



Boat owners at Lac de Guerlédan

- Didier In those days, there was no-one on the lake; there were no boats, nothing. We saw a few fishermen, but they were rare. People didn't even come to swim in the lake, didn't even walk around it. Once the tourists started coming; then, it really developed.
- Lorna Was there a beach at that time?
- Didier No, no, there were no buildings, nothing. It was wild, natural. The water in the lake was always at the same level, and there were a lot more fish. There were all sorts of small fish: perch, pike and so on.
We bought the place in 1972, and we got a boat two years later. It was a wooden boat and could take 50 people on the lake. And then, when we saw that it worked, we got ourselves trained up, and when we knew that a lot of people would be coming, we bought another boat. That had room to take 140 people, and as we saw business improving, three years later, we got another boat where we could serve meals.
- Lorna No-one knows the lake better than you. Could you describe the lake a little, its depth, whether it's dangerous...
- Didier The lake is 12 kms in length. It's in the valley of the river Blavet, with woods on each side. They dammed the valley, making an artificial lake 12 kms long. This was done in the 1930's in order to produce electricity. In building the dam, they produced enough electricity to supply the whole of Brittany. It's true that the lake is a bit dangerous, as there are few flat places; it's pretty steep-sided. There are rocks on both sides: schist and slate quarries on the north side, in the Côtes d'Armor; sandstone and granite on the south bank, in Morbihan.
- Lorna And have you ever seen the lake empty?
- Didier Yes, three times!
- Lorna And when was the first time?
- Monique 1966, 1975 and 1985. I remember that in 1966, it lasted all summer, so there were a lot of visitors, mostly at the weekends. In '75, there were again quite a lot of people, but then, it was only dry for two-and-a-half months. We had sailings on the lake until 7th

September; the lake was empty by the end of that month, and the water was back by December 15th. But there were only a crowd at weekends, I have to say.

Didier People came to see the bottom of the lake, the old canal and to walk along the tow path. They could walk along the bottom of the lake.

Lorna Are there still houses at the bottom?

Didier There are about a dozen houses at the bottom, which are lock-keeper's cottages.

Lorna And how many locks are there?

Didier Seventeen. Yes, seventeen, like the one at Bon Repos. Of course, the houses have lost their roofs; only the walls are standing.

Lorna And at that time, people could just wander about anywhere?

Monique Yes, along the tow-path.

Lorna And wasn't it dangerous?

Monique You had to take care.

Didier And the grass grew back really quickly. In a couple of months, during the spring, there was grass everywhere..... Just a bit later on, you'd think that there had never been a lake there!

Lorna And the fish...?

Didier They were collecting them from 15th October, and putting them in the lakes around here, like Bosméléac, and further up in the canal. They used a big tank to transport the fish to the other lakes.

Monique The last time, there were some big fish, and they were caught and sent to Lorient, to be sold in the fish market there.

Lorna And what was the effect of emptying the lake, for the businesses around, at Beau Rivage and for the people of Caurel?

Monique I can tell you that no-one made a fortune.

Lorna Are there many more tourists nowadays?

Didier It's not the same type of tourism nowadays. Before, we had Dutch Germans, visitors from all over, and they made this their main holiday destination; they stayed ten days or a fortnight in the campsites. Now, people come for two or three days and move on.

- Monique Before the middle of July, there weren't as many people around, and after the 14th July, the two campsites were full! It's not like that any more. There are crowds nowadays, they come from the region. We see a lot of 22's, 56's, 29's, 35's on the car number plates. They're the ones that fill the campsites. We can see the difference!
- Didier They say the internet will bring us a lot of people, but we'll wait and see. I don't know...I'm not persuaded...
- Lorna Because they have talked of 3 million visitors to Beau Rivage...
- Monique In any case, no matter how many come, we lose out, with our floating restaurant, our cruises, our boat hire and our pedalos. It may not seem much, but we will certainly lose out. There are those who say "You don't need to worry, you're subsidised". But we can't claim anything. No, for us, it's a dead loss! They say "You'll have a huge crowd to make up for it". But we can only do what we can do, eh?
- Didier There'll be a lot of walkers, whatever happens, because this is one of the most beautiful places in the world!

