploumanac’h lighthouse to Île Renote (8.5 km)

What? – Uniquely shaped pink boulders. A must-see in Brittany. How? – Park at the free car park close to Phare Ploumanac’h (48.835418, -3.480278) at Rue Aimée Fournier and walk along the rocky pink granite coastline. Schedule in some time for some impromptu picture taking during the first metres. Walk past the Port of Ploumanac’h and the Plage de Tourony at the bay of Sainte-Anne to finish at the peaceful Île Renote. If you don't feel like doing the whole distance, going around Île Renote is a beautiful walk of 2 km. There are some parking spaces next to the island (48.834719, -3.510448).

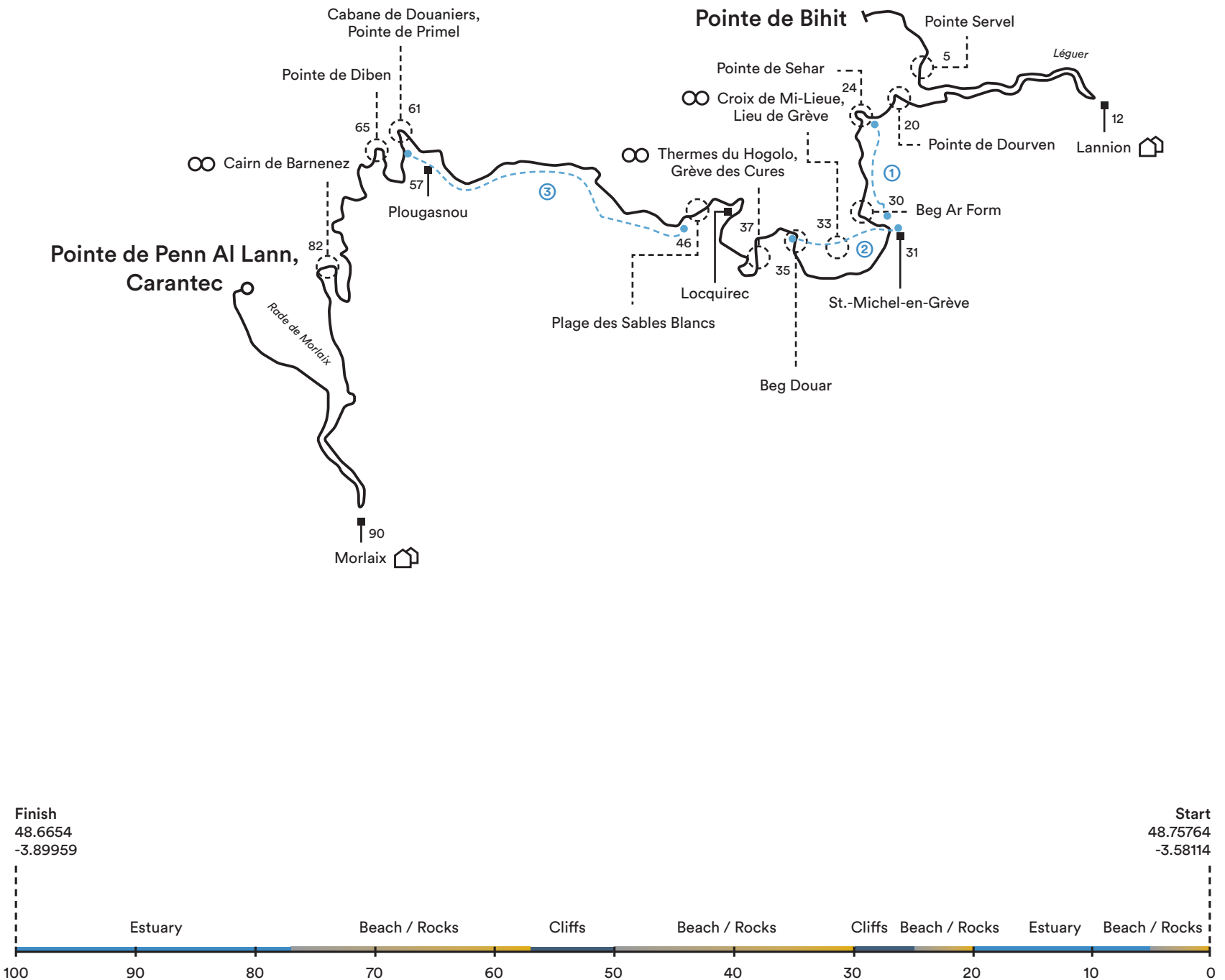
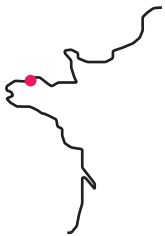
Pointe de Bihit to Île Milliau (5 km)

What? – Explore two charming peninsulas by foot, marking the end of the Pink Granite Coast. Spot a menhir along the way. How? – This can only be done at low tide. Start at the parking du Castel at the northwest of the Port of Trébeurden. Go around Île Milliau to spot a menhir and a gîte. Leave the island by crossing the Plage de Tresmeur, keeping the water on your right-hand side. Finish by going around Pointe de Bihit, where you can park your car at the end of La Roche Mignonne Street (48.760238, -3.577172), close to Plage de Tresmeur (800 m).



Stage 18

Pointe de Bihit, Trébeurden > Pointe de Penn Al Lann, Carantec



The dive into the history of Lannion, Morlaix and Barnenez

Stage 18 marks the transition between the departments of Côtes d'Amor in the east and Finistère at the most western tip of Brittany, with the Le Douron river as the borderline. With regard to nature, this stage is not the most spectacular 100 km we've seen, but the green surroundings exude a pleasant tranquillity, with a fine blend of cliffs, expansive beaches and beautiful bays. Anse du Diben is one of those amazing coves and you get a great view of it from the Cabane des Douaniers. Anse de Térenez and Rade de Morlaix, flanking the Cairn de Barnenez on both sides, are also not to be missed. Large moon-shaped beaches line the shore, such as Plage du Guerzit, Plage de Primel and the never-ending Grève de Saint-Michel, which has the mysterious solitary Croix de Mi-Lieue. The local cliffs provide great hikes northwest of Saint-Michel-en-Grève and north of Plougasnou. The most remarkable treasures in this part of Brittany might be man-made. The medieval cities of Lannion and Morlaix have preserved their architectural gems. If you'd like to take a dive into history, you can visit the Roman Baths in Hogolo and the Cairn de Barnenez, which is – hold on – said to be the oldest building in the entire world.



Croix de Mi-Lieue

A mysterious 18th-century Christian cross standing in the middle of the crescent cove of Saint-Michel-en-Grève. The cross is surrounded by water twice a day due to the rising tides.

Cairn de Barnenez

The building said to be the oldest in the world sits right at the top of a steep green peninsula, overlooking the bay.

Thermes du Hogolo

The ruins of a Gallo-Roman bathhouse, originating from the 1st century AD.



Lannion

Lannion is a medieval city on the banks of the Léguer river and is the capital of the Trégor province. Admire the half-timbered houses and the majestic church of Brélévenez, from which you can overlook the city after climbing 150 stairs, called the Escalier de Brélévenez.

Morlaix

This city, with its riverbanks in different municipalities, is characterised by two architectural delights. The first, the ancient Pondalez houses, have architectural overhangs, as the surface area of every storey grows with each added floor. Some of the most impressive of these are Maison dite de la duchesse Anne on Rue du Mur and the Maison à Pondalez on Grande Rue. The second outstanding feature of the town is the imposing viaduct connecting both riverbanks. Take the Venelle aux Prêtres, which will take you to the first level of the viaduct.



Reach

Lannion and Morlaix are the best-connected cities in this area, as they both have a train station. Morlaix even has access to a highway, connecting it to Brest in the west and Saint-Brieux in the east. The nearest airport is in Brest.



Hike

① Pointe de Séhar to Saint-Michel-en-Grève (9 km)

What? – Hike along the cliffs and end with a great view of the long beach of Saint-Michel-en-Grève.

How? – Start at the car park along the Route du Port at Pointe de Séhar (48.724586, -3.582453). Make sure that you start at the west side of the little peninsula and follow the stony beach until the adjacent road goes up and offers you the chance to follow a single trail. From then on you'll hike along cliffs to finish with a sweeping beach view at Saint-Michel-en-Grève. There are plenty of parking options along the Route d'Arvor (48.683694, -3.567328).

② Say hi to the Croix de Mi-Lieue (4 km)

What? – Take your boots or go barefoot from Saint-Michel-en-Grève to Beg Douar. Only possible at low tide.

How? – Start at the car park along Route d'Arvor (48.683694, -3.567328). To pass the cross you need to walk at a 30°–40° angle from the road alongside the beach. To reach Beg Douar, slightly curve to the right at the end until you see a little port. This walk is only possible at low tide.

③ Plage du Moulin to Pointe de Primel (15 km)

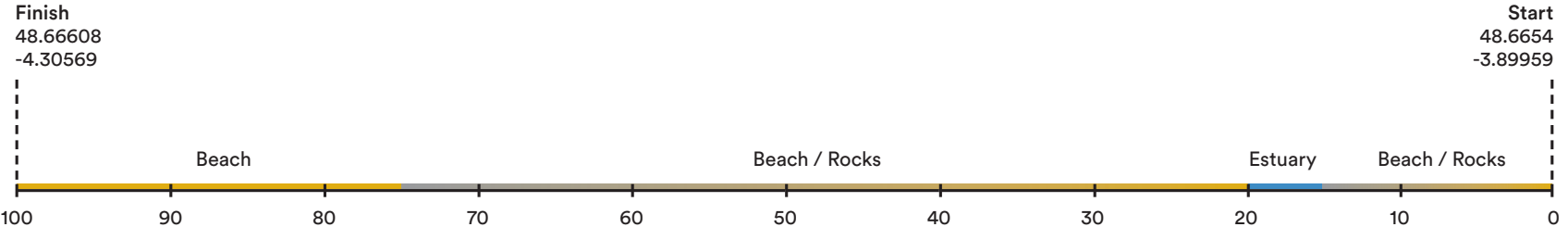
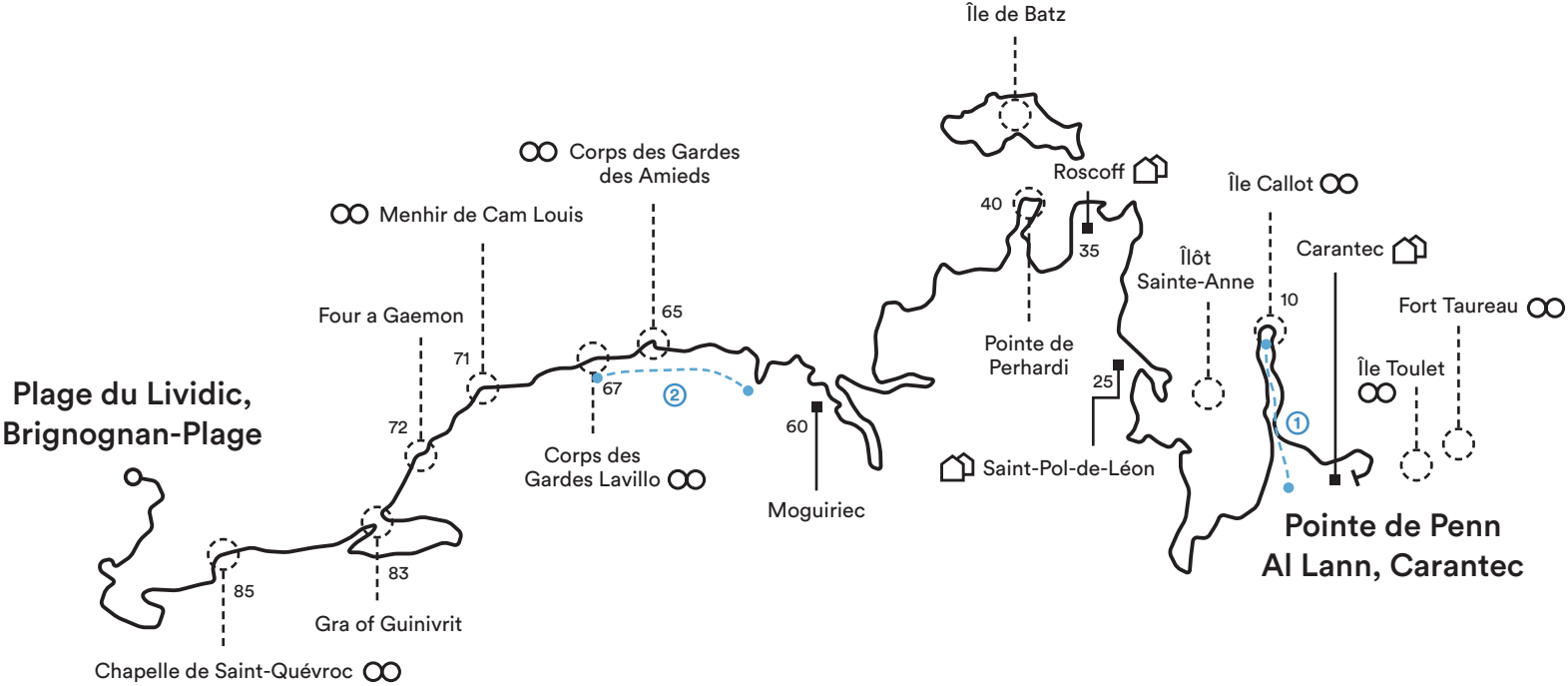
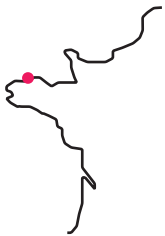
What? – Hike along cliff paths mere metres from the sea to end at the Cabane des Douaniers, which has a great view over a charming bay.

How? – Park at the car park at Plage du Moulin de la Rive (48.686710, -3.676268). To reach the Sentier des Douaniers, the single trail along the cliffy coast, you will need to go back to the street and follow the Route de Morlaix for 500 m. Turn right on to the Rue de la Corniche, which will bring you parallel to the shore. After 300 to 400 m you'll see a single trail directing you towards the sea. Follow that track for 15 km to reach the Pointe de Primel and the Cabane des Douaniers, which has a great view of Anse du Diben. You'll walk next to the cliffs the whole time, only interrupted by the beaches of Poul Rodou (after 2 km) and Plougasnou (10 km). At Pointe de Prime, you'll find a parking facility along the Rue de Karreg an Ti in Plougasnou (48.714409, -3.815648).



Stage 19

Pointe de Penn Al Lann, Carantec > Plage du Lividic, Brignognan-Plage



The artichokes of Saint-Pol, the onions of Roscoff and the beauty of Carantec ~~~

This Finistère stage has three distinct parts. The first part is dominated by the blue water of Morlaix bay and its surroundings. The Carantec peninsula is the perfect family destination as it is a huge playground for lovers of water sports, such as snorkelling, paddle boarding or surfing. It is also close to Île aux Dames and Île Petit Ricard, one of the most important bird reserves in Europe. Closer to shore sits the wonderful Île Callot, which is very inviting for a Sunday stroll, the small Île Louët, with its charming lighthouse, and the impressive Château du Taureau. At the west side of the La Penzé estuary you'll find the cities of Roscoff and Saint-Pol-de-Léon, which owe their importance and wealth to the prosperous agriculture in the region. The second part of this leg is made up of rocks and small beaches. Up as far as Moguirec and the Le Guillec river, the shore is a wild, ever-changing variation of rocks and small beaches. West of Moguirec, the scenery becomes rockier with big boulders, such as the Rocher du Singe or the Menhir de Cam Louis. Typical for this coastline are the guardhouses of Amiets, Lavillo and Theven, which are built next to boulders that are bigger than houses, and which were used to indicate when the enemy was approaching the coastline. More ancient stones can be found at the prehistoric Allée Couverte de Guinirvit. Beyond this point the shoreline turns sandy until Brignogan Plage, which is followed by the vast beach and dunes of Plage de Ker Emma, where the Chapelle Saint-Guévroc is situated.

∞ See Île Louët and Château du Taureau ~~~

The twin islands of Île Louët and Château du Taureau lie only a few hundred metres apart. The first hosts a little lighthouse and a small house that is available for rent. The latter is a 16th-century fort that was built by the grandmaster Vauban to protect the city of Morlaix. It feels like a miniature version of Fort Boyard, as it is entirely surrounded by water. However, it is open for sightseeing tours.

Île Callot ~~~

A 2 km long peninsula that is only accessible at low tide. A great place for a walk.

Menhir de Cam Louis ~~~

With its 7 metres of height and its proximity to the sea, this monolith has been a helpful beacon for ships for centuries.

🏠 Stroll Carantec ~~~

A former 'place to be' for artists in the early 1900s, this flowerful peninsula with its many little bays has been turned into a family holiday destination giving quick access to Île Callot and Morlaix bay.

Saint-Pol-de-Léon ~~~

This capital of the artichoke and cauliflower and former episcopal capital is the proud home of the highest church tower in Brittany, the Kreisker chapel, whose 169 steps offer you an amazing view over the region. Together with its 'twin tower', the Cathédrale Saint-Paul-Aurélien, the Gothic towers can be seen from miles away. Visit the Saint-Pol community to see the ancient half-timbered houses.

Roscoff ~~~

Famous for its pink onions, Roscoff served as an outer harbour for its southern neighbour Saint-Pol-de-Léon, exporting its agricultural and maritime treasures. This well-located port and beach resort has lots to offer, including a Gothic church, richly decorated ship-owners' houses and a view of the Île of Batz. For seaweed lovers, it's worth noting that France's very first thalassotherapy centre was opened in Roscoff in 1899. The chapel of Sainte Barbe offers a great view of the bay.

⚓ Hike ① Île Callot (3.3 km) ~~~ ⚓

What? – Explore Île Callot at low tide and discover the charming chapel at the end of the route.

How? – Park along the Rue du Port in Carantec (48.672982, -3.922732) where you'll find some bars and terraces in which to have a drink before you head out. Follow La Passe, the road that takes you to Île Callot at low tide. If you want to get off the beaten track, you can go left and then right before you take the 'bridge' and follow the natural *passe aux moutons* across the sand on your left. Once on the island, keep left when you have the choice and 3 km later you'll find the chapel and the end of the island.

② Route of the guardhouses (6 km) ~~~ ⚓

What? – Start at an old stone quarry and pass by two famous guardhouses that are built next to big boulders.

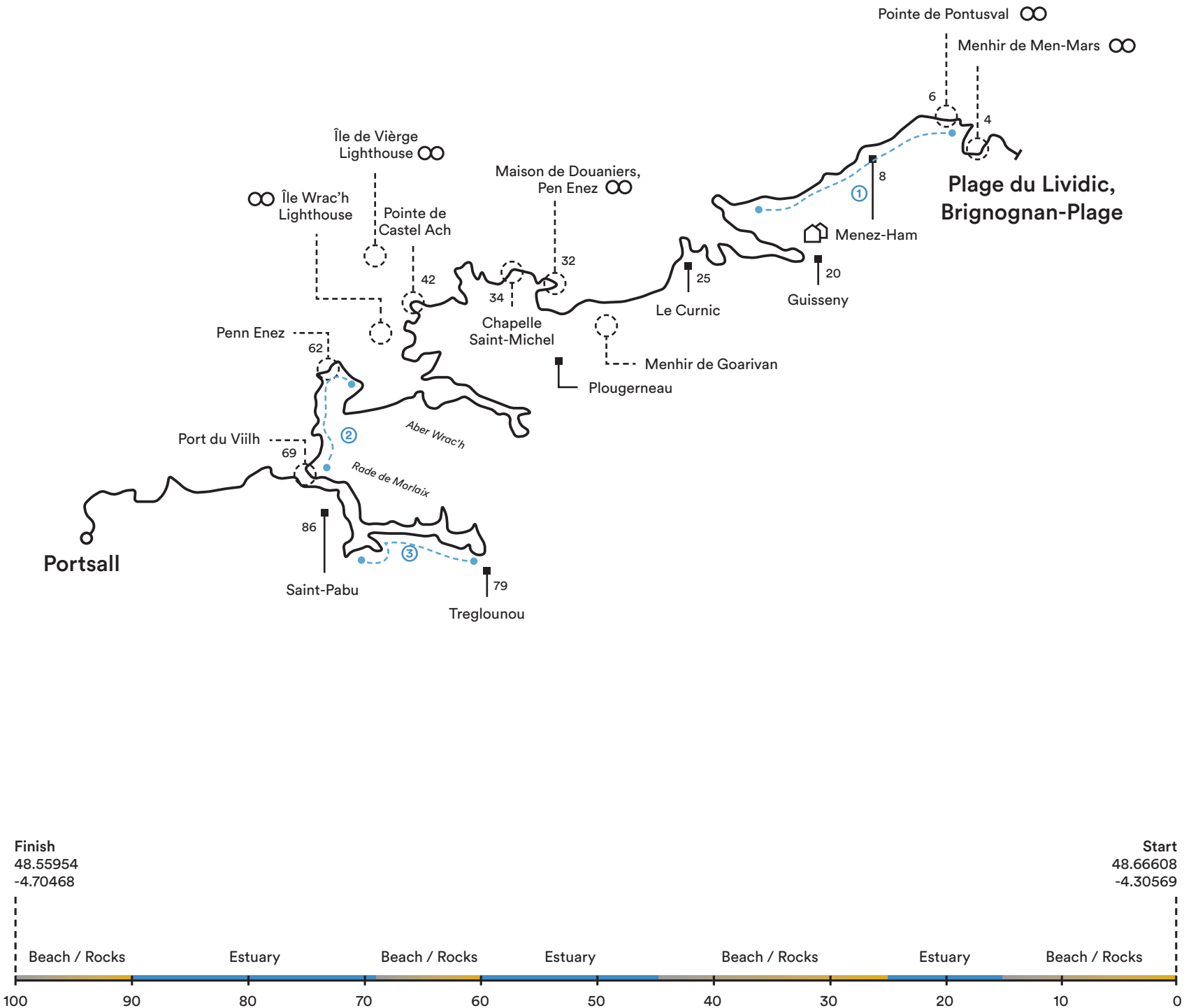
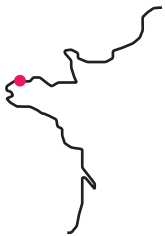
How? – There is no easy parking here. Drop your car somewhere along Port Neuf Street in Cléder (48.687927, -4.096194) and walk towards the water, where you'll find the Rocher du Singe, a rock that looks like a giant hand giving you the finger. Nearby there is an old stone quarry. Next to the quarry you'll find a coastal path that guides you past the guardhouses of Amiets (after 4 km) and Lavillo (after 6 km). Beyond this point it's harder to find a track. If you go back to Rue du Brouan and follow the street, keeping the sea on your right-hand side, you'll end up at the car park at Place du Port in Cléder (48.689000, -4.159050), which is 500 m further on.

📍 Reach Morlaix is the biggest city in the area with guaranteed rail access. There are stations at Roscoff and Saint-Pol-de-Léon, but at the time of writing both were closed. Brest is the recommended airport.



Stage 20

Plage du Lividic, Brignognan-Plage > Portsall



The biggest lighthouse in the world ~~~

Abers, where the sea meets untamed coastline, are the fjords of Bretagne, deep furrows in the landscape that change with the tides. You'll find three abers in the northwest of Finistère, which bears the name 'the Coast of Legends'. Aber Wrac'h is the first one on your route. This is where Baie des Anges and Pont du Diable meet – a paradise of small islets. The second in line is Aber Benoît, which meanders between farmed fields and forests and is known for its oysters. The most southern one, Aber Ildut, is included in Stage 21. This part of Finistère has one of the greatest concentrations of lighthouses in the world, with the Pontusval Lighthouse, the Phare de l'île Wrac'h and the Phare de l'île Vierge as shining examples. The last of these is the tallest lighthouse in the world. The site of Ménez Ham, only a few kilometres west of Pontusval, has another house between the rocks, an impressive sight of grass fields along the coast with boulders as big as houses both on land and in the sea. The 17th-century Chapelle Pol, which is squeezed between the rocks, is a unique site. The coast is made up of fine sand and hundreds of creeks and curves, as if drawn by a child. The sea and beaches are covered with thousands of rocks. Just off the coast, dozens of islands appear to grow larger at low tide. On the mainland, you'll find dozens of typical chapels and menhirs, such as the Chapelle Sainte-Marguerite, Chapelle Saint-Michel, Chapelle de Loc-Majan and Chapelle de Brouennou, along with the Menhir de Men Marz and the Menhir de Lannoulouarn. The region is known for harvesting black algae or goemon, which is traditionally done with a long stick called a scoubidou.

∞ See Lighthouse of île Vierge ~~~

With a height of 82.5 m, this lighthouse is the biggest in the world. Visit the island by boat and mount the 365 steps, admiring the wonderful blue interior and the incredible view of the ocean and Aber Wrac'h.

Lighthouse of île Wrac'h ~~~

The little brother of île Vierge. This charming little lighthouse and the island it sits on are accessible at low tide from Saint-Cava beach.

Menhir de Men Marz ~~~

With a height of 8.5 metres, this menhir close to Brignogan-Plage just missed out on being on the podium for France's biggest menhirs, ranking fourth.

🏠 Stroll Ménez Ham ~~~

A tiny 17th-century village containing thatched cottages. Enjoy the unique Saint-Pol chapel, which is surrounded by grassy dunes.

📍 Reach You are nearing the extremity of the Finistère department, and thus coming closer to the 'end of the world'. Of course, this means that accessibility suffers. The nearest train station or highway can be found in Landerneau or Brest, the latter also having the closest airport.

⚡ Hike ① Pointe de Pontusval to Énez Amann ar Rouz (8 km) ~~~ ⚡

What? – A stroll along the dunes, beaches and forests of boulders, passing by the magical Ménez Ham site.
How? – Park at the car park near Pointe de Pontusval at the end of Route du Phare in Brignogan-Plage (48.676690, -4.346629). You will find the sandy single trail through the dunes a few metres from the beach. Walk along it keeping the water on your right-hand side. About 2.5 km down the road you'll reach Ménez Ham, with its prominent boulders, chapel and peculiar fishing houses. After 8 km of walking along a beach speckled with boulders, you'll find yourself on the small peninsula of Énez Amann ar Rouz, which is surrounded by partly submerged boulders. You can park your car on the sandy strip at the end of Neiz Vran Street (48.655311, -4.434566).

② From Aber to Aber (6 km) ~~~ ⚡

What? – Go around the Penn-Énez peninsula west of Aber Wrac'h, which has spectacular views of île Vierge, île Wrac'h and Fort Crezon, and then notice the scenery changing from sand to forest upon your arrival at Aber Benoît.
How? – Start at the car park or roundabout at Penn-Énez (48.603710, -4.593640), which can be found along the street bearing the same name. Follow the trail across beaches, rocky peaks, swamps and forests. Finish at Port du Vilh (48.575423, -4.608705), which has a view of Aber Benoît.

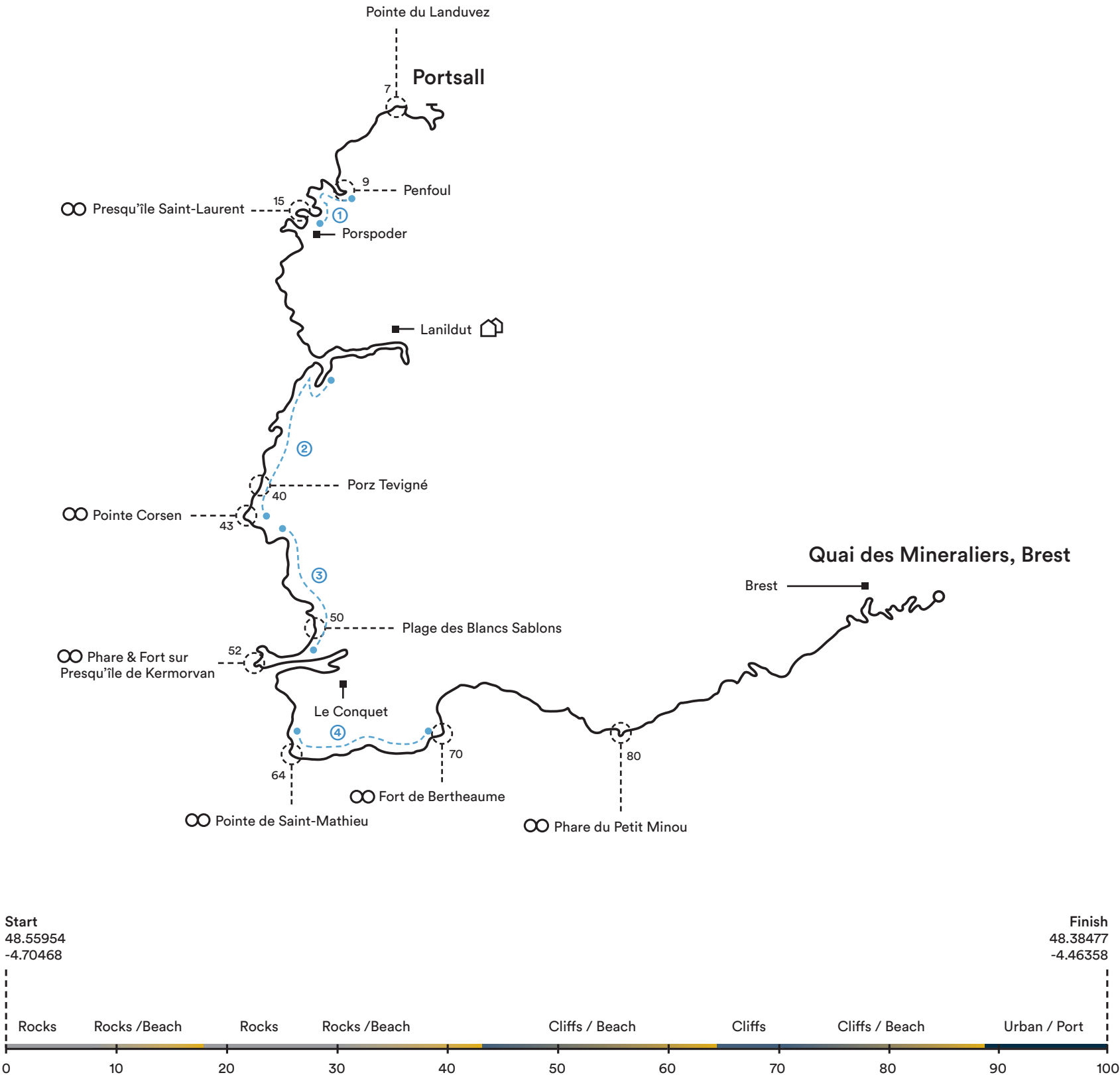
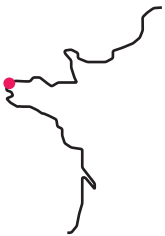
③ Follow Aber Benoît (5 km) ~~~ ⚡

What? – Follow the bushy riverbanks of the Aber Benoît.
How? – Start at the car park (48.553296, -4.535205) by the bridge before entering the village of Tréglonou. Cross the street and follow the trail along the river, being guided by the red-white GR signposts. After 5 km you'll have rounded a peak and you'll find yourself back on the main road. Follow that road for 50 m before taking the path that goes up on your left. This path will take you to the chapel of Loc-Majan, with a great view of the river (48.555092, -4.580397). You can't reach the chapel by car, so park somewhere nearby.



