









# FOLLOW ~ THE COAST —

HIKE THRILLING TRAILS AND DISCOVER HIDDEN GEMS

created by  
Charles Van Haverbeke & Maximilien Monteyne

**The Atlantic Coast**  
from Knokke to San Sebastian

**Lannoo**

To my parents, who taught me the power of beauty, art and wonder  
To my cousin Celine, who left us too early, yet continues to inspire us to pursue a happy and conscious life  
To Elise, who helped me more than anyone to hold on to this crazy journey, being the incredible and pure person she is  
To Max, who enthusiastically embraced this project, ready for a crazy ride, and whose energy pushed many people to achieve something they had never imagined doing  
To Arthur, Harry, Josephine, Karen and Pieter, whose massive efforts built and shaped this book  
To all of the runners who wrote this book and who showed how powerful believing in an idea could be

To the crazy ones



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If you have any questions or comments about the material in this book, please do not hesitate to contact our editorial team: [art@lannoo.com](mailto:art@lannoo.com)

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## Foreword

Many people have asked how the idea to run the entire coast of Europe came to life.

The first spark of the idea popped up during the Marathon des Sables in 2017; an extraordinary adventure that I had the honour and pleasure to run with friends, while also being supported by many other friends. It proved to be a challenge that was so significant that I could feel the energy in the air. It inspired people thousands of kilometres away to keep refreshing their browsers to get updates about people they barely knew. In the following weeks it dawned on me that we are all looking for extraordinary moments to lift us out of our everyday routine ... to be in the zone or to experience a natural high.

The longing for a shared feeling – so strong that it could make people stop in their tracks and take a deep breath – was exactly what inspired the idea to create a challenge. This project would turn out to be a massive joint effort, continuously growing in meaning and power. Its sole purpose would be to create beauty. And nothing more.

The idea of a year-long relay was born, a journey that would only be achievable through the efforts of many teams of runners each creating memories that would last a lifetime. Since we strongly believed in the power of this challenge, the size of the journey was not a source of fear, but rather one of motivation. It excited me to abandon the everyday quest for Return on Investment. Our journey almost felt like it was art, providing a strong counterforce against the prevailing belief that everything needs to make sense or have a sound financial or functional goal.

Mapping the entire coast of Europe sparked a curiosity that I hadn't felt in a long time. It naturally incited more reading and exploring. It became clear that, besides achievement, exploration was a dimension that should be embedded in this journey. Exploration and the enriching of the mind by learning are things that sets humans apart from the rest of the planet. So we felt it was time to explore what is often taken for granted and to create a book as a tribute to what sets us apart.

In the end we found that the project we created was deeply rooted in our human nature. It tapped into our unique desire to collectively create, to face challenges, to explore and to do things that don't fit in to a rational plan. This challenge brought us something that we all crave: meaning in life. It inspired me and hundreds of runners to make the book you are about to read.

I hope it will inspire you to explore, to create, to hold on and to connect with others.

Enjoy!

Charles

# À la carte

Some people love nature, other crave little tiny streets to wander.

The below menu indicates which stage has which kind of flavours for you in store.

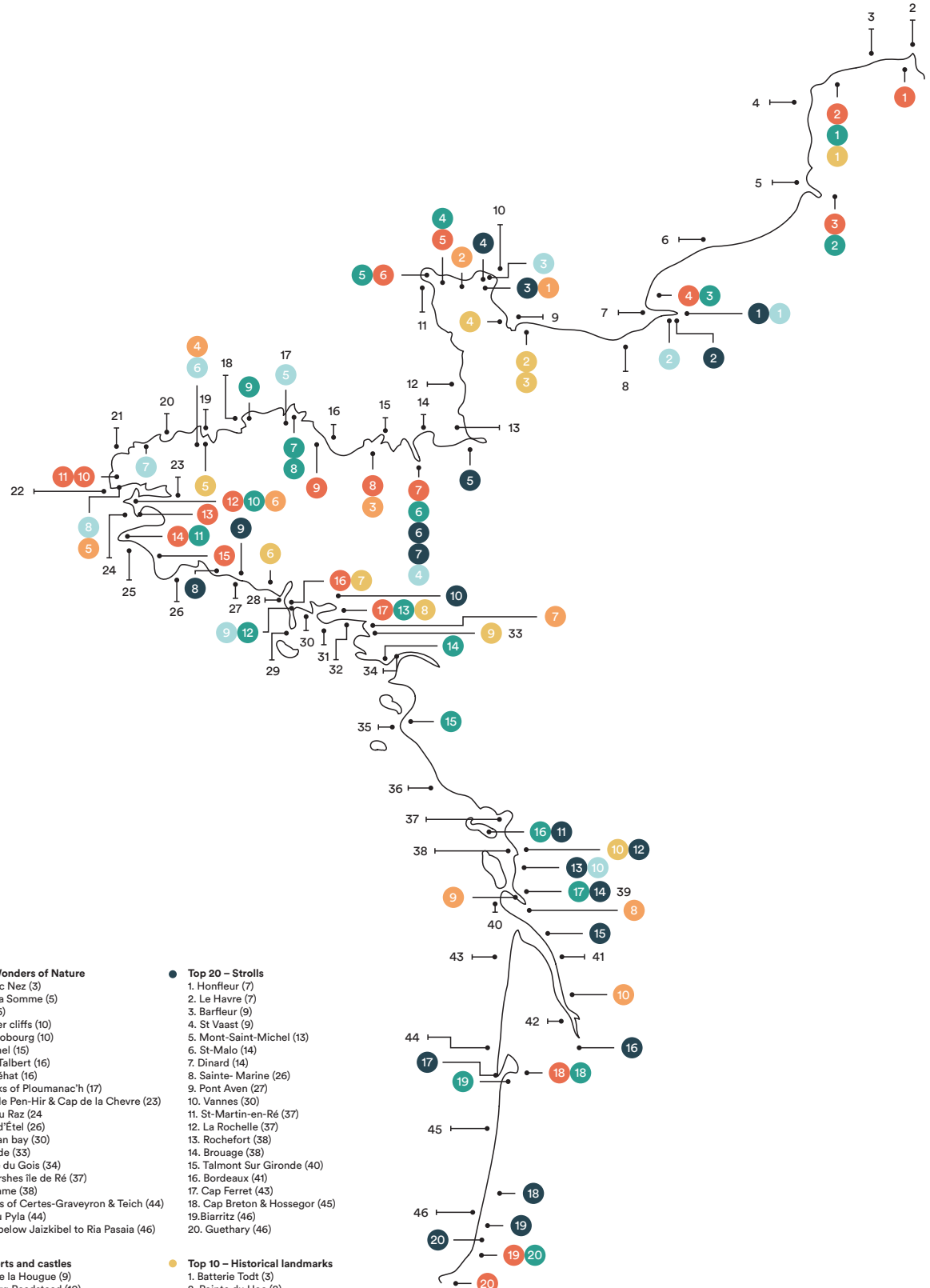
● Best-in-class  
 ● Great  
 ● Normal  
 ● Not recommended

