



The history of Binic



1 PLACE LE POMELLEC

Your first stop is Place Le Pomellec, just in front of the Tourist Office. This square bears the name of an important family of Binic shipowners. The main road in front of you was once the location of the river "ic". It was diverted at the foot of the museum and its bed filled, allowing urban development to take place.



Departure and arrival : Touriste Office
6 place le Pomellec



This tour has a significant difference in altitude



Distance : 3,5 km



Time : 1h10



1

PLACE LE POMELLEC

The name Binic comes from "Pen-Ic", which means "mouth of the Ic" in Breton.

The oldest traces of port's trading activities date from the Bronze Age. Then, thanks to its geographical position and its shipping vocation, Binic became a centre of trade, with important fairs and markets.

From the end of the 16th century, several markets were held in Binic. In the 17th century, there were 4 annual fairs, including a grain market, a butter market, and a cattle market.

Since 1920, it has been the market place every Thursday morning. It is one of the liveliest and most colourful market in the region and one of the biggest in summer, as it extends on the quays.

Between the 16th and 20th centuries, the port grew considerably thanks to the development of cod fishing in Newfoundland and Iceland. The port is now exclusively a marina with nearly 600 berths.

2

RUE DES MOULINS - MILL STREET

"Rue des Moulins" – Mill street - was the former main street and gateway to the town. It owes its name from the many mills in the valley, 14 water mills and 3 windmills, which produced flour.

The duty on the goods was collected in the typical little fisherman's house situated at the bottom of the slop. Tons of goods passed through Binic, including salt, grain, flour, vegetables, wine, cider, livestock, brandy, wood, building materials and sand.

The "Côte à Marie" – Mary's slop - is not named after a woman called Marie, but after Mr. Marie, a 19th century whaling ship owner from Binic. Whaling was very lucrative but remained a minor activity in Binic. Mr. Marie's 2 boats sailed the southern seas, sometimes as far as Australia.

This large grey stone building (N.12) is thought to have been Mr. Marie's home. Later it became the Maritime Registration Office, where sailors registered before setting sail for Newfoundland or Iceland.

Walk along this building to the right.

Building No. 2 is a reminder of the beginning of seaside tourism. This building with its elaborate balconies was the "Grand Hôtel de Bretagne" in the early 20th century. Several hotels accommodated tourists who came to enjoy the beach.

3 PLACE DU MARCHÉ

The port of Binic was an important cod fishing port. This fish lived in Newfoundland, off the coast of Canada or in Iceland. The fishing campaigns lasted 6 months from April to October for Newfoundland. Sometimes it took up to 1 month to reach the destination. For Iceland, the campaign lasted from February to August with a 15-day crossing. After the campaign, the boats did not return directly to Binic but stopped first at Mediterranean ports such as Marseille to sell a part of their cargo. They loaded up goods such as soap, wine and oil and finally made it back to Binic...well... if they hadn't been shipwrecked or attacked by pirates in the meantime!

But why go cod fishing in terrible conditions when you could catch other fishes off the coast of Brittany? Cod was the most abundant fish in the world, very prolific and much eaten! Fishing cod was more lucrative than working in the fields, and a fisherman could earn up to 4 times more than a sailor of the French Royal Navy.

The current "La Sentinelle" restaurant became the Customs office after the little house you saw earlier.

The "rue Joffre" was once the main shopping street. You can see traces of this past by observing the facades of the buildings. At No. 14 for example was the "Hotel de l'Univers" that advertised cuisine with fresh butter, aperitifs, and branded liqueurs.

Walk along this street, cross to skirt the restaurant "Le Grand Large", cross again to approach the marina wet dock and stand near the bell.

4 PLACE DE LE CLOCHE

Note the name on the plaque beneath the bell. It refers to Mr. Marie's whaling ship, the Persévérant, which was wrecked off the coast of Australia.

The current "Galerie d'Art Athéna" is typical of 19th century shipowners' houses. It belonged to a very important family of the town: the Le Pomellec family.



The bell was used when the sailors left for their fishing trip and to regulate selling times at the fish market. Binic's shipowners were among the first to officially ship out boats for Newfoundland in 1510. In the 17th century, Binic was the most enterprising port in the Saint-Brieuc region and in 1845, Binic became France's leading cod fishing port. At that time there were 37 sailing boats representing 1,700 sailors from Binic and the surrounding countryside. During this period the existing quays were enlarged, and others were built with the jetty. Work ended in 1854 with the completion of the lighthouse.

From 1850, Newfoundland fishing declined in favour of Iceland fishing. The fleet for Iceland grew from 3 to 110 vessels. It required less investment: the boats were 2-masted schooners that could take around twenty men on board, instead of 3-masted vessels with fifty men for Newfoundland. Moreover, cod was more abundant in Iceland as stocks in Newfoundland were beginning to run low.

During First World War, a long decline began due to a lack of manpower and adaptation. The last sailing ship left for Iceland in 1925. Later, the port was converted to scallop fishing and finally to a marina.

