



In heaven!

Our Francophile Travel Editor finds her perfect niches among mammoth rocks and in 'fairy tale' woods as she continues her tour of fantastique France

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146 miles

What I love about early summer evenings is the ethereally beautiful light, which makes the enormous, curiously shaped boulders of the Côte de Granit Rose glow such a gorgeous coral-gold. It's nearly 10pm as we skirt the picturesque harbour of Port de Ploumanac'h, opposite one of our favourite sites, Camping Tourony, to reach Plage Tourony. The fabulous view from this beach is to the much-photographed Île de Costaérès and its château. I'm thinking just how perfect everything is and it's my birthday tomorrow...

We wake to drizzle and mist. Determined to make the best of things, our morning walk is a short one from Plage Tourony and its neighbour, Quo Vadis, then west through the pinewoods looking across the Baie de Sainte-Anne to Île Renote, where we shelter under dripping pines bordering the pinkish sand of Grève Toul Drez.

I had intended to save my most-loved Brittany walk for far better weather, but can't hold myself back. Despite threatening skies, we join the GR34 (aka *Sentier des Douaniers*, the custom officers' path) at Port de Ploumanac'h, peeking through the branches of pines and oaks for glimpses of the rocks-turned-islets offshore.

The mammoth blocks of granite, which characterise the Côtes d'Armor, are scattered everywhere. The woods are

ME AND MY 'VAN



Helen Werin...

is MMM's Travel Editor and is crazy about Brittany, but her children have moaned so much about, "Oh no, not Brittany again!" that she went without them on this trip



2002 Roller Team Auto-Roller 41 on a Fiat 2.3-litre diesel engine. Roly's cosy layout, with overcab double bed, Pullman-style dinette and generous locker space suits our family

criss-crossed with barely-there paths that lead beneath low branches and end abruptly in a jumble of rocks through which we either have to squeeze or scramble over.

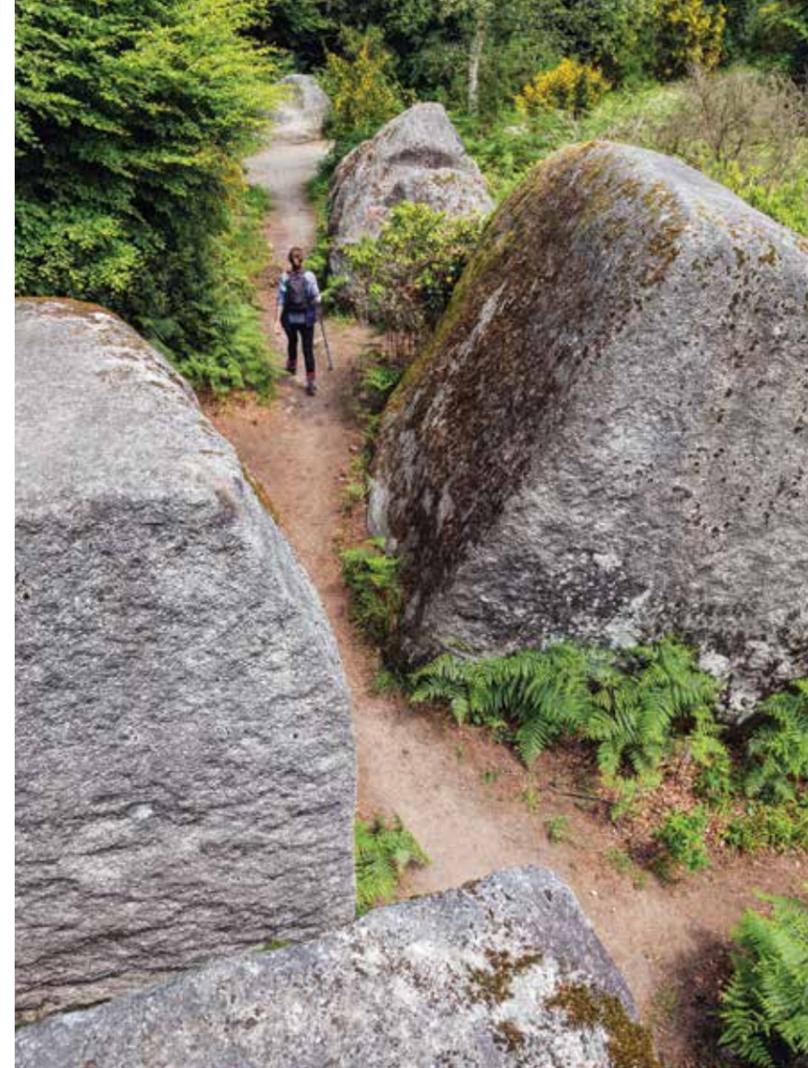
The reward? The sensational coastal scenes that have lured me here so many times. The *sentier* comes round to Plage de la Bastille, then rises, over and around the multitude of boulders, to that heart-fluttering view above Plage de Saint-Guirec.

