

# BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE  
NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. BRANCH



Bateaux européens et flotte de pirogues

Bretons and world travel

KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

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# BRO NEVEZ 117

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The **U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL)** was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation on October 20, 1981. **Bro Nevez** ("new country" in the Breton language) is the newsletter produced by the U.S. ICDBL. It is published quarterly: February, May, August and November. Contributions, letters to the Editor, and ideas are welcome from all readers and will be printed at the discretion of the Editor.

The U.S. ICDBL provides Bro Nevez on a complimentary basis to a number of language and cultural organizations in Brittany to show our support for their work. Your Membership/Subscription allows us to do this. Membership (which includes subscription) for one year is \$20. Checks should be in U.S. dollars, made payable to "U.S. ICDBL" and mailed to Lois Kuter at the address above.

*Ideas expressed within this newsletter are those of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent ICDBL philosophy or policy.*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

As you will no doubt notice you are receiving this "February" issue of Bro Nevez well into March. I will not make excuses, except to say that when it's ready, it's ready, and it seemed worth extending the preparation time for this issue so it could be full of interesting information. The research to make sure that information is as accurate as possible can take more time than one would imagine! It is an interesting task but this is not my "day job."

I would welcome contributions from more readers to take a bit of the weight off the editor for future issues – short notes, book reviews, information about a particularly good or bad website on Brittany you have discovered. It would be nice to hear from a few different voices here in the U.S. I know there are U.S. ICDBL Members out there who have knowledge and creativity to contribute!



## Letter to France

*From time to time the U.S. Branch of the ICDBL writes a letter to French political leaders to express our concern and hopes for the Breton language. This is part of our mission to show that it is not just the people of Brittany who care about the future of their cultural heritage. The following is a letter we sent this January in French as well as English ... and the response we received February 25 from the Chef de Cabinet for President Sarkozy. – Lois Kuter*

**U.S. ICDBL**  
U.S. Branch of the  
International Committee for the  
Defense of the Breton Language

January 18, 2011

Monsieur Nicolas Sarkozy  
Président de la République  
Palais de l'Elysée  
F 75008 PARIS  
FRANCE

President Sarkozy,

Our Association, created to support the Breton language, has monitored the situation of the language for the past 30 years or so. We noticed with great hope the amendment brought to the French Constitution in Article 75-1 to recognize regional languages as part of

France's heritage. It was interesting to note that the responsibility to deal with regional languages was devolved to the territorial authorities, and therefore, we are interested in seeing how this will be implemented.

On December 7, 2010, a legislative draft was presented by Deputy Jung to the National Assembly with concrete proposals to ensure the preservation and transmission of regional languages. Our hope now is that this piece of legislation will be adopted and will receive sufficient funding from the territorial authorities to become a reality. Our members know first-hand how important adequate funding can be for such a project, as we have been raising monies to support the Breton bilingual schools since their creation.

Breton is not the archaic rural language one would imagine. This Celtic language has served as a cultural vehicle to carry the Round Table legends all over Europe, to bring Christianity to many areas of Northern Europe and, in more recent times, it has helped archeologists and linguists decipher the Gaulish inscriptions and get a better understanding of those distant ancestors of the French. We believe it deserves respect and is well worth the effort to keep it alive. Nonetheless, past history has shown that, together with other regional languages in France, it has been neglected if not attacked by those who would see it as endangering the unity of the country.

We are not so presumptuous as to consider France the only country that has overlooked its human rights obligations. At the same time the regional language legislation was proposed in France, the U.S. finally endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and President Obama met with Native American representatives in an effort to redress the wrongs our own country had committed over the centuries.

We hope that in the New Year the United States will make a sincere effort to act on its ideals to support the First Nations who contribute so much to our country, and we now have reason to believe similar efforts will be conducted in France to give regional languages the place they deserve. France, an avowed bastion of liberties, cannot afford to do less for its own citizens than its European neighbors or the United States, without risking losing credibility on the international stage when it comes to human rights.

Respectfully,

David Brûlé, President of the U.S. ICDBL - Chairman, World Language Department, Amherst Regional Schools, Millers Falls, Massachusetts  
Dr. Lois Kuter, Secretary of the U.S. ICDBL, and Editor of Bro Nevez, Ambler, Pennsylvania

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*I have not translated the response we received. It is very short and boils down to the idea that our letter was received and that the President has taken note of our thoughts. Since I tend not to use Ms. or Mrs. (or Dr.) or any other title in front of my name it was naturally assumed that I was a "monsieur" since Lois is not a name well known in France.*

*Le Chef de Cabinet  
du Président de la République*

Monsieur Lois KUTER  
U.S. ICDBL  
605 Montgomery Road  
AMBLER, PA 19002  
ETATS-UNIS D'AMERIQUE

Cher Monsieur,

Votre lettre est bien parvenue au Président de la République française et il m'a été confié le soin de vous répondre.

Soyez assuré qu'il a été pris connaissance avec attention de votre démarche et de vos réflexions.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Cher Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

Guillaume LAMBERT



## Diwan – A Quick Introduction

The following information was gleaned (and translated from the French) from the Diwan website: [www.diwanbreizh.org](http://www.diwanbreizh.org). See the section called “Présentation” on the side-bar under Diwan Breizh for much more information. My apologies in advance for any mistranslation of concepts. – Lois Kuter

### *Some statistics*

341 employees (teachers, trainees, professors, administrative staff, directors and teacher trainers)  
120 non-teaching employees in the pre/primary schools and secondary schools.  
41 pre & primary schools  
6 middle schools and 1 high school  
3,361 students school in 2010-2011.

### *Diwan's pedagogical project*

Diwan is a movement by parents and teachers making the choice to bring a culture to life through schooling with the principal base of that culture being the Breton language – a modern tool for thought, expression and communication.

Until the creation of Diwan there was no possible choice for this since schools supported the advance of a single culture, the French culture through only one means – the French language.

Diwan schooling, from pre-school up to the university, is a concrete way to dynamically retake and retool the Breton culture and its foremost element, the Breton language, as part of a cultural development that spans life well beyond the walls of a school.

Diwan views itself as part of a modern evolution for our culture and civilization, taking into account the reality of an environment dominated by the French language and culture, in a process of mutual enrichment.

Diwan schools are open to all families – Breton speaking or not – who are moved by the principles cited above, no matter what origin, race, language or religion they may have.

### *Immersion: a strategy for bilingualism*

The Diwan system of teaching is not based on equal scheduling of two languages, the dominant language and the minority language. Diwan has the objective of a real bilingualism where there is mastery of both languages. With French being totally dominant in every

part of society – in public life, in the media, on radio and television, and in most family life – school must offer a 100% linguistic immersion in Breton from the earliest age. Even so, the immersion in Breton represents just 25 to 30% of the waking life of a child in a French speaking family. This is relatively little time. It's between the ages of 3 and 4 that the capacity to learn languages is the strongest. Through games, songs, and activities, the young child effortlessly learns Breton, no matter what maternal language they have.

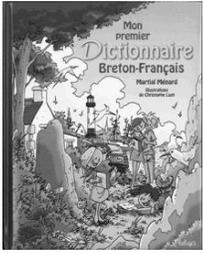
In Diwan a large majority of parents do not speak Breton, but nevertheless, students become perfectly bilingual by the end of the primary school. In Diwan, pre schools function entirely in Breton. Fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic are taught in Breton. This knowledge is then transposed in French without additional effort. Learning to read is learning to read, no matter what language is used. Everything in the life of the school is done in Breton so that Breton is not just the language of the class, but a language for social life.

In middle school as in high school, Breton is the language of social life and for teaching most subjects. Use of English to teach some subjects completes this effective method of linguistic learning. This teaching system specific to Diwan makes it the only school system using the Breton language for all levels of transmission in academic and social life of schools. This is a vital condition to give Breton the best chances to remain a living and creative language, useful in Bretons' future, rather than just a badge of identity that one claims without mastering or practicing the language.

### **Skol Diwan Landerne**

Since 1992 when I was invited to become its “godmother” the U.S. Branch of the ICDBL has maintained a special relationship with Skol Diwan Landerne, the Diwan pre and primary school in Landerneau. From time to time we have been able to send a bit of monetary support for special projects and when in Brittany, U.S. ICDBL members have visited to school to show our interest in its progress.

All Diwan schools rely on the direct involvement of parents and of support committees who come up with creative ways to raise funds to improve the school. For the 13<sup>th</sup> year Skol Diwan Landerne will organize a “Foire Bio” – a fair featuring natural products, from wine and honey to vegetables and cosmetics. This will be held March 19 & 20 in Landerneau and has attracted some 4,000 visitors each year to purchase products as well as learn from presentations about healthy foods and the benefits of supporting local producers of natural products.



## **New Breton-French Dictionary for Children** *Mon premier Dictionnaire Breton-Français*, by Martial Ménard. Coop Breizh.

Dictionaries for the Breton language have existed for more than 500 years – with the Catholicon, a trilingual Breton-Latin-French dictionary dating to 1494. And there are many published today which are focused on particular vocabularies, or languages (Breton-French, Corsican-Breton, etc.). This new dictionary is the first designed specifically for children. It is the work of Martial Ménard, former director of An Here, a publishing house specializing in Breton language books for children, and co-director with Jean-Yves Lagadeg for the first Breton-Breton dictionary published in 1995 (a ground-breaking dictionary with over 10,000 entries). Christophe Lazé partners with Menard as the artist for this new children's dictionary. The dictionary includes over 1,200 Breton words which provide a translation in French as well as a sentence to show how the word is used. Some 1,500 illustrations make the dictionary appealing to children (and adults).

### **Learning A Little Breton, Little-by-Little** *Bemdez, ur frazenn ouzhpenn*

Ofis ar Brezhoneg offers a number of resources and one of these is a little booklet designed so that you can learn a new phrase each day. This is published in a Breton to French version, but also Breton to English: *Bemdez, ur frazenn ouzhpenn / Each day, a new Breton sentence*. Organized by months, you can learn a new phrase each day as you sit at the breakfast table, or as you commute to work, or you can open this little pocket-sized pamphlet randomly and try something out.

