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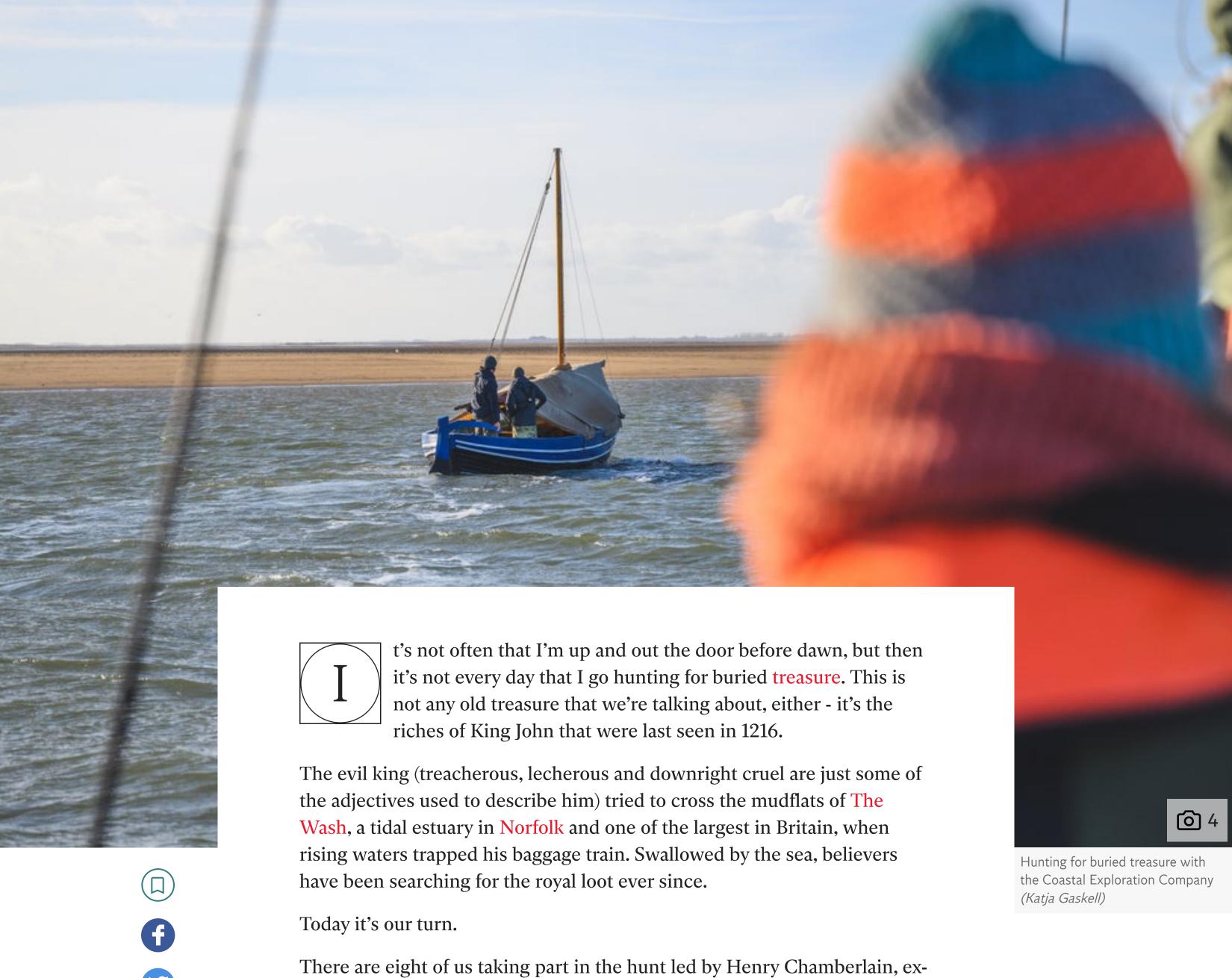
CORONAVIRUS ADVICE

Hunting for treasure in Norfolk's sandbanks

INDEPENDENT PREMIUM

A sailing trip to The Wash provides more than the promise of a gold rush, finds Katja Gaskell 18 hours ago





marine and the founder of the Coastal Exploration Company. Established

five years ago, the company offers unique seafaring expeditions into the

I climb on board Salford, a proud 30ft whelker dating back

to the 1950s and the last of her kind to have been built in

creeks, salt marshes and open seas of the North Norfolk coast on

traditional sailing boats. Henry has already given us our early-morning briefing ("sail into The Wash, find the treasure") and all that remains is to load the final few items onto the boats.

