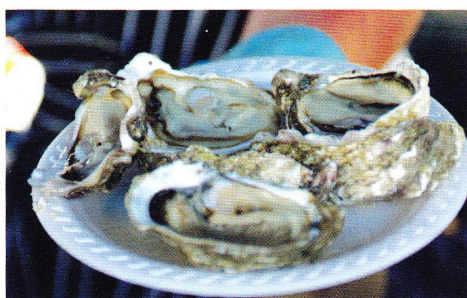


# At low tide

Freelance journalist, **Susie Boulton**, takes a walk on the wild side at low tide and discovers the molluscs on Jersey's seashores.

## In search of the Ormer

If you happen to be on the beach off-season you might spot locals scouring large rocks in search of the near-mythical gastropod: the ear-shaped ormer. A relative of the limpet, this indigenous mollusc is prized for its delicate flavour and beautiful mother-



of-pearl inner shell. The Channel Islands are the most northerly of its habitats and it was formerly an Island staple. Overfishing led to the ormer becoming a gourmet rarity, and nowadays there are stringent regulations to protect it. Fishing is only permitted between October and April, and only on the first day of each new or full moon and the five days following. Those who flout the rules are subject to hefty fines.

## Oyster Finds

Equally rare is the Jersey oyster, which was once a rich source of income for the island. In 1797 large numbers of the shellfish were

discovered on the muddy seabed between Jersey and Normandy. Boatloads were sold off to the English market and the thriving industry led to the construction of Gorey harbour and village, formerly nicknamed 'the Pearl of the East'. By the 1830s the village had doubled in size, its fleet of 250 oyster fishing smacks bringing in around 12,000 oysters on each trip. The French and English tried to muscle in on the flourishing industry, with their oyster fishing boats encroaching on Jersey waters. Efforts at control finally gave way to a free for all and by the middle of the century the oyster beds had been over-fished and the industry was all but over. You can still find the occasional native oyster far out at low tide but those that end up on your platter, the more plentiful Pacific oysters, will have been nurtured in farms in Grouville Bay.



Up to 600 tons of oysters are harvested here annually, making it the biggest production in the British Isles. Cultivation takes place in



what is known as the Jersey Ramsar Site, stretching from St Helier Harbour to Gorey Pier. This protected marine wilderness, characterised by weather-worn reefs, mud, sand and shingle shores, is exposed twice daily by one of the largest tidal ranges in the world. Some 107 species of fish, 57 of crustacean, 113 of mollusc and 230 of seaweed have been recorded here. The oyster seed is brought from hatcheries in France, each one just 6mm in size. They grow in netted sacks on the beach for around 18 months by which time they have reached their selling weight. Seventy per cent are exported to UK and France.

Visitors to Jersey can follow an oyster trail at low tide with expert guide Trudi Trox, a German geographer with a passion for the sea and an impressive knowledge of oysters, ormers and other Jersey shellfish. The trail also takes in the Bouchot mussels, sweet molluscs grown from seed on rows of wooden poles. Walks end with oyster tasting at the Seymour Inn. Here you're guaranteed superfresh oysters - the pub lies opposite the beach where the pearls of the sea are bred.

Information on Oyster Trails can be found at: [www.jerseywalkadventures.co.uk](http://www.jerseywalkadventures.co.uk)

