

Sustainable Visitor Management at the Grands Sites de France Method and Practices



About the Grands Sites de France

The Grands Sites de France (Great Sites of France) are all emblematic landscapes of our country that receive a significant number of visitors and are classified under the Act of 2 May 1930 regarding the "protection of natural monuments and sites of artistic, historical, scientific, legendary or picturesque character".

The Grands Sites de France work in partnership with the government in the interest of striking a balance between long-term preservation of the sites, reception of very large numbers of visitors and development of the local economy. They truly are a laboratory for the sustainable and innovative management of our territories.

The Grands Sites de France Network (RGSF) is the national association of sites that have been awarded the Grand Site de France label by the Minister responsible for the Environment and those that endeavour to obtain it.

Disclaimer:

Kindly note that all publications (guides, minutes and other documents) and audio/video recordings (talks, webinars, etc.) are available in French only. Consequently, an English translation of their titles is given between brackets when they are first mentioned. In all subsequent mentions, only the original French title remains.

FOREWORDS	P.4
INTRODUCTION	P.6
I. TERRITORIAL STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE:	
Mobilising Stakeholders and Co-Developing the Territorial Tourist Project	P. 9
Sheet #1 • Massif du Canigó • From Mountain Peak Management to Tourist Destination: a Territorial and Partnership Approach	
Sheet #2 • Gorges de l'Hérault • Territorial Governance to Spread Out the Flows	P. 12
Focus • Falaises d'Étretat - Côte d'Albâtre • Mobilising Stakeholders to Prepare for the Travel Season	P. 14
2. VISITOR OBSERVATION:	
Choosing and Organising Tools Based on Management Goals and Territorial Specificity	P. 15
Sheet #I • Massif de l'Estérel • Studying Visitors to Better Structure the Flow Management Strategy	
Sheet #2 • Salagou - Cirque de Mourèze • Facilitating a Participatory Visitor Observatory	
Sheet #3 • Sixt-Fer-à-Cheval • Artificial Intelligence - A New Data Source for Analysing Visits.	
Focus • Bibracte - Morvan des Sommets • An Observatory to Serve Territorial Tourism Intelligence	Г. 22
3. FLOW CONTROL:	
Using Regulations, Land Control and Contractual Measures	
Sheet #1 • Dune du Pilat • Supporting Practice Management by Purchasing Real Estate	
Focus • Gorges de l'Hérault • Regulating Visitors' Access to Preserve the Environment	
4. SITE PLANNING:	D 20
Immersing Visitors and Revealing the Sensitive Nature of the Landscape	
Sheet #2 • Cirque de Navacelles • Planning for Lookouts to Relieve the Beating Heart of the Site	
Focus • Camargue gardoise • Bringing Nature Back to Connect the Historical Site to its Landscape Setting	
5. TRAFFIC AND PARKING MANAGEMENT: Organising Vehicle Flows in Harmony with Nature and the Landscape	D 35
Sheet #1 • Baie de Somme • A Long-Term Action Plan to Decrease the Number of Vehicles	
Sheet #2 • Puy Mary - Volcan du Cantal • Setting Up a Shuttle Service to Reduce the Impact of Cars	
Sheet #3 • Salagou - Cirque de Mourèze • Regulating Camper Van Parking	
Focus • Dune du Pilat • Designing Parking Spots Respectful of the Landscape and Habitats	P. 42
6. GREEN MOBILITY DEVELOPMENT	
Offering Decarbonised and Less Impactful Transport Alternatives	P. 43
Sheet #I • Dunes de Flandre • Integrating Into a Territorial Active Mobility Scheme	P. 44
Sheet #2 • Escapade Nature sans Voiture® (Car-Free Nature Getway), An Experiment Full of Opportunities for the Territories	
Focus • Vallée de la Vézère • Making the Electric Bike More Desirable than the Car	P. 48
7. TOURISM OFFER TRANSFORMATION:	
Promoting a Form of Tourism Consistent with Heritage Values	
Sheet #1 • Marais poitevin • Coordinating the Offer with a Group of Stakeholders to Make Visitors Stay Longer	
Sheet #2 • Concors - Sainte-Victoire • Promoting Alternative Offers to Distribute Visitors	P. 52
8. OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES MANAGEMENT:	
Reconciling Uses and Structuring Practices in Harmony with Biodiversity and Coexistence Principles	
Sheet #1 • Gorges du Verdon • Supporting Wild Water Sports Professionals to Reconcile Site Preservation with Economic Activity	
Sheet #2 • Concors-Sainte Victoire • A Charter to Steer Sporting Events	
9. COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS RAISING:	D. ()
Speaking to Visitors Before their Trip to Guide Tourist Practices Sheet #1 • Leveraging Communication Tools to Manage Visitor Numbers	
Sheet #2 • Choosing Not to Communicate	
10. VISITOR RECEPTION AND MEDIATION TOOLS:	D / 4
Informing and Meeting Visitors Onsite to Spark Appropriate Behaviours	
Sheet #2 • Cirque de Navacelles • A Personalised Welcome Onsite Thanks to Eco-Volunteers	
Sheet #3 • Outdoor Measures to Go Meet Visitors and Inhabitants	
FURTHER RESOURCES	P 70
ACRONYMS	P.71
METHODOLOGY	P71

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We view the Grands Sites de France as more than just national property; they are also a challenge.

National wealth in the sense that they attract visitors, generate wealth and are our legacy to future generations. At the same time, they represent a challenge, as we must strike a balance between making them accessible to all, protecting their biodiversity and landscapes, adopting eco-friendly practices and promoting local cultures. Such are the stakes of our tourism policy.

Indeed, tourist destinations have been suffering lately from overtourism - a new concept - whereby the great number of visitors and their occasionally inappropriate behaviours threaten the environment, the inhabitants' quality of life and the tourist experience. Furthermore, according to the World Tourism Organisation, 95% of the world's tourists visit less than 5% of emerged lands. Managing tourist flows is thus becoming an inevitable parameter of public action, benefitting from the resources of programmes such as Avenir Montagnes ("Mountain Future") and Destination France.

In response, site managers, territorial authorities, sports federations and start-ups have been brainstorming and launching initiatives. One of these is the partnership between the General Directorate of Businesses and the Grands Sites de France Network. We are proud of this partnership, which led to the creation of this guide. As part of the Tourism Sector Committee, this partnership proposed a series of actions in the summer of 2023 to sustainably manage flows over the next few years.

Due to the visibly increasing impact of climate change in the mountains, the Avenir Montagnes programme was launched by the Prime Minister in May 2021 and given 331 million euros to support investment and engineering. Its goal is to assist mountain territories in transitioning towards a more diverse and sustainable tourism model.

In terms of investment, 300 million euros have been mobilised equally by the government and the regions; the 150 million euros in government credit enabled us to support 482 projects in 2021 and 2022.

For the engineering part, 31 million euros have been mobilised, including 11 millions from the Territory Bank, which were allocated to 3 supporting mechanisms adapted to the challenges facing mountain territories:

- 100 mountain mobility projects under the joint supervision of ANCT and France mobilités have been selected, mobilising 10 million euros;
- 25 sites have been chosen by Atout France for the renovation of leisure property (the ultimate goal being to work with 50 sites);
- Finally, 62 territories have been rewarded as part of the Avenir Montagnes engineering programme led by ANCT with the support of the Territory Bank.

How to sustainably manage tourist flows is an important issue to consider when rolling out the Avenir Montagnes plan. The Grands Sites de France Network has been enlisted to that end alongside the French Federation of Pedestrian Hikes and the Federation of French Regional Natural Parks. The distribution of visitors in the territories is a key issue for the sustainability of biodiversity and landscapes, the sharing of the economic rewards of tourism, and the well-being of the inhabitants and visitors.



Gisèle Rossat-Mignod

Director of the
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Louis VillaretPresident of the
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France is a highly sought-after tourist destination. Many millions of both foreign and French visitors (re)discover each year the immense wealth of our natural and cultural heritage with its varied and accessible landscapes, remarkable sites, art-rich and historical buildings, etc.

Although such enthusiasm brings us joy, it also means we have to take new issues into account. When thousands of visitors walk together through the streets of the ancient city of Carcassonne, hike alongside the cliffs of Étretat or bathe in the river by the Hérault gorge, we know that this impacts site preservation, human and non-human resident acceptability, the quality of the landscapes themselves or the welcoming of visitors, among other things.

This is why the Territory Bank is committed to supporting the reflection led by the Grands Sites de France Network on sustainable tourism at these sites. This is part of the necessary ecological transformation of our territories, which is at the heart of our work.

The resulting "Sustainable Visitor Management" guide tackles each concern in an interdisciplinary manner and is based on the feedback from the Grands Sites. It has been designed like a toolbox. Feel free to use it in the way that best suits your needs!

Since the beginning of the Grands Sites de France national policy, visitor management has been a core concern of the authorities in charge of managing these remarkable landscapes. Hosting an increasing number of visitors whose practices are constantly evolving, these protected sites are as fascinating as they are fragile. In the years that followed the Covid-19 crisis, we have observed a tremendous rise in the number of visitors and changes in their behaviours. The effects of climate change are of course increasing the pressure exerted by tourism on sites and natural resources.

Based on the experiences of many Grands Sites de France managers, this guide adopts a nonstandard, pragmatic project methodology that draws on more than twenty years in the field.

Its goal is to highlight actionable mechanisms, exemplary practices and recommendations taken from concrete, inspiring experiences in terms of sustainable visitor management.

Such actions are carried out by elected officials and professionals as part of interdisciplinary territorial projects led in a cooperative and consistent manner to serve the landscape and local life.

Based on a dialogue and a vision of the territory inspired by local values and heritage, these approaches favour a more peaceful form of tourism that brings hope for the future.



The classified site and Grand Site de France logos represent the geometrical shape of France at the centre of a camera diaphragm. They reflect the gaze of mankind upon its environment, an appreciation of its beauty.

Origin of the Policy: Protecting Sites under Pressure

Made famous by 19th century artists, the iconic landscapes of the Grands Sites de France¹ are classified as such pursuant to an act passed on 2 May 1930, to ensure that their artistic, historical, scientific, legendary or picturesque nature that earned them such national recognition endures. The Grands Sites de France - which are often rural territories, carry unique landscape values synonymous with memory, a return to one's roots and transmission. Highly photogenic and well known to all, their beauty arouses emotion, attachment and desirability. Although they welcome close to 38 million visitors each year, they represent a mere 1.6% of France's territory.

In the late 1970s, the tourism industry was booming. In France, people now had 5 weeks of paid leave instead of 3. Tourism changed, laying the foundations of what would become institutionalised tourism. Massive flows of visitors travelled by car to the seaside, the mountains or the countryside,

mostly in summer, disturbing the fragile balance between the preservation of the landscape and environmental quality of these places and their economic development. The site protection policy spearheaded by the Ministry of the Environment thus evolved to include these new concerns and support sites by encouraging the emergence of a local form of management.

The first "Grand Site Operations" headed by managing authorities aimed to repair the damage done and give back some lustre to these landscapes degraded mainly uncontrolled tourism. Rehabilitation and rewilding actions were implemented in trampled areas or those strongly impacted by the omnipresence of cars. In partnership with local authorities, the government implemented a national policy to suggest a sustainable form of management for these rehabilitated classified sites and fight against their degradation on a continuous basis.

Evolution of the Grands Sites de France's Consideration of Tourism

Created in 2002 and incorporated into the law in 2010, the Grand Site de France label is awarded by ministerial decision in recognition of the efforts led by local authorities to preserve these remarkable and protected landscapes (art. L341-15-1 of the Environmental Code). This certification acknowledges exemplary management based on successful actions that have a positive impact on the territory. Following a continuous improvement principle, it is awarded for a limited time - first 6 years, then 8 years since July 2023 - and can be renewed.

Grounded in the rehabilitation and preservation of these remarkable sites, visitor reception and local sustainable development, the Grand Site de France approach evolves as it becomes necessary to plan for a multidisciplinary strategic vision and tackle the issues on a territorial project scale rather than by strictly looking at each specific problem to solve. In this way, the Grand Site de France integrated management project intersects with territorial organisation in all its complexity. Indeed, the territory to be protected is impacted not only by tourism, but also by other sectoral policies such as agriculture, urban planning, energy transition, etc. These policies are all considered and, ideally, given consistency through the lens of the classified site and its landscape backdrop (see the "La

démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France : Méthode et pratiques'' guide ("The Landscape Approach in the Grands Sites de France: Method and Practices')).

The Grands Sites de France are places where people live and work, that they visit, experience and protect; they draw on the highly mobilising force of people's attachment to an iconic landscape to rally both insitutional stakeholders and civil society behind a common territorial project. As territorial communities are responsible for a distinctive heritage they must pass on to future generations, they lead public projects that focus on general interest as a core part of their work.

Due to the lack of familiarity between the tourism sector and these authorities and local disagreements over approaches, the Grands Sites de France began in 2010 to build their own tourist culture, increasingly integrate their actions and make fundamental changes to the tourist developments underway FCH. 1/7. The Grands Sites and tourism stakeholders began to dialogue and would continue to do so towards a better mutual understanding of their protection and economic development concerns.

Far from a policy that advocates isolating sites or turning them into museums, the Grands Sites

HOSTING CAPACITY

When it comes to the Grands Sites de France, hosting capacity is not a value set in stone, but results from the interaction of several factors, such as site fragility, hosting culture, tourism modalities, etc. It is determined based on the impact the number of visitors has on the site, the quality of the visit and territorial life, with the notion of social acceptability as an indicator.

¹ For the purpose of this guide, the Grand Site denomination is used generically to designate certified sites and those in the process of obtaining the certification label.

seek to encourage a form of tourism that is rooted in the specificities of the site, adapted to its fragilities and compatible with local life and the multifunctional nature of the territory. In return, tourism stakeholders and inhabitants alike benefit from rehabilitated, organised spaces capable of offering an experience on a par with visitors' expectations.

Long-term Sustainable Management: a Multidisciplinary Method

The Grand Site de France approach is unique in that the preservation of the iconic and protected landscape is served by an integrated and planned project.

To sustainably manage tourism, the Grands Sites de France refer to this overall project, including every aspect of its multidimensional nature.

Said nature mostly transpires through:

 A collectively-led reflection involving all stakeholders concerned as part of a multidisciplinary governance to serve the sustainable project of the territory; An endeavour to strike a balance in the territorial strategy based on an acute knowledge of the site and its ecosystem (number of visitors, economy, regulations, geography, biodiversity, landscape, heritage sites, agriculture, craftsmanship, etc.).

In other words, this approach blends innovation with efficiency by encouraging projects where issues and themes can intersect.

NOTE TO THE READER:

This guide aims to echo this approach as it identifies 10 potential action areas that are neither comprehensive nor exclusive but interdependent, depending on the territorial project into which they are to be integrated. Although this guide was divided into themes to make it easier to read, links are suggested between the various chapters and practical sheets to make the global methodology more legible.

FROM ISSUES TO RESULTS: 10 INTERDEPENDENT LEVERS

Control over the high season and sustainable visitor management contribute to site preservation, the well-being of the inhabitants, the development of local economic rewards and the improvement of the living and visiting environments.





The landscape-driven project approach offers an immersive and more peaceful form of tourism conducive to a quality visitor experience outside of peak visiting periods.

A Method Based on Experience

Members of the Grands Sites de France Network have been sharing and capitalising on their tourism experiences for over twenty years through:

- Thematic talks: "Quel tourisme dans les Grands Sites?" ("What type of tourism at the Grands Sites?") in 2013, "Du sens aux sens: vivre et faire vivre l'expérience Grands Sites de France" ("From the meaningful to the sensory: experiencing and making others experience the Grands Sites de France") in 2014 and "Fréquentation touristique et vie locale dans les paysages d'exception: quel équilibre?" ("Tourism and local life in exceptional landscapes: how to balance them?") in 2019.
- "Grands Sites de France et tourisme", (Grands Sites de France and Tourism") a framework document approved by the 2014 RGSF General Assembly and conveying the Grands Sites de France strategic position and values in terms of sustainable tourism.

- The "Le tourisme durable en pratique: 20 exemples innovants dans les Grands Sites de France" guide ("A Practical Guide to Sustainable Tourism: 20 Innovative Examples at the Grands Sites de France") in 2016, illustrating said values with concrete experiences.
- The "L'entrepreneuriat de territoire dans les Grands Sites de France" guide ("Territorial Entrepreneurship at the Grands Sites de France") in 2020, which includes an exploratory reflection and methodology principles for dynamic economic activites rooted in territorial values.

As an extension of the aforementioned body of works, this guide furthers the RGSF collective brainstorming, centering it on its sustainable visitor management expertise. It also complements the "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France: Méthode et pratiques" guide published in 2022.

Reading Keys

This publication is designed for the members of the Grands Sites de France Network and for all elected officials and stakeholders who, outside the RGSF, strive for tourism to be better included in territorial projects. Inspired by the Grands Sites de France experiences, the methodology relies on diverse and complementary solutions. These experiences are not meant to be identically reproduced on any territory facing similar challenges; rather, they offer keys for success and encourage experimentation. Kindly note that the sites spotlighted here still have visitor-related challenges to overcome and continue to search for new solutions.

This guide also fits into a range of national, European and international works on sustainable visitor management. In France, the natural area networks in particular have been mobilising on this topic and leading complementary works. The various publications on the subject are to be gathered and highlighted as part of the national plan on flow management launched in 2023 **P.70**.

TERRITORIAL STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

Mobilising Stakeholders and Co-Developing the Territorial Tourist Project

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

From the beginning, the founding principle of the Grands Sites de France national policy has been that local authorities should willingly embrace it. The landscape and local heritage values inspire stakeholders to mobilise, which is the basis for the long-term territorial project. The tourism component of said project is part of that comprehensive strategy and its purpose goes beyond the mere issue of visitors. It contributes to:

- Welcoming visitors in a manner that preserves the site and sustainably develops the economy of the territory,
- Reconciling the environment and economic development, ensuring that practices are compatible with both local life and visitor reception.

To advance this project, governance should adopt a systemic approach that coordinates the various sectoral policies of the territory - including tourism - with a specific goal in mind: site preservation > P.7.

For the Grands Sites de France managers, the challenge is to successfully co-develop with territorial stakeholders a vision for the future that can go beyond conflicts and personal interests. To that end, they bring together actors from a wealth of areas: elected officials, community technicians, government institutions and services, professionals from the sector, inhabitants and any public or private stakeholder identified for their knowledge of the site and what constitutes its memory, values and specificities.

The visitor management strategy is decided based on the most relevant geographic scale and can extend beyond the confines of the Grand Site de France per se. Protection areas as well as potential transfer areas, each stakeholder's skills and departmental or regional tourist policies are all taken into account.

Recommendations

- Gain in-depth knowledge of the issues and build territory-specific engineering.
- Define action area(s) to act on the relevant scale.
- Facilitate stakeholder groups by organising regular and inclusive dialogue and consultation sessions. These sharing spaces (steering committees, technical committees, follow-up committees, etc.) encourage the development of a common project culture and foster dialogue, cooperation and a better appropriation of the issues linked to a large number of visitors.
- Mobilise stakeholders around a reference knowledge base in every step of the project ▶CH.2.
- Base decisions on a long-term prospective vision.
- Formalise territorial partnerships so that they persist.
- Accept that it will take a long time to implement

- the structuring project, but mobilise the necessary flexibility for quick decision-making in reaction to one-off, circumstancial and/or urgent visitor peak management issues.
- Associate stakeholders who are indirectly linked to tourism professions - such as scientific boards, academics, artist collectives, local citizen associations, social integration actors, chambers of skilled trades and crafts, as well as stakeholders from economic industries rooted in territorial resources - can be a source of creativity and innovation for the territory (see "L'entrepreneuriat de territoire dans les Grands Sites de France" guide).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- "Valeurs communes des Grands Sites de France" ramework document ("Grands Sites de France Common Values") - RGSF, 2014
- "Grands Sites de France et tourisme" framework document -RGSF, 2014
- Minutes of the 14th RGSFTalks "Quelle gouvernance et quelle organisation pour la gestion des Grands Sites?" ("Managing the Grands Sites: governance and organisation choices") - 2012
- Minutes of the 15th RGSFTalks "Quel tourisme dans les Grands Sites?" - 2013
- Minutes of the 21st RGSFTalks "Fréquentation touristique et vie locale dans les paysages d'exception: quel équilibre?" -2019
- Grands Sites Thread No.13
 "Comment mobiliser et sensibiliser les habitants à la démarche Grand Site de France?" (Mobilising Inhabitants and Raising their Awareness about the Grand Site de France Approach") - RGSF, 2019
- "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France - Méthode et pratiques" guide - RGSF, 2022

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Project and follow-up tools: Territorial contracts (such as "Destination Contracts"), multistakeholders steering committees, preliminary studies, charters and structure plans, etc.
- Mobilisation tools: Field workshops, consultation meetings, trainings, educational tours, shared resources platforms, cartographies, internal communication tools, etc.
 CH.2.

From Mountain Peak Management to Tourist Destination: A Territorial and Partnership Approach

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE MASSIF DU CANIGÓ (CANIGÓ MOUNTAIN)

For centuries, the Canigó has been a majestic natural feature, attracting the gaze and feeding the imagination of the men and women of the Roussillon area and elsewhere. This coastal mountain is the Catalans' compass and the sailors' daymark. Due to its distinctive geographical features, somewhere between "Mar i Munt" ("sea and mountain", this site is home to exceptionally diverse landscapes and biodiversity.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Canigó Grand Site Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors:

Around 700,000 on the mountain and between 28,000 and 32,000 at the summit

Number of inhabitants: 31,190

Grand Site de France surface area: 105,652 hectares

WHY?

Situated close to spa towns, the Canigó mountain has been a tourist territory since the late 19th century. The creation of hiking trails and the inauguration of the Cortalets refuge in 1899 would lay the foundations of the current form of mountain tourism. After WWII, the economic balance of the territory was weak and tourism became the main development axis. In those days, mountain visits were done simply by driving motor vehicles up to the various refuges, if not beyond. However, the "Pla Guillem" case in 1994, when a trench was dug at 2,200 metres above sea level to keep the cars from wandering off the track that connects the two slopes, sparked strong reactions and marked a turning point in the tourist trajectory of the mountain, laying the groundwork for the site management project.

As part of a traffic circulation plan co-led by the government, the National Forest Office (ONF) and the Mixed Syndicate, management and motorised transport flow regulation efforts were combined at the various access points of the mountain FCH.3/5. In view of the issues involved in securing and maintaining the congested network of trails and thanks to a strong political will to control flows in order to protect the natural and landscape heritage of the mountain and traditional activities such as pastoralism, several access tracks to the classified site were successively closed.

Between 2008 and 2020, almost 40 kilometres of motorised tracks going to the Mariailles and Cortalets refuges - necessary to reach the Canigó Summit - were closed to the public, with the exception of duly authorised people. As a result of the continuous consultation of the local population and natural and climate events (landslides, Storm Gloria, etc.), the entry point for motorised vehicles was then lowered to under I,000 metres above sea level. Concurrently, a network of foot-, horse- and cycle paths connecting the gates to the classified site was built and fully enhanced by the Grand Site,

completely transforming the volume of visits as well as the exploration conditions and experience of the Catalans' sacred mountain.

Today, the question remains whether visitors should be spatially spread out more by territorially structuring the Canigó destination so that it goes much further than the confines of the classified site and those of the Grand Site de France.

HOW?

To complete this scaling up and move from the Canigó Summit to the Canigó Destination, the operation originally run at the heart of the site was progressively expanded to encompass a much larger territory. The various geographic levels and the implementation of measures distributed between 10 reception sectors selected for their territorial, heritage, landscape and reception value are expressed in the strategy. To approach this large territory, name it, make it intelligible and create a narrative around the destination, one of the key steps was to design the Grand Site de France landscape plan (see "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France - Méthode et pratiques" guide). Not only did this landscape plan clarify things, it fostered dialogue between the territorial actors of both slopes and suggested that the territory be read in a new light, revolving around 3 scopes with their own stakes and aims:

- The "Massif du Canigó" classified site (23,212 ha), i.e. the heritage focal point including other protection and management measures (Natura 2000, national reserve, state forest, guided biological reserve, etc.);
- The Grand Site de France (50 municipalities), which is the backdrop of the classified site, an area certified for its classified site preservation, management and enhancement project;
- The Destination Canigó-Pais Catalá (80 municipalíties) corresponding to the territorial partnership tourist area, as well as the scope of the Grand Site Occitanie / Sud de France¹.

To control the spatial distribution of flows from the summit area to the valleys and make it so that visitors explore the entire destination, one hundred reception hubs were identified, such as villages, points of interest, tourist sites, gates to the classified site and guarded refuges, for example. In an effort to connect, to network and diversify the tourism offer and to highlight the heritage, a global reception plan was devised for the Destination, conveying each thematic or sectoral approach: footpath structure plan, cycle strategy, signage plan, plans to enhance the Canigó North and South balconies and the piedmont, etc.

In addition to this destination scope, which goes beyond the Grand Site de France area, governance is reinforced governance by three key bodies:

- The Grand Site de France Massif du Canigó Mixed Syndicate's trade union committee, which spearheads the overall project and includes the Department, the Grand Site municipalities and the ONF:
- The sector committees, which include the key institutional and socioeconomic stakeholders for each of the 10 reception sectors (town/city halls, communities of municipalities, tourist offices, the ONF, economic actors, etc.);
- The Destination Committee, which unites the 3 communities of municipalities part of the destination, their intercommunal tourist offices and the Canigó Grand Site. Mixed Syndicate. Created by the Spôtt² contract between the Grand Site

de France and the government, it meets 2 to 3 times per year to define and implement the Destination partnership project.

NEXT STEPS

Originally the sole lead of the classified site management and preservation project, the Canigó Grand Site Mixed Syndicate now plays the leading role in organising visits to the territory. It is fully committed to the projects rewarded by Avenir Montagnes in the Engineering and Mobility sections.

By ensuring that each of its localised and thematic projects echoes the overall objective and involves the partners and key stakeholders, the territory has been transforming and manages to reconcile its greater power of attraction with heritage preservation.

Coupled with project engineering and innovative measures to support economically-oriented project leads (see the guide on territorial entrepreneurship), this strategy resulted in:

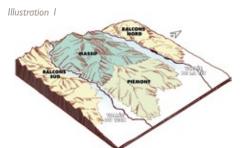
- A Canigó by bike strategy,
- A reception furniture charter,
- The enhancement of the forgotten historical heritage surrounding the Pinosa mining city and the network of converging paths,
- The enhacement of the Canigó North and South balconies as well as its piedmont.

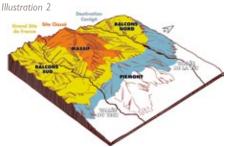
Keys to success

- The elected officials' political lead.
- Several levels of action:
- Loosening the noose around the heart of the site,
- Supporting the economic enhancement of the balconies,
- Shaping the offer and communicating around the proposed experience ▶CH.7.
- A common basis for the dialogue made possible by the landscape plan to identify the spaces and how they relate to each other.
- "Building a destination", thanks to appropriate, consistent governance and work scale.
- The 10-reception-sector approach that ensures greater work proximity daily.
- Accepting that it takes a long time to structure the destination. As Florian Chardon, Grand Site Director, says: "The territory is a work in progress and time is needed for the mental image to translate into something concrete."