The phrases are short, and relate to everyday communication and simple conversation. As the months progress, the phrases get a bit longer, but never so complex that you can't master one each day. This is not a phrase book like those a tourist might carry which is organized so you can find vocabulary and phrases on a particular topic, but a fun way to learn just some basic words and phrases in Breton ... and one of the rare resources for English speakers.

This little booklet can be downloaded from the Ofis ar Brezhoneg website for free. Find it in the list of publications using the following link: [www.ofis-bzh.org/fr/actualite/publications](http://www.ofis-bzh.org/fr/actualite/publications)

Here are the phrases for the first ten days of March:

1. Kompren a rit? / Do you understand?
2. Petra a dalvez? / What does it mean?

3. N'ouzon ket, tamm ebet / I haven't got any idea.
4. Gallout a rez adlavaret, mar plij? / Would you repeat please?
5. Petra a lavarit? / What are you saying?
6. Petra 'peus c'hoant da gaout? / What do you want to have?
7. Marteze ! / Maybe !
8. A c'hall bezañ ! / Why not?
9. Posupl eo. / It's possible.
10. N'ouzon ket. / I don't know.

### **Learning A Little More Breton – by Taking Classes**

Ofis ar Brezhoneg also posts a guide to Breton classes for adult learners on its website: [www.ofis-bzh.org](http://www.ofis-bzh.org). This is organized by organizations and by regions within Brittany (with maps to help you locate locations) and the list also includes courses available outside of Brittany (sadly lacking news of anything for Breton learners in the U.S. except for a contact to Matthieu Boyd at Harvard University). The information gives websites to explore for more detailed information as well as contact information for those who want to sign up or ask questions of an individual. If you will be traveling to Brittany and want to take a class – long or short term - this is a great resource that you can consult on line or print out for future reference.

### **Breton from the Source – “Seekers of Memories”**

Learning Breton “by the book” in a class setting can result in knowledge of a rather lifeless standard version of Breton. Certainly any of us who have studied a foreign language know how limited our conversational skills can be when we travel and how the Spanish our high school teacher taught sounds nothing like that we hear in Puerto Rico or Andalusia. To help learners master Breton as a living language, André Le Gac came up with a project six years ago to put students (young and older) in contact with native speakers. Called “Quêteurs de mémoire,” this project is supported financially by the General Council of Finistère. Breton learners individually or as a group are linked with native speakers to research a specific topic – such as farming practices, maritime knots, marriage customs, or the Resistance Movement in the Quimper area, to name just a few this past year. The “seekers” and “passers” of knowledge must meet at least three times. In 2009-2011 some 1,500 Bretons participated (1,200 of the school children) with over 50 different projects. During the past six years one can only imagine the great conversations and wealth of knowledge passed and received by those involved.

## Prizioù 2011 – Prizes for creations in the Breton language

This January 2011 the television station France 3 Bretagne held its 14<sup>th</sup> ceremony/celebration to award prizes in a number of categories to recognize creative work in the Breton language.

The following are the winners and nominees in the six categories of prizes.



### Levr : Priz ar gwellañ levr a faltazi / Prize for the best fiction book in Breton

The Winner: Riwal Huon for the book *Ar marc'h glas* (Al Liamm)

Other Nominees: Jakez-Erwan Mouton for *Ar gitar tredan* (An Alarc'h) and Mich Beyer for *Kan ar mein* (An Alarc'h)



### Yaouank : Priz ar gwellañ intrudu evit ar yaouankiz / Prize for the best initiative for youth

The Winner: the book and DVD *Ar roué Marc'h* produced by TES (Ti Embann ar Skolioù Brezhoneg)

Other Nominees: Gouren Federation for its Breton wrestling classes for children and Keit Vimp Beo for the DVD *Ur wech e oa*.



### Pladennoù: Priz ar gwellañ pladenn vrezhonek / Prize for the best recording of song in Breton

The Winner: Oktopus Kafe for its CD *Ar vro didu*

Other Nominees: Alambig Electirk for *Disadorn noz fever*, and Roy Eales for *Just in Case*.



### Kweled : Priz ar gwellañ oberenn / Prize for the best audiovisual work

The Winner: The film *Youenn Gwernig* by Jean-Charles Huitorel (co-produced by Algal Production & France Télévisions)

Other Nominees: *Istoriou Breizh* by Luc David (co-produced by Pois Chiche Film & France Télévisions), and *Pennou Pentur* by Mikael Baudu (co-produced by Gwegolo filmoù, TV Rennes & Tébéo-Ty tele)



### Spered ar yezh: Priz ar gwellañ intrudu da wellaat implij ar yezh / Prize for the best initiative to improve the quality of the language

The Winner: Jean Claude Le Ruyet for his doctorate thesis: *Parole, liaison et norme. Étude présentée dans le cadre d'un corpus de quatre règles de prononciation pour le breton des écoles*.

Other Nominees : Ronan Koadig for his book *Brezhoneg Goueloù* (An Alarc'h) on the Breton spoken in the Goueloù area, and Ti ar Vro Lesneven for its song book *Kanit 'ta tudou!*



### Brezhoneger ar bloaz / Breton Speaker of the Year

The Winner: Teatr Piba for its creation *Eden Boyabes* (see below for more).

Other Nominees: *Gouel broadel ar brezhoneg*, the national festival of the Breton language relaunched in May 2010, and Emgleo Breiz for the first digitized books in Breton *Buhez Lola P.* and *Trésor du breton parlé*.

### A little more about Teatr Piba

Teatr Piba describes itself on its website (in Breton or French) <http://teatrpiba.com> as a professional company created in 2009 and based in Quimper. Its creation was the logical end to meetings and collaborations of different actors and actresses, musicians, and directors, who had the Breton language in common. Their crossed paths and shared experience led to a common desire to create a theater in Breton that was contemporary and alive.

Breton language theater has a long history and continues to grow with the performance of older works and the creation a many new plays in Breton. Teatr Piba is part of a federation of theater groups who perform in the Breton language (although not exclusively in Breton!) called C'hoariva teatr brezhonek. This was founded in 2005 to support Breton language productions by professional and amateur theater groups as well as in schools. They collaborate to provide training for actors and technicians, to support those organizing theater productions, and to edit theatrical works for youth and all audiences.

And the website for this federation ([www.teatr-brezhonek.org](http://www.teatr-brezhonek.org)) describes its mission and provides practical information about how to find performances of Breton language theater.

The site also provides links to the theater groups who are part of this federation:

Ar Vro Bagan  
Bugale San-Frañsez Lesneven  
Bugale Skolaj Jakez Riou  
Bugale Skolaj Plijidi  
Bugaleaj Kerne  
C'hoari Las  
C'hoarivari  
Elektrake  
Hemon Prod  
La Obra  
Mat Ar Jeu  
Rebeldia  
Strollad Forst Fouen  
Strollad Fubudenn  
Strollad Kallag  
Strollad Landi  
Strollad Lesneven  
Strollad Plon8  
Strollad Plougin  
Strollad Tro-Didro  
Teatr Brezhoneg War Raok  
Teatr Penn ar Bed  
Teatr Piba

## Musical Instruments of Brittany: Biniou & Bombard

Lois Kuter

*The following description is a modified version of material found on the U.S. ICDBL website in a guide to Breton music I prepared quite a few years ago (and have tried to update from time to time with new references for recordings and publications). It seemed worth reprinting this since I was asked by a Bro Nevez reader who had read the article about festoù noz in Brittany to explain what a biniou and bombard were. Those of us with a passion for bagpipes who have listened to these instruments for many years forget that they are quite mysterious to most Americans. So here is a quick introduction.*



The *biniou koz* ("old bagpipe" in Breton) or *biniou bihan* ("little bagpipe") is traditionally played in pair with the *bombard* (see below). The two players are referred to as *sonerion* (in Breton) or *sonneurs de*

*couple* (in French). The biniou (as it is usually called without the adjectives *bihan* or *koz*) is a mouth-blown bagpipe with one drone. It is high-pitched (an octave above the Scottish Highland bagpipes), with a range of ten notes. Its tuning has varied from one area of Brittany to the next (it can be found in the keys of G#, A, B, or C), and Bretons continue to research the history and diverse use of this instrument. The bombard (*bombarde*, in French) has a range of two octaves with its lower range pitched an octave below the biniou. The biniou provides a continuous sound due to the steady supply of air from the bag to both the drone and chanter. The chanter (the pipe used to finger the notes) is only 5-1/2 inches long with 7 finger holes; the single drone is approximately 14 inches long.

The biniou and bombard pair is found throughout Brittany today and performed by some 400 pairs. It has been traditionally found in the southwestern and south central part of Brittany where its practice remains strong. The style of paired playing found today has been well documented as far back as the turn of the 19th century, although there are references and visual depictions indicating that these two instruments might have been played in pair at least as far back as the 16th century in Brittany. In contrast to singers, *sonneurs* in past centuries have been professional musicians (at least part-time) who were hired for weddings, fairs and other public events. Except for very rare exceptions, biniou and bombard pairs have been men.



The *bombard* is a member of the oboe or shawm family. Describing it as an oboe, however, is misleading since it has a very powerful sound, more closely resembling a trumpet. The bombard is played as oboes are played with the double reed placed between one's lips; the second octave (unison with the range of the biniou) is achieved with lip pressure. In contrast to the continuous sound of the bagpipe, the *bombard* is capable of staccato which makes it particularly effective in pair with the biniou. This is an instrument that has been in constant evolution with many different keys developed as well as milder versions (*lombarde*, *piston*) developed for use in ensembles.

Today, both the biniou and bombarde are played in combination with an unlimited number of instruments (saxophone, fiddle, flutes, electric guitar, percussion from all over the world ... ) or with voice in fest-noz bands, rock groups and ensembles of all styles - in arrangements of traditional Breton dance tunes and airs or for new compositions.

