



MY GIRLS

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Exploring the magic of the marshes

*Take a trip with the Coastal Exploration Company
and discover Norfolk's salt marshes, which are among
the last great British wildernesses*

Always moving, always shifting. A place where man-made structures never last. Bridges collapse into the mud and silt, tracks weave and meander. Creeks displace, the deeper water appearing in an ever-different spot. The tides change. The winds blow. The salt marshes are alive and changing every time you go.

Henry Chamberlain, founder of the Coastal Exploration Company, loves the mystery of our county's mesmerising salt marshes. Following an adventurous career in the Royal Marines (where he survived mountains, jungles and deserts) and 15 years as a Humanitarian with the United Nations World Food Programme, Henry returned to his childhood home on the Norfolk coast.

"I was brought up here and so the salt marshes seemed normal to me, but we're very lucky to have them; the Norfolk coast is so rare and distinct," he says. "The Coastal Exploration Company is fundamentally about getting people out to this beautiful part of the county to connect with nature and slow down. We do this on traditional wooden boats under sail, using just the wind and tides."

The salt marsh explorations led by Henry and his crew take place on board some of Norfolk's last remaining lug rigged mussel flats, engineless open wooden boats built in Brancaster and King's Lynn. With a flat bottom and no keel, they float in just inches of water - making them perfect for navigating the smallest of creeks. "We leave the

pontoon at Wells and use the power of the tide to take us in," Henry says. "As we pass the last moored yacht it feels as though you could be miles away from any civilisation."

There are different ways to propel the boat. The crew either drift along on the tide, use a long oar called a scull operated in figure-of-eight movements or hoist the sails if the wind is in a favourable direction.

"We journey deep into the salt marshes until high tide, when the water becomes almost static and we drop anchor for a peaceful hour or so," Henry explains. While the boat rests, guests are treated to locally sourced food and drink and enjoy wild swimming, wildlife watching and foraging.





PICTURES: The Coastal Exploration Company provides access to mesmerising coastal spots using traditional Norfolk fishing boats. They strive to celebrate the county's outstanding beauty and champion sustainable transportation practices.

"Our staff are very knowledgeable and love to share their appreciation for the marshes," Henry says. "We show people how to forage for samphire, sea purslane and sea aster. We point out the incredible array of marsh wildlife, from oyster catchers, curlews and terns to foxes and otters. The experience changes with the seasons and we want it to be as engaging and practical as possible."

But the Coastal Exploration Company are committed to preserving the salt marshes too. "We try to support the work of Natural England, the Holkham Estate and wildlife agencies by educating people about how to behave on the salt marshes," Henry explains. "We avoid walking on the marsh, instead staying mostly in the water or on the boat. We also collect any debris we spot such as plastic crabbing buckets and fishing lines."

As the tide turns and begins to go out, the explorers return to Wells. Taking a different route through the creeks, they move naturally with the water. "It's important to us to be a sustainable tourism company," Henry says. "We minimise use of diesel engines to avoid noise pollution and fossil fuel issues."

Henry also offers a sail cargo service to local businesses, delivering goods entirely under sail between King's Lynn, Wells and even as far as Norwich. While he admits it's not a complete solution to replacing the trucks on our roads, he hopes offering transportation using nothing but sail power might inspire creative conversation about a different way to do things.

"We ship products for local businesses such as Barsham Brewery, Malt Coast brewery, Burn Valley Vineyard and Sandringham Apple Juice,

which we hope takes a handful of trucks off the coast roads. We've even linked up with a schooner bringing olive oil from Portugal," says Henry.

A recent addition to the Coastal Exploration Company fleet is Victorious, a 42ft Norfolk Smack



originally built in King's Lynn in 1923. With a gaff rig (dyed the traditional red) as well as two head sails, Victorious was built to work under sail. She also has an extremely efficient and shallow hull shape, perfect for the Norfolk coast. "The craftsmanship of this boat is just beautiful," Henry says. "We are thrilled to have hung on to one of the last King's Lynn vessels that would have been sailing cargo professionally on the Norfolk coast. There would have been hundreds of these boats lined up on the quay in the 1920s, and we would love to see her moored up in the Purfleet once again for people to admire."

An adventure through the salt marshes with the Coastal Exploration Company can easily feel like travelling back to a simpler time. "People love stepping outside the busy coastal areas into the creeks with us," Henry says. "Leaving modern devices behind, you find a sense of another world and a deeper connection. The power of the tide breathing in and out is a wonderful way to slow life down."

To find out how to join Henry and his crew, visit www.coastalexplorationcompany.co.uk

