

RESTORING THE MARITIME CHARACTER OF THE MONT-SAINT-MICHEL

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A N O P E R A T I O N O F N A T I O N A L I N T E R E S T

A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE 



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## THE MONT-SAINT-MICHEL AND ITS BAY, WONDERS OF WORLD HERITAGE

The Mont-Saint-Michel stands in a bay with a remarkable landscape and ecosystem. This site with its rare beauty has been rewarded with two entries on the UNESCO list of world heritage sites (1979). Its international reputation is founded on this exceptional dimension.

Its architectural prowess and its exceptional harmony with its bay, which were so dear to its creators, are timeless. The Mont is a place of high emotion, combining land sea and sky and where Humans meet nature.

This masterpiece was under threat. Sediment had built up around the Mont over the years as humans have intervened: land reclamation and creation of the causeway, construction of the dam and so on. Gradually the sea was pushed back and the land and salt marshes took over. The maritime landscape was scarred by a fifteen-hectare car park at the foot of the ramparts.

International experts were categorical. If nothing had been done, by 2040 the Mont-Saint-Michel would have been surrounded by salt marshes. This transformation would have

swept away once and for all the spirit that was the driving force behind the people who built the abbey.

## THE BAY IS REINVENTING THE MONT

Europe, France, Brittany and Normandy decided to act together to ensure that this treasure of humanity remains a monument desired and preserved for the people who love it and for visitors from all around the world.

With studies launched in 1995, work beginning in 2005 and completed in summer 2015, the operation to re-establish the Mont's maritime character is one of the most original development operations in Europe. The European Union emphasises the sustainable dimension of the Mont-Saint-Michel's development project, which has struck the balance between preserving a major heritage site and managing its many visitors.

The project has lofty ambitions: to profoundly restore the landscape which provides a setting for one of the key locations of humanity and to renew the approach to the site, in the spirit of its crossings and in a way which is more respectful of the site.



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An operation of national interest supported by



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## PROTECTING A MAJOR HERITAGE AND TOURIST SITE

**T**he Mont-Saint-Michel is currently one of the most visited sites in France. Nearly 2.5 million visitors come from all around the world to admire it. But the conditions in which they are received were no longer in keeping either with the location itself or with the public's expectations. The facilities are now finally in keeping with this exceptional site.

**With a new reception, new access and, new methods of transport, everything has been thought of to ensure that the Mont is accessible to everyone.** The approach to the Mont for visitors has been radically improved and redesigned as a crossing between the mainland and the Mont, an expression of the rock's distance. The discover route is worthy of this cathedral of world heritage and its symbolic representation.

To ensure sustainable restoration, all the car parks at the foot of the Mont have been transferred to the mainland. The new access brings visitors through a large reception area. The discovery begins at the car park, placed away from the Mont (2.5 km) on the mainland. It offers new reception services and a **Tourist Information Centre (TIC)**. This glass building, dotted with wood panels, offers visitors the opportunity to know more about the Mont, the Bay and the Normandy and Brittany regions, in a highly attractive interior.

**Visitors can then choose between two routes:** on shuttles running 7/7 and 24/24 or along the landscaped pedestrian walkways that open up spectacular views over the landscape, the Mont and its bay. A range of viewpoints and places to take a breather are available on the dam and the bridge. This much-enhanced site content enables visitors to enjoy their stay at the Mont-Saint-Michel on a much more personal level. The shuttle departures are regulated and adapted to meet the daily visitor numbers to manage flows better.

The project therefore responds to the sustainable management imperatives of a major site. It enables every type of audience to take ownership of it: whether they are seeking a cultural or spiritual approach, to contemplate the Mont in a major landscape or to discover or rediscover it, each visitor takes away their "own little piece of the Mont" at the end of their trip to suit their own aspirations.

*The public partners have launched "The Mont Saint-Michel and its Bay" tourist destination framework contract worth 1.3 million Euro to promote the area to tourists around the world. The contract features a significant marketing and communication aspect tasked with winning international customers.*



The Tourist Information Centre in the car park



### TOURIST MANAGEMENT

Under the auspices of the Joint Council, a Mont-Saint-Michel visitor observatory has been put in place to monitor changes in Mont visitor levels, to assist tourist flow management sustainably on site and to create an effective decision-making assistance and prospecting tool.



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## A BRIDGE TO WALK ON WATER

The different structures that have been produced to re-establish the Mont-Saint-Michel's maritime character are intimately linked via the objective of combining the area's beauty and its technical functions. Refined, elegant and using noble materials, they share understatement and technical intelligence. This sensitive architectural approach symbolises a sustainable development operation that is fully geared towards the bay and the abbey.

### AN ISLAND APPEARS AS IF BY MAGIC

**An extraordinary scenery takes place following the replacement of the former causeway by a footbridge and an esplanade at the foot of the Mont-Saint-Michel.** The esplanade is completely covered by water for around twenty days per year (an average of 40 tides morning and evening). The Mont then becomes an island again for a few hours, with its ramparts surrounded by water as the tides ebb and flow. This phenomenon had not been seen since the causeway was built (1879).

The footbridge remains above water no matter how high the tide. It has been designed to let the waters flow through and provide a spot for visitors to contemplate the Mont and the bay's magnificent landscape.

The Mont's terraces and ramparts offer the perfect viewpoint to watch this tidal show. Visitors can move around at their leisure to look on the bay, its reflections and its fascinating colours.

Evenings also provide the opportunity to enjoy the abbey's summer night-time events, to have dinner in the village's narrow streets and to take advantage of the Mont's atmosphere at night fall, or for early risers, as the sun comes up.



