

ISLAND LIFE

Jersey, Channel Islands

Corbiere Lighthouse, on Jersey's southwest tip, was built in 1874. The light was mostly dim during German occupation (1940-1945).

jersey revealed

Take a walk with us along the seafloor, and see the other half of Jersey.

BY SUSAN MCCARTHY

» I'M STANDING HALF A MILE FROM THE JERSEY shore in Wellington boots, eating seaweed, having just discovered my favorite variety of it. This is not what I had planned for this trip — walking away from land and into a different world. But I have found a place that some say is Jersey's last wilderness: the sea bottom.

Just 14 miles from France — though a self-governed area dependent on the British Crown — Jersey is the largest, most southern of the English Channel Islands. It's 45 square miles when the tide is in and double that when the tide goes out.

It gets loads of sunshine, which once made it England's greenhouse and farmers' market.

The charming island of fruit and flowers, Jersey's terra firma, I had experienced for myself yesterday. I'd come to see its famed zoo, founded by conservationist Gerald Durrell in 1959, and then, after, decided to explore the small, nine-mile-long island. From a little bus that traverses its length, I had seen its greenness and its explosions of yellow — daffodils blanketing fields, daffodils on cliffs, daffodils along the lanes — and I saw the famous toast-colored Jersey cows grazing

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Jersey is a land of contrasts best experienced by hiking the seafloor when the tide is out, after you've explored its farmers' markets and flower-filled meadows. From the shore of the Royal Bay of Grouville, take a guided hike about a mile out to Seymour Tower, a defensive structure built in the 1780s to guard against French attack.

in the fields. Their cream, I later discovered over a lunchtime soup, is as rich as rumored. It was later in the day in the capital of St. Helier, though, that I came across a notice for an unusual tour: tidal walks. These guided two- to five-mile walks across the temporarily exposed ocean floor sounded to me like a marvelous way to understand the whole island — not just the part above water. I signed on.

The next day, I arrived for a noontime tour that began at Le Hocq in St. Clement Parish on the southeast coast; half a dozen other adventurers were waiting by the shore of Moonscape beach. We strolled out from the sea wall and, as guide Andrew Syvret explained our route, the water fell rapidly and silently, baring the ocean floor. I didn't see it move, but every time I returned my gaze to the waterline, the newly uncovered landscape stretched farther and farther away, great tumbles of rock among miles of sand.

We walked to where, until some 8,000 years ago, a land bridge connected Jersey to France. "Woolly mammoths used to run around here," Syvret said. We splashed past oyster farms where the delicacy, clean and pure, grows in mesh sacks on metal tables fixed



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to the seabed. I touched the sacks, marveling that they would be under 15 feet of water in a few hours.

Syvret showed us different seaweeds, including pepper dulse, which he said tastes “a little like mushrooms, a little like curry and a little like some kind of seafood.” So here I am, crouching in my Wellies, nibbling dulse a half mile from shore. The flavor is delicate, yet rich. I take another taste, and another. The sun is warm on my back. Syvret points out a seaweed referred to as *cliaque* in the local dialect of Jërriais, named for the sound it makes when you drop it. He shows us an invasive seaweed called oyster thief, a type called carrageen, and nori, which most of us have eaten wrapped around sushi. It’s OK, but it’s not as good as the pepper dulse. As we walk, I keep a sharp eye out for more dulse.

“There’s a natural reluctance in my father’s generation toward eating seaweed,” says Syvret. During World War II, he tells us, the Nazis occupied the Channel Islands and put locals on starvation rations. They ate seaweed, especially carrageen, out of necessity.

We have lunch far out from shore on a towering pile of rocks topped by an old beacon. The sun shines

as we eat sandwiches and look out to the turbulent sea. Gulls, gannets and shags wheel past. Sometimes, our guide tells us, you will see barn owls fly by, winging from Jersey to France for an evening’s hunting.

The tide, we all know, can return with shocking speed, trapping idlers on rock spires which become submerged. “There can be 30 seconds between getting back safely, and not,” Syvret says. So, long before the tide’s rise, we turn around, heading away from the domain of gannets, oysters and cliaque to the familiar Jersey of cows, cream and daffodils. ✦

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SOUTH-SIDE ELEGANCE: Stay at the Eulah Country House, an Edwardian-style mansion-turned-hotel that overlooks St. Aubin’s Bay and the capital, St. Helier, on the island’s south side. Rates from \$190, including breakfast. eulah.co.uk

HIGH TIDE: At the nine-acre Jersey Lavender Farm, learn how oil is extracted from the plants and visit the Farm Shop for all things lavender, such as a jar of lavender-and-honey mustard. Admission is \$4.50. Open from May 9 to September 17, jerseylavender.co.uk. Four miles north of St. Helier is the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, better known as the Jersey zoo, home to several rescued species, including the black lion tamarin and the Andean bear. The \$14.50 admission supports Durrell conservation programs. durrellwildlife.org

LOW TIDE: Discover Jersey’s vast stretch of wilderness on a tidal walk, or “moonwalk,” led by guide Derek Hairon, who is also known for his kayak tours. Due to fast-changing, 40-foot tides, no one should explore these areas without a local expert. Rates from \$25 for a three-hour tour. Tours are scheduled according to the tides. jerseykayakadventures.co.uk



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