On your way, you may see a small colourful boat tied to the pontoon. This is a dory (a flat-bottomed boat), it was used to set lines on the cod banks in Newfoundland. Sailors left from the main boat, sometimes as far as 6 km away, and set the lines on which the lures, whelks for example, were hooked... at minus 10 degrees, the temperature in Newfoundland! A few hours later, the sailors came to collect the fish.

In Iceland, the sailors fished from aboard with a single line, then the fish was cut up and preserved on board in salt, as in Newfoundland.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, alongside fishing, seaside tourism developed, particularly thanks to the train line from Saint-Brieuc.



Schooner living the port



5

PORTES DU PORT

In front of you are the marina gates, built in 1966. It was at this time that scallop fishing was revived. Previously, fishing was very limited. A fortunate trawl in 1961 revealed the size of the stocks and the revival of this fishery. Around a hundred scallop boats from all over Brittany come to anchor in the port. Binic was the second port of the Bay of Saint-Brieuc for this fishing. You can still see the old fish auction, a small house on the quay opposite the lighthouse. Fishing in Binic came to an end in the early 1980s, when a computerised auction was set up in Saint-Quay-Portrieux, the neighbouring town and the fourth port of Brittany. Today, the Bay of Saint-Brieuc accounts for 50% of national scallop production. This fishing is highly regulated: the season lasts from November to April and is limited to 2 days a week and 45 minutes a day.

A word of advice: if you want to buy real scallops, choose the "Pecten Maximus". The name "Saint-Jacques" is not protected and scallops from Asia or elsewhere can be found with this name.

6

PLACE DE L'ÉGLISE

You are standing in front of the church of Notre-Dame de Bon Voyage. Binic did not exist as a town but belonged to the parish of Etables. On 22 August 1821, thanks to high-level supports, Binic's shipowners have obtained the creation of their own municipality. A proper church was therefore built, as you can see. It was soon too small and was enlarged until 1930. If the church is open, take the opportunity to explore the interior and the statue of Notre Dame de Bon Voyage, bathed in light.

Next to the bakery is a carriage entrance marked 1883. This is where the coaching inn used to be, which explains the large arch.

A little further up the street, you can see the oldest house in Binic. The lintel indicates 1679. It once housed the The White Horse Inn. It is said that a crime was committed here....

7

RUE WILSON ET RUE DES FONTAINES

Walk up rue Wilson and then rue des Fontaines. Along the way, you'll see several seaside villas, including the Villa Jehanne, dating from the early 20th century. It was originally the villa of the shipowner family the Verry-Puech. The villa was later transformed into a sanatorium, an establishment specialized in the treatment of tuberculosis. In the 1970s, it became a holiday camp. Today, it is privately owned.

With the birth of seaside tourism at the beginning of the 20th century, beautiful villas in the same style as the Villa Jehanne began to appear. They were mostly facing the sea and owned their own beach huts and private access on beaches. Numerous guesthouses opened their doors too, offering comfortable bedrooms, a bathroom and even electricity.

In Etables, Oscar Legris, an industrialist from Versailles who fell in love with the region, spurred the construction of around twenty villas and a hotel in the Godelins district. I invite you to discover it thanks to our heritage leaflet "Itinerary of a tourist in Étables". It is available in English and free at the Tourist Office.

8

RUE DES TERTRES

This street has fishermen's and captains' houses, like No. 14.

Keep going to the end of the street. Before the 20th century, travel was reserved for the elite and artists. At that time, swimming was completely absurd, the sea was a fantasy world populated by monsters. The industrial revolution increased the need and the desire to travel, particularly to treat health problems.

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Doudelins "Castle"



The Avant-Port Beach

This trend spread to the wealthier classes. It led to the creation of tourist complexes, built onto existing towns, or created from scratch. This expansion was closely linked to the development of the rail network. Trains used to pass through Binic and Etable from Saint-Brieuc. The line opened in 1905 and enabled the first bathers to visit our beaches. 5 trains run each day in both directions. The journey took a total of 1 hour 30 and covered 30 km. The line was closed in 1956, but several viaducts still bear witness to this era, including the Chien Noir viaduct at Binic and the Pourrhis viaduct at Etable-sur-Mer. You can still cross the Pourrhis viaduct and learn more about its history thanks to our heritage leaflet "The Pourrhis Viaduct". Holidays really took off in France with the 3-week paid holiday law of 1936, which became 5 weeks in 1981. Today, the town's population is multiplied by 3 during the high season.

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RUE DES ISLANDAIS - ISLAND FISHERMEN STREET

Here you are in a typical district with its old houses that belonged to the fishermen of Iceland and Newfoundland. The No. 14 is one of the most representative fishermen's houses in the area.

