



Saint-Julien-en-Born

The history of Saint-Julien-en-Born is one of patient metamorphosis, dictated by a close dialogue between humankind and a once-hostile nature.

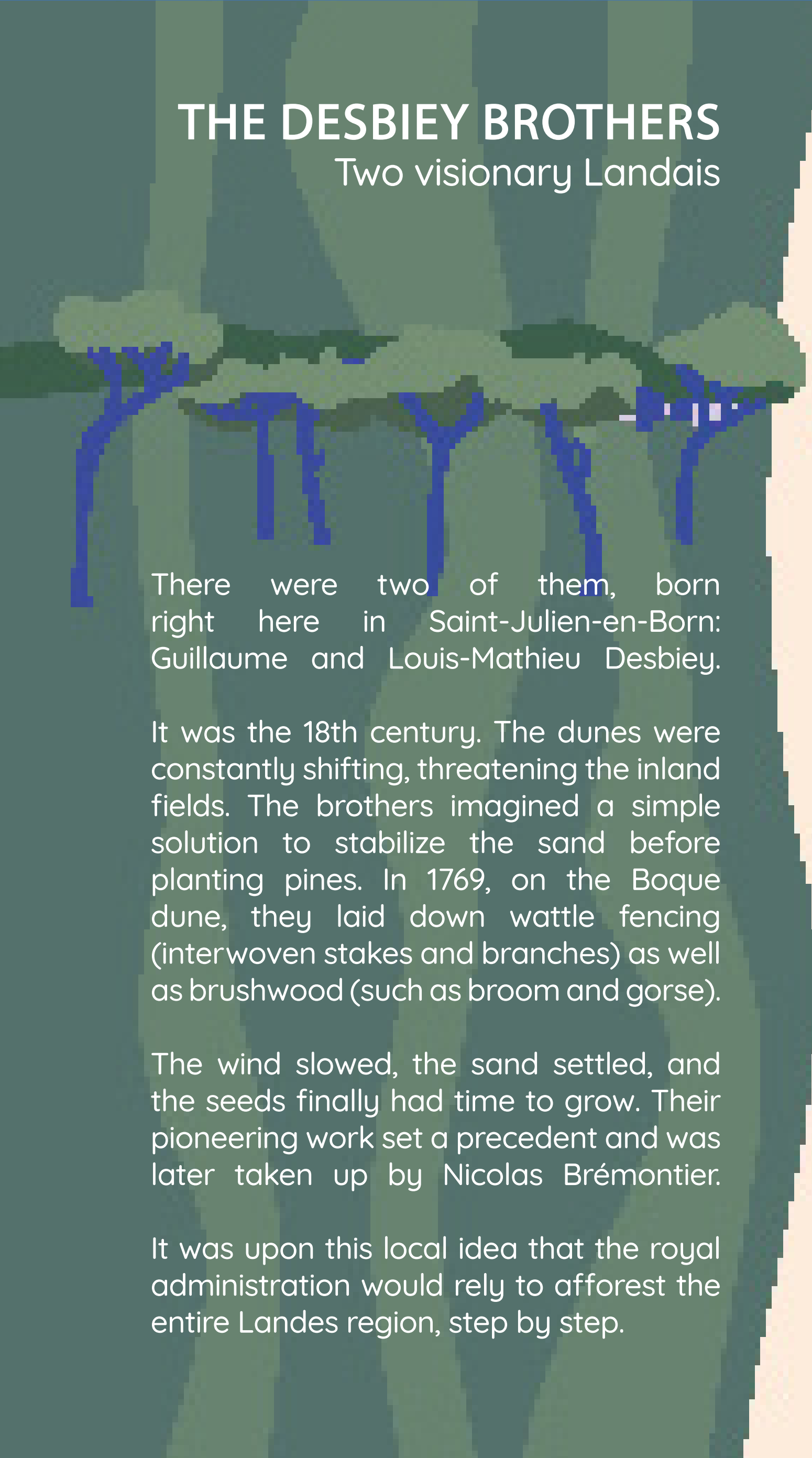
Formerly a stopover on the coastal route of the Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James), the village originally grew around its medieval parish, struggling for centuries against shifting sands and unhealthy marshlands.

