

What lies beneath

Jersey has one of the largest tidal ranges in the world. As the sea drains away from shallow offshore waters, **Carolyn Fry** explores an undersea world accessible to walkers for only a few hours each day.



THIS PAGE: ALEX BENWELL; OPPOSITE: STEVE WELLM/JERSEY TOURISM

Jersey's tidal areas are home to numerous species...if only we could find them

Opposite: The tide recedes to reveal a rocky seabed around Seymour Tower

TWICE A day, the island of Jersey increases in size by up to a third. It's all down to the ebb and flow of the tide as the pull of the moon sucks water away from its cinnamon beaches and jagged cliffs, exposing a bizarre low-lying landscape. Pink granite outcrops emerge dripping into the daylight as salty streams drain away sea water.

For just a few hours, landlubbers get the chance to walk on the seabed among the crabs, seaweed and starfish that call this seemingly hostile

terrain home. Then the tide floods back in, the island shrinks and it's hard to believe there was ever anything so unusual beneath the waves.

"This habitat is only an hour from Paris or London but it's no less special than the Great Barrier Reef," says marine biologist Andrew Syvret.

Along with 20 or so locals and holidaymakers, I've joined Andrew for a three-hour guided walk across the seabed. We aim to meander around the rock pools towards the distant French coast until we reach Icho

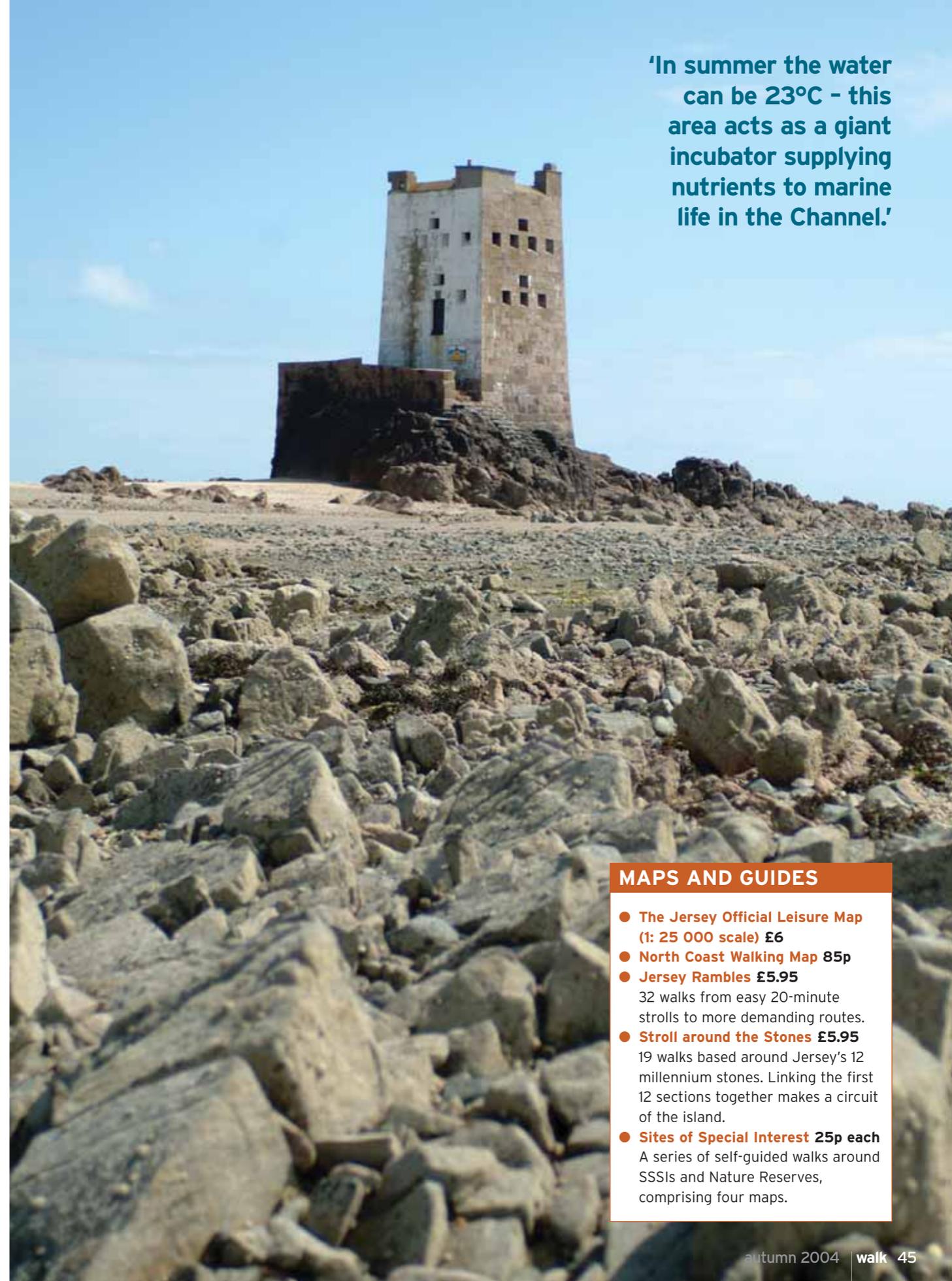
Tower, one of several forts built around the end of the 18th century. Though it sounds like the kind of walk you could do on your own, you'd be foolhardy to try without knowing your way around the rocks and gullies. "When the tide comes in, the water rises by 5cms a minute," warns Andrew. "It could be over your wellingtons in less than ten minutes."

