

Our coast & beyond

Interviews and text: Cavan Scott

The Coast team return for a fantastic new series, but this time they're not just exploring Great Britain but also our neighbouring coastlines.

Neil Oliver explains the secret of the show's success

“ Britain is unique. Every other country in Europe is linked to land, but we're out here in our little archipelago. That fact alone has defined our destiny. It stopped Napoleon, it stopped Hitler and that's only in recent terms. For thousands of years, that divide has kept us different.

It's amazing to be back celebrating our shores, as *Coast*

Photos: Sean Mayon

was only intended to be a one-off series. However, by the end of series five, which we're filming now, the BBC will have broadcasted 45 hours of the stuff. Why? Well, when series one came out, we were living in interesting times. People were starting to really worry about climate change and there was war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Then *Coast* arrived with a celebratory feel that was never triumphant.

The beauty of Britain
Coast never implied that Britain was better than anywhere else, but pointed out that just up the

It wasn't *Rule Britannia*, but said it was ok to take pleasure in our natural beauty, culture, history and geographic richness. Like the coast itself, it was reassuring. It stated that our foundations underfoot were still quite firm.

road from where you live, there's always an amazing sight. There's something in the size of the country that makes a difference. Wherever you are in the UK, you're only ever 72 miles from the coast. Our land is not too big, meaning you can't feel a sense of ownership for the whole place, but at the same time it's big enough to escape and get lost in every now and again.

I believe that the coast can be described as the fifth country of the United Kingdom. People living on the coast of north-east Scotland almost have as much in common with those living on the coasts of Cornwall, Cardigan Bay and Galway as they do with their immediate neighbours. There's a shared relationship with the sea; the comings and goings of coastal life unite them.

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Shoreline stories
Above all, people are the most important part of the coastline. They've certainly helped to make our show a success. I remember talking to a chap back in series three called Harry about his time working as a bellboy in the Midland Hotel, that Art Deco edifice in Morecambe. While filming the current series, a guy came up to me and told me he was Harry's

son and his dad had passed away just before the episode went out, but the family was overjoyed that he'd taken part. His story would live on. Every year we put on record the personal stories that would otherwise be lost. Lose these stories and you lose what's important about the British coastline, the people who have made it what it is today.

Now turn over for
20 highlights of
Coast series four





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9. The *Titanic's* last stop

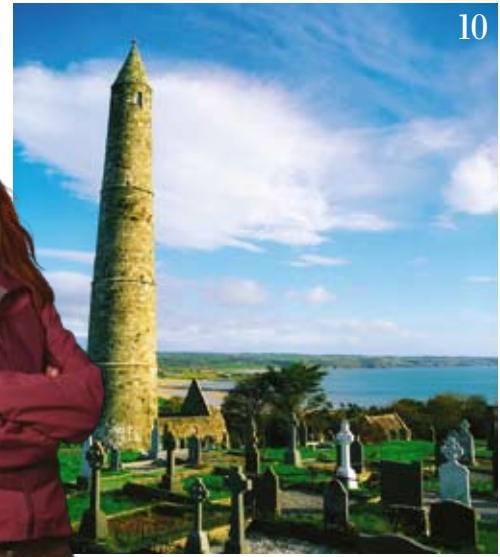
Continuing the theme of how *Coast* interacts with adjacent shores, Neil Oliver heads to Cork harbour in Ireland and, more specifically, to Cobh. Here, he tells of one particular day in the harbour's history, 11 April 1912, where a disappointed theology student, Frank Brown, was forced to disembark a ship that had launched from Southampton the previous day. With a heavy heart he watched it begin its journey to New York. Frank was actually a lucky man. The ship was, of course, the *Titanic*.

Visit Cobh: The *Titanic* wasn't alone in being the last stop for British and Irish holidaymakers setting sail for America. To visit Cork, call 0808 234 2009 or go to www.discoverireland.com.

10. The white towers of Ireland

Across Ireland, some 60 mysterious round towers dot the countryside. There have been many explanations for their construction from priests' boltholes to outlandish theories that they channel paramagnetic energy from the stars for crops. Alice Roberts (right) investigates their origins and also the strange written language of Ogham, the oldest secular writing system in Britain, dating back 1,600 years.

See round towers: The Ardmore tower is about 15 miles south-west of Dungarvan. You can find it on OS Map 82 or visit www.roundtowers.org



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11. Sefton Sands safari

Miranda visits the largest expanse of open dunes in England with a crack BBC crew, to capture some amazing footage of Sefton Sands from the viewpoint of the creatures that live there, including minute sandhoppers, natterjack toads and rare sand lizards. "We were trying to record the sound that sandhoppers make," Miranda remembers. "You expect these guys, who've worked on epic David Attenborough series, to have amazing high-tech equipment – but actually it was a coat-hanger with two personal mics stuck under a rock!" The result is still spectacular.