Stage 21

Portsall > Quai des Mineraliers, Brest



The cliffs, lighthouses and forts of Finistère, the most western tip of France ~~~

Stage 21 takes us past France's most western point, slowly travelling from sloping meadows to the roaring ocean and towering cliffs. During this 100 km stretch, we'll see some of the most iconic lighthouses in the world, built to warn ships about the dangers of the rocky coast. You'll discover the many forts protecting Brest, which has been one of the key military bases in France since the 17th century. Along the coast, there are plenty of opportunities to hike on the GR34, but there are few noteworthy villages to stroll around. There's no need to worry; this is one of the most recommended legs for hikers and lovers of naval history and military architecture.

∞ See Petit Minou Lighthouse ~~~

This one deserves the prize for being the most enchanting, stunning lighthouse we've ever seen. What it lacks in height, it makes up for in its dramatic setting, as it sits on a rocky island that is only accessible via a cobbled bridge.

Fort de Bertheaume ~~~

This old fort situated on a rocky island has been turned into an attraction; you can even zipline to the island. However, it is only accessible during limited opening hours. Check the website.

Pointe St.-Mathieu ~~~

The most southwestern point of this area, which is blessed with many highlights: an iconic lighthouse, the remnants of an old abbey and a monument commemorating WWII.

What didn't make the cut, as we only select three options, but definitely are must-sees: Kermorvan Lighthouse (not open for visits), Pointe de Corsen (the most western point of continental France), Presqu'île Saint-Laurent, Fort du Mengant, Fort du Dellec and Fort du Toulbroc'h.

🏠 Stroll Nothing really to stroll in this stage. We'll focus on the wonders of nature you might want to see.

Lanildut ~~~

The no. 1 port for sea kelp in Europe with 38,000 tonnes or 65% of Brittany's algae production, benefiting from the proximity of the archipelago of Molène, 20 km away, where some of the biggest algae beds in Europe are based. See some 17th to 18th-century fishing boats here too.

🚤 Reach To visit the small islands of Molène and Ouessant, take the boat from Le Conquet. The biggest villages of this stage are Lanildut and Le Conquet, both of which are fairly well connected by road to Brest. Bad news for railway enthusiasts: there is no train to be found here and the closest station is Brest. A decent road connects the coastal villages making the coastal road trip fairly smooth.

⚓ Hike ① Route Touristique – Tremazan to Kerlaugan (5 km) ~~~ ⚓

What? – Hike along Pointe Landunvez and enjoy the uninterrupted view of the sea crashing against the rocks.

How? – The route runs along the D127 from Tremazan (parking facilities on La Cave 48.5577555, -4.7201513) to Kerlaugan (parking facilities at 48.532327, -4.749942). There is a paved road with an adjacent trail.

② Porscav (Lanildut) to Pointe de Corsen (12 km) ~~~ ⚓⚓⚓

What? – Walk south towards the most western point in France, hopping from one little beach to the next on a single sandy trail.

How? – Park your car near the small port of Porscav at Rue de L'Aber (48.468124, -4.757603) and hike towards Pointe de Corsen (with parking facilities close to Route du Cross Corsen, 48.4149062, -4.7939333). If a 12 km hike is too much and you'd rather only do 7 km, you can start at the car park next to Plage de Porspaul at Rue de Porspaul (48.444744, -4.775340). This route will have you beach hopping like a pro. Each beach is separated from the next one by medium high stony hills with occasional little peninsulas running into the sea.

③ Pointe de Corsen to Kermorvan (10 km) ~~~ ⚓⚓⚓

What? – Hike along the most western part of France past fierce cliffs up to the mythical peninsula of Kermorvan.

How? – Park your car at Pointe de Corsen (48.414862, -4.793841) and follow the *sentier côtier*, keeping the sea on your right. Your endpoint will be the car park at the entrance of the peninsula along the Route de la Presqu'île de Kermorvan (48.364023, -4.775308).

Enjoy a post-hike drink in one of the many bars and restaurants on the nearby southern bank of Le Conquet.

If the route is too long for your liking, you can go around the Kermorvan peninsula (3 km) instead and park at the endpoint (48.364023, -4.775308). The views of the nearby Plage des Blancs Sablons and the Kermorvan Lighthouse at the tip make this a highly recommended hike. Or just add this one to the 10 km hike above to add a little extra to your day.

④ Pointe St.-Mathieu to Fort de Bertheaume (8 km) ~~~ ⚓⚓⚓

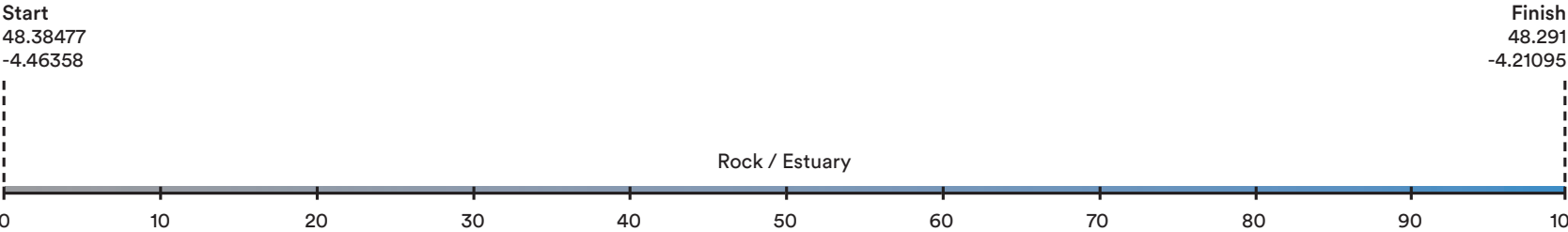
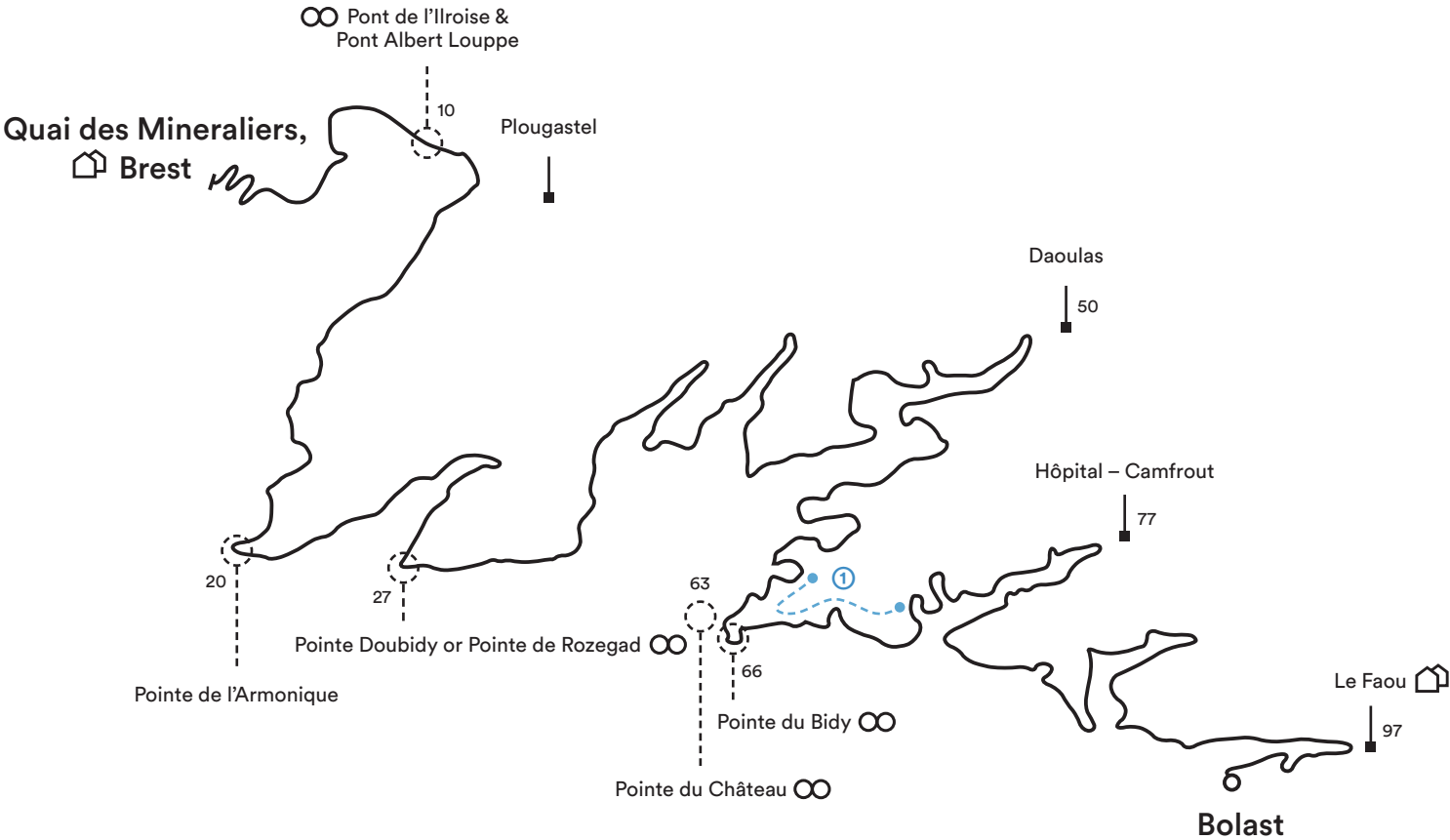
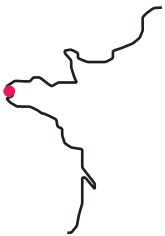
What? – Enjoy a coastal walk along the rocky and hilly cliffs between two of this region's famous landmarks.

How? – Park your car at one of the parking facilities at Pointe Saint-Mathieu and finish at the car park near Fort de Bertheaume (48.337419, -4.701284). If you arrive at the fort during the day you will have the opportunity to visit. Along the route you'll discover two bunkers.



Stage 22

Quai des Mineraliers, Brest > Bolast



The connection between Brest and Crozon

In the Tour de France, this kind of stage would be called a transition stage. There’s nothing remarkable to see on this 100 km stretch of shoreline connecting the peninsula of Brest to Crozon, with the exception of the city of Brest. This leg strings together a couple of foresty peninsulas making their way into the Rade de Brest, forming a claw-like shape that juts out into the water. The hilly landscape is coated with bushes and fields. At the peaks of the peninsulas, you’ll find some little islands that have a more Scandinavian look and feel. There are ample muddy bays, often with unusual dams to protect the bays from the tide. The nature is beautiful and has a more inland feel, but it is, in our humble opinion, not worth either the detour or an overnight stay.

See **A duo of bridges across the Éloron**

Pont de l’Iroise, the cable-stayed bridge spanning the Éloron, was built in 1994 and perfectly illustrates the new architectural approach used to revive Brest. Admire it from nearby Albert-Louppe bridge, which is for pedestrians and cyclists only. The splendid view of the city of Brest is a nice bonus.

Pointe du Bindy

A headland with two little overgrown islands that are accessible at low tide.

Pointe du Château

A thin stretch of land leading towards a tiny island that is accessible at low tide. The path is used to cultivate oysters.

Hike **① Around Pointe du Bindy (8 km)**

What? – Get a true feel of the area by circling Pointe du Bindy and marvelling at the little bays and gorgeous islands surrounded by colourful fishing boats.


How? – Start near the coast at Anse du Roz at the crossing of Route du Yelen and Route de l’Anse du Roz (48.322058, -4.318878). Don’t park your car close to the water; you need to avoid the rising tides. The route ends at Port de Moulin Mer, where you can park your car along the D333 (48.315721, -4.287128). The *sentier côtier* is difficult to find at times. In particular, right after you come around Pointe de Bindy (after approx. 2 km) you’ll need to look carefully. Take Rue Le Bendy and make a right, heading away from the street towards the coast again at 48.315798, -4.329896. The official name of the path on this side of the peninsula is sentier côtier de l’Anse du Bourg.

Stroll **Brest**

Brest is the biggest city in the Finistère department and the third biggest city in Bretagne, with approx. 130,000 inhabitants. It also has a lot to offer. Known for its military past, the city has many naval attractions to enjoy. Discover the cable car that takes you from one riverbank to the other and visit Océanopolis, the biggest aquarium of its kind in Europe.

Le Faou

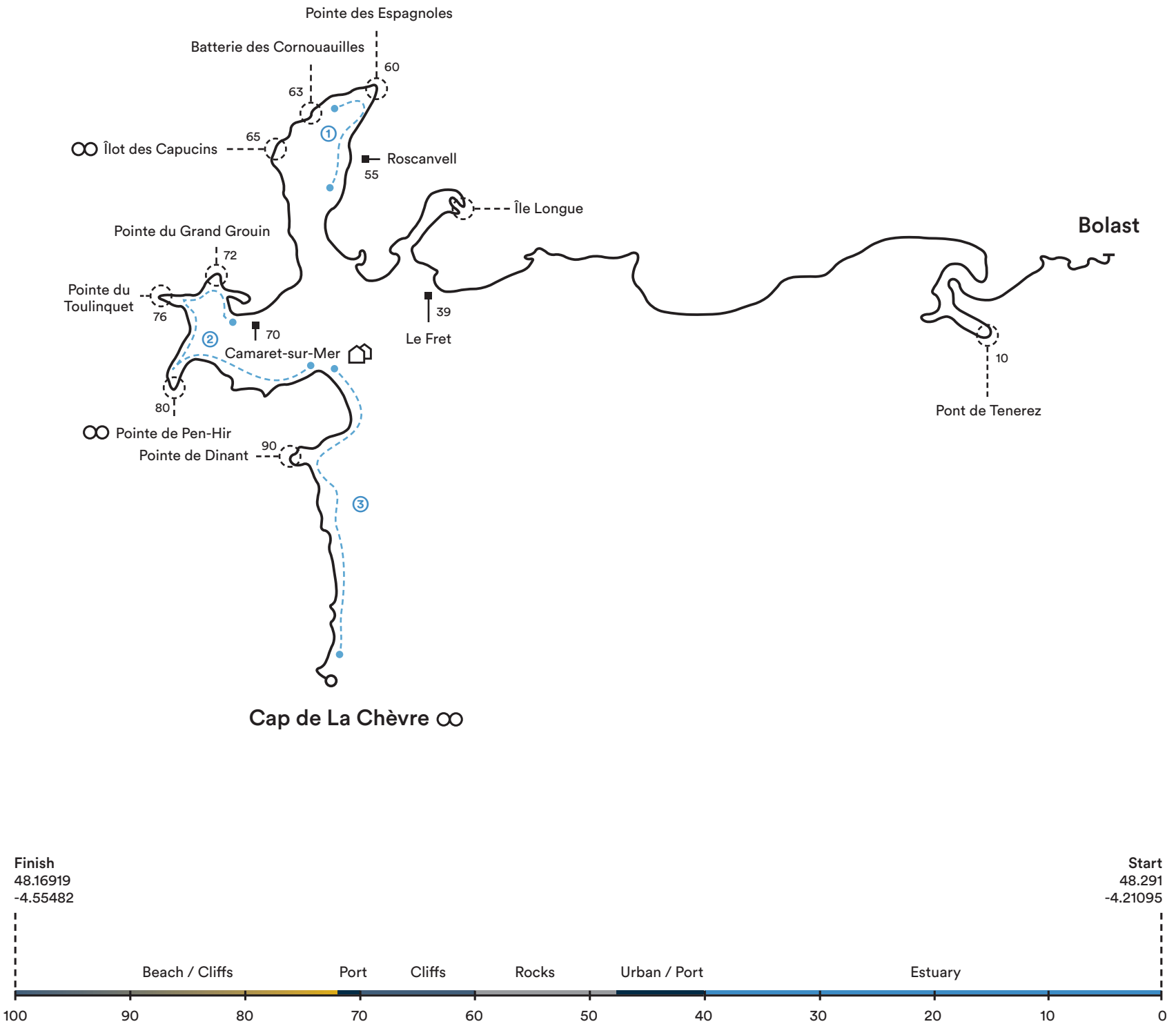
These three picturesque small villages all have the same look and feel, as they are all located near a bridge. You can bet on finding a typical old church, some crêperies and a collection of boats waiting for the tide to rise. Quiella has the most distinct little river port, surely worth a visit. Check out the wooden houses, walk the Quai Quelen and visit the Place de la Mairie.

 **Reach** Brest, our starting point, is home to an airport and a TGV railway station. You can visit all of the picturesque villages we’ve mentioned by using the highway. As soon as you move westwards towards the tip, the roads get smaller and access becomes a little harder.



Stage 23

Bolast > Cap de La Chèvre



The stony wonders of the Crozon peninsula

The three arms of the peninsula, Roscanvel, Camaret-sur-Mer and Crozon, along with the impressive Cap de la Chèvre, will be among the most impressive cliff and rock formations you've ever seen. If you want to escape your urban playground and reunite with nature, this is the place to be. A remote and uncharted wilderness awaits you, with incredible sights of the almost limitless power of the sea. This stage offers you the opportunity to hike near to the coast for almost the whole time. Despite the remote location and the lack of city life, there are quite a few things to see around here. After crossing the Térénez Bridge, you'll pass along a fairly monotonous stretch until you reach the more interesting sights of the Roscanvel peninsula and its many forts, such as the one on îlot des Capucins. Following the coast, the next thing you'll see is Camaret-sur-Mer, which is the best place to stay on the peninsula. After passing Camaret you can hike all the way up to the tip of Cap de la Chèvre along the mighty cliffs of Pointe du Toulinguet, Pointe de Pen-Hir, Pointe de Dinan and, finally, the dramatic Cap de la Chèvre.

See **Îlot des Capucins via the Route des Espagnols**

The Roscanvel peninsula curves upwards towards the city of Brest and is therefore surrounded with 17th-century forts that were built to protect the bay of Brest. This is a perfect 15 km tour by bike, or you can travel by foot if you enjoy a long walk.

Pointe de Pen-Hir, Camaret-sur-Mer

Impressive rugged cliffs towering 70 m above sea level. Go and discover the massive cross on the cape, as well as the nearby menhirs de Lagatjar or the ruins of the Manor Saint Pol Roux. The neighbouring Pointe du Toulinguet is not accessible.

Cap de la Chèvre

The lowest arm of the peninsula, south of Morgat, is an enormous area of wild, untouched nature, starting from the dazzling Pointe de Dinan.

Stroll **Camaret-sur-Mer**

There is only one real city on this side of the peninsula and it has more to offer than any other city on the whole of the Crozon peninsula. The port has many restaurants and you can also find a few attractions on the other side of the bay, such as the Tour Vauban, the chapel and the boat cemetery.

Reach **Crozon is situated between Brest and Quimper, so you can travel by train or plane to one of those cities. Afterwards, a car is, as you know, the most reliable form of transport when visiting the Finistère department. Camaret-sur-Mer, Crozon and Morgat are the biggest municipalities and we recommend that you stay in Camaret.**

Hike **① Route des Espagnols, Roscanvel (12 km)**

What? – Go around the Roscanvel peninsula by foot or bike to see dozens of forts and enjoy an incredible view of the city of Brest.

How? – The scenic route, Route des Espagnols, starts right outside the village of Roscanvel, but for practical reasons we recommend starting at the aire de pique-nique de Kervian at the crossroads of Route de la Fraternité and Route de Quélern (48.305074, -4.555171), as it's easier to make a circle like this. The Route des Espagnols is a road suitable for hikers, bikers and cars and takes you towards the northern tip of Pointe des Espagnols, less than 2 km away from Brest. Further along you'll find Fort des Capucins, Fort du Cornouaille and many others. If you would like to finish the route where you started, you can turn left at Fort de la Fraternité onto the Route de la Fraternité, which will allow you to arrive back at the aire de pique-nique.

② Pte. de Pen-Hir and Pte. du Toulinguet (9 km)

What? – Conquer the mighty Pointe du Toulinguet and Pointe de Pen-Hir on the western side of the Crozon peninsula.

How? – Start at Plage de Pen Hat on Pointe du Toulinguet (48.277156, -4.616909) and head to Plage de Kerloc'h (48.258244, -4.555088). The route will guide you past the ruins of the Manor Saint Pol Roux, the Lagatjar menhirs and the Atlantic Maritime museum. You'll also pass Pointe de Pen-Hir, which has an impressive cross on top.

③ Pte. de Dinant and Cap de la Chèvre (13 km)

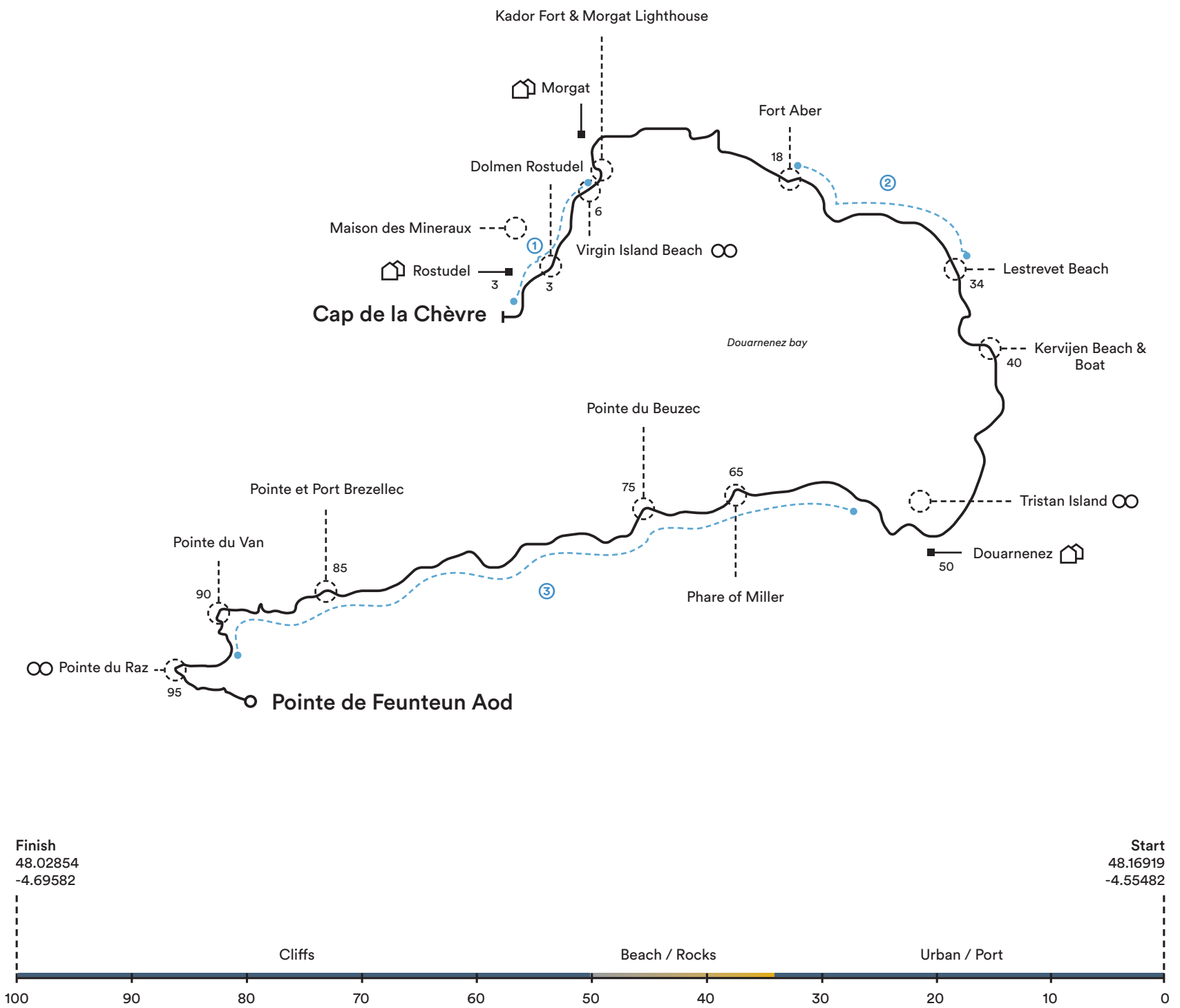
What? – If you like the remote wilderness, no sounds apart from the pounding waves and vast nature as far as the eye can see, then you should definitely check out this hike.

How? – Start at the Plage de Kerloc'h (48.258244, -4.555088) car park and stroll along the massive beaches of Kerloc'h, Kersiguénou and Goulien before hitting the Pointe de Dinan and arriving at the amazing Cap de la Chèvre. Along the remote path you'll feel far away from the outside world, with only a few parking facilities nearby. Finish at the car park at Cap de la Chèvre (48.171539, -4.551180). You can shorten the hike by parking at Parking Pointe de Dinan (48.233492, -4.563796) and either taking an 8 km trail to the car park near Cap de la Chèvre (48.171539, -4.551180) or a 5 km walk to the car park near Plage de la Palue (48.204874, -4.549146). Choose your route carefully, as the trail is rough and takes more time than normal.



Stage 24

Cap de la Chèvre > Pointe de Feunteun Aod



The cliffs of Pointe du Raz and Cap Sizun

If you zoom in on the most western extremity of France, you'll discover that it's actually three rocky, pointy peninsulas stretching out into the sea. The most northern peninsula is the Brest peninsula, with Pointe-Saint-Mathieu on its south-western extremity. In the middle, you'll find the rugged Crozon peninsula, with Pointe de Pen-Hir and Cap de la Chèvre perfect examples. And, last but not least, Cap Sizun completes the list with the mythical Pointe du Raz and its legendary chapel and lighthouse. Today we travel from the tip of Cap de la Chèvre to the tip of Pointe du Raz along the wonderful GR route of Cap Sizun. You can divide the 100 km coastline into three parts: the southern side of Crozon, stretching from the fairy-tale setting of Plage de l'Île Vierge along the beaches east of Douarnenez bay, to Douarnenez and then to the long wild and remote area surrounding Cap Sizun. You can look forward to wilderness highlights, menhirs and the marine caves at Morgat, as well as Fort de l'Aber, the boats at Kervijen and, of course, the city of Douarnenez. Douarnenez is a city with four ports and a history of sardines. The mysterious Tristan Island lies just offshore. The entire seaside is rocky, but with ample sandy beaches.

See **Pointe du Raz**

At Pointe du Raz you'll feel as if you're sitting on the edge of the world. The La Vieille Lighthouse and the yellow Tourelle de la Plate are both far out in the ocean. The old chapel on the shore is one of the most beautiful and mythical places in Bretagne and in France as a whole.

Plage de l'Île Vierge

Plage de l'Île Vierge is one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Hidden behind the forest and shielded by rocks, this spot has an exotic Corsican vibe.

Tristan Island

Marvel at the treasures of this little island, with its chapel, pirate history, exotic gardens and royal buildings. Take a guided tour and plan your trip at low tide, as most of the island is only open to visitors who are with a guided tour and it is not accessible at high tide.

Stroll **Douarnenez**


The city of four harbours. Visit Port-Musée, nearby Port Rhu the oldest port of the city. For a view on the city and the bay go to Île Tristan and low tide or Plomarch with its Roman ruins.

Rostudel

Classified mini village in the middle of Cap de la Chevre. Absolutely nothing to do but very authentic and beautiful.

Morgat

One of the few villages on the remote Crozon peninsula. Not much to see in the village but the port, lighthouse and surrounding menhirs are worth a visit.

 **Reach** This is one of the most remote stages in the book. Most of the route is nestled in the extremities of the Finistère peninsula. Luckily for us, extremities attract people, so the viewpoints are fairly accessible by car. Douarnenez is the biggest city in this stage, the rest are all villages. The rough coastline is fairly accessible, with small parking facilities and beaches. So while you might walk alone for a few kilometres, you are never more than 5 km away from the civilised world.

Hike **① East of Cap de la Chèvre (10 km)**

What? – One of the best hikes in the book. Trek along a true *sentier côtier* with steep cliffs on your right, a fairy-tale beach below and dolmens in the woods.

How? – Park your car close to the tip of the Cap de la Chèvre peninsula at the Parking du Cap de la Chèvre, which is 500 m from the village of Rostudel (48.171566, -4.551333), and follow the semaphore towards the southern tip. You'll end up at Port de Morgat, at the car park alongside Quai Kador (48.223759, -4.499700). The path is very well signposted and the vegetation is typically a low brown-purple bush, which enables you to have a wide view. Factor in time to descend to the wonderful Plage de l'Île Vierge (after 6 km) and to marvel at the dolmens, little forts and spectacular views you'll find along the way.

② Fort de l'Aber to Plage de Trez-Bellec (8 km)

What? – Hop from beach to cliffs and discover a handful of old forts.

How? – Plan your trip at low tide in order to cross to Fort de l'Aber. Start at Four a chaud de Rozan, the ruins of an old castle (48.236582, -4.428577). Keep the stream on your right and walk towards the sea. At low tide you can cross to the rocky island of Aber and discover the ruins of the little fort built in 1846. Walk back and follow the trail along the shore. You'll pass by Plage du Poul, Pointe du Guern and Trez Bihan Plage before ending up on Plage du Trez-Bellec, with parking facilities next to the beach along Route de la Plage and Le Caon (48.217598, -4.375908).

③ GR route to Pointe du Raz (40 km)

What? – The GR34 from Douarnenez to Pointe du Raz on the north side of Cap Sizun is one of the roughest and most awe-inspiring coastline hikes in the world.