## Some Reading

See the « Panorama » section of the Dastum website : [www.dastum.net](http://www.dastum.net) for a history of the bombard and biniou including musical examples. Dastum also produces an excellent magazine, *Musique Bretonne*.

Musique Bretonne—Histoire des sonneurs de tradition. (Douarnenez: Le Chasse-Marée/Ar Men). 1996. 512 pages. A beautifully illustrated and documented history of bagpipe, bombardes, the veuze and other instruments in Brittany.

La Musique bretonne, Roland Becker & Laure Le Gurun. (Spezet: Coop Breizh) 1994. 120 pages. Good single source of background information on Breton music--especially good for piping and instrumental traditions.

"Le couple biniou-bombarde: aux origines d'une grande tradition" Laurent Bigot. Ar Men 59 (May 1994):pages 26-39. & "Le couple biniou-bombarde: Apogée, décadence et renouveau" Laurent Bigot. Ar Men 61 (August 1994):pages 10-29  
Excellent articles with beautiful photographs and illustrations about the history of the biniou and bombard in Brittany.

Toniou Breizh-Izel--Folk Music of West Brittany, Polig Monjarret. (Bodadeg ar Sonerion) 1984. 675 pages. 2,200 dances and melodies collected from biniou and bombarde players between 1941 and 1954 in Lower Brittany; introductory section describes structure of music and collection activity.

Toniou Breizh-Izel 2, Polig Monjarret (Bodadeg ar Sonerion & Dastum). 2003. 700 pp.  
Another 2,000 tunes collected in the 1940s and 50s.

### Just a few more recent recordings

Jean Baron & Christian Anneix.  
Hentad. Keltia Musique KMCD 140. 2003.  
Retrospective of long career of this pair including lots of great photos.

Yves Berthou & Patrick Molard.  
War Roudoù Leon Braz. Dastum – Tradition vivante de Bretagne 17. DAS 144. 2002. Homage to the famous piper Leon Braz, with extensive notes.

Jorj Bothua, Pascal Guingo, Philippe Quillay, Pascal Marsault. Plijadur. Assoc. Plijadur CD JB 10508/1  
Bombard paired with biniou and with biniou braz (Scottish style bagpipes) and in the very unusual combination of bombard, biniou kozh and biniou braz, performed by champions of Breton piping competition.

Jean-Elie Le Goff, Jacky Le Hetet, Daniel Philippe, Gwendal Berthou, André Thomas.  
An Toull Karr. Coop Breizh CD 947. 2005. Dances and melodies featuring the Plinn area.

Fabrice Lothode & Chim Cadoudal.  
Ça va durer comme ça pendant longtemps? Demat Deoch. 2005. Paried biniou braz and biniou koz with bombarde focused on Vannetais repertoire..

Gildas Moal & René Chaplain.  
Fin 'Zun. Coop Breizh CD 938 – DB10. 2003.

Daniel Philippe & Daniel Le Féon  
C'hwezher ur vro / Le soufflé d'un terroir. Dastum Bro Dreger DBD 01. 2004. Tregor region featured in well documented CD.

Serge Riou and Hervé Irvoas.  
Gant ar vombarde hag ar biniou. Coop Breizh CD 902. 2000.



## **Heard of, but not heard – Notes on 33 new CDs from Brittany**

The following information has been compiled from notes and reviews from the following: *Ar Men* 179 (Nov.-Dec. 2010) & 180 (Jan-Feb. 2011) / *Armor* 491 (Dec. 2010) & 492 (Jan. 2011) / *Bremañ* 350 (kerzu/Dec. 2010) & 351 (genver/Jan. 2011) / *Musique Bretonne* 223 (Nov.-Dec. 2010) & 224 (Jan.-Feb. 2011) and the websites Tamm Kreiz ([www.tamm-kreiz.com](http://www.tamm-kreiz.com)) & Coop Breizh ([www.coop-breizh.fr](http://www.coop-breizh.fr))

**Gweltaz Adeux. Ehan.** Coop Breizh  
Singer and guitarist for the group EV, Gweltaz Adeux teams here with Nico Guérin on bass guitar and Christophe "Tof" Rossini on drums in a CD with 11 new songs in Breton. Rock and roll in the Breton language is not new, but always refreshing and proof that Breton is a language with a wide range of expressive possibilities. Check the website [www.gweltaz-adeux.com](http://www.gweltaz-adeux.com) to hear and see more.

**Alambig Elektrik. Disadorn 'noz fever.** L'Apprentis Producteur APP 002.  
First CD for a group which includes Roland Conq (guitar), Gaël Runigo (accordion), Youenn Le Cam (bugle and trumpet), and Lors Landat (song). A mix of traditional and newer compositions are found, featuring dance but also some melodic creations. This is an unusual mix of instruments and voice where the use of electronic sound is very effectively incorporated.

**Aodan. Origin.** Kerne Proudctions. Alkémai Production, Alk 01  
Described as an encounter of Tolkien with the Goadee Sisters, this group has a dramatic presentation of music, text, instruments and costume in its performance. Singers Fañch Oger and Stéphanie Devau lead dance with trips from Brittany to the orient and eastern Europe. Shane Lestideau, Jonathan Dour, and Matjilde Churel provide violin, Pierre-Yves Kermorvant is on bass, and percussion is provided by Benoît Guillemot. ([www.aodan.net](http://www.aodan.net))

**Bagad Kemper. Live au Cornouaille.** Keltia Musique KMCD 520  
This is a 2009 performance by the Bagad Kemper at the Festival de Cornouaille where they celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The performance includes not only this top bagad but a host of guests who have performed with them – including Marthe Vassallo, Erwan Volant, Gilles Le Bigot, and Bernard le Dréau. This performance is a “best of” in drawing on some highlights of their creative past.

**Bagad de Lann-Bihoué. L’essentiel.** Wagram 3201372.  
This 3-CD anthology presents the music of this Navy bagad during the last ten years when it shifted from a band of conscripted recruits to a more stable membership. The band now has a certain professionalism, but its varied musicians (including women!) still bring a mix of talents and repertoires from all over Brittany.

**François Cadic. Chansons populaires de Bretagne publiées dans La Paroisse Bretonne de Paris (1899-1929).** Patrimoine Orale de Bretagne. Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Dastum & Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique. 626 pages & CD.  
This is a book accompanied by a CD presenting the collection work done by François Cadic (1884-1929) – one of many priests of Brittany and emigration communities of Bretons who promoted traditional song, stories, and the Breton language. This book includes songs published in La Paroisse Bretonne de Paris between 1899 and 1929 with translations, musical notation, and commentary by Cadic. The accompanying 74-minute CD includes a performance of 32 songs collected from traditional singers.

**Louis Capart. Premières Chansons – l’Intégrale.**  
This is a two-CD set with 41 songs with all the texts (French) in the jacket notes to celebrate the work of the singer-song writer Louis Capart.

**Chansons maritimes, à l’écoute des grands chanteurs de tradition.** EMDT – Arexcpo en Bretagne & FRCPM-Bretagne. AVPL 64

This CD is composed of recordings spanning some seventy years of maritime ballads and work songs of the coasts of western France, Canada and the Antilles. A collection of “great singers” must by necessity also include shanty man Stan Hugill for some English language song. This recording echoes presentations made at a colloquium held in 1998 in Aiguillon-sur-Mer on maritime song.

**Frères Cornic. Sonerezh Breizh.** Kerjava.  
This is the first CD by this bombard-biniou pair of brothers François (bombard) and Julien (biniou koz) Cornic who perform at festivals and for dancing. This CD includes traditional marches and dances (gavottes, pach-pi, hanter-dro, kas a-barh, laridés) in a straightforward presentation that evokes the festive nature of public performance at Breton events. For more information: <http://frerescornic.free.fr>.

**Jean Cras. Les melodies avec orchestre.** Timpani 1c1160  
Including previously unrecorded or selections recorded some 20 years ago, this performance is by the Orchestre de Bretagne with Claude Schnitzler conducting. The CD includes texts by a variety of poets and writers set to music by Jean Cras (1879-1932) and performed by soprano Ingrid Perruche, tenor Philippe Do, and baritone Lionel Peintre with the full orchestra or a string quartet.

**Dastum. Rennes en Chansons.** Société et tradition orale en Bretagne, Vol. 2.  
This 73-minute CD has 31 selections of songs from and about the city of Rennes. As one might expect this means a variety of styles and themes are found. Traditional songs from the Dastum archives are presented by singers Albert Poulain, Charles Quimbert, Bertran Ôbrée, and Jean Baron .... to name a few. The CD also includes songs of a “pop” tradition from different epochs of city life of Rennes. Ample CD notes (96 pages) introduce this selection of songs from over 200 candidates for inclusion and give text and context to enhance the discovery of this city’s history and musical life. The CD is accompanied by an exhibit at the Musée de Bretagne in Rennes. For more information: [www.Rennes-en-chansons.fr](http://www.Rennes-en-chansons.fr).

**Roy Eales and his Friends. Just in Case.** Al Levrig/Justi-in-case.com  
Roy Eales is a journalist and poet who has lived in the Tregor area of Brittany for 25 years. This CD includes poems in English, Welsh, French, Breton and German set to music and performed with the assistance of some notable Breton musicians, singers and writers. Texts are read by Eales as well as Marthe Vassallo, Fañch Peru, Julie Murphy, Bernez Tangi, Nanda Troadeg, and Jean-Michel, Kemo and Matilda Veillon (to name some). Musical accompaniment includes guitar, sax,

accordion, bass fiddle, flutes and trumpet by a very talented line-up of Eales' friends.

**Fest-noz pour les nuls.** Keltia Musique KMCD 522. This CD follows *Musique bretonne pour les nuls*, and *La musique celtique pour les nuls*, with the intention of presenting the fest noz and its music and dances to those starting from scratch in learning about these. A booklet describes the traditional fest-noz and its modern version, and describes basic dance steps which are learned only in viewing the DVD where some twenty are presented clearly by Bretons who have taught dancing. Music is weighted towards fest noz bands but also includes a bit of traditional song. This CD is a practical first step for those unfamiliar with Breton dance who might want to go to their first fest noz.

