

ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Continue ahead
L	left
R	right
TJ	T-junction
P	parking
km	kilometre
m	metres
D	Route Départementale (eg D10)
GR	Grand Randonnée (long distance footpath)
Mkt	market
TO	Tourist Office

MAP SYMBOLS

	abbey		lighthouse
	archaeological feature		marsh
	belvedere		menhir
	campsite		mill
	chambres d'hôte		monument
	chapel		motorway
	château		museum
	church		parking
	cross/calvaire		path limit (see next/previous map)
	dolmen		path to follow
	electricity station		path alternative/detour
	fontaine		picnic area
	fort		railway
	gîte d'étape		road (surfaced)
	hamlet		roundabout
	hotel		seamark
	houses		semaphore
	houses/town		track
	lavoir		youth hostel

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is intended for anyone and everyone who would like to take a walk along the north coast of Brittany, whether it be just an afternoon's stroll or a whole month's walking holiday that they have in mind. The whole route between Mont St Michel and Morlaix (almost 600km) is fully described with easy-to-follow directions, and is accompanied by practical information on tourist offices, shops, restaurants, accommodation and transport.

The directions given here make for simplicity - they describe a route that hugs the coast as far as it is practically possible, and you should need no more than these to keep you on the right track. Most of the coast is accessible for walking, either by the GR34, a major footpath, other local paths or along beaches (depending on the tides). A certain amount of road walking may be necessary in places, for ease of access or to avoid stretches of littoral impassable because of private property boundaries or unsafe cliffs. Some sections of the route suggested in this book may not be viable at the highest tides and road alternatives are usually suggested.

The introduction gives an overall view of the characteristics of coastal walking and a planning section at the end of the book covers factors to be taken into account when considering a walk along the littoral.

The glossary gives helpful terms of reference and vocabulary.

A list of abbreviations and map symbols used in the text is also included (opposite).

Each main chapter of the book deals with a section of coastline, working west from Mont St-Michel.

A brief introduction gives the overall length and flavour of the route, and highlights its attractions. Directions for walkers are then presented in full, using standard abbreviations (see p.6) in blue text.

The schematic scale maps mark the suggested route by a green broken line. Alternatives and diversions are shown by a dotted line. Each map is numbered and thus linked to the written directions. e.g. **24/3** in the directions refers to point **3** shown on map **24**. Map symbols can be found on page 6.

Note on directions The amount of detail in the directions does vary considerably, depending on the complexity of the route: towns and villages often require lengthier explanations than the concise presentation where the route is straightforward. Sometimes the route is obvious and the book is only necessary for back-up at those inevitable points where confusion sets in. Extra detail such as warnings, descriptive phrases and alternative routes are given in bold within the text of directions.

Information about sights along the way or within a short distance of the path is given in black in the text or in separate boxes. This is

inevitably selective, and local tourist offices will be able to provide further suggestions for visits in each area.

At the end of each section, a box contains practical information about accommodation, services and transport. This list is not exhaustive, but a starting point for planning walking holidays. Consult the town websites given there for further information. Please note that we cannot guarantee the opening hours/months of shops, bars and restaurants or accommodation.

The places listed under services have at least basic shopping facilities (bakery and/or supermarket, and usually a cash-point) and refreshments in the form of a bar/café. Most have a range of eateries and shops. In the summer season many extra outlets will be open.

Note on Accommodation A selection of places on or very close to the coastal path is given, with the emphasis on B&B, camping and dormitory accommodation for walkers. This is only a small sample of what is available - the criteria of selection have generally been average prices and all year round opening. In the main, hotels are not listed, unless in special locations, nor B&B in towns - for these, consult the relevant tourist offices (details also given). Much accommodation is seasonal, so the choice will be greatest from June to September.

The transport details are designed primarily to help those planning linear walks, so taxi information and the website of local bus networks are given.

Suggestions for other walks in each area are given in brief. *Walking Brittany*, also by Judy Smith, and *Central Brittany Coast to Coast* by Penny Allen are recommended for further reference.

The planning section at the end of the book has useful advice for preparing to walk the coastal path, with suggestions for the best walking if only a limited time is available.

An index of main place names is also included for ease of reference.

Colour photographs taken by the author are used throughout.

PLEASE READ

It is at all times the responsibility of each individual to decide on the advisability of a walk on the coast with regards to safety in respect of tides, high seas, and strong winds, especially on cliff paths.

Essential equipment should include proper footwear, bad weather protective clothing, an adequate supply of water and some form of communication device, whether a mobile phone or at the very least a whistle. Enjoy coastal walking, but please try to remain safety conscious.