Visit Sefton Sands: Formby is maintained by the National Trust and is open Monday to Saturday from dawn to dusk. Visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk for details.

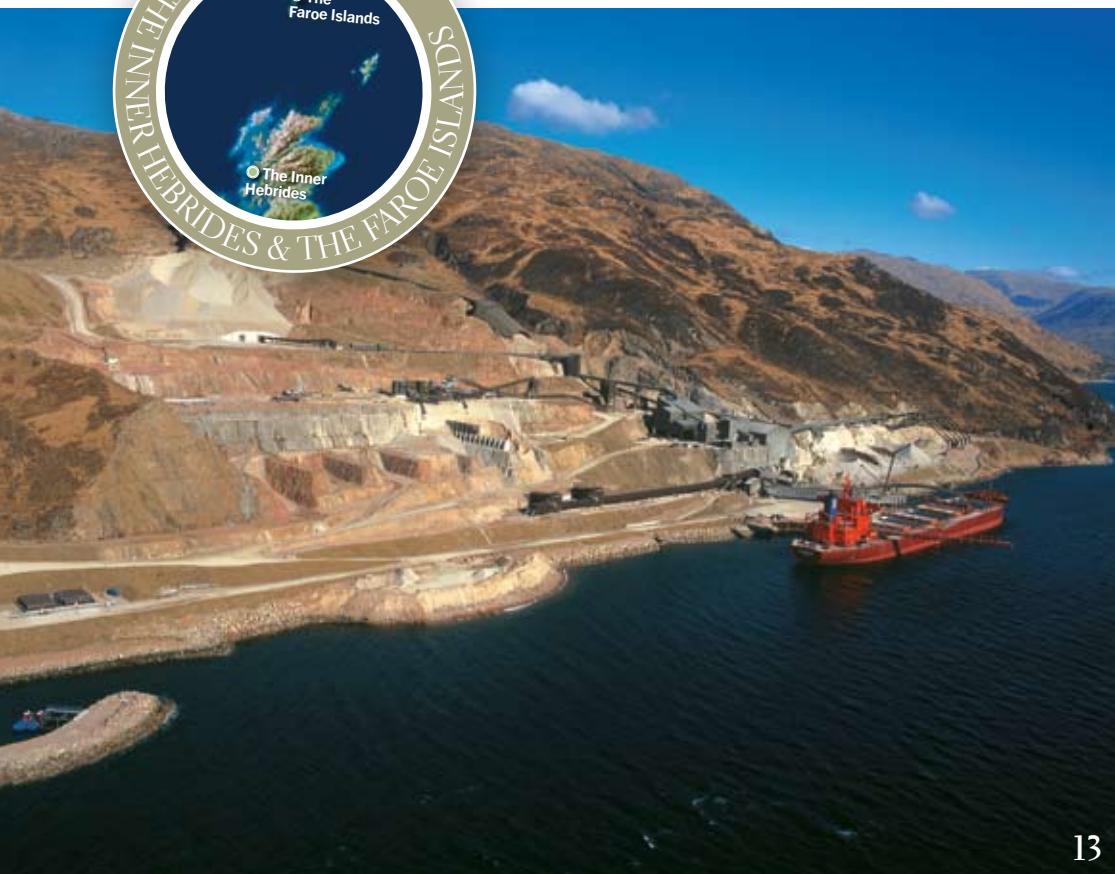
12. A clean-living village

The Lever Brothers saved paying import duties for their soap ingredients by building their own dock in the marshy banks of the Mersey at the end of the 19th century. As part of the deal, they transformed the mudflats into a picturesque garden village: Port Sunlight, an idealised oasis for the plant's workers.

Visit Port Sunlight: The unique model village of Port Sunlight (www.portsunlight.org.uk) is found on the Wirral Peninsula between Lower Bebington and New Ferry.



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13. The rock that makes Britain's roads roll

When you drive around Britain, there's every chance you're roaring over rock quarried from Glensanda, in the mouth of the Great Glen Fault, Europe's biggest super-quarry. The granite here is incredibly hard and is therefore ideal for withstanding the punishment of Britain's cars and lorries. Ironically, you can't get here by road, only by the sea, but journeys will continue for many years to come, with 800 million tonnes of the hill waiting to be mined.

Visiting Glensanda: With no roads, the only way to walk alongside the super-quarry is a long and difficult hike along 7 miles of coastline. However, the island of Lismore gives you spectacular views of this industrial giant.

14. The sea eagles of Canna

Only 20 people still live on the remote island of Canna, so it's little wonder that a reintroduction of sea eagles on neighbouring Rum has spread to Canna, with a couple of breeding pairs. Neil abseils a tortuous sea cliff to examine the remains of a recently abandoned sea eagle nest, discovering what the birds have been eating, including the jawbone of a lamb.