**Marcel Guilloux. *Marsel Gwilhouz, ur skouarn da selou.*** DVD. Assoc. Connaissance et sauvegarde du patrimoine. This 52 minute DVD by Nicole and Michel Sohier made its debut as part of the celebration of Marcel's Guilloux's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. This film presents this singer and storyteller who has been so influential for younger generations of singers mastering the Breton language gwerz and song for dancing. The film has two versions – the first entirely in Breton and a second copy subtitled in French.

**Hamon-Martin Quintet. *Du silence et du temps.*** Coop Breizh CD 1038. This is the fourth recording by this group of Gallo musicians well known for their welcome presence at festoù-noz. Rooted in traditional song and dance, the group also includes a number of compositions in its performance with dances predominating - ronds, ridées, and pile menu ... The group includes Mathieu Hamon for song, Janick Martin on accordion, Erwan Hamon with flute and bombard, Erwan Volant on bass, and Ronan Pellen on cittern (a guitar-like instrument).

**Dav Hans. *Pollution Mentale.*** This rock band features singer Dav Hans surrounded by six musicians with an interesting selection of themes. Song titles include: "Pollution mentale" (the title track), "Restez Breton," "Sarkozy va," "Le Tango du fiasco," and "C comme chomage," among others with a less political tinge.

**Hiks. *Fig. 2.*** Aztec Musique CM 2280 There's an electronic and strong electric surge in this music for Breton dance with an emphasis on rhythm – not just for Breton dance but for compositions with other roots. The melodic line is carried by Pierre Droual (fiddle), Gaël Lefevre (bombard), Lors Landat (vocals) and Gervan Leray (harmonica) who are joined by Goual Belz (bass guitar), Yann Le Gall (electric guitar), Yann

Harscoat (programming) and Ronan Fouquet (sound mixing).

**Paul Huellou. *Un Eostad.*** Goasco Music 1001/1 This is a re-edition on CD of an LP recording called *Kanaouennoù Breizh Izel* (Velia 2230056) which came out in 1978. The CD includes three songs by Paul Huellou- "Ar Skrilhed," "Nevez Amzer," "Lokarn" – as well as two by Alice Lavanant (1911-2001) from the Tregor, and four songs written by Filomena Cadoret, a singer well known in the fisel country in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Added are two traditional songs – "Ar gwezenn avaloù" and "Ar bloavezh mat." While the warm voice of Paul Huellou would be enough on its own to enjoy these Breton language songs, you'll find Paul's son Pol Huellou on flute and whistle, Paddy Keenan on uilleann pipes, Brendan Fahy on guitar, Pascal Segard on fiddle, and Jean-Claude Normant on piano. The accompaniment is simple and testifies to the strong links between Huellou (father and son) with Irish musical friends. CD notes give a good presentation of Paul Huellou and his long engagement in Breton language song.

**Kalon ur vamm – *Berceuses de Bretagne.*** Coop Breizh CD 1031 This is a double CD of Breton lullabies which includes the first CD of this name by Sophie Le Hunsec (1998). In the second CD you hear two other great voices of Brittany: Véronique Boujot and Bleunwenn Mevel. They are accompanied nicely by the string quartet Arz Nevez as well as with harp of Soazig Kermabon, guitar by Yves Ribis, and flutes by Pascal Beven.

**Ronan Le Dissez, Stéphane Foll and Kristen Bodros. *Dilezet 'meus ma dousig evit mont da soniñ.*** Self-produced DB 11 10-1. Bombard player Ronan Le Dissez plays in pair with biniou players Stéphane Foll and Kristen Bodros – in one case uniting all three. They are joined at times by fiddler (and arranger) Pierre Stéphan, bass fiddle player Delphine Quenderff and percussionist Gaëtan Samson. The repertoire spans both Upper and Lower Brittany.

**Nolwenn Le Roy. *Bretonne.*** Mercury (Universal). Nolwenn Le Roy is a pop star in France who rose to fame through the ranks of the Star Academy talent show. She was born in 1982 in St. Renan (Finistère) and spent her early childhood in Brittany before moving around with family job changes. On this new album she looks to her Breton roots and some fond memories with an interesting mix of 14 songs in French and in Breton. Included are some that every Breton knows – "La jument de Michao" and "Tri Martolod" which have been made famous by Tri Yann and Alan Stivell. Also included is a text by poet Anjela Duval, "Karantez Vro" and the Breton national anthem "Bro Gozh Va Zadou." In just 5 weeks over 200,000 copies of this CD sold –

30,000 on the first day of its release in December. While some Bretons feel this singer (whose grasp of Breton is limited) is claiming her Breton roots just to make money, others have embraced her expression of a sincere desire to honor her Breton identity and promote the Breton language. There is nothing especially new in her interpretations of Breton songs, but Nolwenn Le Roy has a beautiful voice. With several other popular CDs in French, Nolwenn Le Roy has no need to sing in Breton to sell CDs or make it to the top of the French hit-parade. You can judge her music for yourself by checking out [www.nolwenn.org](http://www.nolwenn.org).

**Mazad Café. Mazad Café.** Innacor.

This is a trio made up of Yannick Jory on saxophones, Alan Madec on button accordion, and Yves-Marie Berthou on various percussion. The music is rooted in traditional sounds but jazzy in its performance as the trio travels from Brittany to the Balkans, Africa and India.

**Frères Morvan. Les Frères Morvan.** DVD. Plan Large Production, VO Productions, France-Télévisions.

Two DVDs by Jérémy Véron capture the Morvan Brothers – famous *kan ha diskan* singers of Brittany, who are not rock stars but farmers who sing to pass along a tradition they love. The first CD, *Frères de chant*, is 52 minutes and the second *E skeud kanañ* (in Breton) is 26 minutes. This is a nice presentation of these famous yet modest singers, the land on which they live and farm, and their thoughts on Breton culture and music.

**Pat O'May. In Live We Trust.** Keltia Musique KMCD 525.

O'May is a rock guitarist and singer who has long resided in Brittany and been part of the Breton music scene. He incorporates bombards and bagpipes as well as brass, sax and percussion with electric guitar. This is a live performance on CD and DVD that captures will the ambiance of his work.

**L'Oz Noz.** L'Oz Production.

This two-CD set includes eight groups with nineteen artists who have recorded with L'Oz Productions. One CD compiles selections from some of these recordings and the second CD includes previously unreleased recordings. A DVD captures a performance of October 31, 2008 for France 3. Groups and artists include: Didier Squiban, Yann Raoul, Manu Lann Huel, Melaine Favennec, Kohann, Bagad Men ha Tan and Doudou N'daye Rose, Arvest, and Skilda.

**Jacques Pellen, Karim Zaid, Etienne Callac.**

**Offshore.** Botu Productions / Coop Breizh.

Electric and acoustic guitarist Jacques Pellen teams with bass player Etienne Callac and Algerian percussionist Karim Zaid for a Celtic-jazz-rock

performance with a North African swing. Music is composed by the three musicians and also includes a composition by Riccardo del Fra and two by Pellen with the late harpist Kristen Nogues, to whom the CD is dedicated.

**Jacques Perkaisne. Dédale.**

Perkaisne is a singer-songwriter accompanied here with piano, bass and percussion. Songs are in French on a range of themes and from a variety of sources – from Baudelaire to La Fontaine – relating to life in general and to Brittany in particular in a few cases.

**Jakez Pincet. Art du solo cornemuse, Vol. II (1979-1981).** Paker Prod 003

This is the second CD by Jakez Pincet, a pioneer in the promotion of Scottish style piping in Brittany and founder of the first Breton “pipe band,” An Ere. This volume includes primarily piobaireachd, but also marches, strathspeys and reels as well as a Breton melody. Recorded in 1979 to 1981, studio engineering has improved the sound quality on this 2d recording of solo work.

**Siam. L'Amour à Trois.** L'Oz Production. L'OZ 65.

This CD pairs Bruno Leroux (song and guitar) with Fanny Labiau (song and bandoneon – a type of accordion popular in South America) in a style which is part rock and part French “chanson.” Texts speak on the state of modern society and the need for social change and political reform.

**Didier Squiban and Sheer K. Mesk.** Last Exit Records, Mesk 01.

Jazz and concert pianist Didier Squiban partnered for a number of CDs with singer Yann Fañch Kemener, and he has written symphonic works. Here he works with Sheer K, a rock group from Brest, with vocals by Stéphanie, trumpet by Flow, electronic programming by Arturopop, guitar by Seb, and percussion from Vince. The performance has a classical and jazzy sound with Celtic themes.

**Tri Yann. Rummadou / Générations.** Marcelle Productions.

Tri Yann is one of the best known and longest-going folk-rock bands of Brittany. This newest album is one of a number they have done with a theme and with texts that present the history of Brittany. In this case you follow a family through 450 years of Breton history. Tri Yann has an unmistakable style and this CD includes a mix of the medieval sound of crumhorns with 60s pop and an electric zing. In performance they are spectacular and their music is always interesting.

