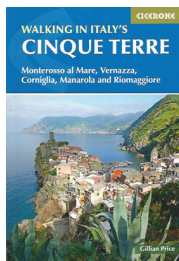


Having called off a trip to MacCulloch's Fossil Tree a couple of months ago by paddling across Loch Scridain in marginal conditions and, for the same reason, not followed the tough 18km shoreline walk described in the book, I would like to have had a picture of the tree included, the destination for this route.

This is not the only destination in the book more easily reached on the sea or from the sea when the weather conditions are right. Plenty of pictures of the coastline and its adjacent topography show why this island and its small outliers offer plenty of scope for paddlers.

### Walking in Italy's Cinque Terre



Gillian Price  
Cicerone  
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The five villages in question form the basis of a national park facing the Ligurian Sea in the far northwest of Italy. They are at the foot of 'outrageously steep terraces' of nearly vertical fields and buildings are frequently stacked upwards as other directions are not on offer.

They are served by a railway which is nearly all in tunnel and by

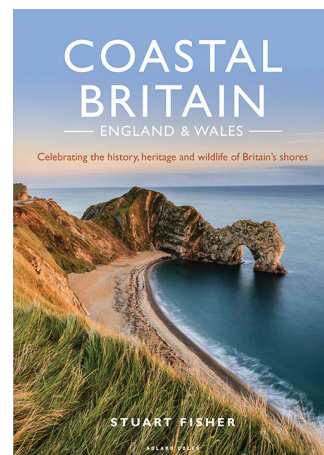
roads which are restricted. Locals use the footpaths, which frequently consist of long flights of stone steps and a connecting footpath which is tolled. One section is in tunnel. The fine views along the coast are only where there are breaks in the shading trees and bushes.

The 12km section of coast does seem to be crying out to be seen from the water, starting from one end. There is just one real beach but 32 serviced beach sections with sunshades, deckchairs and the like. The villages have harbours which you are strongly encouraged to visit.

The final walk is a circuit of the island of Palmaria with successively smaller islands of Tino and Tinozzo, all close to each other.

Maps are at 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 although there is a large scale map of each village.

This is a tempting guide to a beautiful section of the Italian coast not easily reached by most visitors.



### Bestseller

*Coastal Britain: England & Wales* is proving to be our best selling book. Within the first month 70% of the print run was sold. The Scottish volume is in preparation.

## Old attitudes

A couple of years ago I had the job of surveying a recent balancing pond for depth. It was about 50m in diameter and it only took me a few minutes to paddle round and check the depth in a few places by lowering a paddle over the side. It was about 1.5m deep, consistently.

More recently I have been asked to do something similar for a nearby reservoir. This one is a bit larger, 1km long, less than half the length of Holme Pierrepont, with width varying between a maximum of 250m and a 100m waist in the centre. Also, it is a bit deeper, reputedly to nearly 5m deep. It was excavated in the 19th century and the issue is whether siltation has reduced its depth significantly, which seems likely, the reason for the interest.

This time it would be less simple but a throwline calibrated for length and used as a plumbob would do for depth and a borrowed measuring wheel to give approximate locations would be accurate enough. All I needed was the permission. This is where it got difficult, this being a managed site.

I would need five million pounds' worth of insurance. In fact, I would be covered for twice that sum by the body wanting the survey but why stop there? Just how much damage could I do with a kayak? How would you set about invoking such a sum? Perhaps you could take somebody's head off while surfing or impale a boat which sinks, drowning its occupants. Maybe you could be hit by a waterspout or lightning, more likely. This is a sheltered reservoir in the south of England, the site surrounded by trees.

I would need a rescue boat to accompany me. Furthermore, its driver had to have passed RYA Level 2. I reported back to the chairman, who admitted that he had such a boat. It has had less use recently as he has been commissioning a couple of other boats over the last couple of years, aircraft carriers, big, shiny, new ones. Most importantly of all, he has a bit of paper which says he is qualified to RYA Level 2.

The rescue boat worried me. As a former WW racer I never had such a facility although I did once while paddling solo round Britain. At Dover I took a line into the eastern entrance of the harbour and out of the west, allowing the harbourmaster to see where I was. It would be inconvenient to have somebody swimming in the harbour entrance with ferries coming in and out in quick succession every few minutes. I called him on arrival and he could not have been more helpful, coming out of his office in person to wave me through when the coast was clear. Even the safety boat he sent to pick me up if I fell in was well intended and would have been wise if it had not insisted on staying so close.

However, this time was on a reservoir. The required buoyancy aid

## Moods

would be no problem and would have pockets for notebook and pencil. I could have produced crash helmet, high vis jacket and steel toecapped boots had they been required.

A further concern is that I would disturb the nesting birds and the otters. I would have thought that, in October, even the wood pigeons would have finished raising their final broods of the year.

The Tryweryn at Bala has information boards about the otters living there, Wales' site most intensively used by paddlers and rafters. I have had the pleasure of encountering otters on various occasions, nearly colliding with one once when it surfaced right in front of me. On several occasions I have met one and we have sat looking at each other for a long while before the otter has submerged. The Lugg, Loch Ewe and Shuna come to mind. I sent a copy of a photo I took of one this summer on Loch Linnhe, which came close to investigate my sea kayak, still carrying a fish in its mouth. If you want to see wildlife close up there is no better way than from a kayak, certainly not on foot, which does scare them.

Apparently, if you go to the reservoir at the right time you can see anglers, canoeists, paddleboarders, dragon boats and others, presumably all with their rescue boats. If a rescue boat is required it would make more sense to work out of that and leave the kayak at home.

The issue is the bits of paper which are not for our safety but for the safety of the providers and their insurers. Customers are not allowed to use their discretion or make mistakes. This contrasts with those who lived through the world wars, who experienced hardship, had to make decisions themselves on the fly and were able to think for themselves afterwards.

Contrast this with the likes of Penn State University in the USA, the members of whose century old Adventure Club are no longer allowed to swim on canoeing trips, even with buoyancy aids. They need to be led by a member of staff and are not permitted to handle knives or stoke the fire, which must make camp cooking difficult. Some young people do undertake extreme activities, often by sidestepping the system, but many reasonable activities have been lost, from the Exe Descent to my local steam fair, because the insurance became prohibitive, not because the risks became any greater. You can understand why many people spend time safely playing on their computers instead of going out of doors.

People have become increasingly reliant on others to make decisions and run the risks for them. I had a book commissioning editor who, when younger, was told by her father to bite off more than she could chew then chew it. What a refreshingly old attitude.