

SIGNS AND WAYMARKS

Generally, cycle routes are well signed, although circuits are often signed in one direction only. On the few occasions when there appears to be a lack of signs, the rule that usually holds good is to follow the road you are on. (This also applies where there is a sign but it doesn't clearly indicate any direction.)

Occasionally a signed route will vary from the published one. This might be the result of problems occurring after the route has been published, so in these circumstances it is best to follow the signs rather than printed information.

PLEASE NOTE

Opening hours of restaurants, shops, etc. often differ from those advertised and cannot be absolutely relied upon. On Mondays many establishments are likely to be shut, especially in small villages.

On the accommodation, refreshments and provisions pages (see p.112), a selection with a varied price range is provided. Local tourist offices may be able to supply details of other establishments.

USEFUL WEBSITES (in French unless otherwise stated)

canauxdebreTAGNE.org

voies-navigables.bretagne.bzh

brittanytourism.com (English)

freewheelingfrance.com (English)



Musée de la Batellerie

Péniches in the port at Redon



Former flour mill and warehouse at Rohan

INTRODUCTION

The Nantes-Brest canal, for walking purposes, does not really start in Nantes nor end in Brest, but the original plan had the intention of linking these places by an internal route across Brittany. 18th century English harassment and blockades of the Breton coasts – particularly the Rade de Brest – made secure navigational routes desirable for both military and commercial purposes. Today the towpath (*chemin de halage*) starts at Lock 2, Quiheix, near Nort-sur-Erdre and provides a continuous route to Guily Glas in Finistère 343kms to the west. The canal has two ‘faces’: firstly that of the seven canalised rivers making up most of its course, and secondly the artificial man-made sections linking the major river valleys. It is largely the first of these aspects that gives the canal such a striking diversity of character and atmosphere along its full length.

Proposals

From earliest times in Brittany, transport by water was used extensively for transferring goods either via the coast or up and down large rivers such as the Vilaine and the Aulne. Inland towns like Redon, Quimper and Landerneau were vibrant river ports,

It was taken up again in 1822 when the *Compagnie des Canaux de Bretagne* was formed. Work then began on new sites in Côtes du Nord (now Côtes d'Armor) and Morbihan too. It was envisaged that completion would require ten years at a cost of 30 million francs – the reality was double that (and commercial usage never came near to justifying such figures).

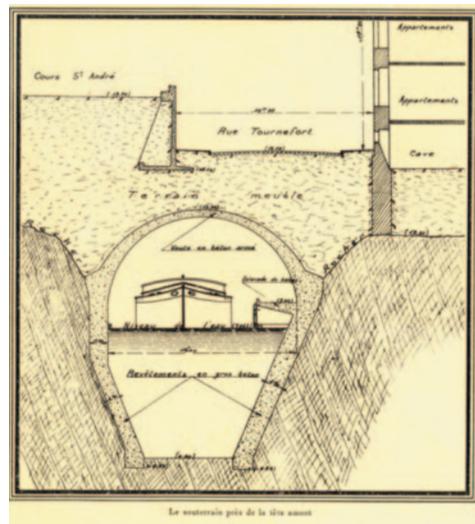
The Duchess of Berry laid the first stone of the first lock in Nantes on 29 June 1828, hence the name '*écluse de Madame*'. (This no longer exists, as a tunnel now houses the Erdre at that point - today the *écluse maritime St-Felix* is the first of the canal.)

The Blavet canal by contrast was finished relatively quickly by 1826, with a total of 28 locks, whilst that of the Ille-et-Rance opened in May 1832.

Construction

Providing the linking sections of the canal (*biefs de partage*) with adequate and consistent water supply required the use of reservoirs and connecting feeder streams (*rigoles*). A large amount of water - about 300m³ - was lost each time a boat passed through a lock, and there was also leakage into the surrounding farmland. Often the water to replenish these losses was brought from a considerable distance.

At Bout-de-Bois (see p.40), for example, where an 8km section was needed to connect the Erdre and the Isac rivers, the *rigole* covered 22kms from the reservoir at Vioreau in its contour-dictated course. It was constructed between 1812 and 1814 by 1200 prisoners at the



Cross-section of the tunnel under Nantes

Jarriais camp, who returned to Spain after the fall of the empire and Napoleon's downfall.