The shrine to the saint, on a small outcrop on the beach, is decked with flags; it's the celebration of Guirec. That night we listen to a service at the fourteenth century Chapelle Saint-Guirec. A procession emerges, carrying models of boats and one of Guirec. Lifeboatmen, in all their gear, are heartily slapped on their backs and women in traditional lace coiffes trail young children proudly carrying flags and hefty banners as they head towards the oratory on the sands.

Trestles are lined up in front of the little chapel the next morning for the fête and we watch as local ladies expertly turn out *galettes complètes* (savoury pancakes). How to eat the galettes without squishing egg down our fronts in view of a swiftly growing queue of drooling customers? Impossible!

When a blazing sun finally appears we trace the Baie de Sainte-Anne to Trégastel's aquarium, built into the granite.

The sea nudging Grève Blanche at



THE JOURNEY

In May we spent two weeks exploring this part of Brittany as part of a seven-week tour of northern France. This feature covers our route from Ploumanac'h to Plomodiern via Huelgoat, the Monts d'Arrée, Châteaulin, the Montagnes Noires and the Crozon peninsula

THE COSTS

Fuel Average 30mpg	£27.24
Site fees (€155.42).....	£138.24
Total costs.....	£165.48



INFORMATION

Let yourself be surprised by Brittany
brittanytourism.com
 We hopped to France via Jersey
condorferries.co.uk

DID YOU KNOW?

During WWII, British and American airmen whose planes had been shot down over France were hidden in the church of Sainte-Marie du Ménez-Hom until they could be put aboard a boat across the Channel. All made it back

FAR LEFT Sun setting behind Île de Costaérès, Ploumanac'h

LEFT Low tide at Port de Ploumanac'h

ABOVE Camp d'Artus, Huelgoat

ABOVE RIGHT Pardon de Saint-Guirec procession, Ploumanac'h

Trégastel is a beautiful turquoise, the incoming tide slowly turning the rock formations offshore into islands again.

That evening is the best: a brilliant sunset streaking golden light across the rocks at Men Ruz lighthouse. Whilst photographer Robin makes the most of the light, I walk above La Manche towards Perros-Guirec, revelling in the solitude and enjoying distant views of the Sept-Îles nature reserve.

Returning to Plage de Saint-Guirec I find 'my' special place above and beyond the shoreline with only the gentle murmur from youngsters playing on the sands drifting up.

The humps of granite in the foreground resemble a herd of elephants wallowing in the water. I could sit here for ever! You can imagine my melancholy as I return past Port de Ploumanac'h, now bathed in such a lovely, hazy light; to wrench myself away is almost painful.

Further west at Trébeurden, the Caribbean-coloured waters off the beaches of Tresmeur and Pors Termen, in which sits the Île Milliau, are some consolation for having to move on from Ploumanac'h.

However, the Côte de Granit Rose is not the only place that has long been pulling me back to Brittany. The incredibly pretty

woods around Huelgoat, the Petites Cités de Caractère – charming small towns of creaky and crooked medieval buildings – and the lonely, windswept landscapes of the Monts d'Arrée and Ménez-Hom in the Montagnes Noires have tugged at me incessantly, too.

En route to Huelgoat we drive across barren moors towards the tiny seventeenth century chapel of Saint-Michel on Montagne Saint-Michel. Cloud is swirling around the hill (380m/1,247ft) on which the isolated chapel sits and I stride through the mist for an 'I could be the only person in the world' feeling. The chapel's door is open; its dank, 'forgotten' atmosphere palpable. With no one around, it feels even more eerie.

Nowhere are place names likely to stir imaginations so vividly than in the woods around Huelgoat. Indeed, Camping la Rivière d'Argent's welcome sign declares this as the 'land of the legends'.

You soon appreciate why as the site runs alongside the Argent (silver river), sprinkled with moss-covered boulders. Tracing woodland paths along and above the Argent, we're side-tracked by places with dreamy names – Le Vieux Pont Rouge (ancient red bridge), La Mare aux Sangliers (wild boars' pond), Le Gouffre (chasm), La



TOP TIPS

Camping Tourony offers about eight motorhome stopover pitches for €11.80 (£10.74), which soon fill up. These are popular and some spaces are tighter than others, or slightly sloping, so arrive by mid-morning after the overnighters have left. Reservations for these spaces is not possible

It can get very busy on the sentier around Men Ruz lighthouse and the lifeboat station on sunny afternoons. Mornings and evenings are best if you prefer a more tranquil experience

The lifeboat station near Ploumanac'h opens on summer weekend afternoons and sells postcards and souvenirs to raise funds

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Port-Launay viaduct; The Tas de Pois, Pointe de Penhir, Crozon Peninsula; Motorhome stopover at Camping Tourony, Trégastel

Mare aux Fées (fairies' pond) and Le Champignon (mushroom).

The Allée Violette (violet path) leads to the Roche Tremblante (trembling rock), where a crowd has gathered to watch people having a go at trying to make this huge lump of granite move slightly. There is a knack to it which few seem to grasp, though (once mastered) it's easy enough with a rhythm to get the stone rocking.