The decisive turning point came in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the town became the stage for pioneering experiments to stabilize the dunes and drain the moors, giving rise to the maritime pine forest as we know it today.

Today, this unique heritage—symbolized by its seaside resort of Contis, its iconic lighthouse, and its protected coastal river (the courant)—flourishes within the Côte Landes Nature community of municipalities, serving as a true bridge between forestry tradition and maritime freedom.

DID YOU KNOW?

The inhabitants of Saint-Julien-en-Born are called the Juliennois. There are 99 municipalities in France named Saint-Julien, and they gather together every year over the Pentecost weekend.



THE DESBIEY BROTHERS

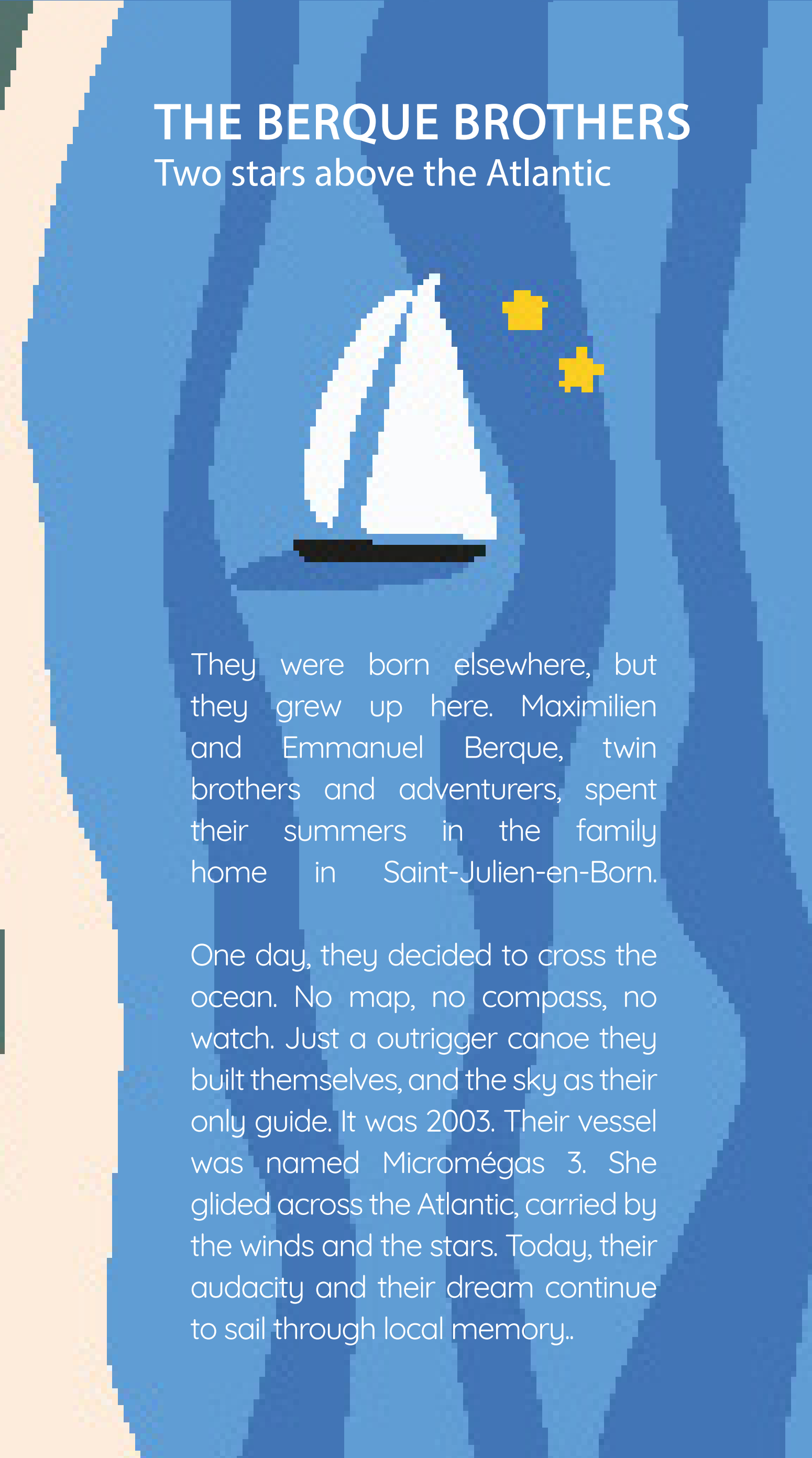
Two visionary Landais

There were two of them, born right here in Saint-Julien-en-Born: Guillaume and Louis-Mathieu Desbiey.

It was the 18th century. The dunes were constantly shifting, threatening the inland fields. The brothers imagined a simple solution to stabilize the sand before planting pines. In 1769, on the Boque dune, they laid down wattle fencing (interwoven stakes and branches) as well as brushwood (such as broom and gorse).

The wind slowed, the sand settled, and the seeds finally had time to grow. Their pioneering work set a precedent and was later taken up by Nicolas Brémontier.

It was upon this local idea that the royal administration would rely to afforest the entire Landes region, step by step.



THE BERQUE BROTHERS

Two stars above the Atlantic

They were born elsewhere, but they grew up here. Maximilien and Emmanuel Berque, twin brothers and adventurers, spent their summers in the family home in Saint-Julien-en-Born.

One day, they decided to cross the ocean. No map, no compass, no watch. Just a outrigger canoe they built themselves, and the sky as their only guide. It was 2003. Their vessel was named Micromégas 3. She glided across the Atlantic, carried by the winds and the stars. Today, their audacity and their dream continue to sail through local memory..

le courant de Contis

Carte de Cassini 18^e siècle



More than a stream—a breath of life. In the Landes region, these small coastal rivers that connect the inland to the ocean are called «courants.» They drain the ponds, the wetlands, the marshes... Without them, everything here would be underwater.



