

The Brida Journal

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Week 46/2021

Ask not what you can learn from others. Ask what others can learn from you.

Tour de France 2021 Stage 1 - Brest





Stage 1 Brest / Landernau

[Right Mouse Click to Listen and Read](#)

We arrived in the afternoon, and the first thing we did was, have a drink in the harbour. There are many restaurants to choose from on the Quai Tabarly. It is a modern area, built in the last 20 years. Brest was destroyed in the 2nd World War and has been rebuilt into a modern town. We were a little disappointed because we did not find any typical Breton atmosphere. There were no hydrangeas, no cobblestones.

But we had a view of the sailing boats. You could hear the seagulls, smell the ocean air, listen to the metal lines hitting the masts and listen to the sound of the wind.

We walked down the Quai de la Douane and saw many people eating in the restaurants with their open terraces.

[Brest](#) is a very modern city. There is lots of concrete between the large spaces. There are no tall buildings, nothing is hidden, there are many shops. We felt the cold atmosphere like on a cold day.

The next day, we visited the Rue St Malo. It is the oldest street in Brest that has cobblestones. It was not bombed during the last war. It is a reminder of an old Brest.



We also decided to go to the ***Conservatoire National de Botanique***, a botanical garden. It has 1800 different types of plants from around the world. Five hundred plants are in tropical glass houses. We took a ride in the Brest Cable Car that gave us a bird's eye view of the town, but we wanted to explore a different part of Brittany. It's not far from Brest, but it is a different world.

We drove to [Locronan](#) that is 38 km south of Brest. It is a delightful village with a population of under 1000 people.

The houses are made from stones from the region that are from the cliffs on the coast. The buildings have thick walls, but the doors are small. The people were smaller several centuries ago.

The atmosphere was welcoming. There were flowers and bushes everywhere. The Gothic church, with its tall steeple, was impressive.

It was a sunny morning. We came to the main square and spotted a terrace in front of a restaurant. It invited us for a “bollée” of cidre. These are ceramic cups used to drink cidre from. Monique put on her dark sunglasses and observed the square, the people, the flowers, everything.



We admired the slate roofs and wondered about the strange construction. The gables are higher than the roof to protect the building from the strong Breton winds. We also noticed that the windows are curtainless and set a little back to protect from the wind and the rain.

The waiter brought the local cidre. We raised it to our noses to smell the apple. It was not too acidic and not too dry. It is a pleasant, light drink.

The alcohol content is 5%, but it is much lighter than a glass of beer. It is a refreshing drink in the late morning, just before the Apéro at lunch.

There was a well in the middle of the square. At the top is a pulley which shows that 150 years ago, people drew water for their animals and themselves. Next to the well is a basin used to store some water for the horses to drink from. After sitting there for a while, we felt happy and very relaxed. It was time to think about lunch and what local specialities we should eat.



For lunch, we could eat “galettes”. It was the obvious choice. Galettes and crêpes. Galettes are savoury and crêpes are sweet. The galettes are made from dark flour and with some salt. Crêpes are made from lighter flour and contain sugar. Generally, you eat one or two galettes as your main course and a crêpe for dessert. The flour used for a galette is coarsely milled, while the crêpe flour is more finely milled.

Clarisse chose a galette with cheese, ham and one egg. Monique decided to eat a galette with cheese, egg, and some vegetables. Bernard decided to try the galette with salmon and crème fraîche. For dessert, Clarisse chose the crêpe with salted caramel butter. Monique decided on the crêpe with warm bananas, and Bernard ate one with Nutella but not with whipped cream. And of course, we needed to drink another bottle of “cidre”. An espresso brought us back to life.



As we strolled back to our car, we passed a patisserie which sells “ty kouign amann”. This is cake heavy with butter, sugar, and caramel. It is so heavy, you can only eat small amounts of it. In Brittany, they bake it only with the local butter. It is a round cake with roughly a 20cm diameter. With lunch still very present in our stomachs, we bought some for later.