**Trouz an Noz. Chome Taï.** Coop Briezh.

First CD by this punk-rock group with songs in Breton, French, and also Gallo. With its song texts (and on its

website) the group attacks fascism, racism, religion, France's government, and a number of other issues. Check out their website to get a listen and look at this outspoken band: [www.tan.lautre.net](http://www.tan.lautre.net)

**Ysa. *Le Couleur du Temps*.** Self-produced. First Cd released this February, this CD features harpist Ysa with songs – in English, French and Breton - and melodies from Brittany as well as other countries. She is accompanied by guitar and accordion. To sample this new CD find it on the Coop Breizh website: [www.Coop-breizh.fr](http://www.Coop-breizh.fr)



## Breton Explorers and World Travelers

The following is the Foreword by Bernard Le Nail to his *Explorateurs et grand voyageurs bretons* (Editions Jean-Paul Gisserot. 1998). While written over twenty years ago this serves as a reminder that Bretons have always been curious about the world around them, near and far, and have been active in its exploration. This essay also serves as a good introduction to the short review of Edward Duyker's biography of Marion Dufresne, an early explorer of Pacific islands and Australia. My apologies for any miss-translation of Bernard Le Nail's eloquent call for a better knowledge of Breton history and the role of Bretons in world travel. – Lois Kuter

### *Avant-Propos*

Although everyone knows that one meets Bretons pretty much everywhere around the world, and that Bretons were great travelers in past centuries, the considerable role they have played in exploration of our planet during the past five centuries remains greatly under-estimated. Of course, the name of Jacques Cartier from Saint Malo, the "discoverer of Canada," is known by all, and there are many people who have also heard of Yves de Kerguelen or Auguste Pavie. But, hundreds of other Bretons who have sometimes accomplished surprising feats and who have contributed in a notable way to the discovery of other lands, remain forgotten.

In most works published up until now which focus on discovery of new lands - whether in French, English, or other languages – there is practically no recognition of Bretons leading these enterprises, with the exception of the voyages of Jacques Cartier. That is a serious injustice to repair. The course of history at the beginning of the period for great discoveries was detrimental for Bretons in that it coincided with Brittany's loss of independence and its attachment to a continental State [France] which itself was little interested in maritime adventure. The terrible Breton defeat at Saint-Aubin-du-Cormier on July 28, 1488, and

the death of the last sovereign duke of Brittany on the following September 9 preceded the "discovery" of America by Christopher Columbus by just four years. During this crucial period Brittany suddenly found itself stripped of sovereignty and thus its political power which in and of itself was a key element needed to encourage Breton sailors to organize and exploit discoveries – as was done by Spain and Portugal. At the beginning of the era of great discovery Brittany had been in no less a favorable position [than Spain or Portugal]; its population was comparable to that of Portugal (1 million inhabitants versus 1.4 million in Portugal) and its navy with 1,800 to 2,000 ships and some 20,000 sailors was notably larger than that of Portugal at this time. The *caravelle*, a new type of ship which would make long ocean voyages possible, had just started to be seen on the Atlantic coasts of Europe, and at the same time as it was found in Portugal it would also multiply rapidly along all of the Breton seacoast. The historian Coonaert wrote that before Brittany had entered into the French orbit Bretons were "kings of the western seas." The works of Breton navigators were considered to be the best in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries According to D.W. Waters, the great English navigator Francis Drake himself used Breton tide tables which were the best and most numerous to be found.

Nevertheless, one century later, Brittany would be largely pushed to the side in this great adventure, and France with her, while the Spanish empire in America extended from Chili to Texas and the Portuguese maritime empire from Brazil to the west coast of Africa and the China sea. The period of great discovery was marked by a great redistribution of Europe: Italy, the region that had been the most far-reaching of Europe in a number of areas at the end of the Middle Ages, would only become engaged late and without real commitment in the far seas adventures. Clouded by their Italian dreams, France didn't know how to take advantage of the extraordinary advantages that came with its possession of Brittany. The big discoveries were made especially by Castile and Portugal, regions that at the beginning of this period were less advanced in technology or on the economic level.

The role of Bretons had thus been discrete but certainly more important than one generally thinks, nevertheless. We don't know if there were any Bretons in the crews of Christopher Columbus but we know, thanks to Florentine Antonio Pigafetta who chronicled Magellan's expedition around the world, that when the five ships of that expedition left the port of Sanlucar de Barrameda on September 20, 1519, among the 265 men of the expedition there were at least two Bretons.

A large number of Bretons evidently took part as soldiers and seamen in the creation of the first French

colonial empire before the Revolution (Nouvelle-France, Acadie, Louisiana, Sant-Domingue, Iles de France and Isles de Bourbon, the Indies, etc.) then in the 19th century in the second French colonial empire (In North Africa, black Africa, Madagascar, Indochina, Oceania ...). They often played a leading role in commercial maritime expeditions: the Company of East and West Indies, voyages in the south seas, etc. And Bretons were leaders in all the military expeditions across the seas, whether it was the siege of Rio de Janeiro by Duguay-Trouin, the expeditions to China or Mexico, etc. Bretons were also part of great scientific expeditions: those of the Academicians to Peru, by La Pérouse and other navigators around the world, etc. In his book *Le Continent austral: hypotheses et découvertes* (Paris, 1893), Painaud reminds us that “almost all the voyages made in the last century by the French to discover the Australian Land were accomplished by Bretons.” We cannot reduce the role of Bretons to a simple execution of political schemes decided upon by the central power in Paris. Numerous Breton voyagers and adventurers also launched themselves into exploratory trips or colonial enterprises without any real official mandate, nor any real assistance from the central government, showing that Bretons had their own true spirit of adventure (likewise found curiously enough with the Welsh, Irish and Scottish) which constitutes a Breton character trait still insufficiently highlighted and too little studied until now.

... There is no lack of original documents to be published – many diaries, journals, and tales of Breton voyages remain unpublished or long out of print. There are a number of Breton travelers and explorers whose extraordinary lives merit a true biography. Their exploits and adventures provide a nearly inexhaustible source for exhibits or films especially.

All these destinies can be a stimulating example for Bretons of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – on an individual or collective level. Brittany was never so shining or prosperous as when it was open wide to the world. It's this vocation that we must fully find again today as exchanges do not cease to expand between every country on the planet. As their predecessors in past centuries, Bretons of tomorrow must tie their rootedness and their identity to a renewed taste for discovery and a gain in a sense of solidarity and fraternity with all the other peoples of our planet.



### A Book on Breton Explorer Marion Dufresne

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

**Edward Duyker**; Translation into French by Maryse Duyker. **Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne – Un**

**Marin Malouin à la Découverte des Mers Australes.** Éditions Les Portes du Large (Rennes), 2010. 352 pages. ISBN 978-2-914612-14-2.

Edward Duyker is an Australian scholar who has written a number of books on French navigators and naturalists who explored the region around Australia. This book was first published by the University of Melbourne Press with the title *An Officer of the Blue: Marc Joseph Marion Dufresne, South Sea Explorer 1724-1772*. This French translation is by Edward Duyker's mother, Maryse Duyker who is originally from Mauritius, a descendant of French seamen of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries who stayed on that island colonized by France.

While it would have been much easier for me to read the original English version of this book about Breton seaman Marion Dufresne, the French translation is not just a translation but includes updates and improvements as well as texts of letters in their original French language. While this is a scholarly work, it is quite engrossing for a non-scholar. Marion Dufresne was a corsair, naval officer, captain of the *Compagnie des Indes*, and explorer – commanding the first French expedition to any part of Australia.

The book follows Dufresne's career and gives a good flavor of what it meant to be a seaman in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this age of instant communication it is hard to appreciate the length of time needed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for information to move, and when one was at sea on a sailing vessel there would be weeks or months spent just waiting for the wind to blow the right direction. Knowledge of tides, weather, and the presence and strength of enemy ships was critical in planning and surviving. The book also gives insight into politics of naval life – nobility bringing rewards in advancements and rivalry between officers. The years away from ones family, the potential of being captured by an enemy ship, the potential for death in a shipwreck in a storm or from diseases like scurvy certainly made the life of a sailor a difficult one. On long voyages of discovery simply keeping enough food and fresh water on board was a challenge. As Bernard Le Nail notes from his research of the many Bretons who set off on long voyages, the desire to travel for adventure and discovery seemed to be enough to offset the dangers and hardships.

This seems to be true of Marion Dufresne in the accounting of his life by Edward Duyker. The element of adventure and glory is certainly found in Dufresne's retrieval of Bonnie Prince Charlie from Scotland after the Battle of Culloden. Marion Dufresne would use the fog to evade enemy English ships and the Prince would be brought safe and sound to the Breton port of Roscoff on October 10, 1746. A large part of Duyker's book is



devoted to Dufresne's trips to the south Pacific to explore unknown coasts of Australia and islands nearby. The search for knowledge in order to better map sketchy coastlines and unknown islands (which could be critical stops in finding water, food and fuel) was often part of a voyage. Dufresne was active at the same period as the better known James Cook who also explored New Zealand, and like Cook, four years later, Dufresne would be killed by native people who felt they needed to protect their land and lives from these odd invaders.



The grizzly fate of Dufresne and his men who were massacred and eaten would have been perfect material for the tabloids of the day, and supported all the stereotypes that would

linger for centuries about savages and head-hunters who mercilessly slaughtered well-meaning explorers. But Duyker succeeds in putting this into a context of the times. Not knowing each other's languages, communication was limited between the strange Europeans never seen before by the "exotic" peoples of the lands they "discovered." While European explorers were welcome for the trade of interesting objects and tools, the arrival of a ship full of half-starving sailors who gathered as much food, fish, or game as they could, and who muddied local streams with their collection of barrel upon barrel of water might not have been particularly welcome. Permission was not asked of the local people to harvest nature's bounty. While Dufresne tried to maintain peaceful relations with the peoples he met it is thought that he and his crew made the mistake of breaking taboos to cut trees to repair their ships' masts. Probably just the most serious of affronts. Duyker does not glorify European explorers and seafarers, noting their role in the slave trade and colonization of lands, and his account of how over 200 Maoris were massacred in revenge after the killing of Dufresne and a fishing party of his men is quite horrifying. Villages were burnt to the ground and any indigenous person that could be found was killed - the worst massacre in New Zealand history.

Besides a gripping narrative, the book is amply footnoted with an index and long bibliography for those who want to learn more. This is just the kind of addition to a growing documentation on Breton exploration that Bernard Le Nail urged in his 1998 preface to his dictionary of Breton explorers. A project which was begun by his publishing company Les Portes du Large before Le Nail's untimely death a little over a year ago, this is indeed an important book for those who want to learn more about the role of Bretons in world travel.