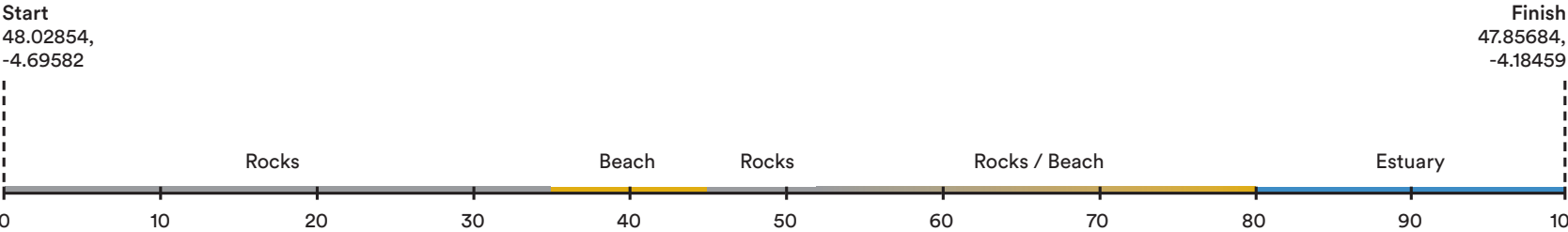
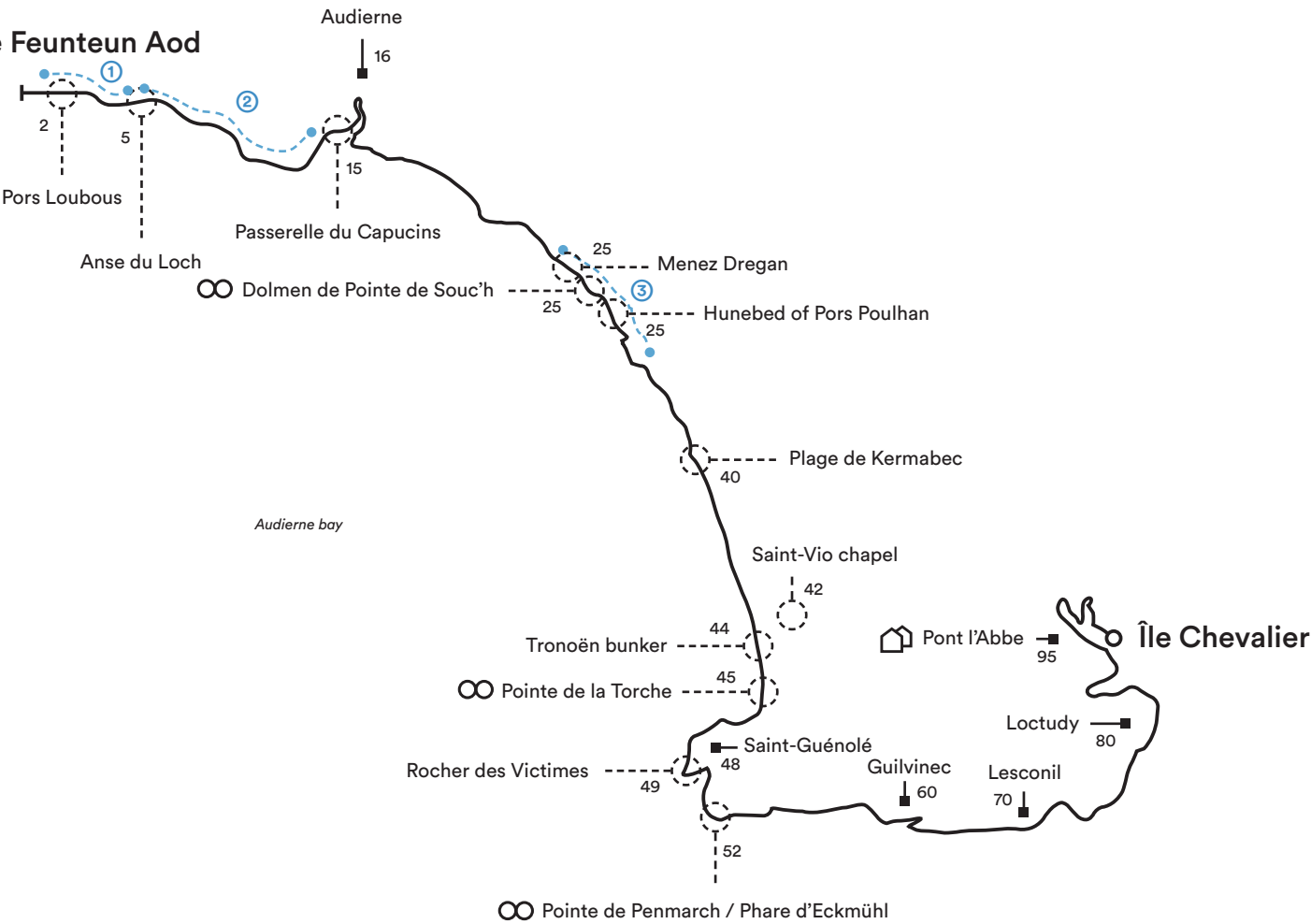
How? – You can access the route via different spots, enabling you to choose your distance, with Pointe du Raz as the endpoint: (i) Start at Treboul for a 40 km hike (48.102124, -4.353127). Walk along the Route des Roches Blanches, leaving the car park with the sea on your right. Take a trail through the woods on your right, heading towards Pointe de Leydé. (ii) Start at Parking Pointe de la Jument for a 35 km hike (48.105055, -4.413355) or at Phare du Millierhich, at the end of Route du Millier (48.098245, -4.464668), which, by the way, is a wonderful place to visit, for a 30 km hike. (iii) Start at Pointe de Beuzec / Kastel Koz for a 25 km hike (48.084118, -4.518263). (iv) Start at the wonderful Port Brézellec for a 10 km walk, with the tiny fishing boats in the bay at the end of the street at Pointe de Brézellec (48.070459, -4.663333). (v) The shortest walk is 5 km, starting from the Chapelle Saint-They de la Pointe du Van car park (48.059638, -4.707745). The final car park at Pointe du Raz is to be found at the end of Rue des Langoustiers (48.037015, -4.716747). The walk to the actual cliff and semaphore is 1.5 km.

Stage 25

Pointe de Feunteun Aod > Île Chevalier



Pointe de Feunteun Aod



The menhirs and beaches of Audierne bay ~~~

As we move southeast from the rocky region of Pointe du Raz on the massive Cap Sizun peninsula, the area remains quite desolate with a lot of vertical metres and a few villages on the way, the perfect surroundings for an amazing clifftop walk. The rocky scenery of the first few kilometres is home to some of the most well-known Neolithic monoliths in the region. Moving further down, the landscape transforms into an endless beach that is more than 12 km long. Pointe de la Torche, Tronoën and Penhors are popular within the surfer community. The Eckmühl Lighthouse at Penmarch marks the end of the shoreline. From here the land curves sharply eastwards, with a greater degree of urbanisation around the cities of Guilvinec, Loctudy and Pont-l'Abbé.

∞ See **Phare d'Eckmühl** ~~~

One of the most famous and most visited lighthouses in Brittany. With a height of 65 m, it is as stunning on the outside as it is on the inside, where it has opaline plates covering the stairwell walls.

Pointe de la Torche ~~~

The most famous surfing spot in Bretagne. In addition to excellent waves, you can also find a prehistoric tumulus on the cape and an old German bunker.

Grotte de Menez Dregan, Pointe du Souc'h necropolis and dolmen de Pors Poulhan ~~~

A prehistoric Valhalla for lovers of the Neolithic period. If you enjoy seeing prehistorical monuments up to 10,000 years old, you'll find the above-mentioned sites within a 2 km range.

△ Hike

Over the course of 60 km, from Pointe de Feunteun Aod up to Penmarch, you'll be able to hike next to the sea quite easily. The first few kilometres provide endless hiking possibilities and the routes mentioned below are our favourites.

① **Pointe de Feunteun Aod to Anse du Loch (5 km)** ~~~ △△△
What? – Windy clifftop walk along the GR34 in the rough territory of Cap Sizun.

How? – Start at Pointe Feunteun Aod. There is a little parking next to the little port on the west side of the bay (or right side when facing the bay) (48.027857, -4.696059) Start on the GR single trail which curves around the bay until you reach the Anse du Loch (48.027139, -4.629494) to finish the trip. After 4 km you'll find a cute little port on the route named Pors Loubous.

② **Anse du Loch to Audierne (8 km)** ~~~ △△△

What? – Cap Sizun wilderness – Part II

How? – Start at the car park along Route de l'Océan, Primelin (48.027139, -4.629494). Finish at the car park on Place du Général de Gaulle in Audierne, next to the pier (48.005322, -4.557067).

③ **Monolith hike (4 km)** ~~~ △△

What? – Follow a single trail along the cliffs and discover prehistoric remains.

How? – Start at the parking facilities at the crossing of Rue du Sablé Blanc and Rue d'Océan, Plouhinec (48.001892, -4.498760). Finish at the little port along the Pors Poulhan Street in Plouhinec (47.986251, -4.462418).

🏠 Stroll **Pont-l'Abbé** ~~~

Described by the author Maupassant as 'the most Breton of Breton towns'. Home to a castle and an inhabited bridge, one of only nine inhabited bridges in the whole of France.

Guilvinec ~~~

A harbour town that originated from fishermen's hamlets. The no. 1 fishing port in France, based on the number of fishermen. Be sure to visit Haliotika, the City of Fisheries.

Loctudy ~~~

A leisure port with a Catholic heritage.

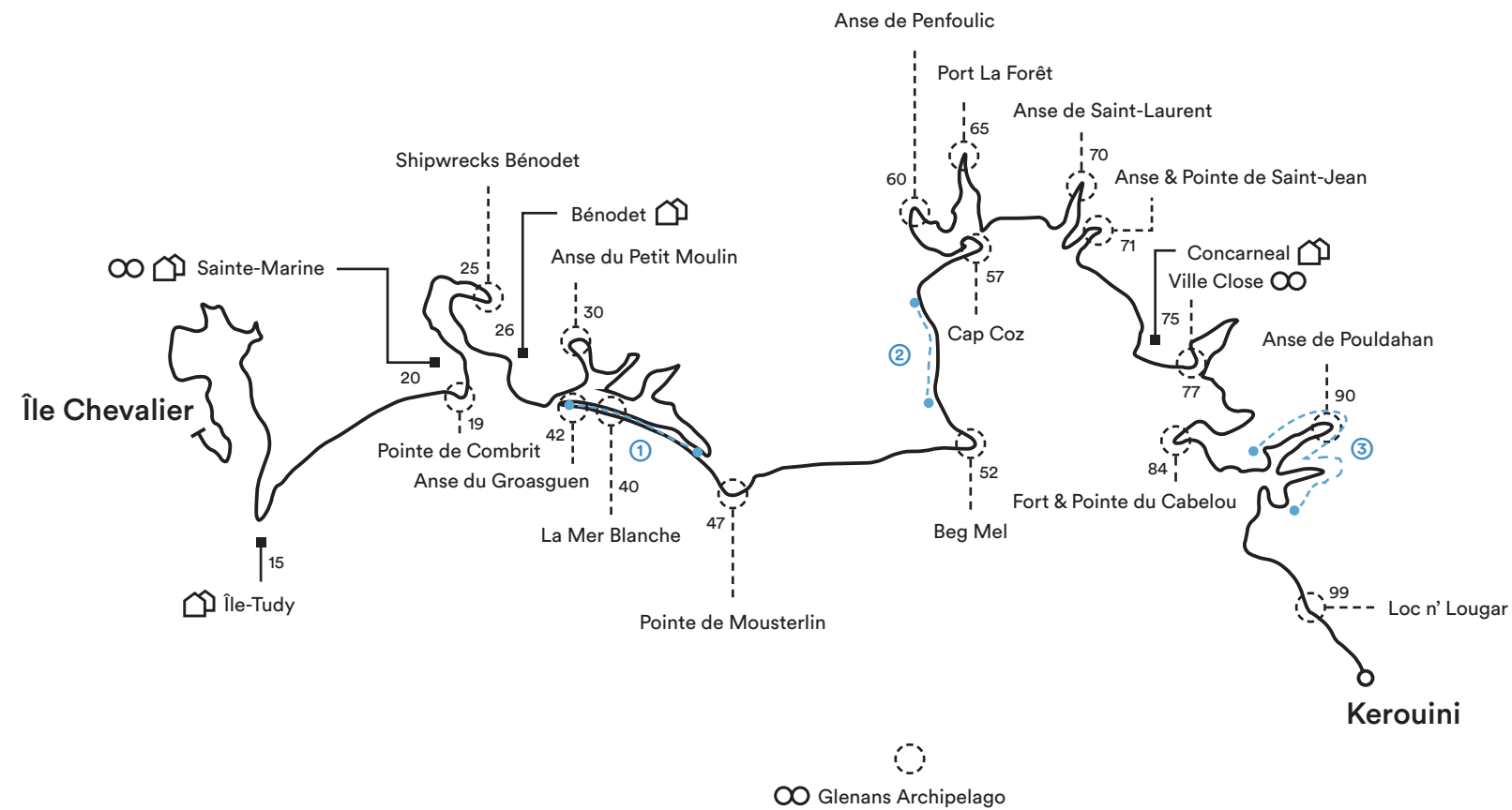
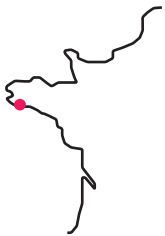
📍 Reach

We are still in Finistère, far away from everything. Quimper, the most accessible town in this area, is 20 km away. The biggest cities are Audierne, Guilvinec, Loctudy and Pont-l'Abbé. The car is your best bet for getting around.



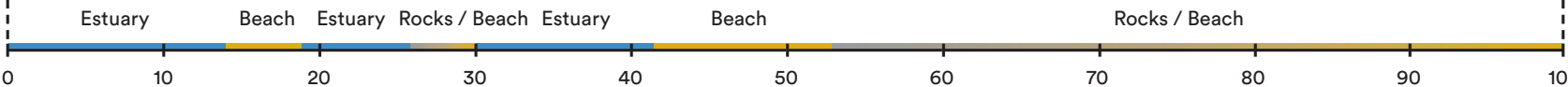
Stage 26

Île Chevalier > Kerouini



Start
47.85684
-4.18459

Finish
47.81226
-3.86904



The bays, creeks and river mouths around Concarneau

Stage 26 is a particularly well-balanced one, with a handful of white sandy beaches to unwind on, some culture to nurture your brain and numerous charming terraces on which to enjoy a glass of rosé. The beautiful mouth of the river Odet gave birth to the charming villages of Sainte-Marine and Bénodet, which are both characterised by lovely little lighthouses and amazing terraces with views of the colourful boats on the water. Nearby places to relax include Plage de Kermor and Bénodet beach. Further southeast you can immerse yourself in the beauty of nature, either along the natural reserve at Mer Blanche or in one of the stunning little bays on the left bank of the bay of La Forêt. Behind this bay you'll discover the culturally rich Concarneau. This is a buzzing city that is filled with shops and restaurants along Rue Vauban, which is its main street, and which has the quaint Ville Close, a fortified 'island', in the heart of the city. Concarneau is the no. 1 tuna port in France, so it is definitely worth visiting when you have a healthy appetite. Offshore, the mythical Glénan archipelago, accessible by boat, will add a Caribbean flavour to your Breton journey.

See **Îles de Glénan**

This small archipelago is made up of several little islands. The blue water and white beaches give the island chain its renowned exotic vibe. Take a boat ride from Bénodet, Concarneau or Loctudy to reach the archipelago.

Pointe de Combrit

You'll have a great view of the river Odet flowing into the ocean from this headland. The nearby fort and lighthouse are definitely worth checking out. Combine it with a visit to the Sainte-Marine centre, which is not too far away.

Ville Close in Concarneau

If you like military architecture, you have to put this 13th-century fortified city, redeveloped by Vauban in the 17th century, at the top of your list.

Stroll **Concarneau**

A charming blend of history and economy, Concarneau's best assets are its walled city centre, Rue Vauban, Place Saint-Guénolé, Musée de la Pêche, Château de Kériolet and Les Halles, the local food market.

Sainte-Marine and Bénodet

Two charming fishing villages on the left and right bank of the Odet. Sainte-Marine has an irresistible chilled vibe and a little harbour dotted with bars and terraces.

Île-Tudy

A popular holiday destination, mainly because of the long beach on one side of the peninsula. Take the navette to the more vibrant Loctudy on the left bank for a wander around the authentic village.

Hike **① Along La Mer Blanche (6.8 km)**

What? – Walk alongside the swampy grounds of the natural reserve La Mer Blanche and then make a U-turn to return to your starting point via Plage de Kerler.

How? – Park your car at either the Mer Blanche parking (47.851165, -4.046515) or a bit further north at the end of Hent Kerler Street (47.855017, -4.051322) and walk towards the beach. Continue along the peninsula to the very tip, which shields the Mer Blanche reserve from the ocean.

② From beach to beach to Cap Coz (3.5 km)


What? – Hop from one minuscule hidden beach to the other, over rocks and single trails, where you'll have a great view of the bay of La Forêt.

How? – Start at Plage de Kerveltrec and park your car along the Hent Kerveltrec Street (47.868698, -3.985495). Finish at the car park at the end of Avenue de la Pointe du Cap Coz (47.890887, -3.973165). The first 1.8 km is an adventurous climb from beach to beach. However, the final 2.5 km is a leisurely stroll along the long white beach towards Cap Coz, where you'll be treated to a magnificent view of Port La Forêt and Kerleven.

③ Promenade de Pouldohan (8 km)

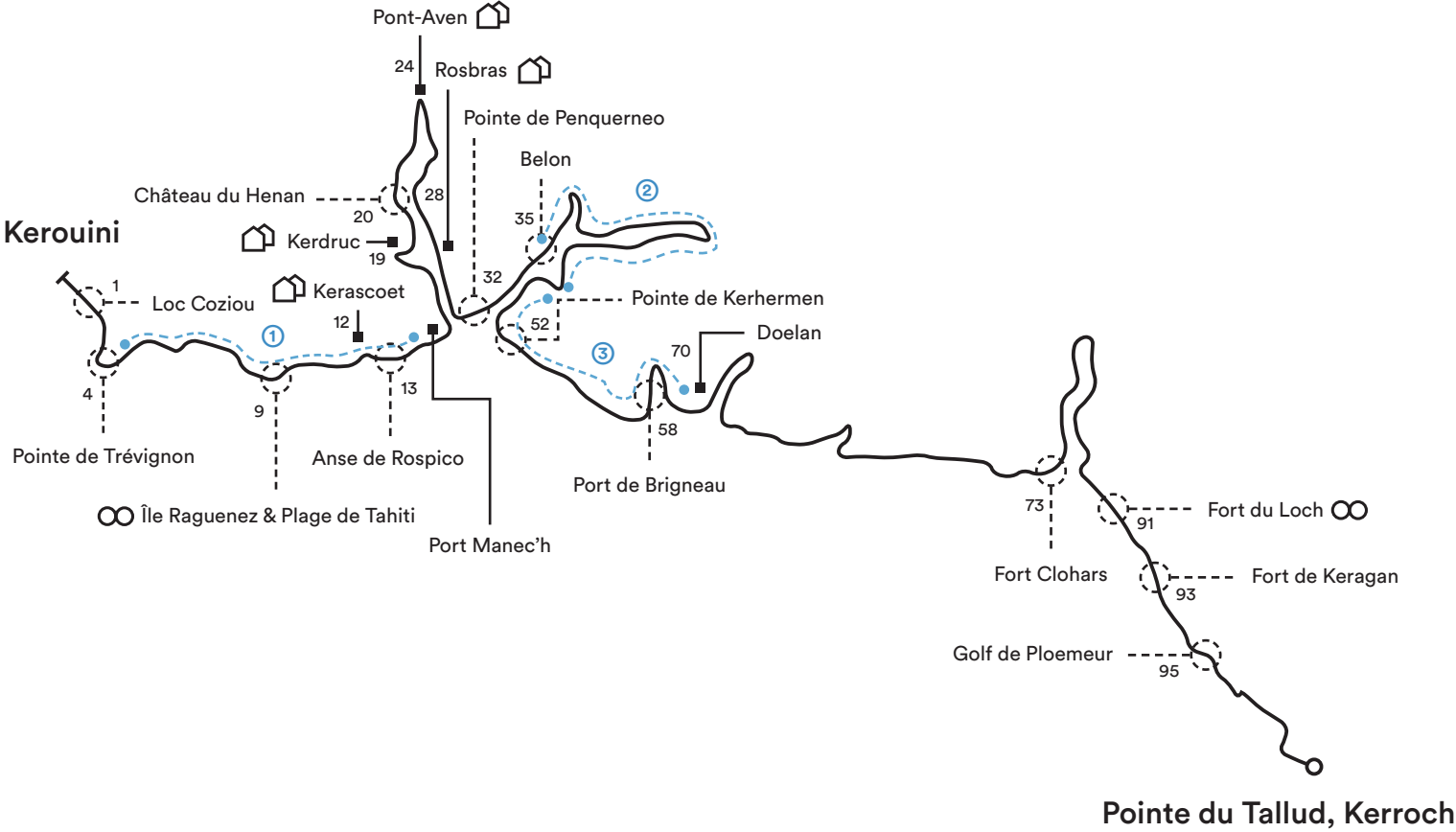
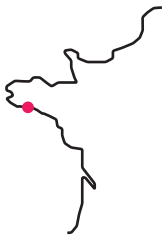
What? – Walk along the Anse de Pouldohan with its dozen little creeks and bays on a woody single trail.

How? – Start at Plage de Kermingham (47.850619, -3.901449). Follow the sinuous path to emerge at Plage de Pouldohan (47.841746, -3.898263). The majority of this incredible hike passes alongside the water; there are only a few (short) times when you'll be forced to trek inland.

 **Reach** There are no airports, trains or highways to be found on this stretch of land. A car is definitely not an unnecessary luxury. If you want to travel by TGV or plane, then Quimper, 10 km from Bénodet, is your best bet. Bénodet and Concarneau are the main cities of this stage and both are fairly well connected by a two-lane road, although it does take a long time since the road goes around the Baie de La Forêt.

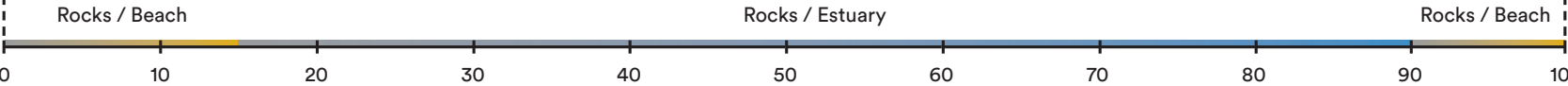
Stage 27

Kerouini > Pointe du Tallud, Kerroch



Start
47.81226
-3.86904

Finish
47.69566
-3.45299



The avens of Pont-Aven, Belon and Kerdruc ~~~

This stage marks the end of the Finistère department, as we enter Morbihan, crossing the river Laïta by the Pont de Saint-Maurice. In the western part of this stage we pass through a typical south Finistère area with idyllic beaches around Névez, for example Plage de Tahiti. Further towards the east, at the lovely Port Manec'h, which we reach after 15 km, we see the typical avens, the Breton versions of fjords, where the ocean meets the sweeter water of the rivers. This is where oysters are kept after they are harvested in order to acquire their hazelnut aroma and where hundreds of colourful fishing boats follow the curves of the rivers. From west to east we'll pass by several rivers – la rivière d'Aven, la rivière de Bélon, la rivière de Merrien – and Doëlan bay, where you will find plenty of opportunities to try a plate of oysters while taking in a view of the water, for example in Port du Bélon, Port de Kerdruc and Port Ros Bras. On entering Morbihan, the coastline changes from riverbank to beach and you'll find heaps of old forts along the shoreline, such as Fort de Keragan, Fort du Loch and Fort Clohars, although the last named is technically still in Finistère.



See Fort de Keragan a.k.a. Fort Bloqué

This fort, built on a small rocky island 300 m from the shore, is only accessible at low tide. It dates back to 1756 and it was originally built to defend Lorient. The nearby Fort du Loch is also worth a visit.

Plage Tahiti and Île Raguénez ~~~

The Raguénez beach owes its nickname of Plage Tahiti to its exotic white-sand-blue-water setting. The nearby inhabited island of Île Raguénez is accessible at low tide, but it is privately owned. The island offers a gorgeous backdrop to the great sandy beach.



Hike ① Plage Tahiti to Port Manec'h (6 km) ~~~

What? – Discover the Névez coast while passing by one paradise beach after another. Two of the gems you'll stumble upon are the stunning Tahiti beach and Rospico bay.

How? – Start at the car park on Rue des Îles (47.788349, -3.799925) and start walking, keeping the water on your right-hand side. You'll come to Anse de Rospico about 2 kilometres after you leave Tahiti beach. Port Manec'h is 3 to 4 kilometres away. There is a car park near the beach along the Courniche du Pouldon (47.804901, -3.741186).

The GR34 runs continuously along the coastline from Port du Bélon up to Le Pouldu at the border of Finistère, providing over 30 km of hiking trails. We've listed two of our favourite sections below:

② Feel the aven (14 km) ~~~

What? – Walk along the Bélon estuary from one side of the port to the other.

How? – Start at the left bank at the end of Kervao Street, a few hundred metres from the crossroads with Kerdru Street (47.821970, -3.698743). You'll see the start of a single trail. Keep the river on your right and continue down the path. You'll need to do a bit of walking on asphalt at two points, once at Beg Lanneguy (you'll regain access to the path at 47.821254, -3.693186) and the second time at Anse de Keristinec at 47.828024, -3.672804, where you'll find the path back along Pont du Guilly Street (47.820130, -3.651129). Look up 'Circuit du Bélon' for more information. This hike finishes at Port du Bélon (right bank, 47.812333, -3.704360).

③ Port du Bélon to Port de Brigneau (9 km) ~~~

What? – 2 km along the riverside, 8 km along the rocky ocean coastline.

How? – Find the start of the trail at the end of Rue du Port de Bélon (47.812762, -3.706836) and keep the river on your right-hand side while walking. After 2 km you'll hit Plage de Kerfany, with a gorgeous ocean view as your reward. From now on there are no more riverbanks with trees, but rougher rocks and open landscapes. Finish at the small Port de Brigneau (47.785772, -3.671647).



Stroll Kerascoët and Kercanic ~~~

Kerascoët and Kercanic are as Breton as it gets, with their blue-shuttered granite stone houses surrounded by hydrangeas, beautiful thatched roofs and sheds made of standing stones or *pierres debout*.

Pont-Aven ~~~

Pont-Aven has a heart for art, with over 60 art galleries, and a true fairy-tale feel, with small bridges, green surroundings and old windmills. Walk the Promenade Xavier Grall, discover the Bois d'Amour and visit the Trémalo chapel.

Port de Kerdruc and Port de Rosbras ~~~

Two very small ports that flank the Aven river on both sides. They are a must-visit if you would like indulge in oysters while enjoying a view of the river, which is usually dotted with colourful boats. If you have some time to spare you should also go and visit Port du Bélon.

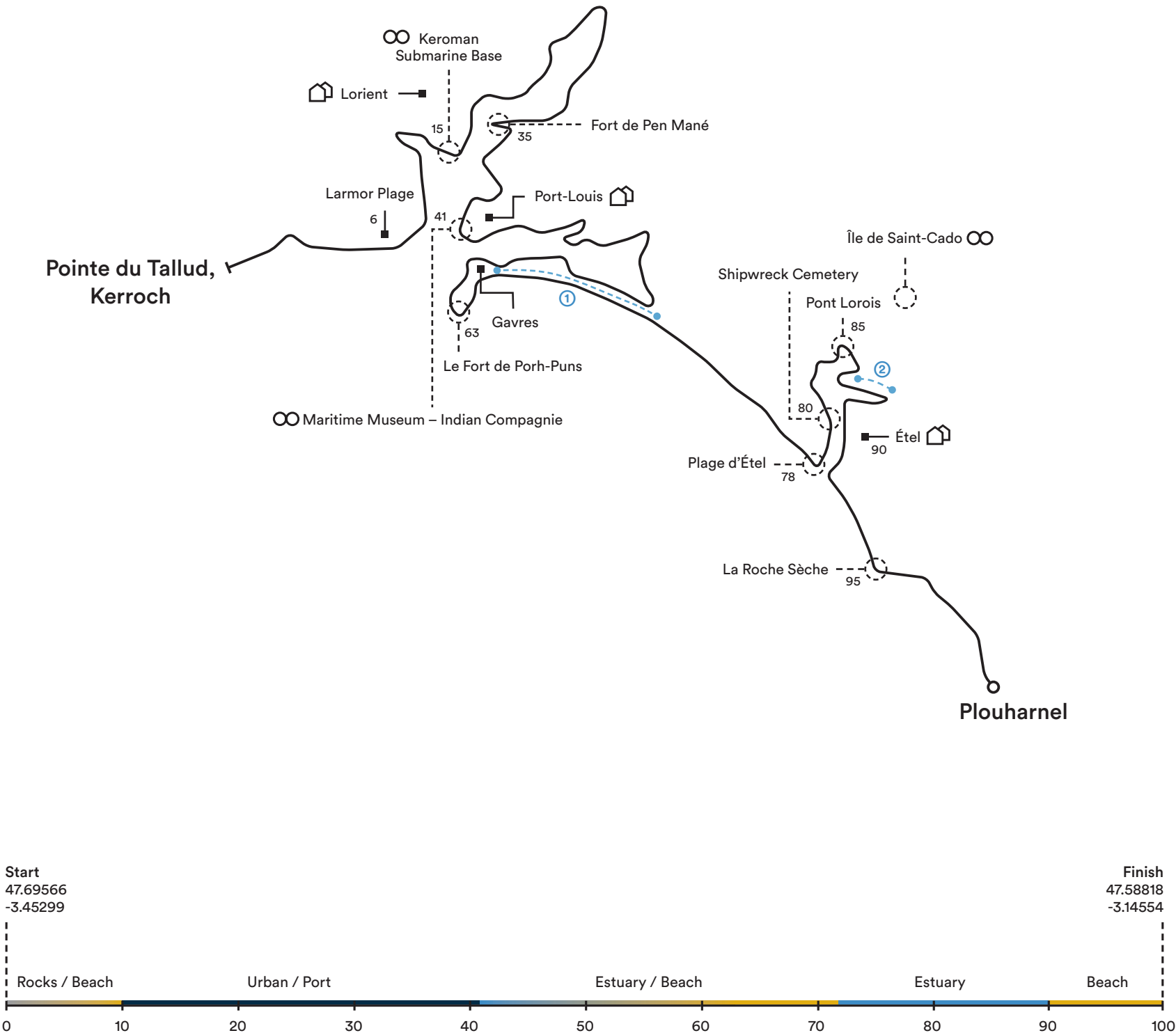
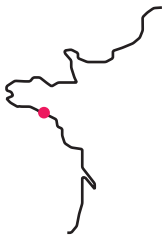


Reach Lorient is very close to the most eastern part of this stage. The bigger cities in the area are – from west to east – Pont-Aven, Riec-sur-Bélon, Moëlan-sur-Mer and Clohars-Carnoët, all of which are easily accessible by car. The coastline is harder to reach, as the avens force you to make extensive detours. The Névez part of the stage, closer to Concarneau, is more accessible. The Rosporden train station is the closest railway station to Pont-Aven.



Stage 28

Pointe du Tallud, Kerroch > Plouharnel



The military past of Lorient and Port-Louis and the marvels of rivière d'Étel

During this stage a generous dose of history is perfectly balanced by natural beauty, as we leave the estuary of the combined Blavet and Scorff river, with Lorient on the west bank and Port-Louis on the east. Lorient and Port-Louis both tell tales of the conquest of India in the 17th century and bear the marks left by WWII. In 1664, the Compagnie des Indes was established in the heart of Port-Louis, in La Citadelle. This is currently home to four museums, but it was once Napoleon's prison. Centuries later, the Germans built one of the handful of submarine bases in occupied France in this area, housing a few dozen U-boats. Once the biggest military fortress in Europe and a workplace for 15,000 Germans, the complex is now open to the public. The Keroman submarine museum features a Daphné-class French submarine as an impressive reminder of the past. Lorient is world famous for its Interceltic festival and for Eric Tabarly Sailing World, an interactive museum on the history of leisure and competitive sailing. Moving southeast, we make a massive U-turn to visit the Gâvres peninsula. Further along this leg we come across sandy beaches until we hit the estuary of the rivière d'Étel, an impressive ria or inlet of over 300 km², with a handful of islands, such as Île de Saint-Cado.