I'd like to tell you about the daily life of the Newfoundland sailors. They spent 6 months away from their families and worked in appalling conditions up to 18 hours a day. The basic equipment consisted of a hooded raincoat and clogs: they lived and slept in these wet sticky clothes. They didn't take the time to take them off because they were so tired, so imagine the state of the bunks the sailors shared... The captain often acted as doctor, with a box of medicines and what was known as "the paper doctor", a small incomplete book giving a few medical indications. Meals consisted mainly of fish, of course, in all its forms (soup, stew, etc.) and biscuits. On Sundays, it was bacon soup with beans or cabbage. They drank cider, wine and Boujaron, a locally made cider brandy. Boujaron originally referred to the tin measure used to ration the drink and then became the name of the brandy itself.

Alcohol was widely consumed on the ships. Many accounts state that conditions would have been unbearable for the men without it.

10

SQUARE DE LA VILLE CADIO

From the lookout point, you see a large white house with green window frames and a flat roof. There is a round veranda in the garden. Have you spotted it? Do you notice anything strange?

This house does lean slightly... by 18 cm. It's Binic's Tower of Pisa!

As mentioned at the beginning of the tour; it was built on marshland which explains this particularity. This house is inhabited by a descendant of Maria Verry Carfantan, who was a woman shipowner. Born in 1851 in a shipowner family of Dahouët, a town situated across the Bay of Saint-Brieuc. Maria grew up in a male environment. She married Louis Verry, a rival shipowner from Binic. Maria's father was furious that she was marrying a competitor, he only gave her one schooner as a dowry; 15 years later, she and her husband owned 9! It was Maria who recruited the captains, managed the equipment, and supervised the construction of the boats... And she had 5 children! She was nicknamed the "The Golden Cod" or "the Lightning" because of her energy, her strength. As a modern woman, she was the first person in the region to own a car. She was also generous. Indeed, the wives of sailors dead at sea on her boats received a pension for life, as did their children until they came of age. Her personal house can still be seen next to the pharmacy.

11 RUE DU CHÂTEAU D'EAU - WATER TOUR STREET

On the gate pillars of some properties, there were objects from the Orient, brought back by the captains of trading ships. Statuettes of Asian lions can still be seen on the gate pillar of No. 10, the Rose Villa. As you continue up this street, you'll come across middle-class houses, like No. 4, which once belonged to captains. They stood opposite to more modest customs officers' houses, as the No. 7.

Return to the marina via Rue des Ecoles – School Street. As its name suggests, this is where schools were located. Some of the buildings can still be seen.

At the bottom of the street, you arrive at Church Place. Walk down to the marina, then turn right to the Quai de Courcy to reach the Tourist Office car park.

The Quai de Courcy has changed very little since the 18th century apart from the shops.

12 SQUARE FICHET DES GRÈVES

You are standing in Square Fichet des Grèves, named after one of Binic's oldest shipowner family. One of its members, Thomas, was also a merchant. In 1627, he and his son were taken prisoner by Moroccan barbarian pirates and sold into slavery. Thomas was bought 18 months later by a merchant from Marseille. He returned home to collect money for his ransom. Then, he went back to Morocco to try to save his son. He managed to free him but in exchange for his own freedom. He died three years later in prison.

As you walk to the next stop, find this house (photo). This is the house of Maria Verry Carfantan, the woman shipowner mentioned earlier.

13 RUE FRANÇOIS LE SAULNIER DE ST JOUAN

Step forward to the location shown in this photo.

This street was originally the main axis to get to Saint-Brieuc. Some of the houses along this street belonged to shipowners. This street was named after an important figure in the history of Binic, François Le Saulnier de Saint Jouan, cousin by marriage of the famous privateer Surcouf.

Like many shipowners, he was also a privateer, which is different from a pirate. A privateer works for the king and can only attack enemy ships of France. Descended from the Fichet Desgrèves family by his mother, who arms privateer ships, François Le Saulnier de Saint Jouan boarded no less than 36 English ships in less than 10 years. Then his own boats were taken one after the other. Our adventurer decided to enter politics and he became the first mayor of Binic on August 22, 1821, the day the town was created. So the first mayor of Binic was a privateer!



In this street also lived, at another time, the family of Cora Vaucaire, a singer born in 1918. She sang classics of the French repertoire like "Le Temps des Cerises", the texts of the poet Jacques Prévert and created the famous song "Les feuilles mortes". She also introduced the famous French singer Barbara.

Return to Place Le Pomellec, the car park of the Tourist Office.

To know more about the history of Binic-Etables sur Mer, ask us for the heritage leaflets and visit the Museum of Binic which presents a rich collection of objects. It is open from May to September.

The Milmarin Museum in Ploubazlanec evokes the merchant navy. It is open all year.



The Museum of Binic



The Avant-Port Beach



Church Place

SCAN THIS CODE FOR THE
AUDIO VERSION



Historical sources : "Binic, port du Goëlo" and "Souvenirs de Binic" de C.Quérré ; "La Saga des Verry Carfantan" JP Dumont Le Douarec. Testimonies from Jacques Barreau. Photos : Be Tourisme and vintage postal cards from Philippe Laribaux collection.

The heritage collection :

- The Pourrhis viaduct
- The sea caves
- The church of Binic
- The route of a tourist at Etables