	From	To	Page	Wonders of Nature	City Trip	Lovely Village	History	Architecture	Overall
Stage 1	Zwingeuil, Knokke	Leffrinckoucke, Dunkirk	14	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 2	Leffrinckoucke, Dunkirk	Digue du Chenal, Gravelines	20	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 3	Digue du Chenal, Gravelines	Digue Carnot, Boulogne-sur-Mer	24	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 4	Digue Carnot, Boulogne-sur-Mer	Le Crotoy	32	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 5	Le Crotoy	Quiberville	40	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 6	Quiberville	Le Havre	48	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 7	Le Havre	Cabourg	54	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 8	Cabourg	Grandcamp-Maisy	60	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 9	Grandcamp-Maisy	Phare de Gatteville	66	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 10	Phare de Gatteville	Dunes de Biville	72	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 11	Dunes de Biville	Pirou Plage	82	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 12	Pirou Plage	Dragey	90	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 13	Dragey	Pointe du Grouin	100	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 14	Pointe du Grouin	Pointe de Château Serein, Plévenon	110	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 15	Pointe de Château Serein, Plévenon	Plage des Godelins, Etables-sur-Mer	116	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 16	Plage des Godelins, Etables-sur-Mer	Port-Beni, Pleubian	126	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 17	Port-Beni, Pleubian	Pointe de Bihit, Trébeurden	134	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 18	Pointe de Bihit, Trébeurden	Pointe de Penn Al Lann, Carantec	142	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 19	Pointe de Penn Al Lann, Carantec	Plage du Lividic, Brignognan-Plage	148	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 20	Plage du Lividic, Brignognan-Plage	Portsall	154	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 21	Portsall	Queai des Mineraliers, Brest	160	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 22	Queai des Mineraliers, Brest	Bolast	172	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 23	Bolast	Cap de La Chèvre	178	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 24	Cap de La Chèvre	Pointe de Feunteun Aod	186	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 25	Pointe de Feunteun Aod	Île Chevalier	196	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 26	Île Chevalier	Kerouini	204	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 27	Kerouini	Pointe du Tallud, Kerroch	212	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 28	Pointe du Tallud, Kerroch	Plouharnel	218	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 29	Plouharnel	Anse de Kercado, Crac'h	224	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 30	Anse de Kercado, Crac'h	Sins, Theix	230	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 31	Sins, Theix	Le Tour du Parc	238	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 32	Le Tour du Parc	Pointe de L'Espernel	244	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 33	Pointe de L'Espernel	Saint-Nazaire	250	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 34	Saint-Nazaire	Noirmoutier-en-l'Île	258	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 35	Noirmoutier-en-l'Île	Les Sables d'Olonne	264	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 36	Les Sables d'Olonne	Pointe-Clément, Esnandes	270	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 37	Pointe Saint-Clément, Esnandes	La Rochelle	276	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 38	La Rochelle	Brouage	284	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 39	Brouage	Pointe de Mus de Loop, La Tremblade	294	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 40	Pointe de Mus de Loop, La Tremblade	Saint-Bonnet-sur-Gironde	302	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 41	Saint-Bonnet-sur-Gironde	Ludon-Médoc, Bordeaux	310	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 42	Ludon-Médoc, Bordeaux	Montalivet-Les-Bains	318	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 43	Montalivet-Les-Bains	Arès, Lège-Cap-Ferret	324	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 44	Arès, Lège-Cap-Ferret	Casino de Mimizan	330	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 45	Casino de Mimizan	Maisica de Bayonne, Bayonne	340	●	●	●	●	●	●
Stage 46	Maisica de Bayonne, Bayonne	Plage de Zurriola, San Sebastian	346	●	●	●	●	●	●

# Best of

Life is full of choices.

