



THE BRETON CANALS – THE ESSENTIALS

Canal and River Halts in Brittany is a dynamic, voluntary association that brings together more than a hundred businesses and organisations from the unique Breton canal and river network. Our members include restaurateurs, accommodation providers, tourism professionals, voluntary organisations, communes, communities of communes and individuals. Our aim is to promote and enliven Brittany's waterways.

THE BRETON CANALS AND WATERWAYS – A UNIQUE NETWORK IN FRANCE

Brittany is known for its stunning landscapes and its coast. Less well-known, but just as valuable, is its unique network of canals and rivers, of which the Nantes to Brest canal forms the backbone. The canalised Blavet flows south from the Côtes d'Armor to the Atlantic, while the Manche-Océan canal links the English Channel to the Atlantic. In all, there are more than 600 kilometres of waterways to explore by boat, by bike, on horseback, or on foot.

THE NANTES TO BREST CANAL

Running across Brittany from the city of the Dukes, Nantes, in the south-east, to the largest Breton port, Brest, in the northwest, you will discover the enchanting heart of rural Brittany.

The Route

237 locks 🌀 364 km from the St Félix lock in Nantes to the Guily-Glaz lock at Port-Launay.

The Itinerary

If you are on foot or a bicycle, note that there is no towpath between Nantes and Nort-sur-Erdre so you will take minor roads that do not always follow the course of the river directly. The towpath runs from Nort-sur-Erdre to Port-Launay. The section between Nort-sur-Erdre and Carhaix constitutes Greenway n°1. Where the Guerlédan dam cuts the canal, take Greenway N°6 to bypass the lake. Similarly, there is no towpath from Port-Launay to the sea, so once again the route uses small roads that do not always follow the course of the river.

Between Nantes and Redon

17 locks 🌀 88.40 km 🌀 Draught: 1.20m on the Erdre and the canalised section
Headroom: 3.80m on the Erdre and 3.00m on the canalised section

Between Redon and Guerlédan

91 locks 🌀 117.80 km 🌀 Draught: 1.40m 🌀 Anchorage: 1.40m 🌀 Maximum speed: 8 kph (5 kph between locks 55 and 107) 🌀 Headroom: 3m

Between Pontivy and the Guerlédan Dam

Not currently navigable.

Between the double lock of Coat Natous and the Goariva lock

Not currently navigable.

Between Goariva lock and Port-Launay

46 locks 🌀 84 km 🌀 Draught: 1.10m on the canalized part and 3.20 between Guily-Glaz and Châteaulin 🌀 Headroom: 3.20m

THE BLAVET

Rising in the Côtes d'Armor, the Blavet runs south to the ancient ducal city of Pontivy, with its mediaeval fortress and narrow streets, then on to the 19th imperial town, once



called Napoleonville and laid out on a grid pattern, then through the countryside until it reaches the estuarial town of Hennebont, a centre of art and culture...

The Route

28 locks ⚓ 57.4 km from Récollets lock in Pontivy to Polvern lock at Hennebont.

Itinerary

The towpath runs from Pontivy to Hennebont after which it uses minor roads that don't always follow the course of the river.

Between Pontivy and Hennebont

17 LOCKS ⚓ 88.40 km ⚓ Draught: 1.40m ⚓ Anchorage: 1.60m

Maximum speed: 8kph (5 kph between Polvern lock and the Jehanne la Flamme bridge).

CANAL MANCHE-OCÉAN

The Manche-Océan canal will take you from Saint-Malo in the English Channel to the Atlantic at Arzal. The journey starts from the Rance estuary, joining the canal at the Châtelier lock and then take you via Rennes to the barrage at Arzal where the Vilaine meets the Atlantic ocean.

The Route

48 locks ⚓ 85 km from the Mail Lock (Rennes) to the Châtelier Lock (Saint-Samson-sur-Rance) ⚓ Rennes-Dinan section: Draught: 1.20m ⚓ Anchorage: 1,60m ⚓ Maximum speed: 6km/h ⚓ Headroom generally: 2.50 m to 3.50 m

THE VILAINE

The Route

13 locks ⚓ 52 km from the Mail lock at Rennes to the Mâlon lock at Guipry ⚓ 79 km from the Mâlon lock to the Arzal barrage with no locks ⚓ Rennes – Redon section: Draught: 1.20 to 1.60 ⚓ Anchorage: 1.60m ⚓ Maximum speed: 10km/h on the river 6km/h elsewhere ⚓ Headroom generally: 3.20 m à 3.70 m ⚓ Rennes-Arzal section: Draught: 4.10m ⚓ Anchorage: 4.30m ⚓ Maximum speed: 6km/h ⚓ Headroom generally: 25 m à 27 m.

HOW CANALS WORK

A canal is a waterway built for navigation. The technique goes back at least to the 5th century BCE. There are two types:

- ✚ A lateral canal, which follows the course of a canalised river, as in the case of the Vilaine, the Blavet and the Oust.
- ✚ A junction canal that connects two river valleys by means of a staircase of locks from each river basin to the summit of the hill that divides them. At the summit there is a dividing pound, or reservoir, which replenishes the locks as boats move up and down.

The Breton network has four junction canals.