INTRODUCTION

Cliffs, coves and sandy beaches, fishing boats and lighthouses, prehistory, mythology and that vivid azure sea - the best of everything associated with Brittany is here on this magnificent north coast. Brittany is different - a part of France that is not quite French, a Celtic land where fervent religious beliefs go hand-in-hand with deep-seated superstition, an enchanted land of legend and folklore. All Breton life and culture springs from the sea, from the early saints who crossed from Wales or Ireland to evangelise these coasts to the generations of fishermen who have risked their lives for its harvest. The Breton heart beats to the rhythm of the waves, and in walking this path so too will yours.

Five hundred and fifty kilometres of path are described here and obviously only the most fortunate few will have the time to do all that in one go. But this path is so accessible that it can easily be taken in smaller bites - a week, a few days or even an afternoon. As a long-distance walk it benefits from readily available accommodation, while shorter sections can be enjoyed by anyone already holidaying on this coast. And although its nature varies from place to place, nowhere at all is it too demanding. The final bonus is that coming from Britain, this path is simply a ferry ride away. There's no need to take the car, just put on your boots before you descend the gang-plank in St-Malo!



So what are the alluring ingredients of this route? Highlights it has, certainly - Mont St-Michel, France's most visited attraction outside Paris, and the Pink Granite Coast, the most remarkable section of littoral in Brittany - but more importantly there are such contrasts here. That could possibly be said of any long-distance trail, but on this north coast the terrain ranges from the flat polders of the Bay of Mont St-Michel to



the 70m high red cliffs of Cap Fréhel, and the even wilder slopes of Beg an Fry in Finistère. The whole route is peppered with unspoilt fishing villages - but there are also the fashionable resorts of Dinard and Perros-Guirec, the old towns like St-Malo, Tréguier and Morlaix, as well as the commercial centre of St-Brieuc. Beaches range from perfect horseshoes of fine white sand to shingly coves with pebbles rattled by the waves, seascapes change from open ocean to calm estuary, and the rock mutates through glowing red sandstone to sombre deep blue granite.

Added to this heady mixture are those elements that are essentially Breton - churches with open bell walls or latticed spires, ancient carved calvaries at the crossroads, menhirs and dolmens scattered across the land. Brittany is one of the seven oyster-producing areas of France and the flat-bottomed boats and mesh sacks of oysters are omnipresent. So too are the seafood restaurants, and although you may not feel like one of those magnificent seafood platters every night, moules-frites eaten overlooking the sea can be a very acceptable alternative.

Walking the entire route for this book has been an unforgettable experience. I had walked many sections previously, but feeling the whole evolve in sequence was magical. At the end of the day, I must thank my husband Eric, who not only walked with me, but also met me, ferried me, carried the heavier pack and generally took charge of operations. Mine was the easy part! I hope that if you, too, are inspired to set foot on this path, you will enjoy it as much as we have. Good luck on your journey!

Judy Smith



1. Mont St-Michel - Cancale

Bay of Mont St-Michel

43 kms



For anyone contemplating the entire Brittany Coastal Path, Mont St-Michel makes a suitably prestigious starting point - albeit that the Mont is in Normandy! Bretons blame this latter fact on the vagaries of the River Couesnon, traditionally the border between the two regions, whose course has altered over the years. Be that as it may, today's boundary is well west of the river and if you are setting out on the path you won't be able to say that you are in Brittany for certain until you have walked almost 12kms.