To make life easier for you, we have selected our favourite spots.



## ● Top 20 – Hikes

1. Digue du Braek (2)
2. Cap Blanc Nez (3)
3. Baie de la Somme (Maye) (4)
4. GR 21 – Vaucotte to Antifer (6)
5. Landemer (10)
6. Nez de Jobourg (10)
7. Promenade du Claire de Lune(14)
8. Round Cap Fréhel & Fort La Latte (15)
9. Pointe de Plouha (16)
10. Corsen to Kermorvan (21)
11. St. Mathieu to Bertheaume (21)
12. Touléguet to Cap de la Chevre\* (23)
13. To Pointe du Raz, North Cap Sizun (24)
14. East of Cap de la Chevre (24)
15. Pointe Feunteun Aod – Audierne (25)
16. Cote Sauvage (29)
17. Île d'Arz (30)
18. Domaine de Certes -Graveyron (44)
19. Passaia to San Sebastian (46)
20. Hondarrribia to Passaia (46)

## ● Top 10 – Architectural landmarks

1. St. Joseph Church, Le Havre (7)
2. Pont de Normandie (7)
3. Phare de Gatteville (10)
4. Villa les Roches Brunes (14)
5. House between the rocks (17)
6. Île tolet (19)
7. Phare Île de Vierge (20)
8. Phare de Petit Minou (21)
9. House l'Île de Saint-Cado (28)
10. Rochefort Pont Transbordeur (38)

## ● Top 20 – Wonders of Nature

1. Cap Blanc Nez (3)
2. Baie de la Somme (5)
3. Étretat (6)
4. Landemer cliffs (10)
5. Nez de Jobourg (10)
6. Cap Fréhel (15)
7. Silon de Talbert (16)
8. Île de Bréhat (16)
9. Pink rocks of Ploumanac'h (17)
10. Pointe de Pen-Hir & Cap de la Chevre (23)
11. Pointe du Raz (24)
12. Rivière d'Étel (26)
13. Morbihan bay (30)
14. Guerande (33)
15. Passage du Gois (34)
16. Salt marshes île de Ré (37)
17. Île Madame (38)
18. Reserves of Certes-Graveyron & Teich (44)
19. Dune du Pyla (44)
20. GR 121 below Jaizkibel to Ria Passaia (46)

## ● Top 10 – Forts and castles

1. La Tour de la Hougue (9)
2. Cherbourg Roadstead (10)
3. Fort la Latte (15)
4. Fort Taureau (19)
5. Fort de Bertheaume (21)
6. Îlot des Capucins (23)
7. Suscinio Castle (31)
8. Fort Louvois (39)
9. Fort Boyard (39)
10. Citadelle de Blaye (41)

