

Roland Garros - The crossing of the Mediterranean sea in 1913 - A tremendous feat

On September 23, 1913, **Roland Garros** took off from the Fréjus Aerodrome near St. Raphael at 5.47 am for the first successful crossing in history.- the crossing of the Mediterranean sea.



On September 23rd, 1913 Roland Garros' plane takes off from Fréjus.

The Flight Preparation

This flight was the result of a long preparation started in July 1913.

For this incredible feat 2 similar planes, the Morane Saulnier H model, were equipped with a 60 h.p. Gnome Sigma engine and a Chauviere propeller.

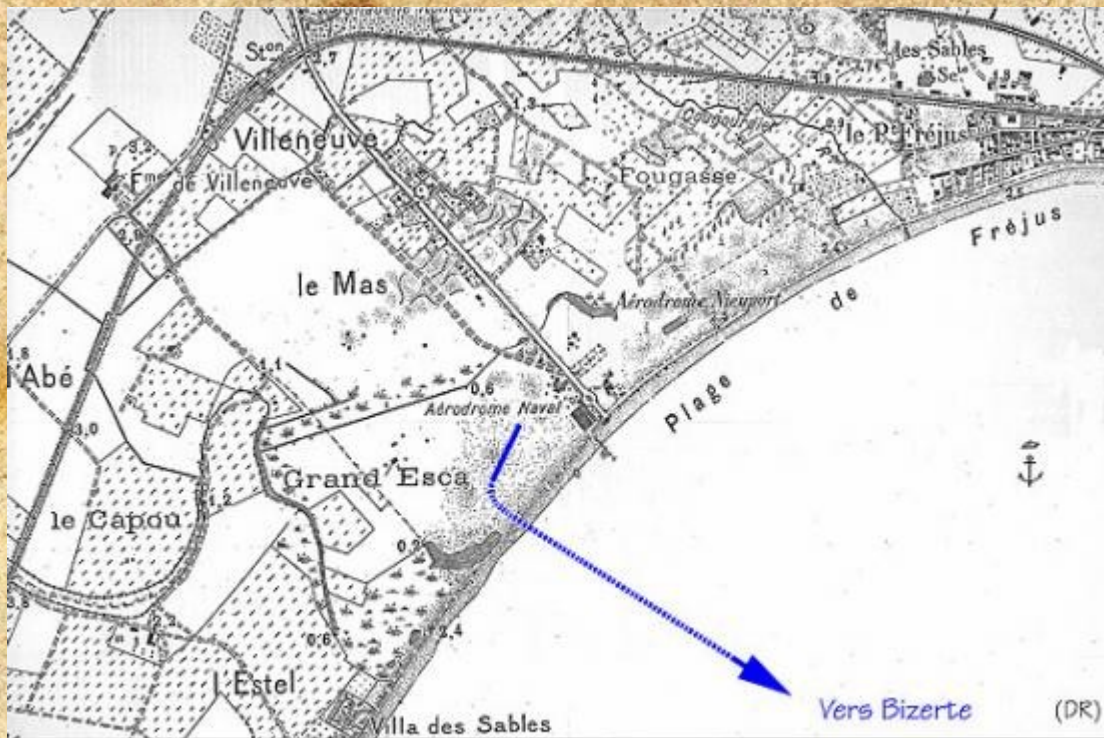
The engine was optimized to give the best performance rate with low fuel

The objective was to diminish the weight of the plane. Nevertheless, the Morane Saulnier took off with 200 L of fuel and 60 L of castor oil.

The Challenge

The flight itself represented a real challenge. Firstly, no other aviator had successfully crossed the Mediterranean sea before Roland Garros.

Secondly, at this time planes were not very reliable as it was a recent invention. (During the crossing the Morane Saulnier experienced engine trouble twice.)



D'après carte IGN de 1913 : l'endroit d'où a décollé Garros le 23 sept 1913 à 5 h 47

September 23rd, 1913 : 5,47 am The aerodrome where Roland Garros took off -IGN Map