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**Design team:** © Dietmar Feichtinger Architect / Design agency Schlaich, Bergermann & Partner.



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## THE DAM GIVES THE MONT BACK ITS SHARE OF THE TIDES

Commissioned in 2009, the dam over the Couesnon provides the river with enough strength to push sediment out to sea and lower the strand level. With each tide it gradually restores the Mont's maritime character, which has been altered for over a century. The effects of its regulated flush system can already be seen and measured scientifically. **By 2025 the Couesnon will have reformed a wide estuary in the bay. The Mont will have regained its maritime landscape and will keep it for many years to come.**



© Thomas Jouanneau

The dam has become an unmissable stopping point on the path that leads out to the Mont or which brings visitors back to the mainland.

Visitors enjoy the peace and quiet afforded by its maritime balcony, a space suspended above the waters, covered in wood and facing the Mont. It also forms a link between two banks, and between bay and continent.

On the path which leads to the Mont, visitors can stand while the tide comes in and watch the water be released. You can also watch the sluice gates move and see the interplay as the dam fills and empties.

**Design team:** © BRL Ingénierie / Luc Weizmann architect / SPRETEC / ANTEA



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## THE MAIN STEPS

The operation to restore the Mont-Saint-Michel's maritime character, supported by the French government and the Baie du Mont-Saint-Michel Joint Council will be fully complete in 2015.



**2009** > **Commissioning of the dam over the Couesnon**, which was officially launched by the French Prime Minister in June 2006. The structure, which is the cornerstone

of the project's hydraulic aspect, has begun its work to remove the sand build-up around the rock with effective results.

\* Prix de l'Ingénierie 2010 (Engineering award)



**2010-2011** > These years saw **the preparation of the reception structures** (landscaped car park, reception and service buildings) **and access work for the Mont** enabling a completely new approach to the Mont. They also marked the start of the **developments upstream and downstream of the dam** (2011-2015) which restored the Couesnon's hydraulic capacity to move sediment away from the rock.



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**2012** > On 28th April **the new car park on the mainland and the public transport shuttles were commissioned** to bring visitors to the Mont. The construction of the bridge began during the same period.



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**2014** > **The bridge was opened to visitors** (pedestrians, bikes and shuttles), but also logistics and the Mont's permanent security services. Thousands of visitors come to see the Mont surrounded by water at high tides again.

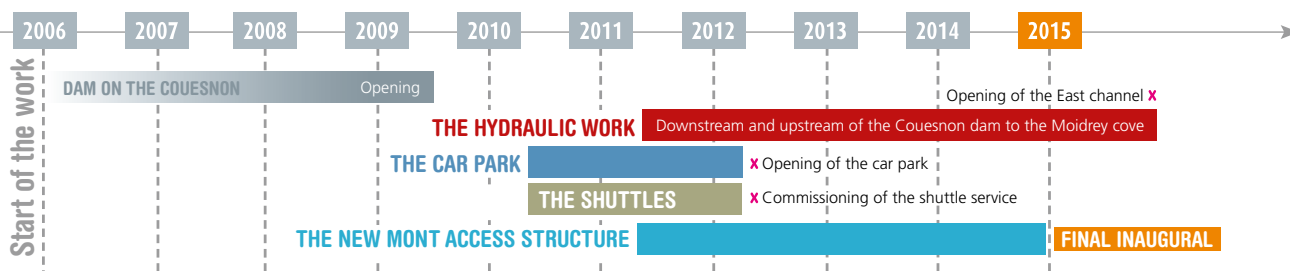


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**2015** > **For the tourist season, the work to re-establish the Mont-Saint-Michel's maritime character is completed.** More symbolically still, the operation is completed with the destruction of the causeway, which was over 100 years old (1879) and which brought visitors from the mainland to the Mont and the full reconditioning of the site (dismantling of the old maritime car parks). Within a few years (2025), the Mont will have regained its full maritime landscape.

**The Mont-Saint-Michel remains open to visitors during the work. Information on the "major work" and a pedestrian guide are available from the site at all times.**

### TIMETABLE



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AN OPERATION OF NATIONAL INTEREST

A PARTNERSHIP OPERATION

Restoring the Mont-Saint-Michel's maritime character represents 184.74 million Euro of direct public investment.

<p><b>European Feder funding</b> €21.15 million</p>	<p><b>French Government</b> €84.93 million</p>
<p>Syndicat Mixte via its local authority members: <b>€74.86 million</b></p>	
<p><b>Lower Normandy Region</b> €35.36 million</p>	<p><b>Brittany Region</b> €15.77 million</p>
<p><b>Manche Department</b> €11.79 million</p>	<p><b>Ille-et-Vilaine Department</b> €4.44 million</p>
<p><b>Self-funding: €7.50 million</b></p>	
<p><b>Water Agency Seine-Normandie</b></p>	<p><b>Water Agency Loire-Bretagne</b> €3.80 million</p>



Cost of the structures: €184.74 M

- > **Hydraulic structures:** €68.52 M
    - Dam: €33.90 M
    - Upstream hydraulics: €24,04 M
    - Downstream hydraulics: €10,58 M
  - > **Access structures:** €38.04 M
    - Pedestrian footbridge: €35.24 M
    - Work on Historic Monuments: €2.80 M
  - > **Project ownership costs:** €29.55 M
  - > **Index provisions:** €22.82 M
  - > **VAT balance:** €4.2 M
- Veolia Transport is financing the construction of the car park and shuttles for €24 M within the context of a Public Service Delegation contract.*

**Project Owner**

Syndicat Mixte Baie du Mont-Saint-Michel  
16 route de La Caserne  
50170 Beauvoir

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