In theory the *rigoles* needed some elementary lining of sedimentary clay mixed with straw to prevent wholesale leakage. At Hilvern, the *rigole* from the reservoir at Bosméléac takes an astonishing 64kms of meanders to reach its destination (see p.69), and on its initial test when filled in 1836, little water actually made it as far as the canal.

Another major feat was the construction of the towpath (*chemin de halage*). There was none from Nantes up the Erdre, despite a proposal of 1811 for the work, so the use of sail or tug was necessary up to Quiheix, just off the river 20kms north.

The towpath was about 2m wide, of earth or gravel, and raised to avoid flooding, almost like a dyke in places between the canal and the *marais*. A ditch (*contre-bóth*) to the side of the towpath provided capacity for streams from the river basin as well as water draining from fields on both sides.

Locks

Locks were essential to enable boats to move up and down the canal as water levels changed. On the steepest stretches, whole ladders of locks were required: on the connecting link between the Oust and the Blavet, for example, there are 12 in 1.6kms at Le Roz (see p.70).

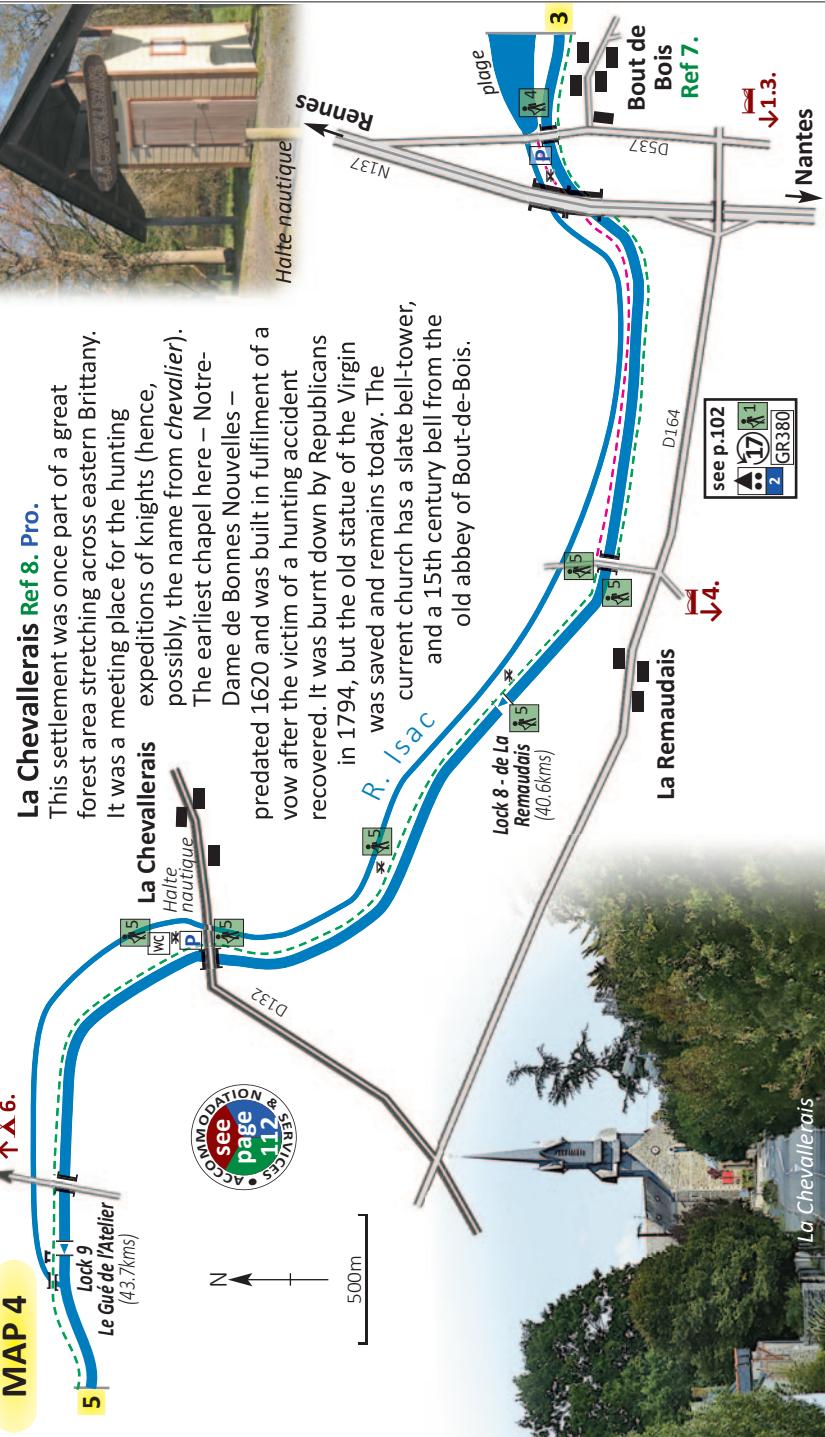
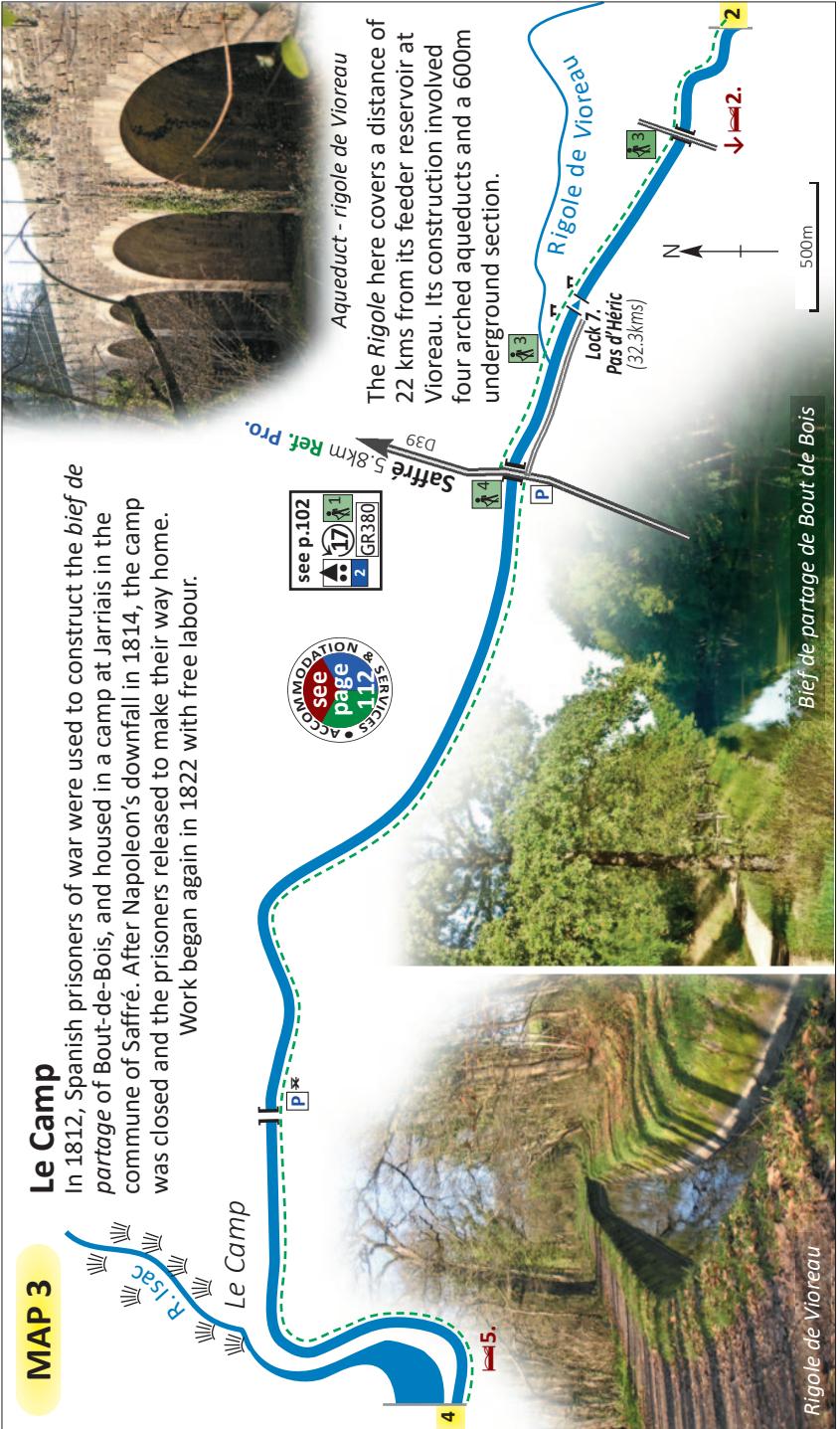
Exceptionally firm foundations were needed for the locks, and 24 hour pumping had to be in place during their construction. Often stakes of water-resistant wood which would not rot, such as chestnut, were laid, followed by a layer of stones and cement before blocks of granite were used for the lock itself. These blocks were joined by mortice and tenon joints.