The courant maintains the balance. It prevents the moorland from turning into a swamp. It flows, slowly, naturally. And when the tide comes in, its rhythm changes: salt water can travel several kilometers inland. A shared breath between forest and ocean.

The Contis Courant is born from the meeting of two rivers: the Onesse to the north and the Vignac to the south. They join at the Plaine de Pigeon, a vast wetland and the remnant of an ancient pond. From there, the water carves its path toward the Atlantic, and from this point on, it is known as the Contis Courant. It gently meanders, forming the natural border between Saint-Julien-en-Born and Lit-et-Mixe.

Yet, its calm is deceptive: for a long time, this courant was unpredictable. Its mouth at the ocean never wanted to stay in one place. Wind, tides, storms... everything pushed the sand to block its exit. Without a well-drained channel, the land would flood and the marshes would rise. So, the inhabitants tried to help, armed with shovels, wheelbarrows, and brushwood. But the slightest swell from the sea would wipe it all away. It took time, tenacity, and eventually the help of public authorities. Between rock armor, jetties, and broader management plans, the courant is now a bit more stable. Yet, it remains wild and alive.



A highly protected courant

Classified as a Natura 2000 site, the Contis Courant is recognized at the European level for its rich biodiversity. Here, fresh water flows down from the forests and meets the salt water of the ocean. This rare mix, known as «brackish water,» creates a fragile ecosystem inhabited by discreet species—sometimes invisible at first glance, yet essential to the balance of the coastline.

DID YOU KNOW ?

From April to October, the pinasse (a traditional flat-bottomed boat) Estele de la Ma II can be seen on the courant. Listed as a Historical Monument, this traditional vessel made of maritime pine is maintained by passionate volunteers who keep the ancestral tradition of seine fishing (using a net) alive twice a year.



the Contis lighthouse

It stands watch. Silent, in black and white, it is the only lighthouse in the Landes. What a legend ! It tells us where we come from and where we might go. Climb its steps or gaze at it from afar: it is the landmark for those who love to get lost.

