

The megaliths of **Carnac** and **the** **Morbihan riverbanks**

A candidate **UNESCO**
World Heritage Site



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Introduction

The shores of the Morbihan represent an exceptional area, unique in the world, characterized by an inordinate concentration and diversity of megalithic sites, linked to the maritime landscape. That's why local stakeholders have been working since 2012 on a UNESCO World Heritage nomination for the Megaliths of Carnac and the Morbihan Shores.

The application was officially submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in January 2024 by the French ambassador, and will be the file that represents the country, on the international stage, for the committee's summer 2025 session.



Territory
concerned by
the **UNESCO**
candidacy

A heritage older than the pyramids of Egypt

Over 7,000 years old, menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, and tumuli have come down to us, marking the landscape and the history of humanity in Morbihan.

Monumental architectures, stone alignments, fascinating engravings, precious stone objects... the exceptional heritage of the Morbihan shores tells the story of a prehistoric, Neolithic population that prospered on the shores, partly thanks to its relationship with the maritime world, but also carved out this unique landscape.

What were they used for? While we know with certainty that dolmens and tumuli, found in extraordinary numbers in Morbihan, are funerary architectures, menhirs and alignments remain an enigma to this day.

What is certain is that these menhirs have left their mark on the various civilizations that have succeeded one another over the centuries. In particular, several millennia later, the Celts integrated this heritage into their folklore and local legends.

But what is undeniable is the exceptional technical skill and ingenuity of this population for its time. The great broken menhir of Locmariaquer is a perfect example of this: the largest man-made menhir, nearly 18 meters high and weighing almost 300 tons, was moved in its entirety from the Rhuys peninsula and erected in Locmariaquer by this Neolithic people: a titanic collective effort.



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GLOSSARY



Megalith

Monument built of one or more large stones, such as a menhir or dolmen. Literally «large stone» in ancient Greek (mega = large and lithos = stone).



Dolmens

Wall and roof stones, forming a corridor and burial chamber. A dolmen represents the archaeological remains of a larger Neolithic monument: in fact, they were always covered by a tumulus.



Menhir or stela

Stone placed in a vertical position by human intervention. When several menhirs are arranged in several lines, we speak of an alignment, and when they are arranged in an arc of a circle, we speak of a cromlech (or megalithic enclosure).



Tumulus

A construction of earth and stones covering a burial space, whether accessible or not. When the tumulus is made of earth, it's called a «tertre», and when it's made of stones, it's called a «cairn».

CHRONOLOGICAL LANDMARKS



The Lascaux cave
18,000 BC

Saint-Michel
Tumulus (Carnac)
4,700 BC



Pyramid
of Cheops
2,500 BC.



Neolithic in Morbihan

20,000 BC

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A heritage as exceptional as the Palace of Versailles

After all, being inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List is not just the prerogative of a few beautiful stones.

Neolithic megalithic sites such as Stonehenge in the UK and the Orkney Islands in Scotland are already on UNESCO's World Heritage List. But to be included, you not only have to be exceptional, you also have to be unique.

This landscape of megaliths on the banks of the Morbihan River represents a masterpiece of human creative genius: the age, quantity and diversity of the sites, as well as the uniqueness of the engravings, make it a rare testimony to Neolithic populations.

This concentration is unrivalled. Covering an area of almost 1,000 km², from the Rivière d'Étel to the Rhuys peninsula, via the Baie de Quiberon and the Golfe du Morbihan, more than 550 megalithic sites, comprising tens of thousands of stones, have shaped the landscape. For reference, there are almost 3,000 menhirs in the Carnac alignments alone, stretching for almost 4 km.

A unique symbolic landscape of megaliths has been built around the water in Morbihan. Today, many monuments are on the foreshore or even underwater, such as the double enclosure of Er Lannic in the Gulf of Morbihan and the Kerbourgnec alignments in Saint-Pierre-Quiberon: these megaliths become true witnesses to the rising waters.

The exceptional nature of these sites also lies in the treasures found at the foot of the megaliths: objects polished from rare materials, sometimes of distant origin, attesting to the presence of a centre of power, trade and influence that extended far beyond the Morbihan.

But it's undoubtedly the presence of some of the largest and most conspicuous alignments of menhirs throughout the region that have become a powerful symbol for Brittany the world over.



DISCOVER UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE CANDIDACY ON VIDEO

bit.ly/UNESCO-MEGALITHS



A heritage as fragile as the Great Barrier Reef

In fact, appearances are deceptive: these stone behemoths are archaeological sites, and have their own fragilities.

It's everyone's responsibility to protect and enhance them, to guarantee the integrity of this universal heritage, unique in the world. Over 10 years ago, the region embarked on a wonderful adventure: to etch this exceptional landscape forever in the history of mankind, in order to strengthen its preservation and protection, thanks to the UNESCO World Heritage candidacy.

A landscape to be discovered on a stroll or hike, with the distance and respect befitting an archaeological monument handed down to us by its first Neolithic builders.

Megaliths mark out this territory: whether extravagant or discreet, they are part of a whole that must be discovered to understand the scale of the phenomenon. A number of gentle footpaths are even entirely dedicated to the responsible discovery of this landscape. These hiking trails are much more than paths: they are portals to the origins of this territory, windows opening onto the unsuspected wealth of its history.

