

Walk on the Wild Side – Seymour Tower

There is an iconic structure on the south east coast that many would love to walk out to and explore however there is a challenge. The challenge is that the object of people's attention is Seymour Tower, it is located two kilometres offshore and Jersey has the third highest rise and fall of tide in the world. Not a spot to venture out to if you are unsure of when you can reach it safely and how to get there. So here it is, a crash course in how to get there safely, a brief and very basic description of what to see and experience on the way and most importantly how to get back in time for tea.

Starting Point: Seymour Slip

Public Transport: There is free parking in the small carpark at the top of Seymour Slip

Bus Route: 1

Difficulty: This walk has been attributed a moderate to difficult rating. Duration: Allow 3.5 hours to complete this walk and always keep together.

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Route

Never, ever set out without consulting an up to date tide chart which can be easily found in any current copy of the Jersey Evening Post. What you are looking for are spring tides, that is the ones that have the highest rise and fall of tide. Always select low water tides of three meters or less to allow you the maximum amount of time to reach your destination and return again to dry land. Leave an hour and a half before low water and set off back absolutely no later than an hour and a half after low water and remember that you will only be able to travel as fast as the slowest walker in your household or group. Always make sure that you have checked what the weather is going to do in the next five hours, dress to match those conditions and wear either old trainers that you do not mind getting wet or a good pair of wellies to keep your feet dry.

The best and most straight forward spot to set off from is Seymour Slip aiming first for the Refuge Tower located midway to Seymour Tower. This is placed there to offer a safe platform for those that take no notice of tides and leave for the shore too late finding themselves cut off. This is because between the shore and the Refuge Tower there are two gullies that flood two hours after low water so barring the way. These are known as Anglaise and Oregon and hold large amounts of water throughout the low waters. For those not familiar with the reef system you will walk through these gullies without realising it as they are not immediately obvious. One of the signs to look out for is the increase in the number of seashells heaped up in the sands and gravels. This is caused by the rising tide flooding the area from east and west and where the two waters meet, they merge and slow so that the material they are carrying settles out onto the seabed. Note how the sands, muds and gravels change as you travel further down the beach and where the worm casts begin and end as these are related to how high or low the beach is in relation to the shore and the bank you will climb up onto as you reach the refuge. You should also notice that the colour of the many seaweeds changes as you move further offshore. They tend to be very green close inshore where the water is shallower and become progressively darker and redder where the water will lay deeper. This is due to the amount of sunlight that reaches them at differing states of tide.

As you near the refuge you will come to a gap in the reef where clay replaces sand for a short time and after that you come to a small body of water. Care must be taken here as although the water is not deep the ground is stony and weed covered. The exposed clays are proof that the whole area was once land as they were formed from wind blown glacial dust. The next obstacle is the large gravel bank on which the refuge is situated. Again, this is created by flood waters meeting from two directions and depositing large amounts of sands, gravels and shells. The number of shells covering the area indicates how rich in marine life the reef system and local waters are.

Once past the refuge tower you are on the high ground known as the Violet Bank and there are several trains of thought here as to what the origin of the name might be. The old name was Viola which might be related to the musical noise the reef makes on the flood though the modern name Violet could also relate to the colour of the water on a sunny day caused by the reflection off of the seaweeds. Though there are not as many as there used to be, there are white painted markers that run in a line toward Seymour Tower and these guide the walker along the easiest and safest route. The plateau of gravels and sands beyond the refuge once extended as far as the outer most marker, however much of the gravels midway to Seymour have shifted in recent years leaving a large shallow pond. From then on, the beach rises slowly toward your destination and here it is worth mentioning that the way ahead can be deceptive. It appears that you continue straight on to the icon climbing a mound however to do so takes you up onto a large area of broken stone and difficult walking. You must look for the last white marker to the left of this mound and in an area of open

beach that takes you around this obstacle. Once around this, the way ahead is clear with a low but steady climb up to the tower.

On your way you may observe an area in the gravels that has what appears to be a green stain oozing out of it. Though it may look as if rotting seaweed is spilling out it is in fact a large body of very tiny marine worms with the common, and very apt, name of Mint Sauce.

Caution again must be taken when climbing the stairs up to the platform as these are very uneven and a stiff breeze often blows across them to upset your balance. The climb is well worth the effort as the views are amazing and it becomes clear as to why the fortification is built where it is. On a low spring tide there is as much reef and beach beyond to walk on as there is when you retrace your steps ashore though this outer realm is only for those familiar with it. Many of the reef heads across the whole of the reef have been quarried over time and trackways cut to extract stone and kelp, criss-cross the area.

The Tower was built to help defend the Island after the failed French invasion that culminated in the Battle of Jersey. Completed in 1781 it once housed two cannons on the platform and was manned by members of the Jersey Militia drawn from St Clement, Grouville and St Martin. During the Occupation it was again manned, the platform having an 88mm gun mounted on it. Today the seaward facing side is painted white as an aid to navigation.

Remember to watch your time now and allow yourselves enough to return safely the way you came.