## DEEP INSIDE A BRETON SKULL Marion du Faouët

Jean Pierre Le Mat

The subtle French moralist Jean de la Bruyère vividly described the peasants under the reign of Louis XIV, during the XVIIth century: "Wild animals, male and female, can be seen, scattered through the countryside, black, livid and burnt by the sun. Tied to the land, they dig and stir with an insurmountable obstinacy. They have an articulate voice and, when they rise to their feet, they show a human face; and indeed they are human. They retire at night into dens where they live on black bread, water and roots ..."

At the death of the famous King-sun, in the year 1715, the situation was just the same. The peasants were treated like cattle. They were oppressed by the landlords, terrorized by soldiers, bailiffs, tax officers. In Brittany the landlords did not have the right of *mainmorte*, which is the power of life or death over the peasants. But in France, in numerous places, this right existed. In Brittany and in France, misery was extreme, famine was permanent, epidemics regularly killed neighbors and members of your family.

The Breton peasants arose in 1675. It was the revolt of the Red Bonnets. They rebelled again in 1717-1720. They were joined then by landlords dissatisfied by fiscal pressure, and some of them plotted against France with the king of Spain. The peasants revolt was crushed. Four landlords were beheaded.

The peasants fell silent again. The beggars were countless. They wandered in towns and in the countryside, looking for jobs, bread, warmth.

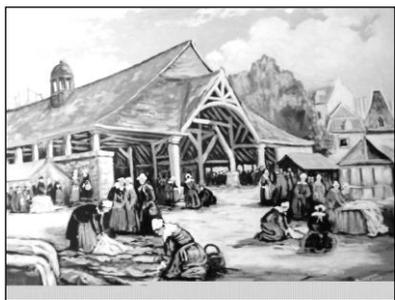
The king prohibited assistance to the beggars. By an order of 1720, "Defends His Majesty... to all individuals of whatever condition they are in the whole kingdom, to give assistance to them in their castles, houses, barns, mills or other buildings, and offer some of their food, on pain of disobedience and imprisonment"

Four years after, a new royal prescription explains that "His Majesty has always seen with extreme pain, since his coming to the Crown, the great number of beggars of either sex who are common in Paris and other cities and places of his kingdom and whose number is increasing every day". He counseled to "all the beggars both men and women, valid and capable of earning their living by their work, take a job to survive".

Numerous beggars did not follow the royal advice and carried on begging. Others created their own job,

becoming professional robbers. This job could be performed collectively. But usually the bands of thieves disappeared rapidly. The gang solidarity failed either through the success of the robberies, everybody getting enough money to be honest after that, or through the failure of the company.

In Brittany, some bands stayed united. From 1748 to 1750, a sizable band acted around Guer and Ploërmel. At the same time, another band of forty miscreants worked around Lorient. From 1751 to 1753, in the parish of Plumeliau, a handful of armed robbers and deserters devastated the countryside. From 1749 to 1761, in the region of Guingamp, Pontivy and Guéméné, Mary Collen and her troop robbed the peasants on highways and at fairs.



Marie Tromel, born in Le Fauouët.

All the descriptions of this young woman were the same. She had grey eyes and red hair. Some said that her hair was thin like silk and also so hard that she could saw the jail bars with it. Her freckled face was pretty and cheerful.

Marie Tromel was born in 1720 in Le Fauouët. With her mother, she lived a wandering life between Le Fauouët and Guemene. When she was twenty years old, rumors spread in the area. She was suspected of robbery, violence, counterfeiting money. She had a baby with her, without being married. She traveled on the roads and to local fairs, escorted by a big dog and excitable young men.

In 1743, some members of Marie's crew were arrested by the Carhaix archers. But, strange enough, they were not considered as thieves or beggars. Marie was freed. Henri Pezron, the father of her daughter, was kept along with others. Not for a long time. They escaped.

This episode was the first marking Marie's fame. Quickly, she reconstituted this band. Now she was nicknamed Marion du Fauouët, Marion the Tricky. She reigned over the countryside around Le Fauouët. The roads belonged to her, night and day. But she was not really a terrible killer or an implacable business woman. Those who offered her a glass of cider or spirits obtained safe conducts. Actually, she was very popular among the poor people she ransomed and helped, turn

by turn. They did not bear her a grudge. She was funny, she was nice. She was not afraid of soldiers nor landlords. She attended the fairs and the pardons, and she danced better than the other girls. She was not shy with the boys.

In 1746, Marion and her companions were feasting in the village of Boterff, in the parish of Ploerdut. They were denounced, probably. The soldiers caught them. They were jailed in Hennebont. Marion and Henri Pezron were sentenced to death. Henri was tortured, according to the laws of the time, but he never denounced Marion. For all the crimes where they were both accused, he cleared Marion. On the road that led him to the gallows, he asked to speak to the judge. Marie Tromel was innocent! After the hanging, the body of Henri Pezron was brought to the designated place where, according to the law, it must rot and decompose.

The next day, the judge changed his mind and his decision. Marion will not be hanged. During three days, she was publicly whipped, half-naked, in the town of Hennebont. With a hot iron, she was marked on the shoulder with the letter V, meaning *voleuse*, thief. She was sentenced to exile out of Brittany and freed.

Henri Pezron died for Marion, but life was boiling in Marion's veins. Despite the sentence of exile, she went back to Le Fauouët and reconstituted her gang. Her new boyfriend was Maurice Penhoat. He was young and bold. He knew the art of relieving the travelers of their valuables. He was also a counterfeiter. With him, the band of Marion found another activity. They plundered the churches, for instance in Le Fauouët and in Quelven in 1748.



Now the band of Marion was at war with the soldiers of the King. Three of her lieutenants, Gargoyle, Bilzic and Penhoat were caught and imprisoned. Marion fled far from Le Fauouët but she was caught in Auray. She

was lucky: sentenced again to exile, whipped and freed.

Around 1750, it was said in Le Fauouët that a landlord, René-Gabriel de Robien, had become the lover and business partner of Marion. He protected the band of thieves and benefited from their loot. Marion was just the same as before. She went to the fairs and along the highways, She gave protection to some of her victims and also to people able to drink or joke with her. But this nice period ended rapidly. The protective landlord was jailed. Marion left Le Fauouët. She was arrested in

Poullaouen, between Carhaix and Huelgoat, during the summer 1752.

She escaped a few weeks later from the Quimper jail and returned to Le Faouët. But the good times were over. The judge proclaimed against her the "admonitions." It was an obligation for the locals to testify against her. The admonitions were linked with the threat of excommunication by the priests. In autumn of the year 1753, Marion was condemned to death in absentia and her effigy was burned. The gang left Le Faouët and wandered through Brittany, plundering churches. At last, in 1754, Marion was arrested in Nantes and then sent to Quimper.

She denied everything. On August 2, 1755, she was sentenced to be "hanged and strangled until death ensued." According to the custom, she was tortured with fire before the execution. After her death the band continued its activities until 1770.

In our Breton skulls, Marion du Faouët is somebody different than a thief. She did what her poor neighbors, our ancestors, did not dare to imagine. She found life worth living again and again. Through centuries and death, we will accomplish what our ancestors did not, and join the ghost gang. We distinguish, in the light of the moon, the roofs of le Faouët The highways are stretching and the forests growing in our brains, and we sing gently at night :

"The red-haired Marion, Mary Tromel,  
Mary the bandit, Mary the rebel,  
Mary the nice girl  
The beautiful Marion du Faouët..."



## Travels in Brittany – An Article from the National Geographic Magazine in 1965 – Part 2

This is the continuation of an article reprinted in the last issue of *Bro Nevez* (minus the photography that is what makes this magazine so popular). As is true for all travel literature for Brittany, this article mixes stereotypes with more matter of fact observations.

**"France Meets the Sea in Brittany" by Howell Walker, *National Geographic Magazine* Vol. 127, No. 4, April 1965**

### Finistère: Wind and Sea and Stone

Antique Quimper's age shows in its cathedral, streets, houses, and nostalgic revivals of days long gone. To its fêtes and fairs flock thousands of Bretons, many in

provincial costume. And they in turn draw thousands of visitors, who consider Quimper and its gaily painted ceramic art the epitome of the quaint in Brittany.

I left Quimper to its carnival crowds and let myself in the coastal loneliness of the French department called Finistère. Here lay the Brittany of my earliest notions: stark, windswept, granite gray, sea bitten. A lighthouse. A solitary church. A fisherman's simple home. A rough stone wall. Gray waves breaking on the gray shore.

I've never looked at old pewter through tears, but the effect, I'd guess, must be something like seeing this land in its misty, melancholy light. And yet I felt a strange pleasure in its wild remoteness. Here was Finistère, literally land's end. At its western reach I stood on windy Pointe du Raz and gazed still farther west toward the Ile de Sein, riding as low as a raft on the Atlantic.

I sailed out to the mile-and-a-half-long, treeless Ile de Sein in a boat carrying two calves, tinned foods, mail, and a dozen passengers. We landed at the only village of the low-lying isle – lying so low, in fact, that high seas have twice flooded it. A quorum of its 1,100 inhabitants waited on the quay.

Village streets barely wide enough for a wheelbarrow give islanders some protection from unceasing, often violent winds. Where the houses end, a few potato plots and an occasional cow find shelter behind the wandering stone walls. A lighthouse, braving the gales, towers over the little island.

On surrounding reefs countless ships have foundered – not to the disadvantage of Ile de Sein. Nowhere else off the coasts of France has the business of picking up the pieces continued for so long or with more success. Salvaged material furnishes the island homes, provides fuel and building timber. Apart from capitalizing on wrecks, though, selfless men of the local lifeguard station have staked their lives to save many a crew.

Understandably such a poor, storm-lashed isle makes the best of a shipwreck. But what occupies the people in fair weather? The men fish. The women, dressed and hooded in black like characters in Renaissance sketches, do manual work, including hard labor. It was the women who carried stones on their heads to build the island church.

During World War II every able male on the island answered the call of Gen. Charles de Gaulle. More than 500, some as young as 14, sailed to England to join the Free French.

