L'Ile d'Elle / Maillezais
Vendée Vélo Tour

This Vendée Vélo Tour stage leads you towards the Marais Poitevin, marshlands known as La Venise Verte, or Green Venice, in France! For starters, follow the meanders of the Sèvre Niortaise River, then tackle the slopes of Vix's vineyards before continuing your cycling adventure through the Parc Naturel Régional du Marais Poitevin. If you're really lucky, you may spot a European otter on Charrouin Island, while foodies will enjoy tasting the local speciality, préfou (unleavened garlic bread), in Maillé. At Maillé, ride alongside the Aqueduc, a surprising piece of hydraulic engineering built to deal with a point where two rivers cross paths, but without mixing their waters… For a fine end to this stage, do visit Maillezais Abbey, its majestic ruins visible from afar. To give your legs a rest, embark on a punting trip to explore the heart of France's Venise Verte from the quays of this charming village.

Départ L'Ile d'Elle	**Arrivée** Maillezais
Durée 2 h 40 min	**Distance** 26,76 Km
Niveau I begin / Family	**Thématique** Nature & small heritage

The route

On this Vendée Vélo Tour stage, you mainly ride along quiet tarmacked roads (a few stretches taking you over into the neighbouring département, or county, of Charente-Maritime), except at L'île Charrouin (in the commune, or parish, of Vix) and La Levée du Bois Dieu (Maillezais), where you cycle along sections of greenway. You need to follow the signposting for Vendée Vélo – here, the way is in fact shared with the Vélo Francette cycle route until you arrive south of the Île Charrouin beside Vix. From L'Île d'Elle, follow directions for Maillé, then Maillezais, followed by Nieul-sur-l'Autise and Saint-Michel-le-Cloucq.
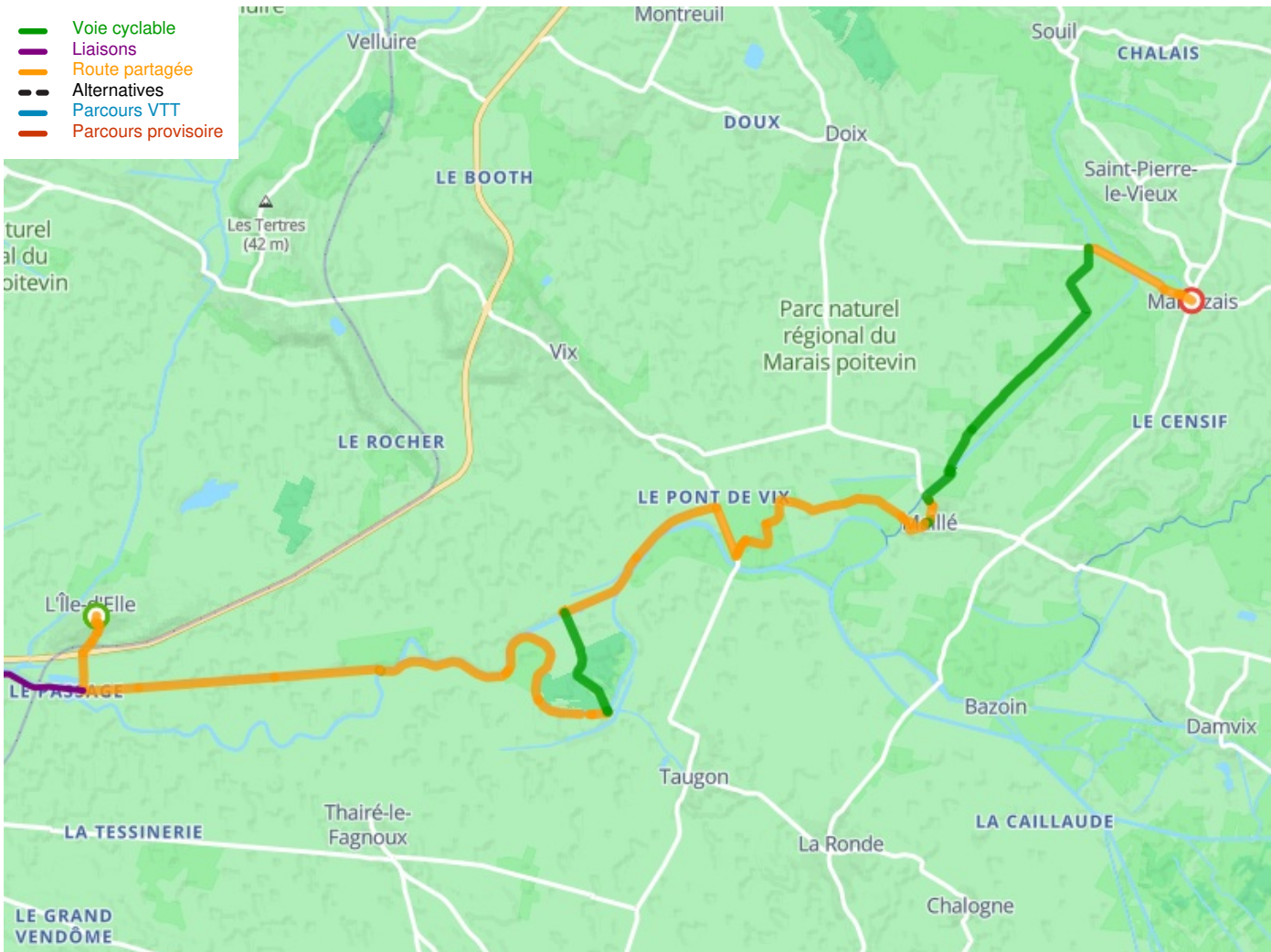
Don't miss