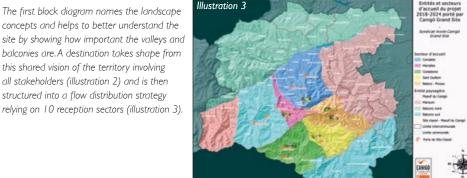
Items to be watchful of

- Shaping the structure of the project before bringing professionals on board.
- Taking the necessary time to carefully develop the tourism offer and the connection with the economic stakeholders.
- · Highlighting the actions carried out and communicating once the site is ready and feels complete with all its partners.





concepts and helps to better understand the site by showing how important the valleys and balconies are. A destination takes shape from this shared vision of the territory involving all stakeholders (illustration 2) and is then structured into a flow distribution strategy relying on 10 reception sectors (illustration 3).



[&]quot;Grand Site Occitanie / Sud de France" is a tourist certification label designed to promote the region's heritage, cultural and historical sites and facilitate the economic development of the territories concerned.

FIND OUT MORE

- www.canigo-grandsite.fr
- www.tourisme-canigou.com
- "Grands Sites de France et Tourisme" practical guide - Sheet #3 p.13 - RGSF, 2014
- "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France" practical guide - Practical sheet p.20 - RGSF,
- "L'entrepreneuriat de territoire dans les Grands Sites de France" practical guide - Sheet #2 p.13 -RGSF, 2020

² In 2015, the Ministry of the Economy launched a call for proposals for "Territorial Tourist Hubs Structuring Contracts" (also known as "Spôtt" contracts) to foster public/private cooperation and a quality local tourism offer.

Territorial Governance to Spread Out the Flows

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE GORGES DE L'HÉRAULT (HÉRAULT GORGE)

Descending from the Cévennes, the Hérault River sculpts the limestone plateau into a gorge that is at times rocky and steep, and at others gentle and fertile, surrounded by rich greenery. Higher up, on the causses, the holm oak and the garigue live side by side. In the mountains of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, the Gellone Abbey founded 1,200 years ago in this spiritual desert is a reminder that pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago once contributed to the development of the villages and the building of the Devil's bridge. There, the river leads to a vast plain where vines and olive trees reign supreme.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: three communities of municipalities, i.e. Hérault Valley (CCVH), Greater Saint-Loup Summit (CCGPSL), and Ganges and Sumène Cévennes (CCCGS)

Annual visitors:

650,000 for the southern area and 52,000 for the northern area, in Issensac

Number of inhabitants: 6,000

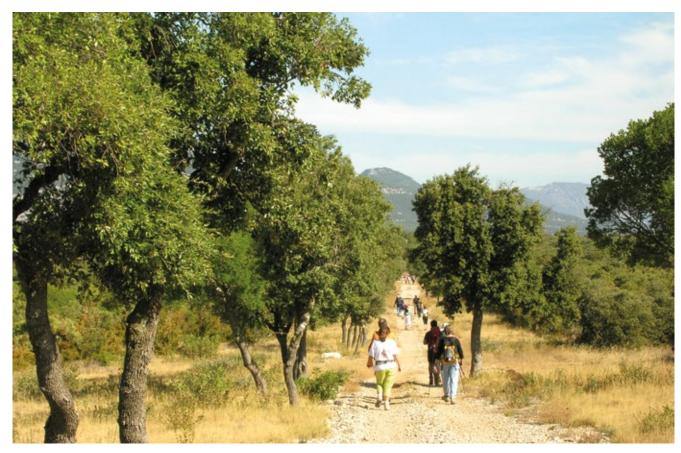
Grand Site de France surface area: 20,788 hectares

WHY

For more than 20 years, the Hérault Valley community of municipalities has been committed to preserving the core heritage of this Mediterranean landscape at the foothills of the Cévennes, and has been working to spread out the tourist flows coming to the village of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert. The tourism strategy brought together the intercommunal tourist office and the village's 4 neighbouring municipalities on 10,000 hectares as early as 1998. Later, in 2017, 20,000 hectares - 10 municipalities and 3 communities of municipalities - would fall under

the Grand Site de France. The tourism strategy and the Grand Site de France project were then gradually adopted into a new, larger intercommunal partnership whose purpose was to manage the wider landscape of the Hérault gorge.

The avowed objective was to relieve the whole gorge from the presence of cars and to limit unauthorised parking by creating reception areas where shuttles and eco-friendly transportation methods would be available **CH.5/6**.



Visitor-related issues are felt much beyond the village of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert and the heart of the gorge.

HOW?

In 2002, the high season grew to about 80 days, with 6,000 to 8,000 daily visitors in the heart of the site. These flows would gather in Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert and over 4 kilometres of gorge, leading to serious problems. As traffic became very congested, people would park anywhere without authorisation, accidents increased and both the site and the quality of the visit decreased.

To channel these high numbers of visitors and spread them out, the CCVH implemented several actions in 5 municipalities, including:

- Acquiring property together and creating parking areas outside of the gorge ▶CH.3;
- Establishing a Grand Site Visitor Centre at the mouth of the gorge ▶CH.4;
- Implementing summer shuttles in response to uncontrolled parking at the entrance of the gorge ▶P.39;
- Highlighting points of interest in the 4 gateway municipalities, such as the Argileum site interpretation centre in Saint-Jean-de-Fos, rooted in the territorial history of pottery making ▶CH.7.

In 2010, the site was awarded the Grand Site de France label for the first time in recognition of the efforts made which led, among other things, to reducing the annual saturation period to 36 days and to making tourism more acceptable.

In 2017, as part of the renewal of the certification label, the Grand Site de France area was extended to include the entire "Gorges de l'Hérault" classified site and to continue working on spreading out flows on a larger scale.

This new management perimeter helped reinforce the occasional cooperation work already happening on the field and to implement new governance.

A comprehensive objective agreement was signed by the 3 EPCIs (Intercommunal Cooperation Public Institutions) for the duration of the certification and translated each year into an agreement governing the financial implementation of the programme. The Grand Site de France traditional steering committee was enlarged to include the other two EPCIs' elected officials, technicians and tourism partners. A rotating presidency between the 3 communities of municipalities encouraged all stakeholders to be involved in the shared project. Visitor distribution goals were shared and season assessment meetings organised to support the

thought process and design a cohesive project. A

landscape plan for the plains, causses and Hérault

NEXT STEPS

gorge was jointly led in 2019.

- The planning tools, strategic studies and visitor data follow-up are being adapted to the new scope;
- A bathing and water sport management scheme has been devised along the entire river from Ganges to Gignac, involving 15 municipalities which share the same canoe flow management issues ▶CH.8:
- The traffic and parking plan established for the southern part of the gorge is being extended to the whole Grand Site de France ▶ CH.5;
- The landscape plan for the plains, the causses and the Hérault gorge, finalised in April 2022 and encompassing even more than the new perimeter outlines 3 great landscape units: the "jewel" (i.e. the heart of the site), the gates, the peripheral biodiversity refuge and balconies

The objective of spatially distributing visitors is based on a strategic project implemented at the right scale, detailed knowledge of peak and potential transfer areas to receive the public, as well as the continuous roll-out of various actions to spread out the flows (shuttle stops, work on the offer, viewpoint enhancement, etc.) ▶P.28.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- Cooperation intersecting the natural areas (Natura 2000), classified site, heritage landscape and visitor-related issue management. Communities were particularly motivated to join the project due to visitor-related concerns.
- Flexible collaboration based on trust, resource sharing, economies of scale and quality relationships, including convivial times to work together and co-develop.

Items to be watchful of

- Spatially distributing visitors is a relevant goal but it must be supported by excellent knowledge of the sites and their ability to receive visitors. Transfer areas must be thoroughly examined, as less visited places often become a refuge for biodiversity. Preserving peaceful sites for flora and fauna is essential ►CH.2.
- Being an attractive site may still be considered a priority for some local stakeholders



FIND OUT MORE

- www.cc-vallee-herault.fr
- Application for the 2017-2022 renewal of the certification label
- · Application cartography atlas

CCVH, CCGPSL, CCCGS have been cooperating to manage together the Gorges de l'Hérault Natura 2000 site since 2011.

Mobilising Stakeholders to Prepare for the Travel Season

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE FALAISES D'ÉTRETAT - CÔTE D'ALBÂTRE (CLIFFS OF ÉTRETAT - ALABASTER COAST)

One of the most popular places for those who come to discover France, the Grand Site Falaises d'Étretat - Côte d'Albâtre has been tackling the issue of intense visit periods since 2021 within a "Mobility - Preparing for the travel season" experimental group. It includes local elected officials, intermunicipalities, tourist offices, an agency working to attract tourists, the gendarmerie (military corps of police agents), the subprefecture and the directorates of the Department and the Region dealing with mobility and visitor-related issues (roads, cycle paths, etc.) linked to the implementation of the Grand Site's mobility and eco-friendly travel plan.

The purpose of this body is to help all stakeholders become aware of how the territory prepares for the travel season in terms of:

- · Locating transferred and authorised parking areas,
- Traffic direction,
- Public transport schedules,
- Seasonal events likely to impact traffic, etc.

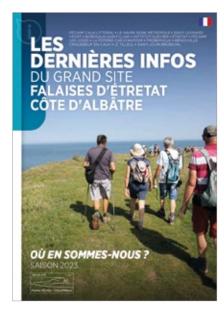
The group has also devised two communication and mediation actions, including:

- Documents and press releases to remind the public of best practices and car-free options **CH.9**,
- A travelling Visitor Centre to raise awareness among visitors and the inhabitants **>CH.10**.

An instant communication platform was tested for two years by the members of the group to keep in touch during the high season. Elected officials could, for instance, signal and locate visitor transfer zones, parking and overflow issues or practice conflicts by sharing photographs. These picture-evidenced field observations helped draft common statements, so that the infrastructure could be adapted to make visits smoother. In order to complement and objectify this field work, the working group receives a quantitative report at the end of each holiday period, based on the observation data provided by:

- The eco-counters located in the sensitive natural areas and along the coastal footpath,
- The road agency's statistics on unlawful parking occurrences,
- The summer mounted brigade's quantitative assessment, especially regarding unlawful parking,
- Seine-Maritime Attractivité as part of their partnership with Flux Vision Tourisme¹, to name but a few FCH.2.

All of these measures are used to regularly follow up on visitor numbers and prefigure the implementation of a permanent observatory.



The press releases are drafted collectively and tackle the issues raised by the members of the working group.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grand Site Falaises d'Étretat-Côte d'Albâtre Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: Over 1.5 million

Number of inhabitants: 30,000

Surface area: 10,758 hectares

S FIND OUT MORE

www.seinemaritime.fr

 $^{^{\}rm I}$ Flux Vision Tourisme is a mobile data analysis solution that provides visitor, origin and movement statistical indicators based on the technical information collected by Orange mobile network.

VISITOR OBSERVATION

Choosing and Organising Tools Based on Management Goals and Territorial Specificity

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

A management project is founded on an acute knowledge of how the landscapes, biodiversity and tourism evolve. Such knowledge relies as much on unbiased quantitative and cartography data - which reveal the characteristics of the territory - as on the collection of sensitive perceptions, memories and the attachment to places and heritage sites. Thus, when estimating visitor numbers over a long period of time, the Grands Sites de France have at their disposal an important tool that helps them define objectives and make decisions.

The Grand Site partners and the territorial stakeholders can be involved in the design, the implementation or the analysis of the results of

these observation tools. Visitor studies are a first step and establish a point of reference. They allow for an in-depth diagnosis that pinpoints the tourism dynamics and visitor-related issues specific to the site: attractive features, visitor profiles, practices, number of visitors per sector, traffic flows, impact, satisfaction, etc.

Regularly updating a study, renewing it every 10 years or establishing a visitor observatory anchors data follow-up in the long term, thus enabling managers to precisely note which sectors are under pressure and when (season, day, time, etc.), to observe how the situation evolves and to keep track of the goals set by the project.

Recommendations

- Exchange territory stakeholders' perspectives, experiences and skills enriches the observation approach and helps build a common visitorrelated vision for the site.
- Combine diverse observation methods and tools is key to having an efficient visitor observatory. Cross-referencing data sources helps go further in the analysis of tourism dynamics, obtain comparative elements and fill in missing information. Among such sources are:
- Mobility studies, movement plans, reception plans, etc. in their diagnosis phase,
- Handcounts and figures from eco-counters, transportation methods (bus, shuttle, ferry, etc.) and ticket counters (parking spaces, places to visit, etc.),
- Studies and interviews conducted with visitors, tourism professionals and inhabitants,
- Permanent and secondary resident census and data collected from overnight stays and tourist tax, etc.

- Add digital solutions to older tools in order to strengthen the reliability of observations and managers' ability to react (real-time observation with Affluences, follow-up on people's behaviours on nature trails through Outdoorvision, My Traffic, Flux Vision Tourisme, etc.).
- Clarify observation needs depending on the project as much as possible: what do you want to observe and why?
- Choose the tool(s) that best fit(s) the geographical constraints (mobile coverage, electrical connection, border proximity, etc.), as each isolated tool has technical or methodological limits.
- Open the observation ground to the stakeholders' perceptions and feelings, as it helps include the tourism acceptability factor and its impact as well as objectify it.
- Measure the visitors' impact on the landscapes and biodiversity instead of looking only at the number of visitors, the economic rewards and the level of satisfaction.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Minutes of the 21st RGSFTalks "Fréquentation touristique et vie locale dans les paysages d'exception : quel équilibre?" -2019
- "Mesurer autrement sa performance touristique -Guide méthodologique sur les indicateurs d'une destination durable" ("Measuring One's Tourism Performance Differently - A Methodological Guide on Sustainable Destination Indicators") - ATD (Sustainable Tourism Actors), 2021
- "Compter les flux, comprendre les déplacements dans les territoires - Panorama des solutions numériques" ("Counting Flows and Understanding Travels in the Territories - An Overview of Digital Solutions") - Territory Bank, 2021

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- A visitor study, whose results can be used to establish a visitor observatory cross-referencing several databases, regularly updated in view of long-term analyses.
- A landscape photography observatory, as the renewal of images can help objectively analyse the visitors' impact on the landscape.
- Summer assessments.
- Mobility studies, reception and movement plan diagnoses, etc.

Studying Visitors to Better Structure the Flow Management Strategy

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE MASSIF DE L'ESTÉREL (ESTÉREL MOUNTAIN)

With its contrasting colours - lava-shaped red rhyolite summits, the deep green of the wide Mediterranean forests and maquis, the azure blue of the Mediterranean Sea, the Estérel mountain range on the French Riviera makes for a compelling sight. Close to large city hubs, it is a natural enclave within a very touristic and urbanised coastline.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grand Site de l'Estérel Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 2,150,000 visits, corresponding to 435,000 visitors Number of inhabitants: 135,000

Surface area: 22,194 hectares

WHY

The forest area of the Estérel mountain range is a place where people come to recharge and do sport, making it a key feature of the local quality of life.

Within this periurban forest, several problems impacting the landscape quality, the visiting experience and fire safety revealed a lack of consistency in the site planning and the need for an intelligible and quality tourism offer.

To tackle this issue and better incorporate the forest's many ecological, social and economic functions, the Greater Estérel Territory Forest Charter was implemented, helping to frame coordinated actions throughout the mountain range. As a result, the need to obtain quantitative and qualitative visitor data quickly arose.

A study was led, which yielded its first results in 2018, when the Grand Site de l'Estérel Mixed Syndicate's application to join the Grand Site de France approach was approved.

Based on said results, the Mixed Syndicate launched two major, complentary studies in view of building an action programme to improve visitor management and reception: a landscape study and a study aimed at devising a Visitor Reception Plan **> CH.4**.

HOW?

Launching the Estérel mountain range visitor study was a key step in the process. For 12 consecutive months, data were collected within a perimeter encompassing the forest area and the coastline. Three goals were identified:

- I. Obtaining visitor data for the mountain, such as the number of yearly visitors, a mobility cartography, visitor profiles, practices, expectations, etc.
- Extrapolate operational information to implement concrete site planning measures and guide the

design of a Visitor Reception Plan.

- 3. Setting up a sustainable visitor observatory ▶P.18. The visitor study relied on several tools. Those used for the quantitative observation data were:
- 17 eco-counters, meant to be used in the long term and rolled out in the entire mountain range thanks to data acquisition and sharing partnerships between the Syndicate, the ONF and the Departmental Council. Pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles were distinguished in the counts, as was the direction of travel.
- 120 half-days of visual counts in 24 spots spread over the year.

The qualitative observation data were collected thanks to:

- 1,629 face-to-face year-round visitor interviews in 27 different spots of the mountain range, as well as self-administered questionnaires available at partner tourist offices and from hosts.
- Interviews with territory stakeholders, i.e. tourist office managers, activity service providers, the hunting federation, breeders, beekeepers, etc.
- An online survey targeting inhabitants and visitors who live near to the site, distributed by tourist offices and local associations and authorities.
- An online survey targeting tourism professionals, such as hosts, restaurant owners, craftspersons, shop owners, activity service providers, etc.

The study benefitted from local environmental and sport associations' knowledge of the field. Thanks to this visitor analysis, the manager was able to obtain fundamental data in view of the Grand Site de France application and train for data collection.

Some key figures from the study:

• 2,150,000 recorded visits in the Estérel mountain range between 1 October 2016 and 30

September 2017;

- 435,000 visitors;
- 668,000 vehicles were parked in one of the dedicated areas;
- I out of 4 visits occurred in April or May;
- 6 out of 10 visits were from residents of the Var or Alpes-Maritimes departments;
- 73% of visits took place in the forest area of the mountain range.

NEXT STEPS

The visitor study was immediately followed by a landscape study and a Visitor Reception Plan.

Thanks to a sectoral analysis of the visits and to quantitative and qualitative benchmarks associated with a landscape project, the Visitor Reception Plan can rely on a strategic vision that goes beyond mere tourism-related issues.

It is based on a consulted site planning approach

capable of prioritising investment measures and tailoring the natural area interventions (footpath maintenance, trail markers, parking area organisation, etc.). Mapping the purpose of the mountain range per sector has helped structure a reception offer in the medium and long term and improve visitor experience, taking into account all practices (reception areas, preservation areas, specific use areas, etc. - >CH.4).

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- The 2016-2018 visitor study was part of a comprehensive, long-term management strategy that includes a range of complementary and interdependent studies: Territory Forest Charter (2015), Landscape Plan and Visitor Reception Plan (2018-2020).
- In a natural environment, mixing several tracking tools and visitor indices is key to obtain reliable data.

Items to be watchful of

 In such a vast area and due to the lack of intial data, the visitor study must be based on a protocol which incorporates multiple, cross-referenced sources, depending on the allocated budget.



Field surveys carried out face-to-face are a source of irreplaceable information, such as visitors' perceptions and site uses.



Facilitating a Participatory Visitor Observatory

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE SALAGOU - CIRQUE DE MOURÈZE (SALAGOU - MOURÈZE CORRIE)

A testimony to a 300-million-year-old geological history, the variety of the landscapes where the red earths of the Salagou meet the basalt black plateaux and light dolomites of the Mourèze corrie makes the site exceptional. Its diverse environment is home to 21 protected bird species.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grand Site Salagou -Cirque de Mourèze Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors:

550,000 including 250,000 on the lake banks

Number of inhabitants:

1,500 within the classified site

Surface area: 11,650 hectares

WHY?

The priming of the valley in 1969 transformed the arid farming landscapes into an attractive leisure area. Very popular among visitors, the lake is a cool spot in the middle of the Hérault department.

Established in 2005 to handle the site's new functions and tackle the massive flow of vehicles and camper vans among other things, the Grand Site Mixed Syndicate was tasked with managing a wide open site with multiple access points **>CH.5**. A commission was thus created to collectively think about a tool dedicated to visitor observation.

HOW

The observatory was set up following a sensitive, pragmatic and experimental multi-pronged approach:

Federate around common values and define the visitor reception position

Right from the beginning, the Mixed Syndicate wished to largely mobilise all stakeholders capable of giving insight on the Grand Site and its uses: gendarmerie, municipal police forces, the ONCFS¹, countryside rangers, professionals and residents. Comprising three scores of people, the Visitor Committee was created to share a common culture and foster dialogue at key stages during the year (tourist season preparation, mid-season assessment, end of season and next season preparation) One of its first acts was to define a common message and a code of conduct meant for the Grand Site's users.

Hiring a mounted patrol as early as 2007 helped connect stakeholders and federate around the shared goal of better managing visitors. It also contributed to filling the gap in field knowledge and to establishing an internal observatory adapted to the site and the managing structure's modest means.

Understand the site and its inner workings to meet the needs in a practical manner

Mapping each space based on its function was also a crucial step not only to understand visitor flows in the Salagou but also to show how important the inhabited areas and farming activities were. Such approach distinguished between:

- Organised highly visited areas;
- Convivial, human-scale spaces that were ideal for meeting people, organised only during the travel season;
- Natural areas to which access is earned or that are protected, bared and further from parking areas;
- Vast agricultural and natural landscapes;
- Villages and hamlets.

Experiment with a tailor-made observatory through effective coordination of human resources

The methodology principles of the participatory observatory were designed with the complex nature of public and private stakeholders' intervention areas in mind and by organising them.

The Mixed Syndicate had a key role to play as facilitator to guarantee that all stakeholders connected. This helped establish a common visitor data collection protocol, intervention modes as well as everyone's missions. The distribution of "site guards" per sector ensured that parking area counts were tallied.

The presence of the Republican Guard, the Grand Site mounted and mountain bike patrols, activity service providers operating near to the Salagou, field agents from the Grand Site municipalities and authorised agents also helped guarantee that vehicle restriction equipment (barriers, ditches, etc.) were in good state, prevent hosting capacity overflow and avoid breaches to the code of conduct **CH.3/5**.

¹ National Hunting and Wildlife Office, now part of the French Office for Biodiversity (OFB)

Extrapolations were made possible thanks to complementary data provided by tourist offices on:

- The number of visits to tourist offices;
- The number of people per vehicle;
- Parking area occupancy analysis;
- Data from Flux Vision Tourisme ▶P.14.

Combine and process data

Finally, the qualitative data and the field patrols' feedback were compared with the count data to deny or confirm the trends observed. Holding regular season assessment meetings helped update the observatory data annually and, more importantly, collectively report on associated observations and corrective actions (strengthening monitoring and pick-up to prevent waste dumping, etc.).

Gain acknowledgement for the observatory

In 2011, a visitor study conducted by a consultancy firm led to the revision of the counting protocol and the acknowledgement of its reliability.

NEXT STEPS

Since 2011, the Grand Site visitor observatory has been annually assessing the effectiveness of the visitor management measures are. Now that data have been collected for 15 years or so, the site has noticed that visits have progressively spread out throughout the year and very positive results have been recorded in terms of compliance with the code of conduct, despite some instances where problems were transferred due to the arrival of tourists in villages or in more remote and less supervised areas.

Improvements made thanks to collective work over the last 15 years show that local stakeholders and users wish to move towards a more qualitative form of management outside July and August, in all municipalities of the Grand Site. However, this desire to continue the work done over time and space is limited by the Grand Site's resources.

The recent integration of the Vissou classified site and the Villeneuvette remarkable heritage site into the Grand Site area requires the protocol to be adapted to take into account the number of visits in both sites and evaluate this number using qualititative criteria.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- Workshops were organised about the spirit of the place for everyone to share their approach and feelings towards the Grand Site. These lively moments were crucial for stakeholders and users to make the landscape preservation issues their own, particularly for tourism service providers established around the lake who became the ambassadors and guardians of such concerns.
- Participatory work made it possible for all stakeholders to agree with the report and the project.

Items to be watchful of

- A yearly analysis and strict compliance with the protocol are essential for the observatory to function.
- This system relies on numerous human resources, who are often volunteers. The absence of any stakeholder can weaken the whole programme CH.10.
- Since the COVID-19 crisis, visits have changed: now, many visitors come from the surrounding area, all year long, provided the weather is nice. In view of this change, the programme must be revised as the off-season extrapolated data are now less reliable.



The Grand
Site Salagou - Cirque
de Mourèze visitor
observatory relies on
the heavy mobilisation of both
the Grand Site team and its
field partners.



www.grandsitesalagoumoureze.fr

Artificial Intelligence - A New Data Source for Analysing Visits

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE SIXT-FER-À-CHEVAL (SIXT-HORSESHOE CORRIE)

A protective wall and open-air arena, the Cirque du Fer-à-Cheval (Fer-à-Cheval corrie) has become the symbol of a territory whose beauty embodies the monumental nature of the Northern Alps' preserved landscapes and rich diversity in terms of lakes, glaciers, waterfalls and mountain streams. They attest to the relation between humans and their environment, from the establishment of a religious community in the 12th century to the development of tourism in the 19th century.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: The Giffre Mountains Community of Municipalities

Annual visitors:

Number of inhabitants: 800 Surface area: 12.000 hectares

WHY?

With an overall number of visitors estimated at close to one million, the count made during the summer in the most visited spot of the Fer-à-Cheval corrie revealed an almost 40% increase in visits between 2019 and 2020. As the site is accessible via a single mountain road, such an increase put great pressure on the road networks and parking areas (congestions, increased accidents, difficult access for emergency services and the inhabitants, pollution, pressure on the environment, etc.).

To tackle these issues and progressively replace carbon mobility options by active ones, local authorities developed a comprehensive strategic vision for the territory relying - among other things - on the strenghtening of reliable visitor data through:

- Pedestrian counts (eco-counters),
- Monitoring of parking ticket sales,
- Occasional road counts made by the Departmental Council;
- Data from the visitor study conducted in 2018;
- Data from the mobility study carried out in 2021.

For the latter study, local stakeholders came together to experiment with a real-time visitor analysis tool developed by a company named Affluences for the parking area of the Fer-à-Cheval corrie¹. In the Grand Site, this new tool was perceived as an opportunity to improve reception and parking in the area leading to the site as well as to better coordinate multimodality over time >CH.5/6. Although this real-time measuring technology was extensively used in enclosed spaces, experimenting with it in an open natural area had never been done.

HOW?

Thanks to the installation of a camera linked to a 4G transmitter which automatically calculated the parking area occupancy rate, elected officials, site reception agents, ASVPs² and tourist offices in the valley were notified in real time whenever the gauge was at maximum capacity. This helped them pass on the information to the visitors as early as possible and adjust their management of the various parking areas.

Based on artificial intelligence and a machine learning algorithm, predictive analytics could also be obtained through this system to anticipate the number of visitors depending on the season, day, time or weather forecast.

A visitor measuring and communication tool, the Affluences system informed visitors of the real time and estimated occupancy of the parking area through a mobile application, a website and a web API to guide them to the most off-peak times **>** CH.9.