GOING WITH THE FLOW

As we set out along a sandy channel between low granite ridges we walk with the current - the water lapping our ankles is, reassuringly, flowing out to sea. Crows drop shells onto the rocks to smash them open before swooping down to peck out the flesh. There are rich pickings for birds and fishermen alike here. Sea anemones and limpets cling to the rocks while, beneath the tidal waters, all manner of fish and shellfish thrive among the protective fronds of seaweed. "In summer the water can be 23°C - this area acts as a giant incubator supplying nutrients to marine life in the Channel," says Andrew.

After half an hour or so, we come to a series of low metal racks containing bulging →

'In summer the water can be 23°C - this area acts as a giant incubator supplying nutrients to marine life in the Channel.'



MAPS AND GUIDES

- **The Jersey Official Leisure Map (1: 25 000 scale) £6**
- **North Coast Walking Map 85p**
- **Jersey Rambles £5.95**
32 walks from easy 20-minute strolls to more demanding routes.
- **Stroll around the Stones £5.95**
19 walks based around Jersey's 12 millennium stones. Linking the first 12 sections together makes a circuit of the island.
- **Sites of Special Interest 25p each**
A series of self-guided walks around SSSIs and Nature Reserves, comprising four maps.

mesh sacks of oysters. "Organisms living here are highly tuned to the rhythms of their environment. If you take these oysters and put them on a plane to Tokyo, they would still open and close in time with the Jersey tides."

As well as harbouring animals, the shallow sea is the natural habitat of hundreds of different plants. Eel-grass, Jersey's only flowering marine plant, grows here, along with some 250 species of seaweed. Some of the seaweeds are edible while others have medicinal properties. The clear gel that oozes from the spiral wrack under our feet is good for treating skin conditions such as eczema.

RESTING PLACE

Suddenly aware of the heavy black clouds ahead we continue apace across sand and gravel towards Icho Tower. We scramble over the large granite boulders at its base to sit on a low platform with our backs pressed against the tower's smooth pink blocks. As we gather our breath, Andrew explains that the seabed we've just walked over is the equivalent of wild mountains or open countryside to the people of Jersey. "This is where we can come to lose ourselves. But you always have to remember there's an element of risk because of the tides."

The sea surging around the rocks just beyond the tower is a reminder that we, too, are resting on borrowed time. Taking a last look at the view, we clamber down and retrace our steps to dry land. It won't be long before the sea will be racing in to wash away any trace of our footprints.

The Moon Walk to Icho Tower features in Jersey's Autumn Walking Week. ■

STEVE WELLM/JERSEY TOURISM



CONTACTS

Jersey Tourism ☎ 01534 500777

Island bus transport and travel passes ☎ 01534 877772

JERSEY'S AUTUMN WALKING WEEK 18 TO 25 SEPTEMBER

Here is a selection of guided walks on offer. Walks are free and do not need to be pre-booked unless indicated. For the full walks programme visit www.jersey.com. A festival leaflet is available on the island.

MOON WALK TO ICHO TOWER

18 SEPTEMBER • 3 MILES (5 KMS)

Start point: advised at time of booking

Suitable wet-to-the-knee footwear

Pre-book (£10) ☎ 01534 485201

VALLEY AND VILLAGE WANDER

18 SEPTEMBER • 3 MILES (5KMS)

Start point: Queen's Valley Car Park, Rue D'Aval, Grouville

Exploring Jersey's east coast. Woodland paths and peaceful country lanes leading to the harbour town of Gorey. Learn about the island's oyster fishing and shipbuilding industries.

COWS, COCKLES AND CABBAGES

18 SEPTEMBER • 2 MILES (3KMS)

Start point: Liberation Square, St Helier

Historical tour of the town includes the 200-year-old indoor Victorian markets.

ALMOST DOWNHILL ALL THE WAY

19 SEPTEMBER • 6 MILES (10KMS)

Start point: Bonne Nuit Harbour Slipway, St John

After a stiff climb from sea level, this walk follows a stream through some of Jersey's prettiest scenery.

WESTERN FORTIFICATIONS WW2

19 SEPTEMBER • 2.5 MILES (4KMS)

Start point: L'Etacq bus stop

Historical walk visiting the restored Battery of Moltke and the impressive German observation tower at Les Landes.

MOON WALK TO SEYMOUR TOWER

19 SEPTEMBER • 3 MILES (5 KMS)

Start point: advised at time of booking

With marine biologist Andrew Syvret.

Suitable wet-to-the-knee footwear.

Pre-book (£10) ☎ 01534 485201

AROUND THE ISLAND WALK

20-24 SEPTEMBER • 48 MILES (77KMS)

Start point: Liberation Square, St Helier

Five-day trek around Jersey's coastline - sandy beaches, craggy headlands, granite towers, historic castles and ancient burial chambers. Pre-book ☎ 01534 500777