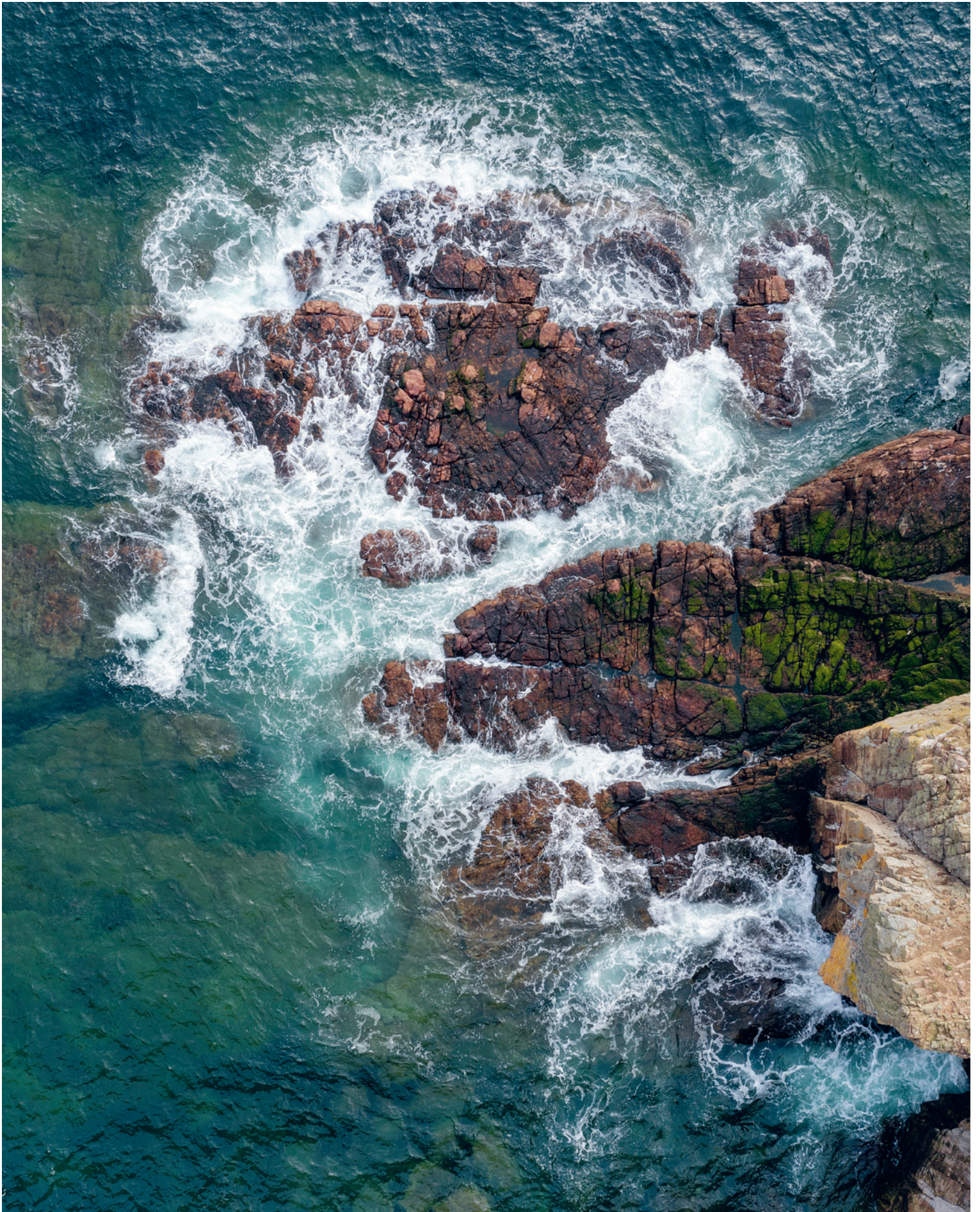
## ● Top 20 – Strolls

1. Honfleur (7)
2. Le Havre (7)
3. Barfleur (9)
4. St Vaast (9)
5. Mont-Saint-Michel (13)
6. St-Malo (14)
7. Dinard (14)
8. Sainte- Marine (26)
9. Pont Aven (27)
10. Vannes (30)
11. St-Martin-en-Ré (37)
12. La Rochelle (37)
13. Rochefort (38)
14. Brouage (38)
15. Talmont Sur Gironde (40)
16. Bordeaux (41)
17. Cap Ferret (43)
18. Cap Breton & Hossegor (45)
19. Biarritz (46)
20. Guethary (46)

## ● Top 10 – Historical landmarks

1. Batterie Todt (3)
2. Pointe du Hoc (8)
3. Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial (8)
4. Landing Beach Utah (9)
5. Cairn de Barnenez (18)
6. U boat base Lorient (28)
7. Carnac Megalithes (29)
8. Île Gavrinis (30)
9. U boat base St Nazaire (33)
10. La Rochelle U boat (38)



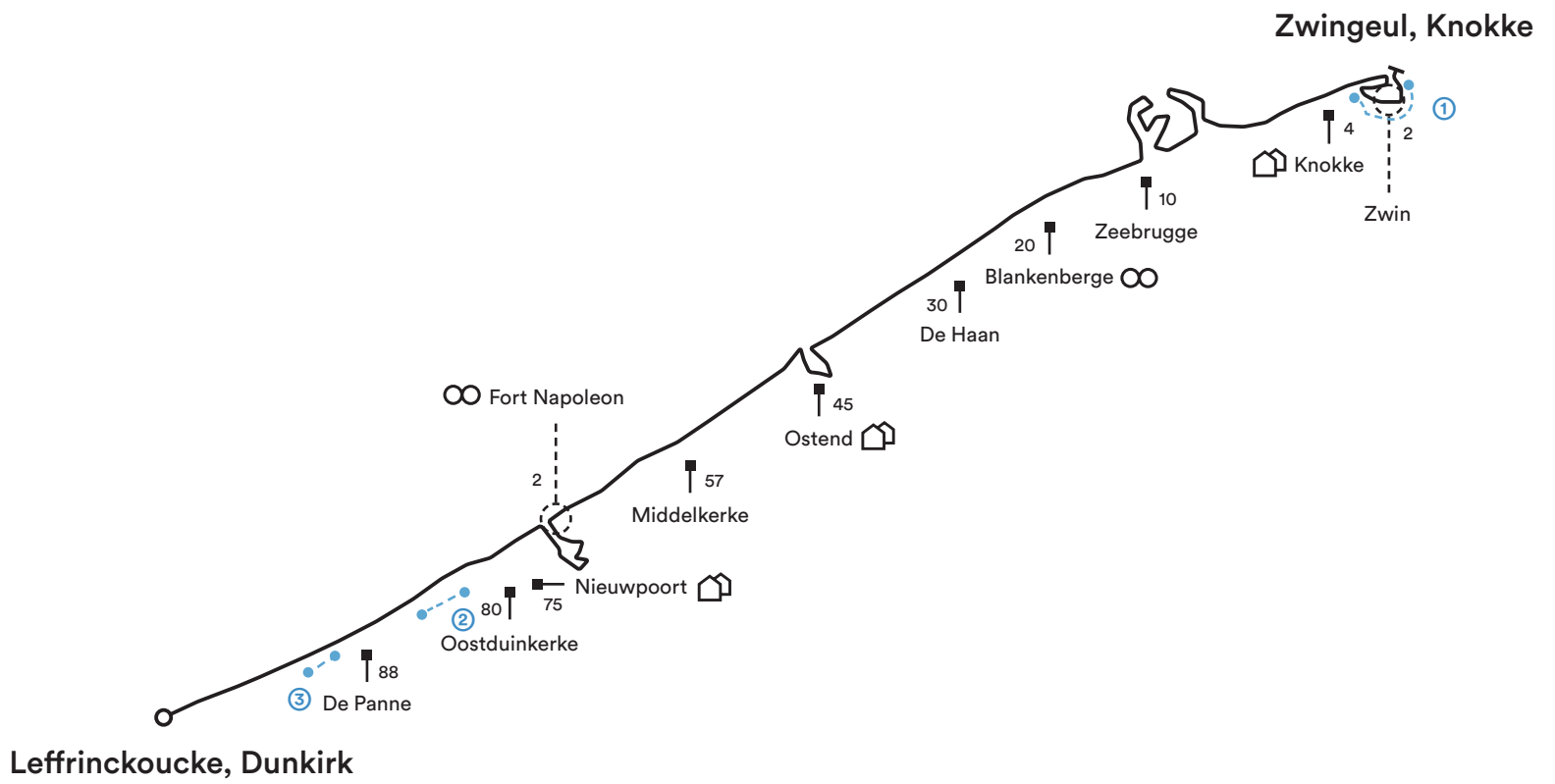
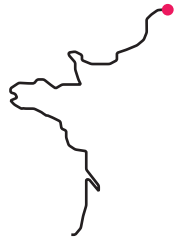