See

Île de Saint-Cado

The crown jewel of the formidable rivière d'Étel.

The Citadel – National Maritime Museum Port-Louis

This impressive fort comes with great views of Lorient and Gâvres. With four museums, you can spend an entire day here if you're up for it.

Keroman Submarine Base

If you are interested in WWII or marine history, this old German U-boat base is your Valhalla. Open to the public.



Hike

① The dunes of Gâvres (6 km)

What? – If you like a long walk on the beach with the wind in your hair, this one is for you.

How? – Park your car at the car park in front of Plage de Lines (47.684515, -3.283352) and follow the beach, keeping the water on your left-hand side. After 5 kilometres of sand you'll find the historic centre of Gâvres and the car park at the crossing of Avenue des Deux Mers and Rue de la Grande Plage (47.692476, -3.353317). If you prefer a shorter walk, there are a couple of parking facilities on the peninsula along the way.

② On the borders of rivière d'Étel (3 km)

What? – The best way to explore the Étel ria is by boat. However, if you prefer to discover the area by foot, this short hike gives you a decent impression.

How? – Start at the crossing of Impasse de Ploumedic and En Nodeve (47.669449, -3.203586) and end close to the Moulin du Bignac at the end of Rue de Bignac (47.662788, -3.190193). You'll walk alongside the Étel river on a single trail for 1 km and then follow the tributary rivière du Sac'h.



Stroll

Lorient

Lorient is a fairly new city, founded in the 17th century. It is a busy medium-sized town.

Étel

Étel village is a great starting point from which to discover the surrounding ria with its varied landscape.

Port-Louis

Port-Louis has a beautiful historic centre. The main attractions are the typical houses on Rue des Dames and Rue Driasker with their quintessential guettes (dormer windows) to monitor the weather and the sea.



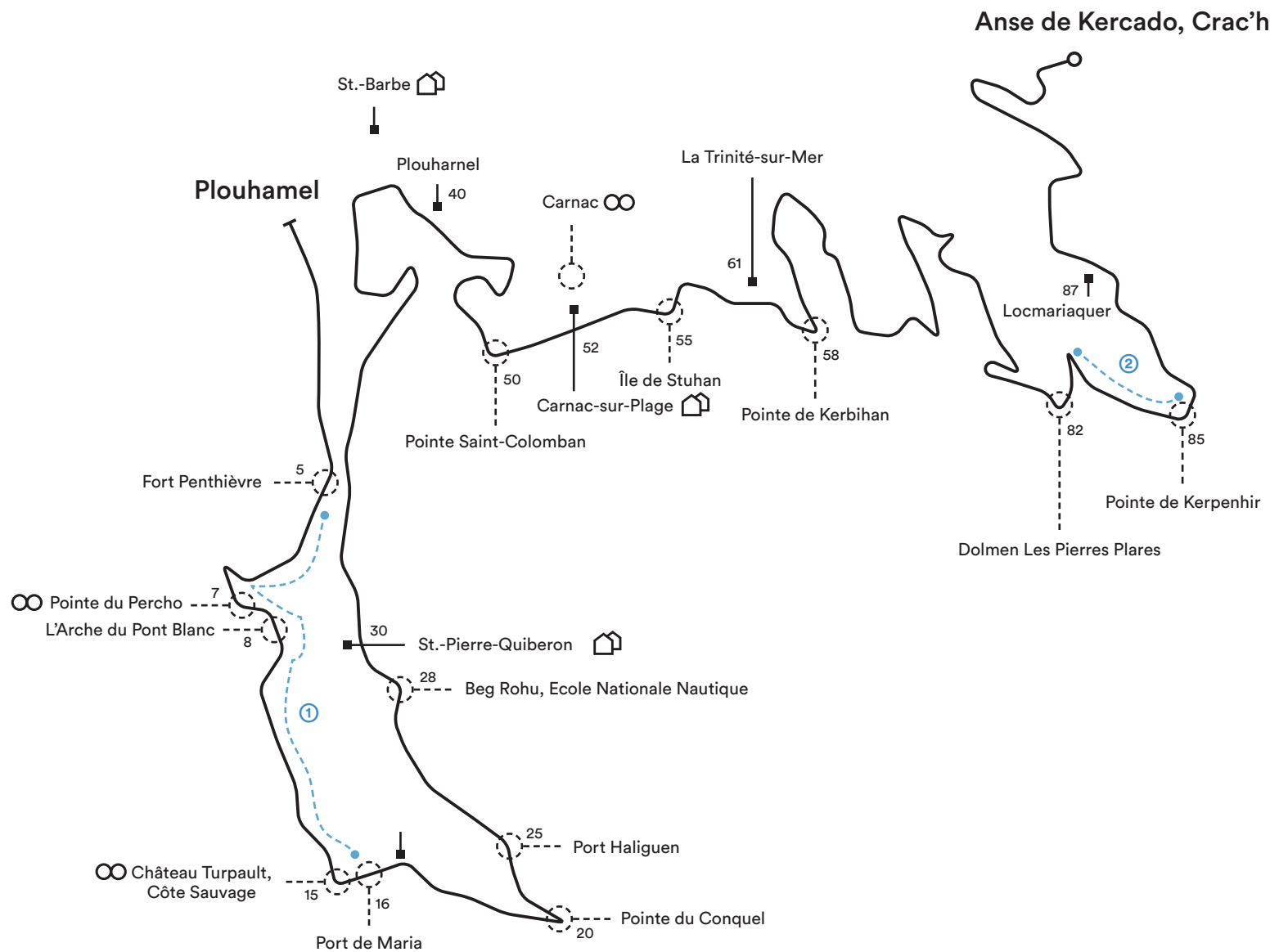
Reach

Lorient has an airport, a TGV station and a highway. The other regions are less accessible, with only two-lane roads connecting Port-Louis to Plouhinec and Kergo on the right bank of the river Étel. The Gâvres peninsula is a detour, but the two-lane road is in good condition.



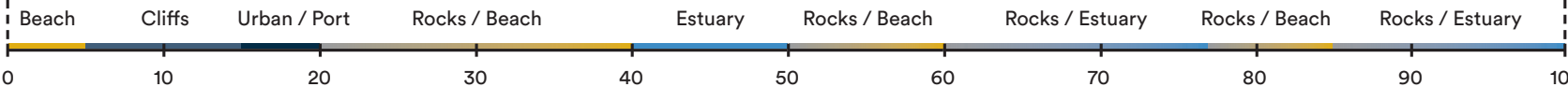
Stage 29

Plouhamel > Anse de Kercade, Crac’h



Start
47.58818
-3.14554

Finish
47.61618
-2.95523



The wild coast of Quiberon and the old stones of Carnac ~~~

If you scan the French Atlantic coast you'll find four large islands lying just off the coast: Quiberon, Noirmoutier, Île de Ré and Île d'Oléron, from north to south. But one of them doesn't belong in that list. Quiberon is not technically an island but a tied island, connected to the mainland by a tombolo, a tiny stretch of land less than 100 m wide. It does not have the same peaceful, pine tree and sandy beach vibe as the others in the list. The western side is more rugged with a rocky coastline and impressive cliffs, called Côte Sauvage. The area also has a handful of menhirs and dolmens to discover along the way. The east, however, does have a variety of sandy beaches, along with the obligatory (and gorgeous) villages with white houses and blue shutters. The island is home to the École National de Voile in Beg Rohu, one of the most famous sailing training centres in the world. East of the peninsula lies Carnac, which is widely known for its unique rows of prehistoric monoliths. It also has a thalassotherapy spa centre that is well worth a visit. Around Locmariaquer, a smaller peninsula in the east, you'll find menhirs, tumuli and sweeping views around Pointe de Kerpenhir.

∞ See

Château Turpault ∞

Despite its medieval appearance, this emblematic castle was constructed in 1904 by the wealthy industrialist Georges Turpault. The château is not open to visitors, but it is worth a visit as you can see the manor from quite close up. Fort Penthièvre, which is situated at the entry to the island, is also worth seeing.

Megaliths of Carnac ∞

This collection of thousands of monolithic prehistoric stones, which are between 5,000 and 7,000 years old, is one of Brittany's greatest attractions. Explore the sites at Ménéac, Kerlescan and Kermario or discover the 6.5 m giant menhir at Manio.

Pointe du Percho ∞

This is a true landmark on the Côte Sauvage, with a natural arch in the rocks, an old ruin and a prehistoric tumulus.



Stroll Carnac-Plage ∞

Carnac-Plage is a popular summer seaside resort, with a long beach and shallow water. It is the sunniest area in Brittany and is brimming with water sports clubs and wellness facilities.

Saint-Pierre-Quiberon ~

Saint-Pierre-Quiberon is the busiest village on the island, with lots of fish restaurants, home decoration boutique shops and art galleries.

Port Maria ~

The former no. 1 sardine port in France and still a hotspot for fish restaurants.



Reach One of the perks of a peninsula is the possibility of a train connection to the mainland. You'll find stations throughout the peninsula: at Quiberon (at the tip), and at Saint-Pierre-de-Quiberon, Kerhostin and Isthme, on the tombolo. The train line continues inland, with the station at Plouharnel-Carnac being the closest to the rest of the stage. A two-lane road connects Plouharnel with Trinité-sur-Mer via Carnac, so access by car is reasonably good. The nearest airport is located in Lorient.

△ Hike

① Côte Sauvage (9 km) ∞ △△△

What? – Take the coastal path and follow several kilometres of the Wild Coast of Quiberon to end at the enchanting Château Turpault.
How? – Start at the Parking du Fozo at the end of Route du Fozo (47.526545, -3.156268) next to the Tumulus de Beg-en-Aud. If the car park is full, there is another one 100 m down the road. The route ends next to Château Turpault, adjacent to Rue des Goélands (47.475631, -3.131852). At the start, be sure to go around the impressive Beg-en-Aud. The cliff trail hugs the coastline of the Côte Sauvage, with little beaches, bays and menhirs along the way. You can extend your route and go as far as the most southern tip of the island, Pointe du Conquel, which will add an extra 4 km. This road will provide a less desolate landscape, as you'll pass Port Quiberon, but it does make for a great stop for a coffee or a sardine.

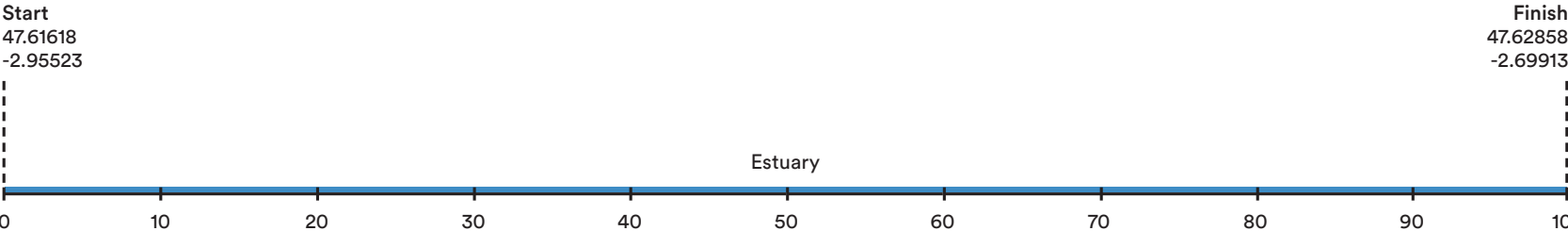
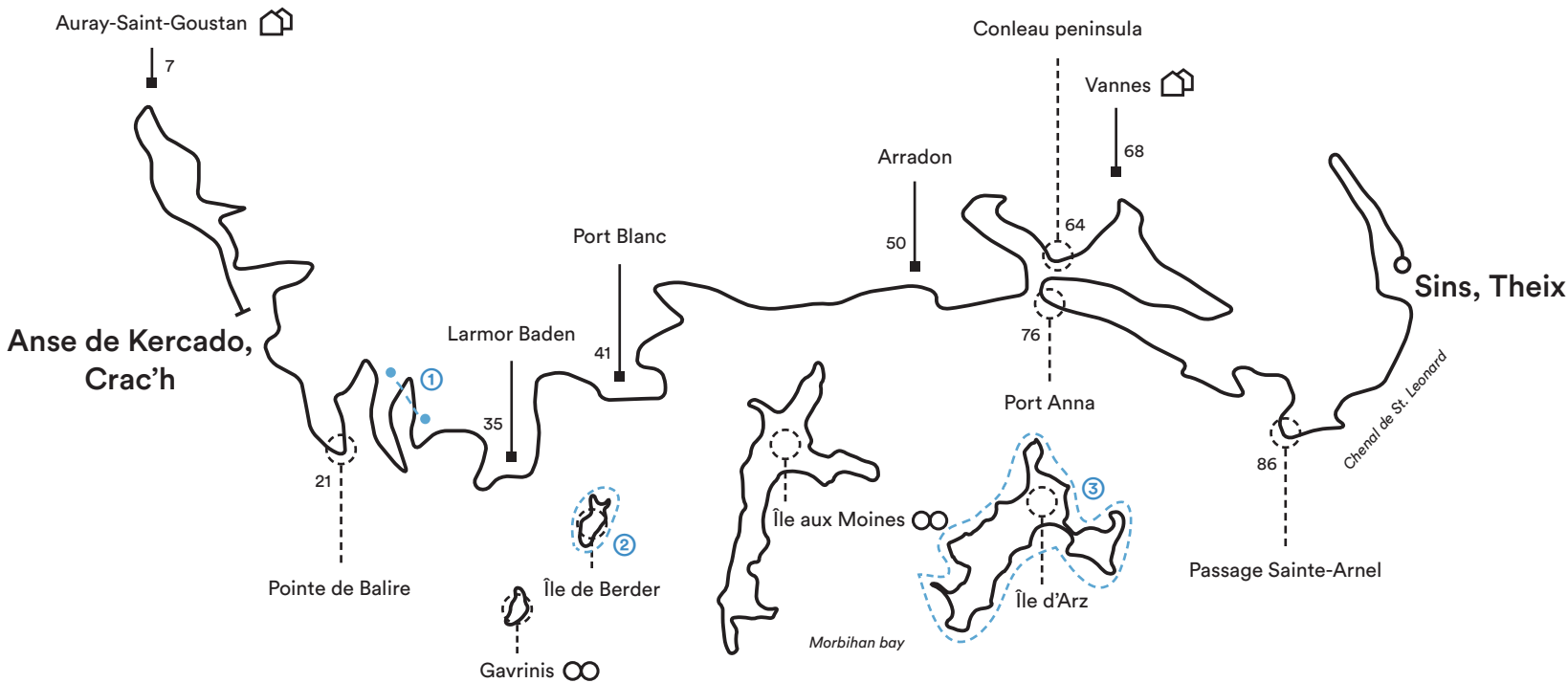
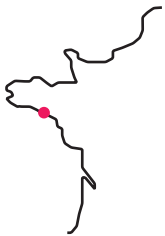
② Around Locmariaquer peninsula (6 km) ∞ △

What? – Follow the curves of the scenic peninsula to explore the dolmen Les Pierres Plates, the panoramic Pointe Er Hourél and Pointe de Kerpenhir en route.
How? – Start at Plage Saint-Pierre and park at the end of Route Saint-Pierre (47.558860, -2.969242). This 6 km hike will bring you to the scenic Pointe de Kerpenhir, with a car park along the Route de Kerpenhir (47.555672, -2.929701). You'll go around the Pointe Er Hourél in the first kilometre and will be rewarded with a view of the Pierres Plates just a few kilometres further on. The small forest at the tip of the pointe makes it seem a mythical place.



Stage 30

Anse de Kercado, Crac'h > Sins, Theix



The islands in the bay of Morbihan ~~~

The Gulf of Morbihan, which is Breton for ‘little sea’, is considered to be one of the most beautiful bays in the world. It contains 42 islands that are scattered across the 40 km² blue-water paradise. While Île aux Moines and Île d’Arz are the most beautiful islets, there is so much more beauty to discover by boat, which you can take from either Vannes or Port Blanc. The 100 km that are covered in Stage 30 run across the northern part of the bay. There is so much variety in their beauty. Highlights include the bird reserve at Séné Marshes, the passage between the bay and the ocean at Port Navalo, the ancient megalithic structure on Gavrinis (nicknamed the Sistine Chapel of the Neolithic), the estuary of Auray with the historical city of Le Bono, Saint-Goustan and, of course, Vannes, the medieval capital of Morbihan. Vannes was founded in 56 BC by Caesar and bears souvenirs from thousands of years of history, the highlights of which are the well-preserved ramparts and beautiful gardens. It’s safe to say that the pearl of southern Brittany has a lot to offer.

∞ See The islands ~~~

Visit the bigger islands Île aux Moines (for biking) and Île d’Arz (for hiking) or the smaller islands Île Gavrinis (for prehistoric ruins), Île de Berder or Île Longue. A short boat trip from Pont Blanc or Vannes will take you to the islands.

△ Hike ① Around Île d’Arz (16 km) ~~~

What? – Circle around the scenic and mythical Île d’Arz, the more rugged sister island of Île aux Moines.

How? – Park your car at (47.628384, -2.778436) and take a 20-minute boat ride from the Embarcadère de l’Île d’Arz at the end of Plage de Conleau (47.627460, -2.777139). When you arrive on the island, walk in an anticlockwise direction. After a few metres you’ll see Pointe du Berno, with a *moulin à marée* from the 16th century.

② Around Île de Berder (2.4 km) ~~~

What? – If a 16 km hike is a bit too much for your liking, you can opt for the lighter tour around Île de Berder. You’ll still get the full Morbihan experience, but with less effort.

How? – Logistically, this walk is also much easier, as you don’t need to take a boat to get to your starting point. However, you do need to plan properly, as the island is only accessible at low tide via a *chaussée submersible*. Park your car at the car park next to the overpass at the end of Rue du Drenez (47.582744, -2.890269). Go around the island in an anticlockwise direction and you will spot Île Gavrinis, with its famous cairn, on your right at the southern tip of the island. At the very end of your walk you’ll be rewarded with the dolmen de la Pointe nord de Berder.

③ Moulin de Baden to Plage de Locmiquel (6 km) ~~~

What? – Follow the banks that hug Morbihan bay, crossing dams and rounding little islands.

How? – From Moulin de Baden to Locmiquel Plage. Park your car next to Moulin de Baden at the end of Rue du Lenn (47.603987, -2.929225). There is no real car park, but the road should be wide enough. When you walk to the water (Le Rohu), you’ll find a path alongside the waterline to Plage de Locmiquel. On your arrival you’ll find a place to park at the crossing of Chemin du Garheu and Rue du Danut (47.592271, -2.911060). Along the route you’ll pass oyster farms, the Touvern dolmen hidden in the woods, and a dam and if it’s low tide, you can even go around the Sept-Îles island.

🏠 Stroll Vannes ~~~

Vannes has an ocean of things to do. Definitely go and check out the Lavoires de la Garenne, which is situated to the south of the Vannes Ramparts and its gardens. Other highlights are Château de l’Hermine, Place des Lices, the half-timbered houses in the old city centre, Place Gambetta to have a drink or Conleau Beach for a taste of the local laid-back pace of life.

Auray – Saint-Goustan ~~~

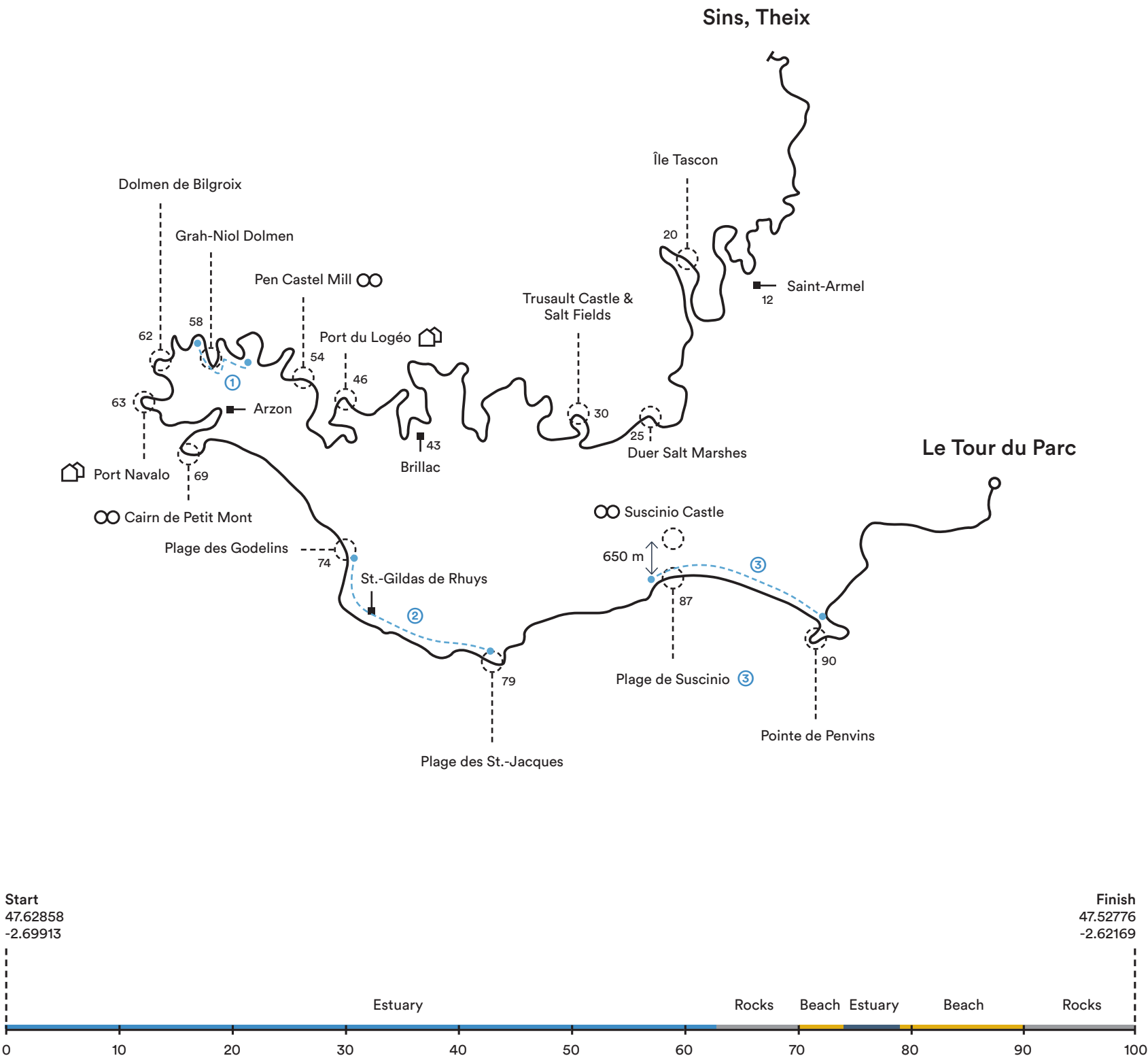
The Auray estuary gave birth to the flourishing cities of Auray, on the left bank, and Saint-Goustan, on the right bank. The toll made it the second most important port during the 17th century and the benefits can still be seen today. It is worth taking the time to visit this beautiful and historic city.

➤ Reach Vannes is easily accessible by both train (TGV) and car. Unfortunately, the local airport doesn’t offer regular flights. So unless you want to charter an aeroplane, you’ll have to land at nearby Lorient (52 km). Auray is connected to Vannes by both train and road, making access relatively easy. Island hopping can be done by boat. The biggest islands are Île aux Moines, accessible from Port Blanc, and Île d’Arz, accessible from Conleau.



Stage 31

Sins, Theix > Le Tour du Parc



The creeks and castles of Rhuys peninsula

This 100 km leg covers the entire Rhuys peninsula, which separates the wonderful Gulf of Morbihan – of Stage 30 – from Quiberon bay. Most of the northern coast has a riverbank feel, where fields and grass naturally transition into the inland sea at Morbihan. The northern side is dotted with little creeks, forgotten bays and little harbours that are worth a look. Once we pass Port Navalo, we are again treated to amazing seascapes, with sandy beaches aplenty, which are briefly punctuated by the cliffy coastline surrounding Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys. In the east, the oyster banks along the estuary at Penerf add to the diversity of the 10 km long peninsula. This versatility is what compelled the elite to build castles here during the Middle Ages in order to enjoy the sun away from their domiciles. The best example of these medieval holiday homes can be found at the bay of Landrezac, where you can spot the impressive Susicinio Castle, owned by the dukes of Brittany. Fans of the Middle Ages will also enjoy the Château de Kerlevenan, along with its gardens, the Château de Kergerget and de Truscat, or the churches and abbey of Saint-Gildas, whose founder granted the peninsula its name. Last but not least, the peninsula is home to prehistoric structures, such as the Kermaillard menhir, the Graniol dolmen and the Bilgroix dolmen.



See **Château de Susicinio**

In the south of the peninsula. A 13th-century castle open to the public.

Moulin du Pen Castel

In the north of the peninsula. One of the older mills in France.

Cairn de Petit Mont

Located at an amazing viewing point that overlooks the Gulf of Morbihan, this monument dating from 4500 BC is one of the many sites on the Rhuys peninsula.



Stroll **Port Navalo**

A village sitting at the tip of the Rhuys peninsula and a stunning barrier between the currents from the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Morbihan.

Port du Logeo

A small port with colourful small pleasure yachts. Not much to do apart from enjoying some food while taking in the view of the water.



Reach As is often the case with peninsulas, Rhuys is a bit isolated from the mainland. The nearest train station is located in Vannes, 20 km by car from Sarzeau. There is no highway, but a four-lane route nationale from Vannes over Sarzeau to Arzon (at the tip of the peninsula) crosses the peninsula. The north of the island, with its abounding bays and creeks, is harder to reach by public transport, so renting a car or bike is recommended.



Hike **① South-Morbihan '4 fingers' hike (6 km)**

What? – Walk on the southern shores of the Morbihan sea while enjoying the incredible views of the many islands and boats.

How? – Drawn on a map, the hike is shaped like four giant fingers sticking out into the Morbihan sea. Start on the easternmost finger, Pointe de Kerners, and make your way westwards along Pointe de la Palisse, Pointe de Penbert and Pointe du Monteno, which is the fourth and last finger. You can begin your hike at the car park at Camping Bilouris (47.560693, -2.878876). Be sure to walk north towards Pointe de Kerners, ending up on the western shore. Once you reach the sea, keep it on your right-hand side. You will find a single trail leading you to Pointe du Monteno. If prehistoric remains are your thing, take a slight detour to Graniol (47.553549, -2.890898). At Pointe du Monteno you will find a small car park at 47.562338, -2.907397.

② Promenade de Grand Mont (7.5 km)

What? – Explore an atypical stretch of cliffs following the single trail south of Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys.

How? – Start at Plage des Govelins (large parking area along the Route de la Baie d'Abraham- 47.512229, -2.846111). Facing the sea, start left along the rocky coastline. After 1.5 km you'll find yourself at the Pointe de Grand Mont cliffs. If you want to shorten the hike you can start your hike there (parking at the end of Route du Grand Mont – 47.500674, -2.849318). About midway through the hike you will reach Port aux Moines, a small harbour with a dolmen nearby. You can end the hike at Port de Saint-Jacques, which has sufficient parking facilities (47.486252, -2.792363) and restaurants in the vicinity.

③ Susicinio beach walk (4 km)

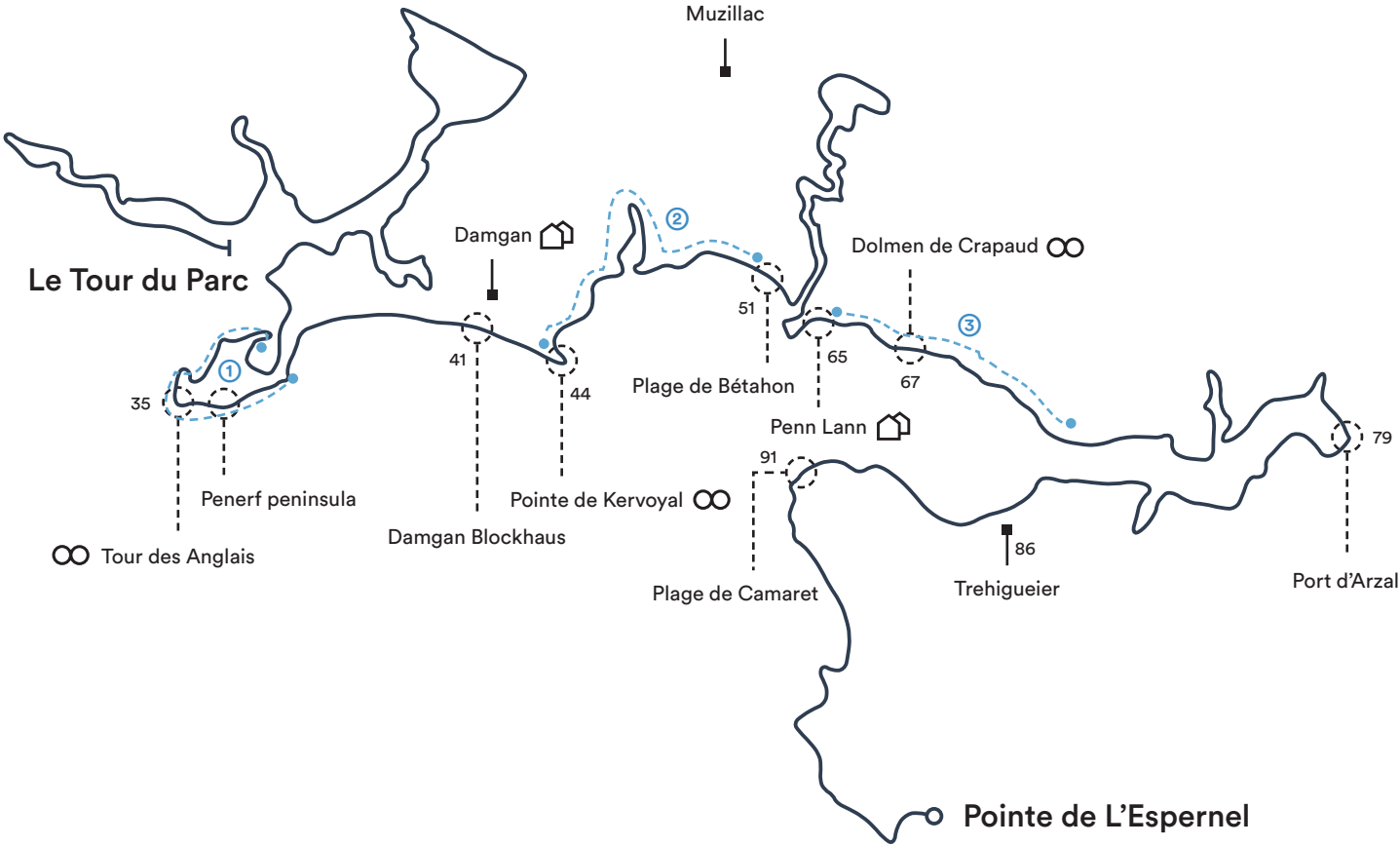
What? – After the rocks of Saint-Gildas and a taste of Morbihan, a shorter beach walk combining the swamps on your left and Quiberon bay on your right is the perfect excursion on the Rhuys peninsula.

