



A boat lift for Guerlédan and the Nantes to Brest Canal

On 23rd November 2015, in front of the Regional Council at Rennes, the mayor of Mûr de Bretagne, Hervé Le Lu, presented a project that had been in the wings for 85 years : a boat lift for Guerlédan and the Nantes to Brest Canal

Guerlédan is a man-made lake, covering 4 km² and was created in 1923 when the Guerlédan valley was flooded as part of the hydro-electric dam project. The valley follows the course of the Blavet River, a 12 km long canalised stretch of the 185-year old Nantes to Brest Canal. Joseph Rattier, sous-préfet of Pontivy and an engineer, Auguste Leson, were the project's sponsors. Their objective: bring electricity to the Centre of Brittany. In 1946, EDF took over responsibility for the dam and power station when France nationalised gas and electricity production. It is still the largest man-made lake in Brittany and supplies electricity to 15000 homes. Its 51M metres cubed of fresh water also supply drinking water to the area and offer superb water sports facilities.

The plans for the damn and lake had originally included a boat lift, to ensure the continuity of canal traffic from Nantes to Brest in the Côtes d'Armor But the project went over budget almost immediately when the engineers discovered that the bed-rock on which they had planned to build the foundations of the damn, was in fact hidden beneath another 6 metres of clay. They were forced to cut back, and the dam finally was no longer topped by a two-carriageway road but a single track, and the boat lift was rubbed off the blue-print in the rush to get the dam finished within time and budget.

17 locks and several lock-houses were submerged and canal transport in the Côtes d'Armor was well and truly dead.

Since then there have been many different designs for some kind of mechanism to allow boats to scale the 45 metre dam. None, however, have seen the light of day - too expensive ... lack of interest to reinstate navigation or just too crazy

You can see all of the 48 plans on the site of the National In-land Waterways Association, the [ANPEI](#).

So why has this idea been dusted down now, why now?

Well everyone is aware of the Guerlédan Lake being drained in the summer of 2015. It was the first time since 1985, and was carried out by EDF to undertake repair work to the dam. The event was a unique (and the last) opportunity for the public to see once more the Guerlédan Valley and its submerged lock-houses and locks. From May until the end of October 2015, Guerlédan saw more visitors than Mont St Michel, the most visited attraction in France.

They came from everywhere. The whole area and especially the town of Mûr,

benefited enormously from this influx : visitors stayed, they ate, they drank, they bought souvenirs, they went on guided tours of the valley, they hired bikes, and if they could have - would have hired boats ! For thousands it was the first time they had explored Central Brittany and they discovered the canal.

The area is still seeing benefits from this event and the Mayor of Mûr is canny enough to ride on this wave of enthusiasm for the area, particularly the canal and the desire to see it navigable once again. The economic potential is not lost on anyone.

His vision is to bring back canal traffic, this time pleasure craft (and why not, commercial vessels as well) and the enticement is a world-class feat of engineering to match that of the Falkirk Wheel in Scotland, to date, Falkirk is the only swinging boat lift in the world. It was funded to celebrate the Millennium, and to reconnect Glasgow to Edinburgh by linking the Union with Forth and Clyde canals. It took 3 years to build, cost £14 million and opened in 2002. It now receives 1.7 million visitors a year, 1.3 million of whom take a 1 hour boat trip to experience the Wheel in all its glory and spend a whopping £3.5 million in the visitor centre, its shops cafe and boat-rides. The project pay-back was achieved in just 3 years.

This is the model that Le Lu is using to excite the public and politicians. He has already acquired a 20 hectare site next to the dam, a dis-used foundry with a 9-metre deep quarry. EDF has agreed in principle to back the project if the Région back it as well.

And if it goes ahead? Well it will reconnect what Le Lu calls the spinal column of Central Brittany and will bring with it, the possibility of increased tourism and trade, which this area sorely needs.

Right now they are undertaking a feasibility study and maybe. just maybe, in 2017 we will see the ground broken on the construction of an attraction that will rival Futuroscope in Poitiers for the number of visitors who will come to marvel ... and of course, we will be able finally after 85 years, to once again sail from Redon to Brest.