"This system has been first and foremost a preventive action tool, helping people to make choices depending on the number of visitors already onsite. It has also been invaluable for destination advisors working in the Giffre Mountains tourist offices who can thus pass on information in real time." Mathieu Battais, Grand Site Sixt-Fer-à-Cheval Project Manager

¹ The specific geography of the site, whose transfer point is located at the bottom of the valley and accessible by a single route is part of what makes this first counting experiment easier.

² Public Road Monitoring Agents

³ Natural Area Conservatory

This new technology was combined with the other observation tools to complement them, and integrated into a comprehensive visitor management approach featuring:

- A site planning and interpretation structure plan **CH.4/10**;
- Stronger reception and parking area management teams CH.5/10 ;
- A visitor shuttle package associated with a travel offer **>CH.5/6/7**;
- The presence of eco-volunteers and facilitators to raise awareness among visitors CH.10;
- Training sessions given to destination advisors working in tourist offices **>CH.7**;
- Communication actions ▶CH.9.

NEXT STEPS

As a result of the satisfactory assessment of the experiment carried out on the Grand Site reception parking area, the system was purchased. Brainstorming continues regarding whether or not it would be appropriate to implement it throughout the entire valley. At the same time, eco-counters continue to be monitored in partnership with the CEN³, with technology cross-referencing and collected data pooling being gradually applied.

The results of the experiment with the technology provided by Affluences was satisfactorily in Sixt-Fer-à-Cheval; nonetheless, many other tools running on artificial intelligence and dynamic information systems (Flux Vision Tourisme, Outdoorvision, Ecocounters, etc.) are being tested out in natural areas.

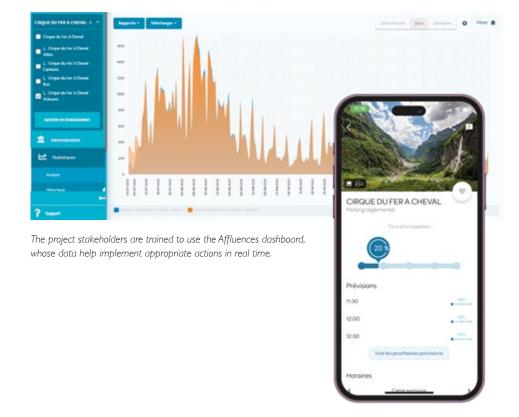
LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- Visitor observation as part of a comprehensive approach of tourism and of its impact on the territory
- The naturally narrow access to the Fer-à-Cheval corrie.
- The partnership approach that mobilised as many stakeholders as possible, thus facilitating cofinancing of the system.
- \bullet The user-friendliness of the tool.

Items to be watchful of

- To be efficient, local actors must make the tool their own and consider in advance how it can be adapted to the site.
- Implementation constraints may be numerous in heritage areas: geomorphological, administrative or regulatory issues, electrical connection, mobile coverage, extreme weather conditions, the visibility of high up or large furniture, to name but a few. Due to these constraints, the modern counting solutions need to be personalised.
- These still exploratory technologies can, in some cases, lead to additional constraints when adapting them to local situations.





• www.montagnesdugiffre.fr

An Observatory to Serve Territorial Tourism Intelligence

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE BIBRACTE - MORVAN DES SOMMETS

Bibracte - Morvan des Sommets is, among the Grands Sites de France, not often considered an overcrowded destination. Yet, rapid changes in tourist practices have been recorded as people are looking for protected nature destinations and green mobility options. Created in 2018, the observatory is intended to measure how these practices are changing and share an objectified vision of tourism with local stakeholders to overcome prejudice at a time when the social acceptability of tourism is being challenged, in Morvan and elsewhere.



The observatory relies on EVALTO, a collaborative face-to-face survey method carried out on social networks or through hosts.

The observatory relies on an operating system that combines the following features:

- A stabilised study protocol to better monitor how the data change over time:
- An objectified knowledged base which is quantified and shared with local stakeholders (decision-makers, tourism professionals, etc.);
- A reliable frame of reference that measures fields in which there is room for improvement (dissatisfaction grounds, untargeted categories of visitors, etc.);
- A "performance" tool comparing the territory's performance to other heritage territories' performances.

Over 500 visitors, 140 tourism professionals, institutional actors and elected officials as well as 200 residents (including second-home owners) answered the survey during its first campaign conducted in 2018-2019. A second campaign in 2023-2024 broadened the scope of visit modes (to include camper vans and hikers).

Here are some of the results:

- Visitors' and residents' perceptions of the level of tourism onsite differs greatly: while the first group appreciates the destination for the low pressure that tourism places on it, the second group feels that this same pressure is already high.
- The residents are unaware of how the site is managed and what its volume of business is.
- The majority of residents is not against the development of tourism, provided it is controlled and respectful of territorial values.
- Residents, tourism institutional actors and elected officials share the same perception that tourism has a transient form in the territory due to a lack of tourist accommodations when in fact, tourists stay on average for 8 days, and 75% of them in commercial lodgings.

This latest observation shows how important is to objectify the data. They are a valuable indicator that can be used to purposefully guide the tourism development strategy of the territory and public investment priorities (here, for instance, by supporting commercial lodging options).

To complement the observatory, the Grand Site de France set up a working group comprising tourism stakeholders in the territory, i.e. three scores of public and private professionals, whose main priority is to develop thematic stay offers in the spirit of the Grand Site de France approach ▶CH.7.

Managed by: Bibracte EPCC (Public Cultural Cooperation Institution)

Annual visitors: 80.000

Number of inhabitants: 3,800

Grand Site de France

surface area: 42.000 hectares



FIND OUT MORE

- www.bibracte.fr
- "Bibracte, ses visiteurs & son territoire touristique" ("Bibracte, its visitors & tourist territory") study report

FLOW CONTROL

Using Regulations, Land Control and Contractual Measures

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

Although the regulations surrounding the classified site do not specifically target visitor management, they protect the site as they monitor its evolution (the state or aspect of classified sites cannot be altered without special authorisation), forbid advertising as well as isolated camping and campsite creation. Yet, as said regulations only apply to the confines of the classified site, Grands Sites de France managers rely on many other tools to control the number of visitors and act upon tourist pratices. They can thus call on:

• By-laws, departmental or prefectural decrees on security, tranquillity or public sanitation grounds, helping to limit or ban motor vehicles from accessing some roads or from parking (on the roadside, at night, etc.). These instruments can be adopted for a specific period of time (summer, time slots, quiet period, etc.) and/or a determined maximum capacity. Where elected officials are responsible for implementing them,

police forces and authorised agents need to be mobilised and coordinated **>.27**;

- Purchasing real estate, which makes it easier to implement the chosen form of management
 site planning or de-planning actions > CH.4, measures to control or offset the impact of tourism-dedicated infrastructure on the landscape;
- Contractual measures for supervising tourist practices onsite. They can target visits associated with specific sport or trade practices or the organisation of demonstrations, for example
 CH.7/8.

By willingly supporting the contractual tools at their disposal (charters, Natura 2000 objective document, etc.), the various stakeholders (landowners, tourist activity service providers, associations, etc.) foster the acceptance of prescribed rules that are consistent with the direction of the collective project.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France" practical guide - RGSF, 2022 ▶CH.1/4
- "Insertion paysagère des campings existants en site classé" ("Integrating Existing Campsites into the Landscapes in Classified Sites") methodological guide Ministry of the Green Transition in partnership with the National Outdoor Hotel Industry Federation, 2020 ▶ CH.4
- Grands Sites Thread "Signalétique d'activités et de services sur les Grands Sites: démarches et outils" ("Activity and Service Signage in the Grands Sites: Approaches and Tools") - RGSF, 2009 ►CH.4/7/8
- Grands Sites Thread "Comment accueillir et gérer les campingcars dans les Grands Sites?" ('Welcoming and Managing Camper Vans at the Grands Sites'')
 RGSF, 2012 ▶ CH.5

Recommendations

- Contact the site inspector (DREAL) and the French building architect (UDAP) for any project involving a classified site.
- Incorporate visitor-related regulations within an interdisciplinary project to connect them to other available tools.
- Inform and train site managers on the diversity
 of the regulatory and contractual tools which
 target heritage and administrative specificities
 of the territory (purposes, intervention areas,
 easements, etc.).
- Organise regulation enforcement (intervention and fine issuance principles) by both training authorised agents and coordinating their work

- with all field stakeholders (seasonal staff, tourist offices, professionals who lead outdoor activities, guides, etc.).
- Anticipate and gradually prepare for changes in tourist practices using outreach and mediation actions targeted at residents and visitors before regulatory measures are strictly enforced >CH.9/10.
- Propose alternatives to access bans (shuttles, hiking trails, etc.).

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Protection decrees and orders based on the Environmental Code, the Forestry Code and other territory protection regimes (protection order, nature reserve, highly sensitive area, architectural, urban and landscape protection area (ZPPAUP), etc.).
- Charters and contractual tools establishing a framework: sustainable tourism, nature site practices, demonstrations and sport practices, etc. > CH.7/8/10.
- The Water and Nature Inter-Service Mission (MISEN), contributing in each department to ensuring compliance with the regulations, especially those aiming to preserve natural habitats and biodiversity.

Is setting a maximum reception capacity efficient?

Implementing quotas can contribute to managing visitors. However, the efficiency of this solution depends on the following factors:

- The site geography Quotas cannot resolve all the challenges faced by inhabited landscapes, but they can be effective on a restricted and identified section of the territory.
- The required jurisdiction and legal system to implement said quotas.
- Sufficient operation and human resources for their implementation to be effective.
- Preparation in advance to prevent rejection from the local population.
- Communication and mediation tools.

Supporting Practice Management by Purchasing Real Estate

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE DUNE DU PILAT (PILAT SAND DUNE)

Located at the entrance of Arcachon Bay, the tallest sand dune in Europe spans over 3 kilometres, rewarding whoever climbs up its 110 metres with an extensive view of the forest and the ocean. An exceptional natural monument that is in constant motion, the Pilat sand dune stands at the crossroads of a large conurbation and a wide, fragile coastline.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grande Dune du Pilat Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 2 million in the entire Grand Site, including 1.3 million through the main access point (9ha)

Number of inhabitants: The Grand Site is located between the coastline and an urban area (128,500 inhabitants over the 12 municipalities bordering Arcachon Bav)

Surface area: 506 hectares

WHY?

An iconic site of the Aquitaine coast, the Pilat sand dune is a considerable asset for the regional economy and a subject of passionate discourse for both the media and businesses. In the 1980s, tourist practices changed and site visits intensified, causing congestion, unauthorised parking, practice conflicts and uncontrolled business development. Seeing that the long term preservation of the natural area was jeopardised, a reception hub at the foot of the dune was created on private lands in the form of a parking area and a "hut village". The shops in the reception hub were subject to commercial or building leases.

In 2012, faced with concers about the land take of the site and its standardisation, the Grande Dune du Pilat Mixed Syndicate, together with the Coastal Conservatory¹, started purchasing real estate for the next 10 years or so as part of Declarations of Public Interest (DUP)². The collection of naturalist data reinforced the scientific knowledge of the dune and argued that the Grand Site should be considered a natural area rather than a tourist attraction.

HOW?

To better control the flows and limit unauthorised parking, real estate purchasing real was identified as a prerequisite to the implementation of the site planning project. The purchasing policy involved public seizures of already equipped plots followed by natural areas or lands that were intended to be restored as natural areas.

To facilitate public intervention, prevent access to the dune from being privatised and progressively remove unauthorised parking areas, an ambitious land control operation was led. The lands became the property of the Coastal Conservatory while being managed by the Grande Dune du Pilat Mixed Syndicate to structure visitor reception around the heritage characteristics of the site, as originally intended.

In 2013, "La Palombière" shop was purchases, dismantled and the premises were restored to a natural, which was highly symbolic for local stakeholders. After several years of administrative and legal procedures, the plots where the Grand Site's reception area is located were purchased in 2018, marking the completion of the Mixed Syndicate's scheme and the beginning of an enhancement project for the reception area and traffic onsite.

Works included landscaping of parking areas (movement patterns, signage, renewal of green spaces, wooden urban furniture P.42), better integration of the hut village into the landscape, green mobility circuits and an educational path which enhances the visitor's immersion between the sand dune and the forest.

As the real estate or regulatory approach alone was insufficient, a prospective landscape study was launched in 2018 to consider all visitor-related issues.

¹ The mission of the Coastal Conservatory, a national public administrative institution supervised by the Ministry of the Green Transition and created pursuant to the Act of 10 July 1975, is first and foremost to purchase coastal lands in order to guarantee their protection and open them to the public. Concerned local authorities are given priority in managing these lands.

²The Declaration of Public Interest is an administrative procedure which helps carry out public interest operation on private lands and as such, is extensively used by the Grands Sites (ancient city of Carcassonne, Ardèche gorge, etc.).





After more than two years of amicable negotiations, the Coastal Conservatory acquired the lands and buildings of the business known as "La Palombière", a former tree tapper hut transformed into a restaurant and located at the foot of the sand dune. Its destruction in July 2013 saw the visual impact and the pressure on the site associated with this tourist activity diminish.

NEXT STEPS

The new and improved reception area was unveiled in 2023. The decision to re-imagine and reduce the business amenity was made not only to reconnect with the original architectural style, but also to represent regional products and local values more.

To support these new businesses and ensure sustainable consistency, the number of service concession contracts has been reduced. The 8 occupants have been managing their business

premises based on concession contracts that grant the site the right to inspect their business and the way they run it. These businesses have been selected for their compliance with sustainable development principles, and an agent has been following up on the contracting tools.

Real estate purchasing operations continued with the aim of preserving the natural areas and the landscapes. The Coastal Conservatory estimated that it could negotiate purchasing all of the coastline plots of the classified site by 2025.

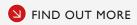
LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- The long-term partnership between the Grand Site and the Coastal Conservatory, through which a real estate purchasing expert specialised in coastal landscapes and sites supported each operation. Pooling skills and actions helps guarantee the spirit of the place endures even when the number of visitors remains very high.
- The Grand Site de France approach is a framework that guides and sustains the territory's commitment through lengthy administrative procedures.
- A strategy in which structuring actions are embedded in a longterm progressive process.

Items to be watchful of

• The erosion of stakeholders' mobilisation as local and national policies evolve over time.



www.ladunedupilat.com



An Organised Strategy to Mobilise Police Forces

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE CHAÎNE DES PUYS - PUY DE DÔME (THE VOLCANIC PEAK RANGE - DÔME VOLCANIC PEAK)

The landscapes of the volcanic peak range are characterised by their 80 almost perfectly aligned young volcanoes that give centre stage to the Dôme, which is nestled in their heart. Shaped by volcanic activity and humans, the three landscape features that are the Limagne fault, the Dômes granite plateau and the volcanic peak range, which are all on the UNESCO Heritage List, now form a pasture and environmentally diverse land, a perfect place for sporting adventures and a tourism hotspot that has been in operation for more than a century.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: The Puy-de-Dôme Departmental Council and the Auvergne Volcano Regional Natural Park

Annual visitors:

1.5 million, including 600,000, on the Dôme volcanic peak

Number of inhabitants near in the periphery of the Clermont conurbation: 300,000

Grand Site de France surface area: 43,000 hectares

World Heritage Site surface area: 40,530 hectares

WHY?

Monitoring and control operations have been carried out for more than 10 years at several levels (Puy-de-Dôme Department, PNRVA¹, prefecture, municipalities, etc.) to defuse the pressure caused by visitors and their inappropriate behaviours on the volcanic peak range. These measures prohibit camping and caravanning within the classified site, making open fires or fires close to woods and forests, travelling by motor vehicle or letting dogs wander unleashed in the summer pastures, for instance. Authorised agents have been mobilised to reinforce the efficiency of protection tools and limit violations.

Some difficulties arose in the adoption of by-laws and their coordination on a multi-municipality scale for practices that went beyond the administrative scope, and in posting regulations onsite.

As no structure (except for the gendarmerie) has the full authority to intervene in every criminal police field, coordinating procedures was quickly identified as a key issue.

HOW?

A "police" working group was created as early as 2017 to better understand the spheres of authority and purviews of the territorial police and patrols in charge of visitor monitoring and awareness-raising, and organise them efficiently.

The working group explain the regulations that need to be enforced and their development, and identify items that require special attention to ensure the preservation of fragile sites in the volcanic peak range, such as:

- Keeping dogs on a leash to protect traditional activities like pastoralism, which is essential to preserving the volcanic shapes and keeping biodiversity perceptible;
- Respecting paths and trails to prevent erosion

- and the disturbance of the wildlife and the domesticated fauna,
- Observing best practices in waste dumping or unauthorised access by motor land vehicles.

In 2020, the department, the PNRVA, the OFB², the ONF, the prefecture, the DREAL³ and the DDT⁴ signed an inter-service partnership agreement for a term of 4 years, with the MISEN⁵ **>P.23** following up on its implementation. Through this agreement, field agents' collaboration was organised and their levers were pooled. It also provided for 4 joint monitoring and fine issuing operations to be run annually in the field.

The purpose of the inter-service operations was to help the various agents who were given the authority of the police to first get to know each other, coordinate their areas of intervention and finally, collaborate in the interest of site preservation. Services and institutions shared their legal, technical and scientific expertise based on their areas of specialty (forest monitoring, PNR's nature guards, etc.). Municipal police agents and the gendarmerie, including the Republican Guard mounted brigade, reinforced the system.

Field agents were trained on preservation awareness • CH.10 . The Grand Site Salagou - Cirque de Mourèze • CH.2/5 also adopted this strategy aiming at pooling coercive methods.

The DDT and the PNRVA guided and evaluated the monitoring days and defined the related procedures based on the issues (dogs wandering in summer pastures, fires, bivouacs, unauthorised and uncontrolled dumping, motor vehicle use, etc.), the risks and the expected results. Each operation relied on an updated map featuring the controlled roads, marked out routes, practices and sensitive sectors.

NEXT STEPS

- The satisfactory results from the inter-service operations led in 2021 and 2022 encouraged the gendarmerie to renew its commitment in the long term, as it created an 8-member mobile squad deployed in the entire Grand Site de France and Heritage List Site and other sensitive natural areas requiring more monitoring.
- Many fires linked to unauthorised camping and bivouacking were regularly observed in the summer, including at the heart of the site. In 2020, nature guards intervened more than 150 times, and 4 PNRVA nature guards were appointed and authorised to continue site preservation efforts.
- Two Natural Habitat Protection Prefectural Decrees were adopted as part of the Protected Areas National Strategy.
- Municipalities in the territory also proceeded with the incremental adoption of orders regulating motor vehicle traffic on municipal roads and implementation of regulatory gateway signage, with technical and financial support from the department.
- Communication tools were designed to support police services during prevention controls.



Nature guards are active all year long in the heart of the protected natural area. They play a key role in preventing and sometimes issuing fines for unauthorised camping or parking.

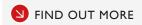
LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- A more comprehensive collaboration on site management reinforced its efficiency. Created in 2020, the Collaborative Management Team comprises a dozen individuals who combine the skills of the PNRVA and the Department. The team includes a practice conciliation agent for the whole Grand Site de France and World Heritage Site in addition to 4 appointed agents authorised to issue fines.
- A few targeted inter-service operations are run each year to reinforce complementary and consistent actions in the field.
- A methodological guide to "fight against unauthorised dumping and waste" was produced with town/ city elected officials in mind, to remind them of all the levers and procedures - including the legal ones - at their disposal.
- Operating methods were tested and adjusted depending on intervention priorities.
- Regular outreach actions were carried out by nature guards among various target groups ►CH.10.

Items to be watchful of

- The complexity of the system due to the many entry points to the site.
- Regulatory instruments which are not enough alone but are part of a comprehensive visitor management strategy, including shuttles, hiking trails, rental bikes, visiting alternatives, paraglider management charter, etc.
- ►CH.6/7/8.



volcan.puy-de-dome.fr

¹ Auvergne Volcano Regional Natural Park

French Office for Biodiversity
 Regional Environment, Planning and Housing Directorate

Departmental Directorate for the Territories

⁵ Natural Area Protection Inter-service Mission

Regulating Visitors' Access to Preserve the Environment

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE GORGES DE L'HÉRAULT (HÉRAULT GORGE)



As the largest petrifying source in the region, the Fontcaude waterfall is a priority habitat for Europe and home to remarkable biodiversity, including 22 bryophyte species.

Located at the heart of the Hérault gorge, the Fontcaude petrifying source, also known as the "Parapluie" ("Umbrella") source is a remarkable natural habitat. In 2016, a Natural Area Conservatory (CEN) Occitanie's diagnosis revealed its high level of degradation and the obvious impact trampling has on plant development. Safety and unauthorised parking issues were identified as aggravating factors, as they make moving within the gorge difficult. The Grand Site de France manager, who also runs the Natura 2000 "Gorges de l'Hérault" site, the CEN and the municipalites of Puéchabon, Aniane and Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert joined forces to remedy this situation. The introduction of article L.360-1 in the Environmental Code granted the Grand Site de France a new regulatory lever to limit access to this protected natural area INSERT.

The municipality of Puéchabon adopted a by-law on 30 May 2022 to ban traffic near the Parapluie source. Prepared and shared with all local stakeholders in view of the coming high season, its implementation led to the installation of awareness and information panels, safety barriers and road equipment designed to limit unauthorised parking.

A communication plan (press release, outreach actions in tourist offices and local authorities, etc.) was drafted to facilitate the understanding and acceptability of this new regulation. A"de-marketing" and "desourcing" campaign was also tested for this highly photogenic site which is very popular on social media **> CH.9**.

Thanks to several monitoring operations, the OFB and ONF nature guards as well as the municipal police were able to fine people for illegal parking and trampling and prevent them from starting fires in throughout the site.

Although the first year of the by-law's implementation focused on informing users and preventing problematic behaviours, the following years should make increasing the nature police's resources a priority to enforce the new regulation more efficiently. Furthermore, this work was the first step towards the adoption of a Natural Habitat Protection Prefectural Decree, which would ensure a more sustainable protection of the source.

This regulatory tool is part of a comprehensive visitor management strategy that has been implemented in the territory for more than 20 years **>**P.12.

key identification facts

Managed by: three communities of municipalities, i.e. Hérault Valley, Greater Saint-Loup Summit, and Ganges and Sumène Cévennes

Annual visitors:

650,000 for the southern area and 52,000 for the northern area, in Issensac

Number of inhabitants: 6,000

Grand Site de France surface area: 20,788 hectares



www.cc-vallee-herault.fr

A new legal basis to control visitor numbers in a natural area

While the decrees that been adopted by elected officials up to that point mostly dealt with motor vehicle traffic, article L. 360-I of the Environmental Code has enabled mayors and EPCI chairpersons since 202 I to ban or control more extensively people's, vehicles' and pets' access to protected areas if such access is likely to compromise the protection of the areas or their enhancement for ecological, agricultural, forest, aesthetic, landscape or tourist purposes - in other words, the protection of animal and plant species.

When the territory concerned by such instrument goes beyond that of a single municipality or intermunicipality, as is often the case in the Grands Sites, the government representative within the department is also mandated to act.

Read the article in full (in French only)

SITE PLANNING

Immersing Visitors and Revealing the Sensitive Nature of the Landscape

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

The Grands Sites de France are territories put under a lot of pressure due to tourism and urban planning. The absence of any visitor management plan in some of them has led to the emergence of infrastructure and practices that challenge their landscape quality: parking areas deep within the site, low-quality buildings or shops, standardised signage and furniture, erosion, etc.

One of the traditional levers to tackle these issues is site planning. Site planning can be considered as an actual preservation and reception tool, as evidenced by many projects. In such cases, efforts do not simply involve creating infrastructure but also encourage removal and reuse (infrastructure dismantling, signage removal, rewilding, rehabilitation, landscape integration, etc.).

The priority in this case is not to spread out uncontrolled visitor flows to address their impact. Rather, the goal is to receive visitors in acceptable ways for the landscape, the inhabitants and the biodiversity and enable each visitor to enjoy a unique, gentle and immersive experience that reveals every single aspect of the heritage landscape. "The hosting capacity corresponds to the number of visitors a site can bear without its attributes

deteriorating, its local populations being submerged and the quality of the visit being altered." Petit traité des Grands Sites, Réfléchir et agir sur les hauts lieux de notre patrimoine (A Short Tract on the Grands Sites: Thinking about and Acting on Our Key Heritage Places), ACTES SUD, ICOMOS France, 2009.

As an essential prerequisite to transforming the tourism offer and tourist practices in the territory, site planning helps restore some consistency to the landscapes without doing so excessively. It can highlight the uniqueness of the place by opening up the view and meet expectations in terms of visiting conditions that match site quality and remain respectful of the living environment, without putting the site under lock and key **PCH.7**.

The installation spots are chosen based on their capacity to host integrated infrastructure and organise reception hubs and areas. Site planning also deals with signage and small reception areas (toilets, bins, picnic areas) or security equipment (safety barriers, low walls, pedestrionisation, etc.). Oftentimes, efforts are aimed at reducing motor vehicle visits, but also anthropisation and phenomena that put resources (particularly water) under pressure.

Recommendations

- Refrain from approaching site planning through a tourism lens alone. Landscape and visitor reception issues are closely intertwined in the projects.
- Involve the site inspector (DREAL) and/or the French building architect (UDAP) in project design.
- Select the necessary level of intervention. In a sober approach, site planning can immediately limit the flows (by removing or reducing areas), control them (through barriers, gatehouses, parking metres), concentrate or guide them (using signage, furniture, road and path maintenance, etc.).
- Rely on the visitor study or observatory data. The land carrying capacity can be a useful indicator to decide on the size of some infrastructure within what the landscape and the environment can bear rather than taking into account the maximum number of visitors which is often reached only a few days per year.

- Plan the site to also meet the needs of the yearround inhabitants, professionals and users >CH.5/6.
- Pay attention to visitor transfer areas so as not to redirect flows towards inappropriate places for biodiversity or security reasons.
- Give preference to temporary or reversible infrastructure (travelling or outdoor reception spots, human presence), particularly during the high season **>CH.10**.
- Control the land to anticipate the effects of real estate speculation (housing access difficulties, strategy slowdown, gentrification).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France - Méthode et pratiques" practical guide -RGSF. 2022 ▶ CH. I
- Grands Sites Thread "Signalétique d'activités et de services sur les Grands Sites : démarches et outils"
 RGSF, 2009 CH.3/7/8
- "Insertion paysagère des campings existants en site classé" methodological guide - Ministry of the Green Transition in partnership with the National Outdoor Hotel Industry Federation, 2020 > CH.3
- "Le schéma d'intentions paysagères

 Retour d'expériences par Alain
 Freytet" ("Landscape Intention Plan
 Feedback from Alain Freytet")
 Coastal Conservatory, 2022
- "A...ménager pour une montagne à vivre" ("Planning and Preserving the Mountains to Experience Them") and "Aménagement touristique, un modèle à repenser" ("Tourism Planning - A Model That Needs to Be Revamped") -Mountain Wilderness France, 2022

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Public reception plan: A framework document that organises the distribution of reception areas based on the protected area(s), the access roads, etc. It can be devised as part of a landscape approach and be combined with other tools such as a mobility plan or an interpretation plan, among others.
- Landscape intention plan: This document summarises the chosen intervention principles for a given site
- Planning documents: Local town/ city planning scheme, Territorial Consistency Plan, etc..