How? – Stroll along the beach of the Plage de Landrezac, just south of Susicinio Castle. Combine the walk with a visit to the castle, a stroll around the Pointe de Penvins and its chapel (at the end) or some kitesurfing at the local clubs. Park your car at the nearby car park (47.503178, -2.741269). The route ends at Poine de Penvins (along the Route de la Chapelle, 47.494316, -2.681075).



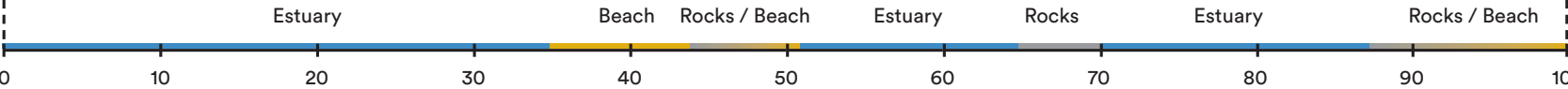
Stage 32

Le Tour du Parc > Pointe de L'Espernel



Start
47.52776
-2.62169

Finish
47.44584
-2.47209



The rocky peninsulas of Tour des Anglais, Kervoyal and Pen Lann ~~~

Dominated by estuaries, with the Pénerf estuary in the west – known for its oysters – and the Vilaine river in the east, this stage shows two distinct faces. One is a rocky section, which is illustrated by the rugged peninsulas of Kervoyal, Pénerf and Pen Lann, and the other is a muddy riverbank section around the estuaries, which has some exceptional sandy beaches south of Damgan, the main city of this stage. This leg is one of the calmest ones in the book, with little to do except for basking in the charm of the spectacular rocks and viewing the amazing wetlands and fields close to the rivers.



Tour des Anglais ~~~

A spectacular viewing point at the entrance to the Pénerf estuary.

Pointe de Kervoyal ~~~

A rocky cape stretching out into the sea, granting a great view of the surrounding bay with its characteristic herd of little boats.

Dolmen du Crapaud ~~~

One of the bigger dolmens in the area.



Damgan ~~~

The only large city in this stage. Apart from the bunker, the nearby dolmen and the long sandy beach, Damgan has no significant highlights to offer.

Pen Lann ~~~

A small village on this rocky peninsula.



① Around Tour des Anglais (5 km) ~~~ △△

What? – Circle the Pointe de Pénerf and admire the Tour des Anglais, which is located at the very end of the jetty.

How? – This is a loop trail, meaning that you start and end at the same point, namely the car park along the Rue des Cap Horniers (47.508344, -2.612776). We recommend that you start in the north and walk in a counterclockwise direction, keeping the sea on your right. Be advised, the hike is not always idyllic and requires some asphalt walking across a relatively busy road. The majority of the tour is along an easy-to-find path along the shore. If you prefer to do a 3 km walk you can walk southwards, keeping the sea on your left, and do an out-and-back hike to the Tour des Anglais.

② Kervoyal to Plage de Bétahon, Pen Lann (5.5 km) ~~~ △△△

What? – Go from one rocky promontory to the other, exploring Kervoyal bay, along with the sandy beaches and rocky cliffs.

How? – Before you embark, note that although you'll be able to see Pen Lan at your arrival point, you will not be able to reach it as there is a stream (Étier de Billier) separating Plage de Bétahon from Pen Lan. If you'd rather enjoy a sunlounger on the beach at Pen Lan, you need to make a detour via Muzillac, almost 3 km further down the river. Start your hike in Kervoyal at the car park in Rue de Pénestin (47.512778, -2.554984). Start walking along the beach, keeping the water on your right. Soon you'll find yourself on a single trail along the cliffs. At the end of the walk, you will arrive at the car park near Plage de Bétahon, at the end of Rue Mor Bras (47.524353, -2.505825).

③ Along the Vilaine estuary (5.5 km) ~~~ △△

What? – Follow the rocky coastline and admire the sea flowing into the Vilaine river.

How? – The hike travels from the parking facilities on the east side of Pen Lan (47.517657, -2.494779) to Pointe du Moustoir, where there is parking space along Rue Le Moustoir (47.499325, -2.441762). Pointe du Moustoir marks the narrowing of the Vilaine estuary, where it transforms into a meandering river. Along the way, you will bump into the dolmen du Crapaud.



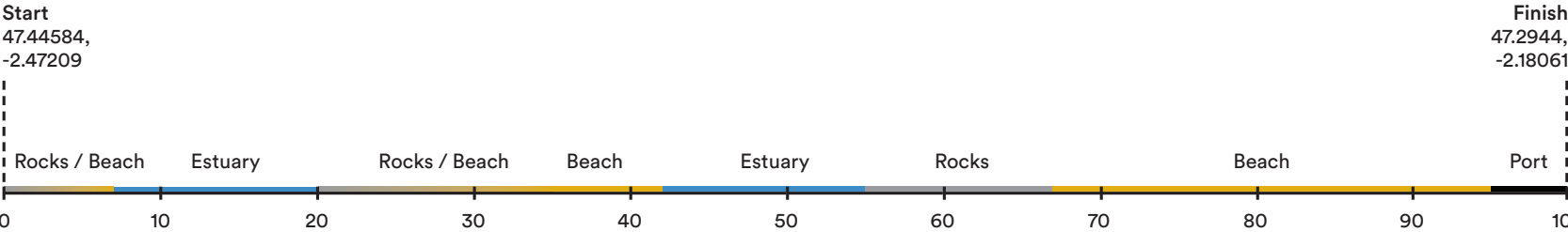
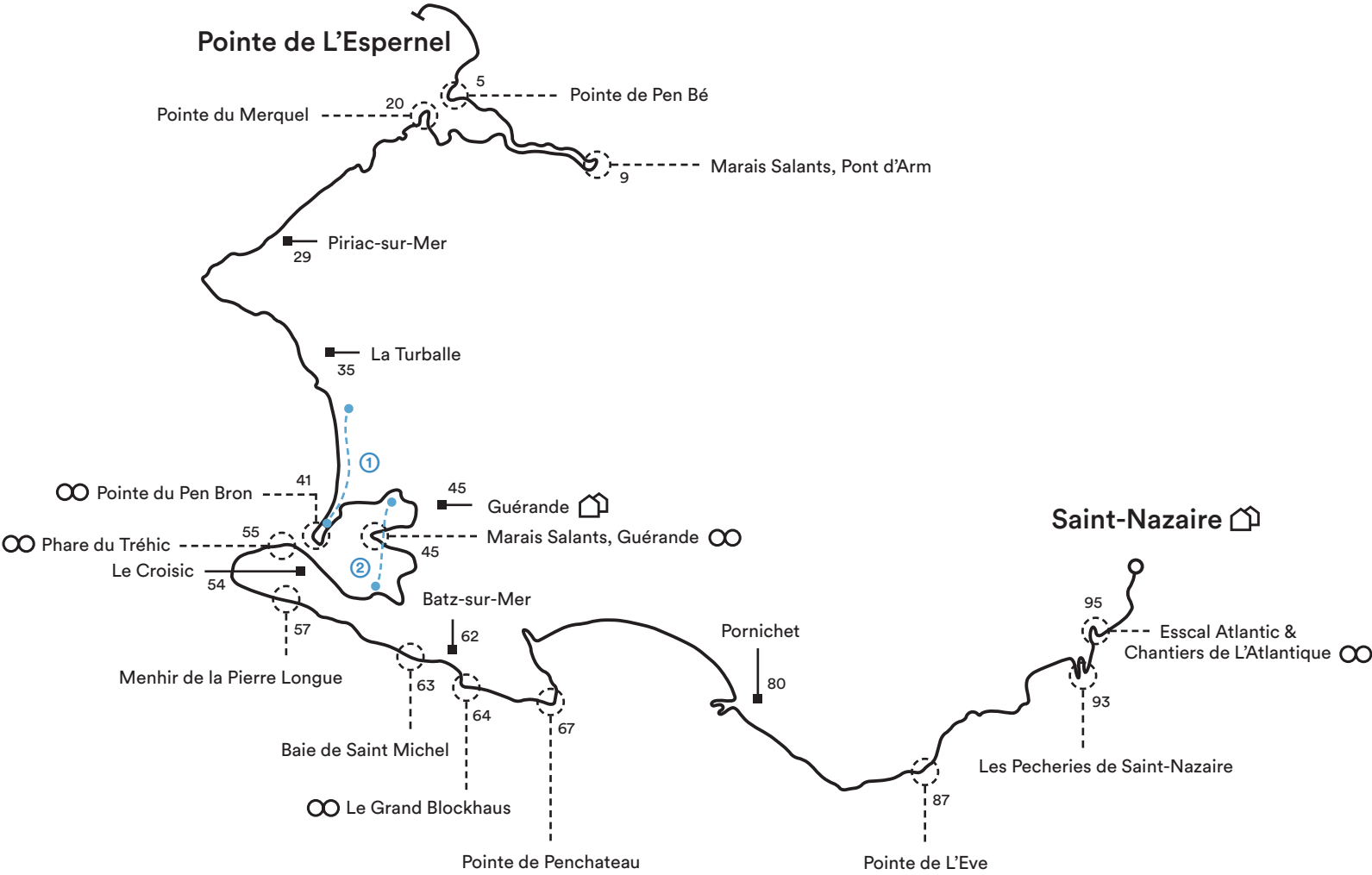
Reach

You probably guessed it when reading the introduction: this area is not the best connected, as it's a bit of a no-man's-land between the bigger cities of Saint-Nazaire and Vannes. The main traffic axis connects Damgan to Arzal via Muzillac, where you'll cross the Vilaine river. The north bank of the Vilaine river is hard to reach. We recommend that you do not count on public transport here, but that you rent a car. A bike is a fun option, but brace yourself for long detours around the estuaries.



Stage 33

Pointe de L'Espernel > Saint-Nazaire



The salt of Guérande and the maritime marvels of Saint-Nazaire

Salt is definitely the keyword of this stage, which will have you crossing Le Croisic and Guérande and moving along the salt marshes, creating an interesting pattern on the map. In addition to culinary treasures, this stage has a few things in store for both history buffs and maritime enthusiasts. You can admire authentic coastal lighthouses on long jetties reaching out into the ocean, the Phare de Tréhic, Pen Bron and Pointe de Merquel being shining examples. At the end of the stage, you'll head to Saint-Nazaire, a port on the Loire estuary, which is lined with wharfs. Saint-Nazaire played – and is still playing – a key role in maritime history, as well as being of great importance in the Second World War. Traces of WWII are still visible in this harbour town, where you can visit one of the five submarine bases built by the Germans and also see the surrounding bunkers.



See

Guérande salt marshes

Between Le Croisic and Guérande lie over 2,000 ha of salt flats, well worth their salt ... and a visit.

Chantier d'Atlantique, shipyard in Saint-Nazaire

Some of the most renowned ocean liners in the world have been built in Saint-Nazaire. You might even be lucky enough to see the shipyard in action!

Le Grand Blockhaus

One of the most impressive bunkers along the Atlantic coast. If you're into WWII, the submarine base in Saint-Nazaire is a must-visit.

Phare du Tréhic and Pointe de Pen Bron

The embrace of the two piers is a spectacular sight that can be seen from both of them.



Hike

① Beach walk along Plage des Bretons (4 km)

What? – Escape the salt marshes and take a long walk on the beach.
How? – Nestled between La Turballe and the Pen Bron peninsula, you'll find a long stretch of sand, named Plage des Bretons. You can park your car in the car park at Quai Saint-Jacques, which is close to Port de Plaisance in La Turballe (47.345943, -2.510162). After 4 km you can turn left to reach the large parking area right before the end of the Pen Bron peninsula (47.312372, -2.504433)

② Salt marshes

What? – Walk between a multitude of salt marshes, wooden cabins and little piles of salt. At sunset, the orange glow of the water provides breathtaking scenery.

How? – The centrally located intersection of D92 and Route du Marais (47.303690, -2.455882) is a great starting point. It is in the heart of the salt marshes and there is also somewhere that you can park your car. We invite you to stroll around, maybe relying on your phone for directions, to discover the intricate web of roads and paths. Some will lead you to salt marches, others towards the mainland and some will be hidden cul-de-sacs, inviting you to retrace your steps.



Stroll

Guérande

Guérande, a.k.a. the Carcassonne of the west, is surrounded by 1.4 km of sturdy fortifications. Salt has been harvested here since Roman times.

Le Croisic

A charming port town with an Océarium; a fun activity for the little ones.

Saint-Nazaire

While it is not one of the cosiest of French towns, its maritime attractions, such as the shipyards, the old submarine base and the Escal'Atlantic museum, make it a fascinating destination.



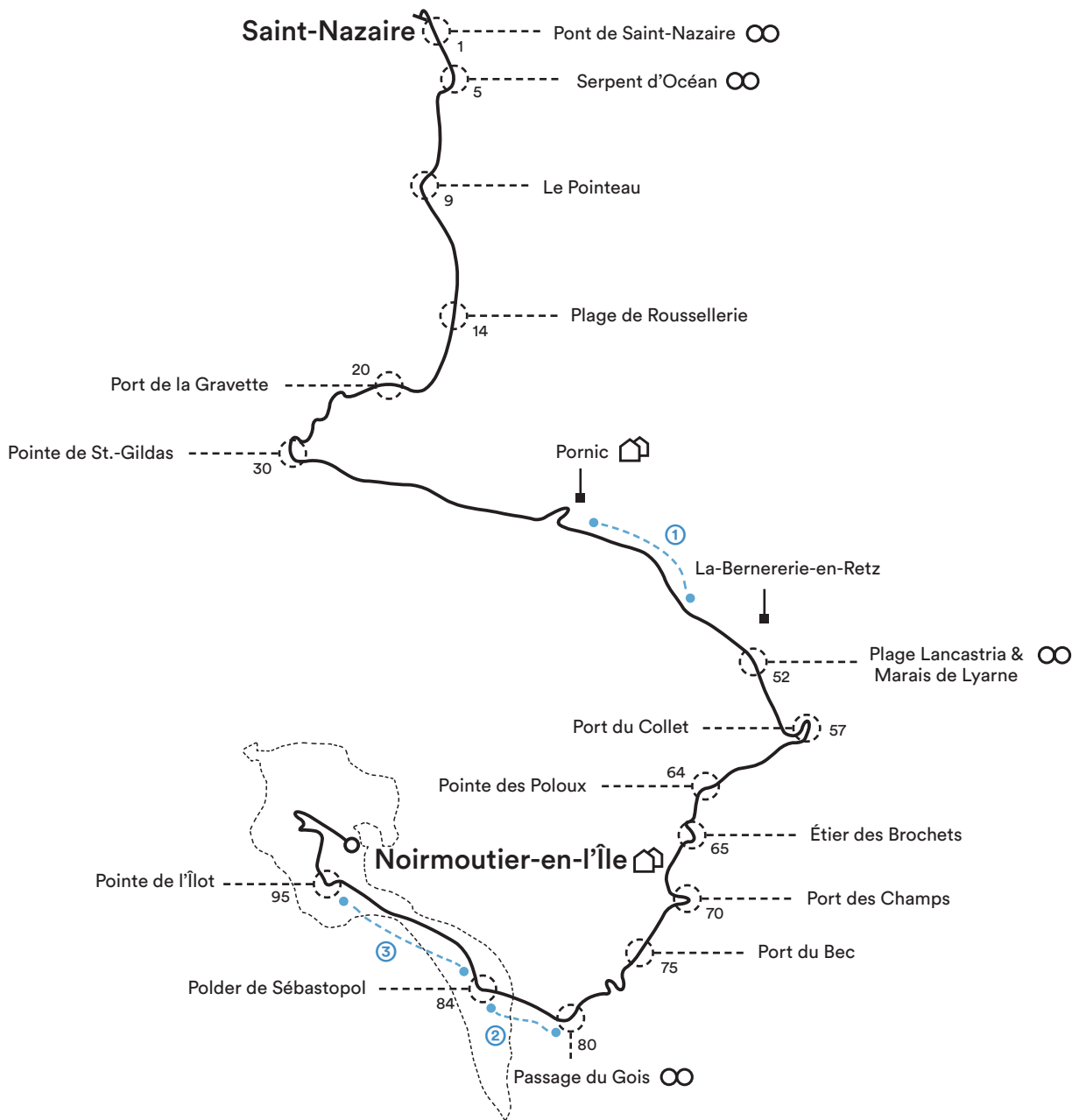
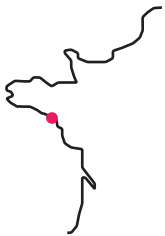
Reach

This is one of the few coastal regions with a train connection. With stations in Saint-Nazaire, Batz-sur-Mer, La Baule, Pornichet and Le Croisic, you can easily get around. A highway connecting Guérande and Saint-Nazaire makes it easy to travel by car. If you want to avoid the detour around the salt marshes when driving from Pen Bron to Le Croisic, there is a boat available. The Pont de Saint-Nazaire, connecting Saint-Nazaire with Saint-Brevin on the other side of the bay, is an easy option if you want to cross the Loire by car.



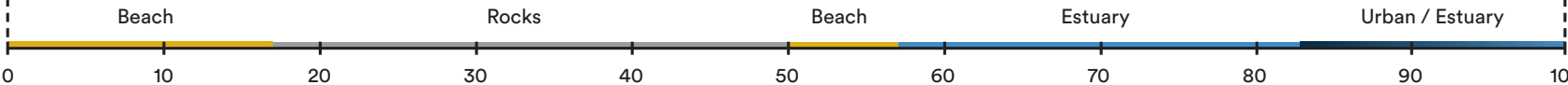
Stage 34

Saint-Nazaire > Noirmoutier-en-l'Île



Start
47.2944,
-2.18061

Finish
46.98994,
-2.22024



The bridge, the snake, fishing huts and the flood ~~~

The 100 km connecting Saint-Nazaire to Noirmoutier-en-l'Île are characterised by countless stilt-borne fisher huts, in all shapes and forms. Some are perched on the rocks, others stand in shallow water and some are even free-floating like islands. Built to gain easy access to fish without getting the fishermen's feet wet, these wooden huts are mounted 3 to 4 metres above the water and are dotted along the banks of the Loire Atlantique. Apart from the humble shacks, this somehow forgotten coastal strip unexpectedly harbours exceptional demonstrations of human creativity, both artistic and architectural, with the elegantly curved Saint-Nazaire Bridge and the Serpent d'Océan as striking examples. The shore alternates pristine long beaches, like the Plage des Rochelets or Plage de la Source, with rugged capes and muddy wetlands in the middle of the Bourgneuf bay, nestled between Pornic and Noirmoutier Island. This stage ends along the Sébastopol polder, with the village of Noirmoutier-en-l'Île as a charming finishing point.



See Saint-Nazaire ~~~

Stretching for 3,400 metres and spanning the Loire, the Saint-Nazaire is the longest bridge in France.

Serpent d'Océan ~~~

A 100 m long metal snake emerging from the ocean in Saint-Brevin.

Plage du Lancastris ~~~

A 4 km long stretch of beach with the characteristic fishermen's huts lined up as far as the eye can see. Take a stroll along the dunes or walk inland to admire the Lyarne wetlands.



Stroll Noirmoutier-en-l'Île ~~~

Wander around the narrow streets of this charming fishing port, discover the white castle and church and enjoy the vast array of sandy beaches, oyster huts and local restaurants. With 5,000 inhabitants, Noirmoutier-en-l'Île is the biggest commune of Noirmutier island.

Pornic ~~~

Pornic, home to 14,000 inhabitants, is one of the bigger cities in the area. The castle, fishing port and restaurants on the docks are highly recommended.



Hike ① Sentier des Douaniers (4 km) ~~~

What? – Follow the Sentier des Douaniers along the cliffs to spot bunkers, menhirs and the typical fishing huts.

How? – We recommend beginning at Plage de la Source in Pornic because of the convenient parking facilities at Avenue du Manoir (47.107357, -2.096127). The track ends right after Plage de la Boutinardière (47.095042, -2.052242) at Avenue de la Boutinardière, where you'll find car parking.

② Passage du Gois (4.2 km) ~~~

What? – Although this is not the most charming hike in this book, it is definitely one of the most exciting. Twice a day the 4.2 km long stretch of concrete is fully submerged in water. You only have a 3-hour window twice a day to cross the causeway – for 1.5 hours before and after low tide.

How? – At both sides of the passage you'll find car parking. You can either park your car on the mainland side (46.920756, -2.104116) or on the Noirmoutier side (46.932359, -2.152467). Near Noirmoutier you'll find the natural beauty of the Sébastopol polder (see below). On the mainland side you'll find some restaurants and bars to recover from your daring adventure. Just mind the time. Note that there is a bridge a bit further south in case you miscalculate. However, brace yourself for a costly taxi trip or a 15 km hike to get back to your car.

③ Sébastopol polder (4 km) ~~~

What? – Indulge in some peace and quiet – and see hundreds of birds – along the single trail at the Sébastopol polder on Île de Noirmoutier.

How? – If you want to walk the entire polder you can park your car at Route du Gois (46.932914, -2.150682). It's hard to get lost, as you can just follow the impressive polder on your right, lining the sea. The polder ends at the car park on Chemin de la Berche (46.959863, -2.184597).



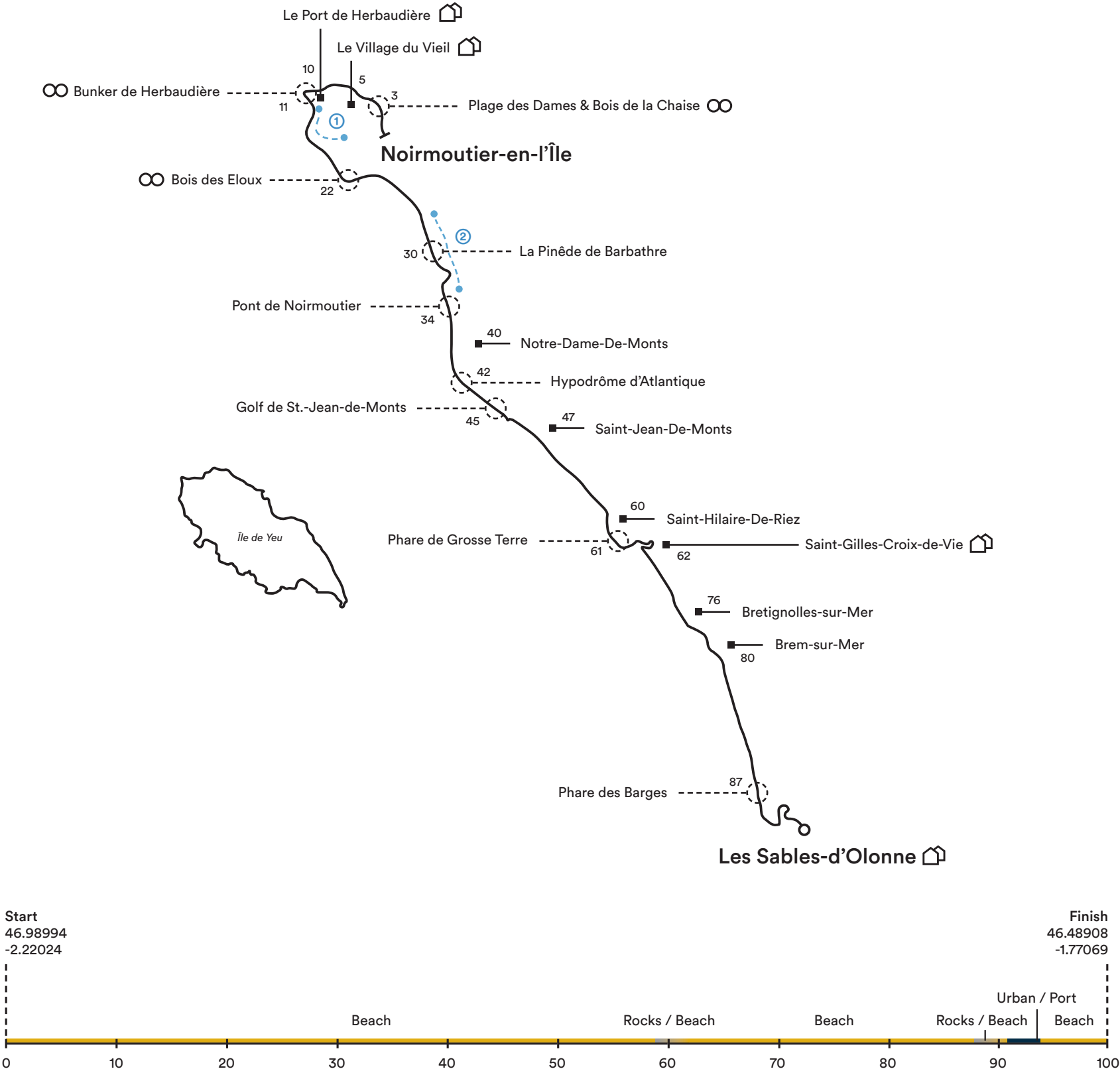
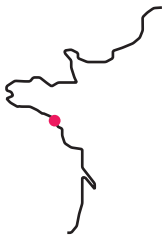
Reach No surprises here: there is one isolated train station in Pornic.

The rest of the coastline can only be reached by car. A two-lane national road travels across the bridge of Saint-Nazaire via Pornic to Bourgneuf-en-Retz, approximately 1 km from the coast. South of Bourgneuf, the coast is surrounded by swamps and wetlands and is therefore harder to reach. Île de Noirmoutier is accessible via a toll-free bridge and the spectacular Passage du Gois. The bridge is the easiest way to reach Noirmoutier-en-l'Île.



Stage 35

Noirmoutier-en-l'Île > Les Sables-d'Olonne



The island of Noirmoutier and the beaches of Sables-d'Olonne ~~~

Beach, beach, beach. Although the large majority of this 100 km shoreline is comprised of sandy beaches, this stage can be split into two distinct parts. Before crossing the bridge to the mainland, you'll find the charm and relative isolation of the island of Noirmoutier. After this, the coastline is marked by more commercial beaches, with big apartment blocks and sailing clubs. While Île de Noirmoutier doesn't have the rich appeal, reputation or buzz of its fellow island, Île de Ré, it does contain similar attractions. It is a great location from which to admire the salt fields, which are just south of l'Herbaudière, or to visit charming villages, such as Noirmoutier-en-l'Île or Vieil. You can also visit the fairy-tale beaches, such as the hidden gem Plage des Dames with its 30-minute-long wooden promenade, local oysters and mussels, and the typical Vendée pine forests, such as la Pinède de Barbâtre in the south, which is an excellent choice if you like taking long walks close to the ocean. Nicknamed Mimosa Island due to its exceptional microclimate, Noirmoutier is a seaside paradise for nature lovers. The southern part of the mainland has kilometres of sandy beaches stretching from Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie to Bretignolles-sur-Mer and finally to Les Sables-d'Olonne, which attracts lots of tourists. However, this area doesn't have the natural charm of the aforementioned island. You'll still find vast pine forests where you can enjoy a day out, but if you are truly looking for the peace and charm of nature then you should head to Noirmoutier. If you prefer a bit more of a vibe and would like more amenities for an easy beach holiday then target the mainland.

∞ See **Plage des Dames** ~~~

A charming beach with fine sand and blue water, lined with wooden cabins and a stunning promenade dating from the 1930s. Discover the surrounding Bois de la Chaise, where you will find luxurious Belle Epoque villas.

Herbaudière ~~~

A bunker at the northern tip of the island overlooking the ocean. However, although it's a nice stopover, it's not very spectacular.

The beauty of this stage is mostly due to the charming beaches of Noirmoutier, rather than because it has any specific places to see.

🏠 Stroll **Le Vieil** ~~~

A charming and cute village, but it does not have many bars and cafés.

Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie ~~~

A village with a touristy vibe. It is worth a stroll up to the white lighthouse of 'Grosse Terre', which is situated on the carved out rocky coast at the northwestern end of the river.

Les Sables-d'Olonne ~~~

A perfect family holiday destination with plenty of amenities, including water parks, gentle waves, a zoo, etc. The town is famed for organising the start of the 4-yearly Vendée yacht race, a one-man sailing competition around the globe.

⚓ Hike ① **Beach, dunes and salt marshes (5 km)** ~~~ ⚓

What? – Discover the diversity of Noirmoutier Island and end your walk in Noirmoutier-en-l'Île.

How? – Park your car at the car park next to Chemin de la Petit Garenne and Rue de Luzérone in Luzérone (47.014322, -2.293260) and walk westwards to the beach. A little heads-up: the first kilometres of the hike cover Plage de Luzérone, which is partly a nudist beach. When the beach begins to curve, at the eighth pier and the sailing club, head inland. Continue your way right between two bigger water pools in the salt marshes (46.989728, -2.300076). Now continue your walk between the marshes in a northeast to east direction, ending at the parking facilities of l'Étier du Moulin, right next to the port of Noirmoutier (46.999069, -2.248638). The port is packed with cosy restaurants and bars to reward you for your efforts.

② **Pinède de Barbâtre and Pont de Noirmoutier (7 km)** ~~~ ⚓⚓⚓

What? – Walk along the sandy roads in the dunes under the pine shades of the Pinède de Barbâtre Forest with a constant view of the sea.

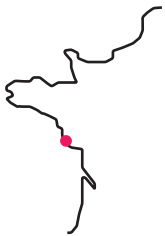
How? – Park your car along de Rue du Camping in Barbâtre (46.945072, -2.185052). A 7 km walk will take you along the west side of the tip of the island, through the forest under the Pont de Noirmoutier and ending up at Pointe de la Fosse. There is a car park at Rue de la Pointe (46.895913, -2.148633). There are plenty of ways to make the walk shorter by finding other entry points to the beach, such as Avenue de l'Océan (46.937498, -2.180091), which will cut 1 kilometre off the walk, or Plage des Boucholeurs (46.916903, -2.168797), which will cut 3.5 kilometres off.

➤ **Reach** The only way to get to Noirmoutier is via the toll-free bridge, either by foot, bike or car. There are many bike rentals available on the island, as the flat 25 km long island is a perfect place to explore by bike. Car access is quite good everywhere. Trains coming from Nantes arrive at Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie or Les Sables-d'Olonne, without any connecting train lines in between. If you travel here by train, we recommend that you choose one of the two destinations and do the rest by bus. There is a decent provincial road, allowing for easy travelling parallel to the coast, but count on its taking more than an hour and a half to travel from Sables-d'Olonne to Noirmoutier-en-l'Île.

