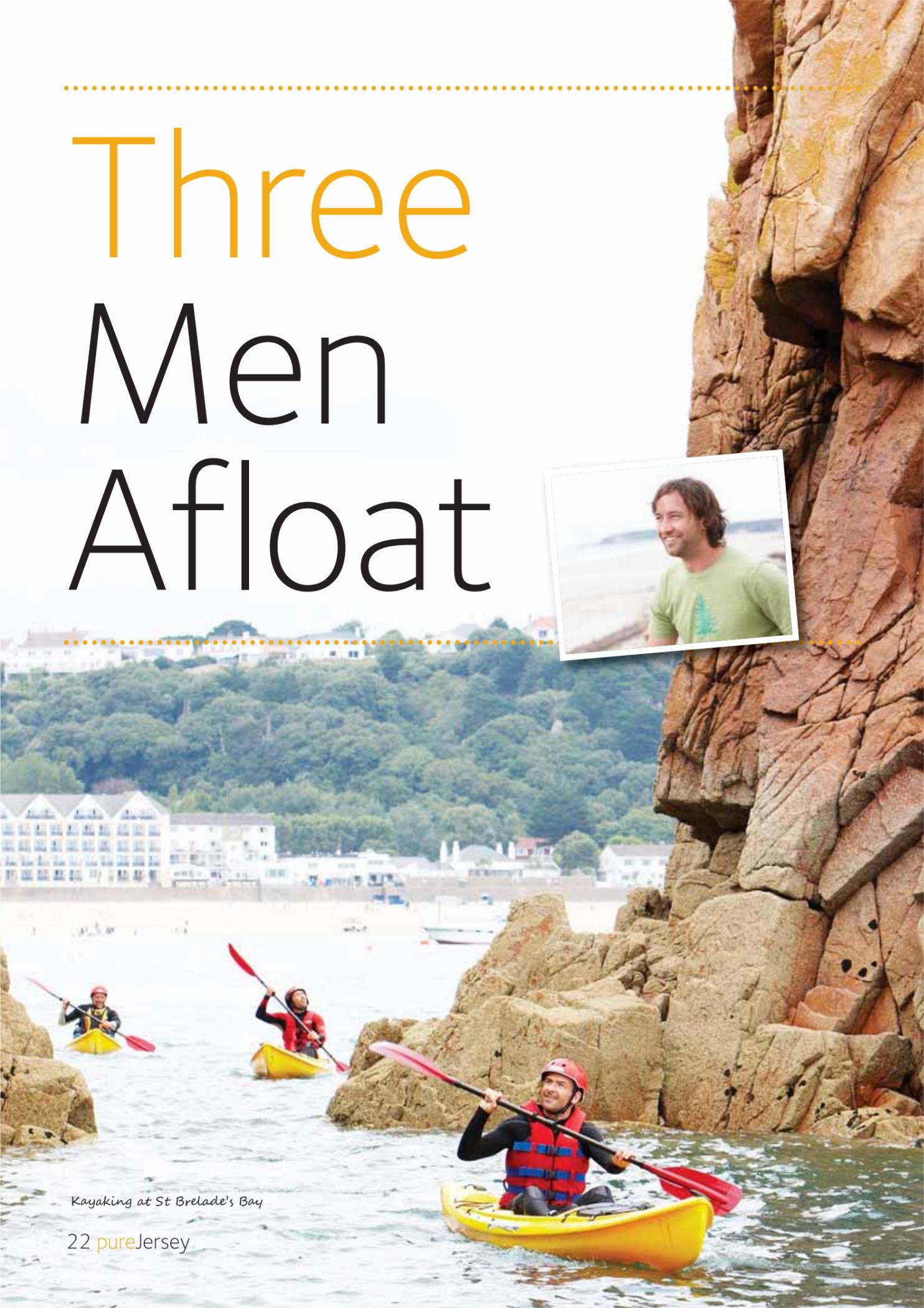


Three Men Afloat



Kayaking at St Brelade's Bay



West-facing St Ouen's Bay, Jersey's surfing hot-spot



Tow-in surfing at St Ouen's Bay

Ed Leigh is best known for his intrepid snowboarding and mountaineering stunts on BBC TV's *High Altitude*. Last summer, he brought his high-adrenaline approach – along with two friends – to Jersey to sample the island's surfing and watersports scene

'I've forgotten my passport and I've sent my driver's licence away to have points put on it.'

It's Friday morning and we are standing in zone J of Gatwick check-in and Spencer Claridge, a very old friend and experienced traveller has just uttered these words. Despite Dave Jordan and my own howls of laughter at the forlorn look on Spencer's face I am concerned that we will soon be a man down on what promises to be a very exciting weekend.

After a chance encounter with Roger, the editor of this fine publication, he extended what at the time sounded like an invitation to sample Jersey's surf scene. Having now seen the planned itinerary I'm not sure that it isn't more of a dare, with a weekend of

surfing, kayaking, coasteering and cliff jumping on the cards. But in the face of such danger I have assembled a crack team: Dave is a band manager who has a dodgy ankle, Spencer is an event organiser with a gammy knee and a bad memory and I am a has-been snowboarder turned TV presenter with a knackered knee. We are ready for everything the island can throw at us. Well Dave and I are, Spencer still has to get on the plane.

Thankfully, after much frantic scrummaging around in his pockets, backpack and luggage, Spencer breathlessly produced some photo ID and the lovely check-in lady let us on the plane. As it banked over Jersey we were treated to one of those sights that seem so unrealistic on UK shores – clear blues skies

over white sand beaches and crystal clear waters. But more amazingly, within 30 minutes of landing we had driven the length of St Ouen's Bay, Jersey's huge west-facing beach and surfing HQ, to check the waves.

