

Del Mar Court - History and historical information. Walking tours.

Del Mar Court is situated in the area called LE VARCLIN. An area known since Neolithic times as a special area. Formerly huge standing stones stood in this area, used by the pagans as worship sites as well as astronomical markers using the sun, moon and stars as their seasonal calculators. Unfortunately these monoliths were broken up and used as building stone in the mediaeval period. The possible remains of one is still in place, slightly re dressed but over seven feet high. It stands, now used as a gate post, on the corner just east of Del Mar Court, on the entrance to the house called Varclin Farm. The use of the word VAR or VARU in old Guernsey names indicates a valley in association with spectral beasts. The name of the connecting lane is COIN COLIN or fairies corner. The old folk of Guernsey were very superstitious.

In Guernsey early settlement was invariably sited at the head of valleys, with a good stream or spring close by and close to flat areas of woodland that would be cleared and used for crops. Le Varclin fits all of these requirements. The stream and springs run just west of Del Mar. The area developed into small farmsteads and in the mediaeval period many granite manors and farmhouses were built. There are many still standing in the area some from the 15th century. By the time the first accurate survey map of Guernsey was produced by the Duke of Richmond in 1787, as part of his military defence work, Del Mar was shown as part of a cider apple orchard.

The beach and the area adjacent to this area is called Fermain, there was a Norman Feudal land holding called Fief Fermain here documented as early as 1200. The meaning of the word Fermain is unknown but it could have been a Norman name or possibly a reference to a strong warrior. Fer Main, Iron Hand. The coastal path to Fermain bay is gained by going down the lane east of Del Mar. At the third bend a track leads off to the left at the house named Fleur du Bois, and joins into the coastal path. The path leads down to the beach through the blue bell woods. From March through summer the millions of wild flowers, primroses, wild garlic, bluebells and campion colour the cliffs and lanes. At the beach the sea wall was built as a defence against the feared French sea born attacks. There is a false Martello Tower there, a lesser Guernsey design with loopholes and canon platform on top.

The coastal path has glorious views and takes you north to St Peter Port (an hours walk) the path gives you views over Herm and Sark. (Daily ferries from St Peter Port) You can walk south to Pleinmont (eight hours walk) A nice short walk to the south takes you to the small harbour of Bec du Nez. Here in the 1800's the De Sausmares family had several fishermen's stores until the military asked for some land to build a substantial Canon Emplacement. They agreed on condition that no one had access to their adjacent fishing stores. Unknown to everyone was the fact that they were regularly smuggling in large quantities of contraband, storing it in the fisherman's buildings and when the soldiers were not around they carried the contraband up the path to Fermain Tavern for onward sale. The old gun platform is a marvellous place for a picnic with its views over the other Islands. (The fishermen's buildings still exist there) That is if you have the energy to carry your eats and drinks down and then back up the paths.

Another pleasant walk with historic connections is along the path to Jerbourg Point. Go south along the coastal path, past Bec du Nez to Pied du Mur and Divette Pier where there is a sandy gully that was used as the landing place for armaments for Jerbourg Castle when the French had captured Castle Cornet in the 1300's. On the right of the path massive earthworks defended the Jerbourg peninsula. These Iron Age ditch and mound structures stretch right over the headland. Their size, forty feet high in places show that the Island was subject to vicious attacks in the Iron Age period.

Walk on to St Martins Point where in times past pirates were hung up here to warn off other marauders. Here also on this headland is the marine fog horn. An eerie place when it is foggy and the mists roll in. Next to the fog horn is the small beach called Telegraph Bay where the early telephone cable connected Jersey and Guernsey. The original name of the beach was Le Vau Betes. The beast's valley or gully, a reference to it being an old site where another spectral beast lived. At this point you could retrace your steps back to Del Mar or carry on in a circular route back via the upper pathway.

