

Inland Waterways of France Volume 1 North and Centre



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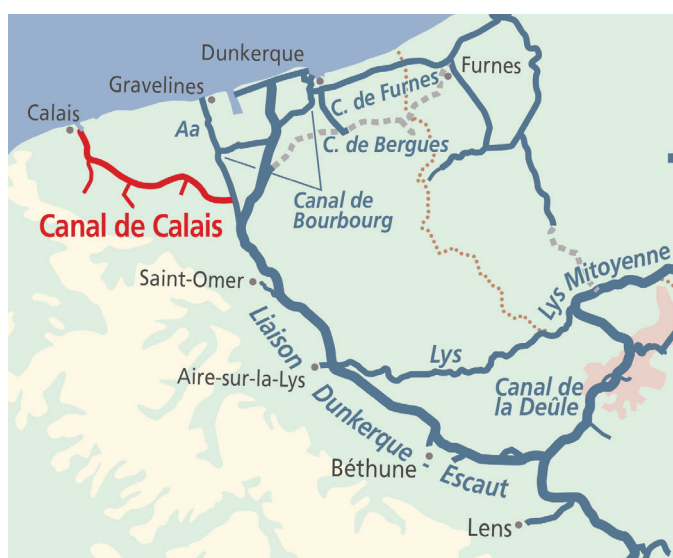
Started on its present line in the late 17th century, the Canal de Calais was opened some 50 years later, and the 'Pont Sans Pareil', a four-branched bridge at the crossroads of 4 canals, completed in 1758. The canal was enlarged for Class II Campinois and 'Canal du Nord' craft in the 1980s over two thirds of its length. Larger craft are still blocked by the Freycinet tidal lock in the port of Calais.

3. Calais Port and Canal de Calais

THE CANAL DE CALAIS IS 29.5KM LONG from the canal lock in the port of Calais to its junction with the River Aa at Le West. It has three branches, extending to the small towns of Guînes (6.2km), Ardres (4.8km) and Audruicq (2.4km), lying on the edge of the Flanders plain. The canal is still regularly used by commercial traffic, and has been upgraded throughout to accommodate 600-tonne barges. The works, completed in the 1990s, included the reconstruction of Hennuin lock, demolition of the iron swing-bridge at the junction, and the automation of lift-bridges. Despite these changes, the canal remains an attractive cruising waterway, but the situation on the branches leaves a lot to be desired. The lift bridges on the Guînes branch are disused, so that only the first 900 metres is accessible, while silting limits the available draught on all three branches to about 1.00m.

Calais as entry port

Calais is the closest port to the UK (Dover or Ramsgate are the usual nearest departure ports) and an interesting town that tends to be bypassed by the vast numbers who transit through the functional terminals (car ferry and Eurotunnel) each year. For navigators it is a convenient point of entry into the French inland waterways network. The marina in the Bassin Ouest is entered through a sea-lock, which has waiting buoys outside. Call Port of Calais VHF 17 harbour control (or 03 21 34 55 23, to arrange for passage either into the marina or through the sea-lock and its lift bridges into the Bassin Carnot: email calais-marina@calais.cci.fr. From here it is right into the Bassin Arrière and through the canal lock into the Bassin de la Batellerie. This is possible approximately 1.5hrs either side of HW, which might guide the planned passage time if you do not need to enter the marina, for example for mast unstepping (see *Introduction*).



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Navigation

There are mooring pontoons near the VNF office at 45 quai de la Meuse (03 21 34 03 49). This may be useful to purchase a vignette, although this is now much easier on-line. VNF will also arrange for a travelling bridge-keeper to open the six lifting bridges on the canal out of Calais.





The lift-bridge at Henuin (top), and canal landscape near Rumingham. © JEAN-MARC GFP



Locks

The canal lock in Calais is part of the Port of Calais. On the inland waterway there is only one lock, situated at Henuin, with a rise of about 1m in the direction of the river Aa. The former 38m lock here was replaced by a modern lock for high-capacity barges, 92.00m long and 8.00m wide.

Draught

The maximum authorised draught is 2.20m. The three branch canals have silted up and offer a depth of no more than 0.80m.

Headroom

All the fixed bridges on the through route leave a minimum headroom of 3.17m above the highest navigable water level (3.47m above normal level). The corresponding dimensions for the branches are of academic interest only, since none of them is maintained for navigation. They are respectively: Guînes 3.40m, Ardres 3.10m and Audruicq 3.70m. Vessels exceeding 28m in length could not enter the branch to Ardres on account of the difficulty in turning under the Sans-Pareil bridge at the junction.

