

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06996-0 - Guide to the Mount's Bay and the Land's End: Comprehending the Topography, Botany, Agriculture, Fisheries, Antiquities, Mining, Mineralogy and Geology of Western Cornwall

John Ayrton Paris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

A GUIDE
TO THE
MOUNT'S BAY
AND
THE LAND'S END.

INTRODUCTION.

Of the Mount's Bay, and the Land's End District.

AT the most western extremity, and in the lowest latitude of Great Britain, is situated this delightful and justly celebrated Bay. It is bounded by an irregularly curved outline of many miles in extent, the extreme points of which constitute the well known promontory of the "*Lizard*," and the singular head-land, "*Tol-Pedn-Penwith*," near the "*Land's End*."

From the *Lizard*, the shores pass northward and westward, and gradually losing, as they proceed, their harsh and untamed features, swell

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2 *Mount's Bay—Scenery.*

into sloping sweeps of richly cultivated land, and into hills glowing with the freshest verdure. As the coast advances, and at the same time spreads itself southward, it unites to its luxuriant richness a bolder character, and, rising like a vast amphitheatre, it opposes a barrier to western storms, while it presents its undulating bosom to the sun, and collecting his rays, pours them again with multiplied effect, upon every part of the surrounding country. The shores now pass westward, and extend to the *Land's End*, in their approach to which they become more rocky and precipitous, and occasionally exhibit some of the finest cliff scenery in the island, displaying by splendid natural sections the exact structure and relations of the rocks of which the country is composed.

The western shores are sprinkled with picturesque villages, churches, cottages, and villas; and near the eastern margin of the bay, a pile of rocks, supporting a venerable chapel on its summit, starts abruptly from the waves, and presents an appearance of a most singular and beautiful description—this is *Saint Michael's Mount*, an eminence equally celebrated in the works of the poet, the naturalist, the antiquary, and the historian.

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[More information](#)*Northern Coast.*

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If we pursue the coast, and, turning round the western extremity of our island, trace its outline as it proceeds northerly, and then easterly to the *Bay of Saint Ives*, a very different country presents itself, instead of the undulating curves, and luxuriant herbage of the southern shores, the land is generally high,—the vallies short, narrow, and quick of descent, and the whole landscape affords a scene of incomparable cheerlessness; on the summit of almost every hill the granite is to be seen protruding its rugged forms in the most fantastic shapes, while the neighbouring ground is frequently covered for some distance with its disjointed and gigantic fragments, tumbled together in magnificent confusion; scarcely a shrub is seen to diversify the waste, and the traveller who undertakes to explore the more desolate parts of the district, will feel as if he were walking over the ruins of the globe, and were the only being who had survived the general wreck; and yet Ulysses was not more attached to his Ithaca, than is the Cornish peasant to his wild and cheerless dwelling.

“ Dear is that shed to which his soul conforms,

“ And dear that hill which lifts him to the storms.”

Nor let the intelligent tourist despair of amusement, for he will find much to interest, much to

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4 *Minerals and Antiquities.*

delight him. There is not perhaps a district in Great Britain which presents greater attractions to the mineralogist or geologist; and there is certainly not one which, in so small a compass, has produced so many species of earthy and metallic minerals, or which displays so many geological varieties. At the same time the antiquarian may here occupy himself with the examination of the rude relics of antiquity, which lie scattered on all sides—nothing is more pleasing than that sacred enthusiasm which is kindled in the mind by the contemplation of the faded monuments of past ages, and surely no spot was ever more congenial to such sensations. But to return from the digression.

