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INTRODUCTION TO THE SAINTS' SHORE WAY

Brittany and Britain have been closely linked through the ages from neolithic trade and medieval rivalry to town twinning and festivals. The Saints' Shore Way highlights this connection in the form of a long-distance walk revealing many points of both conflict and affinity across the centuries.

The idea for this themed walk springs from a connection with Cornwall in England, where the Saints' Way cuts across the peninsula from Padstow in the north to Fowey in the south. It is imagined that migrants in the Dark Ages may have travelled this route before embarking for Brittany, often with the intention of settling and evangelising that new land.

There are many stories of the arrival of these people along the Breton shore, and many place-names and natural features of the landscape retain the imprint of their names and associations to this day. They are closely connected with the early stages in the formation of Brittany as a distinct entity, founders of the first towns and churches.

The walk itself makes use of the coastal path, the former *Sentier des Douaniers* or Custom Officers' path, a reflection of the need for surveillance of a shore which has frequently been the scene of stealthy arrivals and departures from the days of English naval raids and smugglers' traffic to the vital work of the Resistance during WWII.

Following the Saints' Shore Way is to explore a world of fishing villages, resorts, historic towns, inviting beaches, sheltered coves, and lonely paths snaking along wild cliffs. Water is a constant companion from the expansive open sea to broad river estuaries and - at the other end of the scale - the sacred sources associated with early saints.

The hub of our journey is Morlaix, strategically placed on the border of the historic region of Léon where our walk starts at Roscoff, and that of Trégor, where the route ends in vibrant Lannion on the Léguer river, a worthy goal in itself, but also a gateway to the well-known Pink Granite coast.

The Saints' Shore Way covers a lesser known part of the famous Breton coast with exceptional natural beauty and many small gems of a unique heritage reaching right back to the Age of Saints. Most of all, it's an exhilarating walk with a stimulating variety of interest to divert and surprise you. Take your time to appreciate the great outdoors and diverse cultural riches, to sample local delicacies and talk to friendly local people to be found all along the route.

THE AGE OF SAINTS

ARRIVAL The name Saints' Shore Way reflects the arrival of many holy men and their followers from Wales and south-west England during the period of upheaval and confusion after the fall of the Roman Empire. This time is often referred to as the Dark Ages as contemporary written evidence is lacking and we look to archaeology and even local legend to fill in some of the gaps. There was no single mass wave of migrations from Britain, but arrivals of small and large groups over hundreds of years.

There were a number of factors behind this movement of people across the Channel. In the 4th century AD soldiers were withdrawn from Britain to Brittany in a last-ditch defence against the coastal strikes of Saxon and Friesian pirates and the westwards expansion of the Franks. Later writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth describe these events, and although the detail may well be disputed the general principle seems sound.

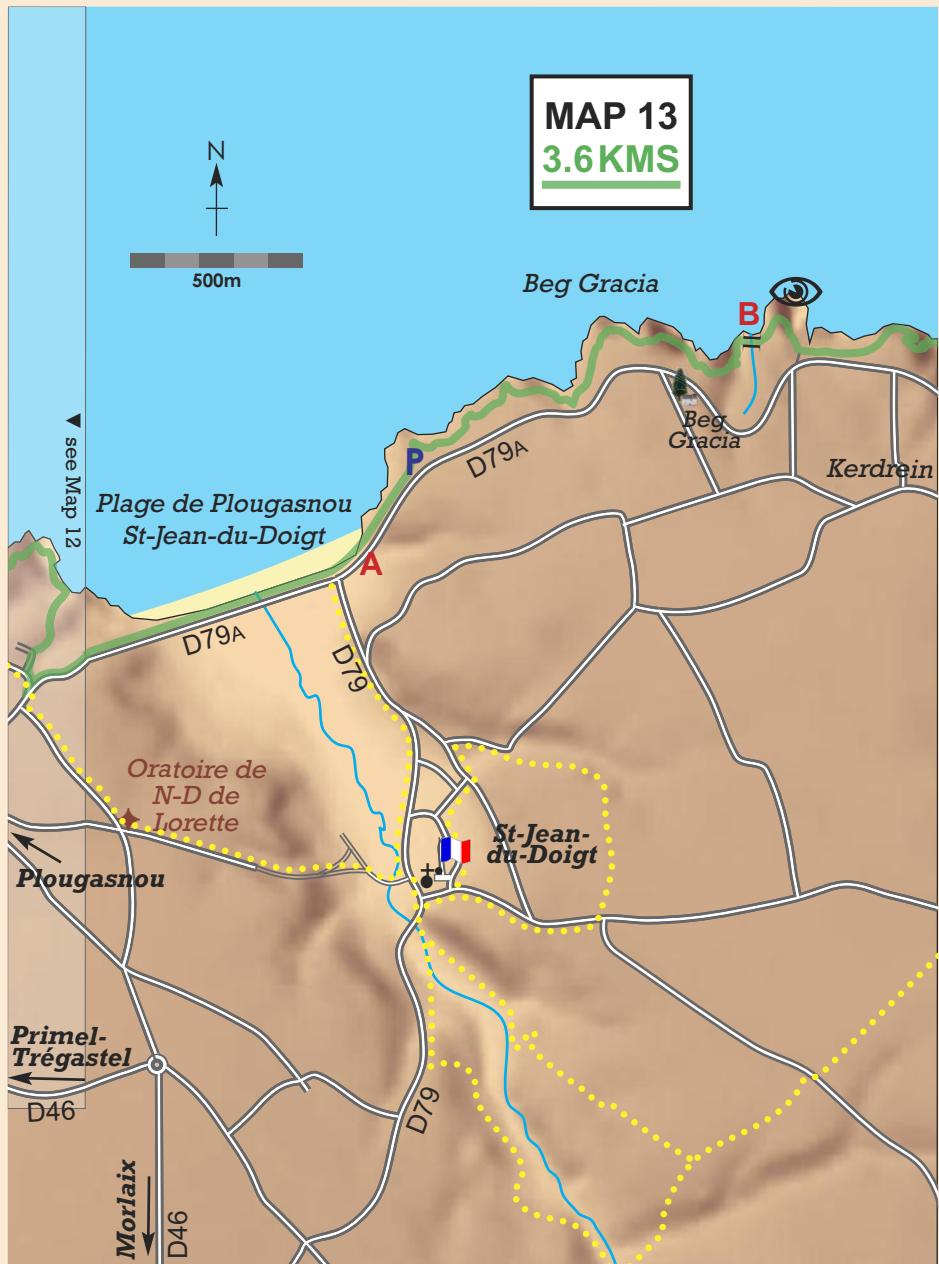
In the 5th and 6th centuries, as Anglo-Saxon invaders moved westwards across England, many Britons from the south-west upped sticks and moved to a new life across the Channel. But there were other factors. Irish and Pictish raids on the Welsh coast probably encouraged the large number of Welsh migrants at that time. A plague epidemic and pressures on available land may also have contributed.