**The Coast**

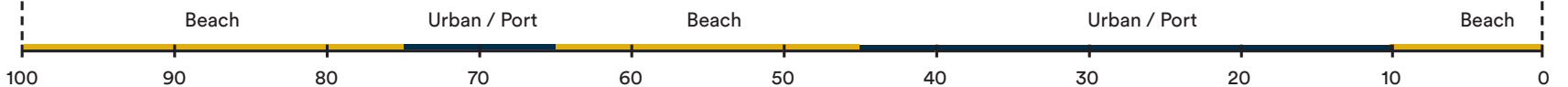
# Stage 1

Zwingeul, Knokke > Leffrinckoucke, Dunkirk



Finish  
51.05748  
2.42786

Start  
51.36891  
3.36649





## The apartments lining the Belgian coasts

During the first 100 km of this journey we technically touch on three countries, as we start on the Zwingel, the border between Belgium and the Netherlands, and finish in Leffrinckoucke in France, after crossing the border just east of De Panne. This part of the coast is the most densely populated 100 km out of the total distance of 4,600 km. Belgium only has 65 km of coastline, which has to accommodate a large part of the 11 million inhabitants looking for sunshine. From the luxury and prestige in Knokke-Heist to the easy-going vibe of Blankenberge, the old royal charm of Ostend and the miles of dunes at both extremities of the coast... This leg has something to offer for everyone. The Belgian shore is a straight line of sand running from Knokke in the northeast to De Panne in the southwest, most of it dominated by apartment blocks elbowing each other for a glimpse of the sought-after sea view. Luckily, the coast is not entirely covered with high-rise buildings. In between the cities you'll find large stretches of dunes: in the nature reserves of het Zwin; east of Knokke; the Schipgatduinen with the Hoge Blekker, the highest dune on the Belgian coast; west of Oostduinkerke; and De Westhoek, which is west of De Panne. In terms of architecture, the villas in Knokke and the Anglo-Norman cottages of De Haan are more enjoyable than the blocks of concrete and glass elsewhere and are surely worth a stroll. In Ostend you'll find more majestic buildings, such as the Royal Galleries or the Wellington race track. The two major commercial ports are located in Zeebrugge and Ostend and leisure ports can be found in Nieuwpoort, Ostend and Blankenberge, which all have navettes to take you from one bank to the other. This stretch of coast also has oceans of culture in store and is home to the Beaufort art festival, with art sculptures scattered across the coast.

### See **Fort Napoleon**

This fort was built in 1814 at the request of Napoleon Bonaparte. Nowadays, it is home to a museum and a chic bistro.

### **Pier of Blankenberge**

A 350 m long pier stretching into the sea, housing plenty of bars and restaurants. Blankenberge city is known for its nightlife.

### Hike **① Nature Reserve, het Zwin**

What? – Discover this paradise for birds (and bird watchers) next to the Dutch border.

How? – Access the reserve at the end of the Zeedijk, next to the statue of the hare (51.364687, 3.347016), by either foot or bike. You'll find the nearest car park at the Zwinlaan (51.358478, 3.323339), which is 2 km from the entrance to the reserve, but during the busy summer months parking spaces are scarce. It is easier to park at the other side of the reserve on the car park at the end of the Graaf Leopold Lippensdreef, next to the border (51.358536, 3.350719). From this point you can immediately access the nature reserve and you will only have to walk 1.5 km to reach the famous hare that is situated close to the sea.

### **② Nature Reserve 'Westhoek' dunes**

What? – Enjoy life in this 350-ha sandy playground. The available routes are explained at the entrance.

How? – Park your car at the end of the Schuilhavenlaan in De Panne (51.0934, 2.56552) to get to the entrance of the nature reserve.

This dune area is open to the public 24/7.

### **③ Hoge Blekker, highest dune in Belgium**

What? – If you want to climb the highest dune in Belgium, this is your chance.