The lock gates were made of oak and metal, now steel, and rested in a V-shape when closed to withstand the pressure of the water. A trap in the bottom of each gate could be raised or lowered to let water in and out of the lock. The lock-keeper opened the traps by

(cont.p.20)

MAP 3 Le Camp

In 1812, Spanish prisoners of war were used to construct the *bief de partage de Bout-de-Bois*, and housed in a camp at Jarraiis in the commune of Saffré. After Napoleon's downfall in 1814, the camp was closed and the prisoners released to make their way home. Work began again in 1822 with free labour.



Carhaix ↗ 1.2.4.5.6.↗ 9. Ref Pro

In the Gallo-Roman period, Carhaix (Vorgium) was founded as the capital of the Osismes tribe. Excavations have revealed streets, houses and commercial buildings as well as remains of an aqueduct that brought water to the town. This involved a 27km transit, both arched sections and subterranean tunnels. Ever since then the town has been the centre of a communications network – road and rail – for western Brittany. A new cultural centre VORGIUM (www.vorgium.bzh) presents the foundation and significance of the Roman town. The Tourist Office (02 98 93 04 42) is housed in the magnificent 16th century Maison du Sénéchal.



MAP 48



'Les 4 As' (four aces), Tour de France winners with Brittany connections.
(sculpture in the centre of Carhaix)

Pont de Goariva marks the entry into Finistère, westernmost department of Brittany. The name Finistère comes from the Latin for 'the end of the earth' (The Breton is Penn ar Bed.) From this point the canal is navigable for boats all the way to the Rade de Brest.

MAP 49

Port-de-Carhaix

Once a thriving port on the canal and a railway junction, Port-de-Carhaix now has an abandoned air despite the comparatively recent Moulin du Poher on the site of the former railway sidings.

Over the D769 a landscaped garden by the canal contains the ecological wonder of a dry toilet (there are now several along the canal in Finistère).

800m up the D82 towards St-Hernin, to the left of the road, is the granite Calvaire de Kerbreudeur, one of the oldest in the area, dating from between 1450 and 1475.

As well as numerous scenes from the life of Christ, it depicts the story of Adam and Eve.

Lock 204 Coscastel

(287.9kms)



MAP 49



Calvaire de Kerbreudeur

Accommodation - Refreshments - Provisions
(all distances are from the canal)

MAPS 1 & 2

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels

1. Hôtel Relais de la Grange (5kms)

Nort-sur-Erdre 02 51 12 60 57

www.relaislagrange.com

2. Hôtel du Commerce (3kms) 6 Place

du Champ de Foire, Nort-sur-Erdre

02 40 72 20 53

Chambres d'hôte

3. Le Marais (3kms) 1 route d'Issé,

Le Marais, 44390 Nort-sur-Erdre..

lemarais44@yahoo.fr 06 88 72 01 72

4. Le Nid Douillet (700m, by

Velodyssey) 261 route de la Bunière

44390 Casson gitelenidouillet@gmail.com

02 40 77 63 64 06 06 63 15 94

Gîte d'Etape

5 Écluse de la Tindière (at the lock

house) B&B or self-catering, 9 places,

open all year 06 70 04 45 09

www.etapecanalgiteeclusedelatindiere.com

6. Le Plessis Pas Brunet (500m) 15

places, open all year.

gitelepplessispasbrunet44.fr

Camping

7. Camping du Port Mulon (5kms)

municipal site, Rue des Mares Noires,

Nort-sur-Erdre 70 places Mar to Oct

02 40 72 23 57 02 36 81 00 01

camping-portmulon.com

REFRESHMENTS

8. Écluse de la Tindière (at the lock

house)- café/ restaurant, open 12-

6pm, April to September.