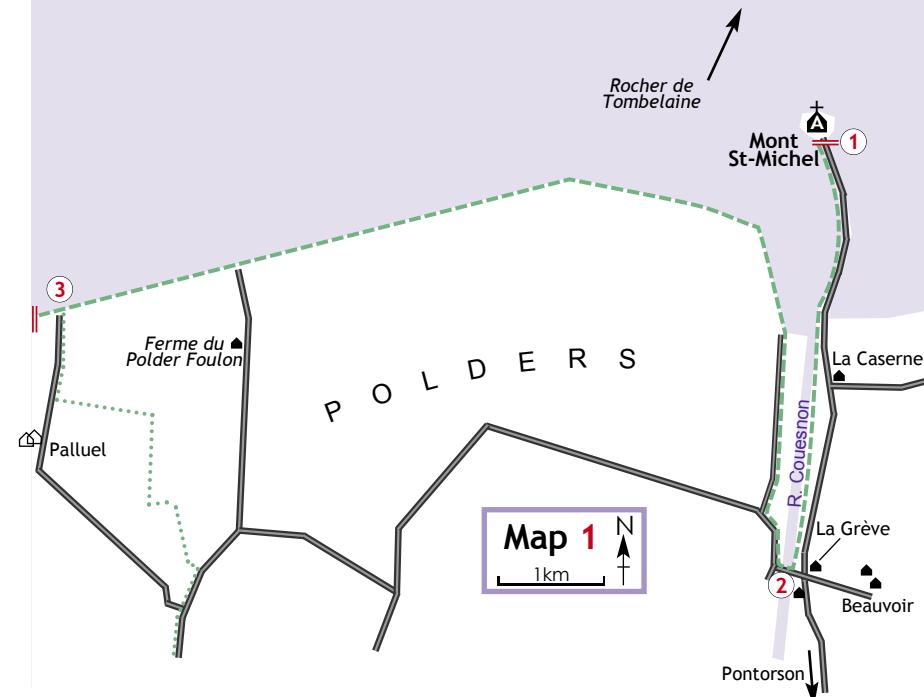
After crossing the causeway from Mont St-Michel, most of this section is on the dyke that holds back the sea from the cultivated polder. This interface of land and sea is a magical place of high-arching skies and wide horizons. The flat arable fields on one side of the dyke are balanced on the other by sheep-grazed marshes that reach far out into the muddy sea. The familiar silhouette of Mont St-Michel grows ever distant, and in the bay itself you can keep an eye on the tide that, according to Victor Hugo, 'comes in like a galloping horse'. Cancale is reached via the oyster port of La Houle, and you must surely promise yourself a plateful at one of the many restaurants along the seafront or in the town.



MONT ST-MICHEL

In prehistoric times the Bay of Mont St-Michel was dry land, and the rock on which town and abbey now stand was a bare lump of granite that had resisted erosion better than the surrounding terrain. The sea subsequently invaded, and the story goes that in 708, St-Aubert, the Bishop of Avranches, had a dream in which the archangel Michael asked that he build a church upon this rock that was now an island. Being not given to hard work, Aubert promptly put the dream out of his mind, but it recurred night after night - and the archangel finally increased the pressure by putting a burning finger through the saint's skull. (The said skull can be seen at the church of St-Gervais in Avranches, and you may be forgiven for thinking that the archangel had podgy fingers!) A small oratory was duly built, and was much extended on the arrival of Benedictine monks some 200 years later. Hard on their heels came the pilgrims. This enigmatic site drew the faithful from far and wide - for some British pilgrims it also became a desirable halt on the road to Santiago de Compostella. The Revolution put an end to it all, and for many years the abbey was used as a prison, before a campaign for its rescue had it declared a historic monument in 1874.

Mont St-Michel is now a World Heritage site, it receives around 3.5 million visitors a year, and is the most visited attraction in France outside Paris. If you can steer clear of the throng (perhaps come in January) there are fine views to be had of the Bay, the rock of Tombelaine to the north and the surrounding coastline. The austere abbey itself is reached by several steep flights of steps, and yet more legwork is needed for the labyrinthine tour of its empty rooms, but for those who come to this site, the visit is surely almost obligatory.



DIRECTIONS

1/1 Leave Mont St-Michel on path beside causeway (or if preferred, grassy path along bottom of dyke) • Do not be tempted to cross over lock gates at mouth of R. Couesnon (dangerous and forbidden), but discipline yourself to continue for a further 2km along the dyke
• Pass through La Caserne and CA to hamlet of La Grève

1/2 At La Grève go R over Pont de Beauvoir (across the Couesnon)
• Over bridge, turn R on road, then first R (signed St-Joseph) • At end of road, go through wooden gate to CA on dyke, soon bending L
• There are fine views of Mont St-Michel and the rock of Tombelaine behind

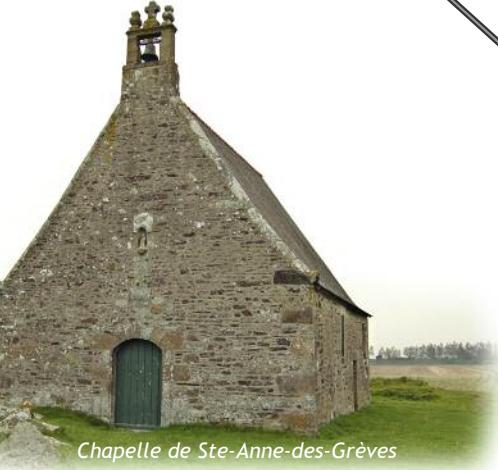
1/3 ALTERNATIVE: Some 10km on from bridge, after road going to farm of Polder Foulon, the path reaches a junction with the road to Palluel. Here a waymarked alternative route turns off inland, passing through Roz-sur-Couesnon, Dol-de-Bretagne and Mont Dol (a similar granite rock to that of Mont St-Michel) before rejoining coastal path just before Hirel (see Map 3)





