



**Clockwise from top left:** Morlaix's lovely half-timbered houses. And its less lovely cars. Pied à terre at Saint-Brieuc. Passerelle Saint-François, near Tréguier. North of Saint-Samson, after leaving Morlaix

deep ravine spanned by a majestic railway viaduct. Unfortunately, cars dominated the town. Fumes and parked vehicles spoiled our search for historic half-timbered houses. We were forced to take refuge in a bar.

Our hotel, like many places we visited, had bikes for hire, mainly electric assist. In the hotel, Celia, an inveterate investigator of tourist leaflets, spotted some about bicycle routes in the area. We realised that my hours poring over Google Maps had been unnecessary. We could simply take EuroVelo 4, La Vélomaritime, which followed the French coast from Roscoff to Dunkirk.

We downloaded the route to our phones but also picked up paper copies wherever we could, usually from tourist offices. We both like a paper map. The route maps showed which sections were on road and which were off road, and whether they were suitable for families or challenging for all. Also signalled were 'dénivelé important' (tough hills). There were quite a few of these, which for me usually invoked another warning: 'pied à terre' (walk it)!

It was a good reminder that, in hilly terrain, fitness isn't optional even with an 18in bottom gear. Those hills were presumably why we encountered so many happy, smiling cyclists riding electric bikes, looking just like they do in the adverts. I often felt envious. Yet a couple of times we did come across traditional, fully-loaded, grey-bearded cycle tourists struggling up long inclines. I wanted to cheer, in awe of their

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A museum told the story of the bike-riding 'Onion Johnnies', with their strings of onions. It brought tears to our eyes  
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strength and determination (and envious of their camping gear).

We booked our first two hotels but for the rest of the trip we estimated where we would be two days ahead and used Google Maps to identify places to stay. Sometimes hotels were scarce. Campsites were plentiful – and French campsites are great, aren't they? – so we missed having a tent to fall back on.

Food was rarely a problem. We did most of our cycling in the morning, and Brittany is loaded with crêperies for a bite and a beer at lunchtime. The craft beer revolution hit France later than the UK but many places now have a local brewery offering hit-and-miss IPAs. In one hotel, catering largely for walkers doing the coastal trail, the menu's prices looked promising but turned out to be for something pre-prepared in a jar, like big baby food. Fortunately, the beers and wine were fine.

### COASTING ALONG

We kept on moving around the coast – Paimpol, Saint-Brieuc, Val-André – on a mixture of quiet roads, farm tracks, dedicated cycle paths and overgrown trails. At Matignon I had the only puncture of the trip, a slow one that held air until we made it to our hotel. I fixed it with the hovering help of the hotelier, a man with a set of tools and a mechanical bent who nodded his approval as I sealed the hole in the tyre with superglue. A German cyclist staying at the same hotel, doing 100 miles or more every day on a lovely ▶