9. Lock 6. Cramezeul. La Cueilleuse-

café, bakery, open April-Sept every day
except Tuesday. lacueilleuse.com

**Nort-sur-Erdre – restaurants, cafés,
bars**

**Sucé-sur-Erdre – restaurants, cafés,
bars**

PROVISIONS

Nort-sur-Erdre – all shops and services

Sucé-sur-Erdre – all shops and services

MAPS 3 & 4

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels

1. Hotel Restaurant l'Abreuvoir

(3.7kms) La Croix Blanche, Héric

02 40 57 63 81

www.restaurant-abreuvoir.com

Chambres d'hôte

2. Les Hortensias (600m) Le

Cramezeuil, open May to September

02 51 12 69 21

3. Pean Béatrice (4.8kms) 2 rue des

Garennes, 44810 Héric 02 72 01 69 53

06 51 65 30 99

chambre-hotes-heric.jimdo.com

4. L'Adenaise (5.6kms) 2, La Denais,

44810 Héric 06 52 71 19 60

adenaise.heric@free.fr

Gîte d'Etape

5. Gîte Domaine des Ecuries Pujol

(300m) 115, Glasnet, Bout de Bois

44810 Héric 02 40 57 62 00

aitawak@orange.fr aitawak.net

Camping

6. M. & Mme Robert (2.3kms) Le Foué,

44130 Blain 02 40 79 19 91 April- Nov

Place in caravan per night possible.

REFRESHMENTS

7. Bout-de-Bois- Restaurant- Côtes &

Bouchons 02 40 95 06 50

Café-Restaurant- Le Canal

(Open for lunch) 02 40 57 60 54

8. La Chevallerais- Bar/tabac

PROVISIONS

La Chevallerais – bakery

MAPS 5 & 6

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels

1. Hotel-Brasserie Le Grand Cerf

(950m) Blain 12 rooms 02 40 79 00 47

2. L'instant B (500m) 4, place Jean

Guihad, Blain 02 28 05 98 44

linstantb-hotelrestaurant.fr

Chambres d'hôte

3. Mme Hecaud (450m) Le Gravier

3 rooms 02 40 79 10 25

4. Escale Canal (170m) 37 Cohignac,
02 40 87 70 36 06 80 92 97 32
escalecanal44@orange.fr
www.chambrecanalblainescale.fr

Gîte d'Etape

5. La Groulais (400m, by the
passerelle) 3 rooms, 14 places, open all
year. 06 88 97 01 79

6. Gîte de l'écluse de Bougard (by the
canal) 9 places, open all year.
06 61 10 89 80
gitebougard.wordpress.com

Camping

7. Camping du Château (400m) Blain
02 40 51 03 51 06 88 97 01 79

REFRESHMENTS

Blain – wide choice of restaurants,
crêperies and cafés.

8. Bougard Crêperie aux berges de
Bougard (by canal) 02 40 79 07 05
(closed Mon/Tues)

PROVISIONS

Blain – All shops and services.

5. La Réserve des Convives (2.6km
from Pont Melneuf), Domaine de l'Isac,
12 l'Ongle, 44530 Guenrouet.
Restaurant, booking advised
02 40 79 86 84
www.lareservedesconvives.fr

PROVISIONS

Saint-Omer de Blain - grocery and
dépôt pain

Notre-Dame de Grâce (1km south of
the canal) Bakery and dépôt pain

MAPS 9 & 10

ACCOMMODATION

Chambres d'hôte

1. Au Pressoir Sans Pression (550m) 4,
impasse de Suza, Le Landron, 44630
Plessé 06 59 34 67 85 06 86 76 52 57
www.au-pressoir-sans-pression.fr

2. Mme Biard (5kms) Le Cougou,
Guenrouet 02 40 79 49 30

Open all year www.lecougou.com

3. Ty Canal d'Or (100m) 5, rue des
Lavendrières; Saint-Clair, 44630 Plessé
02 40 87 83 67 06 71 82 70 65
www.tycanalidor.com

Gîte d'Etape

4. Halte Nautique (by canal)
Guenrouet mairie 02 40 87 64 18
May – Sept 6 places

5. La Rivière Blanche (2.5kms)
La Touche-Robin, Guenrouet
Open all year (14 places)
02 40 87 64 94 06 81 26 92 85
<http://rb44.free.fr>

Camping

6. Camping Saint-Clair (by canal)
Guenrouet mid Apr- end Sept Place in
caravan per night possible
02 40 87 61 52 chabliny@wanadoo.fr

REFRESHMENTS

Guenrouet – restaurant, café, bar

7. Crêperie du Port PK 73 (by canal)
Guenrouet June-Sept 02 40 87 69 00

PROVISIONS

Guenrouet – grocery, bakery,
delicatessen