2/1 CA on dyke, passing the 17th century chapel of Ste-Anne-des-Grèves • At road CA alongside it

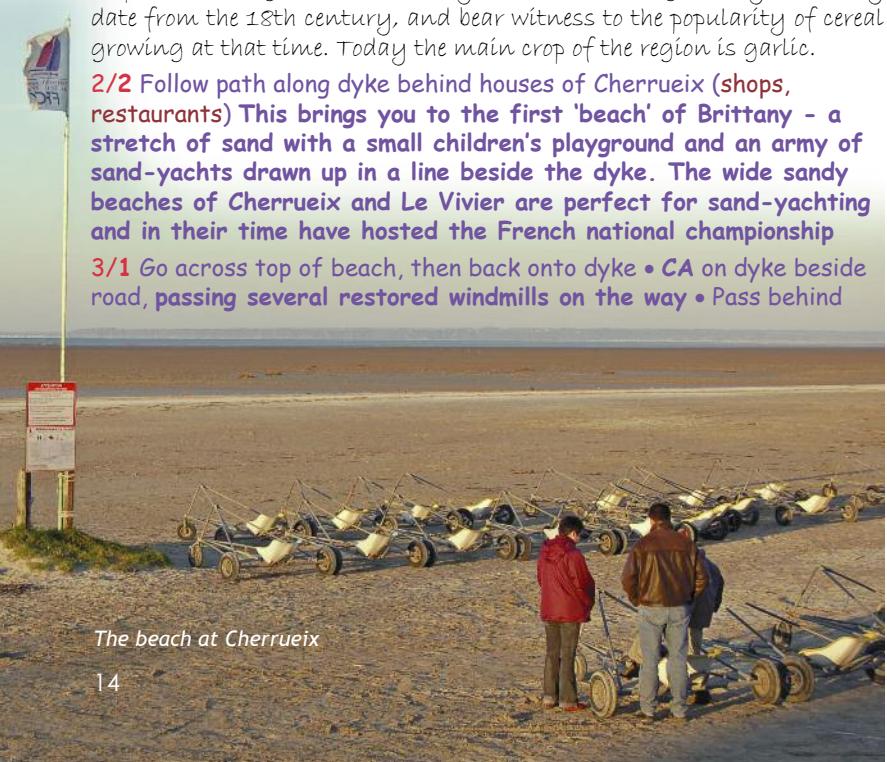
From the chapel all the way to Château Richeux you will be walking on a dyke known as the **DIGUE DE LA DUCHESSE ANNE**. Built around the 12th century, it created fertile polders where crops could be grown. The many windmills along the dyke mostly date from the 18th century, and bear witness to the popularity of cereal growing at that time. Today the main crop of the region is garlic.



Chapelle de Ste-Anne-des-Grèves

2/2 Follow path along dyke behind houses of Cherrueix (shops, restaurants) This brings you to the first 'beach' of Brittany - a stretch of sand with a small children's playground and an army of sand-yachts drawn up in a line beside the dyke. The wide sandy beaches of Cherrueix and Le Vivier are perfect for sand-yachting and in their time have hosted the French national championship

3/1 Go across top of beach, then back onto dyke • CA on dyke beside road, passing several restored windmills on the way • Pass behind



The beach at Cherrueix

houses of La Larrounière and CA to Le Vivier-sur-Mer • The first buildings of Le Vivier are the huge dark sheds of the **Maison de la Baie**, an enterprise offering visitors a closer look at the Bay and the procedures involved in mussel culture (mytiliculture)



Maison de la Baie organises trips to the mussel beds

3/2 Beside Maison de la Baie, cross river on road (D155) and immediately turn R into port area • Walk past all boats and tractors, then turn L on path alongside small field to return to dyke (After 1km the inland variant of the path rejoins this coastal route) • Follow dyke beside D155 to Hirel (restaurant)



Map 3
1km
N

MUSSEL FARMING

Mussels were certainly known to the Romans, who regarded them as delicacies for special occasions, but there is no record of cultivation before the 13th century. Today several methods of mussel culture exist, but in Normandy and Brittany they are generally grown on huge oak stakes 6-8m tall, arranged in 'bouchots', spaced to allow the passage of a flat-bottomed boat.

