



Radome Telecommunications Museum

Jon So, we're at the Telecommunications Musueum, called the Radome. Why do we need a telecommunications museum at all?

Virginie Well, we need a telecommunications museum to realise the improvements made in this specialisation over the past years, because things keep evolving a lot, and they evolve quicker and quicker, so we need to keep in mind what it used to be in the past, to be grateful for what we have now.

Jon Absolutely. But I thought the communications 'centre' was in Rennes in Brittany. What are we doing here, therefore, in Lannion?

Virginie Well, most people think that the main telecommunications centre is in Rennes, but it's actually at Lannion. In the past, in the 50s, the main centre was near Paris, and then the government decided to add those offices, engineers' centres and other regions outside of Paris, and they decided to have the telecommunications centre in Brittany, and as the director of this centre was from Lannion, he wanted to give a chance to his own town, so said well okay, let's have it at Lannion.

Jon Is this where all the research takes place? All the development of new technology?

Virginie Most of them, most of them, yes.

Jon Okay, we're now in this huge dome which probably explains why it's gone all echoey. So why the need for such an enormous dome surrounding this equipment?

Virginie Well, the radome is there to protect the antenna, because the antenna is very fragile. It cannot resist [to] rain, wind[s] and differences of temperatures, so to be operational it had to be protected, and this is why the radome is up there; it's like a huge umbrella indeed.

Jon What about the surface area of the dome, more information, any facts and figures?

Virginie Yes, so the radome is 50 metres high and it's one acre? One hectare.

Jon One hectare?

Virginie Yes.

Jon And what about maintenance?

Virginie Well, the radome is inflated with air, only, inflated it weighs 33 tonnes. So 33 tonnes inflated, and we have some kind of huge ventilators working 24 hours a day. Only one is on [now], when it is more windy another one is on.

Jon Why does it actually need to be inflated, is it to protect it from the wind outside?

Virginie Yes, from the wind outside, yeah. It's to protect ...

Jon And what's the material?

Virginie The material? The dome is decran, decran material, it's a plastic-coated material and it's only 2mm thick.

Jon This is 2mm thick?

Virginie Yes, just 2mm thick.

Jon So what happens if a bird flies into it?

Virginie Birds are not dangerous. It wouldn't make a hole. Even though it's very thin, it's very resistant.

Jon Very strong.

Virginie Very strong.

Jon And does it need to be painted?

Virginie Yes, it needs to be painted every 5 years. The painters are working just like window cleaners on skyscrapers. First, they remove the former layers of paint using water pressure, then they spread two layers of paint with spray guns. And it takes between two month[s] and four month to have the radome painted again all fresh. The last time it was painted was two years ago.

Jon And I should explain this is also now used as a cinema isn't it?

Virginie Yes. It's used, well the antenna is used as a cinema, so that people know the history of the site, because it's a very important site in the history of telecommunications.

Jon So what exactly would visitors see if they came to look at the screen?

Virginie Well, the visitors get to see a show ...

Jon Projected on the inside of the dome.

Virginie Yes, absolutely. There's very beautiful light [show] which tells the history of the radome, and the antenna, and everything ...

Jon And we're now in a room which is intended to replicate the inside of a ship.

Virginie Yes.

Jon Could you tell us about this room?

Virginie This room is inside a cable ship, and we get to see where the cable is being coiled all around the cable tank before it is laid onto the sea.

Jon Is it a complicated process putting cable like this (which is very heavy) on the sea-bed?

Virginie Yes, it is complicated. It takes several month[s] to have the cable being laid on the Atlantic Ocean, for instance.

Jon So how much cable are we talking about there?

Virginie Inside this boat, well the real boat, there used to be 5000 kilometers of cable inside of it, and it weighed 5000 tonnes.

Jon That's enough. And for us too that's enough. It's well worth a visit, so Virginie, thank you very much for sparing your time.

Virginie Thank you very much.