Why isn't the lighthouse at the water's edge?

It is a question often asked upon discovering the Contis lighthouse standing 800 meters from the shore. Isolated, rising from the midst of the pines, it seems almost out of step with the ocean.

In 1863, the engineer Léonce Reynaud chose to build it on a leveled dune, more than 11 meters high. Why? To increase its focal height: the 41.5-meter-high tower rests on this natural pedestal. The result is a light visible more than 40 kilometers out at sea, amplified by a Fresnel lens—a feat of optical engineering that concentrates light into powerful beams. At night, the lighthouse emits a white flash every 5 seconds.

By day, it serves as a daymark: a visual reference point. And along the Landes coast, this is invaluable. The coastline here is flat and uniform, with neither cliffs nor capes. The lighthouse, with its towering silhouette and spiraling stripes, becomes a distinctive landmark in the landscape.

Finally, there is the wisdom of its location. The coastline is unstable. The wind shifts the sand, and the tides eat away at the dunes. Had the lighthouse been built closer to the ocean, it would have been exposed to erosion. Its foundations of garluche—the local reddish ironstone—rest on sand. Solid, yet alive. The lighthouse is thus a masterclass in balance: technical, symbolic, and geographical.

KEY DATES

1856

The Lighthouse Commission decides to build a new lighthouse between Biarritz and Cap Ferret to secure this stretch of the coastline.

1860

Emperor Napoleon III signs the decree for the execution of the works.

1861-1863

Construction of the lighthouse based on the plans of architect Léonce Reynaud.

20 décembre 1863

Official commissioning of the lighthouse.

1873

The lighthouse withstands an earthquake.

1933

Electrification of the lighthouse.

1937

L'artiste local Louis Lucien Bellocq, dit «Menoune», peint deux bandes noires en spirale sur le phare pour améliorer sa visibilité diurne.

1944

Local artist Louis Lucien Bellocq, known as «Menoune,» paints two black spiraling stripes on the lighthouse to improve its daytime visibility.

1999

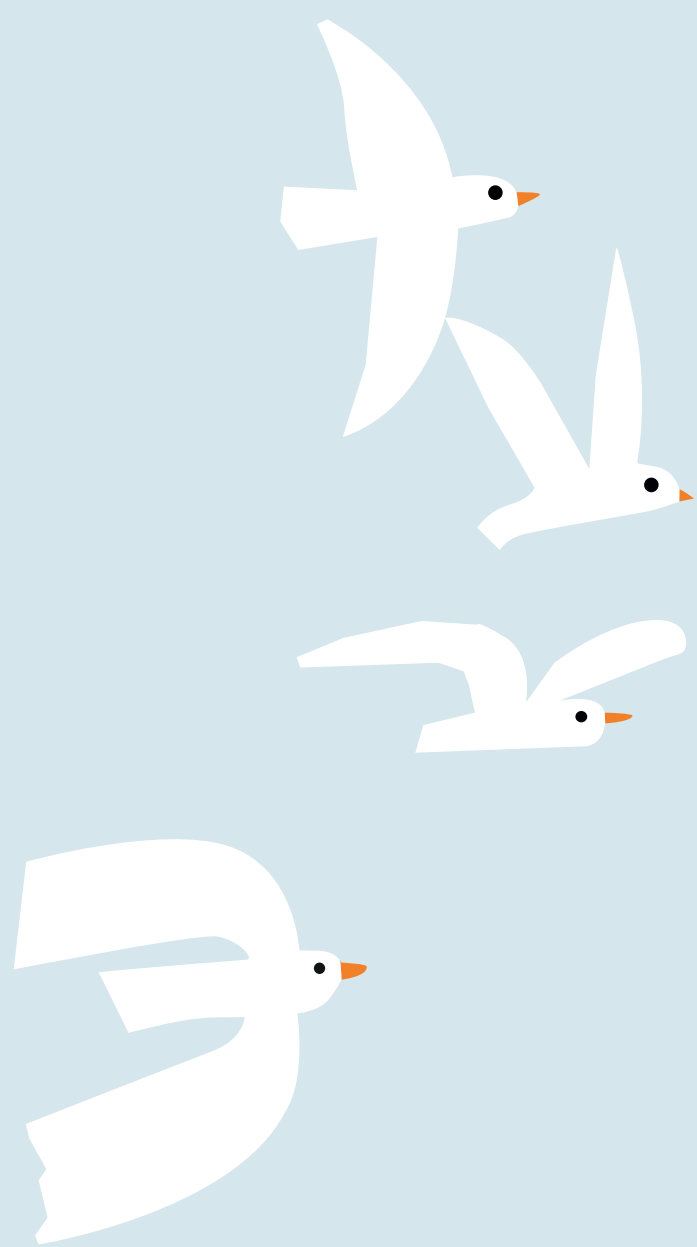
Automation of the lighthouse, now remote-controlled from Bayonne, and the departure of the last lighthouse keeper.