Our chosen venue was the laid-back Laneez surf school and shop, run by brothers Nick and Mark Durbano, Nick's other half Karena and a crew of local faces who were all equally welcoming. What the two brothers don't know about Jersey surf isn't worth knowing. Sadly, this didn't extend to summoning up waves on demand, but in the face of a small but perfectly formed swell they did conjure up Stand Up paddle boards, perfect for messing around on and exploring St Ouen's rocky outcrops.

'No matter what kind of wave you're looking for you can find it on this exposed little island.'

Laneez Surf Shop

The beach boys at El Tico, St Ouen

I haven't had such an idyllic summer's afternoon in Britain since I was a kid. We spent the best part of four hours swimming, jumping off rocks and then getting to grips with the paddle boards in the small waves. All of this in board shorts without a breath of wind. Some sundowners at El Tico, the sleek new art deco café/cantina on the sea wall alongside Laneez, sealed one of those magical days that only pop up once in a while.

Saturday dawned slightly later than planned and not quite as sunny, but a call on the waves from the boys at Laneez let us know that, while a little blown-out, there was a wave worth getting wet for. We headed for breakfast at Big Vern's halfway along St Ouen's, a beach café and surfing hang-out that's an island institution. The

décor showed us what we had missed yesterday. For the most part it was a photographic record of Jersey's best waves – all very impressive. It highlighted the fact that in terms of serious surf we had come out of season, but also that no matter what kind of wave you're looking for you can find it on this exposed little island.

We hooked up with the Laneez boys again to size up our options. Slowly people were starting to filter down to the beach and join in the conversation – Jersey is that kind of place. Ryan Hervé of Nutz Surfboards was one of them. He exemplifies the island's passionate surfing culture. While I had never met Ryan before, his reputation as a master of the art (and science) of making surfboards precedes him. His company manufactures

enough boards to be financially viable, and he also designs custom boards tailored minutely to specific customer requirements.

Ryan is part of a very healthy local surf scene. Jersey's Surf Club, which celebrated its half-century anniversary in 2009, is the oldest surf club in the UK. Such solid foundations have nurtured an industry that now not only boasts a highly respected surfboard manufacturer but also the brilliantly named Funky Puffin, the pioneering eco-friendly surf wax company. I met up with Andrew Scott Miller who built Funky Puffin from nothing and his love of surfing, Jersey and the environment was an inspiration. If you see a block of Funky Puffin pick it up – it's the only green-minded surfwax on the planet.



The surf still wasn't huge, so we grabbed some foam boards that Laneez use for teaching and headed out for the Watersplash, the name of the most consistent wave at the centre of the beach (and, incidentally, yet another legendary St Ouen surfing café). After a couple of hours trading waves and trying headstands we called it a day and as we did the clouds cleared and the wind dropped.

The Laneez boys could see that those photos at Big Vern's were still haunting us. The humble Mark explained that he had started to explore waves on the outer reefs for tow-in surfing, using a jetski to tow a surfer into waves too big to paddle into – in layman's terms a wave the size of a house and up. Sensing our disappointment at wasting

better conditions Mark gave us a tow out to the reefs. After only half-an-hour we'd all contracted spaghetti arms from the exertion and gained serious respect for the waves that Mark has helped pioneer.

How time flies. It was now almost 3.30pm and we weren't where we should be, at Grève de Lecq further up the coast for a spot of coasteering. Paul, our patient coasteering guide from Surf and Sun Watersports, suggested a postponement until Sunday. We didn't argue. Exhaustion and hunger (we hadn't eaten all day) were taking their toll.

We wolfed down jacket potatoes from the beach café (they have lots of them in Jersey, you know). But with the sun still well

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and truly out we couldn't resist washing our spuds down with some sea water, so went for a scout around the headland to see what lay in store for us tomorrow. A couple of rock jumps into the water and a lot of laughing later we were sitting on the deck of the Prince of Wales pub above the beach glowing with all the fun we had managed to pack into the day while watching another glorious sunset.

Sunday was play day with Surf and Sun, with sea kayaking first on the menu. We launched out of St Brelade, a beautiful south-facing beach, with island legend Kevin Mansell. He didn't mess about. Within 15 minutes we had rounded the point where Nigel Mansell (no relation) lives and were in what felt like total isolation.

Dipping between crags in the rocks Kevin continued what was fast becoming a Jersey tradition of being wonderfully friendly and modest, while regaling us with stories of cliff jumps and kayaking adventures. I wished we had more time as it was obvious that an overnight adventure or even a solid day in these kayaks would give you some amazing access to hidden parts of the island you'd never otherwise be able to reach. Our two hours whizzed by and before we

knew it we were belting back up to Grève de Lecq to get there in time for coasteering with Paul.

Kitted out with wet suits, helmets and life jackets we set off around the rocks to the east of the beach. Knowing this was our last outing we made the most of it. Bravado was running high and having had a few jumps the previous days our acrobatics were becoming more and more adventurous.

So it was that two hours later we floated gently through an incredible cave short-cut back to the beach. I'd gotten off lightly. Spencer had a rapidly swelling black eye, while Dave was happy that his reproducing days were over as a straight shot to crown jewels on one ungainly, unsuccessful jump had rendered him speechless.

There was only one way to end it all. Back at El Tico we enjoyed a very late lunch, some more sunshine in a glass or two. Battered, shattered and sunburned, Jersey had well and truly beaten us. On all counts the island had exceeded our expectations, and we'd made some good friends along the way. But guess what? A wonderful late-summer swell charged in just after we left. Still, it's a great excuse to return.



Off the rocks at
Grève de Lecq