How? – Park your car on the car park at the Panoramalaan, not far from the crossroads with the Zeelaan (51.111556, 2.644665). If you prefer a longer walk, you can head north towards the Doornpanne dunes and Schipgatduinen dunes between Koksijde and Oostduinkerke.

### Stroll **Knokke**


As one of the chicest seaside resorts on the Atlantic coast, Knokke is home to the holiday residences of the vast majority of the Belgian elite. Visit the casino, the many galleries and the stunning golf course or stroll through the Zoute, where you'll find plenty of restaurants. It's the perfect location to spot the expensive cars of the people dining out.

### **Ostend**

Ostend is the biggest city on the Belgian coast and the former holiday destination of the royal family. Visit the Royal Galleries, the Wellington track and the James Ensor museum.

### **Nieuwpoort**

Home to one of the biggest yacht ports in Europe, Nieuwpoort has lots of history to offer. The impressive King Albert I monument is a fitting memorial to Belgium's many losses in the First World War.

 **Reach** Belgium has the densest highway network in the world. All of the coastal cities, from Oostduinkerke to Knokke, are located only a few kilometres from an exit. You can find train stations in the biggest cities: Knokke, Duinbergen, Heist, Zeebrugge, Blankenberge, Ostend and De Panne. The entire coastline is accessible by the Kusttram, a tramline that runs along the coast for over 68 km with 69 stops. You can fly to Ostend or, alternatively, to either Brussels or Antwerp (both 1 hour away by car from the coast). There is a ferry service connecting Zeebrugge to the UK.













De Kusttram, passing through Reverside, Ostend

51.210011, 2.855513



Sculpture by Fabre, 'Searching for Utopia', Nieuwpoort



Epernayplein, Middelkerke

51.187464, 2.812532







## Stage 1



From left to right: Heather Tanner (US), Charles Van Haverbeke (BE), Christophe Morbee (BE), Nick Van Praag (BE), Daniel Calvert (UK), Tim Corbusier (BE)

### Shoreholders:

Nick Van Praag (BE)

Tim Corbusier (BE)

Charles Van Haverbeke (BE)

Heather Tanner (US)

Daniel Calvert (UK)

Christophe Morbee (BE)

*Le Grand Départ* of the Mare Nostrum started with a big international team.

Heather, our first US shoreholder, crossed the ocean to discover the Belgian coast. In her daily life she runs marathons below the 2 hr 45 min mark, making her one of the fastest runners in the USA. Charles is the founder of the Mare Nostrum, guarding the troops. Christophe joined the first 10 km of Stage 1 as a warm-up for Stage 2. Nick has been building an impressive ultra-endurance CV, with the UTMB, CCC, Marathon des Sables and Ironman. In our Mare Nostrum journey he was the first to run two stages back to back, in two days. Early adopter Daniel made the effort to travel from Berlin (twice) in the week before his big Scottish wedding. And Tim, last but not least, is the founder of 'Proper Strand Lopers', a multi-thousand member group who join forces to clean up our beaches. He decided to run this stage to raise awareness of nature, while also expanding his boundaries, as his previous running record didn't include runs above the 30 km mark. The date of 1 July ended up being even more memorable for Tim, as he got down on one knee and proposed to Ulrike, his soon-to-be-wife.

This strong team should've been in for a walk in the park and a guaranteed finish of Stage 1. Unfortunately, the flat Belgian coast turned out to be a Mexican standoff. After Ostend, which was 40 km in, Charles had to forfeit because of a persisting hip injury. Then, a bit later, Daniel's stomach forced him to get into the car and, finally, Heather had to give up with the finish in sight. It was now down to Tim and Nick. Luckily, the latter had a great deal of experience and mostly only needed mental support and a jar of pickles from the local shop in order to get going. Tim started to fall behind near Blankenberge and found his own pace, finishing some time after Nick. Nick finished at around 7 p.m. and celebrated his endeavour in the local baraque à frites with a round of French fries for the crew. Tim pulled himself over the finish line, basking in the golden glow of the setting sun, and still found the energy to kneel down – ignoring the cramps – and pull out a ring only a few minutes before experiencing a temperature shock.

What a way to start this journey.

## Stage 2



From left to right: Peter Van Praet (BE), Stefaan Rossel (BE), Christophe Morbee (BE)

### Shoreholders:

Peter Van Praet (BE)

Stefaan Rossel (BE)

Christophe Morbee (BE)

Meet the entrepreneurs running the shortest stage so far, which was because the shoreline was blocked by the impenetrable zone surrounding a nuclear plant. That meant that they had to conquer the concrete jungle of the Dunkirk harbour, with its endless digues, with nothing to distract them other than chemical industrial plants.

Peter, King of Pasta, has been an avid adviser and supporter of the Mare Nostrum since its inception in 2017. Passionate by nature and blessed with a creative heart, Peter was attracted by the craziness of the idea and challenged its format countless times. Stefaan, an entrepreneur who invests in everything that moves, from grass to food, is Peter's regular companion of the route and couldn't let him run the stage alone. Christophe, who had warmed up the day before by running an easy 10 km in preparation for his big day, completes the line-up.

The many ins and outs, roundabouts and turns were quite the mindf\*\*\*, but the positive nature of the gang prevailed. Followed by a car packed with great pasta dishes and other goodies, they conquered the blistering sun that was shining in the blue July sky. Digue du Braek, a 7 km stretch of asphalt, might be the longest back and forth of the book, ending at Saint-Pol Lighthouse where local fishermen were testing their luck in the big port.

