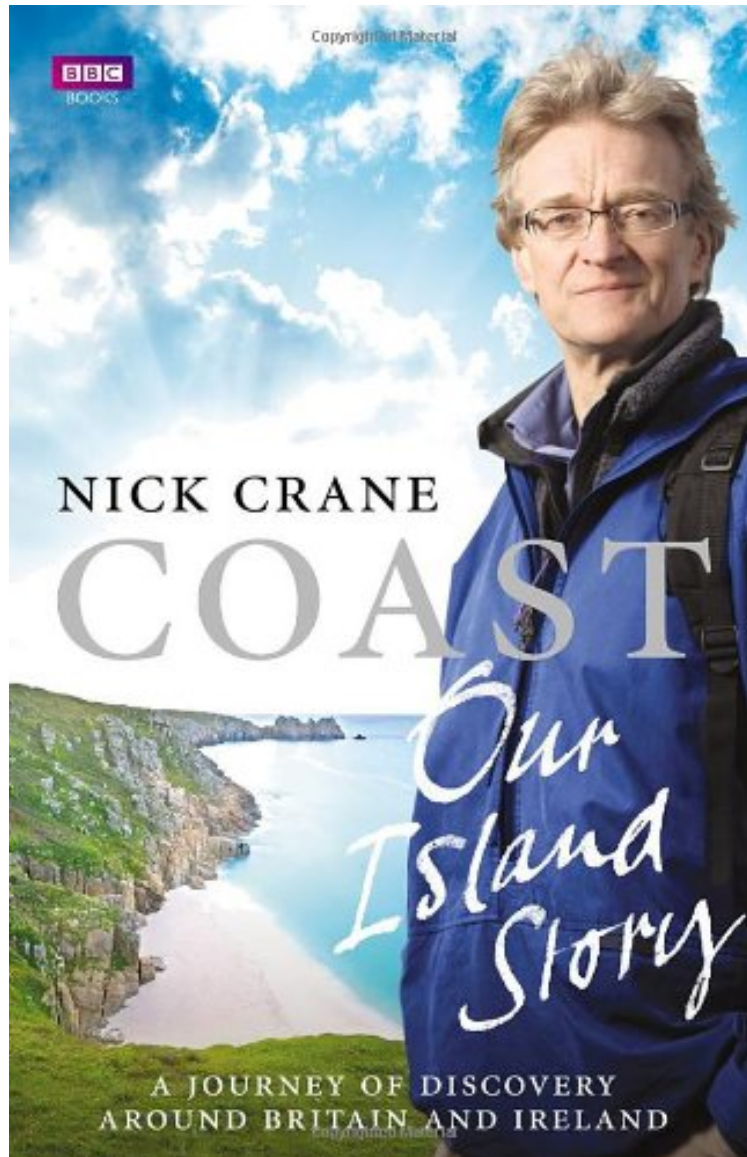


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## Coast: Our Island Story: A Journey of Discovery Around Britain and Ireland

Nick Crane

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**Nick Crane : Coast: Our Island Story: A Journey of Discovery Around Britain and Ireland** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Coast: Our Island Story: A Journey of Discovery Around Britain and Ireland:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating, but information overloadBy AcornNick Crane is one of