A great proportion of the migrants landed in the Armorican peninsula, and made a significant contribution to the formation of Brittany in the coming centuries. Long trade links and linguistic affinities made this a natural destination. Others landed further east on the coast of what is now Normandy, and some went south to the north coast of Spain. The travelling groups varied in number from a handful to a few hundred, and many were led by holy men, monks from Wales, south-west England and Ireland who felt a call to evangelise lands across the sea.

Stone boats

Legends tell of saints arriving in stone boats, a miraculous start to their new lives in Armorica, but there may be a more mundane explanation. A scribe might easily have confused the Latin word 'cumba' or small boat with the early Breton word 'koum', a valley or hollowed out stone trough.

MAP 13
3.6KMS



DIRECTIONS

A At the end of the beach, go up the road to a parking area and then turn L down steps onto the coastal path.

Challenging section with very steep undulations follows: care needed.

B Cross wooden bridge over deep valley. CA, with views back to the Pointe de Primel.

Path turns R uphill (L to viewpoint) almost to road, but turn L before barrier.

CA along coast with great views ahead.

St-Jean-du-Doigt

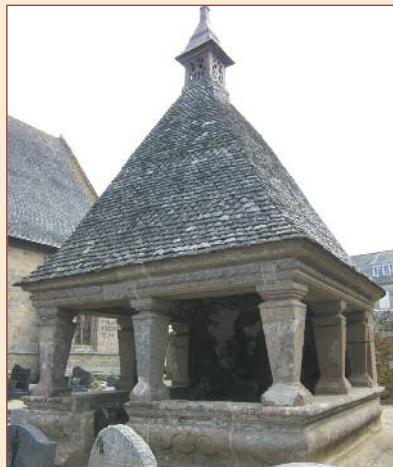


The name of this attractive village (B, R, shop, Fête du Violon in June) comes from the famous relic of St John's finger (*doigt*) held by the church. This was first brought from Normandy in the early 15th century by a Breton soldier, and placed in the earlier chapel of St-Mériadec here. Many miracles of healing were attributed to the relic and soon pilgrims thronged to the spot. A larger church to accommodate this success was started in 1440 but not finished until 1513. The adjacent Maison du Gouvernement (1572) was used as a hostelry for visitors.

There's a story that English soldiers in Brittany in 1489 (when support had been sent by Henry VII to Anne de Bretagne who was trying to keep Brittany free of French overlordship) stole the precious finger to take back to England, but it miraculously returned to its original spot. A later tradition claims that Anne herself may have visited seeking a cure for eye problems.

The parish close (*enclos paroissial*) here certainly merits a detour for its display of Flamboyant Gothic art. This includes an impressive triumphal entrance gate, the church, ossuary (1618), *calvaire*, baroque fountain (1691) and open-air oratory (1577) with finely carved beams.

The Pardon is held on the last Sunday of June.



Oratory

