

DAYS AWAY

Cornwall

wild wild west

by Gemma Hall

Printed in the Summer 2006 National Trust Magazine

With its mining heritage, colonies of artists, coastal walks and National Trust connections, the west of Cornwall is, says **Gemma Hall**, the perfect spot for a break away

Peering over the Atlantic, a steam-powered engine pumps water from a mine 650 yards below the sea; pistons rise and fall and men load ore-laden rocks onto carts, which are led away by women and boys to be crushed by a machine with 96 stamping feet. The sea cannot be heard for the sound of winding mechanisms and men's voices. It is the mid-nineteenth century at Levant Mine in West Cornwall.

Today pockets of pink thrift and heather grow around Levant Mine's last surviving engine house, now protected by the National Trust and part of a World Heritage Site bid. There is beauty in this blasted landscape, with its orange earth, copper-green pools and slender chimneys. In evening light, the silhouette of a 100ft (30m) tall metal tower, a mile along the coast, is an arresting sight. You can imagine the iron wheel cranking up, but the ropes, chains and hoists are gone and everything is silent except for the sea – its tropical tint incongruous with the granite cliffs and industrial buildings.

This luminous seascape lured many artists to Cornwall, notably Turner in 1811 and an influx of Modernists in the 1920s. Painters such as Alfred Wallis and Ben Nicholson and potter Bernard Leach became part of

the renowned St Ives Society of Artists. Nicholson's wife, the sculptor Barbara Hepworth, noted: 'There is a radiant light here. I've only experienced equal brilliance in parts of the Med.'

In the 1900s, St Ives was the centre of pilchard fishing, but the industry is now in decline, as it is across Cornwall. However, restaurants continue to source locally-caught seafood and, very occasionally, between the young people carrying surfboards, you see a man with a beard and pipe – a real life Captain Birdseye.

THE MINING LEGACY

In the nineteenth century, Cornwall and West Devon supplied much of the world's tin and copper and played a vital role in the industrialisation of Britain. Hulls of ships, the brass industry and one of the first passenger-carrying vehicles – the 'Puffing Devil' – were all possible because of these mines. By the 1930s, mining here was in grave decline, unable to compete with the lower price of metal overseas. Thousands of workers emigrated to Latin America, Australia and North America. It is said that, 'wherever a hole is sunk in the ground, you will be sure to find a Cornishman at the bottom of it, searching for metal.' The Cornish coastline became dotted with what locals called 'knack't bals' – abandoned engine houses, chimneys and machinery. Good sites to visit are: **Levant Mine** (NT) – see the 166-year-old beam engine in operation (details in your National Trust Handbook); and **Geevor Mine** and museum – where the workers' helmets, satchels and overalls appear abandoned as on the day operations ceased in 1990 – one of the last mines to close in Cornwall. Many of the guides are ex-miners. Learn more about mining history between 13 and 21 May at the 'On the Edge' festival (01736 788669, www.landsendarea.co.uk).

ART TRAILS

Galleries in Cornwall are ubiquitous. For the greatest concentration, no place beats St Ives. Discovering art is best done on foot and without a map as there's something tucked into every lane. If time is limited visit: **Tate St Ives** and the **Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden**. Visit the garden early when there are fewer visitors and the light is low. Hepworth's studio remains exactly as it was when she died in 1975. Opposite is the contemporary **Plumbline Gallery**. Visit **The New Craftsman** for ceramics by St Ives School artists. To see craftspeople at work, go to the **Sloop Craft Market**. **The St Ives Society of Artists** has housed works in an old church since 1945. Their summer exhibition runs from 6 June until 8 August. **The Leach Pottery** shows Bernard Leach's Japanese-inspired ceramics. **Newlyn** should be your next stop. The first 'artists' colony' in Cornwall was based here in the late nineteenth century. **Newlyn Art Gallery** and **Badcocks** are the places to go.

EXOTIC GARDENS

With its Mediterranean climate, West Cornwall is an open-air greenhouse in summer. **Trengwainton Garden** (NT) is jungle-like, with bamboo, ferns and palms from Australasia and South America. Close by are the subtropical gardens at **Glendurgan** (NT). **Bonython Estate Gardens** has a colourful display of South African plants.

THEATRE

Cut into a cliff face 200ft (60m) above Porthcurno beach, the open air **Minack Theatre** is a must-see. This season, performances include Hamlet, The Wind in the Willows and The Three Musketeers.

COASTAL VILLAGES

Tucked into a hollow four miles (6km) from St Ives, **Zennor** is one of the most appealing places in West Cornwall. The village's most famous resident, D.H. Lawrence, described the colour of the sea as 'peacock-mingled'. As you descend into Zennor, note the rough farmland strewn with boulders. You are looking at prehistoric field systems. There is a path off the main road which leads to **Zennor Quoit** – a 4,500-year-old burial chamber made from granite slabs. The twelfth-century **St Senara's Church** contains curiosities, such as the 500-year-old Mermaid Chair. Visit on Wednesday evenings to hear the bell ringers. **The Wayside Museum** tells the story of Cornish life through its compendium of artefacts, many found in nearby fields. The traditional kitchen with a Cornish range is a gem. **Mousehole**, near Penzance, is an attractive fishing village with cottages stacked around a cupped harbour. **Coverack** on the Lizard Peninsula with a tranquil sandy cove and thatched cottages attracts fewer visitors.

