



The Monts d'Arrée

Situated in the centre of Finistère, the Monts d'Arrée are the highest and oldest hills in Brittany. Not exactly mountains in size, they nevertheless provide striking scenery, unique in the region, and perfect walking territory. Consisting of high open moorland (landes) and peat marshes (tourbières), the Monts d'Arrée run roughly east/west, forming the heart of the Armorican Regional Park. On the stark ridge of hills is the huge signals mast, visible for many miles around, which was subject to an attack in 1974 by the FLB, a Breton separatist movement. Nearby Roc'h Ruz has recently been established as the highest point at 385.01m.

To the south lies the vast bowl of the Reservoir de St-Michel: on the edge here near Brennilis is the first nuclear power station built in France, begun in 1963 but now well into the decades-long process of dismantlement. The landmark chapel of St-Michel de Brasparts lies to the west and it is possible to drive almost to the top of its hill, where the 360° views are outstanding (in clear weather) – the Neolithic stone alignment called The Wedding Party, for example can be seen below just across the main road. Various circular walks including the summit are also possible, as the GR 380-37 runs nearby and numerous stony tracks provide connecting links.

Nearby is Lac du Drennec, which has a fairly level 7km walk around its perimeter with some excellent views of the Monts d'Arrée. It is also a good place for swimming. Starting not far away, from the huge Neolithic dolmen at Mougau Bihan, just outside Commana, there is a short (2km) 'Korrigan' trail over the tourbières, which has information boards (in French) about this fragile eco-system and details of the unusual plants, like the carnivorous drosera, which can be found there.



To find out more about life in this historically fascinating area of Brittany, there are several excellent eco-museums within the regional park. The Moulins de Kerouat near Commana and the

exceptional Maison Cornec at Saint-Rivoal both provide a wealth of detail of the social and economic development of the Monts d'Arrée. There is also the Maison du Recteur (open in July/August) at Loqueffret, whilst the animal/nature reserve at Menez Meur has wolves and wild boar in addition to many native breeds of cows, horses, pigs and goats. To discover the history and vast folklore associated with the wolf, the Musée du Loup at Cloitre-St-Thegonnec is highly recommended. Nature trails near here in the Landes de Cragou also provide fine walking.



For an introductory walk to get the best sense of the Monts d'Arrée, I suggest the 7km Circuit du Roc'h Bichourel, which starts in Botmeur. This involves some road walking (with one section needing careful attention to traffic), but most of the route is very quiet and the views on ascent and descent are superb, and a short detour can take in Roc'h Trévézel, until recently regarded as the pinnacle of the Monts d'Arrée. From here you can see as far as the ferry port at Roscoff to the north and the Montagnes Noires to the south.

For a greater challenge, try the 14km Circuit des Landes et Tourbières, which begins from the carpark at the Ferme des Artisans on the D785 near Mont St Michel. This route will provide an up-close acquaintance with the tourbières, as it crosses the marshes around the reservoir on wooden walkways, and also includes some typical Mont d'Arrée hamlets and the wide open spaces of the landes from the summit of Menez Kador to the chapel on top of Mont St Michel. There is little cover on this walk, so pick a clear, dry day!

Full directions for the Landes et Tourbières circuit, plus two other excellent Monts d'Arrée walks (from Menez Meur and Loqueffret) can be found in my book *Walking and other Activities in Finistere* – see books page for details). I am planning a Monts d'Arrée walking guide for 2007.

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