In early spring, when the sea temperature begins to rise, these posts are driven in along the low-tide mark, and ropes are tied tightly between them to form a sort of grill. Mussels release their minuscule larvae in millions at this time of year, and they are carried in by the tides to attach themselves to the ropes. It takes a further six weeks or so before they are visible to the naked eye.

In early summer, with the young mussels just a centimetre or so across, the ropes are cut from the posts and wound around them instead. These young mussels are placed farthest from the shore, and are subsequently moved inland as they grow. The mussels are finally harvested by hand or by machine at around 18 - 24 months of age.

The Bay of St-Michel is the most important mussel farming area in France, yielding 1/6 of the national production.



4/1 CA along dyke to St-Benoit-des-Ondes

4/2 Leaving St-Benoit, the path on the dyke comes to an end where the vegetation is no longer cut back. You could stay on the dyke and struggle through the long grass, but the marked path goes inland • Turn down road on L (rue de la Baie), then up first road on R (Pont Benoit) to return to D155 • Cross this road diagonally L, taking rough road towards more mussel sheds • Bear L in front of them (Château Richeux peeps through the trees on the cliff ahead) • At end of rough road **CA** on path, around shore below château, to a pretty beach • Leave beach on wooden ladder to return to coastal path, now running behind wide sweep of sand, then climbing to cliffs



Map 4
1km

Plage Du Guéscelin

1km



La Houle and the Cale de l'Épi, Cancale beyond

- At bottom of hill, CA along promenade with its many shellfish stalls and restaurants

The first of the two breakwaters at La Houle has a rather curious appearance. Constructed in 1837, its many arches were designed to let the current pass through without resultant silting, and it was later extended to allow boats to dock. Now restored (although the arches are blocked with sand), this Cale de l'Épi (dock-breakwater) is unique in France.

- At roundabout near second breakwater, CA through barrier • 100m double back L on path leading up to monument on top of hill • Directly below are Cancale's famous oyster beds, clearly visible at low tide



Cancale's oyster beds

1. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

SHOPS & SERVICES

- Mont St-Michel TO 02 33 60 14 30 www.ot-montsaintmichel.com
- La Grève
- Le Vivier-sur-Mer
- St-Benoit-des-Ondes
- Cherrueix
- Hirel
- La Houle
- Cancale TO 02 99 89 63 72 www.cancale-tourisme.fr

See also: www.ville-cancale.fr • www.pays-de-dol.com

ACCOMMODATION

Chambres d'Hôte

1. La Renardière (200m) 21 rue du Lion d'Or, 35120 Cherrueix 06 78 71 55 14 www.cotemer-cotejardin.com
2. La Chatonnière des Müller-Langlais (200m) 34 rue de Dol, 35960 Le Vivier-sur-Mer 02 99 48 97 74 www.vivier.biz
3. Mme Théault (on route) 60 rue du Bord de Mer, 35114 St-Benoit-des-Ondes 02 99 58 76 90 <http://faceauxflots.site.voila.fr>

Gîte d'étape

4. Gîte d'étape de l'Aumone (500m) 35120 Cherrueix 02 99 48 97 28

Camping

5. Camping de l'Aumone (500m) 35120 Cherrueix 02 99 48 95 11 www.camping-de-laumone.com Open mid-June to mid-September
6. Camping Le Tenzor de la Baie (300m) 10 bis rue Théophile Blin, 35120 Cherrueix 02 99 48 98 13 www.le-tenzor-de-la-baie.com Open late March to early October

TRANSPORT

Bus services: St-Malo - Cancale, also St-Malo - St-Benoit-des-Ondes - Hirel www.ksma.fr
 St-Malo - Dol-de-Bretagne - Pontorson - Mont St-Michel www.lescourriersbretons.com
 Pontorson - Mont St-Michel www.mobi50.com

Taxi: Taxi de la Grève 02 99 48 81 90 Le Vivier-sur-Mer
 Taxi de la Baie 02 99 89 87 20 Cancale
 Taxi Cancale 02 99 89 73 90 Cancale

OTHER WALKS

This flat area may not be the best for circular walks, but nevertheless the Office de Tourisme in Dol-de-Bretagne (www.pays-de-dol.com) can offer you details of several interesting well-waymarked circuits, some incorporating sections of the coastal path.

An unaccompanied walk out into the bay is not advisable: contact the Maison de la Baie at Le Vivier. They organise walks led by suitably informed and equipped guides, as well as train rides to the mussel beds. Tel. 02 99 48 84 38 (www.maison-baie.com)