The squad finished with a lightning fast last mile, zigzagging between road works, and arrived at the port of Gravelines around 5 p.m. Just in time for a refreshing pint of Duvel before they hit the road to return home.

Legend has it that Peter and Stefaan joined a business meeting in Ghent later that evening.



## Stage 3



Elise Van de Vyver (BE)

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**Shoreholders:**  
Elise Van de Vyver (BE)

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Meet Elise, the first one to prove that you don't need a companion to run a 100 km stage.

Only a couple of days before her big day she got word that her running buddy was 'out' because of a last-minute injury. 'No biggie', she must have thought, as she conquered the steep hills of Cap Blanc-Nez and Cap Gris-Nez with a big smile on her face. Elise was the first woman to crush a Mare Nostrum stage and, to date, one of the few to run a second, albeit in dramatically different conditions. Both times she had to finish the stage alone, maybe three times is the charm?

At 7 a.m. Elise started rather tentatively, but with the support of her loyal boy squad, coach Bert and co-shoreholder Alec, who were following by bike. The first marathon was checked off at the heights of Cap Blanc-Nez and by then her legs had begun to challenge the brave idea of running all the way to Boulogne-sur-Mer.

At Wissant, a beach resort famous for water sports, the well-deserved vanilla ice cream Elise ate will be a lasting memory. On Cap Gris-Nez, the merciless hammer hit hard, but after a bit of water and a high dose of caffeine she made her way to Boulogne.

After the slippery descent down the Pointe de la Crèche stairs, with a spectacular view of the port of Boulogne-sur-Mer, the deserted beach was an amazing finish line, with an incredible last effort on the concrete wall of Digue Carnot. An inspiring and incredible feat, after which Elise's legs refused to function and the supporting squad came in handy to carry her back to the car for a well-earned supper.

## Stage 4



From left to right: Robin Claessens (BE), Thomas Thewissen (BE)

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**Shoreholders:**  
Robin Claessens (BE)  
Thomas Thewissen (BE)

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Two entrepreneurs and seasoned ultra-athletes by nature, Thomas and Robin met each other on a lovely, relaxing walk in the remote desert, also known as the notorious Marathon des Sables. Because of their mutual passion for food, the support crew during their stages were often surprised with new recipes and meals, instead of the other way around. Thomas has a passion for bringing food to your doorstep and loves the taste of a good red wine. Robin, on the other hand, invested in 'brown gold', or chocolate, and is keeping the standards of our Belgian heritage high.

Both heroes have run two stages to date and they have an affinity for long sandy beaches and the mandatory wet feet that they get when they refuse to follow the road and instead cross a wetland. A fun tradition to keep! To reach Étaples they had to wade through the river for a few kilometres in order to avoid the muddy riverbanks because they had missed the road to get to the bridge. Back on the shores of Le Touquet, their Sahara experience came in handy to conquer the long beaches leading towards Berck. To reach the finish at Baie de la Somme they had to pass through Parc du Marquenterre. They did not know, however, that the part closest to the sea was forbidden territory and they had to jump several fences to get out and back on track.

A midnight finish at Le Crotoy didn't prevent the duo, whom we can count among the biggest fighters of the entire journey, from signing up for Stage 36 for another round of beaches and creeks.



**Zwingeul, Knokke (51.368494, 3.366849).** A view from the beach at Zwingeul with the city of Knokke in the background. Het Zwin was the first nature reserve in Belgium, established in 1952. Its 770 ha offer a wide variety of fauna and flora and it is known for its birds. In the far distance, you can discern both the skyline of Knokke-Heist, the most expensive strip of coastal real estate in Belgium, and, if you look more closely, the wind turbines of the port of Zeebrugge.



**Blankenberge, Pier (51.321305, 3.136429).** The pier of Blankenberge was built in 1933, stretching 350 metres out into the sea. It was the first one of its kind in the Atlantic Ocean and it is still the biggest. In 1914 it was burnt to the ground by the Germans during WWI. In 1933, the current version of the pier was erected. In the background you can see the skyline of the harbour of Zeebrugge, the second biggest port in Belgium after Antwerp. Zeebrugge is one of the top importers of cars in the world, with over 2 million cars imported in 2018.



**Ostend, east bank (51.241646, 2.936832).** A picture taken close to Ostend, the biggest city on the Belgian coast, with its Europacentrum, a 104 m high residential building towering above the city. The city is nicknamed 'The Queen of the Belgian seaside resorts', as the royal family liked to spend their holidays in the city.



**Ostend, east bank (51.226095, 2.901710).** Ostend is the biggest city on the Belgian coast. When visiting, you must take a stroll underneath the Royal Galleries, the neoclassical arcade on the right of this picture, which stretches for 380 metres from the royal villa in the east to the Wellington racing track in the west. The covered walk, built between 1902 and 1905, frequently houses art exhibitions, offering an accessible cultural activity. In the east, the Wellington horse track with its remarkable tribune is worth a visit. This multifunctional site regularly hosts horse races, has a 4-hole golf course, and hosts athletics events and even concerts by famous performers, such as Michael Jackson (1997), David Bowie (2002) and Bon Jovi (2003).