When a site is classified, any modification in the state or the aspect of the area and the natural monument must be specifically authorised by the minister or the prefect, depending on the extent of such modification **PCH.3**.



A Strategic Reception Plan to Master the Flows in the Area

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE LES DEUX-CAPS BLANC-NEZ, GRIS-NEZ (THE BLANC-NEZ, GRIS-NEZ TWO CAPES)

A window opening onto England, the Blanc-Nez, Gris-Nez Two Capes landscape hosts 1.5 million visitors who flock there each year to admire the contrasting colour palette of the sea, sand, cliffs and fields. Separated by 15 roughly kilometres and 80 million years, the two capes and their landscapes - both natural and farming - bear the trace of their geological past, human settlement and conflicts.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Pas-de-Calais Departmental Council

Annual visitors:

1.5 million

Number of inhabitants: 15,000

Grand Site de France surface area: 7,505 hectares



Thanks to the location of the northern lookout and the new path to Cape Blanc-Nez, a great number of visitors can safely enjoy the view of the English coast while preserving the moor from trampling.

WHY?

In view of the uncontrolled number of visitors mostly travelling by motor vehicle - on this coastal site, a study was carried out as early as the 1990s to come up with a first estimate of the number of visits **>** CH.2. The study's observations showed that visitors were massing on the coastal strip, with tourists favouring Cape Blanc-Nez and Cape Gris-Nez and locals preferring the beaches.

Sites and villages further from the coastline were merely passed through, and only a handful of seaside market towns received a certain amount of interest. This unequal distribution of visitors progressively led to the homogenisation of landscapes, which open wide onto the sea and are therefore very sensitive to any building project.

HOW?

Encouraged by the results of the restorative and rehabilitation actions performed to tackle urgent issues at the time (including the securing of Cape Blanc-Nez), the Grand Site de France elected officials established in 2012 a profile of the tension

areas and reception spots. These were to be fixed through a Strategic Reception Plan (SRP), which aimed to identify visitor flows at entry, parking, meeting and leaving points, as well as in areas with a potential for immersive discovery, wandering or consumption. The plan fulfilled the need to create consistent equipment and infrastructure throughout the Grand Site de France and set a prospective territorial vision.

Ten years later, the elected officials decided to review the direction taken in the SRP following a decade of site planning and due to changes in both the landscape and tourism.

Indeed, a landscape study revealed that the coast was not the sole custodian of the landscape values but that farming plateaux, woody meadows, summits and peaceful vales contribute as well.

As a result, the issue of giving visitors the opportunity to explore the Grand Site further by extending the offer to include the site's specific landscape features, i.e. the link between countryside and seaside, was fully incorporated into the site planning strategy **CH.7**.

A visitor study was also completed in 2015 to strengthen stakeholders' understanding of how hikers and tourists operated and moved onsite, and highlighted the need to have a full mobility profile ▶P.16 ▶CH.5/6.

In 2023, due to the increasingly complex management of peak visiting periods, steps were taken to review the SRP so that stakeholders' observations could be taken into account. The updated version was split into 5 local reception plans, each based on 4 key concerns:

- Receiving (reorganising or distancing parking areas from the cliff edges, etc.)
- Supporting alternative mobilities and car-free exploration
- Taking the landscape changes into account (shoreline, effects of climate change)
- Identifying targeted experiences to be implemented (diversifying the tourist amenity in favour of outdoor activities, following up on the tourist services offered in the territory, communication, etc.)

These local plans included guidance on how to access and connect reception areas, depending on the characteristics of each sector (landscape atmosphere, geographical location, visitor number quality, practices and means of transport used, etc.)

They were also interconnected, and their implementation answered both the specific issues of the site concerned (flow management and enhancement of the spirit of each place) and the issues of the broader landscape, i.e. respecting its integrity without turning it into a museum.

From the perspective of heritage value, natural habitats and fragility of each sector, intervention priorities for the whole Grand Site (reception area rehabilitation or creation, path courses, interpretation elements, etc.) were identified in the plans.

Role of the Visitor Centre in the transfers

The Visitor Centre was established in 2014 in a former farmhouse that was rebuilt after WWII. It was purposefully located away from the coast to encourage visitors to discover the hinterland. In addition to proposing rental bikes to explore the site differently, it also functions as a shop, a restaurant, an accommodation and offices, and is

the starting point for anyone wishing to discover the territory through its large network of footand cycle paths.

next steps

Since 2012, the Grand Site de France tourist practices have evolved (increased number of camper vans and equipped vans, cycle touring, etc.), the exploratory offer has expanded (presence of many tourism professionals), and the regulatory framework and distribution of mandates have changed (transport, urban planning, etc.).

Updating the SRP helps the manager reconcile the many uses of the territory and react more effectively to any new practice through a structured, comprehensive vision of site planning, as was observed at the end of the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns. For instance, in cases where the integrity of sensitive natural areas was violated, intalling height restriction bars, security gates, props and furniture was helpful in limiting overnight parking, which is forbidden in classified sites.

One of the new steps was to seize the opportunity of the certification label renewal in 2024 to expand the perimeter of the Grand Site de France from 7,500 to 17,000 hectares, towards the small mountains further back from the coast.

To reach this crucial stage and succeed in better spreading out visitors further back from the coast, the plan was to:

- Specify the reception and parking capacities on the coast and in the extended area during the tourism-intensive periods;
- Share a clear position on the daily reception and parking of camper vans in each municipality (everyone already agrees on the overnight parking issue) ►CH.5;
- Brainstorm with the Calais and Boulogne-sur-Mer conurbations about implementing bus and shuttle services (seasonal fluctuations, costs, etc.) Consideration should also be given to connecting these modes of transport to the railway network.

Public toilet supply and management was also a key point to improve, particularly in reception areas close to natural ones.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- A precise diagnosis of the tourism offer, the uses and the way visitor flows operate, which helps lay the foundation for a reception
- A landscape expertise grounding the Landscape Consistency Plan approach for a larger territory than the tourism area under tension
- The highly participatory and collaborative review process of the SRP, which included inhabitants, tourism service providers, elected officials, managers and natural area technicians for each of the local Reception Plans.
- A geographical location between two conurbations with the "transport" mandate, which enables the Grand Site de France to be served by transport lines with regular service that helps fully integrate alternative mobilities into the SRP.

Items to be watchful of

- Experience shows that a strategic reception plan should ideally be the first measure; yet, tourism pressure and climate change often require emergency site planning operations to be conducted.
- Occasionally hard-to-predict practices and developments (tourism acceptability or attempts to enforce tourism rules, development of camper van tourism, gentrification and real estate speculation phenomena,
- The hosting capacity of the territory depends on both objective parameters (waste, water and sanitation system management capacities, etc.) and political decisions to control or not control tourism development and the pressure on local land, natural and agricultural resources. Natural and climate risks are also taken into account.

VISITOR CENTRES

Although they are not a necessity, Visitor Centres can be included in various site planning scenarios to provide a wide range of functions and uses for receiving visitors. They are often part of the flow control system in their own right and play a role in transmission. Located at the heart of the site or in a strategic flow point, they can:

- · Move an inconvenient parking area or bring visitors to another part of the territory;
- Play a major part in transfers by providing bike rental or shuttle services, hiking trails or cycle paths, encouraging visitors to leave their car to discover the site differently (as in the Hérault gorge, the Navacelles corrie, the Gard Camargue, Mary volcanic peak, etc.).

FIND OUT MORE

- www.lesdeuxcaps.fr
- Feedback guide on how signage impacts on the landscape were processed, Grand Site de France Les Deux-Caps Blanc-Nez, Gris-Nez, 2022



Planning for Lookouts to Relieve the Beating Heart of the Site

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE CIRQUE DE NAVACELLES (NAVACELLES CORRIE)

Visitors discover this startling, over 300-metre-deep geological curiosity right from its edges. The Navacelles corrie traces the vast natural meandering course carved out then abandoned by the Vis River 6,000 years ago. With its contrasting causses and gorge, the landscape showcases the strength of the elements. Pastoralism has also shaped this site and its low walls, maintained meadows, strip-shaped fields and clusters of houses, which earned the wider landscape a place on the World Heritage List.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grand Site de Navacelles Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 250.000

Number of inhabitants: 1,700

Grand Site de France surface area: 46,163 hectares

WHY?

Every year, 250,000 visitors come to enjoy the impressive views of the Navacelles corrie from the Blandas and La Baume Auriol lookouts. Located on either side of the geological formation and the hamlet of Navacelles - which is at the centre of the site, these balconies are accessible by two roads crossing the causse where visitors used to stop and take in - albeit briefly - the striking landscape. Due to constraints related to the site's layout and an essentially car-based form of tourism, the small hamlet of Navacelles witnessed peak visiting periods and spaces filled to capacity that were increasingly impacting its inhabitants and the environment as tourism grew.

HOW?

A comprehensive strategy in favour of spreading out flows and extending the length of visits was gradually developed. It was first implemented in the hamlet through rehabilitation and parking space reduction measures. Next, the lookouts were enhanced, as they seemed to provide natural transfer points and gateways to the heart of the Grand Site de France.

Structuring studies

To guide site planning choices, several studies were conducted, offering technical, political and legal solutions for this controlled site and its singular topography, which straddle two departments:

- The landscape and architectural charter (2010), a non-regulatory instrument that protects, highlights and ensures consistency among the various landscapes of the site;
- The traffic and parking plan (2014, updated in 2022) ►CH.5;
- The guiding scheme which plans, outlines and organises Navacelles hamlet and its outskirts (2022).

Taking into account inabitants' expectations

Thanks to the local elected officials' extensive

concerted efforts to hinder the disorganised development of shops, discussions took place on the future of tourism in Navacelles as early as the 1990s.

Expectations revolved around purchasing and site planning projects that would discreetly unveil the beauty of the site.

Several consultation workshops followed to reconcile the perspectives of the inhabitants, who wanted their hamlet to be a private haven again, and the very different perspectives of shop owners, who were interested in maintaining the tourism economy. Despite their diverging opinions, stakeholders agreed on the need for basic equipment and, most importantly, the necessity to preserve the site. >CH.I.

Public spaces in Navacelles hamlet were enhanced (from 2020 to 2023, and all of the removed materials were reused) to help rewild the meandre, reduce the number of parking spaces, set up a shuttle turnaround area and rehabilitate walking routes while improving reception signage.

The Blandas lookout

In Blandas, the department adopted a real estate purchasing approach to remove buildings on the cliff edge and rearrange the lookouts.

The landscape was restored and vehicle traffic restricted thanks to a parking area that was large enough to absorb summer peaks. As a result, these organised spots now disconnect visitors from the road.

Less fragile than the hamlet, the lookouts are transfer points (with shuttles connecting the hamlet and the opposite lookout, hiking trails, rental electric bikes, etc.) where visitors can admire breathtaking views.

This has turned the Blandas lookout into a unique spot, where visitors can feel the spirit of the place and stay longer to enjoy it.

The Grand Site de France Houses

An exhibition space was created and adapted to disabled visitors in Blandas. It promotes strolling

through the various staged viewpoints and landscape atmospheres.

When they arrive, visitors are guided to the parking area at the reception building and then to the promenade that leads to an abyss **>CH.10**. In both Blandas and La Baume Auriol, the Visitor Centres make visitors aware of the broader territory through the services they offer, such as tourist information, exhibitions, locally sourced products, etc.

Results

Efforts to recover the landscape of the meander - a long-term project - gradually yielded results. The goal of all the aforementioned approaches was to make the site more pleasant for visitors and inhabitants alike. The Grand Site visitor observatory reveals that the average visit lasted much longer in 2017 than in 2007, rising from 30 minutes to 4.5 hours, with 76% of visitors spending 2 to 4 hours on site versus 32% in 2007 **FCH.2**.

Studies have shown that visitors enjoy the lookouts (90%), visit several villages (81%), use the hiking trails (37%), bathe in the river (28%), buy local products (9%), and visit heritage sites (8% visit the megaliths). The slowly growing number of hikers is helping to increase visits before and after the high season **> CH.8**.

NEXT STEPS

- As proposed in the design of the Landscape Intention Plan in 2022, work on scaling up the second lookout in La Baume Auriol began in 2024.
- After 10 years of operation, further equipment and other developments will be implemented in Blandas (shading, better integration of alternative mobilities, improved signage, etc.) > CH.6.
- Improvements are planned in the reception and mediation system of the Blandas lookout so that it is connected to the interpretation centre network of *The Causses and the Cévennes, Mediterranean agro-pastoral Cultural Landscape,* which is included on the UNESCO's World Heritage List **>CH.10**.
- Reinforcing observation measures, shuttle service and awareness campaigns on overnight parking under classified site regulations are key issues for the future.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- Local consensus in site planning choices, setting territorial project goals, regardless of passing political trends **CH.I.**
- A tailor-made visitor observatory capable of identifying vehicle movement between both lookouts, thus helping to observe the effects of site planning on full-capacity levels in the hamlet and the number of visitors using the shuttles **CH.2**.
- Defining the maximum parking capacity in the hamlet while implementing a free shuttle service during the summer were crucial in distributing vehicles in the site > CH.5.
- The Avenir Montagne Mobilités programme, which has awarded the Grand Site, helps improve the excess vehicle absorption system (temporary traffic lights, traffic easing areas, informative and sensitive camper van map) during peak visiting periods ▶ CH.5/6.

Items to be watchful of

- The visitor observatory revealed that the parking area in La Baume Auriol was regularly at full capacity in the summer due to the combined development of hiking and shuttles, which increases transfers and the number of cars parked all day.
- The growing number of camper vans, both circumstancially and due to more welcoming facilities, makes it more difficult to enforce the regulation on overnight parking in classified sites and increases fire hazards > CH.3/5.



At the Blandas lookout, the Grand Site Visitor Centre is a semi-buried building, not visible at first glance. Visitors exit their vehicles, step over the wall of a former enclosure and follow a drystone-bordered path until they reach the panoramic viewpoint.

S FIND OUT MORE

- www.cirquenavacelles.com
- Navacelles hamlet, a recomposing landscape - A retrospective on the Navacelles hamlet public space enhancement project, Grand Site du Cirque de Navacelles Mixed Syndicate, 2022

Bringing Nature Back to Connect the Historical Site to its Landscape Setting

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE CAMARGUE GARDOISE (GARD CAMARGUE)





Before the de-planning operations, the outskirts of the ramparts were filled with cars. Then the parking area was moved back, traffic was pushed away from the ramparts and the place was bordered by pedestrian planking. The traffic direction was changed to grant access to residents only.

Classified in 1973, the Aigues-Mortes site outlines the picturesque and iconic landscape "of a town set in a flat marsh landscape between earth and water", its natural and agricultural setting.

In the I 950s, the strip of land all along the ramparts grew thicker and pushed back the salt water of the Étang de la Ville (Town Pond) classified site. The development of uncontrolled practices, particularly those linked to tourism, was soon followed by the construction of new roads, parking areas, wine cooperatives, etc.

To restore the site's full natural and landscape quality and views on and from the ramparts, a rehabilitation project was launched in the 2000s. One of the first symbolic actions of this landscape recovery operation was the demolition of a very visually disruptive wine cooperative in 1999 and other recently built structures a few metres away from the ramparts.

Gradually, de-planning actions were carried out to move the parking areas located at the foot of the ramparts away. These were followed by a series of rewilding operations that reconnected the southern ramparts of Aigues-Mortes with their surroundings. A set of discreet infrastructures and paths were arranged to offer visitors alternative parking places for visiting tours without disturbing the daily life of the town

The "Marette" Grand Site de France House and a network of discovery trails were created to help spatially distribute visitors from the heart of the Grand Site and restore the bond between pedestrians, the natural area and the cultural and historical heritage.

The managing Mixed Syndicate relied on three complementary studies to achieve this, i.e.:

- A heritage and landscape study;
- A traffic and parking structure plan with recommendations on landscape integration or parking area removals and an green mobility strategy;
- An interpretation plan for the Gard Camargue and its points of interest that attract visitors.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

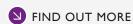
Managed by: Mixed Syndicate for the protection and management of the Gard Camargue

Annual visitors:

1.9 million

Number of inhabitants: 30,000

Grand Site de France surface area: 39,645 hectares



www.camarguegardoise.com

TRAFFIC AND PARKING MANAGEMENT

Organising Vehicle Flows in Harmony with Nature and the Landscape

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

Motor vehicle management has played a key part in the emergence of the Grands Sites de France national policy **P.6**. People still drive their cars on a daily basis and on holiday.

Site regulation and planning are essential tools to better manage the number of cars and limit both the hazards (noise, pollution, congestion, etc.) they cause when concentrated in restricted areas and the footprint left by regular and excessive parking practices (visual impact, soil sealing and land take, erosion, etc.) ▶ CH.3/4. However, other measures can be used to channel, distribute or limit the number of cars within sites. To implement them, partners with the required authority (departmental or regional road services, etc.) must be involved. Besides, tourist routes and parking spaces are in themselves often opportunities to discover the site and serve as the first point of contact with it; that is why it is important to ensure that they blend with the landscape and provide reception areas and information.

The 'transfer' concept is particularly crucial in natural areas and central to vehicle flow management strategies during seasonal peaks¹. The transfer can be organised by:

• Preventing certain vehicles from circulating and/

- or limiting or stopping traffic at certain times of year with a specific order **CH.3**;
- Planning vehicle reception based on vehicle size and the site's capacity to accommodate them >CH.4;
- Linking parking areas to the other traffic and transportation networks (trains, buses, ships);
- Developing intermodal transport opportunities, including shuttle, bike rental or borrowing services, etc. > CH.6.

The idea is to steer visitors towards other methods of visiting, in less-busy places and times, by:

- Creating a ticket counter and pricing policy for parking areas. In the Grands Sites, paid parking can be an efficient flow control tool in peak periods;
- Working on travel directions, road signage and GPS information to guide visitors, mark entrances and exits, encourage visitors to pass through the villages and clarify permitted and forbidden practices;
- Securing and making some less-travelled roads more user-friendly. This can be done as part of landscape enhancement projects;
- Purposely undersizing parking areas for site capacity and the preservation project **CH.4**.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Minutes of the 18th RGSFTalks "Démarches paysagères dans les Grands Sites de France" ("Landscape approaches in the Grands Sites de France") - 2016
- "Paysages et biodiversité, Les Grands Sites de France s'engagent" ("Landscapes and Biodiversity: the Grands Sites de France Commit") Feedback - RGSF, 2019
- Minutes of the 23rd RGSF Talks "Comment favoriser un développement des territoires en harmonie avec la nature et les paysages?" ("Facilitating Territorial Development in Harmony with Nature and the Landscapes") -2021
- Grands Sites Thread on camper van management - RGSF, 2012

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Visitor observation tools to find out about vehicle reception capacities CH.2
- Traffic and parking plan, mobility schemes, etc.: These are possible variations of the Strategic Reception Plan ▶ CH.4/6 . They provide a diagnosis and guidance to structure reception hubs and mobility amenities.

Recommendations

- Involve stakeholders in charge of roads, mobilities and public transport in the territorial project
 CH.I.
- Calm shared spaces on public roads by prioritising more active means of transportation over cars
 CH.6.
- Consider the benefits of introducing shuttle service to give priority to inhabitants' needs.
- Encourage the use of public transport: digital information and tickets, an attractive and harmonised pricing policy, network coordination (stops and frequency), etc.
- Push the parking areas away from the heart of the site, provide information and services there and connect them.
- Work on integrating the tourist route and the parking areas into the landscape.
- Optimise parking area capacity by marking spaces discreetly or having an agent onsite >CH.10.
- Incorporate traffic and parking into the information and communication strategy (experimenting with Waze, Park4Night, etc.) > CH.9.

¹ Transfer is defined as the point in space and time when users leave their vehicles to change their method of travel in order to reach their goal (tourism opportunity, passenger drop-off, hiking on a trail, etc.).

A Long-Term Action Plan to Decrease the Number of Vehicles

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE BAIE DE SOMME (SOMME BAY)

With sand dunes, cliffs, pebbles, meadows and marshes woven into its landscape, Somme Bay is the result of an alliance between water, plants and sand, shaped by a thousand shades of light. A preserved natural area with exceptional biodiversity, this vast and rich landscape is located next to a heavily populated area.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Somme Bay - Greater Picardie Coastline Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 2 million

Number of inhabitants: 27,000

Grand Site de France surface area: 41,500 hectares

WHY?

After WWII, the Picardie coastline became less attractive as a tourist destination, which led to a loss of private investments and the transformation of its lodging sector into caravanning-oriented practices. In the 1970s, thanks to the increase in the number of paid leaves, Somme Bay regained its reputation as a near-natural seaside resort accessible from the city. The infrastructure was able to meet visitor reception needs at the time, which essentially meant giving a large number of cars easy access to the shore. The inauguration of the Chunnel in 1994 and Highway A16 in 1998 opened up the territory increasingly, so that Somme Bay quickly became a heavily visited site for short stays.

Committed to limiting the harmful impact of cars along the entire coast for 20 years, the Mixed Syndicate has carried out a long-term operation to better channel traffic and parking.

HOW

The first phase of a diagnostic study was launched in 2001. Considering the coast and the hinterland as a united whole early on contributed to mobilising stakeholders around the territorial project.

Based on a common perception of the iconic Somme Bay landscapes, the strategic project gradually took shape, identifying the threats - including those linked to tourism - to these fragile landscapes. These laid the foundation for the direction taken by the vehicle reception strategy, which addressed the parking areas' full capacity issues with more than just ad hoc solutions **PCH.I**.



To reach the Somme Bay coast in the most active and eco-friendly way, the strategy implemented by the Grand Site encourages visitors to leave their cars as soon as possible by connecting parking areas to cycle paths and walkways.

Relying on a comprehensive grasp of the flows

To guide the project, much attention was paid to understanding traffic flows. A visitor study was launched as early as 2002. At the time, few studies were carried out on very wide "territory-sites" with several gateways.

The study was updated in 2013 and in 2023, and incorporated the new tourist mobility dynamics each time, with the long-term goal of establishing a visitor observatory **CH.2**.

The key factors that influence the inflow of visitors (calendar, weather forecast, tides) were studied in combination with existing visitor data (road and cycle metres, qualitative studies, etc.) and provided critical considerations about the travel routes that could be used to create an "intra-site" mobility map. Based on this in-depth knowledge of the flows, a bike plan was executed between 2012 and 2017 for the Grand Site de France coastal front. A vehicle transfer strategy towards the hinterland of the coast was concurrently implemented in a perimeter demarcated by departmental road D940, which encircles the point of access to the heart of the Grand Site. This strategy aimed to curb the arrival and excessive concentration of vehicles on the busy Crotoy and Saint-Valery-sur-Somme coastal sites. Efforts were also made to structure a tourism offer that encouraged alternative transportation methods and discovery of the inner areas of the lower Somme valley ▶CH.6/7.

"Despite the magnificent places and monuments located in them, Somme Bay towns and villages a little further from the shore have gradually become inactive as destinations. Visitors pass through them without stopping. The economy of these towns suffers from this situation, and so does the coast."

Gérard Désérable, Letter on the stakes for the Maritime Picardie Maritime - Bresle Valley territory, Abbeville Chamber of Commerce and Industry, January 2006.

Managing transfers and the last mile

To reduce the presence of as many cars as possible from the most sensitive areas and the highly popular coastal strip, transfer zones were moved to the coastal hinterland. The strategy planned for a network of satellite parking areas to be located at town entry points and outside hamlets. Connected to the railway, walkway and cycle path network, these transfer areas were part of a travel planning programme meant to ease continuous access to the heart of the site and comfortably reach the "last mile" without a car.

Reorganising accesses and flows in areas at full capacity

Hourdel hamlet and Point, the go-to place for anyone wishing to watch the seals, had major peak

visiting periods. In response, two main measures were implemented:

- The conversion of the "White Road", a former road partially destroyed by coastal erosion, into a greenway.
- The creation of a natural parking area at the back of the hamlet thanks to a land partnership with a local company. As visitors must now pay to park there, they have been progressively abandoning it, forcing stakeholders to keep thinking about this sector.

The entry point to Saint-Valéry-sur-Somme also suffers from packed and congested roads in the summer and on bank holidays. Free parking outside the town was proposed at a strategic location where passengers can transfer to intermodal types of transport including bicycle, boat or train options (canal, harbout, cycle path, coastal trail), to redirect vehicle flows. As an incentive for drivers to leave their cars there, this new reception hub will be one of the stops of the summer shuttles from the town centre.

The conversion of an ancient abandoned railway site into a landscape parking area in Mers-les-Bains / Tréport is another example of actions led to relieve the site and implement the various flow management strategies.

During the high season, the pedestrianisation of the seafront of this municipality located in the southern part of Somme Bay reduces the pressure but also the number of parking places. An abandoned railway site and station located there were used to create a 550-space, year-round free parking area, even in the high season, which blends into the landscape Located close to the sea and the town centre, it is connected to an electric shuttle service that stops at the beaches and the shops.

NEXT STEPS

These major projects are still being planned using a territorial dialogue and consultation approach. To assist in spatially distributing visitors and encourage them to stay longer, a form of slow tourism focusing on the coastal hinterland is being developed with the goal of leaving cars behind at the D940 by:

- Expanding tourist accommodation amenities;
- Certifying services (with the "Bistrot de pays" ("Local bar") certification label, for instance);
- Suggesting complementary or alternative ways of exploring the site from the traffic-easing parking areas inside the villages >CH.7.

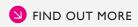
LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- Regularly updated knowledge of the flows served as both the ground for action and its indicators (2002, 2013 and 2023 visitor studies and installation of counters at 10 sites) > CH.2.
- Several prospective studies and in-depth contemplation ahead of the projects helped reach the long-term goals > CH.I.
- Distancing the parking areas from the site was a first step to ending the adverse developments.

Items to be watchful of

- The strategic traffic and parking plan must be able to sufficiently rely on local practices and inhabitants' perceptions of the site so that adjustments can be understood and result in a change in local uses.
- Because studies and real estate purchases take time, the project may already be obsolete when the time comes to implement it, which it is why it is necessary to regularly review it >CH.3.



www.baiedesomme.org

Setting Up a Shuttle Service to Reduce the Impact of Cars

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE PUY MARY - VOLCAN DU CANTAL (MARY VOLCANIC PEAK - CANTAL VOLCANO)

Deep within the Cantal mountains, the iconic pyramid-shaped of Puy Mary overlooks a multitude of landscapes alternating between far-off ridges, steep mountain passes, agricultural valleys and more secluded wooded valleys, etc. Often located in alcoves, sometimes perched, the hamlets and mountain huts remind visitors that people live there.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Mary Volcanic Peak Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 400,000 to 500,000 between May and October

Number of inhabitants: 3,500 (8/km²)

Grand Site de France surface area: 47,000 hectares

WHY

In this mid-sized mountain territory with very low population density (8 inhabitants/km²), public transport amenities are scarce and most trips are made with one's own vehicle. However, there is a great deal of traffic near the site. The tourist route, which is part of the landscape, leads to the mountain and connects the valleys and villages.