As we strolled around, we could hear the old people speaking the “Breton” dialect. It is still taught at primary school. The feeling of unity is deep in Brittany. They have strong Celtic roots. Oddly enough, a cheque written in the Breton dialect is recognised in France. A cheque written in our own Alsatian dialect is not. Curious!



We also decided to explore the [Crozon Peninsular](#) that is less than 20 km from Brest. We walked along the coast for some hours. It was such a beautiful day, and the water was a lovely blue. We heard the waves roll in and out, mixed with the cry of the seagulls circling above us. The wind always blows on the coast, but that day, there was just a gentle breeze. The coastal air always seems unique. You can smell the salt.

Monique observed that the Atlantic coast seems to smell differently from the Mediterranean coast. The whole experience felt like receiving free thalassotherapy.

It can be difficult to walk against the wind, but today it was not. We walked in the dunes, which are covered with grass. Further down, we could see the cliffs. The optics are deceptive. The cliffs look closer than they actually are. When there is low tide, you can walk out onto the seabed. The beach is much narrower at high tide.



We also walked on the narrow and stony footpaths on the cliff edges. One could not walk side by side. Instead, we had to form a line. As we walked behind each other, it was difficult to talk and to stop to admire the view. But stop one must. There are bushes of white and purple heather on the sides. Heather is native to Brittany, and it grows everywhere. There are no trees because it is too windy.

We met another couple who were also walking along the customs path. Fifty years ago, customs officials patrolled the coast to stop smugglers bringing in contraband to France. They built small huts in the rocks to hide from the smugglers as they crossed the water. Now, many of these paths have been turned into tourist paths allowing people to admire the coast.

We greeted the couple that then continued on their way. We stopped to have a picnic and found some rocks to sit on. We opened a bottle of cidre and took out a baguette and some Camembert. It is the most popular cheese in France. In Brittany, salted butter is preferred to unsalted butter. There is nothing better than the taste of a fresh baguette with salted butter and enjoying this in the outdoors, perhaps with a glass of red wine. This is the heart of the French soul. We felt at peace and one with the surroundings.



In other parts of our walk, the atmosphere was more dramatic. The sea formed the cliffs over many centuries. The waves crashed against the cliffs; it was a little loud. It is like a slow drumbeat when the water flows in and out. When you stand in front of the cliff, you could suffer from vertigo. It might be dangerous. We were in the same area, but the contrasts were great. Bernard walked to the cliff edge to take the pictures, which made Monique a little nervous.

The scene is relaxing. The heather mixes with small, delicate pine trees. The water is crystal clear, the hidden beaches are protected from the wind. People were paddling lazily in the water, looking down at the seabed. For us, it is nice to spend a couple of hours in this beautiful spot. It is very secluded, you can be by yourself, be alone. For Bernard, it was a little too lonely.





In the evenings, when the sun sets, the colours are beautiful, the cliffs are darker, the atmosphere is peaceful as long as you can see the colours of the sun and the horizon in the distance. But the atmosphere can become like a Hitchcock film. It is a fitting ending to a lovely day. But it was time to move on to our next destination.

Clarisse, Monique & Bernard are clients at [Peters-Langues](https://www.peters-langues.com).

The Worksheet - 46.21

Would you like to improve your written English? Write your answers directly in the spaces under the questions. If you would like some feedback, send your answers to frank@peters-langues.fr

Tour de France. Stage 1.

1. What were the first impressions Clarisse, Monique & Bernard had of Brest?
2. What were they expecting?
3. What were the first impressions of the village of Locronon?
4. What is the difference between a Galette and a Crêpe?
5. Which Galette and Crêpe that the three friends ate would you have chosen?
6. What was the weather like at the Crozon Peninsular?
7. Why were there customs paths on the coast?
8. What was the gastronomic highlight of that day?
9. Why was Monique nervous?
10. Would you like to visit this region? Why?

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