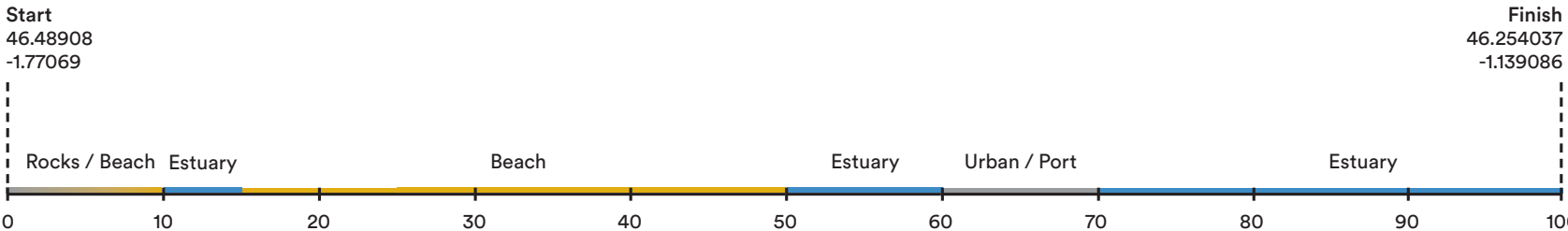
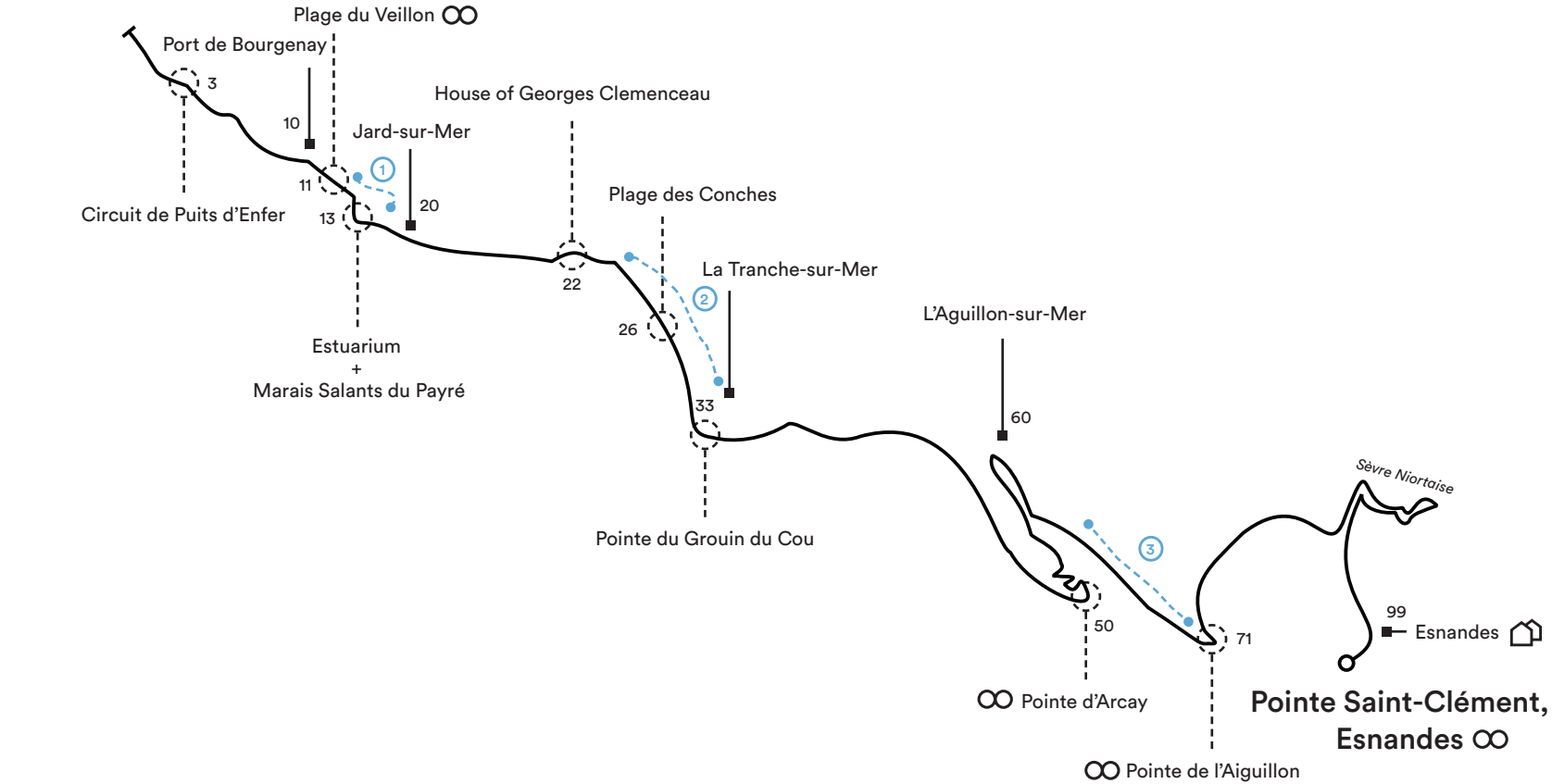


Stage 36

Lac de Tanchet, Les Sables-d'Olonne > Pointe Saint-Clément, Esnandes



Lac de Tanchets, Les Sables-d'Olonne



The sunflowers and mussel beds of Aiguillon

Most of the 100 km coastline is situated in the Vendée department, which is famous for its sunflowers and mussels. The shore has three distinct parts, starting with the rocks south of les Sables-d'Olonne that go right up to Plage du Veillon and the Payré estuary. After this rugged start, we set foot on Vendée's notorious beaches again, going along Longueville-sur-Mer, La Tranche-sur-Mer and La Faute-sur-Mer, three perfect family holiday destinations. Last but not least, after crossing the river Lay we pass through the fields and muddy wetlands of Aiguillon bay. The land is mostly flat and allows for easy walks near the waterfront.

See

Pointe Saint-Clément

Just 2 km from Esnandes, a limestone cliff towers over the mudflats, offering a great location from which to watch a festival of birds. During winter you can spot up to 100,000 birds at a time. Pointe Saint-Clément is also a wonderful window through which to admire the silhouettes of Île de Ré on the left and Pointe de l'Aiguillon on the right. The sunset views are absolutely stunning.

The mussel beds at the end of Pointe d'Arcay

The Baie de l'Aiguillon provides 20% of the mussel production of France and the sandy peninsula of Pointe d'Arcay is one of the best spots to see the mussel fields.



Stroll

Esnandes

Located about 10 km from La Rochelle, this small village is famed for its mussel farming. The local heritage is celebrated by the Maison de la Baie Marais Poitevin museum and sustained by more than 20 active farms harvesting over 100,000 tonnes of shellfish per year. Make sure that you also walk past the remains of the Gallo-Roman villa and the church originating from 1029.



Reach

Almost the entire region is easily accessible by car. From Sables-d'Olonne until L'Aiguillon-sur-Mer there is a provincial road very close to the shore. Only the wetlands behind the Aiguillon bay are trickier to reach by car but therefore a perfect playground for the bike. The train or plane takes you to Les Sables-d'Olonne but the rest of the stage is only accessible by bus, car or bike.



Hike

① Le Tour ne Sol, follow the river (5 km)

What? – Follow a charming estuary as it makes its way inland and discover salt marshes and rows of majestic sunflowers flanking the sinuous road. Walk across the beach alongside the water as it curves its way inland and admire the marais salants (or salt marshes) where salt is harvested from the sea.

How? – Park your car near the restaurant at Plage du Veillon (46.435345, -1.659434). Follow the water of the Chenal du Payré à Talmont and cross the bridge. When you reach the other side, keep the sunflowers on your right until you hit the paved Rue de la Bourie. End your walk at La Salorge Grandeur Nature, a museum dedicated to the salt fields (46.444108, -1.629874).

② Marathon des Sables (8 km)

What? – This is the trail for you if you like to dig deep and power through, if you enjoy the feeling of loose sand beneath your feet and if you don't mind conquering a hilly path through the forests of Longueville-sur-Mer.

How? – The route starts at the crossing of the sandy Chemin des Poches Molles and the paved Avenue du Dr Mathevet (46.405224, -1.502346). The endpoint is the crossroads between the sandy path Rue du Paré Feu and the paved road Rue de la Coquille Saint-Jacques (46.346068, -1.449809). The road cuts straight through the woods, but it is completely made up of sand and can probably be done barefoot, if you don't mind crossing a couple of paved roads. The hike is entirely straight, apart from two slight bends at (46.365921, -1.464834 and 46.349007, -1.460617).

③ Pointe d'Arcay, the mussel stroll (8 km)

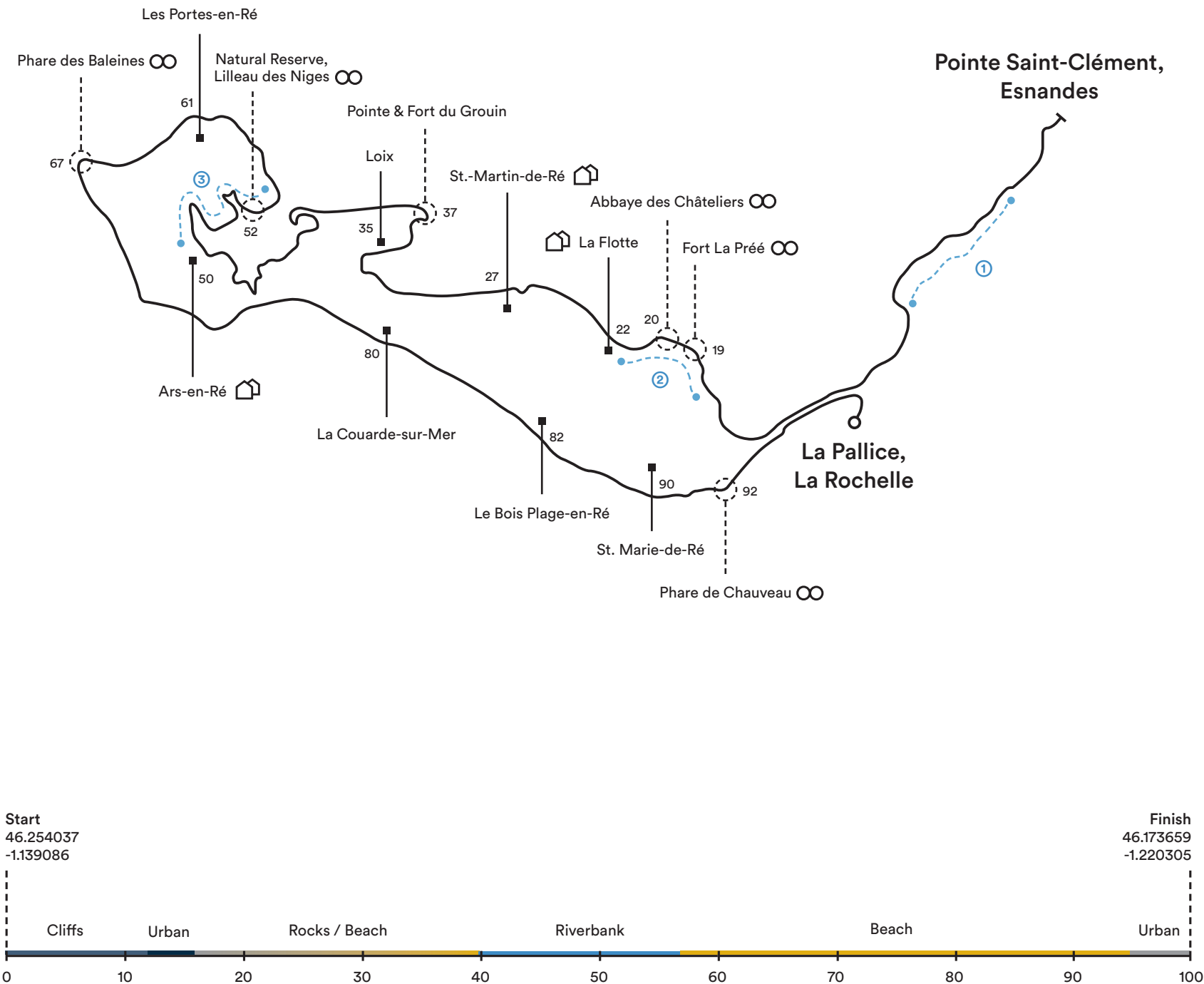
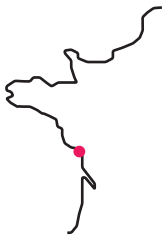
What? – Take a walk on the beach on the west side of Pointe d'Arcay, keeping the restricted natural reserve on your left and the mussel beds on your right.

How? – Park your car at Boulevard de la Forêt (46.329050, -1.324446) and head towards the Plage des Bélugas. Enjoy an 8 km hike on sand up to the cape of the peninsula, which is marked by a wooden plaque.



Stage 37

Pointe Saint-Clément, Esnandes > La Pallice, La Rochelle



The tour of Île de Ré

Nicknamed the French Hamptons, Île de Ré is flooded by tourists every summer. Every year, hordes of people descend on the island and are charmed by its enchanting summer vibe, salt marshes, pine trees and picturesque villages. The slender, 30 km long island is a must-visit and the best way to explore it is by bike, using the 100 km long network of cycle paths. Our advice? Go in September or May, just outside the tourist-studded summer months. The famous salt marshes and oyster farms are located in the northeastern part of the island, around Loix, and to the northeast of Ars-en-Ré. The must-stroll villages of Saint-Martin-de-Ré and La Flotte are located in the southeast, with Ars-en-Ré further north. The natural reserve, Lilleau des Niges, is a true paradise for birdwatchers and nature lovers. If you're craving some shade, go to the pine forests between Le Bois-Plage-en-Ré and Saint-Marie-de-Ré. Alongside these villages you'll also find most of the campsites and tourist amenities, as these are closest to the long sandy beaches on the southwest of the island, such as Plage des Grenettes, Plage des Gollandières and Plage de Gros Joncs, which is a popular surfer's destination. The pictures can't fully express the chilled southern France vibe of Île de Ré, so we strongly suggest that you experience it for yourself and fully savour the traditional white houses, endless quiet streets and local seafood on every corner.

See

Abbaye des Châteliers and Fort la Prée

The ruins of a 12th-century abbey in the middle of the poppy fields next to the star-shaped Fort la Prée. Although it is often believed to have been built by Vauban, the fort was actually constructed by Pierre de Conty.

Phare des Baleines

Climb the 257 spiral steps to get to the top of this 59 m high lighthouse that guides ships towards the neighbouring harbour of La Rochelle. Make sure that you also visit Musée de Baleines. Be advised: especially during summer, this becomes a little like Disneyland. It is full of visitors and the place feels like a tourist trap.

Lilleau des Niges

Head out into the wild and marvel at the salt marshes and the flocks of birds in this enchanting natural reserve.



Stroll

Saint-Martin-de-Ré

The biggest 'city' on the island is surrounded by 14 km of fortified walls that were built by Vauban. Wander around its narrow streets and adorable white houses, which are centred around the little harbour. Saint-Martin-de-Ré is a charming epicentre of culinary excellence.

Ars-en-Ré

A lively small town with lots of flea markets, art galleries, a vibrant food market and a unique church with a black and white bell tower that can be seen from all around the area.

La Flotte

A cute little port, perfect for sipping a rosé at sunset.

Hike

① Pertuis d'Antioche cliff walk with a view of Île de Ré (7.5 km)

What? – Walk along the cliffs on a pleasant white chalk path for a breathtaking panoramic view of the island.

How? – The route starts at the car park at the end of Rue du Port (46.200545, -1.200161) at Port Lauzieres – famous for its oysters – and ends at the parking facilities near Coup de Vague (46.241828, -1.143987). You can easily extend your walk by going further north up to Pointe Saint-Clément and you will be able to see another nice viewing point (+1.5 km) and more oyster farms along the way. Or head further south until you get to Pointe de Queillé (+3 km), where you can watch the cars driving on the Pont de Ré.

② Fort de la Prée to La Flotte (9 km)

What? – Walk along the northeast coast of Île de Ré, past medieval buildings, to arrive on the sunny dock terraces of the charming port village of La Flotte for a well-deserved drink.

How? – Park your car on the little car park (46.178226, -1.289394) next to Route du Fort la Prée, a couple of metres away from – you guessed it – Fort la Prée. Circle the star-shaped walls or go inside to visit the graffiti museum. Continue towards the sea for a short while before the mysterious ruins of the Abbaye des Châteliers pull you back inland. After a stroll between the remains of the 12th-century abbey, you can head back to the coast to see oyster banks popping up on your right, just before entering the charming village of La Flotte. Here you'll be faced with the hardest challenge of the hike: choosing a terrace on which to enjoy your glass of rosé and taste the local oysters. Park your car at Place de Verdun (46.188579, -1.324970) next to Cours Félix Faure.

③ Lilleau des Niges, bird and salt marsh hike (10 km)

What? – This hike is a navigational challenge, but it is well worth the price: an unforgettable labyrinth walk in between the salt marshes and the birds in the Lilleau des Niges reserve, starting from the vintage paradise Ars-en-Ré.

How? – Park your car at Parking du Marché, next to Quai de la Pré (46.211300, -1.512502) in the harbour. Walk towards the sea. You'll be crossing the water twice, at the Chenal des Villages and the Chenal du Vieux Port, in order to reach the village of La Patache. In La Patache you can park your car next to the sea in the car park situated near the crossroads of Rue de la Grande Jetée and Route du Fier (46.229595, -1.483325). If you still have some energy left, you can conclude the walk by taking a last stroll towards the pointy sand bank at Banc du Bucheron. There is not much elevation on this route, but the many turns and swamps might make it mentally challenging.



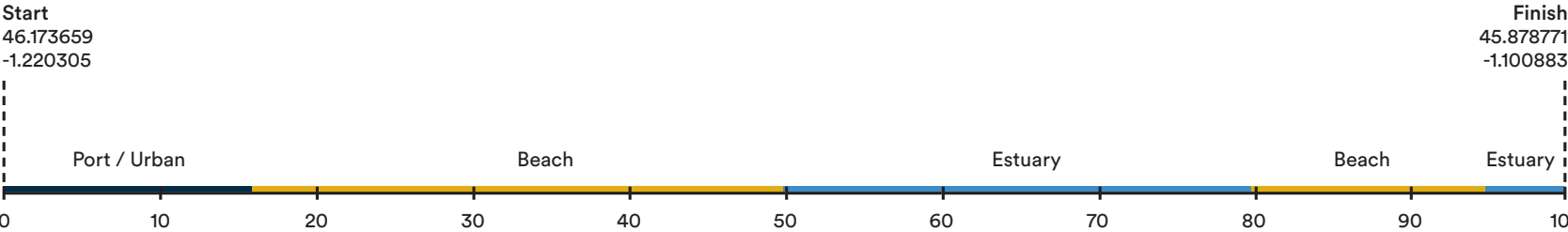
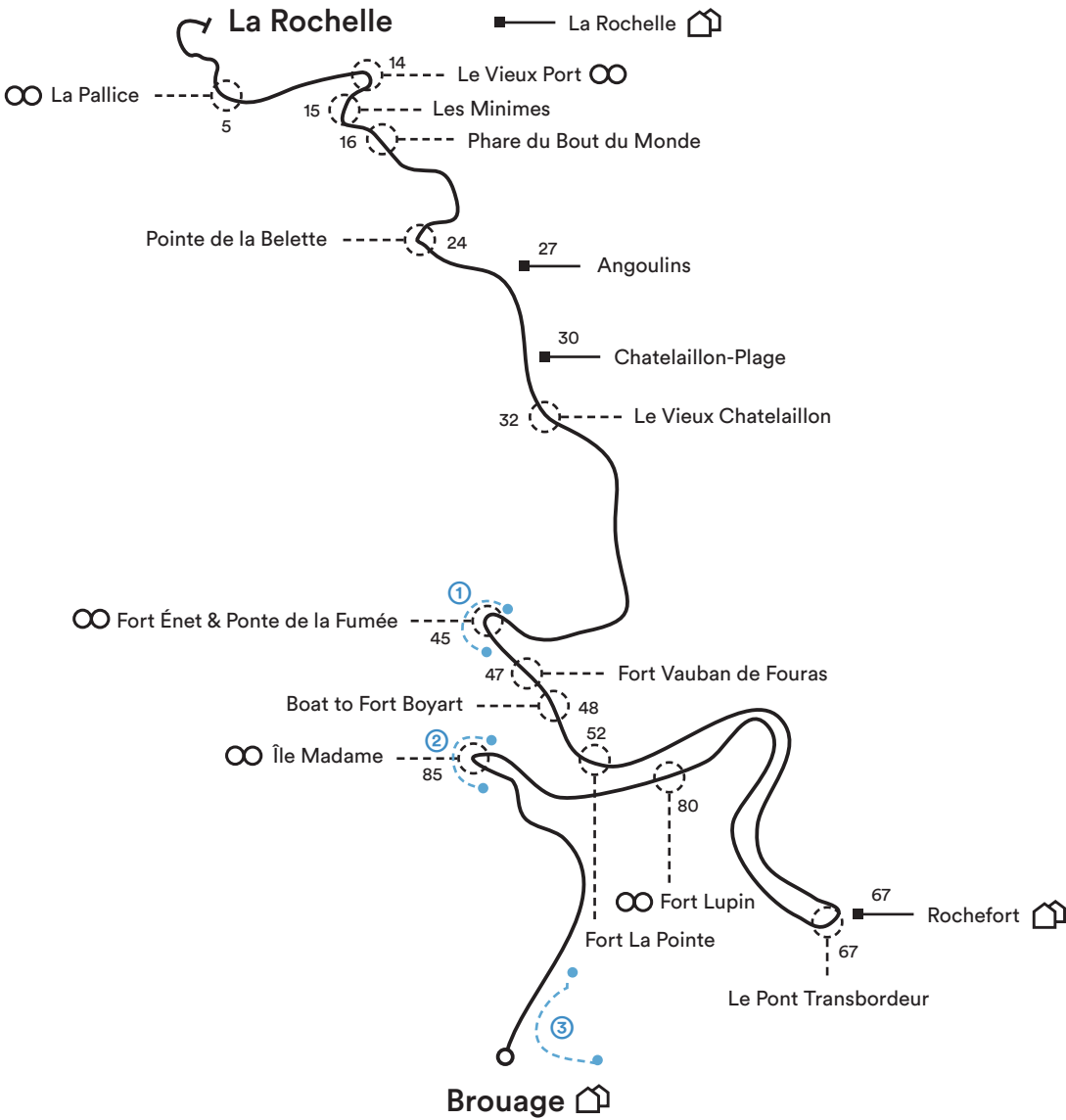
Reach

La Rochelle and Île de Ré are major holiday destinations, so transport to and around both should not be a problem. Take a plane to La Rochelle or a three-hour TGV from Paris. Île de Ré is only accessible by the toll bridge, so you'll have to take the car, bus or bike to get there. Luckily, bikers or hikers don't have to pay. There is also a bus departing from La Rochelle station to the island. Don't hesitate to rent a bike at a local shop; it's the best way to get around.



Stage 38

La Rochelle > Brouage



The stage of the forts sheltering La Rochelle and Rochefort

This leg is one of the most interesting stages in the book. History aficionados and lovers of unique natural phenomena will enjoy it as it is, which combines some of the most interesting places to visit on the French Atlantic coast. We start strong in La Rochelle, capital of the Charente-Maritime, which was founded in the 12th century. Its authentic historic centre, famous port – Le Vieux Port – framed by the fortified towers, Tour Saint-Nicolas and Tour de la Chaîne, the pale limestone houses that give the city its nickname of La Ville Blanche, the Provence vibe and the hundreds of restaurants and bars around the port and the central food market all make up La Rochelle's incredible appeal. Next on the list is Rochefort, a hidden pearl that is situated along the river Charente, with a historic city centre and remarkable old bridge, le Pont Transbordeur. Rochefort was of key strategic importance in the 17th century due to its many wharfs. Napoleon gave the order to build dozens of forts in order to form a line of fortification to protect the French arsenal against the English navy, the most notorious of these being Fort Boyard. It turned out to be like a forerunner of the German Atlantikwall, which was built during WWII. Last but not least, Mother Nature created two distinct places from which to witness the formidable phenomena of the tides, granting (or denying) access to the islands of Île Madame and Fort Énet. This is a spectacular experience. Further south, we meander through the Moëze-Oléron Nature Reserve, between the unspoiled fields and the oyster farms, to stumble upon the hidden village of Brouage at the end.

See The castles

Follow the coastline for a royal detour to Fort Énet (private, but visits are possible: only accessible at low tide by foot), Fort Vauban à Fouras (public), Fort La Pointe (privately owned, no visits allowed and not accessible by car), Fort Lupin (visits allowed) and, last but not least, Fort Boyard (only accessible by boat from Fouras).

Île Madame

A little island located 1 km off the shore of Port-des-Barques at the entrance to the river Charente. Only accessible at low tide by a pretty strip of sand and shingle that becomes impassable as the sea rises. There is not much to see except for the castle, the fishing huts and the (incredible) view of the bay, but the journey alone is worth the trip.

Le Pont Transbordeur

Cross the Charente using this unique suspended bridge that is situated a few kilometres from Rochefort city centre.

Stroll La Rochelle

La Rochelle has a charming city centre. It is often flooded with tourists but is a must-see when visiting Île de Ré or Charente-Maritime. The city has lots of museums and history on offer, alongside the trendy or delightful restaurants and bars that can be found in the centre and flanking the docks of the port.

Rochefort

Nominated as one of France's top 10 stylish towns by Lonely Planet, Rochefort should be on your list. Built fairly recently during the reign of Napoleon, the city is made out of straight, wide boulevards, which add to the feeling of grandeur.

Brouage

Speaking about hidden gems, this fortified village full of art galleries, restaurants and bars has a very out-of-this-world vibe, as it is situated in the middle of pastures and oyster farms. It is definitely our greatest discovery in this stage.

Reach You can easily reach La Rochelle and Rochefort by train. You can even fly to La Rochelle, as both the city and the nearby Île de Ré are big tourist magnets. The northern part of this stage between Rochefort and La Rochelle is more accessible, with a national highway running along the coast and train stations at Fouras and Châtelailon-Plage. The more recommended and picturesque southern part, with the hidden treasures of Île Madame and Brouage, are car or bike only destinations, with no direct train line. Rent a car to enjoy these relatively undiscovered gems and, if your time is limited, skip the northern part.

Hike Reaching Fort Énet (4 km) (only at low tide)

What? – This is the same type of walk as the Tour de Madame, but it is longer and more popular with tourists. The ideal trip if you like forts surrounded by oyster fields and if you've always wanted to feel like Moses splitting the sea.

How? – Park your car at the paid car park at the end of Pointe de La Fumée (46.002528, -1.120639), the long stretch of land west of Fouras. Wait for low tide and walk along the rocky footpath through the oyster farms to reach the fort, which is 2 km further along.

Tour de Madame (8.5 km) (only at low tide)

What? – Remember Passage du Gois, the unique causeway only accessible at low tide? Île Madame follows the same principal, only it is a lot more charming and safe. The gap is only a 1 km sprint or swim, depending on your timing. A walk around the island will take you less than an hour. Exploring this hidden gem is a must.

How? – Park your car at the crossing of Avenue Paul Geoffroy and Rue du Grand Large (45.941151, -1.089946), as it can get busy further down with cars filled with beach lovers. Follow the direction of Avenue Paul Geoffroy under the trees, pass by the beach and then turn sharp right when you come to the end of the beach (45.945075, -1.099970). You'll see the passage to the island in front of you. Once you have passed the muddy path, you can walk around the island by following its only road. If you want to take a shortcut, you can head straight to the fort and back. Walking around the island is 3.5 km, the causeway is 1 km.

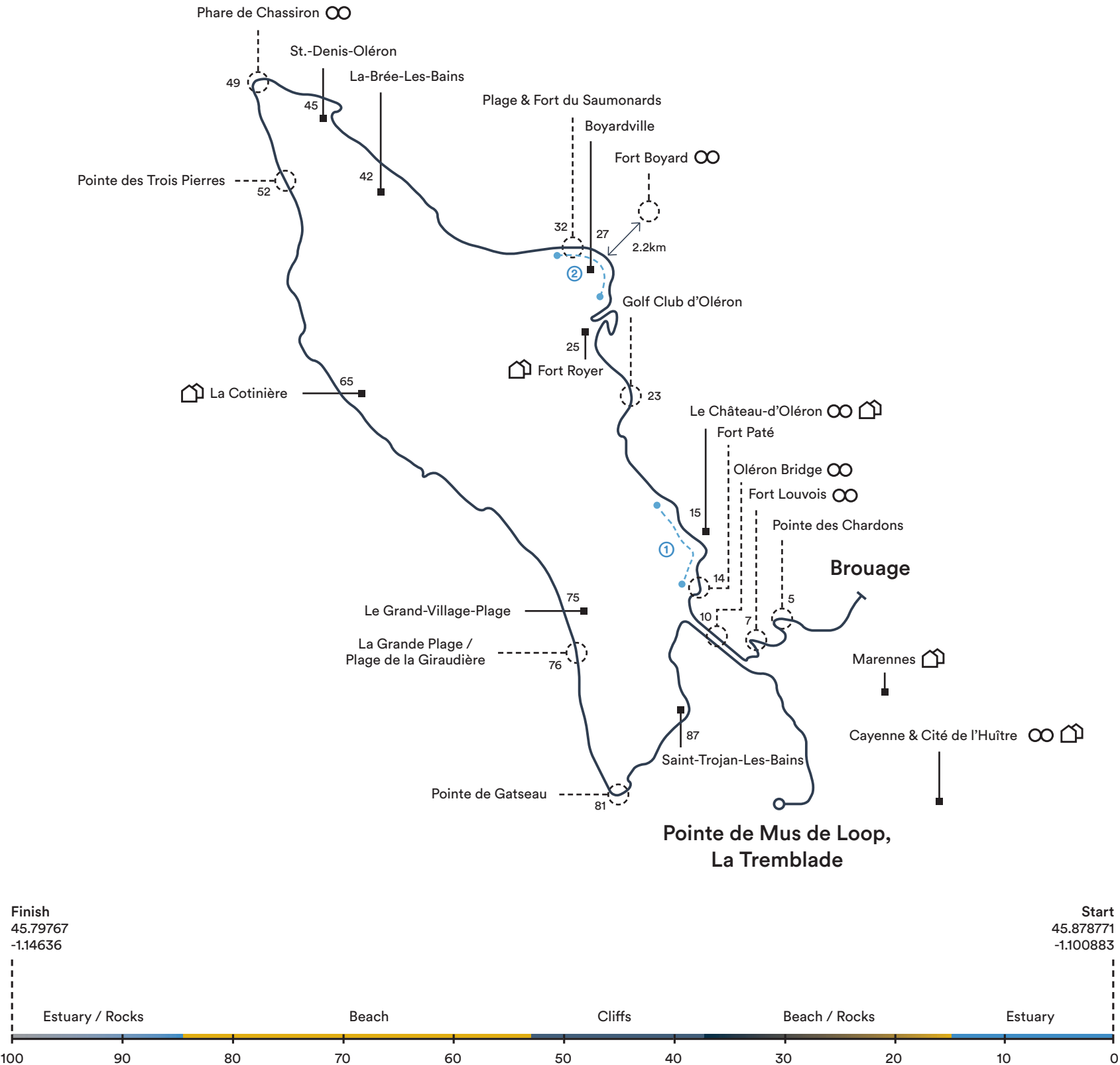
Moëze-Oléron to Brouage hike (7 km)

What? – Hike between swamps and wetlands to go from lost to a warm welcome in a fortified village.