NAVIGATION DATES AND OPERATION OF THE LOCKS

Since 2022, the waterways open on the Friday before the 1st Easter school holiday zone after 1st April begins and close during October.

Lockkeepers and the operation of the locks

Locks are *always* operated by lockkeepers, not by boat owners. You should arrive at a lock no later than 15 mins before the end of the service. On certain sections, for example where there is a staircase of locks, you must contact the waterways authority at least 24 hours in advance to arrange in advance for a lockkeeper to accompany your boat. If you are travelling in convoy, notification is a minimum of 48 hours in advance



(see directories below). For individual locks, you are strongly advised to telephone the lockkeeper before your arrival. For a list of locks and their telephone numbers on the waterways network download the directories here:

Nantes to Brest Canal:

[Annuaire des écluses du canal de Nantes à Brest](#)

The Blavet:

[Directory of locks on the Blavet Canal](#)

Manche Océane canal (comprising the Ille & Rance Canal and the Vilaine):

[Directory of locks on Ille & Rance Canal and the Vilaine](#)

A NATURAL HERITAGE TO CHERISH

An ecosystem is a natural environment defined as the flora and fauna that live and interact with each other within that environment.

The ecological importance of the Breton canals

Following the termination of commercial navigation in the early 1970s, the Breton canal network was in danger of disappearing. However, it was soon realised that the canals were an excellent source of drinking water, so maintaining the quality of the water is of major importance for both humans and the animal and plant species that live in it.

The Principal Species requiring Protection

The Fauna & great biodiversity

There are many different species of fish living in the canals. The presence of protected species maintains the biological balance. Migratory species live alternately in both fresh water and salt water. Atlantic salmon, eel, shad, lamprey and sea trout use rivers as a route to their breeding grounds.

Omnivorous or herbivorous white fish such as carp adapt well to the living conditions of the canals. The most common species are the carnivores such as pike, perch and zander. They prey on small or sick and injured fish.

Among the mammals, two species are of particular interest to scientists and naturalists. The otter and certain species of bat, including the great Rhinolophus, or horseshoe bat. The canal banks are home to numerous species of birds such as the moorhen, the grey heron, the kingfisher, etc. Hunting is banned in the vicinity of the canals which indirectly protects these species.

A vulnerable ecosystem

Canal ecosystems are finely balanced, so the introduction of non-native species disrupts their biological balance. Frequently they proliferate and become harmful to the detriment of native species.

The invaders

At the end of the 19th century, freshwater fish and mammals from both the American continent and Central Europe were introduced. Among the most common are the catfish, the sun perch, the black bass and the Wels catfish that can grow up to three metres long. These fish, sometimes called "the teeth of the canal", prey on native species and invade their habitats. The most invasive mammal is the coypu, originally imported into France for its fur, however, some escaped. Coypu thrive in the canals and multiply rapidly, weakening the banks by digging deep galleries into them.

The Flora - The hidden role of trees

The trees that line the canals play a vital role. Most importantly they help to stabilise the banks and limit evaporation particularly in the summer and in addition they also define the territory belonging to the waterway. The main species found are oak, beech, chestnut, alder, common ash, white willow, black poplar and maple.



PREPARE YOUR STAY WITH OUR MEMBERS

Our members are located right across the waterways network. If you want to find overnight or longer-term accommodation, or hire a boat or a horse, or find somewhere to eat, or plan a trip with plenty of activities, they are there to help you. And if you belong to the Association, there are often advantages such as discounts on offer. Click on the interactive map below and plan your trip knowing you can rely on our members. Download our booklet to show their locations:

<https://www.escalesfluviales.org/preparer-votre-sejour-2/>

CLASSIFICATION OF LOCATIONS

The association has set up a system of classification, or labelling, for communes bordering the Breton waterways, (known in French as *communes mouillées* – literally “wet communes”). The aim is to enable visitors easily to identify the facilities and services available, as well as activities, historic and natural sites, and events.

Participating communes fall into three categories:

Cités Fluviales: a major location offering facilities such as water, electricity, picnic tables, etc., tourist services and accommodation for one or more nights.

Étapes Fluviales: A location suitable for an overnight stay.

Haltes fluviales: A location offering leisure facilities and natural and historic sites.

Download the directory: [A guide to labelled locations](#)

CULTURE

Concerts, Shows and Events

Brittany’s waterways extend for over 600km and are not just the preserve of boat owners and kayakers. They are a unique natural resource open to everyone, whether you are on the water, or following the towpath on foot, by bike, or on horseback, or are an angler or a naturalist. Some events bring to life the history of the the Nantes to Brest canal, the Blavet, the Ille & Rance canal, and the Vilaine. What with festivals, travelling shows and concerts, some on boats, walks, and even fireworks on 14th July, there is always something happening on the Breton waterways.

CONTACT 🐾 YOU HAVE A QUESTION?

Contact us on 06 76 44 90 64 🐾 contact@escalesfluviales.bzh

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Our website: French <https://www.escalesfluviales.org/>

English: <https://www.escalesfluviales.org/en/welcome-2/>

The regional website: <https://canaux.bretagne.bzh/>

Other contacts:

For a huge selection of books and maps on the French waterways contact Editions du Breil - Guide de Navigation (Navigation guides) 11400 Castelnaudary -

+33 4 68 23 51 35 - www.carte-fluviale.com