6 novembre 2009

Listing of the lighthouse as a Historical Monument.

DID YOY KNOW ?

To reach the top of the lighthouse, you must climb 184 spiral steps. The effort is rewarded with a 360° panoramic view of the Landes forest, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Contis stream.



the dune

The dune constitutes a unique ecosystem, shaped by the wind and the ocean. It is organized into successive bands, stretching from the beach to the forest, with each zone featuring specific soils and vegetation.

Stabilizing the sand : a vital necessity.

As early as the 18th century, efforts began across the entire Aquitaine coastline to stabilize the dunes. Two combined approaches are used:

Mechanical techniques: first, breaking the force of the wind.

Windbreaks are installed: these are flexible barriers made of wooden ganivelles (chestnut or pine slats bound with wire) or natural fiber netting. These structures slow down the wind at ground level and trap blowing sand grains.

The dunes are also covered with brushwood made of broom, strawberry tree, or maritime pine branches. The sand settles, the surface retains moisture, and seeds begin to take root.

Biological techniques: planting to stabilize, letting nature do the rest. **Once the dunes are somewhat stabilized by the fencing and brushwood, they must be held in place. To achieve this, nothing beats plants—species capable of rooting in sand, growing back after every storm, and thriving in what others would consider a desert.**



oya

(European Marram Grass)
Also nicknamed «gourbet» or «sand reed.» A grass with flexible blades and deep roots, it forms dense tufts, slows the wind at ground level, and stabilizes slopes. The more the sand covers it, the more it grows. It is resilient yet highly sensitive to trampling; every step off the designated paths weakens it.



sea Holly

(Eryngium maritimum)

With its prickly leaves and metallic blue hue, this «dune thistle» adds a vibrant splash of color. Above all, it can withstand anything thanks to an incredible taproot that plunges several meters deep into the sand.



Sea Immortelle

(Helichrysum stoechas)

You will smell this plant—with its small yellow flowers and dry, powerful fragrance—long before you see it. Its scent is reminiscent of curry. It grows low to the ground, carpeting less exposed areas and attracting a multitude of pollinating insects. Its leaves are downy and silver-grey.

DID YOU KNOW ?

Together, these plants do more than just decorate: they build the landscape. They stabilize the dunes, nourish the soil, and shelter a discreet biodiversity. As beautiful as they may be, picking them is strictly prohibited.



th beach

Place of freedom and relaxation, the beach invites you to simply savor the moment, between warm sand, sea air, and an infinite horizon. It is also a living, shared natural space that must be respected.

The beach wrack

What the ocean entrusts to the shore

With every tide, the ocean deposits a strip of debris at the top of the beach. This is the beach wrack (known in French as *lalaissé de mer*). This line of seaweed, driftwood, shells, and sometimes feathers or skate egg cases, marks the boundary of the last high tide.

Many find it «dirty.» In reality, it is the sign of a living beach. Better yet: it is a fully-fledged ecosystem.

Shelter and pantry

Beneath the dry seaweed and broken shells, life is teeming. Small insects, larvae, sandhoppers, and crustaceans... all provide vital food for shorebirds like the plover.