**De Kusttram, passing through Raversijde, Ostend (51.210011, 2.865513).** With a length of 68 km, the Kusttram is the longest tramline in the world. The tram travels from Knokke to De Panne and has 69 stops along the line. During the peak summer months, a tram runs every 10 min (every 20 min in the winter months). The line is used by over 3 million passengers every year.



**Searching for Utopia by Jan Fabre, Nieuwpoort (51.150038, 2.723332).** The Belgian coast is a great place for art lovers. The sculpture is one of two remnants of the three-yearly Beaufort art festival that is held along the entire coast. This multi-city art project was first held in 2003. Some of the installations were preserved or bought by the cities they were hosted in. The most famous ones are the yellow *Olnetop* by Nick Ervinck, known for his 3D inspired sculptures in patented yellow; *Searching for Utopia* by Jan Fabre, the orange *Rock Strangers* by Arne Quinze, situated on the dyke of Ostend close to the harbour, and *Caterpillar 5bis* by Wim Delvoye.



**Epernayplein, Middelkerke (51.187464, 2.812532).** Seafront promenades are a well-known phenomenon on the Belgian coast. The promenade in Middelkerke-Westend provides 6 km of walking and cycling with a view of the sea.



**Bray-Dunes, France (51.088737, 2.544201).** It is clear from the surroundings that we have crossed the border with France. Only a handful of buildings are scattered between the dunes in Bray-Dunes, the first city on the French coast. The beach at De Panne, which you can see in the background, is the widest beach on the Belgian coast, with 450 metres of sand at low tide, making it the perfect place for land yachts, little three-wheeled carts that use the wind as a propelling force. De Panne was also the place where the first competitive land yachts were built, and it was used by the Dumont brothers in 1898.



**Leffrinckoucke (51.058992, 2.437299).** Leffrinckoucke, with the skyline of the Dunkirk port.



**Blockhaus des Escardines, National Reserve Platier d'Oye (51.006002, 2.061081).** Grand-Fort-Philippe is linked to Calais by a 14 km stretch of dunes, of which a big part is a nature reserve. You'll find WWII souvenirs in the form of bunkers decorated with local street art on the adjacent beach and in the dunes.



**Dover Patrol Monument, atop Cap Blanc-Nez (50.9247941, 1.7098543).** The obelisk, towering 134 m above the sea, is in memory of the efforts of the Dover Patrol, a joint initiative between the UK and France during WWII to rid the Channel of German submarines. Cap Blanc-Nez is a must-see for nature lovers and fossil hunters. Beware, excavating the fossils is not without danger.



**Cran d'Escalles, near Cap Blanc-Nez, view of the cliffs of Dover (50.920368, 1.701301).** On bright days you'll see a thick white line on the horizon. It's no Fata Morgana, but the outlines of the white cliffs of Dover in England, approximately 34 km away. The view across the sea has invited humankind to think of unique ways to connect both coastlines. Since 1988, the Channel Tunnel – nicknamed the Chunnel – has served as a 50.45 km connection between Dover and Calais, running 75 m below the seabed and 115 m below sea level. Nowadays, the Eurotunnel is by far the most efficient way to cross the Channel. Transporting over 20 million people and 20 million tonnes of freight a year, it still holds the record for the longest underwater section of any tunnel in the world. But the crossing that speaks most to the imagination is swimming the Channel. Since Matthew Webb tackled the 33-and-a-bit km between England and France in 1875, around 2,000 people have followed suit and over 8,000 people have participated in relay swims.

According to the Channel Swimming Association (CSA), a swim can only be officially recognised if you are not assisted by any kind of artificial aid and only use goggles, one cap, a nose clip, ear plugs and one sleeveless and legless bathing costume. Luckily, you are allowed to grease yourself up for insulation – many use goose fat. Shakespeare Beach is the most common point of departure and most people aim for Cap Blanc-Nez or Cap Gris-Nez, the latter being officially the closest point to British soil. The fastest recorded time is just 5 minutes shy of 7 hours and the slowest swimmer so far spent 28 hours in his bath of salt. It's hard to say which one of the two is more impressive. If we've just warmed you up to the idea, please take note of the official rules: you are not allowed to touch another person during the course of the swim, any food or beverages will be passed to you by a long pole from your escort boat. Since the temperatures can plummet to 6 °C, the CSA wants to ensure you're up to the test and will ask you to complete a six-hour swim in similar temperatures before letting you attempt your act of bravery.

Finally, be sure to book your time slot one to two years ahead.



**Audresselles (50.829193, 1.591297).** The GR120 or Sentier du Littoral allows for great sea views between Cap Gris-Nez and Audresselles, the village shown in the picture.



**Pointe de la Crèche, Boulogne-sur-Mer (50.750270, 1.595773).** Sandy stairs will take you to the tip of the rocky Pointe de la Crèche for a panorama of the fishing villages of Audresselles, Ambleteux and Wimereux, from north to south. The last piece of land on the horizon is Cap Gris-Nez.



**Plage de Boulogne-sur-Mer (50.747123, 1.595385).** A desolate area just outside the city of Boulogne-sur-Mer, a few metres from Nausicaâ, the giant aquarium that is open to the public. A mere kilometre away, a fleet of nearly 150 boats sets sail to fish merlin, mackerel and herring, making Boulogne-sur-Mer the biggest fishing port in France.