At the foot of Puy Mary, the access points to the various valley roads that converge at the Pas de Peyrol pass are open between May and October. During peak visiting periods, 900 vehicles drive through on average, leading to congestion and practice conflicts in this restricted area.

When elected officials became aware of this particular issue with Pas de Peyrol in 1991, the Mixed Syndicate was created with the aim of preserving the site.

Tourist and local mobilities are therefore a key concern in the Grand Site de France project. Although the importance of road passes was revealed by a 2013 landscape plan as a way to see and experience the site from the road, the

implementation of a shuttle service was quickly perceived as a structuring lever for managing vehicle flows on the mountain and better supporting the territory's overall sustainable development.

HOW?

Operating a network of public transport lines was in keeping with the Grand Site de France's broader actions to decrease the number and impact of vehicles and establish an alternative mobility culture based on:

- A landscape consistency plan for road infrastructure in 2001, which helped transform road safety equipment, surplus lands, viewpoints, etc. with landscaping techniques >CH.4;
- The rehabilitation of the Pas de Peyrol pass in 2012, the removal of unauthorised parking areas and the creation of 150 maximised parking spaces that fit within the site's limits;
- The implementation of alternating traffic measures for large-size vehicles and camper vans during busy days starting in 2020, as this was the main cause of daytime congestion on the 3 access roads to Pas de Peyrol because these vehicles could not easily be passed on local mountain roads CH.3. Meanwhile, a parking fee was charged at Pas de Peyrol for all vehicles during the high season.

The public "discovery transport" was tested for two consecutive summers, in 2016 and 2017, to limit unauthorised parking and ease traffic at Pas de Peyrol while giving visitors access to the heart of the mountain and highlighting the valleys. The shuttle left from the villages located in the centre of the valley that were equipped with reception and parking areas. Small-sized, 9-seat mobile vehicles that could pass vehicles travelling in the opposite direction were the preferred solution for travelling the narrow, fairly low mountain roads.

Itineraries were designed to provide ways of discovering the site and linked to the 5 Visitor Centres and network of great outdoors centres.

The Grand Site's Visitor Centres and great outdoors centres are meant to become multimodal reception areas where visitors can take a shuttle or choose any other transportation method that encourages them to leave their cars.



They did more than divert traffic because they were conducive to thought-provoking experiences along road segments that highlight the landscape. Special efforts were made to hire local drivers who had great knowledge of the mountain and were keen to share their territory. As site ambassadors during the trip, they would for example tell visitors about the place, give them tips for a more immersive visit and advice on how to prepare for their hikes ▶CH.10.

A 2016 satisfaction survey of 284 passengers revealed how the shuttles were actually used and who used them:

- Visitors who were passing through stated that they were fully satisfied with the service, which was also very popular with local tourists and mountain activity professionals, who were able to develop their offer thank to it;
- The shuttle was also popular with seasonal workers and inhabitants who did not drive or want to use their car during the high season, which strengthened the inhabitants' bond with the valleys;
- Paragliders and hikers were the most frequent users. The latter group emphasized that it gave them the a wider range of opportunities to engage in their sport and wander without their vehicles.

The shuttles not only fulfilled the desire to uphold the Grand Site de France's nature as a 'passingthrough' site, but also helped relieve pressure from cars and camper vans, serve populated areas and encourage users to change their car use throughout the territory. They promoted different experiences of the site where visitors could slow down, contemplate, observe, and enjoy the landscapes, outdoor activities and other points of interest on the mountain beyond Puy Mary. They facilitated parking in Pas de Peyrol because they met the need for all-day parking and prevented unauthorised parking by scores of hikers who hiked for a day or more.

Since then, the shuttle service has returned every year and served 30,000 passengers in 6 years.

NEXT STEPS

Since the summer of 2022, the system was expanded as part of an increased partnership approach with the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region and the EPCIs from 2 to 9 lines, which now stop at the populated areas of Aurillac, Salers and Murat as well as at the major tourist and leisure sites in the department.

To maximise the role the shuttles play in the transfer system, 22-seat vehicles were introduced on the roads in 2023 between far-away towns and the 5 Visitor Centres. Nine-seat shuttles take over from these to reach the pass. The frequency of the lines is regularly reviewed to maximise transport capacity and connections based on the actual situation in the field, tackle the issue of visitor distribution in the valleys, and allow visitors to take some time to visit the villages.

A carpool system for short and medium distances should be implemented, in keeping with the measures taken to foster a more responsible form of mobility on the mountain.

At the same time, digital signs at the bottom of the valleys will indicate the capacity of the Pas de Peyrol parking area to encourage people to use the shuttles when it is full.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- The shuttle network has been a structuring tool for tackling visitor-related concerns in the Grand Site de France. It is one of many actions that form part of a consistent, comprehensive
- The system also assists the inhabitants who require services within the territory.
- It helps connect areas in the territory beyond the confines of the Grand Site de France while fostering active accessibility.
- The service was adopted by local officials and professionals, including hosts and restaurant owners who are the first to promote it to
- Parking is provided at shuttle stops.

Items to be watchful of

- It takes several seasons to test and adjust the system before the shuttle network reaches a stable capacity.
- The service offer and operation must be easy to understand. Communication must be coordinated with all local tourism stakeholders to link mobility. leisure and sport practices ▶CH.9.
- Striking a balance between fragile site features and service optimisation (frequency, rotations, connections, schedule extension times, length of the season -, etc) is important.

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE..

In 2022, over 14,000 people used the summer shuttle service of the Grand Site de France du Cirque de Navacelles, preventing 5,500 vehicles from entering the hamlet and many carbon emissions and other associated problems. In the Hérault gorge, comprehensive management - which involves controlling parking rotation rates and the shuttle service - contributes during peak periods to preventing around 700 vehicles from entering the gorge and limiting the number of simultaneous visitors in the village of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert to 1,500, which means no more than 3,500 visitors/day. The maximum gauge for admissible visitors in the village went from 80 overflow days in 2002 (with 6,000 to 8,000 visitors/day on average) to 24 days in 2022 (with 5,500 visitors/day on average).



FIND OUT MORE

www.puymary.fr/les-lignes-du-volcan

Regulating Camper Van Parking

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE SALAGOU - CIRQUE DE MOURÈZE (SALAGOU - MOURÈZE CORRIE)

Deep inside the Hérault department, the beauty of the Salagou landscape lies in the lake and plateaux that overlook it and open onto impressive panoramic views. The priming of the valley and the appearance of the lake in 1969 shocked and disrupted operations in the territory before new practices gradually emerged.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grand Site Salagou -Cirque de Mourèze Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 550,000 including 250,000 on the lake banks

Number of inhabitants: 1,500 within the classified site

Surface area: 11,650 hectares

WHY?

Overnight parking similar to camping is forbidden in a classified site. Despite this ban, the growing popularity of Salagou Lake in the 1990s and the development of camper vans led to settlements of these vehicles along the lake banks to the point of forming actual "walls". Very visible at the heart of the classified site, they occupied a fragile area and caused landscape, aesthetic and environmental problems as well as practice conflicts.

A vast territory full of gateways and wide spaces, the site was damaged by the increasing number of camper vans staying overnight. As soon as the Grand Site Mixed Syndicate was created in 2005, elected officials and residents prioritised the issue of managing and accommodating these particular visitors **PRI8**.

Elected officials wanted to welcome them like other visitors, in any season, without spoiling the landscape by sharing the space with different tourist practices and local activities.

HOW?

Supported by a specialised consultancy firm, the managing institution identified compatible conditions for accommodating these overnight visitors in view of the site's fragility, their profiles, their origin, their expectations and their needs. After setting interim goals, the Grand Site slowly proceeded to gradually reorganise camper van visits.

Collectively drafting a code of conduct and clarifying the rules for visitors

Between 2007 and 2012, a "visitor commission" helped clarify the situation for the many stakeholders who were carrying out onsite operations in a desynchronised way and shared various messages with visitors about authorisations, parking areas, etc.

Next, priority was given to drafting a code of conduct regarding practices in the Grand Site. This document was intended to define common rules, particularly as regards the following:

- Parking outside the dedicated areas was forbidden so that they remained vehicle-free and quiet. This principle led to some very sensitive natural areas being closed during the summer:
- Overnight parking outside of areas equipped for such stays and campsites was forbidden.

The code of conduct encouraged users to become aware of the surrounding biodiversity, the agricultural activities and the fire hazards, and used welcoming wording and as much positive language as possible in the rules FCH.3/9. It included a Grand Site map showing the locations of the various visitor facilities.

Introducing and enforcing this code of conduct

A major information campaign was rolled out, with new boards installed in each parking area. A list was made of the Grand Site and the surrounding areas in the territory where camper vans could stay and included in a leaflet. The information was passed on by tourist offices, on websites and through press releases targeting magazines that specialised in camper van tourism.

Furthermore, these areas were monitored on mobile applications such as Park4night², so that any information at odds with the overnight parking legislation applicable to the Grand Site would be deleted.

Article R.111-42 of the Planning Code

² Park4Night is a collaborative parking areas and lets them add information to the database about their own experience at a specific place.

Thanks to coordination efforts between all municipalities' elected officials and the support of a legal analysis, harmonised by-laws were adopted that banned overnight stays by vehicles from 10pm to 8am.

To facilitate acceptance of the regulation and enforce it efficiently, a system of fake reports was conceived in 2011 in consultation with the gendarmerie's communications department. Its purpose was to remind visitors of the regulation in force and gradually make them abide by the new rules during a year of outreach before fines began to be issued. In 2012, around 200 reports were written **>CH.3**.

Outreach was conducted by a mounted patrol created in 2007 to cover 1,000 hectares, including 16 parking areas, in July and August. The Grand Site now has mountain bike patrols to support the mounted patrol. These field agents organise the work of the various authorised agents - gendarmerie, municipal police, intercommunal police, the OFB - that are physically present onsite. Since 2017, the Republican Guard has also been travelling the banks of Salagou Lake in the summer. Together, they inform visitors, monitor their behaviours and enforce the code of conduct.

Marking what is forbidden

In 2014, a programme aiming to enhance the parking area on the Liausson banks and integrate it into the landscape was carried out with the Hérault department and completely closed off certain sensitive areas on the banks to vehicles.

The principle of having a vehicle-free "tranquillity strip" all around the lake was also helpful in restoring the banks and gave visitors a public place where they could contemplate the landscapes. Several planning operations were carried out (diverted parking areas, barriers, ditches, parking areas with a maximum height, etc.) to limit uncontrolled parking **>CH.4**.

Results

The Grand Site showed improvement in camper van management. The survey conducted as part of the visitor observatory revealed a clear decrease, from 110 vehicles parked overnight in 2009 to 27 in 2022 **FCH.2**.

NEXT STEPS

In 2022, tourist reception agents from the Grand Site communities of municipalities were also trained on the code of conduct.

New practices have emerged that raise questions about the future: grouped settlement of equipped vans, space privatisation, increasing presence outside of the high season, etc. Visitors coming in equipped vans are showing an interest in being received a little like bivouac users. The issue of extending overnight stays to periods outside the high season is emerging, and partnerships are being developed with farmers in the territory to host 2 to 3 equipped vehicles and introduce these visitors to their products and activities.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- A system that enabled the managing institution to set up an accommodation framework and principles without freezing, rejecting or suffering from tourism.
- A trial period and a progressive improvement process.
- An observatory to follow-up on the effectiveness of the initiated measures **> CH.2**.
- A long-standing working group that took the form of a "visitor commission", which made coordinating much easier > CH.1.
- Outreach and "tips" for visitors to start changing behaviours before fines were introduced. Around 9 out of 10 people who were made aware of the visitor rules complied with them > CH.3/10.
- Coordination work between the Grand Site's patrols and police forces > CH.1/3.

Items to be watchful of

- The growing popularity of this form of carbon-emitting exploration mode, which was boosted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Strong pressure deep within the site which affects smaller neighbouring municipalities that lack both experience with these kinds of issues and the resources to manage them.
- The amount of the fixed fine, which does not act as a deterrent, since it often costs less than a night at a campsite.
- The increased need for a yearround operational infrastructure and reception solutions to accommodate visitors in July and August when campsites are full.





Camper van "walls" on the lake banks occupied a very large, unsuitable area, leading to practice conflicts. Now, cars and camper vans are parked further back and no longer appear in the landscape.

FIND OUT MORE

- www.grandsitesalagoumoureze.fr
- "Le tourisme durable dans les Grands Sites de France : 20 exemples innovants" practical guide - Sheet #7 - RGSF, 2016
- Grands Sites Thread "Comment accueillir et gérer les camping-cars dans les Grands Sites?" - RGSF, 2012

Designing Parking Spots Respectful of the Landscape and Habitats

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE DUNE DU PILAT (PILAT SAND DUNE)



The landscape integration of the parking area is remarkable given the high number of visitors and turnover rate all year. The project is very focused on biodiversity: lights that respect the dark infrastructure¹, nest boxes, etc. Wildlife lives in this space and can be observed outside of peak hours.

With 2 million annual visitors, a third of whom arrive in July and August, the site sometimes reaches a daily average of 10,000 visitors during the high season. The two main roads that lead to it are, consequently, under a lot of pressure.

A visitor analysis carried out over 3 years has showed that increasing parking capacity in the immediate vicinity of the Grand Site was not a solution to control the flows. Instead of building a large infrastructure, the managing institution preferred to control the number of visitors by limiting parking spaces, and maintaining an acceptable number of facilities that do not disturb the site's natural state.

The idea was to improve travel fluidity and integrate the parking area into the landscape while carrying out a comprehensive site rehabilitation programme. This first operation was aimed at restoring the heritage value of the natural area and coming up with concrete answers for issues such as visitor accommodation, security and interpretation.

Land monitoring procedures were continued with the support of the Coastal Conservatory P24 and helped forge substantial progress in controlling secondary access points to the site and eradicating unauthorised parking. Real-time information on the parking area occupancy rates was provided using variable message signs on the main roads and on the website to support controls. PCH.9.

Visitor distribution was confirmed over the entire day, as arrivals between 8am and 8pm were recorded.

After the Mixed Syndicate purchased the reception area, which included the parking area, a comprehensive space enhancement project was carried out starting in 2023. Key aspects of this project included making routes smoother and sorting them out to make pedestrian traffic intelligible, comfortable and safe and give it priority over cars.

The parking lot capacity remained unchanged and despite the fires that hit the Grand Site in 2022, restoration work in the damaged area was limited to the original space and did neither reduce its size nor extend the parking area (even though the Grand Site is heavily funded by parking), so that areas could be rewilded and replanted. A shuttle service and a bridge parking lot were created to reduce unauthorised parking in the vicinity of the Grand Site.

Although the size of the parking area helps control the number of visitors, it is only one of the available tools to do so, and important work is being done to decarbonise accessibility ightharpoonup CH.6.

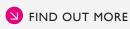
KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grande Dune du Pilat Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 2 millions in the entire Grand Site, including 1.3 million through the main access (9ha)

Number of inhabitants: The Grand Site is located between the coastline and an urban area (128,500 inhabitants over the 12 municipalities bordering Arcachon Bay).

Surface area: 506 hectares



www.ladunedupilat.com

¹The dark infrastructure is a network of ecological corridors characterised by a certain level of darkness that protects night-time biodiversity from light pollution.

GREEN MOBILITY DEVELOPMENT

Offering Decarbonised and Less Impactful Transport Alternatives

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

Resorting to individual cars is a source of many problems that can compromise site aesthetics and tranquillity **CH.5**.

Encouraging green mobility in tourism answers several concerns, such as minimising the impact of cars, better managing flows, improving the living environment and visiting experience, limiting carbon emissions¹, etc.

To address these concerns, the Grands Sites have been developing and promoting infrastructure and sustainable mobility offers and endeavour to incorporate them in strategies with a larger scope **CH.1/2/5**. Additionally, they take both residents' and tourists' travels into account².

Developing green mobilities means suggesting changes in one's relationship to time, humans, landscapes, nature and oneself, and questions the very notion of travel. The visitor's experience of the site is more intimate, which aligns with values and a chosen form of tourism that becomes part of the tourism and communication strategy.

Recommendations

- Make the development of green mobilities part of the larger territorial situation (1€ trains in the Occitanie region, free buses in the Dunkirk conurbation, EuroVelo routes, tourist travel regional or departmental plans, etc.) ►CH.I.
- Use in-depth knowledge of this larger territory's decarbonised mobilities, multimodal amenities and practices as a basis to identify missing links
- Establish partnerships between public institutions with different mandates but also with the private sector (protected area managers, government departments in charge of biodiversity, roads, mobility, transport, tourism or planning, tour operators, rental bike companies, etc.)
- Consult inhabitants as mobilities affect their living environment >CH.I.
- Organise transfers by connecting train stations, large parking areas, camper van areas and itineraries that structure the socio-economic fabric of the territory with public transport or green mobility equipment. The last mile is strategic because in the absence of any other method to visit the site, choosing one's car will prevail. CH.5.
- Make passing through the sites meaningful: include in the territorial reception plan what makes their discovery using green mobility methods special >CH.4/10.

- Rely on the green mobility and travelling plan.
 This plan defines practice goals based on what is acceptable for the site and its inhabitants, as some cycle itineraries are now at full capacity.
- Developing long-distance itineraries (GRPs (long-distance country hikes), GRs (long-distance hikes), cycle routes, etc.) is not always compatible with the preservation of fragile habitats. However, these itineraries can serve as a backbone to create exploratory loops CH.7/8/10.
- Active paths must be respectful of the landscape and habitats >CH.4/8. When they are part of a slow tourism approach, paths and trails allow visitors to take their time, tell the story of the landscape, follow former rural paths and prevent the territory from being parcelled out >CH.10.
- In a rural environment, taking into account farming machines in mobility flows may be compulsory (as with the Cliffs of Étretat - Alabaster Coast).
- Amenities must be supported by dedicated services, i.e. pay-per-night accommodation, secured stopping places, repair and refill stations, and by certified reception (Accueil Vélo certification label, etc.) > CH.4/7/8.
- A communication strategy adapted to car-free visitors is necessary **>CH.9**.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Développer le tourisme à vélo dans les territoires (Developing Cycle Touring in the Territories) -Vélo & Territoires, 202 l
- Grands Sites Thread "Comment développer une offre de tourisme sans voiture dans les Grands Sites de France?" ("Developing a Car-Free Tourism Offer in the Grands Sites de France") - RGSF, 2021
- Cahier de recommandations pour la réalisation d'aménagements cyclables dans les espaces protégés (List of Recommendations to Build Cycle Infrastructure in Protected Areas) - Ministry of the Green Transition, 2011
- Écomobilité touristique et de loisirs vers les espaces ruraux
 Une opportunité pour les territoires - (Tourist and Leisure Sustainable Mobility in Rural Areas
 An Opportunity for Territories)
 Réseau rural français/RGSF, 2010
- Minutes of the RGSF 12th Talks "L'écomobilité dans les Grands Sites" ("Sustainable Mobility at the Grands Sites") 2010
- "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France" practical guide - RGSF, 2022

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Active and green mobility plan: A strategic planning document aiming to coordinate mobilities, spread out visitors and encourage the exploration of certain places. Often associated with a visitor reception plan or a vehicle traffic and parking plan, it complements the network of strategies implemented in the territory. It includes actions intended to enhance or develop active travelling, clarifies who is in charge of which construction or renovation project and provides for the strategy to be made accessible to the general public (Cliffs of Étretat - Alabaster Coast, Sixt-Fer-à-Cheval, etc.).
- Bike plan, Reception and signage plan, etc.

¹ According to the 2021 assessment of greenhouse gas emissions from the tourism sector in France conducted by ADEME (Green Transition Agency), national tourist mobilities accounted for 77% of all tourism emissions. ² With 22 million French people riding a bike during their holidays, cycle touring is booming. Cycling on day trips or to commute to and back from work is also gaining popularity (source:Vélo & Territoires).

Integrating Into a Territorial Active Mobility Scheme

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE DUNES DE FLANDRE (FLANDERS SAND DUNES)

Located between Dunkirk Harbour and the Belgian border, the Flanders sand dunes are an open landscape where the greenery, the sea and the sand dunes take centre stage. There, the dune and farming areas stand alongside tourism-oriented built heritage elements that reinforce the reputation of the place as a seaside resort. The site bears the mark of History and a Flemish culture rooted in conviviality and the sea.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Dunkirk Incorporated Municipality (CUD)

Annual visitors: 500,000 in the dune areas (figure based on the 2012 visitor study)

Number of inhabitants: 196,000 for the Flanders-Dunkirk territory including the CUD and TCP (Territorial Consistency Plan) perimeters

Surface area: 3,300 hectares

WHY?

Whether by the sea, inland or cross-border, the Flanders sand dune landscapes hold much architectural, cultural and natural wealth. In 2012, a landscape study and a visitor study - supplemented by a reception and discovery organisation plan in 2023 - revealed how polarised visits were on the seafront. These observations helped define the trajectory and direction of the Grand Site, so that it could diversify its exploratory offer while preserving the landscape thanks to green mobilities **CH.1/4/7/10**.

HOW?

Due to its geographical situation, the Grand Site territory possesses infrastructure and equipments that make accessing it easier thanks to a wide range of mobility methods: highways, Transmanche harbour terminal, railway station, etc. Since 2015, the Dunkirk Incorporated Municipality (CUD) has been actively developing its mobility amenities within the conurbation (free buses, cycle routes, PlanVélo+, hiking trails, etc.). The services in charge of the Grand Site participate in the collective brainstorming to integrate visitor management into that scheme.

In addition to being a lever that has helped improve access to tourist areas, these projects have also shaped the development of an alternative mode of discovery revolving around a "car-free" principle, the idea of wandering and the exploration of municipalities further away from the coast. The managing institution's goal was to use this multimodal offer to structure the discovery of the Grand Site, in order to relieve the seaside areas and coastal sand dunes.

Reconfiguring what already exists and structuring an accessible and functional public transport offer

In September 2018, the CUD bus network became entirely free for users. This initiative was a first step towards the structuring of a sustainable mobility project for the Grand Site, including a complete redesign of the bus lines to service 3 poles along the coast. This met inhabitants' and holiday-makers' needs in terms of travel and transport regularity. Among other things, the hub located next to the train station was created to make bus but also bike transfer easier, since each bus station was equipped with secured bicycle sheds. At the same time, a Bike Plan helped incorporate continuity issues between the various green mobilities into the strategy and the infrastructure.

Organising cycle touring

Going from Belgium to Brittany, EuroVelo 4 - La Vélomaritime¹ passes through the site. Because it is supported by a range of services dedicated to bicycles (parking areas, toilets, water points, stop areas, etc.), this itinerary along the sand dunes structures the offer. It is key in exploring the Grand Site by bike, and a starting point for other itineraries that contribute to spreading visitors in the coastal hinterland.

Furthermore, thanks to travellers-testers' feedback, the creation of an Escapade Nature sans Voiture® ("Car-Free Nature Getaway") helped identify spots that required attention along the route or that blocked it. It also played a part in determining what this seaside destination offered and how visitors perceived it **P.45 CH.7**.

³ In 2015, only 25% of travels under one kilometre in the CUD territory were done on foot.

¹ EuroVelo routes are 17 long-distance cyle itineraries covering 38 European countries and over 45,000km of dedicated roads. ² The CUD joined forces with the Western Flanders province to lead an Interreg European project with the goal of maximising cross-border management in the protected sand dune areas. During their 5-year cooperation, the 12 Belgian and French partners developed a common vision and actions that brought consistency to the landscape, environmental and visitor reception plan in view of progressing "Towards the Development of an Excellence Cross-Border Ecodestination" (the VEDETTE project).

Becoming a hiking destination

To anticipate the negative effects a bicycle-centred only mobility would have (itinerary congestion, bike shed occupancy, etc.), the Grand Site relied on cross-border cooperation to lean towards a varied multimodal offer both on the coast and inland, by connecting with the existing Belgian routes².

Invented in Belgium, the node-point network (NPN) system consists in numbering major intersections to harmonise signage along the foot- and cycle paths. These number markings make the route more legible and help users to better find their bearings. The Nord department continued the NPN in the dunes to relieve some itineraries and on all departmental paths.

This was a very significant measure that gave momentum to the territorial active mobility scheme. It was supported by a Coastal Conservatory's purchasing project and a plan to create a harmonised trail network throughout the cross-border dune landscape ►CH.3.

The concurrent "green path policy" led by the CUD (a key land policy aimed at connecting natural areas) contributed to encouraging walking in the territory through the installation of bicycle and pedestrian bridges and the conception of strolls and visits ►CH.4/7/8.

Among the partnership initiatives that helped establish a comprehensive web of infrastructure, the Flanders-Dunkirk Urban Planning Agency (AGUR) developed as part of the Flood Action and Prevention Programme 6 foot or cycle itineraries to explore the agricultural landscapes, discover how the hydraulic system works and visit heritage elements at the edge of the Flanders sand dunes.

NEXT STEPS

The conception of a "walking plan" is a new phase in the development of active mobilities. The goal remains to better distribute visitors as well as generalise useful, sport and stroll walking.

The Maritime Flanders CPIE's (Initiative for the Environment Permanent Centre) 2023 study on all forms of hiking (by bike, on horseback, on foot, etc.), identified visitor profiles based on their practices and associated each profile with an expected level of services. The CPIE is planning a major action programme based on the Lanscape Plan of the territory and cross-references the potential reception and interpretation sectors with the landscape entities >CH.4/10.

Finally, once the Ferme Nord (Northern Farm) in Zuydcoote is rehabilitated and turned into the Grand Site Visitor Centre, it will provide hikers with a place to stop and be for all visitors a tourist information centre located on La Vélomaritime and at the starting point of several hiking trails.



From Dunkirk, it is easy to gently immerse oneself in the landscapes of the Flanders sand dunes on foot, by bike, by bus, etc..

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- A strong political will against the all-use-car trend ▶CH.I.
- The many invested stakeholders prove that there were multiple public policies in favour of active mobilities ▶CH.I.
- · Local associations' and sports clubs' commitment ▶CH.8.
- The Maritime Flanders CPIE's push in favour of the active travel study fostered close work, increased knowledge of the field and trusted exchanges with professionals of the industry ►CH.1/2/10.
- Endeavours to optimise routes and improve service combined with free buses boosted the number of public transport users.

Items to be watchful of

- The need for a main point of contact to coordinate all local policies and the offer network.
- The difficulty in determining who has the authority to do what and who the managing institutions dealing with the development of sustainable mobility are.
- The very compartmentalised information for each form of mobility results in heterogeneous signage and leaves little possibility for pedestrian and cycle connections.
- The still prevailing image of the Grand Site as a seaside resort and "cycling destination", as well as the fact hiking in the north of France is very much tied to the summer season ►CH.7/9.
- The services offered must be sufficient to develop a wandering practice (pay-per-night accommodation, luggage deposit, e-bike charging stations, etc.) ►CH.7.
- The size of the infrastructure impacts the project, its control of the land and the environment ►CH.3/4

FIND OUT MORE

- www.grandsite-dunesdeflandre.
- www.grandsite-dunesdeflandre. com/projets-transfrontaliers/ vedette
- en.eurovelo.com

Escapade Nature sans Voiture® (Car-Free Nature Getaway), An Experiment Full of Opportunities for the Territories

GRANDS SITES DE FRANCE NETWORK

The goal of the "Escapades Nature sans Voiture®" is to identify, test and highlight ideas for short, immersive and decarbonised stays at the Grands Sites de France. These getaways are unique in that they comply with precise specifications and have been tested onsite, thus guaranteeing they are in line with the values of the Grands Sites de France

WHY?