How? – Park your car at the car park at Plage de Plaisance (45.909773, -1.073704). To start your hike through the nature reserve, first walk further southwards down the paved road until you see a sharp three-way junction. Take the unpaved road on the right (45.903861, -1.072681) and continue to go south. Soon you'll find yourself surrounded by seemingly endless oyster beds and the path will become more and more desolate. You might feel as if you're lost, but don't worry, after a solid 3.5 km of walking on piled-up earth between the wet grasslands and meadows, the path will bend left and curve inland. Let the Havre de Brouage river bring you back to society. At the end of the 7 km hike you'll start seeing coloured huts popping up between the fields and you'll spot the fortified walls of Brouage village on the right, almost resembling a remote Roman galleon. The car park situated at the entrance to the walled town (45.868299, -1.068270) provides a practical endpoint. The natural reserves of Moëze-Oléron (north of Brouage), Yves and Marais de Fouras (south of Fouras) are great locations for a nature escape.

Stage 39

Brouage > Pointe de Mus de Loop, La Tremblade



The tour of Île d'Oléron

Île de Ré's big brother, 150 km further south, is the largest French island on the Atlantic coast and the second largest overall, after Corsica. Nicknamed La Lumineuse, it attracts many tourists wanting to soak up some sun. Île d'Oléron has a great deal in common with its little brother: salt marshes, pine trees, scenic villages and a hundred kilometres of bike lanes, and it is even more notorious for its oyster culture. Île d'Oléron has enchanting flora and charming villages in spades. Le Château-d'Oléron in the southeast is the cultural hub, with its brightly coloured oyster farmers' huts, now housing small local art galleries and workshops, and an impressive 300-year-old citadel, now used to host expositions. The centrally located Saint-Pierre-d'Oléron is the biggest city in the area. However, while it is convenient for your daily needs, it's a little lacking in the charm department. Fort Royer, an oyster village just north of the Golf Club d'Oléron, however, is as charismatic as it gets. If you enjoy visiting ports, you can make a stop at the leisure harbour Saint-Denis-d'Oléron and fishing harbour la Cotinière. The majority of the coastline is lined with fine sandy beaches, except for the rocky top part of the island at Saint-Denis-d'Oléron, connecting Phare de Chassiron to Pointe des Trois Pierres, which is a rough cliffy area. If you prefer to go hiking in the shade, you'll find solace in the local pine forests, such as the Saumonards Forest – north of Boyardville – or Forêt de Saint-Trojan – south of le Grand-Village-Plage. The true capital of oysters is found just south of the island. The southern part of Marennes has dozens of oyster farms along the Chenal de Marennes and the Cité de l'Huître. This is a fun family venue.

See **Phare de Chassiron**

The second oldest functioning lighthouse in France, marking the northern tip of the island.

Fort Louvois

A typical Vauban castle that was built to defend Rochefort and which is surrounded by oyster fields. The castle is only accessible at low tide. The fort now serves as a museum.

Fort Boyard

The best place to see this notorious castle, which is surrounded by water, is from the beach at Pointe des Saumonards. For visits, check Stage 38.

Stroll **Le Château-d'Oléron**

The cultural hotspot of the island; it is brimming with authentic buildings, artists and lots of oyster and other seafood restaurants.

Marennes & Cité de l'Huître

Marennes is probably the oyster capital of France, maybe even the world. An added bonus of this charming local village is the beautiful channel, perfect for oyster farming and oyster tasting.

Fort Royer

Are you up for more oysters and colourful cabins? Then the small village of Fort Royer is the place to be.

Hike **① Pointe Chassiron cliff hike (3 km)**


What? – Hike from the Pointe de Chassiron along the cliffs southwards with a view on the waves pounding against the rocky coastline.

How? – Start at the lighthouse (46.046607, -1.410349) and finish at the little car park along the Rue Jean-Bart (45.946951, -1.234733). Follow the path along the low cliffs that run parallel to a road on the left. The path is easily accessible.

② Saumonards Forest to spot Fort Boyard (3.2 km)

What? – Combine a beach walk with a view of one of the most spectacular forts in the world. Take your binoculars though, the fort is 2.4 km away and surrounded by water.

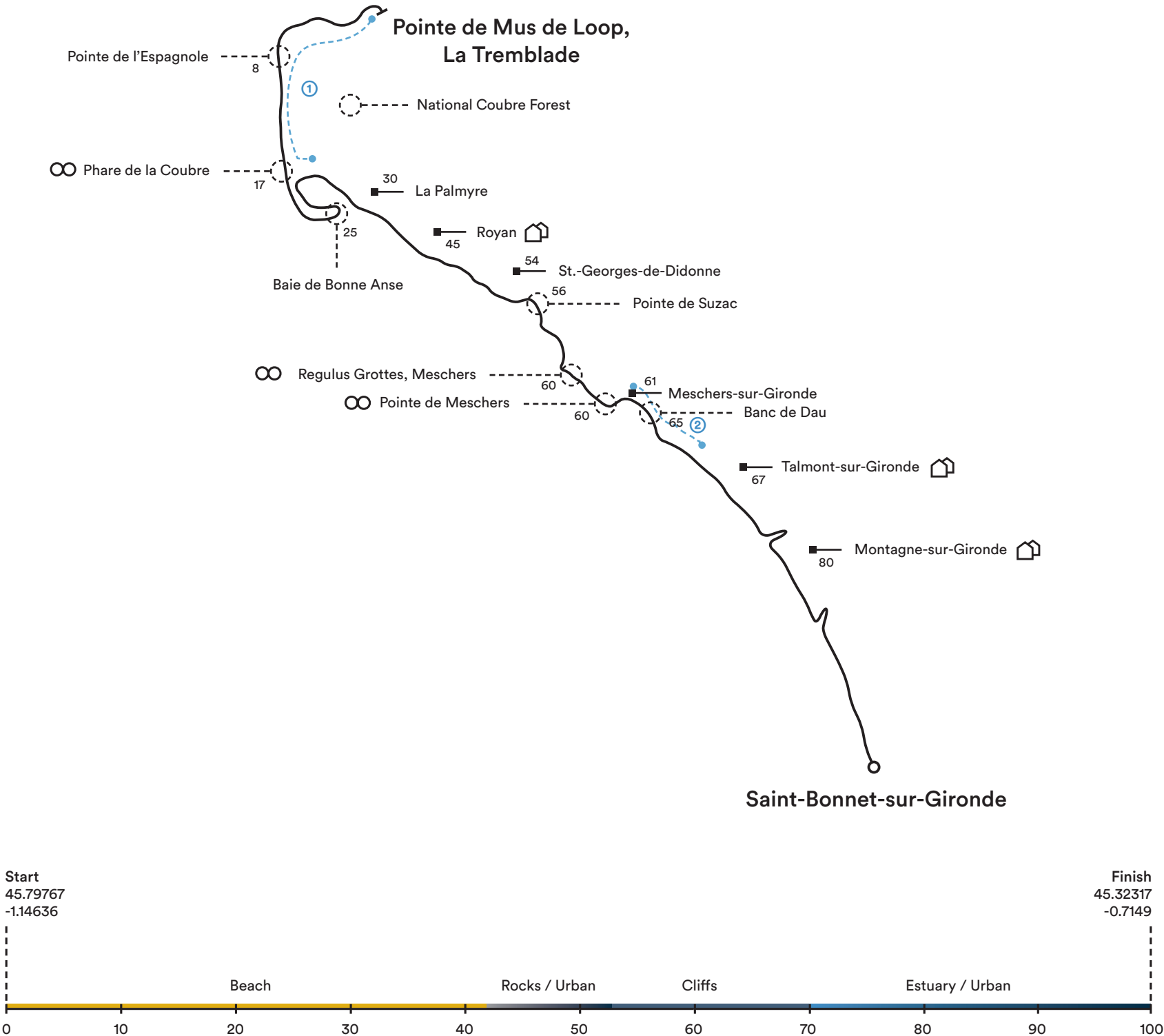
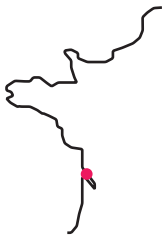
How? – Park your car at the free car park at the Saumonards forest, only 400 m from Boyardville centre (45.972845, -1.239938). The hike will lead you to another car park at Plage des Saumonards (45.989722, -1.254627). Walk towards the beach and continue walking on the sand, keeping the ocean on your right. Follow the natural curve of the forest to reach the celebrated Pointe de Saumonards and get a glimpse of the notorious Fort Boyard. You can walk back through the forest and loop back fairly easily.

 **Reach** To get to the island, you can take the train to the stations at Surgères, Saintes or Rochefort, then take the bus. However, as at Île de Ré, we recommend taking the bike. Saint-Pierre-d'Oleron and Saint-Denis-d'Oleron are easily accessible by car, but you will not find a road with more than two lanes on Oléron Island.



Stage 40

Pointe de Mus de Loop, La Tremblade > Saint-Bonnet-sur-Gironde



The end of the ocean and the east bank of the Gironde ~~~

The last 100 km of Charente-Maritime's coastline shows three quite distinct faces. The first one is the characteristic Vendée landscape with sandy beaches and immense stretches of pine trees in the Forêt domaniale de la Coubre. There is a lighthouse marking the beginning of the Gironde estuary, which is the biggest estuary in Western Europe. The enormous river is 75 km long with a maximum width of 12 km and marks the meeting point between the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Dordogne and Garonne rivers in the east. We will need four stages to cover the entire shore of the Gironde estuary. The second part starts at Royan, the biggest city on this part of the coast. This section is marked by limestone cliffs and the rocky curves of the Gironde bank, along with authentic fishing huts, the caves of Meschers-sur-Gironde and the cute little village of Talmont-sur-Gironde. On the third and last part of our programme, we'll be leaving Talmont-sur-Gironde and passing Barzan. The shore starts to truly feel like a riverbank with more green popping up. Mortagne-sur-Gironde, the last large village in the Charente-Maritime department, borders the banks of the Gironde and Vitrezay, which is the start of the Gironde department, with its famous Médoc region on the left bank and Bordeaux as its capital.

∞ See **Phare de la Coubre** ~~~

A beacon of light marking the entrance to the Gironde estuary, right in the middle of the Coubre Forest.

Grottes de Régulus, Meschers-sur-Gironde ~~~

A series of caves built on the limestone cliffs overlooking the Gironde.

△ Hike **① Forêt domaniale de la Coubre (15 km)** ~~~ △△△

What? – Explore the Coubre pine forests and enjoy the unique views of the Gironde estuary and the Coubre Lighthouse.

How? – Start in Ronce-les-Bains and walk along the beach to circumvent the pine forests. After 15 km you'll reach the Phare de la Coubre via a hybrid route, partly beach – with great views of both Oléron Island and the Gironde estuary – and a chunk of sandy pine forest tracks. Enjoy the GR4, which leads you through a chess pattern of hiking and mountain bike routes. If you want to go solo, use your smartphone as a navigation tool and you will not lose track. If you prefer a shorter walk, there are parking facilities at the crossing of D25 and D268 (45.728720, -1.228825) or along the D25 at Parking du Vieux Phare (45.707922, -1.233174), which is a 1.5 km walk from the phare and only 100 metres from the sea, or you could use the car park next to the lighthouse (45.698073, -1.229621).

② Banc de Dau and Talmont-sur-Gironde (4.5 km) ~~~ △△

What? – Follow the white chalk path along the cliffs next to the Gironde estuary to end up in the charming village of Talmont-sur-Gironde.

How? – Park your car on the car park at the end of the Impasse des Carrelets (45.555526, -0.944026). Finish your hike at the obligatory car park right before entering Talmont (45.537329, -0.904883). More or less halfway you'll pass the Banc de Dau, with a handful of stilted fishing houses stretching out into the water.

🏠 Stroll **Talmont-sur-Gironde** ~~~

Classified as one of Les Plus Beaux Villages de France, Talmont is a picture-postcard stop that you must not miss. Let the whitewashed houses, cobblestone streets and artisan shops charm you and then head to the edge of the village for a visit to the little Romanesque church.

Royan ~~~

Classified as Ville d'Art et d'Histoire, the city combines the charm of the Belle Epoque with modern architecture, a buzzing port, an unspoiled seaside and plenty to see and do, both in town and close by.

Mortagne-sur-Gironde ~~~

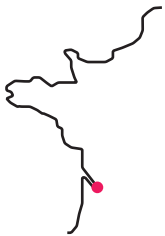
A former hotspot for maritime industry, today it is a peaceful village with a handful of restaurants and brocante shops.

📍 **Reach** If you want to cross the Gironde estuary, take a boat from Royan to Pointe de Grave on the left bank. There is also a train station in Royan. If you want to travel along the coastline you're better off renting a car or going by bus, as none of the smaller villages has a train station. There is no highway, but efficient D-ways, such as the D730 and D145, allow you to travel efficiently.

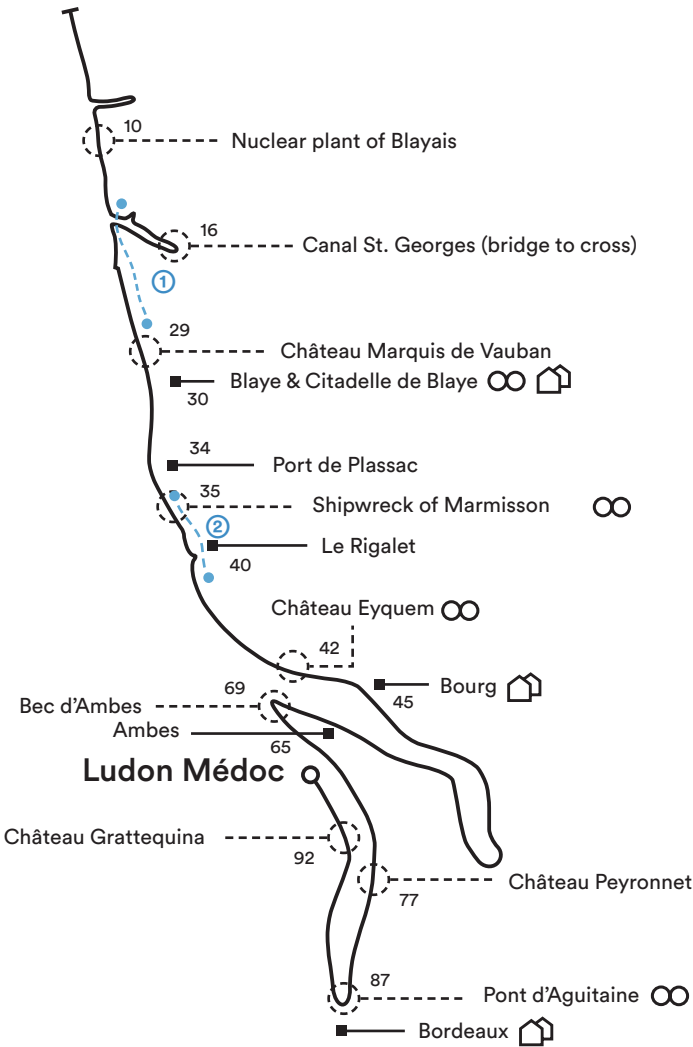


Stage 41

Saint-Bonnet-sur-Gironde > Ludon-Médoc, Bordeaux



Saint-Bonnet-sur-Gironde



Finish
45.32317
-0.7149

Start
44.99809
-0.56872

Estuary



The vineyards of Blaye and the area around Bordeaux ~~~

We continue our trip south and head to the magnificent city of Bordeaux, which is situated along the eastern bank of the Gironde estuary, the biggest one in Europe. Just like in the Médoc region, the riverbank is an ideal breeding ground for vines, and this wine-producing region is especially known for Côtes de Blaye. The vineyards and local châteaux are a must-see – although they are not very well known because they are difficult to reach from Bordeaux. Château Eyquem, Château Tayac (with its palm tree driveway), Château de Barbe and Château des Arras – in an old military fort – should be on your shortlist. This stage has more hills than the flat Médoc fields, giving the region a more attractive, authentic and adventurous character. The city of Blaye is brimming with military heritage, with its impressive citadelle and château and a ferry that crosses the river Gironde. Bourg is Blaye's little brother, with a small castle and old houses overlooking the Gironde. Between Blaye and Bourg, small cliffs have formed an alley, which is home to elegant houses with little gardens that look out on the Gironde. These form the petite hamlets of Le Rigalet and Marmisson, which are the perfect places for a stroll. Here you'll find typical fishing huts built on stilts and a rusty boat wreck. Along the riverbanks are small ports such as Port de Plassac and Rogue de Thau, all boasting the same incredibly wide view of the impressive stream. When crossing the river Dordogne and later the Garonne – via the Pont d'Aquitaine – take some time to visit Bordeaux, as this incredibly beautiful city is a paradise for lovers of food and drink. Our book can't begin to describe the many treasures of the capital of wine. But believe us, a visit to Bordeaux is well worth your time.

∞ See **Citadelle de Blaye** ~~~

Protecting the gates of Bordeaux, this is one of the most impressive and well-preserved citadelles in France, and it was granted UNESCO World Heritage status in 2008. Built on 38 hectares of land, the fortress has a great hotel bar and the vibe of a quaint medieval village. Enter via one of the impressive arched bridges.

Pont d'Aquitaine ~~~

This impressive suspension bridge is, with its 1,776 m in length, one of the 100 longest bridges in the world.

Château d'Eyquem ~~~

This gorgeous château offers sweeping views of a spectacular U-turn descending the hill and the industrial area on the tip of the Bec d'Ambès peninsula.

🏠 Stroll **Bordeaux** ~~~

The biggest city in this book is not only impressive in size but also in beauty, as it is world famous for its vineyard-laced countryside.

Blaye ~~~

Blaye is a charming city, with Château des Rudel and the neighbouring vineyards of Côtes du Blaye as highlights.

Bourg ~~~

Bourg is a petite hamlet with a few widely scattered places to enjoy some food or drinks.

➤ **Reach** Bordeaux is the reference city of this stage and is located only 50 km from Blaye and 40 km from Bourg. Blaye gives you access to Lamarque on the other side of the Gironde. Unfortunately, there are no trains along the shores.

⚓ Hike ① **Along the banks of the Gironde (7.5 km)** ~~~ ⚓

What? – Stroll across the eastern bank of the Gironde and enjoy a view of Île de Patiras.

How? – Park your car along Freneau Street (45.232452, -0.684620). Go left at the T-junction – the street on the right will lead you to a house. Continue until you reach the water. At around 40 m from the riverbank, a path runs parallel to the channel for the next 7.5 km. Follow this path until you hit Port du Bernu, where you can park your car along the D737, preferably at the end (45.170709, -0.669225).

② **Marmisson and Le Rigalet (4 km)** ~~~ ⚓

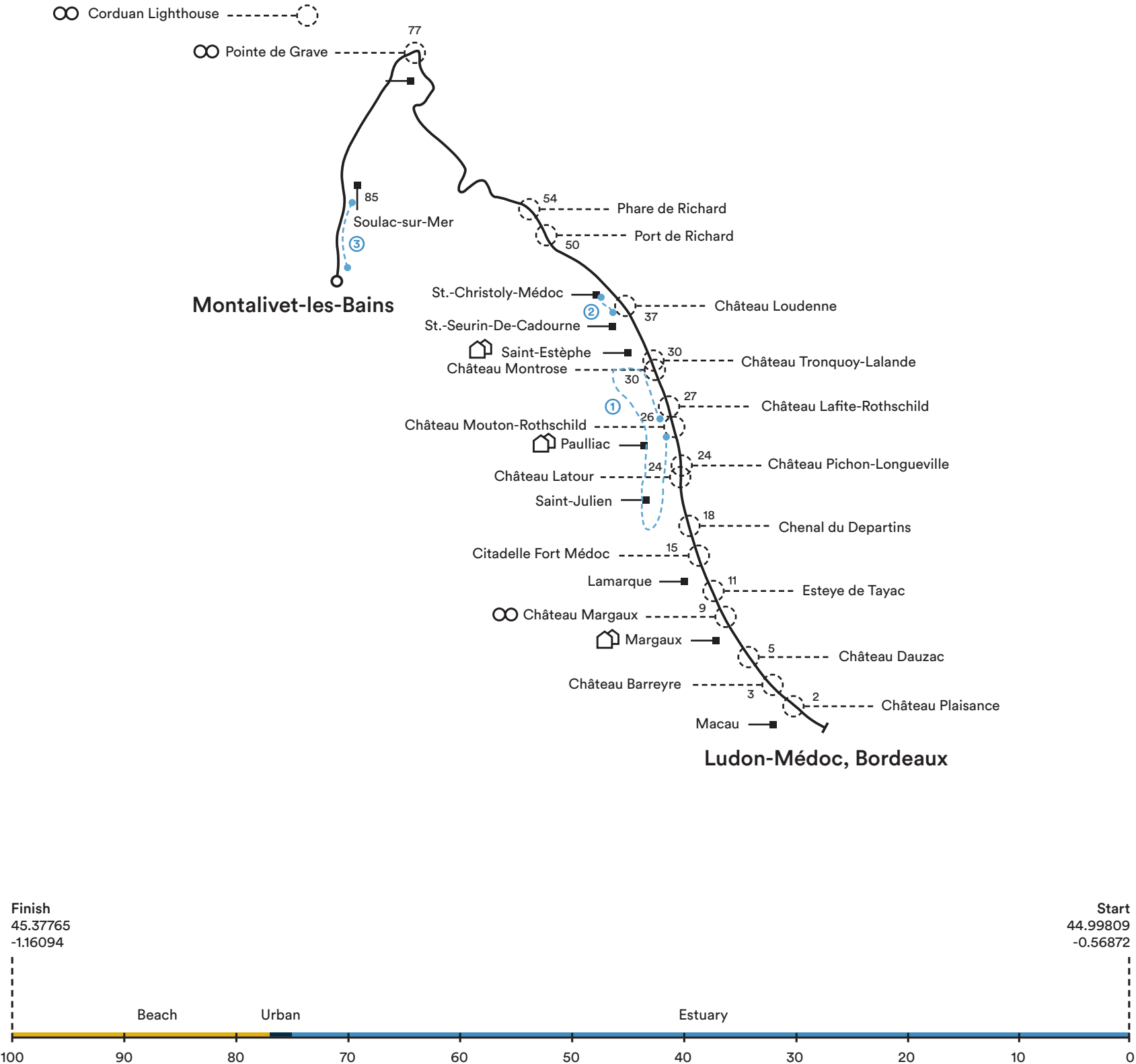
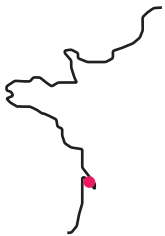
What? – Stroll past the exotic little gardens and white porches of the stately, elegant houses squeezed between the Gironde and the green cliffs of Le Rigalet and Marmisson. This is not a single trail, but definitely a hidden gem.

How? – This hike runs along a paved road that, although it is not your typical hiking trail, is fairly calm as it is hidden from sight and has little car traffic. You can start along the eponymous street at Roque de Thau (45.078945, -0.637313). Continue for 4 km. Eventually the road will curve up and away from the river. Walk for 1 km more to reach the centre of Bayon-sur-Gironde, where you can park next to the wonderful little mairie or the church, both buildings worth checking out (45.053957, -0.600919).



Stage 42

Ludon-Médoc, Bordeaux > Montalivet-les-Bains



The Médoc vineyards

The Médoc region sits on the left bank of the Gironde. The Médoc is a world-renowned wine powerhouse and home to four of the most prestigious wine villages: Margaux, Saint-Julien, Pauillac and Saint-Estèphe. The local châteaux produce some of the world's most expensive bottles of wine and encompass a mammoth 16,000 hectares, of which 5,500 ha produce classified AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) wines. To separate the best from the rest, Emperor Napoleon III asked each region to install a classification system of crus. Médoc ended up having 60 crus, of which 5 were classified as premiers crus. That means that the area is home to five of the most prestigious wine houses, both in the region and in the world: Château Lafite-Rothschild, Château Latour and Château Mouton-Rothschild in Pauillac; Château Margaux in Margaux and Château Haut-Brion in Pessac. Médoc is also home to the longest marathon in the world, the Marathon du Médoc, which starts and finishes in Pauillac and which passes alongside vineyards and châteaux. When we move to the northern tip, the soil gets sandier, which is why you'll find considerably fewer wine houses in Bas-Médoc, north of Saint-Estèphe, than in the southern Haute-Médoc. Along the riverbank we found small ports, such as Port de Richard, and the typical fishing huts. The flat countryside, often just a few metres above sea level, is nicknamed Petite Hollande because of the many dykes that protect the valuable land against the water. At Pointe de Grave, north of Le Verdon-sur-Mer, we stumbled upon the most northern extremity of the Gironde department. Here there was a remarkable change in scenery, evolving from riverbanks to a sandy ocean beach with incredible views of Royan and the offshore lighthouse at Cordouan. When travelling along the shores of Soulac-sur-Mer and Montalivet, you'll get a taste of the typical scenery that will be the common theme for the next few hundred kilometres up to the Spanish border – long endless beaches flanked by vast pine forests.

See **Châteaux**


Visit the most prestigious wine houses in the world, namely, Château Lafite Rothschild, Château Latour and Château Mouton Rothschild in Pauillac; Château Margaux in Margaux and Château Haut-Brion in Pessac. Also, don't miss Cos d'Estournel, which is a very atypical château, and Château Pédesclaux.

Pointe de Grave

A great viewpoint from which to observe the other side of the Gironde estuary, the city of Royan and, further north, the most majestic watchtower in the world: the Cordouan Lighthouse, which is built 7 km offshore.

Stroll **Pauillac and Saint-Estèphe**

The prestige of the wine villages is mainly rooted in the surrounding châteaux, as the villages themselves are surprisingly normal. Out of the four wine villages, Saint-Estèphe and Pauillac have the most charm and the most buzz, although it is clear that the main attractions are to be found outside the villages.

 **Reach** As one of the biggest cities in France, Bordeaux is very well connected, with a highway, trains and aeroplanes. There is a railway line connecting the Médoc region to Bordeaux, with a stop in Margaux. You can cross the Gironde by boat in two places. There is the possibility of travelling to Blaye from Lamarque, a little north of Margaux, and further north you can cross the Pointe de Grave to reach Royan.

Hike

Unfortunately, walking alongside the Gironde in the Haut-Médoc is not feasible as most vineyards reach as far as the riverbank. There are no hiking roads in this area, only higher up.

Marathon du Médoc (42.2 km)

What? – Visit 50 wine houses over a 42.2 km trajectory.

How? – www.marathondumedoc.com. If you want the true experience, you should enrol for the real event. If this doesn't fit your schedule, you can download the itinerary from the website and run or walk it at your own pace.

Riverbank of the Bas-Médoc (7 km)

What? – Make your way, mere metres from the Gironde water, and pass little ports and classy wine houses.

How? – From Chenal de la Maréchale to Port de Saint-Christoly-Médoc. Start at the bend of the D2 road, just after having crossed the Chenal (45.309706, -0.786443). Take the first street on your right and walk alongside the canal until you hit the trail. You can park your car at the right bank of the Chenal de la Maréchale, closer to the Gironde. After walking along the path for 1.7 km, you'll pass Château Loudenne, which is often rented out for parties. After 2.7 km you'll find yourself on the Chemin de Lamena, alongside the fishing huts, for a few kilometres. Finish alongside the little port, at the parking area next to Route de By, Saint-Christoly-Médoc (45.359283, -0.821614).

Beach walk

What? – A 14 km stretch of sandy beach connects Soulac to

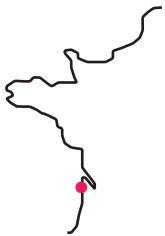
Montalivet. Perfect for a breath of fresh air after your wine tastings.

How? – Park your car just outside the city centre in order to avoid paid parking. You can park at the crossroads of Rue el Burgo de Osma and Boulevard Charcot, in front of the Archaeological Museum. In Montalivet you can park along the Boulevard Général Leclerc (45.380226, -1.157927).

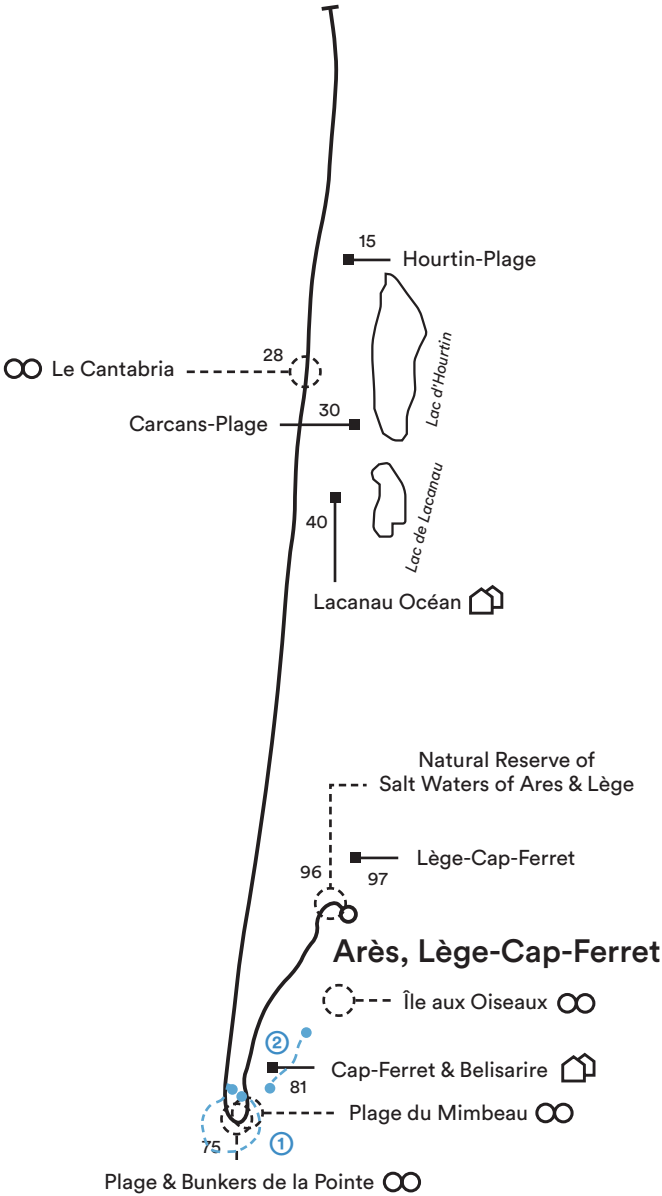


Stage 43

Montalivet-les-Bains > Arès, Lège-Cap-Ferret



Montalivet-les-Bains



Start
45.37765
-1.16094

Finish
44.7635
-1.1472

Beach

Urban

Beach



The waves and beaches of Lacanau and Cap Ferret

This stage resembles the landscape we'll find further on in Landes: kilometres of long sandy beaches bordered by massive pine tree forests. There are 75 straight sandy kilometres to navigate in order to reach the tip of the Pointe du Cap Ferret, before the coastline curves north again to form the Bassin d'Arcachon, a large bay stretching from Cap Ferret to Arcachon. The entire coast is covered by pine forests and two big lakes lie a few kilometres from the shore: Lac d'Hourtin-Carcans, east of Hourtin, and Étang de Lacanau, southeast of Lacanau. With Lacanau and Cap Ferret on the itinerary, we are passing two of the most popular holiday destinations in France. Lacanau-Océan is a paradise for surfers, with lots of nightlife attracting a young audience in the summer months. Lacanau also appeals to more mature vacationers, with its pine forests and golf courses, making it a well-balanced resort. Cap Ferret is the Saint Tropez of the Atlantic coast, famous for its oysters and for the red and white lighthouse that offers a spectacular view of the Bassin d'Arcachon and Dune du Pyla. Stroll down the fairy-tale streets with the luxurious wooden villas shaded by pine trees. The beach to the west is perfect for surfers, while the beach inside the bay will appeal to those looking for a chill-out day with rosé and fruits de mer.

