



Clockwise from top left: Ferry from Dinard to Saint-Malo. The ready-for-anything electrified Flying Gate. Tourist office in Clécy. Leaving Saint-Malo in wet weather gear



bike he'd built himself, tipped us off that we could divert to Dinard before the Vélomaritime crossed the Rance river. There we caught a ferry to Saint-Malo, arriving by boat at another spectacular French port.

We weren't the only cyclists. The morning arrival of the Portsmouth ferry had deposited a phalanx of British cycle tourists, who were relaxing over coffees in the sunshine, keeping an eye on their steeds stacked against the ancient city walls. I was taken by an electrified Flying Gate, which was festooned with spare tyres, wing mirrors, multiple locks, a pump lock (!), bungees, a monkey mascot and a clothes peg on the brake cable. None of your lightweight bikepacking nonsense here. Every eventuality covered – a touring cyclist after my own heart.

The météo was forecasting a storm for the following day, accurately as it turned out. Leaving Saint-Malo we wore wet weather gear for the first and only time during our trip. The rain eased pretty quickly, and by mid morning we were cycling past the Cançale oyster huts under a cloudy sky punctuated by the kites of happy windsurfers. Mont-Saint-Michel was a blip on the horizon.

NORMANDY ENDING

We gave Mont-Saint-Michel a miss. Magnificent from afar, up close it's an expensive tourist trap selling expensive tourist tat. Instead we spent Sunday afternoon in Pontorson,

which was cheap but not cheerful. The hotel had the nerve to add an extra €10 to our bill for storing the bikes overnight in an outhouse. In retrospect, the magnificent tourist trap might actually have been a better bet.

At least we had a decent meal, whereas the following day we fell foul of French Mondays. After the Sée estuary at Pontaubault, the Vélomaritime climbs steadily into the Normandy countryside on a greenway. Part of this is a small engineering miracle: the former Fougères to Vire railway, which winds its way upwards (2,700ft in two days for us) through a very hilly region without bridges or tunnels.

A scrappy breakfast at our hotel (another €10 each) left us desperate for lunch so we dropped off into Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët and were lucky to find a boulangerie open. They happily made us sandwiches – in wraps, the only bread they had left. In the evening at Mortain-Bocage not a single restaurant was open. Fortunately, a small épicerie provided the essential victuals: wine, cheese, crisps and a plastic sandwich. French Mondays!

We left the Vélomaritime at Sourdeval, heading back across country to the coast at Caen, where we boarded a train to Paris. From Gare Saint-Lazare we had a thrilling ride across to Gare du Nord, where, folding the bikes again, we caught the Eurostar home. Yippee for the folders! ●



Fact file
An adventure unfolds

Getting there: We travelled by train to Plymouth and then by cross-Channel ferry to Roscoff. Our compact folders were no problem on GWR (gwr.com) but its trains carry only two or four full-size bikes, with reservations essential on intercities. Brittany Ferries (brittanyferries.com) accepted our Bromptons as luggage with no charge made.

Getting home: French regional trains (TER) have designated spaces for bikes and nobody seems to check the number being carried. There's no charge. Bicycle carriage on Eurostar, on the other hand, feels almost impossible. They will carry 20in-wheel (or smaller) folding bikes for free as long as they're covered. But if you're planning to travel with a full-size bike, check availability with Eurostar well in advance.

Distance: 400 miles over two weeks.

Route: EuroVelo 4 (La Vélomaritime) from Roscoff to Sourdeval.

Conditions: Varied from overgrown tracks to smooth, quiet roads. Not all sections were family/trailer/tandem/trike friendly; consult the maps. Mid-June weather was pretty much perfect.

I'm glad I had: A toe strap to 'lock' my folded Brompton when lifting it around (a sudden unfolding at baggage check-in is embarrassing).

I wish I had: Filled down the sharp corners of my Aceoffix QR pedals. Blood on the hotel bedsheets is awkward...

More information: lavelomaritime.com