Visit Canna: A number of boat operators offer tours to Canna, including AquaXplore (0800 731 3089, www.aquaxplore.co.uk) and Arisaig Marine (01687 450224, www.arisaig.co.uk).

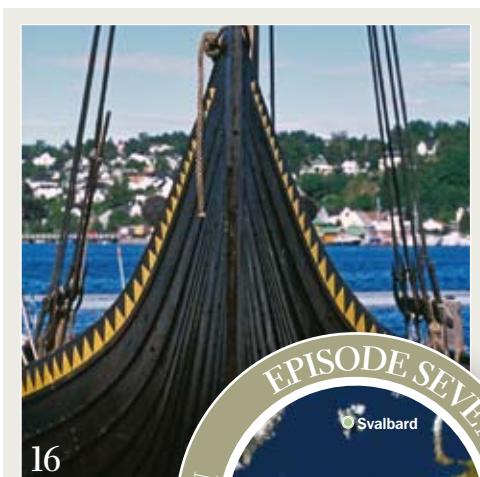


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15. The bone-eating snot flower

What happens when whales die in our waters? Wild-swimmer Kate Rew heads out from Tobermory with scientists who, 15 months ago, dumped a whale bone in the sea. They discovered a worm that feasts on the bone: the 1cm-long *Osedax mucofloris* (Latin for bone-eating snot flower), part of a secret ecosystem that exists on the seemingly barren remains of sea creatures.

Read more: See the BBC's report on the discovery of the bizarre worm at tinyurl.com/snotflower.



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16. Modern Viking longboats

"To go into a boatyard still making these clinker boats in the middle of the fjords, was frankly bizarre," admits Mark, recalling how he met craftsmen who still make the infamous longships that brought the Vikings to Britain in the traditional way.

See British clinker boats: A number of British firms also build clinker boats, including Wootton Bridge Industries on the Isle of Wight (www.clinkerboat.com), while you can see traditional Viking boats at Unst Boat Haven on the Shetland Isles (www.unst.org).



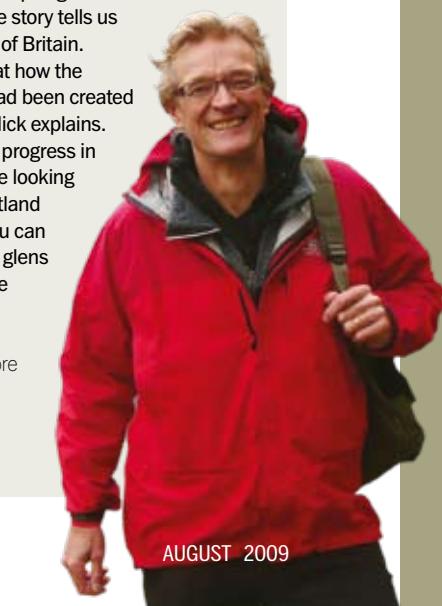
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17. Travelling back in time

Nick Crane (below) meets the residents of the little community of Geiranger in Norway, 4,000 people who live in the path of an impending tidal wave that is inevitable due to collapsing mountainside. But the story tells us much about the birth of Britain.

"We were looking at how the Scottish landscape had been created during the Ice Age," Nick explains. "The Ice Age is still in progress in Norway, so what we're looking at in Geiranger is Scotland 15,000 years ago. You can see what our modern glens and peaks would have looked like then."

Discover more: Explore the majestic and still evolving landscape of Geiranger by visiting www.geiranger.no.



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18. The diving gannets of Bass Rock

According to Sir David Attenborough, the 150,000 gannets colonising the Firth of Forth's Bass Rock are: "One of the wildlife wonders of the world", but Coast has never managed to get there. "Neil tried three times but was foiled by the weather," Miranda explains. "We finally managed this year. The nearer you go, you realise the rock is covered in white. Not just guano but thousands of gannets." The team filmed the gannets from below as they dived. "I dread to think what would have happened if they missed the fish and hit the cameraman!" Miranda added.

Meet the Vikings: A weekend of Viking action at Lindisfarne Priory, 29-31 August. Call 0870 333 1183 for details.

Visiting Bass Rock: The Scottish Seabird Centre organises boat tours to Bass Rock. Call 01620 890202 for details or visit www.seabird.org

19. The Birth of England

Lindisfarne is regarded as a place of tranquillity, but in June 793 it was anything but, as Vikings first arrived to plunder, pillage and rape. The actions of those invaders were to change the history of our country forever. "After the cataclysm of 793, wars with the Vikings continued here for 200 years," Mark (right) says, "but one beneficial consequence was that in those wars, the nation of England was formed."

Visit Cullercoats: Cullercoats Bay is located just south of Whitley Bay and North of Tynemouth.

Catch Coast on Tuesdays
at 8pm on BBC Two.

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