After the war General de Gaulle personally awarded the Cross of Liberation to the island, with this citation: "Ile

de Sein: in the face of enemy invasion, refused to abandon the battlefield that was hers: the sea [She] sent all her sons into combat under the flag of Free France, thus becoming the example and symbol of all Brittany.”

On the mainland once more, I headed for Brest, less than a three-hour drive away. But it took me several days to make the trip – because I went to a *pardon* in Rumengol.

### Footsore Pilgrims Attend a Pardon

A pardon, in addition to its obvious meaning, takes on special significance in Catholic Brittany. It's the name for a religious pilgrimage attended by those who seek to find forgiveness of sins, to make vows, or to ask favors. Many villages in the province observe pardons. It's a provincial traditional almost as old as Breton Christianity.

At Rumengol, a minute village, pilgrims began arriving on the eve of Trinity Sunday. Men, women, and children – many on foot – came from points scattered over northwest Brittany. I watched a group, weary from plodding all day, sink with relief upon the grass outside the church. One man removed his shoes and socks to rest aching feet.

As darkness fell, scores of pilgrims assembled on a meadow just west of the church. Each carried a flaring torch. Chanting in unison, they filed slowly over the meadow, around a wood, and past the cemetery to show that the dead and the living are together in Christ. The procession ended in the church, where Mass was sung.

Next morning, the pilgrims were pacing the required seven circuits around the church in expiation of the seven deadly sins. In the crowd I saw women so frail with age they could barely hobble; they wore long black dresses and the caps of their parishes.

Pilgrims completing the seven rounds moved inside to Mass, and new arrivals replaced them in the expiatory circle. Overflow crowds attended services at an outdoor altar, singing hymns to their patron Lady:

*O Rumengol, pell amzer zo,  
C'houni eo boked kaera hor bro;  
Peb rozenn goant, peb lilienn  
A zo disliv enn ho kichenn.*

*[O Rumengol, after so long a time,  
You are the most beautiful flower of our land;  
A lovely rose, a lily  
Are without color compared to you.]*

If I understood little else, I could sense the humility, simplicity, sincerity of these devout Bretons.

On to Brest. During World War II the Germans used this strategically located port for their submarines and other warships preying on Allied convoys. Like St. Nazaire and Lorient, Brest had to rebuild from the rubble up.

Here now I found a city called the most modern in Brittany. Public buildings, shops, and hotels lined handsome wide streets. Among the civilian crowds bobbed bright red pompoms on French sailors' flat wide caps.

Walking across Pont National, Europe's longest drawbridge, I looked over a naval port entirely restored and still expanding. I saw warships building, arriving, revictualing, departing; tugs, lighters, tankers; sailors everywhere, and still more ships in the roadstead, which is large enough to hold all the war fleets of Europe.

Apart from its naval importance, the harbor thrives on commerce; the import-export of agricultural produce and heavy-industry cargoes from and to all parts of the world.

How much traffic? I got a fair idea during my visit to the off-lying Ile d'Ouessant. On the lofty gallery of the lighthouse called Créac'h, I talked with one of the keepers.

“About 40,000 ships pass by this lighthouse in a year,” he said. “Sometimes you can see 20 at once.”

I could also see the need for this lighthouse near the Ile's west end, as well as another at the northeastern tip and two more rising from insidious shoals and rocks in the surrounding waters. Indeed, the reefs, currents, and fogs have heaped sinister fame upon Ouessant; they have caused too many shipwrecks down through the years for maritime annals to count. And this “isle of tempests” inspired the Breton saying, “Who sees Ouessant sees his blood.”

But Ouessant makes a brighter claim: The Créac'h lighthouse is the world's most powerful, with a normal range of 24 miles. Coordinating with a beam from Land's End in England, it guides ships in the night to the entrance of the English Channel. My lighthouse view ranged over the five-mile-long island shaped like a crab's claw. Only a fraction – one-fiftieth, to be exact – of the treeless land is cultivated. Everywhere else sheep graze, tethered in pairs, black and white on a gray expanse. And the wind persists in howling – oowessaaan ... ouessaaan ...

Ouessant, whose name comes from the Gallic name Uxisama, “the Highest,” is eerie at night. Lighthouse beams radiating into black infinity brush cottages with swift strokes and sweep the fields like the wind, briefly touching huddled bundles of fleece.

Always outdoors, the sheep shelter from gales in nooks of stones pies four feet high in the shape of crosses. From whatever quarter a storm comes, the animals find protection.

About 21,000 people live on the island. Women work the little plots, raising potatoes, barley, wheat; they care for the sheep and milk the cows. Men go to sea as sailors in the navy or merchant marine.

At the isle’s one village of Lampaul, population about 350, I failed to find hotel accommodation. But an elderly widow, Mme. Jeanne Scoarnec, offered me a room in her home – a small house with all the charm of an old-fashioned dwelling.

Madame Scoarnec clung to the traditional dress of Ouessant women. Beneath a black-bowed bonnet her plaited silver hair fell to a velvet bodice pinned, not buttoned, in front. Full skirt and heavy shoes completed her all-black costume.

#### “Without Bretons ... No French Navy”

Black. Always black. Are the women in perpetual mourning? Unquestionably, the people of Ouessant never forget their dead; they consider the deceased still part of the living family. For those lost at sea the islanders hold especially solemn ceremonies.

When a sailor disappears, his family places a small symbolic cross of wax – the object of a funeral service – in the village church. From here the cortege formed by the entire island populace moves to the cemetery, where a priest lays the wax cross to rest in a granite chapel dedicated to lost mariners.

Of Breton sailors, author Anatole Le Braz wrote, “It is always among this race that France recruits the largest and best of crews for her fleet. Without Bretons ... there would be no French navy. The rude sea, to which they’re born consecrated, is for them in every case a daily school of endurance, of courage, of denial. They live by its favors only on condition of being constantly ready to pay for these with their death, and they excel at dying in beauty.”

#### Products From Seaweed: Soap and Ice Cream

Breton farmers, too, live by the favors of the sea. For example, seaweed has fertilized their fields since time unremembered.

But that is only the beginning of the usefulness of seaweed, now processed for livestock food, toothpaste, paper coating, soap, medicine, paint, ice cream, and beauty cream.

More fascinating to me than these final products was the gathering of their raw material along the coast. Near Tréompan, at the northwest tip of Brittany, I watched open boats at work not far offshore. Using an implement like a sickle with a 12-foot-long handle, a boatman cut the weed, twirled it as one winds a spaghetti around a fork, and hauled the dark soggy mass aboard.

A horse splashed into the surf drawing a cart; the boatman transferred his cargo, and it rolled ashore to dry in a grassy field nearby. Crammed into gunny sacks, the dried weed left the field aboard horse-drawn wagons.

One factory I visited converts this raw material into a fine-grained powder used as gelatin. Manager Jacques Richard showed me how the weed is crushed, cooked in chemical solution, dried by evaporation, and turned to powder.

M. Richard waved toward a mountain of seaweed. “It looks like lot, *non?*” he said. “But 25 tons of wet weed will weigh only five when dry. And we use five dry tons to produce one ton of powder.”

As fertilizer, this marine crop helps Brittany raise half of France’s cauliflowers, 38 percent of its peas, and a third of its artichokes. In fact, the district around St. Pol de Léon surpasses any other in the nation in crops of cauliflowers and artichokes.

These vegetables seem to monopolize every acre. They press right up to village churches and surround towns. Cartloads flow through the streets and flood market places.

If the farmers do not like the prices, no sales – absolutely no sale. They will dump their harvest knee-deep in the streets rather than sell at an undignified figure. That, however, happened but once while I was in the province. \*

Normally, St. Pol’s market is a happy, impressive sight, the friendly meeting place of farmers and buyers. Here one feels that Brittany is a land of plenty. I certainly felt it, and said so to a woman shopkeeper in St Pol.

“Yes, St. Pol is a nice place,” she sighed, “yet the people are not content.”

“Why not?” I asked incredulously.

“Because,” she said, “they’re too happy.”

"Afraid I don't understand."

"They have it too easy," she explained. "Good climate. Good soil. Good crops. Plenty to eat. Plenty of money." At this point the woman leaned toward me over the counter, on the brink of confidence. "Do you know what a hectare is worth in this region?" No" I'll tell you. Two million old francs, *alors!*"

At the current rate [1965] that meant \$4,000 for about two and a half acres, or \$1,600 an acre.

I walked across the central square to St. Pol's old cathedral to think about people too happy for contentment.

### Churches Symbolize Breton Faith

Any Breton church, I supposed, would be an ideal place to meditate. But thoughts wander with one's gaze over aged stained-glass windows, frescoed walls, rustic beams, chiseled pulpit choir stalls. Candles flicker in a corner, a solitary woman, too old to kneel, sits like Whistler's mother, praying or perhaps meditating.

When accustomed to the dim light, my eyes found niches holding saints crudely but lovingly carved from oak hundreds of years ago. And rare the chapel without the sculptured figure of St. Yves, Brittany's favorite saint, almost always shown standing between a rich man and a beggar.

Rich and poor alike pooled wealth and effort to build Brittany's granite churches, from modest parish chapel to city cathedral. All reflect the common religious fervor of the province; some show that the faith of the smallest and poorest Breton communities has, in an architectural sense, worked miracles.

More recently another sort of miracle has brought the heretofore little-known Breton village of Pleumeur Bodou astounding fame. Here on a windswept plateau in a rather indifferent farming region, France installed a space-telecommunications center – the first contact point for the Continent's space relations. This French station, in July, 1962, tuned in on the U.S. satellite Telstar for the first exchange of live television programs across the Atlantic.

From the complexity of electronic installations, I retreated to the natural simplicity of a little village called Port Blanc, on Brittany's northern coast. There one day I met François Bernard, a hearty boatman who agreed to take me out to two islets off Port Blanc.

We headed first for Ile St. Gildas to visit an unusual monastery – unusual because the brothers make no

vows, wear no habits, and stay as long or short a time as they choose.