A first line of defense

The beach wrack traps sand and prevents it from being blown away by the wind, helping to stabilize embryonic dunes. In a world where storms are growing stronger, every single strand counts.

A nourishing cycle

What the ocean leaves behind, it sometimes takes back. As the tide rises, a portion of these nutrients returns to the water, feeding plankton and coastal fish, and closing nature's loop. For scientists, certain remnants—such as skate egg cases—provide precious clues about the health of marine species.

Cleaning the Beach While Respecting Its Balance

The Syndicat Mixte du Littoral Landais manages waste collection up to its full recycling and repurposing. Driftwood is left on-site; it is not waste! Two methods are used depending on the season, the area, and beach usage:

Selective manual cleaning

This is carried out exclusively by workers with disabilities or those in professional reintegration programs. They collect only human-made waste: plastics, glass, and metals. This selective sorting leaves the beach wrack intact, preserving the small living creatures that depend on it.

Le nettoyage mécanique

For the needs of tourism and safety by targetting the most frequented areas. The frequency of cleaning and the techniques used (screening or raking) are carefully managed to minimize the impact of heavy machinery on the beach, varying according to the season. To limit erosion, this method of cleaning is strictly prohibited within a 5-to-10-meter zone from the foot of the dune.

A tip : don't pick up everything

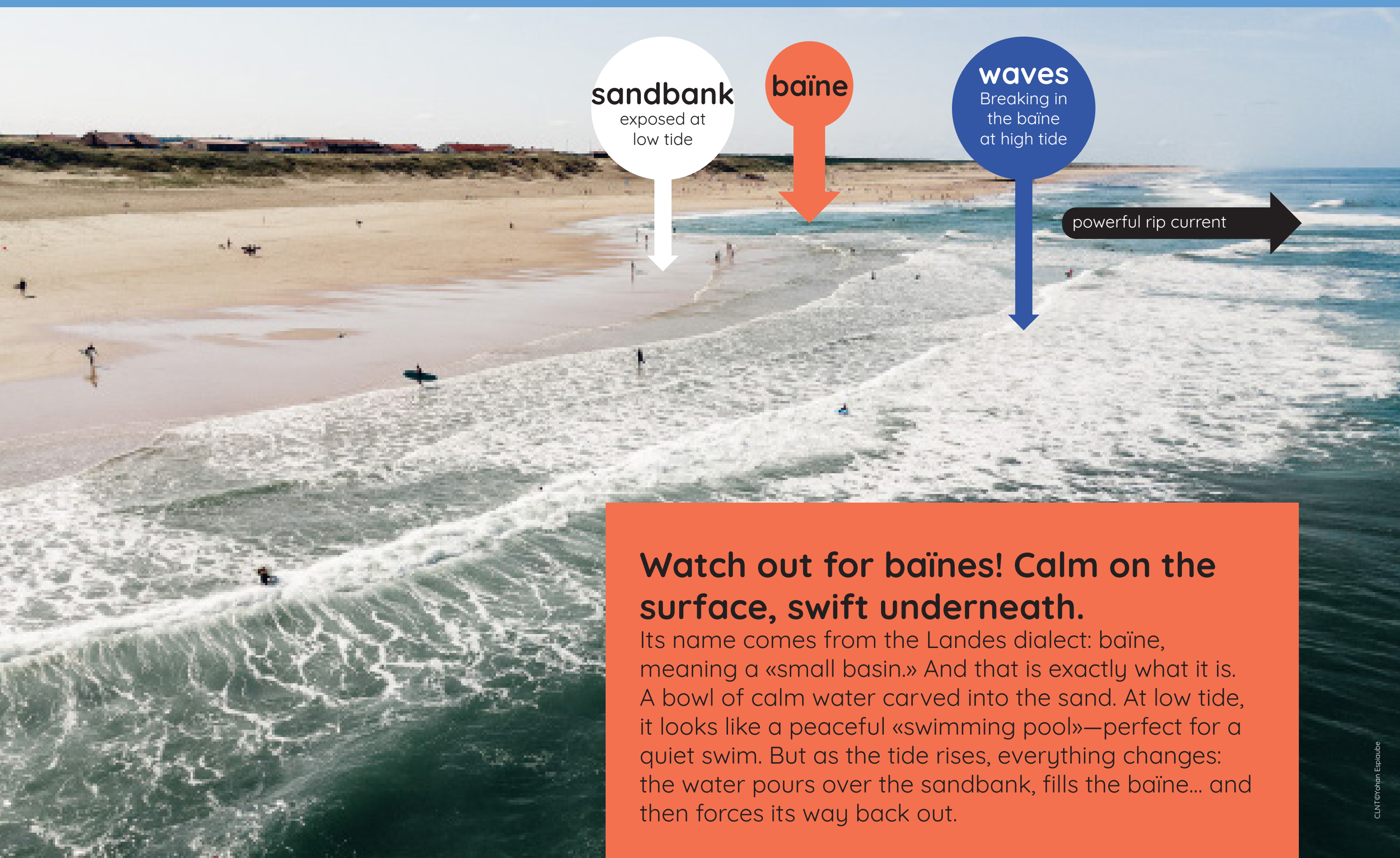
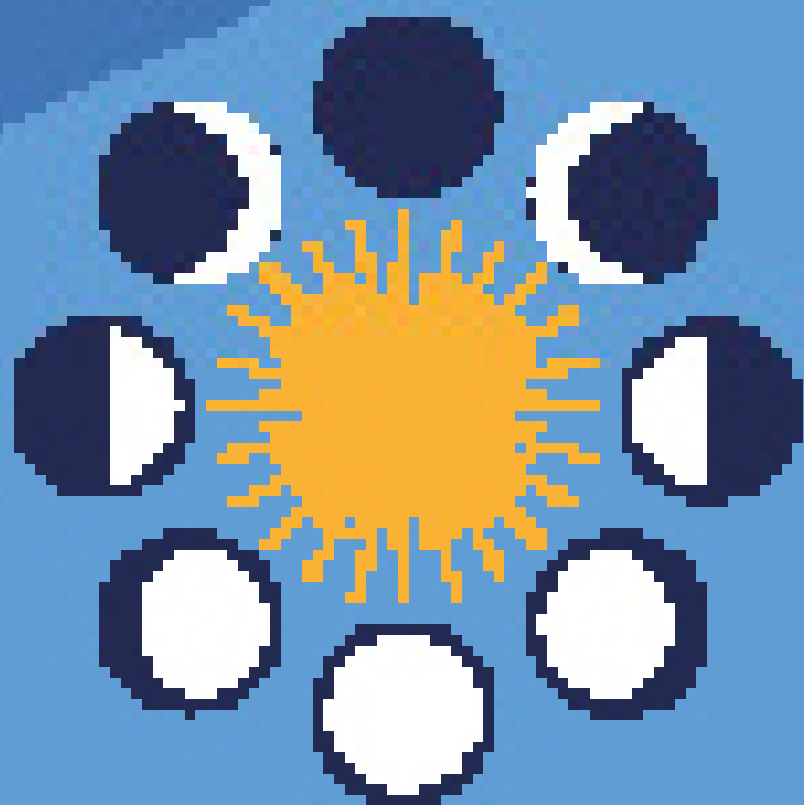
Picking up plastic waste? Yes. But leaving a piece of wood or seaweed behind can sometimes protect the beach much more than you think.

DID YOU KNOW ?

There are no trash cans on our beaches—this is a deliberate choice. We practice the simple rule of «pack it in, pack it out.» To keep the sand alive. And the sea, clean.

the ocean

Vast, powerful, and ever-shifting, the indomitable Atlantic Ocean imposes its full might. Its waves sculpt the coastline and dictate the rhythm of the landscape, offering a raw and living spectacle.



The Secret of the Tides

A ballet between the Earth, the Moon, and the Sun

How does it work ?