When the project emerged in 2014, tourists were opting for low-cost flights favouring weekend getaways to discover the European capitals rather than nature experiences amidst France's remarkable landscapes. The purpose of the concept was to go against that trend and prove to the general public that travelling in France without a car and exploring all aspects of exceptional rural landscapes was possible. Additionally, it was designed to encourage decarbonised, off-season stays.

The project also aimed at pushing Grands Sites managers to experiment with an off-season offer revolving around green mobilities to reinforce their sustainable visitor management strategies.

HOW?

This concept is part of a voluntarist approach from the Grand Site to test the feasability of an entirely car-free trip, starting from the visitor's home and including an immersive discovery route. The test relies entirely on the existing green mobility amenities of the territory without new infrastructure being especially built. Small boat, horse- and steam trains riding, walking, cycling - all means of transportation are used to connect an array of tourist amenities and services that make an intimate exploration of the Grand Site truly possible. To facilitate the experimentation, the Grand Site and its partners in charge of tourism, outdoor activities and mobilities usually establish a mobility diagnosis. The full picture is complemented by an inventory of shop amenities and tourist services.

One of the key stages to creating an Escapade Nature sans Voiture® lies in asking the project stakeholders about what they wish for the territory in terms of the tourism offer. A mindful questionnaire is sent, in which everyone is invited to imagine they are a Grand Site host and determine their own relationship with the landscape, the trails and the contemplation, pause, breathing or food places they

would suggest to a guest coming to the territory for the first time.

All these projections are brought together to create a 2 to 4-day itinerary that will be the basis for the test. The "Escapade Nature sans Voiture®" name and the use of the associated logo are approved if the traveller who tested the itinerary favourably reports on the following:

- The Grand Site exploratory offers and activities are:
- accessible without a car;
- in line with the spirit of the place and the values of the Grands Sites de France, and contribute to discovering every single aspect of the site (landscapes, heritage sites, expertise, seasonal and local products, etc.);
- open outside the high season.
- The itinerary is accessible to people with a moderate level of fitness;
- Itinerary adjustments are possible to meet the validation criteria of the test.

Since 2014

- 19 getaways have been the subject of an experimentation project and a full-scale test
- 16 have been deemed feasible and replicable enough to be highlighted on the dedicated website. Among these, 2 are connecting loops between several very or relatively close Grands Sites and straddle several departments who co-endorsed them alongside their ADTs (Departmental Tourism Agency) and the RGSF:
- Navacelles Corrie; Hérault Gorge; Salagou Mourèze Corrie (Hérault and Gard departments)
- Southern Canal Béziers ; Cathar City of Minerve, The Cesse and Brian Gorge ; Ancient City of Carcassonne (Hérault and Aude departments)

The test value and triggering quality of the concept proved an interesting lever. Indeed, it became a tool for the Grands Site to obtain a sustainable mobility and visitor experience specific diagnosis.

S FIND OUT MORE

- escapadenature-sansvoiture.com
- www.grandsitedefrance.com/ nos-themes/ecomobilite
- Grands Sites Thread No.14
 "Comment développer une offre de tourisme sans voiture dans les Grands Sites de France?" -RGSF, 2021
- "Grands Sites de France et tourisme" framework document -RGSF. 2014
- "Valeurs communes des Grands Sites de France" framework document - RGSF, 2014







Escapade Nature sans Voiture® travel journals

For some, the test showed that developing certain transportation methods rather than others, setting up partnerships between tourism stakeholders, devising mediation tools or improving car-free accessibility information could be interesting.

Through these Escapades Nature sans Voiture®, stakeholders collectively sketch a desirable trajectory for tourism, which they identify with and contribute to ▶CH.I/7.

Thanks to this lever effect, the concept was rewarded at the Palmes du Tourisme Durable (Sustainable Tourism Awards) in 2017 in the "Territoire et Destination" ("Territory and Destination") category. "In Vézère, the Escapade Nature Sans Voiture® truly spurred the development of green mobilities. This experience has helped us show partners and elected officials that cycling along the Vézère River instead of using one's car was possible", says the Grand Site

NEXT STEPS

The project was assessed in 2020. Obstacles and initiated actions in each territory involved in the experimentation were identified, leading to question more broadly tourist sustainable mobility at the Grands Sites.

As 2024 marked the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Escapades Nature sans Voiture® concept, the Grands Sites de France Network and its members have been continuing their strategic thinking to adapt an immersive, off-season and decarbonised offer to the current green, economic and tourist transitions.

Although the 16 experimentations have technically proven that reaching the last mile without a car was possible, the work continues to promote the idea among tourism influencers and the general public. Making the experimentation one's own remains key to adapting it to circumstances in the field and making it attractive.

New issues have been appearing in terms of promotion tools (videos, access to updated and real-time information, sustainable-mobility-focused map, etc.) and accessibility, leading towards a more economical model, capable of reaching new target groups.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- A test function that reinforces the already implemented measures and identifies blocks.
- Connecting tourism professionals encourages them to continue their partnerships beyond the experimentation to create marketable packages of tourism products.
- An ode to taking one's time and meeting others, in line with slow tourism principles; it further contributes to extending one's stay and, for the Grands Sites de France, to positioning themselves as sustainable tourism destinations.
- A created itinerary intended to be differentiating and qualitative, with viewpoints and experiences that would not be accessible by car.

Items to be watchful of

- A changing situation where gaps occasionally persist in the:
 - adaptation of services to a car-free public (bike and luggage transport or securing, distance between services, etc.);
- off-season offer in a rural environment (public transport schedule, lack in accommodation or food places open in the late season, etc.):
- access to information (natural site interpretation, identification of basic services onsite, distances and travel times);
- infrastructure (signage, security).
- The concept reassures stakeholders about the possibility to explore a site without a car, in keeping with the values of the Grands Sites. The travel journal helps visitors prepare for their getaway, but it is not a field orientation tool. This is not a marketable, ready-to-use offer, either.

Making the Electric Bike More Desirable than the Car

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE VALLÉE DE LA VÉZÈRE (VÉZÈRE VALLEY)



By expanding its discovery offer thanks to the electric bike, the Grand Site de France reaches a larger public looking for a peaceful, car-free immersion into the landscape.

The Vézère Valley crosses the Dordogne department on 45 kilometres. All along the river, the landscape reveals cliffs, causses, thick forests and prehistorical heritage sites. The deconcentrated tourism offer available in this vast heritage territory is characterised by multiple reception hubs and places to visit, the exploration of which often requires much travel.

This situation gave the Grand Site de France the opportunity to test self-service rental e-bikes. Led by the Homme Valley community of municipalities, i.e. 26 out of the 35 municipalities the Grand Site de France encompasses, the project was initiated thanks to the support of the ministry responsible for the Environment as part of the TEPCV programme¹.

A fleet of 18 rental e-bikes accessible 24/7 was distributed in 4 spots in the valley, targeting both visitors and residents. Launched in July 2018, the service was managed by the Lascaux-Dordogne tourist office and recorded over 900 kilometres cycled in the first year only. The service became more popular each year, reaching more families and a less sporty public wanting better accessibility amenities².

The first evaluations conducted showed that the service was mostly used by regional visitors. A "resident pass" granting 3 free hours per use was implemented to encourage inhabitants to use the service more. It was further complemented by a long-term rental service (up to 3 months) which was very successful.

Other green mobility development perspectives have now emerged around the future Voie Verte (Green Path) cycle route mostly, which will be the main traffic artery for cyle touring in the Vézère Valley. This also connects to other projects, such as the implementation of summer shuttles decided by the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region.

Green mobilities carry many advantages; however, they bring issues to the surface such as the accommodation and parking of a large number of e-bikes, battery charging stations and signage adaptation, and generate new costs. In other Grands Sites particularly committed to cycle touring, such as the Pilat Sand Dune, the Charente Estuary - Rochefort Arsenal or the Blanc-Nez, Gris-Nez Two Capes, stakeholders are trying to anticipate the consequences of such development on the heritage landscapes and the living environment.

KEY IDENITIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: EPCC Prehistoric Times Interpretation Centre

Annual visitors:

1,700,000 over 32 visit sites out of the 51 this vast territory holds

Number of inhabitants: 30,000

Grand Site de France surface area: 72,300 hectares



www.pole-prehistoire.com

² In August 2023, the service reported a record number of 242 rentals

¹ Territoires à énergie positive pour la croissance verte (Green Growth Positive Energy Territory) is an excellence territory in terms of the energy and green transition.

TOURISM OFFER TRANSFORMATION

Promoting a Form of Tourism Consistent with Heritage Values

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

The Grands Sites de France are keen to use their natural force of attraction to better control local development. Thus, opening up to tourism is often synonymous with transformation, going from a suffered to a chosen form of tourism.

Provided it is adapted to the territory and rooted in its values, the tourism offer can contribute to avoiding the normalisation of the place, revealing its uniqueness, minimising practice conflicts and making visitor flow smoother.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 and climate crises, coupled with increasing occurences of tourism rejection from inhabitants, have highlighted again how in line a tourism offer must be with the new societal expectations in terms of environmental responsibility and target both visitors and inhabitants.

Although oftentimes, they do not have authority over tourism policies - not to mention the creation of tourism products - Grands Sites managers, tourism insitutional actors and private stakeholders aim to facilitate the emergence of such an offer. As a result, they act as resource centres regarding territorial values, guide and support tourism stakeholders, connect them, facilitate collective brainstorming and promote offers in line with their strategies, among other things.

The managing body can occasionally be required to design a tourism offer to fill a gap in the market, in response to a strategic territorial goal and with the aim of generating economic momentum for the market to take over (e-bike rental at a Visitor Centre, Escapade Nature sans Voiture® offer, etc.).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- "L'entrepreneuriat de territoire dans les Grands Sites de France" practical guide - RGSF, 2020
- Video of the Tremplin programme
- Video of (future) entrepreneurs' meeting sessions in Puy Mary
- "Portraits de paysage" ("Landscape Portraits") film -RGSF & Clément Couturier, 2017
- Minutes of the 23rd RGSF Talks "Comment favoriser un développement des territoires en harmonie avec la nature et les paysages?" - 202 l
- Minutes of the 15th RGSFTalks "Quel tourisme dans les Grands Sites?" - 2013
- "Tourisme et Grands Sites de France" framework document -RGSF, 2014

Recommendations

- Forge a collective and uniting narrative that embodies the territory, involves institutional stakeholders, private service providers and local tourism professionals, and relies on a extensive knowledge of the heritage landscape and site characteristics >CH.1/2.
- Express a shared vision of what desirable tourism looks like for the territory - through a sustainable tourism charter for example >P.52 - and design the reception and/or interpretation plan >CH.4/10.
- Translate this framework into more concrete actions

 signage, infrastructure, mobility, interpretation
 to create an ecosystem favourable to the implementation and development of economic projects consistent with the goals ►CH.4/5/6/10
- Boost the emergence of a quality, renewed offer by supporting the search for technical and financial assistance, offering training and making knowledge available, and make collaborations easier by facilitating a network of professionals (see the "L'entrepreneuriat de territoire dans les Grands Sites de France" guide - RGSF, 2020).
- Highlight local crafts, traditional activities, agri-tourism and local industries that protect employment and the landscape and enrich the visitors' site discovery, and showcase them.
- Preserve the local economic diversity by regulating the development of businesses to avoid excessively depending on tourism.

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Sustainable tourism charter ▶P.52: A sometimes local variation of broader orientations.
- Inventory of the territory's tourism offer
- Training sessions and stay creation: The collective project may lead to marketable offers (4 discovery tours highlighting "heritage stops" and 7 "slow tourism" package trips at the Navacelles Corrie; winter, sustainably mobile or slow offers in Bibracte Morvan des Sommets) but more importantly, to the establishment of a territorial working community that enhances producers, craftspersons, farms, cultural or wellness places, etc.
- Facilitation and co-creation tools (mindful questionnaire, guidance documents, etc.), to imagine an offer "one would suggest to a friend" and make visitors' search for authenticity easier:
- A consulted development plan to support the design of thematic offers and unite local projects (bike strategy, Escapades Nature sans Voiture®, nature sports plan, etc.)..

Coordinating the Offer with a Group of Stakeholders to Make Visitors Stay Longer

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE MARAIS POITEVIN (POITEVIN MARSH)

The iconic part of the Marais Poitevin, i.e. its eastern wet marsh, is classified for its picturesque landscape shaped by humans since the 20th century. It is a 2,000km labyrinth of waterways bordered by lines of pollarded trees and natural meadows, a "green cathedral" for its thickness and homogeneity, a haven of tranquillity and lush nature much appreciated by visitors.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: The Poitevin Marsh Regional Natural Park Managing Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors:

1.4 million throughout the Regional Natural Park, including 700,000 in the Grand Site de France

Number of inhabitants: 86,500 in the Grand Site de France

Grand Site de France surface area: 49,000 hectares

Regional Natural Park surface area: 200,000 hectares



Leaving for a boat ride at the Sansais - La Garette pier (1961)

WHY

In the 19th century, visitors mostly came to the wetland for a romantic boat ride. Such enthusiasm promoted the gradual development of piers and of a tourism offer increasingly focused on this flagship activity. In the 1990s, standardisation and visitor concentration phenomena stressed how this tourist mono-activity was endangering the marsh. Studies revealed that 80% of visitors were driving there for a half-day only, to go on a small boat ride that little benefits the territorial economy and causes traffic, landscape degradation and visiting experience standardisation.

NOTA BENE

Management of the Grand Site de France Marais Poitevin is entrusted to the Regional Natural Park Managing Mixed Syndicate, which intervenes throughout the Marais Poitevin, i.e. on 200,000 hectares. The Grand Site de France represents 1/4 of the Park's intervention territory.

Both an emblematic site and sustainable development laboratory, the Grand Site is the main gateway for visitors to explore the other facets of the Poitevin marsh.

To organise the tourism business, the managing institution relied on scaling up the boating activity and diversifying the offer in order to encourage visitors to stay longer, better distribute them in time and space and offer them to explore the Grand Site in a mindful way.

HOW?

Restoring the landscape and reception terms

A commission comprising some of the Park's elected officials and technicians, government services, partners, experts, tourism professionals and environmental protection associations was created to set the terms of a new tourism offer. This commission fostered interdisciplinary dialogue and determined the overall strategic direction to rehabilitate the wet marsh. >CH.I. This first step in stakeholders' coordination led to key actions, such as:

- The rehabilitation of the emblematic landscape and its traditional activities thanks to waterway maintenance, replanting and restoring the harbours and canal access points from the villages;
- The improvement of visitor reception infrastructure: integrated cycle equipment through "Bike Plans", renovation and conversion of empty homes

into holiday cottages and B&Bs, and visiting site enhancement;

 Efforts to structure transfers by connecting pedestrian bridge connections and creating pedestrian and cycle exploration itineraries and parking areas connected to the villages.

►CH.4/5/6

Professionalising the flagship tourism activity to enhance it

The group gradually applied quality controls to small boating and incorporated it into a "slow tourism" offer so that it would become the visitors' first choice when discovering the Grand Site.

The managing institution created its own "Qualité batellerie" ("Quality Inland Waterway Transport") certification label as early as 2004, which would quickly evolve to become part of the national "Quality Tourism" approach. Little by little, upscaling procedures extended beyond boating, with the "Valeurs Parc naturel régional" ("Regional Natural Park Values"), "EU Ecolabel", "Tourisme et handicap" ("Tourism and Disability"), "Accueil vélo" ("Bike Accommodation") certifications, etc.

At the same time, a "Knowing the Poitevin marsh" training session was proposed each year to over one hundred tourism professionals, permanent and seasonal workers alike, such as boating guides, tourist office and visiting site staff, etc. The training was based on field education (landscape reading, visits, etc.). It contributed to sharing the landscape, historical, hydraulic, geological, cultural and environmental specificities of the Poitevin marsh, fully comprehending its inner workings and giving information on exploratory activities.

Meanwhile, the Poitevin Marsh Nature, Environment and Territory Education Network (RENET) was created to promote environmental education and foster partnerships around educational tools, events and training sessions **>CH.10**.

Diversifying the tourist experience at the Poitevin marsh

The main reasons for discovering the marsh, i.e. the beauty and tranquillity of the landscapes, are the basis for the visitor distribution strategy. It revolves aroung showcasing the range of the Grand Site de France's tourist and cultural appeal (stone and tile villages, hydraulic heritage, harbours, slipways, small-size heritage, etc.). This offer forms a network of accommodation, nature events and

heritage visits at several small sites spread across the Grand Site and connected through green mobility infrastructure and hiking loops.

These initiatives gradually but sustainably transformed tourist practices. In 2013, visitor surveys showed progress, with visitors staying on average 6 nights in the heart of the site and enjoying a range of activities in various areas of the territory versus their spending a half-day in 1990, mostly in the municipality of Coulon.

Little by little, heritage enhancement and visitor reception improvement actions expanded beyond the Grand Site de France. In the Park, visits remained relatively focused on coastal beaches and the wet marsh. In order to continue to spread visitors and galvanise the tourism offer, the dry marsh, Aiguillon Bay and the coastline were included into a structuring plan through nature tourism development measures and the promotion of the ornithological wealth of the area conducive to off-season bird watching.

NEXT STEPS

Measures meant to distribute visitors continue through the promotion of the Sèvre Niortaise River - the backbone of the marsh, which had not up to that point been included in the tourist dynamics.

Led by the Park, this structuring project aims to rekindle the attraction power of river boating and involves three departments over 109 kilometres. It is seen as an opportunity to reinforce the bonds between the municipalities along the river that crosses the Grand Site.

This way of exploring the territory, following the current and the crossing of hydraulic structures, is based on the restoration and promotion of the hydraulic and landscape heritage. The whole Poitevin marsh should reap the economic rewards of the Park's endeavours to bring water activities and land discovery (visits, restaurants, exploratory activities, etc.) together under a revitalised tourism offer.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- The partnership work between environmental protection and tourism stakeholders that led to coordinating strategies and pooling communication media and tools, as part of a collective uniting the tourism development agencies
- Project carriers were supported very early on.
- The knowledge gained from the first experimentations deep in the classified site - the most visited and fragile area - served as a reference to roll out actions in other sectors of the marsh.

Items to be watchful of

- The development the offer implies that human and financial resources be expanded in order to maintain the cycle and waterway networks, operate the equipment and facilitate visits.
- The need to raise awareness among decision-makers, instructing services and residents to make them consider the multiple issues surrounding the offer transformation requires continuous facilitation work while also increasing operational needs
- Despite training sessions and quality control procedures, tourism service providers do not always give the same qualitative welcome.

FIND OUT MORE

- pnr.parc-marais-poitevin.fr
- Excerpt from "Portrait de paysage" at the Poitevin marsh
- "Le tourisme durable en pratique : 20 exemples innovants dans les Grands Sites de France" guide, Sheet #2 p.11 and sheet #4 p.15 -RGSF, 2014

 $^{^{1}}$ As defined by the Ministry of the Green Transition and Territorial Cohesion (MTECT), slow tourism promotes disconnecting, rediscovering local territories, and meeting and sharing with local populations. This practice encourages more eco-friendly trips with low CO 2 emissions that are respectful of the heritage and biodiversity

Promoting Alternative Offers to Distribute Visitors

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE CONCORS - SAINTE-VICTOIRE

The iconic Sainte-Victoire outshines the discreet Concors. Yet, this mountain is a typically rural and wide natural area. Classified in 2013 for its landscape value, this site is home to intimate hills and vales, secret forests, agricultural plains, farms, farmhouses and villages with colourful buildings and narrow streets, inviting walkers to relax.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Aix-Marseille-Provence Metropolis

Annual visitors:

1.5 million, including
1.3 million on Sainte-Victoire
and 250.000 on the Concors

Number of inhabitants:

194,210 (1.8 million in the Metropolis and living area)

Grand Site de France surface area: 48,904 hectares

WHY?

A steep, limestone mountain face whose height and iconic shape overlook the Provence landscape, Sainte-Victoire is naturally the first choice for those seeking an unmissable climb, a bucolic break or a sports ground. Its emblematic profile is so attractive that visitors tend to flock to it and its southern slope, to the detriment of its northern slope with its wealth of natural, cultural and built heritage.

Elected officials quickly identified this imbalance as a source of concern for this inhabited and authentic territory; that is why they expressed their will to guide visitor flows towards a larger area.

Upon renewal of the certification label in 2019, the addition of "Concors" to the Grand Site de France's name helped strengthen the position of this second mountain and activate a pluralist tourism offer.

at the starting points and on the most followed trails ightharpoonup CH.4/5/8, i.e.:

- Reception structures: the Bimont parking area kiosk, a strategic place adjoining the dam ▶P.69, the Grand Site Visitor Centre in Vauvenargues where Picasso's castle is located, etc.;
- The furniture and information signage on the territory's identity and trails, located at the start of the hiking routes and in the parking areas CH.10;
- Hiking trail marking, rehabilitation of the Imoucha hiking trail (with its 80,000 visitors, it is the most followed itinerary in the Grand Site), mountain biking and rock climbing management, etc. > CH.8.

Then, collectively work on the desired tourism offer

Adopting a Sustainable Tourism Charter in 2015 strengthened the partnerships between the Grand Site de France and local tourism professionals. Co-developed with the municipalities and the Tourism Departmental Committee around values and knowledge sharing, the charter set principles and gave directions for a long-term tourism offer of improved quality. Grounding their work in the intrinsic quality of the protected landscape and the inabitants' decive role regarding visitor reception, the signatories of the charter wished to promote a form of tourism that participated in energising the local economy all year long and focused on the villages and the views over Sainte-Victoire to "enjoy it from further away".

Suggest alternatives: "Sainte-Victoire: Better than having it is seeing it"

To relieve Sainte-Victoire from the pressure exerted by tourism while keeping the feeling of wonder it arouses and local economic rewards, the "In the spirit of Sainte-Victoire" tourist eco-itinerary was created in 2019 as part of EMbleMatiC, a European transnational cooperation programme.

At the European level, the project aimed to promote the most beautiful landscape views over 9 emblematic Mediterranean mountains (Canigó, Etna, Olympus, etc.), from neighbouring lookouts.



Wilder and more intimate, the Concors mountain is a window onto an unsuspected Provençal heritage. Pictured here is the Verdon canal.

HOW?

First, make the existing offer more qualitative

On Sainte-Victoire, 60% of visitors focus on a triangular zone that includes a dozen parking areas. Issues revolve around existing infrastructure and equipment quality, security and improvement

Located on the southern balconies overlooking Sainte-Victoire, visitors can discover on this route producers, craftspersons, farmers and restaurant owners who partnered with the project.

Support discovery of the Concors

Similarly, "The Concors loops" promote local produce, shop owners and craftspersons from the 8 municipalities in the north of the mountain through 22 rural paths leaving village centres. Municipalities participated in the design of these tours that foster inter-village relationships, particularly in the planning and marking of starting areas.

Other actions to develop historical trails through the rehabilitation of heritage structures near the villages helped spread out visitors. For instance, a project was carried out to transform the Verdon canal - an old irrigation route - and its surroundings into a hiking route. The Grand Site was entrusted with planning it, as part of its heritage preservation and visitor reception mandate. Thanks to a secure, comfortable and recreational route, visitors can discover this little-known hydraulic heritage.

NEXT STEPS

- The Grand Site de France has been involved in the design of a reception plan after its visitor study was last updated in 2022.
- The reinforced symbiosis between the Grand



Sainte-Victoire alone attracts over 1.3 million visitors each year. The "In the spirit of Sainte-Victoire" route offers views over its emblematic mineral face from 7 villages.

Site and its neighbouring natural mountains in terms of landscape, hiking and the hydraulic, geological and palaeontological heritage is part of the brainstorming to diversify the offer and include an even larger territory. Some thematic itineraries already cover national or transnational territories (EuroVelo route 8, Méditerranée à vélo, European Route d'Artagnan, etc.).

• Consideration is being given to address the wish of some private stakeholders involved in these

projects to display their partnerships and their alignment with the values the Grand Site de France defends.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- The local elected officials' unanimous wish to better distribute visitors between the north and the south of the territory **> CH.I**.
- Carefully considered and tailormade projects led together with munipalities.
- The design of tools aimed at the general public, particularly a tourist map, was essential to creating these new offers CH.9/10.

Items to be watchful of

- The lack of land control can be detrimental to heritage trail connection and cohesion goals, as these trails can be very parcelled out >CH.3.
- Administrative delays and political shift, pre-survey, work with the architects and inspectors, land negotiation and financerelated phases can impede the momentum of such long-term projects.
- The new offer may require enhancement equipment and work. Suggesting temporary starting areas can be a solution CH.4.



- www.grandsitesaintevictoire.com
- Map of local produce and expertise: www.fuveau-tourisme. com

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES MANAGEMENT

Reconciling Uses and Structuring Practices in Harmony with Biodiversity and Coexistence Principles

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Nature and Wilderness Stays in Natural Reserves and Other Protected Areas Charter - French Natural Reserves, 2023
- Minutes from Landscape Day: "De la pratique ordinaire à l'événement de grande ampleur: Du paysage quotidien au territoire d'exception. La place des activités, manifestations ou infrastructures sportives dans les paysages." ("From Ordinary Practice to Large-Scale Events. From an Everyday Landscape to an Exceptional Territory.The Role of Activities, Events or Sport Infrastructure in the Landscapes.") MTECT, 2017
- French Federation of Regional Natural Parks' Resource centre on sports and sport-based activities
- Nature Sport National Resource Hub's Documentation centre

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- OA plan, trail plan, etc:
 Framework documents which guide the development of OAs and establish principles for cohabitation and the respect of habitats and land owners.
- Sporting events charter: A territorial document that details the organisation limits of the event or practice. A committee can be created to follow up on the charter. These charters specify site concerns, protection areas and the distribution of events over the year. They define participants' and acceptability thresholds for the environment, biodiversity and residents, etc.
- Regulation on site use (see the Salagou - Mourèze Corrie, "monument sites" or Departmental domains).
- Passing-through agreement between the managing institution and private land owners.
- Training sessions on the legal framework of nature sports or the evolution of case law, available at the Nature Sport National Resource Hub
- Knowledge tools on outdoor practices (Outdoorvision, Biodiv'Sport, Suricate, etc.) ▶ CH.2

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

Although aficionados of outdoor activities (OAs) were once mostly supervised by specialised organisations such as sports clubs and federations, these activities are now practised in a much more independent, free way, which leads to managing institutions gradually losing control over and knowledge of uses. In the great outdoors, practices are changing with the use of digital tools and social networks (maps, itinerary or photo sharing collaborative platforms, GPS use, influencers, etc.), the development of "adventure"-oriented sport holiday offers and a greater access to sport amenities.