There were only half a dozen of these lay monks when I was there. They live by farming, selling their produce on the mainland. They keep horses, cows, sheep, and goats. And they make excellent goat cheese.

### Isle of Opera and Champagne

Leaving this isle to its solitude, to its heady pines and sweet-smelling hay fields, we ferried a short distance to Ile d'Illic. We walked up to the island's only home, a three-story gray stone Breton manor. In this house Ambroise Thomas composed the opera *Mignon*; Henryk Sienkiewicz wrote *Quo Vadis?*; Col. And Mrs. Charles A. Lindbergh once sojourned. And here now was the summer residence of Charles Jean Heidsieck, maker of famed champagne.

Heidsieck's vivacious daughter Ingrid asked us into the house, and almost before you could say "pop," she opened a bottle of champagne – Heidsieck, of course. The boatman François held his glass up to the light and licked his salt-dry lips. Ingrid questioned me about New York and California, but I was really thinking about these two little islands off the Brittany coast.

Lovely isles - St. Gildas and Illic. As different as goat cheese and champagne. As alike as tiny islets with pines on them and rocks rimming them in – unto themselves and their separate worlds.

My problem at Port Blanc was how to tear myself away from this friendly village. But then I could say almost the same of any place I stayed in Brittany.

Along the Emerald Coast – between Le Val André and Dinard – I passed from one light-hearted resort to another. The very configuration of the shore lifted one's spirits: sheer cliffs, creeks, coves, sandy beaches, massive capes plowing out to sea – a deep-blue sea exploding into pillars of spray and drifting away with the salt wind.

And so I came to Dinard, the largest, most popular, most chic of summering places on Brittany's north coast. Casino, hotels, cafés, villas, and gardens, bordering the broad sand beach invited holiday throngs from all over France, England, and America.

Only the mile-wide estuary of the Rance separates Dinard from St. Malo, yet these towns seem oceans apart. From a distance St. Malo appears to float on the water like a mirage. But the airy illusion turns to granite-hard reality when you enter the island stronghold behind its massive ramparts.

While World War II left much of German-occupied St. Malo in smoldering ruins, the ramparts remained largely intact – astonishing when you consider that the earliest sections date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. And restoration followed the old architecture faithfully, from the steep-pitched shingled roofs down to the paving blocks in the narrow streets.

### New Dam Will Tame the Tides

Through these byways strode early explorers, pirates, men of letters: Jacques Cartier, discoverer of Canada's St. Lawrence River; Samuel de Champlain, founder of Quebec; René Duguay-Trouin and Robert Surcouf, corsairs courageous; François-René de Chateaubriand and Félicité de Lamennais, writers bold as any pirates.

The names, of course, belong to a bygone era; yet the spirit of those adventurous times persists today in this "City of Corsairs," as Malouins call their town. For one thing, St. Malo is the only port in Brittany that still sends a cod-fishing fleet to the frigid waters off Greenland, off Newfoundland, and north of Scandinavia.

St. Malo's industries will most likely expand with completion in 1967 of a unique project not far upriver. I went to the site, where men were building a dam across the Rance, about half a mile wide here. The dam would serve as an automobile bridge and contain a lock for water traffic. But at the heart of all of this construction, a hydroelectric plant was shaping up to harness the big difference between the high and low tides – as much as 40 ½ feet. \*\*

The incoming tide will turn turbines as it fills the basin behind the dam. Then, when the tide recedes, water from the reservoir will flow back through the turbines. Thus, the coming and going of the sea will produce 544 million kilowatt-hours a year and make the Rance River hydroelectric power plant the first of its kind in the world.

Still farther up the Rance, I entered medieval Dinan – another town where I thought all I need do was relax and enjoy it. Impossible. The temptation to explore the castle, ramparts, churches, and every little alley between centuries-old houses overpowered me. I was up with the sun to watch mist rise from the Rance and unveil a hump-backed Gothic stone bridge. I was out in the night, walking and forgetting time.

On one evening stroll I returned the greeting of a man I thought a guide. He joined me, and we continued the promenade. He led me along twisted, hilly, cobbled streets weirdly fascinating in the dim glow of lamplight. And all the while he unraveled the history and legends of Dinan.

When at last we reached the square in front of my hotel, I tried to give him what I considered fair payment for the tour.

"But, monsieur," he said as the unaccepted note fell from my hand, "this disturbs me. I don't want your money. I am no guide. I work in the post office. It pleased me to be with you. That is my reward."

Embarrassed beyond telling, I stopped, picked up the note, and suggested we refresh ourselves at the nearest café. An hour later we parted, friends.

### Shepherd Carries World With Him

Then came the day when I had to drive away from Dinan and from Brittany, but not without a last look at the Breton coast. Rounding a headland, I caught a breath-taking view of distant Mont St. Michel. It rose like a fairy tale castle in insular splendor off the shore of neighboring Normandy.

Between the Mont and me, I saw a shepherd watching his flock on the salt meadows. I stopped to photograph the scene – a scene as old as the 11<sup>th</sup>-century abbey crowning the isle in the background. The shepherd gave me a friendly wave, and I walked over to him, pleased to delay my departure from Brittany.

"Just n time for the latest news," he said, tuning his portable transistor radio.

### **A Few Notes from the Editor:**

\* This comment about farmers dumping produce in the streets just once while this author was in Brittany is interesting. Like most travel writers who focus on the quaint and cheerful side of life, this journalist wandered blissfully through scenic Brittany in 1965 seemingly oblivious to the very important events of this period when farmers were forming cooperatives to better organize and market their production. Dumping vegetables in the street was not just a childish impulse by farmers insulted by low prices. It was part of a series of demonstrations to bring changes to the structure of agriculture in Brittany.



In June of 1961 vegetable farmers of northwestern Brittany descended upon the town of Morlaix to take over the sub-prefecture offices, and leaders of the demonstration Marcel Leon and Alexis Gourvennec were arrested. Gourvennec, in his early 20s, was a prime mover in organizing artichoke and cauliflower producers in the Leon area so that the farmers could be guaranteed fairer prices. The sale of seed artichokes to other regions of France was identified as one problem leading to a glut of artichokes

which brought prices down. Forming cooperatives from the grass roots was a way to give Breton farmers more control over prices and distribution of their products, and the 1960s was a period when this transition was taking place not only in vegetable farming, but also milk, meat and grains. It was a period of great tension, too, and “direct action” was used to force governmental change to give Bretons more economic decision-making power locally. “Direct action” included demonstrations, the dumping of produce on streets (including truckloads of artichokes taken to Paris), and the occupation of buildings and cutting of telephone poles and wires. Through this collective action Bretons succeeded in getting important reforms that would bring major changes to agriculture in Brittany.

For more information about this very important decade in Breton agriculture see:  
 Suzanne Berger, *Peasants Against Politics: Rural Organization in Brittany, 1911-1967* (Harvard University Press, 1972). If you want all the details, find the book by Fanch Elegoet, *Révoltes paysannes en Bretagne – à l’origine de l’organisation des marches* (Editions du Léon, 1984). A very good summary presentation of economic, social, political and cultural change in this key period in Breton history can be found in Jean-Pierre Le Mat’s “Les Texans de l’Europe (1960-1990)” a fifth part added to the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of Henri Poisson’s *Histoire de Bretagne* published in 1993 by the Coop Breizh.

\*\* The Rance River tidal power project completed in 1967 (some reports indicate 1966) was the first large-scale commercial power plant of this kind to be constructed in the world and still operates today. Because of the high level of tides needed there are few river estuaries where such plants have been built. While considered a “clean” form of energy, such dams can be detrimental to ecosystems and the migration of fish and wildlife. The large investment of capital and long period before this power system pays off also adds to its scarcity. Using tides to generate power is not a new idea and small mills have been built for many centuries (in Brittany and elsewhere) to take advantage of this flow.



### **Cyclists in the Tour de France to see Brittany**

While cycling as quite popular in the United States despite roads that only rarely leave room for safety, we having noting here equivalent to the Tour de France. The route of this famous race changes each year but always includes geography to test a cyclists endurance. Brittany does not have much in the way of mountains, but it has lots of little roads and a population that adores this sport – after all, Bernard Hinault is a Breton, and quite a few other champions have hailed from Brittany.

In 2010 the Tour de France bypassed Brittany entirely but for the 98<sup>th</sup> year of this race in 2011 the race will go through all five departments of Brittany. Here are the Stages where racers will pas through Brittany:

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage on July 4  
From Olonne-sur-Mer (Vendée) to Redon
- 4<sup>th</sup> Stage on July 5  
From Lorient to Mûr-de-Bretagne
- 5<sup>th</sup> Stage on July 6  
From Carhaix to Cap Fréhel
- 6<sup>th</sup> Stage on July 6  
From Dinan to Lisieux (Normandy)

### **The U.S. ICDBL – Briefly Put**

In the U.S. where knowledge of world geography is often woefully lacking, the word “Brittany” often brings a blank look or confusion with “Britain,” and of course there are all those women named “Brittany.” Thus, a major role of the U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language is to simply introduce the existence of Brittany and the Breton language to the American public.

The Breton language is still spoken by an estimated 250,000 people in Brittany, but it is threatened with extinction. Breton is no longer forbidden in schools or totally hidden from public view, but France continues to withhold the resources necessary for its development as a healthy living language, despite demands from an ever widening population for its support and growth in the schools, media, and public life of Brittany.

#### Who are the Members of the ICDBL?

Some of our members are of Breton heritage, but the U.S. ICDBL is intended to be a group of “anyone and everyone” showing support for the Breton language rather than an organization for Breton-Americans like so many other “ethnic” organizations here in the U.S. We do have quite a few members with Irish, Scottish or Welsh heritage, so there is a strong inter-Celtic element to our work. Most of our members speak neither Breton nor French and most have never been to Brittany. But we all have some reason to help fight for the survival of the Breton language.

PLEASE JOIN US if you are not already a member.

For more information, contact:

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