THE CLIMATE of Mount's Bay is the circumstance which has principally contributed to its celebrity, and is that which renders its shores so beneficial to invalids. Its seasons have been aptly compared to the neap tides, which neither ebb nor flow with energy; for, notwithstanding its southern latitude, the summer is never sultry, while the rigour of winter is so ameliorated that thick ice* is rarely seen; frost, if it occurs, is but

* Skaiting, as an amusement, is entirely unknown among the young men of Penzance. The marsh between this place and Marazion, which is generally overflowed in the winter season, and which offers, when frozen, a very fair field for the skaiter, has not

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Climate of Mount's Bay. 5

of a few hours duration; and the snow storms which, coming from the north and east, bury the fields of every other part of England, are generally exhausted before they reach this favoured spot, or their last sprinkling is dissolved by the warm breezes which play around its shores.

The records lately collated and published by Dr. Forbes, from the meteorological journals of Messrs. Giddy, eminent surgeons at Penzance, afford abundant proof that this neighbourhood enjoys a mean summer temperature *under*, and a mean winter temperature greatly *above*, the mean of places similarly situated as to latitude, but differing in the latter being placed at a distance from the sea; for the mass of water held in the vast basin of the ocean preserves a far more even temperature than the atmosphere, and is constantly at work to maintain some degree of equilibrium in the warmth of the air; so that in the summer it carries off a portion of the caloric from it, while in the winter it restores a part of that which it contains.*

been more than four times during the last thirty years sufficiently solidified to admit of that diversion, viz. in the years 1788, 1794, 1814, and 1819.

* It is this fact that permits the cultivation of many species of plants in the open ground about London, which in the vicinity of Paris will not live without a green-house.

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[More information](#)6 *Mildness of its Winter.*

The same registers have, moreover, recorded a fact with respect to the Penzance climate which renders it still more acceptable to the invalid,—the comparatively small annual, monthly, and daily range of its temperature. Nor are the indications of the thermometer the only test upon which we need rely,—the productions of nature will furnish striking elucidations, and amply confirm the justness of our meteorological observations. From the vegetable kingdom we derive conclusive evidence of the mildness of our winter, since all green-house plants may be preserved with far less care and attendance than in any other part of England; myrtles* and geraniums, even of the tenderest kind, and many other exotics, are here constantly exposed during the winter, and yet they flower most luxuriantly in the summer. The *Hydrangea* attains an immense size in our shrubberies, as does also the *Verbena Triphylla*. The great American aloe (*Agave Americana*), has flowered in the open air at Mousehole, at Tehidy park, and in the Scilly

* These plants thrive in the open air, and commonly attain a height of ten or twelve feet; they may be seen trained on the front of some of the houses in Penzance to double that height. A sufficient quantity of cuttings was obtained from a tree of this description, covering one of the houses, in the course of six weeks, to supply the oven with fuel for three months!

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[More information](#)*Vegetation.*

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islands. To these we may add a long list * of tender exotics, all of which are flourishing in the neighbourhood of Penzance, and it has been justly remarked that were ornamental horticulture to become an object of attention in this neighbourhood, as it is in many other parts of England, this list might be very considerably extended. Amongst the rare *indigenous* plants of this district, the *Sibthorpia Europæa* may be particularised as affording a remarkable proof of the

* The following catalogue was drawn up by the *Rev. W. T. Bree*, of Allesley, Warwickshire, *viz.*

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Amaryllis Vittata. | Hydrangea Decolor. |
| Arum Colocasia. | Haustonia Coccinea. |
| Azalea Indica. | Hemerocallis Alba. |
| Buddlœa Globosa. | Lavandula Viridis. |
| Bocconia Cordata. | Lobelia Fulgens. |
| Coronilla Glauca, &c. | Myrtus Communis. |
| Calla Æthiopica. | Mesembryanthemum Deltoideum |
| Cistus Salvifolius. | Melianthus Major. |
| Chrysanthemum Indicum | Mimulus Glutinosus. |
| Camellia Japonica. | Magnolia Tripetala. |
| Cyclamen Persicum. | Metrosideros Lanceolata. |
| Canna Indica. | Olea Fragrans. |
| Cheiranthus Tristis. | Pittosporum Undulatum. |
| Dahlia (many varieties.) | Phylica Ericoides. |
| Daphne Indica. | Protœa Argentea. |
| Eucomis Striata. | Punica Nana. |
| Fuchsia Coccinea. | Solanum Pseudo-Capsicum. |
| Geranium (several species of the African G.) | Teucrium Frutescens. |
| Hypericum Coris. | ———— Marum. |
| ———— Crispum | Verbena Triphylla. |
| ———— Balearicum. | Westringia Rosmarinacea. |