Rather worryingly, once a gang of muscular motorbikers get the hang of it, the rock seems to tremble a good deal more easily than it has done on our previous visits. I move away, hoping that erosion hasn't loosened it so much that these beefy blokes won't tip it down the slope just as I'm going past.

The rather magical aura of the woods around Huelgoat is heightened at La Ménage de la Vierge (virgin's house). Here, the granite closes in and the high water has carved it in a circular fashion. A metal ladder takes us into the cave-like chamber, Grotte du Diable (devil's cave). A chink of light enables us to see the water flowing through the chasm. The water is low. On other occasions I've witnessed an impressive torrent making you ponder the power of nature.

The woods – mostly of beech, but also birch, sweet chestnut and oak, interspersed with glades of hawthorn bushes, ferns and

tall bracken – are rapidly reclaiming the fort of Camp d'Artus. These defences, which well predate the mythical Arthurian times and were probably built by a Celtic tribe, are far more overgrown than I can ever remember; the Grotte d'Artus (Arthur's cave) less so. Again, I find it so hard to drag myself away from the mysterious and magical ambience of this very special place.

The church of St Germain at Pleyben is one of the finest in Brittany, though covered by scaffolding when we park in the attractive square. It is a magnificent mix of Gothic and Renaissance architecture and dominated by two towers, one of which is crowned by a lantern dome.

Inside, it's a masterpiece of religious art. The panelled archway in the nave has carved timber beams representing sacred and mythological scenes. Equally impressive is the calvary (1555) in the shape of a triumphal arch and with three Finistère crosses on it depicting 30 scenes from Christ's life on two levels.

Opposite is what I've also come to Pleyben for: to buy a couple of large bags of deliciously chewy florentines with orange and almond from the Chatillon Chocolatier shop. A walk is needed to burn off some of the calories.

We spend the night at Camping de Rodaven, alongside the Aulne at Châteaulin (also the Nantes-Brest canal at this point).

WE STAYED AT

Camping Tourony, 105 Rue de Poul Palud, 22730 Trégastel ☎ 0033 296 238661

📍 camping-tourony.com

📅 6 April – 21 September

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: Stopovers from €11.80 (£10.50); bigger pitches from €19.20 (£17.08)

Camping de Rodaven, Parc Bihan, 29150 Châteaulin ☎ 0033 683 015267

📍 campingderodaven.fr

📅 24 April – 20 September

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €16.80 (£14.94)

Camping la Rivière d'Argent, La Coudraie, 29690 Huelgoat

☎ 0033 298 997250

📍 larivieredargent.com

📅 Early April – mid October

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From €20 (£17.78)

Aire de Camping-Car Pen Hir, Rue Georges Ancey, 29570 Camaret-sur-Mer

📅 All year 📍 €7 (£6.23)



It's only a 10-minute walk along the towpath to the bustling town, strung out on either side of the wide river/canal. It's so nice that we stay for a second night.

We stride out to Châteaulin and Port-Launay (2¼ miles), pausing en route to buy a *cravate* (custard and chocolate chip pastry) and a baguette. We leave Châteaulin for Crozon, but not before visiting the market where juicy-looking hams are turning on a rotisserie and the smell of crispy roast potatoes pervades the air.

At the Ménez-Hom, clouds are clinging to the rounded summit and the sky is heavy. The landscape is bare, but for a few sparse wind-bent trees in the distance.

The Ménez-Hom is mesmerising. It feels like a desolate and lonely spot, yet the panorama (when the clouds part) is amazing. I can see right across the Crozon Peninsula (across which you can follow a Marc'h trail), just making out the Tas de Pois (pile of peas) on the Pointe de Pen-Hir at its tip.

The lovely sweep of Douarnenez Bay, with beach after beach, is spread before me whilst, looking north, the white buildings of Brest stand out against the grey skies. I glimpse the famous Térénez bridge before a

ABOVE Charming Châteaulin

BELOW Amusing sign on a gate at Port Launay saying 'danger sheep'!



bank of rain spoils my reverie.

The aire at Camaret-sur-Mer is high above the northern coast of the Crozon and next to yet another place exuding mystery, the Alignements de Lagatjar. This is a group of about 65 menhirs for which, apparently, there's no explanation and there were once hundreds more. As we walk to the nearby ruin of the Manoir de Saint-Pol-Roux, rabbits dart about, distracting from views across to Brest and southwest to the war memorial on the Pointe de Pen-Hir.

The rain is so heavy and the wind so strong the next day that we give up on walks and our decision to leave the Crozon Peninsula and head south towards Bénodet in search of sunshine throws up a surprise in the church of Sainte-Marie du Ménez-Hom in Plomodiern. Elaborate early sixteenth century carvings of biblical scenes form the coving. Inside, turn your head one way and the décor is very plain, but turn your head in the other direction and you are wowed by the most over-the-top gold-coloured scenes and decoration.

Will there be more such unexpected delights during the rest of our travels throughout Brittany and into Normandy? Watch this space... [MMM](#)

This feature was written prior to the coronavirus pandemic. We are publishing it for your enjoyment and to help you plan future trips. Readers must follow the latest government advice before leaving their homes [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)