Above all, this candidacy is a collective promise to preserve this age-old heritage and pass it on to future generations.



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The Unesco World Heritage listing process was initiated in 2012

Spearheaded by the Paysages de Mégalithes association, this collective regional project brings together local authorities (town councils, inter-communal bodies, the Département, the Région and government departments), relevant public establishments and associations with an interest in heritage and tourism. It is also supported by the Paysages de Mégalithes scientific committee, chaired by **Yves Coppens**, the famous paleontologist from Morbihan, and made up of **eighteen French and European archaeologists specializing in megalithism.**

megalithes-morbihan.com 



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Deconstructing preconceived ideas about the **consequences** of World Heritage listing

1 / It will lead to a strong development of tourism in the area, resulting in over-visiting.

FALSE The aim of the UNESCO World Heritage listing is to mobilize all the players in the area to improve the preservation and protection of the monuments. All public-sector partners have committed themselves to this objective, signing a «Charter of Commitments» in 2023, based on the values of the candidacy.

However, the megalithic heritage of southern Morbihan is already recognized in France and abroad: it's a heritage that's already as well-known as some of the sites already on the World Heritage List. In fact, some visitors think we've already been on the list for several years.

The development of our region's megaliths is seen as an opportunity to meet the challenges of de-seasonalizing the offer throughout the year and managing visitor flows in a virtuous way, outside the summer season. This application is part of an ongoing process of structuring the destination's future tourism.

2 / Site closures will follow one another and lead to commercial management of heritage.

FALSE This is not the ambition of a World Heritage listing, nor that of this project. Depending on the state of ownership of the sites, the vast majority of megalithic sites are now open to the public. This local heritage has been at the heart of local life for probably thousands of years, and the aim of the UNESCO candidacy is to keep it that way.

To do so, they must remain in a good state of preservation, allowing the monument and its surroundings to remain in good health, and posing no risk to visitors. It is only in cases of extreme, exceptional deterioration that certain monuments have been closed, with the agreement of the relevant government departments and after appropriate diagnosis.

Today, monuments are subject to a health watch and shared protocols, enabling us to anticipate any alerts and avoid such cases as much as possible. However, these monuments are still very fragile and need to be taken care of.

3 / There will be no negative impact on the environment or local development

TRUE Protecting and preserving doesn't mean putting things under a bell: UNESCO doesn't provide any new tools for World Heritage protection but relies entirely on national regulations. It's up to us, collectively, to find the right balance between the preservation of a thousand-year-old heritage and local development. This ambition takes shape within the framework of the management plan for the site, put in place by all those involved in the bid.

In fact, UNESCO does not provide any funding for listed properties. It is the collective ambition of the local community, the impetus of the territory, that creates the opportunities for funding by local authorities and the State for preservation and protection actions.





🔗 TO FIND OUT MORE...

Alignments of Carnac

menhirs-carnac.fr/en 🌐

Locmariaquer megaliths site

site-megalithique-locmariaquer.fr 🌐

Cairn of Gavrinis

cairndegavrinis.com/en 🌐

Cairn of Petit Mont

cairndepetitmont.com/en 🌐

Carnac Museum

museedecarnac.com 🌐

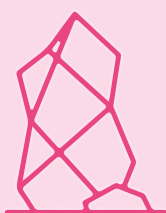
Vannes Museum

mairie-vannes.fr 🌐 (FR)
musee-dhistoire-et-darcheologie

*The museum is currently closed
for renovations to give it a facelift*

MEGALITH TRAILS

- 🌐 megalithes-morbihan.com 🌐
ressources/supports-de-communication 🌐
- 🌐 carnactourism.co.uk 🌐
discover/menhirs-and-heritage
- 🌐 golfedumorbihan.co.uk 🌐
explore/live-the-exceptional/cultuur/megaliths
- 🌐 baiedequiberon.co.uk 🌐
discover-megaliths-morbihan
- 🌐 morbihan.com 🌐 (FR)
idee-balade-le-sentier-des-megalithes-a-erdeven
- 🌐 brittanytourism.com 🌐
unlock-the-secrets-of-the-great-megalithic-sites



Morbihan has a rich megalithic heritage

that extends far beyond the UNESCO
World Heritage candidate perimeter.

DISCOVER OTHER MEGALITHIC SITES AND INITIATIVES

Menhirs of Monteneuf

leslandes.bzh 🌐 (FR)
les-menhirs-de-monteneuf

Landes de Lanvaux

golfedumorbihan.co.uk 🌐
meet-the-exceptional/gulf-of-morbihan

CPIE⁽¹⁾ Val de Vilaine

cpievaldevilaine.fr 🌐 (FR)



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CONTACTS

PAYSAGES DE MÉGALITHES

74 rue des Korrigans
56340 CARNAC
France

contact@megalithes-morbihan.fr
Tél. : +33 (0)2 97 29 84 39

megalithes-morbihan.fr



PAYSAGES DE MÉGALITHES

MORBIHAN TOURISME

2 rue Louis de Broglie
56038 VANNES
France

informations-touristiques@morbihan.com
Tél. : +33 (0)2 97 54 06 56

morbihan.com



L'esprit Sud de la Bretagne