

# "Garfield" phones have littered France's coast for 30 years; mystery solved

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For more than 30 years bright orange "Garfield" phones have been washing up on the French coast to the bemusement of local beach cleaners, who have finally cracked the mystery behind them. Locals had long suspected a lost shipping container was to blame for the novelty landline phones, modelled on the prickly feline cartoon character, that have plagued the northern Finistere beaches for decades.

"Our association has existed for 18 years and in that time we have found pieces of Garfield telephones almost each time we clean," said Claire Simonin, the head of local beach cleaning group Ar Viltansou in Brittany.

But it wasn't until a local resident revealed that he had discovered the container after a storm in the 1980s that they were finally able to locate it -- wedged in a partially submerged cave only accessible at low tide."He told us where it was... it was very, very dangerous," Simonin told AFP after an expedition to track it down.



Spare parts of plastic 'Garfield' phones are displayed on the beach, March 28, 2019 in Plouarzel, western France, after being collected from a sea cave by environmental activists.GETTY

"We found this incredible fissure that is 100 feet deep and at the very bottom, there were the remains of a container." "Under the boulders in front of the entrance, we found 23 complete handsets with electronics and wires. They were everywhere," she added. But the mystery, first reported by the France Info public broadcaster, is not *fully* solved.

"We have no idea what happened at the time: we do not know where it came from, what boat," said Fabien Boileau, director of the Iroise Marine Nature Park in Finistere. "And we don't know if several containers fell into the water, or only one."

The dry-witted Garfield, first dreamed up by illustrator Jim Davis in the late 1970s, has since spawned a television show, a film series starring Bill Murray as the voice of the titular cat, and a merchandising empire worth hundreds of millions of dollars annually.



The discoveries in France highlight the problem of plastic pollution, which has become the subject of a major global environmental campaign in recent years. The world currently produces more than 300 million tons of plastics annually, and there are at least five trillion plastic pieces floating in our oceans, scientists have estimated. Some forecasts predict that there will be more plastic in the seas than fish by 2050.

Even animals living in the deepest ocean trenches have been found with fragments in their gut, according to new research published in February showing how the scourge reached into the bowels of the planet.

Container ships arriving from Asia and elsewhere travel past the northwestern coast of France as they head to the major European ports including Calais, Antwerp or Rotterdam. Around 148 million shipping containers are sent by sea each year, according to the International Maritime Organization, a United Nations agency.

Between 2008 and 2016, shipping companies lost over 1,500 containers on average each year, most during accidents such as capsizing, running aground or when sailing in heavy seas, according to a survey by the World Shipping Council, a trade association. In one accident alone in 2014, more than 500 containers were lost from a ship run by the company Maersk in a storm in the Bay of Biscay.

Depending on what is in them, lost containers can have long-lasting effects on marine life and coastal communities. (Most of the containers lost in the 2014 Maersk accident were empty, and none contained hazardous material, the company said.)

Rules on reporting and dealing with lost containers vary globally. As part of an action plan on marine waste, the International Maritime Organization plans to discuss in May setting standard procedures for the reporting of lost containers and for addressing liability for plastic consumer goods lost at sea.

Volunteers in Brittany tracked down the source of the Garfield phones after a local man told them about a big storm that struck in the early 1980s. Last week they ventured into the sea cave, normally cut off by the tide and only accessible a few days each year, where they found metal from a container and Garfield-shaped phone shells, still containing potentially dangerous electronic components.

The telephones appeared to have been those made by Tyco, advertised in the 1980s as “real phones for real fun.” They feature a keypad, have a classic electric “ring” — and Garfield’s eyelids slide half-open when the user picks up the handset. They have survived as vintage items, still sold on auction websites and at flea markets. They will also very likely continue to haunt the Brittany shoreline.

“Behind the fun character of Garfield, there is plastic pollution that does not decompose in the ocean, and that we will continue to face for years,” said Claire Simonin-Le Meur, a local volunteer.

In March, the ship "Grande America" sank 300 kilometers west of the town of La Rochelle, spilling 2,000 cars and 365 shipping containers into the ocean, 45 of which held dangerous materials.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/garfield-phones-mystery-devices-washing-up-on-beaches-france/>

[https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/magazine/anchovy-dressing-salad-recipe.html?fallback=0&reid=1JObWCyLECE34ogYuot8FrViljB&locked=0&geoContinent=EU&geoRegion=M&recAlloc=story&geoCountry=ES&blockId=home-featured&imp\\_id=132722224&action=click&module=editorContent&pctype=Article&region=CompanionColumn&contentCollection=Trending](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/magazine/anchovy-dressing-salad-recipe.html?fallback=0&reid=1JObWCyLECE34ogYuot8FrViljB&locked=0&geoContinent=EU&geoRegion=M&recAlloc=story&geoCountry=ES&blockId=home-featured&imp_id=132722224&action=click&module=editorContent&pctype=Article&region=CompanionColumn&contentCollection=Trending)

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