The Moon pulls the water toward itself, creating a bulge of water on the ocean: this is high tide. On the other side of the Earth, a second bulge forms due to the Earth's own movement. And as our planet rotates, we pass through both of these bulges every day.

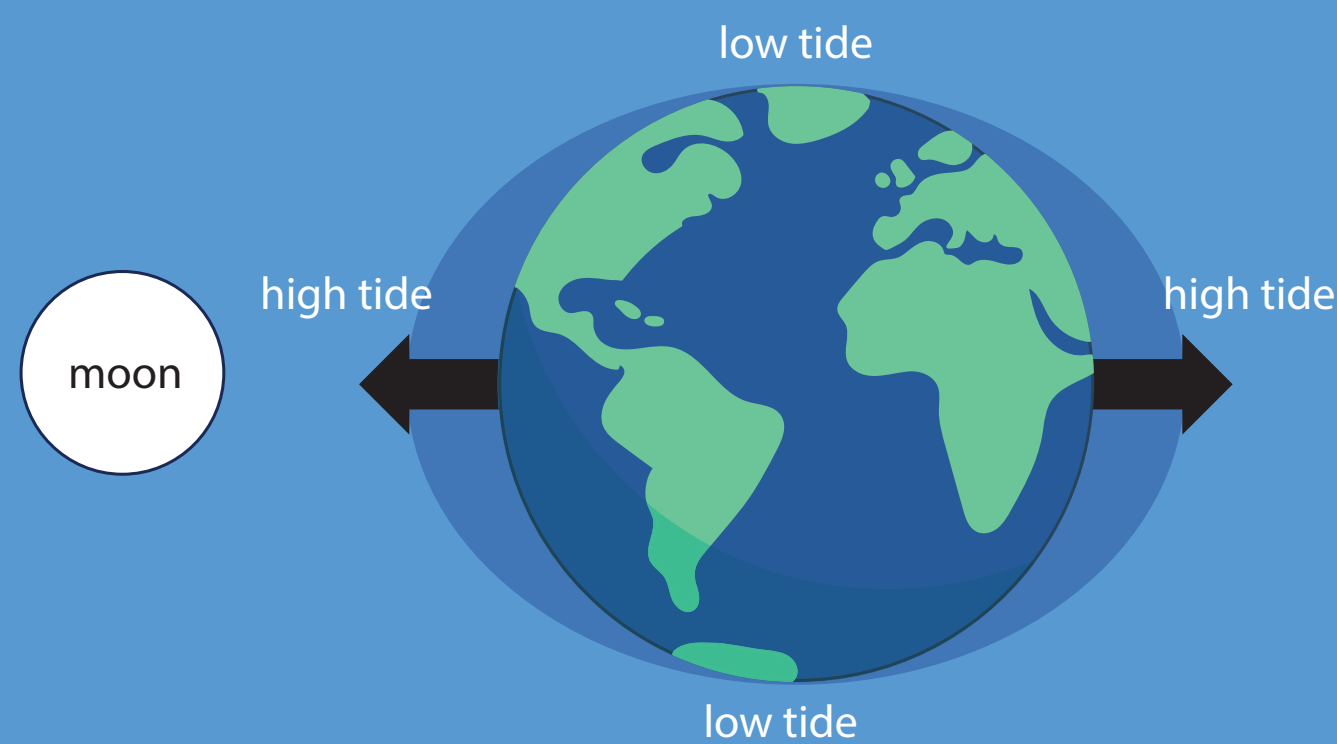
The result: the ocean rises (high tide), then falls (low tide), then rises again... and this cycle repeats every single day without exception.

The role of the sun

The Moon has the greatest influence, but the Sun plays a part too. When they align, their gravitational forces combine. This results in a high tidal coefficient, making the tide much stronger.

Le coefficient

It ranges from 20 (where the water barely moves) to 120. This number determines the tidal range—how high the ocean will rise and how far it will retreat.



DID YOU KNOW ?

A high coefficient can reveal and dramatically expand the beach at low tide, occasionally bringing pieces of the past back to light—such as the wreck of the Renown in Contis !