In addition to their constant growth, the popularity of OAs resurged at the end of the Covid-19 crisis,

which translated into a large number of people going to natural areas for well-being or health reasons or to try a new sport.

These activities are a source of substantial economic rewards, that much is true; and yet, they can damage natural habitats and local life. The stake for the Grands Sites lies in controlling the specific impact OAs and sporting events have.

This means making the various practices more compatible with the site so that every user can enjoy a quality experience, and anticipating some of the hazards OAs and large sporting events amplify - fires, erosion, flora and fauna disturbance, harmful practices, litter security, etc.

Recommendations

- Involve both public and private OA professionals (clubs, federations, event organisers, regional/ departmental representatives of various sport practices, etc.) in getting to know, protecting and managing the site and the impact their activity has on natural areas.
- Take on the role of coordinator and mediator. Site managers are often the preferred central and field intermediaries due to their comprehensive view of activities and events that happen in the territory. They liaise with government services and act as representatives with the municipalities. Being often Natura 2000 managers as well, they organise expert assessments and evaluate environmental impacts.
- Regularly update one's specific knowledge about OA local actors and regulations in force regarding certain practices. This can take the form of a map that records uses in sensitive areas (nesting, expert or seasonal practices, etc.).
- Co-develop a charter or agreement governing outdoor activities and events and involving all stakeholders (managers, organisers, sport associations, government services, elected officials, etc.). Setting a collective trajectory helps implement the necessary measures to anticipate impacts, facilitate stakeholders' training and spread out sporting events in time and space.

- Enforce the legislation applicable to certain practices (by-laws on bivouacking, motor sports, trail closing or pushing access points further away on ecological grounds, etc.). To achieve this, make sure to clearly communicate with sports enthusiasts and reinforce human presence on site >CH.3/9/10.
- Influence behaviours by communicating and raising awareness on an OA culture respectful of habitats and a nature tourism code. This means communicating in a way that reaches both beginners and experts CH.9/IO.
- Work on service amenities adapted to the territory's concerns (pay-per-night accommodation, maintenance and promotion of hiking itineraries, shuttle services, traffic modification, parking arrangements, etc.) **> CH.4/5/7**.

Supporting Wild Water Sports Professionals to Reconcile Site Preservation with Economic Activity

PROJET GRAND SITE DE FRANCE GORGES DU VERDON (VERDON GORGE)

The Verdon gorge is an exceptional natural site at the confluence of the Mediterranean Sea and the Alps. The Verdon River carved out a 33-kilometre-long, up-to-700-metre-deep bed plunging into the limestone mountain. As the biggest European canyon, the gorge presents spectacular and preserved landscapes, classified in 1990 to protect them. Characterised by rich natural habitats, they are an emblematic tourist destination for outdoor sports enthusiasts.



KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Verdon Regional Natural Park Managing Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: estimated at over 1 million

Number of inabitants: 3,500 Surface area: 24,800 hectares

Each travel season kicks off with canyoning in the Verdon gorge alongside wild water sport professionals, to introduce them to its rich environment, the areas to be avoided, the impact of trampling, etc.

WHY?

Straddling the Var and Alpes-de-Haute-Provence departments, the Verdon Regional Natural Park (PNR) is involved in the Grand Site de France approach for its symbolic and most visited focal point. The very high number of visitors flocking to the lakes and gorge during the peak travel season mostly impacts several geographically constrained sites where fragile species nest.

Starting in 2020, aqua trekking quickly became one of the preferred methods to discover the emblematic landscapes of the Verdon River at the core of the gorge. As a result, the need for increased outdoor activity management was felt, in order to control the excessive number of visitors and its effects in these areas already full to the brim. Organised by the canoeing-kayaking and rope activity professionals present in the territory, this

sport was at times practised by more than 800 people a day on 2.5 kilometres of river during the high season. Despite the river maximum capacity being set 490 people per day, the actual number in the Samson corridor could be much higher and, consequently, lead to practice conflicts and disturb habitats.

HOW?

Site geography and the way its accesses are laid out gradually led to an increase in unauthorised parking around the "Samson corridor", which is all at once the entrance to the canyon, the end of the departmental road, a u-turn place for vehicles, an intervention area for emercy services and the starting and arrival points for hikers and people practising wild water sports, etc.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- An authority dedicated to visited natural site planning and management This managing body is part of the Park Mixed Syndicate, benefits from an ancillary budget and is selfgoverned ►CH.I.
- The content of an AIPPB for the Verdon River and the scientific arguments on which it was based were defined through extensive consultation work, made possible by a collective agreement on the principle of adopting such regulation in 2011.
- The creation of outreach tools together with the professionals: a booklet dedicated to aqua trekking, an "aqua-guide" introducing fish species and meant to be brought along to the river; etc.

Items to be watchful of

- Raising awareness among stakeholders might not suffice to control the number of visitors.
- Adopting regulation setting maximum capacities is much more effective when these gauges are clarified before tourist activities develop > CH.3.
- Awareness raising among stakeholders must be constant, due to how dynamic and rapidlychanging some economic activities are.
- Rather than training all stakeholders who have participated in the rapid development of water activities in the territory, training local professionals rooted in the territory year-round only would have helped to better anticipate the evolution of aqua trekking and to form a network of ambassadors of this activity.
- Integrating the impact of climate change on the evolution of nature sport practices is a necessity.

The Grand Site played a part in the design of a comprehensive visitor reception approach which included the enhancement of reception areas - lookouts, river access, parking area push back, signage, hiking trail network improvement, Visitor Centre creation, composting toilet installation, etc. - in that spot of the gorge. All the adjustments were aligned with an integrated management, consistent with the characteristics of the Verdon gorge and complemented by dedicated staff in the reception area, a facilitation and interpretation programme and the take-over of the shuttle service stopping at the Blanc-Martel hiking trail, the most representative trail of the gorge > CH.1/4/5/6/10.

It became clear early on that raising tourism stakeholders' awareness regarding the issues of the site was necessary. The Grand Site has been offering training since 2002, in partnership with the Fishing Federation, the Regional Water House, national electricity company EDF (which manages the dam and water releases) and the Bird Protection League, to support OA - and especially water activity - professionals. Comprising a theory session indoors and a practice one in the river, this training has helped raise professionals' awareness on the preservation of the environment in which they work, craft messages for their clients, and determine the river path to follow from entry to exit so as to not disturb biodiversity and to adapt practices to the site's fragile features.

After several years of working with OA professionals, they have been better incorporating biodiversity concerns into their practice. A framework agreement signed in 2010 made all Grand Site partners' commitment to better managing visitors in the Samson sector official. Large-scale consultations tool place in 2011 and 2012, resulting in an interprefectural biotope protection decree (AIPPB) regarding the Rhône streber that set guidelines for the various wild water activities and demarcated practice sectors on 18 kilometres of river.

At the same time, regulation specific to the territory was drafted with the professionals' support. It set the maximum number of people per day in the river at 490, and practice times and periods for a sector upstream of that covered by the AIPPB **PCH.173**.

Thanks to these instruments, the Samson sector-popular among aqua trekkers - was given special treatment: a dedicated path depending on the water level, river signage, adaptation of outreach tools, etc.

The Samson corridor infrastructure enhancement project included the issues covered in the and AIPPB contributed to soothing the site thanks to the installation of an access barrier, and the implementation of membership-based parking for professionals to receive clients in a less impactful area, shuttles to cadence access to the river in accordance with the regulation, and a drop-off point near the shuttles that helps eradicate unauthorised parking **>CH.5**.

NEXT STEPS

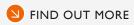
These transformations in the way the main access to the gorge is organised were heavily rejected by the river professionals, making discussions and mediation attempts difficult for both the Park and the Department. Together with the State representative, they put this situation at the core of their work to enforce the AIPPB which was co-developed in the territory, despite its rejection. The eco-guard scheme has also been largely reinforced, and external mediators are working to re-establish talks.

The Verdon gorge, which was rewarded by Avenir Montagnes in the Engineering category, is also directly concerned by climate change. The site has been suffering from extreme heat waves over the past few years, leading to droughts and impacting water levels and the watershed.

In view of these issues, the managing institution is forced to rethink visitor reception and management. A lot of work is thus done around a wandering travel offer (creation of a long-distance hike itinerary, the Grande Randonnée de Pays des Gorges du Verdon ▶CH.7) and a comprehensive interpretation project encompassing the entire Park. Launched in 2023, the Visitor Centre includes an interpretation space as well as an exhibition area, facilitated by dedicated staff trained by the intercommunal tourist office. Other heritage discovery activities offered by the territorial tourism stakeholders are communicated through an event programme. After the adjustments made to the Point Sublime lookout and arrival point of the Blanc-Martel trail, such steps have been realising the Grand Site's interpretation plan defined in 2018, which plans

for the promotion of other sectors of the gorge,

particularly the ridge road. ▶CH.10.



www.parcduverdon.fr

¹ Endemic species of fish on the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

A Charter to Steer Sporting Events

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE CONCORS-SAINTE-VICTOIRE

Near to Aix-en-Provence and Marseilles, the tall shape of emblematic Sainte-Victoire overlooks the wide forest of the Concors mountain with its hidden vales and picturesque villages. Here, various activities have been coexisting for a long time, including sport and leisure ones: the first trail was marked by the French Mountaineering Club as early as I 898.

WHY?

Coveted for its 180 kilometres of marked hiking, trail run or mountain bike routes, its climbing routes and paragliding spots, Sainte-Victoire mountain hosts close to 1.3 millions annual visitors. Located in city outskirts, it is a much favoured place for sports gatherings and sporting events.

Naturally sollicited by the government as a Natura 2000 site manager, the Grand Site de France managing body was tasked with answering the many event organising requests submitted to the prefecture.

Visitors were central to the managing body's concerns. Massed in a few sectors, they sometimes put a lot of pressure on natural habitats - pressure that must be contained.

The creation of an outdoor sporting event guidance document was a first endeavour to tackle the issues linked to the impact these events have on site life, with a view to reconcile practices with preservation.

The goal was to establish a standard list of criteria that guaranteed territorial identity values were respected, habitat alteration and species disturbance were prevented, all users of the natural area could cohabit and residents' peace was preserved.

HOW?

Ratified in 2009, the outdoor and sporting event charter set guidelines to reconcile the territory's event and sports life with eco-friendly practices.

Although event organisers were consulted, the first version of the charter quickly came up against what was happening in the field, revealing discrepancies. Such implementation difficulties led sports associations to come together to adapt the various principles of the document. After several years of experimentation, the charter was enriched with this collaborative work, which further resulted in an organiser guide.

This guide features pragmatic recommendation

components, such as:

- A calendar that indicates sensitive times for naturalist concerns, fire hazards, visitor-related and hunting issues, etc.;
- A map of sensitive areas;
- Advice to enshrine events in sustainable development (cleanliness, sound system, carpooling, economic rewards, etc.);
- Recommendations on the maximum number of participants to reduce their impact on habitats and contain vehicle flows and parking, etc.

The charter was also intended to make event organising procedures easier by supporting organisers as early as possible. The managing body, the Natura 2000 facilitator and the nature guards were involved in the organisers' contacts with the municipalities and the delimitation of itineraries and preferred food provision and spectator- reserved

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACT

Managed by: Aix-Marseille-Provence Metropolis

Annual visitors:

1.5 million, including
1.3 million on Sainte-Victoire
and 250,000 on the Concors

Number of inhabitants:

194,210 (1.8 million in the Metropolis and living area)

Grand Site de France surface area: 48.904 hectares



areas, including onsite and during the event.

Capped at 35 per year with a maximum of 350 participants for each, the events are planned with the Grand Site de France fragile balance in mind. The event calendar takes into account peak visiting periods, and several weekends are accordingly reserved for residents, who make the biggest contingent of the site's visitors.

The charter guarantees equitable space sharing by ensuring that itineraries follow marked trails for at least 80% of their length.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- Sound knowledge of both regular and exceptional events and their organisers.
- Important work done on the desired form of tourism for the territory, on which the principles of the charter are based ▶P.52.
- Natural area managers and nature sport professionals' collaboration with muncipalities' dedicated points of contact.
- A flexible approach to problemsolving. The Grand Site acts as facilitator, particularly with organisers, with whom municipalities or the subprefecture are not used to working.
- Recommendations in the charter aimed at making organisers participate in the preservation of the Grand Site de France image of excellence and primitive nature.
- Recommendations that encourage organisers to consume locally in the villages the event passes through or starts from.

Items to be watchful

- The site ability to host events during peak visiting periods.
- The emergence of impossible-toclassify new practices.
- The upsurge of itineraries published on collaborative platforms and social networks.
- The innovation displayed to attract new, unexperienced participants to certain events



"This area is as much a biological reserve as a land of economic activity, residence and varied social practices. Events perfectly belong there, insomuch as they are respectful of site life and do not sustainably disturb its rhythm and character." Preamble to the charter

The organiser and nature guards evaluate each event once it is complete, which helps obtain feedback from the field and anticipate corrective actions to be implemented in view of future editions.

Now ratified by 14 municipalities, 2 intercommunalities, the Bouches-du-Rhône department and 21 nonprofit and public sporting event organising structures, the charter lives on and keeps issuing recommendations to better inform visitors in natural areas and control their numbers. More than a habitat preservation and visitor management tool, the charter acts as a link to events in the territory.

Finally, as part of a continuous improvement process and since the charter cannot replace the various regulations applicable, a guide intended for the municipalities and organisers would better inform them of the regulatory prerequisites and unavoidable administrative steps.

Over 10 years after it was first ratified, implementation of the charter was extensively assessed. The fact that it works very well was underlined, as it led to the establishment between stakeholders of a relationship actually based on trust, and to requests being smoothly processed.

A review of the charter is under way following the recent 15,000-hectares-or-so enlargement of the Grand Site de France. It should imply:

- Updating knowledge to fit the new scale and balancing the new municipalities' community life with the principles of the charter;
- Reinstating an annual follow-up committee;
- · Analysing events tied to emerging practices.

Furthermore, the charter is being integrated into the metropolitan eco-events charter.

FIND OUT MORE

- www.grandsitesaintevictoire.com
- 2009 Events Charter
- 2012 Events Charter Organiser Guide
- Grand Site Sainte-Victoire Sporting Events Charter - 2010-2014 Assessment

Sharing Areas and Making Beach Practices Coexist

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE DUNES SAUVAGES DE GÂVRES À QUIBERON (PRIMITIVE SAND DUNES FROM GÂVRES TO QUIBERON)

In South Brittany, nature, the wind and the ocean shaped a huge sand belt between the Gâvres and the Quiberon peninsulas. Oceanic, primitive sand dunes tangle and untangle over 35 kilometres of gentle and undulating relief unbroken by urbanisation. When the ocean swells and the wind rises, water sports enthusiasts take to the water. The colourful wings of the kitesurfing boards catch the wind while surfers eagerly wait for the best wave.

WHY?

In this vast dune area, each season brings the spectacle of authentic nature under a changing light, attracting multiple users and as many ways to contemplate or experience the landscape. Perception studies conducted in 2016 showed that the key forces of attraction and grounds for satisfaction were "the sense of freedom in a wide natural area" and the primitive nature of the landscape. In the summer, the 25 kilometres of beaches fill with visitors eager to feel the breeze; at the same time, the site geomorphology and its orientation make it an exceptional spot for water sports, which gained popularity in the 2000s. Serious degrees of spatial saturation were observed, degrading the experience of visitors whose thirst for preserved, wide open natural areas is unquenched.

The Mixed Syndicate which manages the Grand Site de France is also the local body in charge of the Natura 2000 programme for a large variety of fragile natural habitats in need of strengthened protection. This heavy focus on biodiversity tells us that water sports enthusiasts sometimes pass through these habitats en route to the places where they practise their activities, ignoring the defensive mechanisms put in place to protect them.

To make all users cohabit peacefully onsite, an innovative zoning system had to be put in place.

HOW?

Regardless of the weather conditions or practice level, the Grand Site is an ideal ground for both experts and people discovering one of the many outdoor activities (OA): surfing, kitesurfing, windsurfing, land sailing, paddleboarding, sea kayaking, sea wading, sailing, etc.

To contribute to a safe, eco-friendly practice reasonable in terms of spatial use, the Grand Site chose to facilitate a territorial agreement on the coexistence of the different uses as opposed to influencing the regulatory lever only.

The work carried out dealt with dividing the beaches into sectors based on all activities and uses recorded with the support of local water sports professionals, the National Sailing and Water Sports School, the public land owners of some areas (the ONF, the Department) and the elected officials of the municipalities involved. **PCH.1/3**.

This zoning took into account habitat and landscape sensitivity, regulatory constraints, users' needs, access practicalities, ideal times to practise water sports, etc.

Concretely, it translated into a precise map, masts put up on beaches, and boards installed at access points to help visitors easily find their way to the zones dedicated to certain practices and promote the safe-regulation of their numbers in the busiest areas of the sand dune belt. The emergency services could also find their bearings and intervene more easily as each sector was numbered.

Armed with this successful experience, the Grand Site de France formalised its sustainable partnerhip with the National Sailing and Water Sports School, which is responsible for training water sports instructors and supervisors. This agreement was one of the factors that sustainably transformed the territorial professionals' business, as they became true guardians of the site preservation in addition to being its actors.

Facilitation and communication actions were also conducted as part of that agreement, including a contribution to the "Cmonspot" ("Thatsmyspot") website, which was created to inform sports enthusiasts of the regulation in force and to raise their awareness on best practices. FCH.9.

The message conveyed by this strong partnership during sporting and other events in the Grand Site has been one of support to a well-thought-out development involving stakeholders and respectful of the landscape that hosts these activities which are part of the territory's identity.

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Primitive Sand Dunes from Gâvres to Quiberon Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 1.5 million

Number of inhabitants: 21,306

Grand Site de France surface area: 11,526 hectares

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- A territorial agreement that influenced the various branches of water sports to create a network of ambassadors able to directly reach out to enthusiasts.
- An effort focused more on a cognitive journey of individual accountability than coercive means such as fining or spacial quotas.
- Local partners' support, fostering self-regulation and making it easier to accept and implement the new way the areas operate.

Items to be watchful of

- Users' attachment to their free access to the natural areas and sites must be taken into account in visitor management measures.
- Natural area managers can be perceived as imposing regulatory constraints. Striking local partnerships with grassroots organisations taking on a role as legitimate intermediaries is crucial.

The agreement founded on the sharing of the area along the sand dune belt translates into a map that details zones corresponding to each water activity.

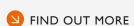
NEXT STEPS

The sector division scheme could be extended to other municipalities of the Grand Site; although these municipalities have been less visited up until now, water practices have been multiplying and applying this measure could curb future difficulties. Such an extension could require dedicated management. FCH.I. Concurrently, as part of its facilitation missions and its partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Mixed Syndicate has been continuing to educate the multiple users of the sand dune belt and to train professionals in the territory. For instance, it brings its experience to local surfing schools, communicating there on the environment and heritage so that surfers will

be experts on the environment in which they practise their activity. These exchanges are a valuable mine of users' feedback and perceptions, which are useful to the Mixed Syndicate's management of the Grand Site.

The entire project has been contributing to enhancing the development of new outdoor offers, to ensuring continuity of the economic activity and to preserving the site's riches for the next generations of users.





- www.gavres-quiberon.fr
- www.c-monspot.fr

COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS RAISING

Speaking to Visitors Before their Trip to Guide Tourist Practices

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

Communication, information and outreach are important action means to contribute to developing a chosen form of tourism and a more acceptable one for inhabitants. These measures complement efforts made to distribute visitors in time and space. As a result, the Grands Sites are carrying out actions and building partnerships with tourism institutional stakeholders whose expertise and scope of influence are far superior, so that the images conveyed match the reality of the sites and their hosting capacities.

However, over the last few years, their being made desirable by photographers and videographers - whether professionals or amateurs - and a much more abundant, uncontrolled and vague communication have had new and negative impacts on these heritage areas: sudden visitor

peaks, unexpected spotlighting, emergence of hardly appropriate practices, accidents, incivilities, practice conflicts, etc.

The key is to better control tourism communication by:

- Developing a communication strategy that incorporates site preservation issues, particularly flow management;
- Establishing a partnership with local stakeholders to share this strategy with them, so that they can make it their own and consistently advocate for it at all levels:
- Adapting to new communication modes, especially those that use digital tools, i.e. monitoring social networks and preparing intervention strategies in advance to address the dissemination of inappropriate messages.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- "Comment s'adresser aux visiteurs pour favoriser les pratiques de tourisme durable?" ("Speaking to Visitors to Promote Sustainable Tourism Practices") article - Revue Espaces No.368, 2022
- "Explorer et respecter des paysages d'exception" ("Exploring and respecting exceptional landscapes") video made with the Explore le Monde influencers -2021
- Vade mecum on communication in the Grands Sites de France
- "La communication engageante: présentation et retours d'expériences des espaces naturels" ("Engaging Communication: Presenting and Giving Feedback on Natural Areas" webinar - OFB, 2022

Recommendations

Devise a collective strategy

- Establish a diagnosis of high visitor numbers' harmful impacts and share it with communication stakeholders.
- Collectively clarify communication goals that assist in managing flows: slow tourism, sustainable mobility, off-season tourism, alternative places or itineraries, approriate behaviours, etc.
- Share those with all economic and institutional stakeholders in the territory, particularly through training sessions, networking, strategy papers and co-developed speaking points.
- Incorporate them into the briefs intended for communication service providers, such as influencers, photographers, content creators, etc.
- Make what is shown consistent with what is written.
- Avoid using the site as loss leader: it might intensify peak visiting period phenomena.
- Know not to communicate or to communicate off-season only.
- Anticipate and guide the impact of film and TV series shoots on visitor numbers.

Messages to make tourism acceptable

• Highlight the territory in a realistic way: give it a sympathetic image but do not stage it, and

- make sure the residents can identify with what you portray.
- Promote wishes for a gentle immersion.
- Forge relationships based on respect for inhabitants and local values through a more humane, embodied communication.
- Refer to history raconteurs, economic stakeholders, nature guides, etc.
- Give visiting advice ahead of visitors' arrival: offpeak times, seasonality, best practices, maximum capacities, safety rules within natural areas, etc.
- Make visit preparation easier by granting simplified access to all practical information: access roads, orientation map, free and pay-for services, etc.

Should you wish to control visitor numbers:

- Support the regulation with educational, clear and regular communication before the travel season, adapted to different audiences (local people, year-round users, occasional visitors, etc.) and offering attractive alternatives that match visitors' expectations **CH.3/10**.
- Check the hosting capacity of the alternative sites in terms of environmental fragility and local acceptability before communicating on said sites **> CH.177**.

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Responsible traveller charters:
 Many examples of such charters
 exist in France (Britanny, Annecy,
 etc.) and abroad (Iceland,
 New Zealand, Norway, etc.) to
 encourage visitors to comply with
 destination-specific rules.
- Trainings and briefs: "The Grand Site de France way of communicating: values, messages and a common culture" is a training the RGSF offers its members as part of a range of communication tools such as photo and video briefs. The RGSF is currently working on an influencer brief.

Leveraging Communication Tools to Manage Visitor Numbers

■ Proactive websites and smart tools

Setting themselves apart from other "showcasing" tools, they are aware of heritage specificities and the interdictions pertaining to them, and feature a map to explore the site in its entirety, practical accessibility information, sound advice and recommendations to anticipate any disappointment should the number of visitors be high. These tools sometimes exist in the form of a mobile application to guarantee consistent information onsite and reach a regular, local public (Espace Nature Puy Mary, for example). Some popular smart tools such as

Waze or Affluences guide driving visitors in real time, depending on site policy regarding visitor numbers. **>CH.2**.

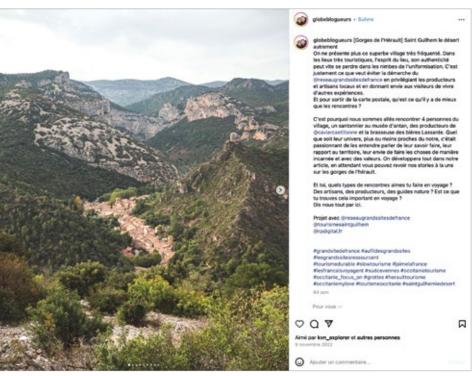
IND OUT MORE

- Pilat Sand Dune: Before you come, check the parking area occupancy in real timel
- Concors-Sainte-Victoire: Overtourism: Nature is not to be consumed but preserved

Social networks and partnerships with influencers

To convey awareness-raising messages to an audience mostly immune to traditional communication channels, the RGSF and the RP Digital agency partnered with several content creators and rolled out various communication campaigns t.

In addition to giving us access to their digital communities, these social network professionals also bring their expertise through much more personal messages. With their posts, they aim at tackling visitor-related issues, inviting their followers to (re)discover these emblematic landscapes differently, i.e. off-season and in a decarbonised, slow, immersive way conducive to meeting the local populations or to exploring less famous places.



Excerpt from the Globe Blogueurs' report in the Grand Site de France Gorges de l'Hérault, which promotes meeting local people and an off-season visit of the site.

Press releases and collective campaigns

To raise awaraness among as large an audience as possible on the state of mind in which to approach visited natural areas, messages on key preservation issues have been relayed via press releases and social networks. These messages help visitors better consider management rules in force depending on the season. In 2021, before the very high travel season began, the protected area networks published a common press release to convey their concerns and recommendations to users who were expected to come en masse with the end of the Covid-19 crisis. Since then, many Grands Sites have been carrying on with this initiative, with the frequent support of their elected officials before the high season.

Choosing Not to Communicate

De-marketing: a collectively made decision in Blanc-Nez, Gris-Nez Two Capes

On both sides of the Wissant dyke, between the Gris-Nez and Blanc-Nez capes, the upstream and downstream sand dunes are popular spots for seaside leisure activities on the Opal Coast. To protect the sand dunes weakened by erosion and an uncontrolled number of visitors, an awareness-raising operation was conducted onsite associated to "de-communication" actions.

Since the 2021 travel season, the Grand Site de France together with

the Hauts-de-France Regional Tourism Committee and Pas-de-Calais Tourism have stopped organising poster campaigns, and have been drastically reducing their promotion communication and actions to focus on guiding visitors in their exploratory journeys.

Shooting requests (films, TV reports, etc.) using the recognizable, emblematic landscape as a set are also being heavily monitored to limit the power of attraction of the site.

Suggesting different interests on the Alabaster Coast

As part of a collaborative work, the Grand Site de France Falaises d'Étretat-Côte d'Albâtre Project has been rolling out a communication strategy that exploits the image of the famous, symbolic Étretat landscape less at certain times of the year, highlighting the Alabaster Coast part of the Grand Site instead.