the presenters of the BBC television series *Coast*. This book is based in part on his experiences during the making of that programme, but is not a re-telling of the programme or an advertorial tie-in. Instead, he explores a number of themes about the British and Irish coasts, and takes us on a journey that covers prehistory to the present day, packing in more detail than you might have thought possible. He opens with an account of how the rocks and shorelines of the British Isles were formed. I'm not a fan of geology, thanks to a mildly insane science master at school, but I'd never heard of Doggerland, the bridge that once linked eastern England to Europe, and was intrigued to know that familiar red rock formations in Devon and Dorset are leftovers from deserts when Europe was drifting northwards over the equator. Caught between the deep Atlantic and the shallow North Sea, Britain's coast is ever changing, beautiful yet often dangerous. Fish and fishing have been integral to life in the islands since the earliest humans arrived. Crane discusses early fishing boats and the advantages of coracles and similar craft. The British appetite for herrings built an enormous industry, but with the advent of steamships and drift nets it was all too much of a good thing and fish stocks collapsed. It is not a singular story. Today all major fish species are seriously depleted and the odds of revitalisation do not look good. Trading ports preceded the ancient Roman occupation, and while trade has fluctuated over the centuries, shipping remains by far the most important means for goods to enter and exit Britain. Waves of invaders after the Romans - the Germanic tribes and then the Norman French - all focused on building ports and sea trade. From Tudor times port towns grew wealthy and remain significant today, though many smaller ones lost their trade as ships got bigger and goods were packaged into containers. The shores of the British Isles are dotted with castles and forts. The Normans were avid builders of coastal forts in order to prevent another invasion like their own. The Tudors revived the idea of lighted beacons to warn of approaching ships so that armies could prepare for battle. The threat of invasion by Napoleon in the early 1800s led to the construction of the Martello towers, many of which are still standing, and the two world wars saw even more fortifications. All these have been rendered largely obsolete by modern warfare based on control of the skies. No study of the seashore would be complete without tales of smugglers and their nefarious cousins, ship wreckers. The rugged coasts, many cliffs, inlets and caves of the islands were a godsend to those evading taxes on trade. Heartless and greedy plunderers used the dangers of the coast to lure ships onto rocks or sandbars so they would founder and be ripe for the picking. It's illegal of course, but that has never stopped people from stealing the cargo and materials of wrecked ships, as events as recent as those in Branscombe in 2007 very clearly showed. On the other side, governments since the Middle Ages have imposed taxes on shipping and trade, and set up customs houses and fleets of ships to enforce the laws. Given its importance in wealth creation, shipping has been subject to much regulation and control. A lot of this was intended to make shipping safer. The invention of sea charts, shipping lanes, lighthouses and buoys, as well as sea rescue services, have all helped to make travel and trade by sea less prone to tragedy and danger. Yet the islands remain strewn with old shipwrecks and human error can never be eliminated. Seaside resorts are an iconic element of British life but they are a relatively recent development. The eighteenth century saw a mania for sea bathing to cure ailments and promote good health, and this seems to hark back to very ancient traditions in coastal communities. Greater leisure time, the laying down of railways and road networks, and the growth of cheap bus and car travel all combined to bring swarms of day trippers and holiday makers to the sea. Others railed against this commercialisation of the coast, but in the end people voted with their buckets and spades. It was only with cheap air travel from the 1970s that many began to abandon Britain's beaches for more exotic shores. Global warming presents a new threat to Britain's coastline and will have a negative impact on the livelihoods of many. Crane discusses this issue but gives little attention to the related problem of pollution and its threat to ecosystems. His assessment of the mess we have made of the seas is generally muted. The main problem I had with Crane's approach is the overwhelming amount of detail crammed into the eight long chapters. I felt at times as if I were going under, unable to breathe. Instead of focusing on one part of the coast, as Jean Sprackland did in her wonderful book *Strands*, he tries to cover the whole gamut. He jumps from one end of the islands to the other, from ancient times to modern and everywhere in between. His enthusiasm is utterly genuine but I often found it more daunting than infectious. The thematic stories are full of interest, but sometimes the thread gets lost in the myriad of detail. That said, you will learn a lot about British shores from this book and I now have a (worryingly long) list of places that I need to go and see. Nick Crane is erudite and passionate about his subject and that shows very clearly. As I put the book down, I realised I should have read it sitting by the British seaside. It's the sort of story that makes you look up occasionally and see familiar things in quite a different way.

*Coast* is one of Britain's best-loved TV series, regularly attracting a viewership of over 3.5 million. It is also a best-selling book series, but this is the first book to be written by a *Coast* presenter and offering stories from every series and more, to create the definitive guide to our coastline. Nicholas Crane brings his geographer's eye and love of the British landscape to take you on an enthralling journey along our coastline. Both a celebration of and reference guide to the coast, Nick draws on all the elements that have made the series such a success, from local history to national defense, forts and ports, fishermen and artists, sacred buildings and detailed cartography, as well as taking in iconic landmarks, seaside holidays and, of course, wildlife. Nick's evocative prose and extensive knowledge infuse this book,

which combined with two color plate sections, make this an unmissable purchase for all fans of the British coast.