- **The Parc Naturel Régional du Marais Poitevin**, protecting unique French marshlands in an area reputed for its rich natural and cultural heritage. Among its landscapes, the marais mouillé (wetlands) has been recognized with the rare accreditation of a Grand Site de France and is popularly known as France's Venise Verte, or Green Venice. A trip on a punt provides an unforgettable way of immersing yourself in its labyrinth of canals, often carpeted with duckweed and, in season, shaded by alleys of trees resembling cathedrals of greenery.
- **Vix**:
  - **Chain-operated ferry boat**: given there's no bridge here, this ingenious system makes it easy to cross from one side to another of the Sèvre Niortaise River, with the added attraction of finding refreshment at the guinguette (a typical outdoor waterside restaurant) south of Vix.
  - **L'Île Charrouin**: listed as a protected natural area (espace naturel sensible) since 1985 and located in a meander in the Sèvre River, this is a haven of peace in which to seek out remarkable regional flora and fauna. The island presents a mix of earth banks, tall trees and meadows grazed by Maraîchine cows, a rustic species that almost became extinct.
- **Maillé**: enjoy a stop in this pretty little village to discover the traditions of a typical Marais Poitevin community, plus, aboard the Bateaux Capucines boats, sample the local culinary speciality, préfou (an unleavened garlic bread), prepared by the village baker, as well as perhaps tasting a craft drink made using local hops, bearing the certification Valeurs Parc Naturel Régional.
  - **L'Aqueduc**: or to be precise, an bridge-aqueduct,

as here two waterways cross, but without their waters ever mixing! This engineering marvel illustrates the hydraulic complexity of the Marais Poitevin… plus it demonstrated great technical prowess ahead of its time, as it was built between 1654 and 1662.
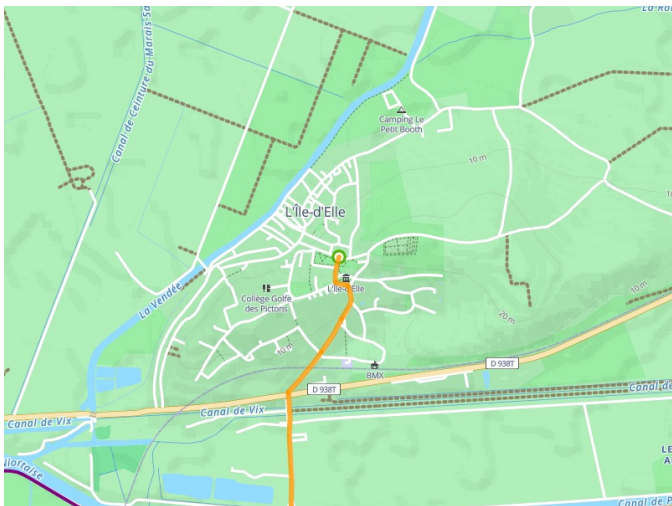
- **Maillezais Abbey**: one of the major historic sites in the département, or county, of Vendée, its ruins still rising to 55m in height, and offering visitors today a rare overview of the flat Marais Poitevin! The abbey dates back in part one thousand years, its architecture mixing Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance elements. (Accueil Vélo accredited site)

SNCF Train stations

- Note that there is no train station on this stage

Voie cyclable
Liaisons
Route partagée
Alternatives
Parcours VTT
Parcours provisoire

Départ
L'Ile d'Elle

Arrivée
Maillezais