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[More information](#)8 *Abundance of vegetable*

mildness of our winter. This elegant little plant when transplanted into the midland counties is killed even in the most sheltered gardens. Nor must we pass over unnoticed the more substantial proofs of the same fact, as furnished by our winter markets, for at a season when pot-herbs of all kinds are destroyed by frost in the eastern counties, our tables are regularly supplied in abundance; * and so little is the progress of vegetation checked during the months of winter, that the meadows retain their verdure, and afford even a considerable supply of grass to the cattle.

Nor is the animal kingdom deficient in proofs of the congenial mildness of western Cornwall. We are indebted to the *Reverend W. T. Bree*, of

* *Cabbages* are ready for the table as early as February; *Turnips* before the end of March; *Broccoli*, against Christmas; *Green Peas* are generally ready by the middle of May. But the most remarkable exception, perhaps, to the ordinary routine of the culinary calendar is to be found in the growth of the potatoe. It is customary for the gardeners in the vicinity of Penzance to raise two crops in one year. The first being planted in November is gathered in April, May, and June; the second crop is planted immediately on taking up the first, and as late as to the middle of July. The first or spring crop has, in general, no other defence from the cold of winter than the stable dung used as manure, and it is rarely injured by the frost! Such is the ordinary practice of the market-gardener; but Mr. Bolitho of Chyandour, has constantly new potatoes at Christmas, and through the whole of January and part of February, raised in the open garden, with no other shelter than that afforded by some matting during the coldest nights,

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food in Winter.

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Allesley, Warwickshire, for the following remarks, which were communicated by him to Dr. Forbes of Penzance, and published by that gentleman in his Observations on the Climate of this neighbourhood.

“ One of the most remarkable instances of the mildness of your climate is the unusually early appearance of frog's spawn: this I observed at Gulval on the 8th of January. According to White's Naturalist's Calendar (which was made from observations taken in Hampshire, a warm and early county,) the earliest and latest appearances there specified, are February 28th, and March 22d. Taking therefore the second week in March as the average for its appearance, you should seem, in this instance, to be full two months earlier than Hampshire.”

“ In this neighbourhood (near Coventry) I rarely see any of our species of Swallow, except perhaps an occasional straggler, before the second week in April, but in the year 1818 I was not a little gratified at observing upwards of a score of Sand Martins, (*Hirundo Riparia*), sporting over the marsh between Gulval and Marazion, on March 31st. The wind at that time was N. W. and the thermometer at 50° in the shade at noon. The Chaffinch (*Fringilla Cælebs*) I heard, in

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10 *Coolness of its Summer.*

Cornwall, begin to chirp his spring note the last day of December. With us he is seldom heard until the beginning of February. The Viper, (*Coluber Berus*), a great lover of warmth and moisture, occurs more frequently in Cornwall than in the midland counties.”

We have already stated that our summers are as remarkable for coolness, as our winters are desirable for mildness. This circumstance necessarily renders our fruit inferior in flavour to that which is produced in the inland counties; indeed the grape very rarely ripens in the open air, and the apricot tree seldom affords any fruit, except in a few favoured spots. The tree of the green-gage plum is nearly equally unproductive. The walnut, and the common hazel-nut very seldom bear fruit. Apples for the table, however, are plentiful and good; and our strawberries may be considered as possessing a decided superiority.

Why then, it may be asked, should not this climate be as eligible to invalids as that which they are generally sent across the Channel to enjoy? In reply we will venture to assert, and without the least fear of being contradicted by those, whose experience renders them competent judges, that it is not only equally beneficial, but far more eligible, unless, indeed, the patient can