To proceed on the circular route go up the path from the fog horn to the car park where there is a massive underground bunker. Built by the Germans as a range finding complex for the many heavy guns on this peninsula. On top of this bunker is a fine viewing point where the whole of the Channel Islands can be seen as well as the coast of Normandy twenty miles away. If you are interested in seeing some bunkers there are two observation and machine gun bunkers open a couple of hundred yards west of the car park. Go south west out of the car park past the five houses and on the bend the coastal path carries on towards the Pea Stacks. (A row of three Islets that resemble old drying stacks of peas) about a hundred yards along on the left of the path there are two bunkers. If you continue along the coastal path you come to Petit Port bay, a superb sandy beach. If you can manage the 150 steps down to the bay and up again then it is worth the effort. Once the meeting place of a very noisy witches coven in the 18th century it was also the landing place for a daring commando raid during the first year of World War II. The path leads out to the main road and Jerbourg monument. Originally the Doyle monument, erected to the memory of General Doyle who provided many coastal defences to protect Guernsey from the threatened French attacks. The original column was blown up by the German forces because it blocked the view of the large guns situated by the car park west of the column. It was also considered too clear a marker for allied bombing aircraft. To return to Del Mar go down the coastal path just east of the monument. That joins the path that goes back to Bec du Nez and runs parallel with some of the deep Iron Age bank and ditch defensive system.

Alternatively you can take a flatter, quicker route back to Del Mar. From the monument take the road going west for a hundred yards and take the first small lane (Bouvee Lane) that drops down to the left. A Bouvee was a mediaeval measurement of land. The amount an ox could plough in a season. If you bear left that takes you to Gypsy lane. So called because the local farmer used to bring seasonal workers to the Island to harvest his potatoes. Mostly Gypsies they would have a wedding ceremony by holding hands through the pierced granite gate posts. Keep walking west. The green lane joins on to Calais Road which joins back to Le Varclin and Del Mar Court.

Another short walk into history is to Sausmarez Manor. Leave Del Mar Court turning right up to the main road, turn left and fifty yards on is the entrance to the Manor. This manor, centre of the ancient Fief De Sausmarez, its records go back to the 1200's. The family was originally from the northern coast of Normandy and were the keepers of the Jerbourg castle where St Martin residents would retreat to in times of attack. The manor is reputed to be one of the most haunted houses in Britain! The Manor and its gardens are open throughout the summer. There is a charming Farmers Market including antiques stalls here every Saturday morning. Note the unusual small building on the road edge which is the mediaeval court house of the Fief. Here the Feudal court met to check tenants and their taxes. All houses were required to pay poulage to the Seigneur. That is a chicken every year by every house owner on the Fief and a lump sum (trezieme) on any property sales. Several of these Feudal Courts still meet once a year in Guernsey but the Guernsey Government nationalised the Feudal taxes in the 1980's

FLORA and FAUNA. Guernsey is unusual because it lacks many of the wild animals normally found in Britain and Europe. There are no foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels or moles. No toads or snakes etc. Guernsey was separated from Europe before the retreat of the ice sheets and cut off from Europe before the mammals repopulated the adjacent coast. There are a number of unusual species here. The Guernsey Elm, nearly wiped out in the Dutch elm disease epidemic. There is a distinct hybrid fern found in one or two places on the south coast but not found anywhere else in the world. The Guernsey gall found on some oak trees, again unique to the Island. (Galls or oak apples were once used, crushed up to make writing ink and as a dye for leather) There is the beautiful Guernsey Lilly. A multi headed scarlet flower with golden spots at their centres. It has a distinct chocolate smell. This bulb was found growing in the sand dunes at Vazon bay several hundred years ago. It is unusual because its type is more like a species found in South Africa. It has been suggested that it may have washed ashore from a ship wreck. It is not unusual to find South American plant seed pods washed up on beaches here. Travelled all the way on the Gulf Stream. Spring is a riot of colour from March onwards. Starting with primroses, violets and wild garlic. Then bluebells in their millions. Campions in both red and white and fragrant yellow gorse and foxgloves. In season the lanes and coastal paths look better than any planted gardens. On the west coast there are specially preserved orchid fields. (April to June)

Other World War II defences you can visit. German underground hospital, St Andrews, 10 mins by car. La Vallette museum tunnels. St Peter Port, 15 mins. The Occupation museum, social history 1940 to 1945. Forest parish, 15 minutes' drive. The German Naval Headquarters, La Collenette Hotel, St Peter Port, 15 mins drive. Fort Houmet 110mm gun bunker, Vazon bay, 20 mins drive.

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