See Île aux Oiseaux

Board a tour boat and visit Île aux Oiseaux and its iconic *cabanes tchanquées*, the wooden houses built in the 19th century to guard the oyster fields. Boats can only access the *cabanes tchanquées* at high tide. At low tide, you will need to go barefoot through the mud to get close.

Plage du Mimbeau

Take a peaceful walk along the 2 km headland in front of the beach at Cap Ferret and enjoy the view of both Cap Ferret and the Bassin d'Arcachon with its oyster fields.

Le Cantabria and the bunkers of Lacanau


This holiday paradise also hides memories of WWII, with blockhouses buried in the sand and the nearby rusty shipwreck of *the Cantabria*.

Stroll Lacanau

Head out to Lacanau if you enjoy a surf vibe and discover the many outdoor activities taking place along its sandy beaches.

Cap Ferret

Cap Ferret is an upscale beach resort. Eat the famous oysters in the villages of Le Canon, La Vigne and Grand Piquey. The restaurant Chez Hortense is also highly recommended; it has been serving the salty delicacies since 1938. Visit the marché du Ferret to discover local specialities.

 Reach There are no railway stations in the area. Bordeaux is situated 1 hour 15 min from Cap Ferret and 1 hour from Lacanau, which is fairly reasonable. There is no highway either, but a humble road does connect the cities at a distance of about 10 km from the shore and occasional roads lead to the beaches.

Hike ① Go around the tip of Ferret (4.5 km)

What? – Go around the tip of the peninsula of Cap Ferret with its infamous bunkers and dunes and enjoy seafood in the most famous restaurant in the area.

How? – This walk is a loop, meaning that your starting point is also your finishing point. Park your car in front of Chez Hortense at the crossroads of Avenue du Sémaphore and Avenue de la Lugue (44.629033, -1.243790). Facing the restaurant, go to the right and follow the Avenue du Sémaphore, moving away from the beach and towards the ocean at the western end of the peninsula. Follow the road until you get to the roundabout. Take a left (or the third exit) to find yourself on the beach facing the Atlantic. Follow the beach, keeping the water on your right-hand side. After 800 m of beach you'll reach the Pointe du Cap Ferret, with a handful of impressive bunkers in the water. Go around the tip of the peninsula, where you'll have a view of Banc d'Arguin and Dune du Pyla across the water. For the last 1 km you'll have to leave the sand behind and walk over the shingle beach until you're back where you started, ready to indulge in an amazing dinner.

② Walk the Plage de Mimbeau (3.5 km)

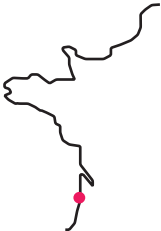
What? – This sandy walk will treat you to the best view of the skyline of Cap Ferret in the west and the Bassin d'Arcachon in the east.

How? – Please note, the indicated distance is the way there and back along the sandy peninsula that stretches parallel to the beach at Cap Ferret, as there is no way to pick you up at the end unless you have a friend with a boat on speed dial. You can park at the end of the Allée des Pinsons (44.633129, -1.246538).

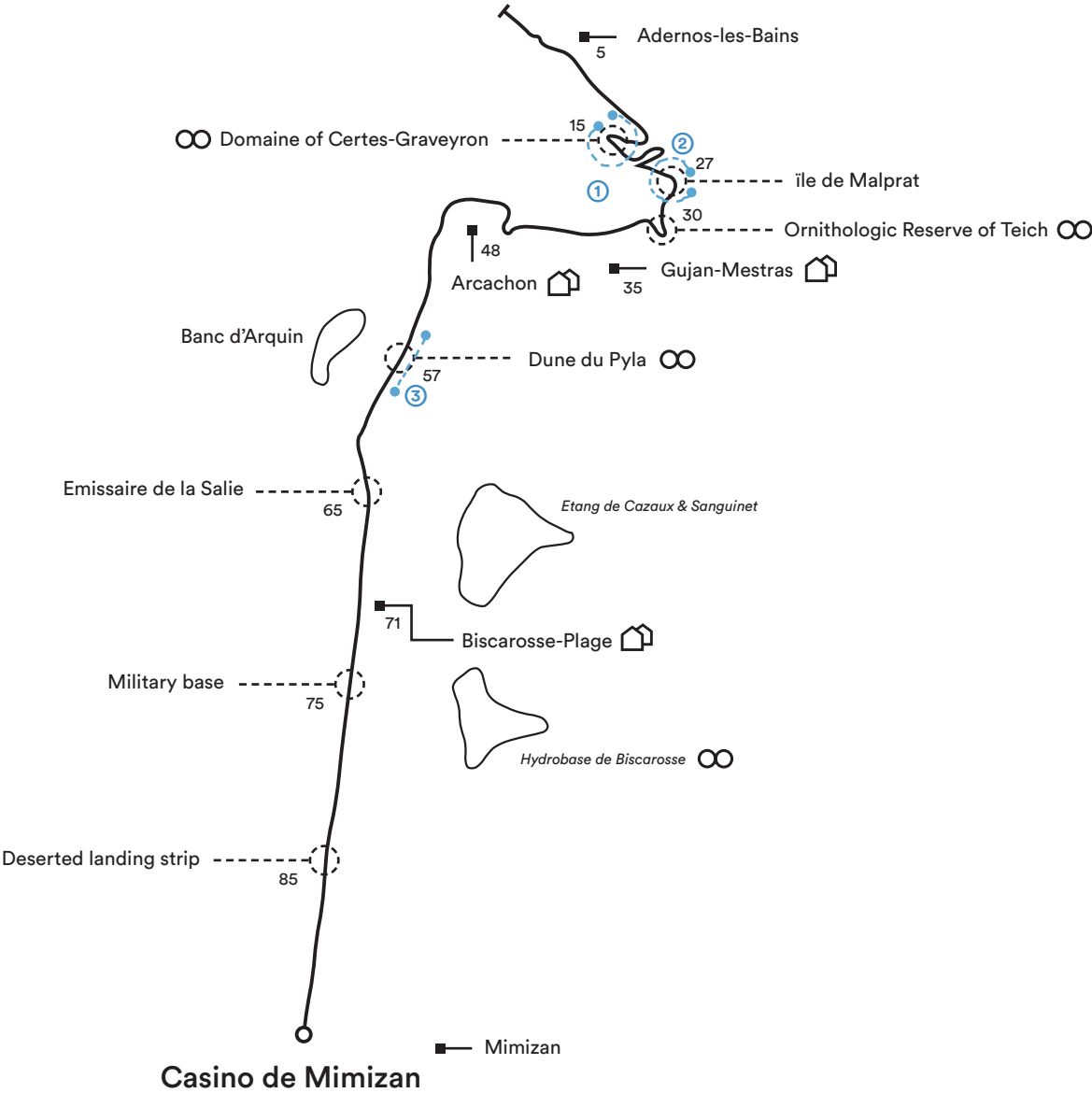


Stage 44

Arès, Lège-Cap-Ferret > Casino de Mimizan

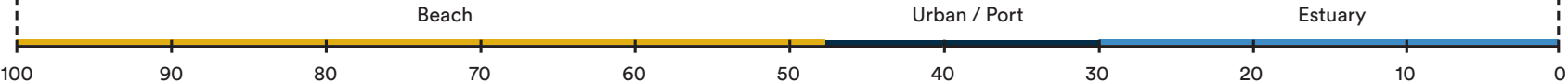


Arès, Lège-Cap-Ferret



Finish
44.21217
-1.29931

Start
44.7635
-1.1472



The bay d’Arcachon, Dune du Pyla and the endless beaches of the Landes ~~~

This stage has two distinct parts. First, there is Arcachon bay, with its many little ports brimming with leisure boats and the giant bird reserves offering fabulous walks for you to enjoy fauna and flora. The Teich Bird Reserve and the Domain of Certes-Graveyron are incredible, unique places that can be discovered either by foot or by canoe. Along the banks of the Bassin d’Arcachon lies Gujan-Mestras, which is known for its oysters. Neighbouring this is the city of Arcachon, which marks the entrance to the bay and is famed for its rich history, Belle Epoque villas and holiday ambiance. The second part of this stage continues with eternal sandy beaches and long stretches of pine forests. The beaches are reasonably flat until you reach the massive Dune du Pyla, a mountain of sand that is visible from the other side of Cap Ferret and which is a must-climb attraction. Run or jump down or take a parapente lesson for some exhilarating fun. Near the end of this stage we came across two huge lakes: l’Etang de Cazaux-Sanguinet and the lake of Biscarosse, a former seaplane base.



See

Teich Bird Reserve or the Domain of Certes-Graveyron ~~~

Some of the most impressive and well-known ornithological reserves in the world, with incredible walks that allow you to enjoy the beauty.

Dune du Pyla ~~~

The biggest dune in Europe, which towers over the surrounding land and offers a spectacular and absurd playing field. We strongly recommend that you hike up and then run/jump down.

Hydrobase de Biscarosse ~~~

Lac de Biscarosse is one of the two large lakes in this area. For less than 100 euro you can book a seaplane and for a little more you can see Dune du Pyla or Arcachon bay.



Stroll Gujan-Mestras ~~~

Treat your inner oyster lover and head to the oyster capital of Arcachon bay, which has a handful of little docks full of seafood places and the museum Maison de l’Huître.

Arcachon ~~~

This chic resort has four distinct parts: Ville d’Hiver, with smart 19th-century villas; Ville d’Eté, with wooden piers or *jetées*, such as the popular Jetée Thiers, and many bars and terraces; Ville Printemps, with a thalassotherapy centre; and Ville d’Automne, with its fishing ports, yacht harbours and water sport facilities.

Biscarosse ~~~

Biscarosse has several things to offer, including the city centre, the lakes and the sea resort. It is the capital of seaplanes and is home to a seaplane museum.



Hike

① Teich (2.5 or 5 km) ~~~

What? – Head out into one of the most renowned bird reserves. Here you will find 120 ha of playground containing 17 observatory huts from which to spot birds.

How? – Start at the entrance to Réserve Ornithologique du Teich, Rue du Port, Le Teich and take either the 2.5 km or the 5 km track. Be warned, no dogs or bicycles are allowed and you have to pay to enter.

② Domaine de Certes et Graveyron ~~~

What? – Wander through the Domaine de Certes et Graveyron following one of two itineraries. Whichever you choose, the magnificent sight of grey herons gracefully taking flight is guaranteed.

How? – Choose between the longer circuit in Certes, which covers 14 km and starts at the swimming bay in Lanton, or go for the 5 km trail in Graveyron, which departs from the port at Audenge. You could also rent a canoe or kayak at the port of Cassy for an outing on the water and explore the domain in a unique manner.

③ Climb Dune du Pyla (7 km) ~~~

What? – Climb and walk the entire ridge of the biggest dune in Europe. The loose sand will make this an adventure.

How? – This tour is a loop, meaning that the starting point is also the finishing point. Start at the parking facility at Dune du Pyla (44.598163, -1.200168), where you’ll also find some bars if you need to fuel up. Mount the 100 m high dune and walk over the ridge until you reach the end of the 3 km of loose sand. Start your descent towards Plage Robinson and keep the dune on your right-hand side during your return. Walking alongside the water will allow you to appreciate the vastness of the dune. March for 3 km until you reach the end at Plage de la Corniche, where you will need to climb the loose sand once again for the final stretch back to the car park.

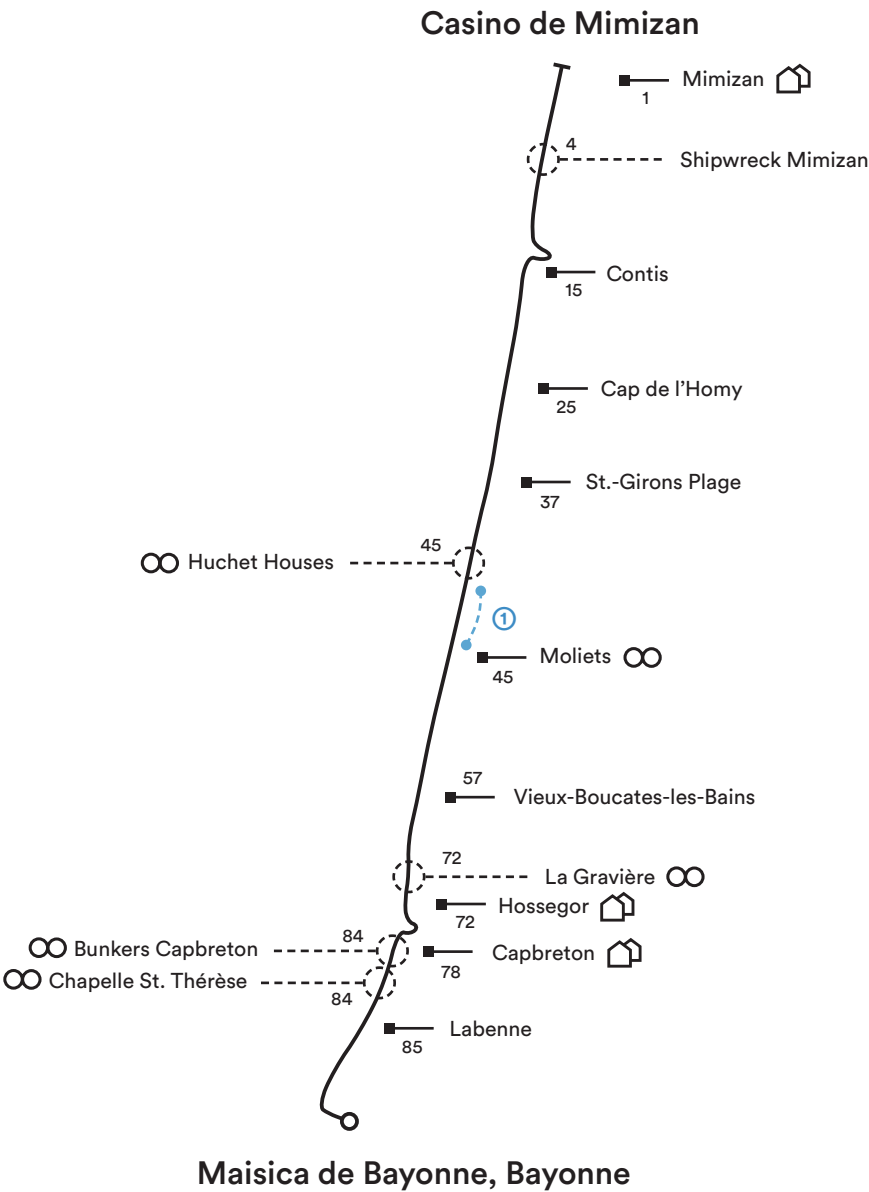
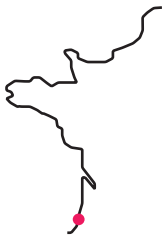


Reach Arcachon is a popular destination and therefore has both a highway and a rail connection with Bordeaux, with stops in Gujan-Mestras, Le Teich, La Hume, La Test and, finally, Arcachon. The connection going south runs far away from the coast and doesn’t come near it until the end of the stage. The car is the best way to get around.



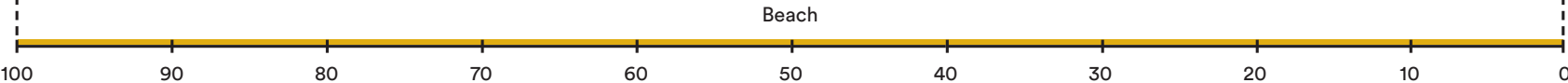
Stage 45

Casino de Mimizan > Maisica de Bayonne, Bayonne



Finish
43.5257
-1.49528

Start
44.2121
-1.29931



The waves and beaches of the Landes

Many surfers enjoy the so-called ‘beach breaks’ that are scattered along the entirety of this 100 km sandy shore. The surf capitals are Hossegor and Capbreton, with La Gravière also being a famously great place to witness the impressive antics of many pro surfers. The swell easily reaches heights bigger than the houses on the shore, tempting both local and foreign daredevils to ride the untamed waves. Hossegor has more to offer than good waves. Its long canals and yacht harbour create an atmosphere that combines a Miami vibe with the elegance of the Parisian Canal de Saint-Martin. The shore is lined with typical Basque buildings with white walls and intense red terraces and balconies. Capbreton is Hossegor’s sister city, situated south of the river Boudigau. The bunkers at Plage de la Savane seem to have been thrown on to the sand like rolling dice, providing a rough and stunning playground for the surfers to navigate when running towards the water. Both Hossegor and Capbreton bask in an intense summer vibe, with spacious villas backed by pine trees giving the region an eternal vacation feel. Above Hossegor, the landscape is less touristy, as the main areas of civilisation are concentrated around the places mentioned on the map, with long stretches of pine forests and deserted beaches between the village centres. The ethereal emptiness is illustrated by the currently deserted Huchet houses, a unique set of holiday houses only a few metres away from the shore. We have never before witnessed private property with such an impressive sea view. Take a walk along the nearby estuaries of Moliets and Courant d’Huchet, where Mother Nature reigns supreme. Further south lies another of the rarities to be found in Landes – the renovated, pristine white chapel of Saint Thérèse. Further inland, southern Landes treats its visitors to gentle hills, in contrast to the long pine flats of northern Landes. This is a gentle introduction to the hills that we’re about to discover later.

See **La Gravière**

The impressive waves hit the shore hard and churn up tube rides for only the bravest daredevils. Check the app MagicSeaWeed to see if today is your day to tame the pumping waves.

Chapelle Sainte Thérèse


Chapels, inspiring inner peace, are often found off the beaten path. Experience the striking contrast between the peaceful scenery and the sound of smashing waves behind the dunes that surround this isolated beauty.

Capbreton bunkers

Ten massive bunkers of all shapes and sizes attract both surfers and graffiti artists.

Stroll **Hossegor and Capbreton**

These two idyllic surfing venues are also great places in which to hang out and absorb the local easy-going vibe. There are plenty of shops and restaurants to satisfy your needs.

 **Reach** The Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport is your best southern option at around 20 km from Capbreton, with Bordeaux as the northern hotspot for flights. Roads are concentrated in the region around Capbreton and Hossegor, while the large majority of the northern part of the stage is fairly deserted. The highway coming from Bordeaux remains far from the coast until around Capbreton. An alternative option is a two-lane road, but travelling from Capbreton to the northern Contis or Mimizan is a fairly slow process with lots of roundabouts and stops. You’ll find train stations in Boucau, Ondres and Labenne, just north of Bayonne.

Hike **① Courant d’Huchet towards Moliet Plage (5 km)**

What? – Walk on top of the green covered dunes towards the beautiful river mouth of the Courant d’Huchet.

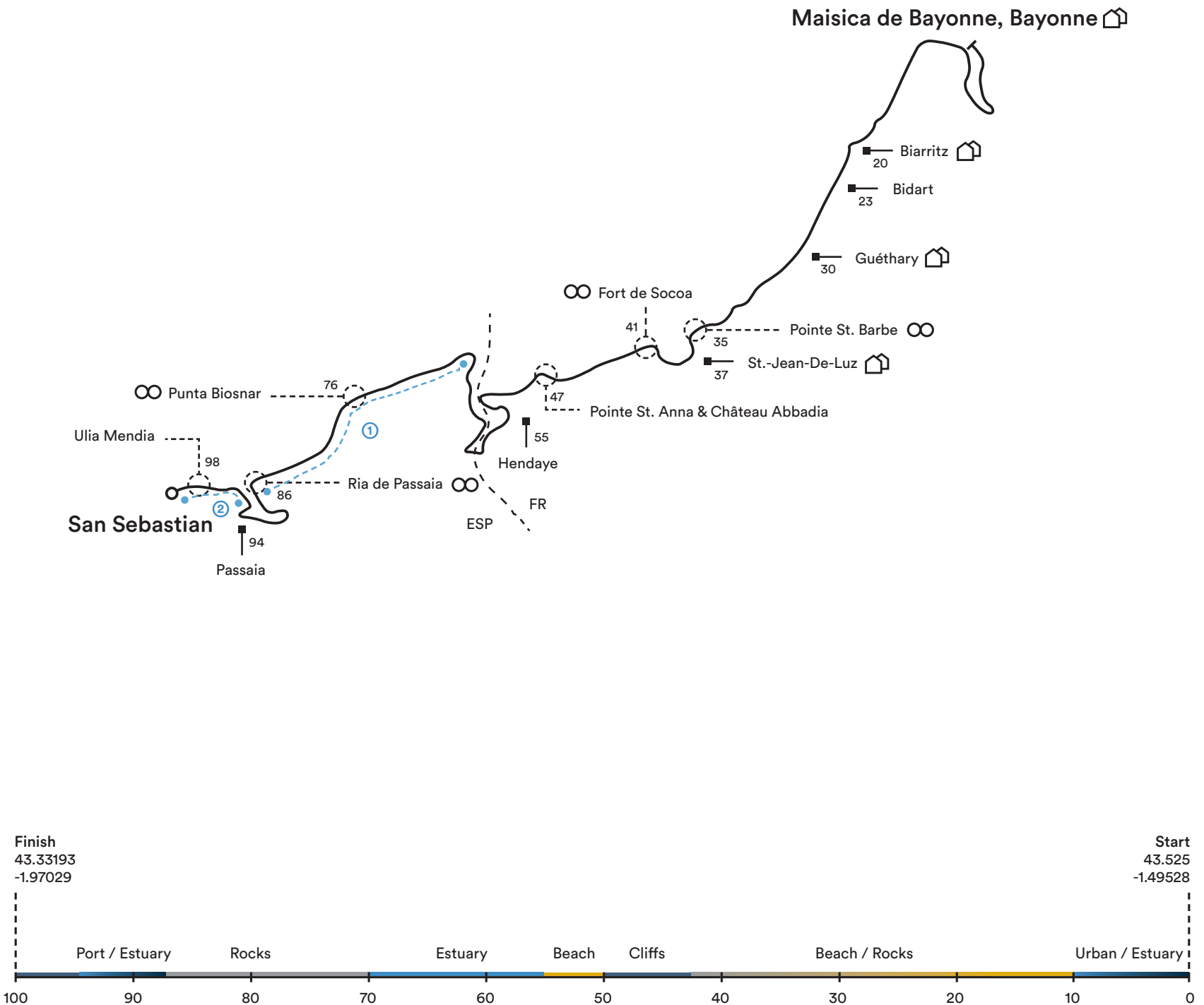
How? – Start at the parking des fusilliés (43.887273, -1.368139) and follow the hiking path towards the sea. You’ll hit the stream after you have walked for approximately 1.5 km through the forest. Follow the river until its final curves at Moliet Plage. You can park at the car park at the end of the Rue de l’Embouchure (43.857862, -1.387980).

The entire shoreline invites you for gorgeous coastal walks.



Stage 46

Maisica de Bayonne, Bayonne > Plage de Zurriola, San Sebastian



The wilderness and pride of the Basque country ~~~

This leg is one of the most complete stages in this book and concludes our journey on French territory with an overwhelming mix of culture, history, leisure and adventure. Buckle up for holiday vibes, surfing and Basque authenticity. As it includes Bayonne, Biarritz and the smaller Guéthary and Saint-Jean-de-Luz, this stage offers an interesting city trip marathon. Biarritz and the surrounding coastal towns, such as Bidart, are a magnet for all types of tourist, who drink in their remarkable experiences and natural beauty. Due to Plage de la Côte des Basques, Biarritz has proved to be one of the most famous surfing destinations. However, it also surprises with classy, chic recreation, with a variety of golf courses, high-end shopping streets with luxury boutique shops and classic buildings, such as the casino. Bayonne and Guéthary are the perfect destinations in which to soak up Basque culture. While Bayonne is a serious city and is seen as the unofficial capital of the French-Basque region, Guéthary is a quaint, unique village built on a rocky, hilly coast. Here you'll find small fishing ports with the typical white and red touches, a flourishing surfer culture attracting many hipsters and a curious hospitality and logistics infrastructure close to the shore, with some pedestrian bridges across the narrow alleys. Saint-Jean-de-Luz has the same holiday vibe and similar red and white villas, yet it feels more spacious and is geared more towards families, owing to its wide bay and green spaces, such as Pointe Sainte Barbe. South of these cultural hubs you'll find vast, remote, green and hilly landscapes to satisfy your adventurous needs. The nature reserve between Hondarribia – the first city across the Spanish border – and the impressive Pasaia, at the foot of the famous Jaizkibel, offers a 21.8 km hike along the GR121, also known as the Talaia Ibilbidea, with its impressive cliffs, hidden bays and free-roaming herds of horses and cows. On the other side of Pasaia lies another great hike past hidden lighthouses and vertical drops from the Faro de la Plata. The hike ends with a formidable view of the beautiful beaches of San Sebastian.



See

Pointe Sainte Barbe ~~~

A hill covered with luscious grasslands, with a white chapel overlooking the bay of Saint-Jean-de-Luz. It's a great place for a picnic with family or friends.

Punta Biosnar ~~~

An impressive rocky headland at the foot of the Jaizkibel. You'll need at least one hour to stroll back and forth and you'll have to conquer a few hundred vertical metres to get there.

Ria de Pasaia ~~~

This river mouth is a true pearl hidden between rocky promontories, with large vertical rock planes at both sides.



Stroll

Bayonne ~~~

Visit the cathedral in the historic Grand Bayonne or cross the river next to the Les Halles food market to go to Petit Bayonne, with its typical coloured houses and vibrant nightlife. Cured ham and chocolate are the local dishes to try.

Biarritz ~~~

Jack of many traits. Go to Plage de Côte des Basques to rent a surf board. Rocher d'Île Vierge and Rocher du Basta, which are featured on many postcards, are a must for a stroll. Your visit is not complete without a drink in the Port Vieux or on the Grand Plage or a shopping spree on Rue Mazagran and Place Georges Clemenceau.

Guéthary ~~~

A cute vibrant surfer village with a snug little port and old hotels right by the shoreline. The many typical white chalets with red sheds are often covered with the drying wetsuits of the young locals.

Saint-Jean-de-Luz ~~~

This is a great family destination. Pointe Sainte Barbe offers a superb view of the bay and also of Fort Sacoa at the other end of the bay.



Hike

① GR121 – Hondarribia to Pasaia (23 km) ~~~

What? – Walk along cliffs, beside little bays and alongside herds of freely running cows and horses on this 15 km stretch through a nature reserve.

How? – Beware, this hike is long and hard, with up to 1,000 vertical metres. Start in Hondarribia and park at Higer Bidea, a few metres before the water purification centre (43.391179, -1.794220). At the car park you'll see a single trail with the typical red-white marking heading into the vegetation. After 7 km of bays and hills you'll find yourself at Punta Biosnar. If you want to shorten your hike, or if you want to take the shortest route to the Punta, you can park your car along the GI-3440, the road going over the Jaizkibel, at a small car park (43.362100, -1.834588), from which it's 3.5 km down to the Punta. Close to the car park you'll find the summit of the Jaizkibel. The parking facilities near the Santa Barbara Tumulua offer a stunning view of the surrounding Pyrenees and the last kilometres of France. Halfway through you'll start making your way up towards the ridge, which ends with a spectacular slim single trail and a view of Pasaia and the lighthouse of Plata. A steep descent and a 1 km walk along the river bring you to the Plaza de Santiago and the nearest car park at Pasai Donibaneke, some 500 m further on.

② Pasaia to San Sebastian (8 km) ~~~

What? – A hike in the woods with a stunning view of San Sebastian.

How? – Park your car at the car park along the Ámbito Portuario Kalea in Pasai. Walk along the west bank of the river for 1 km, past a ship-building factory, before taking the steep stairs up to the Faro de la Plata. The rest of the walk will be in the woods alongside steep drops to the ocean. You'll find an aqueduct and an old battery that was meant to defend the shores from enemies. Your hike ends with an incredible view of the beaches of San Sebastian. The streets going up the hill are too narrow to park, so it's best to go down to the Calle José Miguel Barandiaran (43.327872, -1.970897).



Reach

Because of its popularity and the many key cities, this region is very well connected. You'll find airports in Biarritz, San Sebastian and, a bit further away, in Bilbao. Train access is guaranteed, with stations in Bayonne, Biarritz, Bidart, Guéthary, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Hendaye and Irun. The local highway will take you from Bayonne/Biarritz to San Sebastian in 45 minutes.



A visual travel guide along the European coast ~

For roadtrippers, hikers and culture lovers

The Book

Follow the Coast explores all the beautiful places to find if you walk the French and Belgian Atlantic coast from Knokke to San Sebastian.

With maps featuring highlights, practical 'how to get there' information, pros and cons for every route and a splash of culture *Follow the Coast* will inspire hikers, road trippers and culture lovers alike.

The Journey

The European coast has a total length of about 100,000 km. We decided to explore it all. On foot. Every day one team covered 100 km and then passed the mission on to another. Together we are venturing along the entire European coastline.

Along the way we have recorded the magnificent scenery on camera and lived the stories of the coast, all of which we capture in a series of books.

This book is the result of our first 4,600 km – the French and Belgian Atlantic coast, which has been run and hiked by almost 100 'shoreholders' from all over the globe – and is gathered together with the tips needed to relive this part of the adventure and discover its hidden treasures.



*We will donate 10% of all royalties to charity
to preserve the natural beauty you'll witness in this book.*