Towpath

There is a metalled towpath throughout.

Authority

VNF Nord Pas-de-Calais, UTI Flandres-Lys
 – Rue de l'Écluse Saint-Bertin, BP 203 53
 62505 Saint-Omer cedex, 03 21 12 95 30

Route description

PK 29.8 Lock, VHF 10, and bridge, entrance from the Bassin Carnot of Port of Calais (2.3 km from the Bassin Ouest marina and 2.5km from the English Channel), 03 21 34 55 23, night €27.10, fuel, water and electricity included, shower, repairs, restaurant plaisance-opale.com

The main port is in one of the tidal basins some distance from the entrance to the inland waterway.

PK 29.5 Bridge (Pont Mollien) and railway bridge, limit of inland waterway, moorings d/s

PK 29.3 Calais public quay r/b, water

PK 29.0 Footbridge (Vic)

PK 28.9 Automatic lift bridge (Vic), two separate decks

PK 28.4 Bridge (Saint-Pierre)

PK 27.7 Automatic lift bridge (Curie), footbridge

PK 27.4 Railway bridge

PK 27.2 Motorway bridge (A16, Calais bypass)

PK 26.8	Industrial quays
PK 26.2	Coulogne automatic lift bridge, footbridge
PK 25.6	Junction with Guînes branch , l/b
PK 24.5	Bridge (Pont de Briques)
PK 22.4	Turning basin
PK 21.1	Les Attaques automatic lift bridge, quay u/s r/b
PK 18.1	Le Pont d'Ardres bridge (Sans-Pareil), Junction with Ardres branch , l/b, quay d/s r/b

The 'Sans Pareil' was a charming four-way stone bridge built in 1745 and set at 45° from the canal alignment (main line and Ardres branch). It has been replaced by a modern structure that is far from unique.

PK 17.2	Sugar mill, pipeline crossings and quay, l/b
PK 15.9	Motorway bridge (A26)
PK 10.8	Fort-Bâtard bridge, quay u/s r/b
PK 8.1	Junction with Audruicq branch , l/b

After 15km of open fenland countryside, approaching Henuin, announce your arrival on VHF 18: the lock-keeper will first open the bridge, then continue to operate the lock.

PK 6.6	Henuin lift bridge, automatic, quay d/s l/b, small village
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Village quayside mooring (the lock-keeper should be told if it is intended to stop here).

PK 6.0	New lock (Henuin), VHF 18/22, water
PK 2.1	Ruminghem bridge, quay u/s l/b, village 1200 l/b
PK 0.0	Junction with river Aa at Le West (PK 13.7)

The junction is near the village of Watten. Turn left (north) on the Aa to reach either Gravelines or the pleasant village of Bourbourg via the Canal de Bourbourg, then and on to Dunkerque. Turn right (south-east) to head along the Liaison Dunkerque-Escaut towards Douai, Paris and the Mediterranean.

Branches off the Canal de Calais

The three branches are listed hereafter for reference, and for possible exploration on foot or by bicycle. They are all heavily silted, and VNF does not allow navigation.

Guînes branch

The branch to the village of Guînes has to be explored by the towpath. It runs close to where the Field of the Cloth of Gold meeting between King Henry VIII and François I happened in 1520.

PK 0.0	Junction with Canal de Calais (PK 25.6), railway bridge
PK 1.1	Lift bridge (Planche-Tournoire)

Current limit of navigation in shallow-draught boats, as none of the lift-bridges are operated.

PK 2.1	Lift bridge (Écluse Carrée)
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There is no longer any superstructure for this bridge, which means that a crane has to be brought in to lift it for the occasional passage of a weed-cutting vessel.

PK 3.8	Lift bridge (Banc-Valois), disused
PK 5.0	Turning basin
PK 5.8	Guînes public quay, town centre 500m
PK 6.2	Terminal basin (filled in)

Ardres branch

PK 0.0	Junction with Canal de Calais (PK 18.1) at Sans-Pareil bridge
PK 0.1	Railway and road bridges
PK 3.6	Brick works and quay l/b
PK 3.8	Swinging footbridge (Brêmes), disused
PK 4.8	Ardres quay, canal ends in cul-de-sac, town 500m

Audruicq branch

PK 0.0	Junction with Canal de Calais (PK 8.1)
PK 1.2	Bridge (Pont Rouge)
PK 2.4	Audruicq canal basin