

Mersea Stone

By Ken Worpole

Mersea Stone is an idyllic shingle spit at the eastern edge of Mersea Island, an outpost of white sand, shingle, mudflats and exotic saltmarsh vegetation. In very hot weather it is the perfect place to spend a day on the beach, as it catches every breeze going, situated as it is at the point where the Colne meets the Blackwater and looks out to the open sea. It's also a great place to swim, even at low tide, as the beach shelves deeply at its furthest point where the Brightlingsea Ferry fetches up on shore during the holiday season. Pay attention to the currents, though, particularly when the tide is on the turn.

We were there often this summer. One morning a seal came round the point

only a few yards from the shore, just close to where we were sitting, reading. It had come along the Colne or possibly from Pyefleet Channel. Its sleek, rubbery black body arced in the water, and then it was gone, appearing only minutes later several hundred yards away. Through binoculars its head could be seen from time to time, surfacing above the calm morning water like a bishop's mitre. Around it terns flashed white in the blue sky before plummeting into the sea and out again.

Mersea Stone is a place for watching the estuary change before your eyes. The horizon is transformed completely as the tides rise and fall. In just a few hours much of the coastline from Point Clear to Colne Point

disappears - along with nearer groynes, sandbanks, and the wooden hulks of wrecked boats - only to re-appear hours later. The sea changes too, its colour graduating from light blue to grey to green to silver, as the waters shift across the uneven sands, and the bright sunlight creates shafts of near-transparency in the shallower waters.

The spit marks the beginning of open water, so it is a popular place for sailing, and is the best vantage point to see some of the historic local fishing smacks and bawleys, now restored, put through their paces. These boats are lovely to the eye, both in their design and construction, but also for their gracefulness under sail.



Above from top: Beach Huts
Mersea Island



Mersea Island

Photography: Elli Constantatou