

# TO THE END OF JERSEY – AND BEYOND

Splashing about in rock pools – sometimes more than one mile offshore – may seem a strange way to spend your day. For **Derek Hairon** and **Trudie Trox** at Jersey Walk Adventures, guiding people into the remarkable inter-tidal area off the south-east coast of Jersey is something of a speciality.

AS the ocean recedes, a huge mass of rocks, gullies and rock pools materializes in front of your eyes. If you walk with someone who knows as much as Derek about the area you'll start spotting things you would otherwise miss.

It is one of the reasons why he tends to avoid using the term 'Moonwalk' and explains: 'To me, the term describes a barren lunar-like place with no life and little history. Instead, you quickly discover just how important the intertidal zone has been in the development of Jersey.'

Not only did this area lead to the growth of the fishing industry, it also generated a 'Klondike' style gold rush in the

early 19th Century. But it was not gold the prospectors found – but oysters. In its heyday over 300 boats were oyster dredging out of Gorey harbour and around 2,000 people earned their living with fishing, sorting or trading oysters.

By 1850 over-fishing had decimated the oysters. Put this into modern terms and you would be looking at an industry second to the finance sector. In other spots you will find evidence of the importance of seaweed or vraic gathering along with cut tracks for horse and carts between the rocks around the south coast.

'The importance and size of the vraicing industry is another hidden bit of our history,' said Derek.

Jersey's huge tidal ranges make the Violet Bank – as the fishermen know it – a place where the water can rise by up to 3 inches per minute on the biggest tides. For anyone who doubts his word, Derek has some impressive videos on the Jersey Walk Adventures website

(<http://www.jerseywalkadventures.co.uk/go/photos/videos/>)

This is not a place to be in unless you are walking with an experienced guide or have good local knowledge.

The south-east coast was Derek's very first playground:

'We'd play and swim in the gullies as the tide came in and my mother always kept three sets of dry clothing in the airing cupboard as I'd normally come home wet. I'm not sure if she knew of some of the adventures we were having.'

His family has lived on the east coast for four generations and on stormy days seaweed can still land in his garden. One relative was a fisherman who crewed on the Howard D - the first motorised lifeboat in Jersey- and for T B Davis on the "Westward". Derek's father was a keen low water fisherman - in his will he asked to have his ashes scattered near Icho Tower.



Trudie Trox



Derek Hairon





Sand bars at Ichu Tower



A Winter walk



Karame Beacon



Oyster beds



Parasitic Anemone

Until the mid 1980's lots of people went low water fishing on the lowest tides. If anyone wanted to explore and discover the low water area, someone would know who could take you out.

And Derek added with a smile: 'I doubt they'd have been willing to reveal their secret lobster, ormer and shell fish spots though, but they were sharing a wealth of knowledge. Over the last 30 years these people seem to have disappeared. It's partly a result of the arrival of convenience food and the changes in our lifestyle. Low water fishing is time consuming, and time to grow or gather your food appears to be valued less these days.'

By the end of the 20th Century the south-east coast was often seen as a bit of a wasteland. One local politician suggested the area was an ideal site for a new airport. Others treated it as a rubbish dump. In December 2000 the coast between La Collette and Gorey received the status of an internationally recognized Ramsar Wetland Site. (The name Ramsar originates from an Iranian city that hosted the first International Wetlands Conference in 1971).

The Ramsar status implies the wise use of an area to protect its nature. As a result there has been an increasing interest in exploring the Violet Bank and learning about its historic role in the development of Jersey.

Jersey Tourism have always been keen to market the coastal tours as 'Moonwalks' and Derek remembered: 'In 2006 I unexpectedly got a call asking if I could take Simon Calder, a top travel journalist, on a walk. This made me realise I should start guiding people in this fantastic place.'

Having set up Jersey Kayak Adventures as his main day job in 2003 the walking tours neatly fitted into the programme and resulted in the creation of Jersey Walk Adventures.

In 2007 Derek was one of the first to train with Jersey Heritage as an accredited guide for overnight stays in Seymour Tower. He has since become the guide trainer and recollected: 'My father had tried to stay overnight in Seymour or Ichu Tower, but the then lease holders had never agreed. Following the training day I visited my 80-year-old mother. I could sense that she felt I'd managed to achieve my late father's wish.'

Having met his partner Trudie Trox, a geographer and travel editor (coincidentally on a guided walk to Seymour Tower), the couple expanded the range of walks to include longer tours to the two towers of Ichu and Seymour and on the lowest tides a walk 'to the end of Jersey'. This leads you nearly two miles from dry land.

The Jersey Walk Adventure programme also includes an Oyster Trail with the opportunity to sample fresh local Groville Bay oysters at Seymour Inn. Trudie, who is passionate about the quality of the shellfish, said: 'It's not food miles here but food yards when it comes to eating these fresh local delicacies.'

Drawing on Trudie's scientific background the couple also takes locals and visitors alike on the 'Wild Vegetables of the Ocean' walk to rediscover the many uses of seaweeds. In autumn the 'Fungi Forays' with a local mycology expert reveal the beauty of mushrooms and toadstools in woodlands and dunes. Perhaps their most remarkable walk is the night-time walk, aptly named 'Walk with the stars at your feet', in search of tiny bioluminescent creatures which twinkle in the dark in just a few spots around the coast.

Guiding walks in the intertidal zone is only possible on certain dates when the tide is low enough. As all walks are in small groups, advance booking is needed. Dates are listed up to 12 months ahead on the JVA website though additional dates for private walks are also available.

'Sometimes,' joked Derek, 'I get people asking if we can leave a bit earlier. So I explain that it's possible – if they are happy swimming ...'