BEACHES

Porthminster and **Porthmeor** are popular with bathers escaping the heaving streets of St Ives. Perhaps the best beaches on the West Penwith Peninsula are at **Sennen Cove** and **Porthcurno**. On the Lizard Peninsula, try **Gunwalloe Church Cove** (NT) or walk down to **Kynance Cove** (NT).

NATURE

If you only visit one area, make it the Lizard Peninsula where you might see choughs, a type of crow which has recently returned to Cornwall. At **Lizard Point**, dolphins and basking sharks are sometimes seen and grey seals bob around the caves. **Kynance Cove** (NT) to **Predannack Cliff** (NT) is a botanist's delight. Look for the heath-spotted orchid, bloody cranesbill and the rare Cornish heath – only found here. Cornwall's largest natural lake, **Loe Pool** (NT), is a tranquil wildlife reserve, famed for its birdlife (more than 100 species). Herons patrol the

lakeside and wildfowl forage in the reeds. Occasionally ospreys are seen and otters are on the increase – a Trust success story. On the West Penwith Peninsula, go to **Marazion Marsh** and the **Hayle Estuary**, both RSPB reserves.

Eating

ALBA

The Wharf, St Ives. Former lifeboat house transformed into a chic restaurant.

01736 797222

www.alba-restaurant.co.uk

BLUE FISH

Norway Lane, St Ives.

Top views over the harbour.

01736 794204

GEEVOR MUSEUM CAFÉ

Pendeen

01736 788662

www.geevor.com

KYNANCE CAFÉ

Kynance Cove, Lizard Peninsula. Snacks in the National Trust's 'green' café.

TREWELLARD ARMS HOTEL

Pendeen. Pub food.

01736 788634

SHEAF OF WHEAT

Chapel Street, St Ives. Popular carvery on Friday and Saturday lunchtimes.

01736 797130

www.sheafofwheat.co.uk

THE ABBEY RESTAURANT

Penzance. An emphasis on local, seasonal produce.

01736 330680

www.theabbeyonline.com

THE BEACH (top left)

Sennen Cove, Land's End. Overlooking a top surfers' bay.

01736 871191

www.thebeachrestaurant.com

TINNER'S ARMS

Zennor. Cosy, traditional pub serving ales and seafood.
01736 796927

THE NORTH INN

Pendeen (close to mines)
01736 788417
www.thenorthinnpendeen.co.uk

Sleeping

BLUE HAYES HOTEL

Trelyon Avenue, St Ives
01736 797129
www.bluehayes.co.uk

MULLION COVE HOTEL

Mullion, Lizard Peninsula
01326 240328
www.mullioncove.com

THE NORTH INN

Pendeen (details left)

Places to visit

BARBARA HEPWORTH MUSEUM (bottom left)

Barnoon Hill, St Ives
01736 796226
www.tate.org.uk

BADCOCKS

The Strand, Newlyn
01736 366159
www.badcocksgallery.co.uk

BONYTHON ESTATE GARDENS

near Helston. 01326 240550
www.bonythonmanor.co.uk

GEEVOR MINE

Pendeen
01736 788662
www.geevor.com

GLENDURGAN GARDEN*

Mawnan Smith, near Falmouth
01326 250906

HAYLE ESTUARY

Hayle. 01736 711682
www.rspb.org.uk

KYNANCE COVE*

Lizard Peninsula
01326 561407

LEACH POTTERY

Higher Stennack
(near St Ives)
01736 796398
www.leachpottery.com

LEVANT MINE*

Pendeen
01736 786156

LOE POOL*

near Helston
01326 561407

MARAZION MARSH

near Penzance
01736 711682
www.rspb.org.uk

MINACK THEATRE

Porthcurno, Penzance
01736 810181
www.minack.com

NEWLYN ART GALLERY

Shows in Causeway, Penzance this summer.
01736 363715
www.newlynartgallery.co.uk

NEW CRAFTSMAN

24 Fore St, St Ives
01736 795652
www.newcraftsmanstives.com

PLUMBLINE GALLERY

2 Barnoon Hill, St Ives
01736 797771

SLOOP CRAFT MARKET

St Ives. 01736 796051

ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT*

Marazion. 01736 710507

ST IVES SOCIETY OF ARTISTS

Norway Square, St Ives
01736 795582
www.stivessocietyofartists.com

TATE ST IVES (top left)

Porthmeor Beach
01736 796226
www.tate.org.uk

TRENGWANTON GARDEN* (bottom left)

near Penzance
01736 363148

WAYSIDE MUSEUM

Zennor. 01736 796945
*www.nationaltrust.org.uk