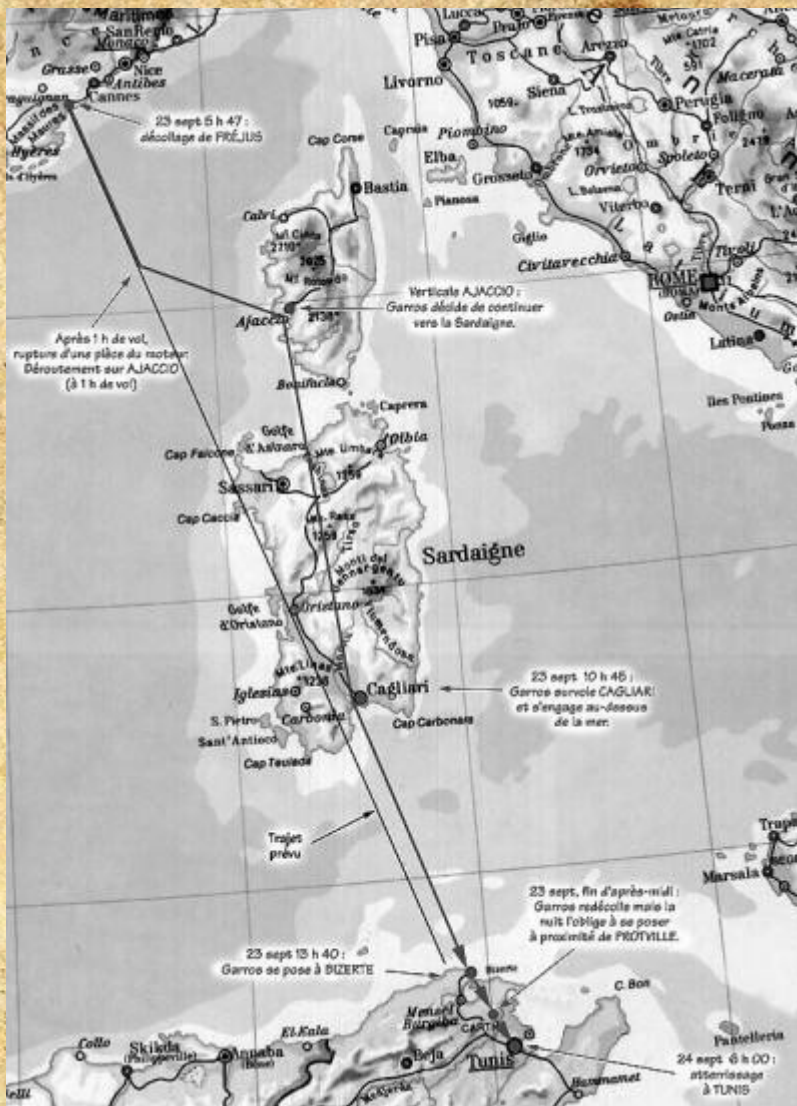
The Flight Path

Roland Garros took off from the Fréjus aerodrome located in the South of France.

He landed in Bizerta, (Tunisia) at 1.45 p.m.

The distance he flew was about 500 miles.

This took nearly eight hours of non stop flying.



Initially the flight was supposed to follow a straight path along the coast of Corsica and over Sardinia.

Corsica and Sardinia were to provide diversion fields in case of any engine trouble or other technical difficulties.

Because of the first engine problems he experienced, Garros decided to fly over Corsica

and Sardinia, diverting from the expected flight path.

IGN Map : Garros' flight path across the Mediterranean sea

The Weather :

The weather conditions were unfavorable.

In fact, a few days before, Garros was obliged to postpone the flight because of strong adverse winds which would have decelerated the speed of the plane.

During the crossing, the wind velocity changed significantly.

This caused Garros to divert from his initial flight plan and increased the duration of the flight.

Engine troubles

After leaving Frejus, the first hour of flight was problem-free. The ascent and the cruising speed were normal. Just as Garros saw Corsica, after 20 minutes of flight, a loud noise came from the engine, as if a piece of metal had broken. Despite this pinking noise coming from the engine, Garros was able to continue his flight.

As a precautionary measure, Garros veered off course in order to fly over Corsica in case of need. He decided to steer towards Sardinia.

Altitude : 4900 ft Because of the winds and clouds Garros was forced to descend over Sardinia.

Altitude : 2600 ft

Garros was afraid of falling behind on schedule which would require more fuel. He had planned for a mechanic to wait for him in Cagliari in case of delay.

11,35 am, he continued his flight over Cagliari despite the fact that he was one hour late and had consumed a lot of fuel.

He experienced engine trouble for a second time. There was another noise of metal breaking. Once again the engine didn't stop and Garros was able to continue his flight.

The Fuel Consumption

Garros had other difficulties to face, namely his fuel consumption.

He climbed to 8000 ft/19800ft, knowing that reaching this altitude would allow him to consume less fuel.

At this point in time, Garros was flying over the sea. He throttled down to decrease fuel consumption but the engine nearly stalled.

The Arrival :

At first Garros searched the horizon for the African coast without the least bit of success.

He didn't think it was necessary to accept the Government's offer to be accompanied by a cruiser. But the French naval authorities decided nevertheless to take the precaution to send 3 torpedo boats to await his arrival.

When Roland Garros spotted the torpedo boats, he dived in their direction. 10 minutes later, the Tunisian coast appeared ahead.

He landed in Bizerta after 7.53 minutes of flying. He had just
5 liters of fuel left in the tank.



September 23rd, 1913 in the afternoon.
Landing in Bizerta, Tunisia

One of the first telegrams of congratulations received by **Garros** was from Louis Barthou, President of the Council and Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. It read:

"I am pleased to congratulate you for this daring feat you have accomplished honoring your own bravery but also the French aviation"

Back to Paris
on September 26th,
1913



Retour triomphal à Paris le 26 septembre 1913

Roland Garros was applauded by the crowd and became famous for completing the first non-stop flight across the Mediterranean Sea.



1913 in Paris : exhibition of Roland Garros' plane,
the Morane Saulnier

A short time later, Roland Garros evoked the anxiety he felt about this eventful flight.

"I was lost in the clouds, around 9842 ft and I had no way of knowing if the plane was moving forwards or backwards, if I was diverted from the flight path on the right or on the left because of the wind....

I could say, without exaggerating, that as a pilot, I have never experienced such a difficult hour of flight in my career."

Extract from "les Ailes Glorieuses" By Jacques Mortane