Concurrently, it has been developing numerous tools to raise awareness on the fragility of the landscape and communicate on territorial structure

to better distribute visitors: press releases about alternative mobilities and encouraging people to plan their trip depending on times of the year, decarbonised means of transportation (cycling, walking, using public transport, etc.) maps, a booklet about best practices, etc. The hosts of the travelling Visitor Centre remind visitors of the information and organisation tools at their disposal as well as the hazards a very high number of visitors entails. **>CH.10**



Prevention and access information messages on of the maps included in the "Guide pratique pour profiter des activités de plein air - saison 2023" ("Enjoying Outdoor Activities: A Practical Guide - 2023 Season") designed as part of the Grand Site Falaises d'Étretat - Côte d'Albâtre summer—season-preparation partnership working group > P.14.

VISITOR RECEPTION AND MEDIATION TOOLS

Informing and Meeting Visitors Onsite to Spark Appropriate Behaviours

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Minutes of the 16th RGSFTalks "Du sens au sens : vivre et faire vivre l'expérience Grand Site de France" - Recommendations on interpretation - 2014
- Grands Sites Thread "Comment mobiliser et sensibiliser les habitants à la démarche Grand Site de France" - 2018
- "Portraits de paysage" film collection- RGSF, 2018
- Portrait of one of the Environmental Initiative Permanent Centre (CPIE)
- "Valeurs universelles, valeurs locales: pour qui, pour quoi un site est-il grand?" ("Universal Values, Local Values: Who and What Makes a Site Great?") 2009 minutes, RGSF and ICOMOS

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Interpretation plan: A strategic tool to discover the site, it defines the narration and the educational tools (interpretation places and paths, happenings, events, communication documents, etc.). As the landscape values are the common thread, they must be collectively precised beforehand through the territorial project ►CH.I/2. The interpretation plan is based on an inventory of the heritage and on scientific and popular knowledge of the site.
- An event programme which relies on expertise, local resources and the heritage. It is a reminder that people live in the Grands Sites, they do not just visit them. The programme establishes bonds and maintains both the social cohesion and the intergenerational transmission.

Background and Stakes for the Grands Sites de France

With more than 38 million annual visitors for 1.2 million inhabitants, the Grands Sites de France are destined to receive people. Attractive, a source of emotion and attachment, they want to be territories that revitalise people, pass something on to them and teach them to discover nature.

Yet, during the seasonal peak visiting periods not to mention if such phenomena are lasting and uncontrolled, the quality of a place vanishes behind the ensuing congestion that deteriorates visitors' experience.

To break away from a standardised visiting model, managing bodies have been relying on the unique heritage values of the sites to create the right conditions for a non-normalised encounter between visitors and the protected landscape. Hence the

absolute necessity to elaborate a thoughtful narrative inviting visitors to contemplate, feel, and understand what makes the site a place worthy of being preserved.

Inhabitants and territorial relays (mediators, guides, volunteers, hosts, craftspersons, etc.) have a key role to play in this storytelling and in creating a chain of values. They help people read the landscape, its components, and the professions that shape, maintain and protect it. By going to meet visitors in the field, guiding them, giving them entry keys and advice, they transform the visitors' relationship to the territory, reinforce the feeling of a living, managed site as opposed to a place to be consumed, and promote an acceptable form of tourism.

Recommendations

- Design an interpretation project for the whole territory that provides a comprehensive mediation framework, specifies what is intended for each place in terms of reception and desirable experience, and classes tools depending on the expected flows.
- Visitor Centres are an important tool in terms of flow management, service provision, intermodality and naturally interpretation but they are not always necessary, nor do they always match visitors' expectations, and territorial capacities to operate them may be insufficient ▶P.31. Onsite mediation, interpretation trails, etc., can complement them or be an alternative way to meet visitors who do not stop by a closed reception place.
- Imagine site interpretation for tourists, local visitors and inhabitants alike by offering several interpretation levels (educational offer for young visitors or targeting inquisitive or passionate minds, off-season or off-peak-time suggestions, small group visits upon reservation, events, electronic tools, etc.).

- Carefully craft the non-commercial tourism offer as it naturally encourages visitors to control their own behaviours and practices onsite.
- Train relays and reinforce physical presence in the field to raise visitors' awareness regarding good behaviours and the risk of being fined if they do not comply with the regulations (see Solutré-Pouilly-Vergisson, the Gard Camargue, etc.).

Interpretation at the Service of a Comprehensive Reception Strategy

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE CAP D'ERQUY - CAP FRÉHEL (CAPE ERQUY - CAPE FRÉHEL)

In North Brittany, between Saint-Brieuc and Saint-Malo Bays, the coast moves forward into the sea, at times rocky, at times sandy or interspersed with moors. With its changing colours and the dynamics at play between nature and traditional human activities such as shellfish farming, fishing, farming and sandstone quarry mining, the site paints each season a new picture for its inhabitants and visitors.

WHY?

The symbolic faces of the territory and its image, the two capes are the first landmarks one notices from the sea. As soon as the Opération Grand Site started, several visitor studies conducted by the Grand Site and the Brittany region led to the observation that visitors tended to go to the coastal sites of the two capes, impacting - sometimes rather strikingly - the environment and the landscape. The results also underlined the low promotion of the Grand Site's natural and cultural heritage, peak visiting periods during the high season and hardly any distribution of visitors in the territory PCH.2. All of these encouraged the managing body to think about a comprehensive interpretation

strategy that would serve a quality reception, a more peaceful visit and the spatial spreading of flows in space, particularly by shifting visitors' interests elsewhere.

HOW?

To tackle visitor-related issues in the territory, the Grand Site incorporated the following goals into its management project:

- Raise awareness among visitors on the cultural, natural and scientific value of the Grand Site and the territorial human activities;
- Reinforce the dissemenation of visiting recommendations to invite less impactful behaviours (observing the markings to protect

KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grand Site Cap d'Erquy - Cap Fréhel Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 1.6 million

Number of inhabitants: 7,689 Grand Site de France surface area: 5.170 hectares



The tools developed as part of the interpretation plan provide visitors with an intimate exploration of the Grand Site de France and its heritage sites, off the beaten tracks. Here, a recreational activity knapsack and an interpretation booklet are used to guide visitors on the Mathurin discovery tour.

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- · Visitor measure and qualifying tools which contribute to identifying the needs in terms of interpretation ▶CH.2.
- An interpretation plan which includes an exhaustive heritage inventory and a territorially consistent strategy aimed at rolling out the various tools in the long
- Inhabitants were consulted to design interpretation tools, which promotes the authenticity of the narrative, intergenerational transmission, a sense of belonging and local populations' acceptance of tourism.
- Complementary tools in which visiting rules and recommendations are recorded.

Items to be watchful of

- The relation between the various interpretation tools and other tools that contribute to conveying the spirit of the place.
- The facilitation work with the community of inhabitants demands consistency to keep them engaged.

- the moor, and ban the construction of cairns or the removal of pebbles which accelerate soil erosion, etc.);
- Invite visitors to travel throughout the Grand Site to better distribute their numbers in space but also in time;
- Improve reception mechanisms on heavily visited sites, particurly Cape Fréhel;
- Support the economy, energise the market towns and promote local products.

The Grand Site initiated in 2018 an interpretation plan to implement these measures. Based on an exhaustive and shared inventory of all heritage present in the Grand Site, the plan was designed with the purpose of making a strategic and comprehensive vision for the territory in terms of cultural mediation and translate it into concrete actions onsite.

The goal was to unveil the unique characteristics of the heritage and make visitors realise how valuable these places are. By improving visitors' understanding of the Grand Site, this approach helped raise their awareness on the need to treat it with care, reinforced the attraction exerted by some places and relieved others. Therefore, efforts were put into a more consistent exploratory offer of the territory that contributed to better distributing flows, improving the quality of the visit and strengthening site protection. ▶CH.7.

The inventory of the tangible and intangible heritage was carried out through participatory workshops involving local heritage and institutional stakeholders, associations and experts. It resulted in a reference document in which heritage sites were mapped and classified by theme - geology, landscape entities, built heritage, socio-economic activities, sea and land movements ▶CH.1/2. The interpretation plan further included a strategy to roll out dedicated tools in the field. Firstly, it led to the creation of 4 interpretation trails, i.e. one for each Grand Site municipality, by 2025. Each trail is a recreational route intended for passing visitors or people used to coming to the sector and an invitation to take one's time while exploring to keep all of one's senses alert to feel the richness of the landscapes and the natural habitats thanks to the activities suggested and to let one's imagination roam in order to dive into the history of the various places and their inhabitants. These paths were systematically designed with volunteer residents who participated in the different stages of the

project (choosing the themes to be broached, the itinerary to follow, supporting materials, etc.).

Other visit structuring interpretation tools are being considered in the territory: two Visitor Centres, one at Cape Fréhel Lighthouse and the second in the centre of Erquy Harbour. As reception, convergence, socialisation, exchange and event venues open to all, they will encourage visitors to keep exploring the local heritage (marine and land biodiversity, landscapes, human activities, maritime signage, fishery, etc.).

More confidential places such as the Islet marsh are nonetheless remarkable regional - not to say national - sites due to the quality of their landscape and their biological richness; that is why interpretation projects are also under consideration for them.

Informative or educational tools also strengthened the quality of visitor reception and were part of the efforts to manage the flows. They included:

- An event programme for the general public on nature, the heritage and the local economy (farm and fish auction house visits, etc.);
- A leaflet introducing the various Grand Site attractions;
- A brochure dedicated to Cape Fréhel giving not only practical visiting advice but also the riches of the site and indications for a more respectful visit;
- A vade mecum and educational tours intended for tourism stakeholders (tourist offices, hosts. bike rental companies, etc.) and Grand Site parners in contact with the public, to relay the key messages ►CH.1/9.

NEXT STEPS

The interpretation plan is one of the essential tools of the Grand Site's action plan. Over time, it will contribute to establishing a complete and consistent web of measures, with each thread corresponding to one aspect of the "heritage personality" of the Grand Site de France. The issue is also to create or reinforce the links between the exploratory offers of each site.

This long-term work requires fine coordination with the other territorial actors working on interpretation. Consequently, the thought-process will in all likelihood continue, collectively and for a long time.

IND OUT MORE

- www.grandsite-capserquyfrehel.
- "La démarche paysagère dans les Grands Sites de France" practical guide, Practical sheet page 27 -RGSF - 2022

A Personalised Welcome Onsite Thanks to Eco-Volunteers

GRAND SITE DE FRANCE CIRQUE DE NAVACELLES (NAVACELLES CORRIE)

The Navacelles corrie is the fruit of the labours of the Vis River that shaped a crescent of fertile meadows in the middle of which the Virgin's Rock sticks out. In the Middle Ages, humans started cultivating these lands, creating terraces and exploiting the gushing water resource of the Foux mills.



KEY IDENTIFICATION FACTS

Managed by: Grand Site de Navacelles Mixed Syndicate

Annual visitors: 250.000

Number of inhabitants: 1,700 Grand Site de France surface area: 46,163 hectares

Before they can welcome visitors, the eco-volunteers are guided through their discovery of the Navacelles corrie and introduced to all its complexities. This in-depth knowledge of the territory and the personal link they forged with it in the course of a few weeks enable them to convey a meaningful message.

WHY?

A series of degradations and incivilities were observed at the heart of the Grand Site de France during the high travel season: waste dumping, fire, unauthorised camping and parking, etc. To remedy this and fill the noticeable gap in visitor reception in Navacelles hamlet located in the centre of the meander, the Mixed Syndicate started an ecovolunteer reception scheme in 2012.

HOW?

Every year for two months in the summer, the Grand Site hosts two teams of young volunteers who are mainly tasked with welcoming visitors and making them aware of the site's fragility and richness.

They intervene in Navacelles hamlet and on the trails, communicating about the geological heritage, biodiversity and human activities, and inform visitors of the Grand Site's de France environmental issues and management.

Furthermore, eco-volunteers make recommendations, convey best practices to be adopted onsite and alert visitors to dangers.

Doing for the most part environmental, ecology-, heritage- or event-related studies, these ecovolunteers come from all over France to spend their time and energy on a protected territory in order to perform missions that bring meaning to their paths and sensibilities.

The Grand Site de Navacelles Mixed Syndicate takes care of them from beginning to end so that they can be completely immersed in their assignments and have the keys to perform them thoroughly. As soon as they arrive, they benefit from various training sessions thanks to the Grand Site partners, particularly, who are fully involved in this scheme, i.e.:

 The French Office for Biodiversity and the departmental nature guards, who raise their awareness on fire hazards and train them to call out to hikers on this topic;

LESSONS LEARNT

Keys to success

- The common will of local elected officials to welcome in a generous and convivial spirit these volunteers who invest a lot in preserving the territory.
 Such immersion leads to highly mobilised relays.
- Partners' involvement in the training of volunteers is crucial to pass on all interpretation and awareness-raising keys and promote a more peaceful form of tourism.
- A low-cost investment (approx. €7,000/year) leading to a reinforced management team at the height of the travel season.

Items to be watchful of

- The welcome these volunteers receive should be of high quality to guarantee their commitment and make sure the notion of a hospitable territory naturally transpires in the messages they will convey.
- The wish to give eco-volunteers a personalised welcome represents a year-round heavy workload to recruit them, prepare their stay, support and manage them.

- A Regional Directorate for Cultural Affairs (DRAC) archaeologist who tells them about the thousand-year-old geological history of the causses and the Vis gorge;
- The Natura 2000 faciliator who introduces them to the local flora and fauna and the difficulties surrounding their protection;
- The CPIE who trains them to facilitate a guided tour of the hamlet and to make it their own so that they can personalise the content depending on the visitors and their own individual sensibilities.

Every summer, the whole territory contrives to give the young eco-volunteers a warm welcome. They are housed at the heart of the Grand Site, in the tiny village of Vissec which numbers 56 inhabitants all year and has gotten used to the summer eco-volunteers revitalising it.

The Mixed Syndicate puts a car at their disposal and the Blandas inn - located near one of the lookouts - prepares their daily meals.

Upon the arrival and departure of each group, elected officials of the territory and the Grand Site management team are all invited to a dinner to get to know them, exchange views on the territory and welcome them.

Stationed at the entrance of the hamlet, the eco-volunteers hold a stall and provide tourist information, the territorial event programme, maps of the Grand Site and hiking itineraries, etc. They are also equipped with educational material to whet the visitors' curiosity and support the awareness-raising messages (a naturalist box revealing the biodiversity one can see onsite, photographs, etc.). Ideally positioned to ensure the free summer shuttles operate properly, this eco-volunteers' reception stall is also the starting point for the guided tours of the hamlet they offer.

Additionally, they make daily rounds on the hiking trails during which they pick up litter, take note of spots where fires were made and make them disappear, and go meet walkers to make them aware of the fragility of the site and the behaviour conducive to preserving it. Easy to identify, they are a point of reference for visitors who do not hesitate to turn to them, particularly in case of an accident.

The eco-volunteer scheme has been assisting the Mixed Syndicate in better managing visitors for 11 years. It complements the reception arrangements

at the two lookouts on both sides of the corrie P.32, helps with transfers and the overall discovery of the Grand Site de France, and contributes to monitoring the visited core of the site.

Although its target is first and foremost visitors, this scheme was also intended for data collection in order to feed the visitor observatory **PCH.2**. Indeed, the volunteers participate in visitor monitoring as they count daily visitors in some key sites, which helps assess whether equipments are at full capacity. They assist in understanding visitors' behaviours at the height of the season, and their observations fuel the reflection around items to be improved for the following year.

"The eco-volunteer initiative is really good. It helps show visitors people who are truly involved, who are not just here to "police" them or as tourists.

There truly is a versatile aspect to it. You meet a ton of people and leave with new ideas and a different perspective on the whole underground side of how the Grand Site is organised."

Annabelle, eco-volunteer in 2022.

NEXT STEPS

Visitors and Grand Site partners alike have unanimously enthused over the presence of young field mediators. As this in situ presence is considered essential and most valuable to manage visitors during the summer peak periods, the scheme will certainly be renewed for many years to come.

Each year, eco-volunteers imagine new activities to enrich their mediation work and make contacts with their various audiences easier (naturalist escape room, Happy Families game, etc.) Such inventiveness in the way they make the messages their own has been inspiring the site manager and its partners to keep developing interpretation tools and means.

Awarded by the Avenir Montagne programme in the Mobilities category, the Grand Site de France has reinforced the eco-volunteer scheme with the territorial administration volunteering mechanism offered by the ANCT, which enables authorities in rural areas to benefit from the engineering skills of young graduates to serve their projects as part of a one-year assignment, roughly. As a result, the Grand Site de France has been able to strengthen its visitor management and green mobility strategy **CH.6**.



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Outdoor Measures to Go Meet Visitors and Inhabitants

Nelcoming visitors as soon as they arrive at the Bimont Dam - Concors-Sainte-Victoire

The Bimont parking area receives 260,000 visitors per year and is subject to major peak periods. To guide visitors, the reception scheme was strengthened in this strategic spot. In the parking area, the lack of demarcation used to lead to uncontrolled parking, limiting the hosting capacity of the place FCH.5. Instead of equipment or markings that would ultimately be useful only a few days per year, the choice was made to resorting to staff to coordinate vehicle parking. As a result, agents guide vehicles and maximise the use of the space, give advice to visitors depending on their particularities (early-morning sports enthusiasts, hikers,

families, people going on picnics or for a walk, motorbikers, equipped van or camper van drivers, etc.), warn ill-equipped walkers and make sure the outskirts of the site are clean.



In the Bimont parking area, human presence has allowed for more sober infrastructure, reduced unauthorised parking and maximised the hosting capacity. With 340 theoretical spaces, the visitor study revealed that the parking area was often overflowing when an average of 247 vehicles only are parked there.

■ A hut in Port-des-Bargues

to reach lle Madame safely

In the Grand Site de France Estuaire de la Charente - Arsenal de Rochefort, access to lle Madame is sinkable. Since 2022, an information point open from mid-June to mid-September has been making visitors aware of environmental concerns and tide times and inviting them to leave their cars on the mainland. Visitors have reported receiving a quality welcome and feeling reassured by a human presence. This measure is one of the first steps towards a more ambitious rehabilitation and flow control programme.



A travelling Visitor
Centre to go
meet visitors
and inhabitants
- Cliffs of Étretat Alabaster Coast



Launched as part of the "Mobility - Preparing for the travel season" working group ▶P.14, the "Grand Sit'info" van travels the vast territory of the Grand Site to communicate about the approach, share best practices and inform visitors as well as residents of the green mobility amenities. The facilitators provide information about the landscapes and the appropriate behaviour to be respectful of the environment, heritage and other users such as farmers. The Visitor Centre passes through the Grand Site municipalities but is also present on campsites, at local events and at markets. In addition to helping visitors, its other purpose is to go meet inhabitants, answer their questions and exchange with them on the territorial projects and the Grand Site's action programme.

Further Resources (in French)

National Agency for Territorial Coherence (ANCT)

- Website and "project library"
- 2023 National Mountain Council. Press kit -February 2023
- Interactive Map of the 2021-2022 Investment Avenir Montagnes financed projects
- "Sustainable visitor management in very attractive landscapes and sites: the example of the Grands Sites de France" webinar organised in collaboration with the RGSF as part of the Avenir Montagnes Programme - 12 July 2022 (no longer available)
- "Visitor management and respect for biodiversity in the mountains" webinar organised in collaboration with the Federation of French Regional Natural Parks as part of the Avenir Montagnes Programme
 12 January 2023 (no longer available)

Ministry of the Green Transition and Territorial Cohesion

- Ministry's website on site policy
- SITE, Information System on Exceptional Sites and Territories
- "Insertion paysagère des campings existants en site classé" ("Integrating Existing Campsites into the Landscapes in Classified Sites") guide, in partnership with the National Outdoor Hotel Industry Federation - 2020

Territory Bank - Deposits Fund (CDC)

- Website and CDC blog
- "Compter les flux, comprendre les déplacements dans les territoires: Panorama des solutions numériques" ("Counting Flows and Understanding Travels in the Territories - An Overview of Digital Solutions") guide - 202 l
- "Biodiv'2050: D'un tourisme de masse vers un tourisme durable: la biodiversité, opportunité de restructuration des filières" ("Biodiv' 2050: From MassTourism to Sustainable Tourism - Biodiversity, an Opportunity to Restructure Sectors") guide - 2021

Atout France (National Tourism Development Agency)

 France Tourisme Durable (France Sustainable Tourism) platform

Sustainable Tourism Actors (ATD)

- ATD website
- "Mesurer autrement sa performance touristique.
 Guide méthodologique sur les indicateurs d'une

destination durable" ("Measuring One's Tourism Performance Differently - A Methodological Guide on Sustainable Destination Indicators")guide - 2021

 "Tourisme et changement climatique, un enjeu local et mondial" ("Tourism and Climate Change: A Local and Global Challenge") white paper - 2020

French Office for Biodiversity (OFB)

- OFB website
- "Recueil d'expériences sur la gestion de la fréquentation post-covid dans les espaces naturels français" ("Collection of feedback on post-Covid visitor management in French natural areas") - 2022
- "Engaging Communication: Presenting and Giving Feedback on Natural Areas" webinar - 23 May 2022

Federation of French Regional Natural Parks (FPNRF)

• FPNRF website and resource centre

ADNTourisme (National Federation of Institutional Tourism Organisations)

 Manifeste pour un tourisme responsable: 10 engagements d'ADN Tourisme (Manifesto in Favour of a Sustainable Form of Tourism: ADN Tourisme's 10 Commitments) - 2021

ADEME (Green Transition Agency)

- Bilan des émissions de gaz à effet de serre du secteur du tourisme en France (Greenhouse gas emissions assessement for the tourism sector in France)- 2021
- Tourisme durable: 20 mesures pour une transition de la lère destination touristique mondiale (Sustainable Tourism: 20 Measures to Help the 1st World Tourist Destination Transition) - 2020

Not to mention

- French Federation of Pedestrian Hikes, Coastal Conservatory, Valley Area Network, Federation of Natural Area Conservatories, National Natural Reserves, IREST (Tourism Research and Higher Education Institution), "Culture, Tourism and Development" UNESCO Chair websites.
- SpeciAlps2 project website and resource
- Rivages de France: Guide pour la maîtrise de la fréquentation (French Shores: A Guide to Managing Visitor Numbers) – 2023
- Les sciences comportementales et le nudge : Quel potentiel pour une meilleure gestion des flux touristiques ? (Behavioural Science and Nudging:

The Potential for Better Management of Visitor Flows?) (2021): AVITEM (Sustainable Mediterranean Cities and Territories Agency).

- Podcasts recorded during the "Patrimoines au défi de l'hyper-fréquentation" ("Heritage Sites and Extremely High Numbers of Visitors) study day organised by the National Heritage Institute
- Simon Jolivet. La police de l'accès aux espaces protégés. Ordre public écologique et politique des "petits pas" (Access to Protected Areas Police: Ecological Public Order and the 'Incremental Steps' Policy). Droit administratif, 2021, 11, pp.study 15. hal-03423101
- Tourisme, nouveaux paradi(gme)s (New Paradigms of Tourism) (2022): Rémy Oudghiri, Maider Darricau, Thomas Lamand et al. Urbanisme, #426, July-August 2022
- "Les vacances des Français" ("French People's Holidays") An IFOP, (French Public Opinion Institute) UNAT (National Union of Tourism and Outdoor Associations) and France Tourism Alliance study – 2022

Acronyms

ADEME : Agence De l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie (Green Transition Agency)

ADT : Agence de Développement Touristique (Departmental Tourism Agency)

AGUR : Agence d'urbanisme Flandre-Dunkerque (Flanders-Dunkirk Urban Planning Agency)

AIPPB: Arrêté inter-préfectoral de protection de biotope (Interprefectural biotope protection decree)

ANCT : Agence Nationale de la Cohésion des Territoires (National Agency for Territorial Coherence)

API : Interface de programmation (Application Programming Interface)

ASVP : Agent de Surveillance de la Voie Publique (Public Road Monitoring Agent)

ATD : Acteurs du Tourisme Durable (Sustainable Tourism Actors)

CCCGS: Communauté de Communes des Cévennes Gangeoises et Suménoises (Ganges and Sumène Cévennes Community of municipalities)

CDC : Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (Deposits Fund)

CEN: Conservatoire d'Espaces Naturels (Natural Area Conservatory)

CCGPSL: Communauté de Commune du Grand Pic Saint-Loup (Greater Saint-Loup Summit Community of municipalities)

CCVH : Communauté de Communes Vallée de l'Hérault (Hérault Valley Community of municipalities)

CPIE: Centre Permanent d'Initiatives Pour l'Environnement (Initiative for the Environment Permanent Centre)

CUD : Communauté Urbaine de Dunkerque (Dunkirk Incorporated Municipality)

DDT : Direction départementale des Territoires (Departmental Directorate for the Territories)

DRAC : Direction régionale des Affaires culturelles (Regional Directorate for Cultural Affairs)

DREAL : Direction Régionale de l'Environnement, de l'Aménagement et du Logement (Regional Environment, Planning and Housing Directorate)

DUP : Déclaration d'Utilité Publique (Declaration of Public Interest)

EDF : Électricité De France (French Electricity Compagny)

EPCC: Établissement public de coopération culturelle (Public Cultural Cooperation Institution)

EPCI : Établissement Public de Coopération Intercommunale (Intercommunal Cooperation Public Institution)

GR : Grande Randonnée (Long-distance hike)

GRP : Grande Randonnée de Pays (Longdistance country hike)

ICOMOS : Conseil international des monuments et des sites (International Council on Monuments and Sites)

MISEN: Mission interservice de l'eau et de la nature (Water and Nature Inter-Service Mission)

MTECT: Ministère de la Transition écologique et de la Cohésion des territoires (Ministry of the Green Transition and Territorial Cohesion)

NPN : Réseau points-nœuds (Node-point network)

OA : Outdoor Activity (Activités de pleine nature)

OFB : Office Français de la Biodiversité (French Office for Biodiversity)

ONCFS: Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage (National Hunting and Wildlife Office)

ONF : Office National des Forêts (National Forest Office)

PNR : Parc Naturel Régional (Regional Natural Park)

PNRVA: Parc Naturel Régional des Volcans d'Auvergne (Auvergne Volcano Regional Natural Park)

RENET: Réseau d'Éducation à la Nature, à l'Environnement et au Territoire du Marais poitevin (Poitevin Marsh Nature, Environment and Territory Education Network)

RGSF : Réseau des Grands Sites de France (Grands Sites de France Network)

SRP : Schéma d'accueil stratégique (Strategic Reception Plan)

TEPCV: Territoire à énergie positive pour la croissance verte (Green Growth Positive Energy Territory)

UDAP : Unité Départementale de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (Departmental Unit for Architecture and Heritage)

ZPPAUP: Zone de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural, Urbain et Paysager (Architectural, urban and landscape protection area)

Methodology

Produced by the Grands Sites de France Network (RGSF), this guide is based on:

- The RGSF tourism tools and publications
- An inventory of the actions implemented by the Grands Sites de France
- Interviews with the sites to nourish the Practical Sheets
- An educational tour from 11 to 13 May 2022 at the Grand Site de France Massif du Canigó
- The evaluation of the visitor management transfer mentoring experiment betwen the Grand Site de France Massif du Canigó and the UNESCO World Heritage Site "Phare de Cordouan" ("Cordouan Lighthouse")

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