

C014-CO Picardy coast (Somme bay)



The Picardie coast spreads for about 40 km from Mers-les-Bains in the south, up north to the Authie Bay. The coast varies. Down south, chalky cliffs from the Pays de Caux spread out beyond Ault before giving way to a vast maritime plain – les Bas Champs – bordered by a pebble bar doubled by a sand bar up north. Large and deep, the "Baie de Somme's" jagged mouth splits the Bas Champs and the sandy coast of the Manquerre bordered by dunes anchored by the inner pine forest. The Authie's river mouth ends this domain. This very flat coast was conquered by men and remains exposed to marine invasion with each strong tempest. Despite the inconvenience of the natural filling of the estuary, the "Baie de Somme" still shelters a few

ports holding an interesting story. Saint-Valery-sur-Somme, which has seen William the Conqueror depart for England; Le Crotoy on the other bank with a Roman installation that witnessed a prosperous era during Middle Age. Hourdel fishing port located at the entrance of the Bay has a more recent installation justified by its better accessibility. A preserved world, paradise for migrating birds, this wild coast will surely seduce you. It might be its particular lighting. It might be this world where everything seems still; where the land, the ocean and the sky seem to come together. A complete return to Nature, an intense moment of happiness.

Itinerary

Day 1 - ARRIVAL AT BERCK. This little town lived on fishing for the longest time before developing resort activities during the second half of the 18th century partly thanks to the railroad. May we suggest you take the time to visit chapels, belvederes, nestling oratories or religious statues scattered throughout the town. *Logging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 2 - BERCK – FORT-MAHON-PLAGE (23 km). There you will go and discover the Authie Bay which draws the line between Nord Pas-de-Calais and Picardie regions. With its pier head and pulley systems this bay is a beautiful illustration of a Picard estuary, which covers about 2000 hectares. Where maritime and land domains join, the landscape is mainly composed of vast spaces made of prairies and salty marshes, punctuated by many ponds. Inside the bay, the riverbank is marked by ever moving dunes. Some superficial dykes spread to the south of the mouth. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*



Day 3 - FORT MAHON PLAGE – LE CROTOY (23 or 13 km) Two options are available:

- *Transfer by taxi to the ornithological park of Marquenterre. Visit this very interesting park for bird lovers (3 hours) before walking from the park to the Crotoy.*
- *Walk from Fort Mahon to the Crotoy along the beach up until Quend Plage and the Pyramid Dune. You will then go deep inland in order to bypass the vast domain of Marquenterre. Further down, you will meet the shore before arriving at le Crotoy, a beautiful beach resort with its long fine sandy beach facing directly south. Dinner, night and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 4 - LE CROTOY and ST VALERY SUR SOMME. (15 km) Le Crotoy was rejuvenated thanks to tourism but knew its true glory days at the beginning of last century. Its very particular light from the bay attracted impressionist painters such as Seurat or Sisley as well as writers such as Colette or Jules Verne. Walking along small streets you may come across beautiful houses where they stayed or the beautiful manor where resided the famous perfume maker Pierre Guerlain which has been turned into a hotel restaurant facing the Baie-de-Somme. Go back few years back enjoying a train ride aboard the Baie-de-Somme steam train, which will happily take you to St Valery Sur Somme (*fare at your expense*). St Valery has a rich past, which you will



uncover while visiting the many quarters of the town. : the maritime district with its port, docks and small streets; the old town surrounded by ramparts sheltering beautiful half timbered houses, outer walls of the ancient fortified castle; and to finish, the abbey district overlooked by the chapel perched atop a headland - *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 5 - ROUND WALK THROUGH LE HOURDEL AND "LA MAISON DE L'OISEAU" (the Bird House) -25 km- leaving St Valery by the beach, along docks and channel of the Somme river, you will come across the Cap Hornu before continuing up to Le Hourdel through dykes above "Molieres", vast wetlands. You will come across a small solitary fishermen village, facing the immensity of

the bay. Life is lead along tides with the arrival or departure of the "sauterelles" (grasshoppers), boats equipped to fish grey shrimp, and the rising of tides offer a breathtaking show. You will continue your journey by the white road, often covered by sand blown by the wind, where you will discover the "Maison des Oiseaux". This is a live museum where you will discover close to 300 species of birds living on the Picard coast. You will then go back to St Valery either by the Cap Hornu or by land. *Lodging and breakfast in the same 3-star hotel*

Day 6 - BRIGHTON – LE TREPORT (20 km). A taxicab will take you to the Brighton lighthouse. This ancient British beach resort was mostly destroyed during a big tempest back in 1917. You will continue on to Cayeux-sur-Mer through the coastline, a little town located on a pebble strand taken way by the ocean from the cliffs and pushed back up north. The family resort area has maintained very little from its rich past with only a few villas left to testify to this period of ocean side resorts, just like the 2 kilometer long boardwalk along which you may see close to 500 beach cabins!! You will continue your walk along the river-bank towards that wetland area also called "bas champs". le Hable d'Ault. This particular spot spreading over 450 hectares gets overflowed by the sea during strong tides despite the offshore pebble bar protecting it. It is a natural reserve for many birds, which you may admire while walking between the ponds. You will come across Onival and its fine sandy beach, crowded during the season. Ault, beach resort, marks the beginning of the cliff, which spreads for about 100 kilometers up until the Cap d'Antifer above the Havre. Within a "valleuse" (dry valley perched above the sea), you will discover the 'bois de Cise' where nestle beautiful villas from the Belle Époque. The path continues along the cliff edge, eroding away under the combined action of the ocean and the weather, before coming across Mers-les-Bains facing the typical port of the Treport. *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*



Day 7: THE 3 SISTER TOWNS OF THE MOUTH OF THE BRESLE AND LA FALAISE (15 km). Let yourself discover the resort district of Mers-les-Bains. Built between 1880 and 1900, the most original or extravagant villas are testimony to oceanside resorts, an euphoric and festive era. Walking along the canal of Penthievre, you will come across Eu where you will visit the Notre Dame Collegiate Church and Saint Laurent: the castle and chapel of the College. By land, you will reach Le Mesnil-Val Plage where you will climb the cliff before going back to Le Treport overlooking the ocean. From the Calvary of The 'Terrasse', you will enjoy the beautiful view from the coast up to Hourdel as well as of the lower valley of the Bresle. You will visit the St Jacques church dated from the second half of the 16th century, located half way up the coast - *Lodging and breakfast in the same hotel*

Season

From middle of April to end of October but be careful this area is very crowded in summer time and we recommend you to reserve at the earliest possible moment.

What's included?

- 7 nights' accommodation (lodging and breakfast) in selected 3-star hotels
- 3 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- Taxi transfers
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) with the route marked on and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Phone emergency assistance.

Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended) - Transfers except those mentioned above - Entrance fees - Drinks - Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls... are not included

Getting there and away

By train: Rang du Fliers rail station is only 6 km to Berck. Several trains a day from Paris Gare du Nord. Taxi or bus shuttle to Berck.

From Le Treport taxi or bus to Abbeville rail station. Trains to Paris or Rang du Fliers to get back your car.

By car: You have to reach the A16 motorway (Paris – Calais - Dunkerque) Exit Montreuil sur Mer and D303 road to Berck

Where to park: several unsupervised free car parks in Berck.

Walk difficulty

Grade 2 - walks of 4 to 6 hours a day. Some stages could be more 20 km (13/15 miles). The terrain is absolutely flat but in some areas you will walk on sand. An average level of fitness or some experience with walking is recommended.