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nearby King's Lynn. Traditionally, this type of flatbottomed work boat would have been used to collect sea snails from the ocean before loading them on trains bound for London. Sailing alongside us is My Girls, a beautiful 20ft crabbing boat that has also been given a new lease of Why Exmoor's wildness life, and now transports visitors to discover the stories, is best explored on a legends and sheer natural beauty of the area. The search literary tour for King John's treasure is the company's latest adventure.

> We sail out of the harbour from Wells-next-the-Sea as the early morning sky is painted with streaks of pink and orange. The boat's depth gauge reads 1.2m and then jumps almost immediately to 0.8m; the seas here are perilously shallow and scattered with sandbanks. Henry, along with skippers Zoe and Colin, checks the navigation app regularly, translating the blue and green splodges on the map into safe sailing channels. Nevertheless, we shudder along the top of one sandbar before gliding into the main channel. Not long after, we're sailing across a blue-grey sea, past a row of beach huts the colour of fondant fancies. The crew hoist the terracotta-coloured canvas sails, cut the engine, and we zip along the coastline just as traditional

Norfolk sailors might have done in times gone by. I'm entrusted with the

helm for a short while and watch as the winter sun breaks through the

clouds, bathing the coastline in a soft, ghostly light. We race past Holkham Bay, Scolt Head Island and the shipwreck on Brancaster beach. There are bumpy patches too; we run into a small squall and get tossed about on the ocean waves, spindrift soaking our faces. **INDY/GO Weekly Newsletter** TIME TO TRAVEL! **SIGN UP**

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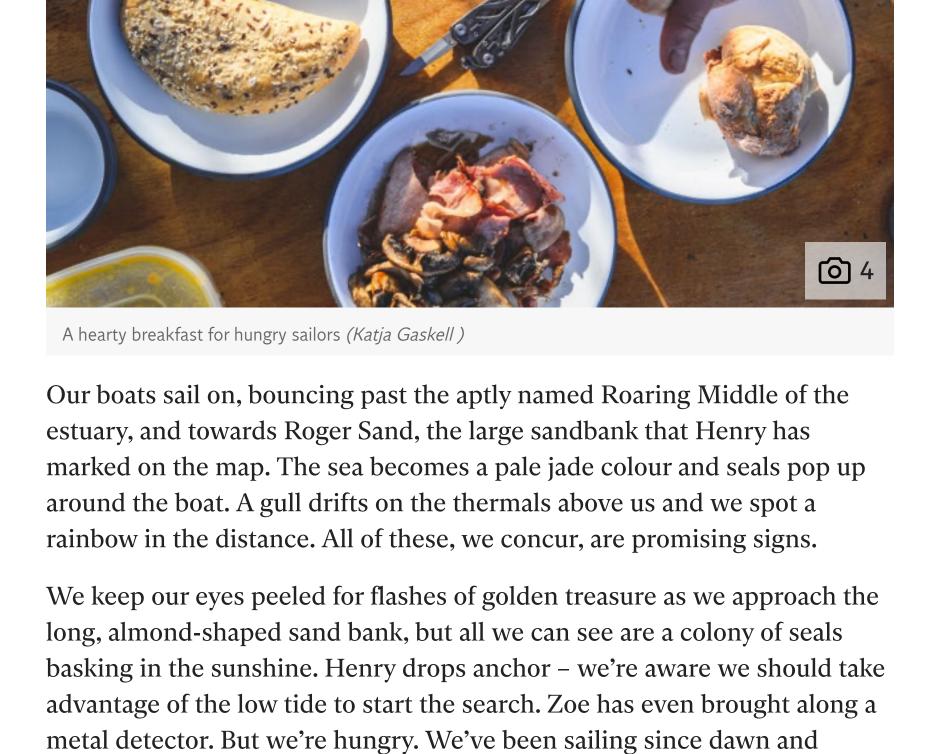


"We know that King John lost his baggage train around here," he says, pointing to an area to the south of The Wash. "But because of the perpetual ebb and flow of the tide, we think the moving channel waters would have dragged the treasure out this way."

Near midday we approach The Wash, a rectangular-shaped estuary that sits

between Norfolk and Lincolnshire. Henry pulls out a map and indicates

where he thinks we'll strike gold.



decide that successful treasure hunts can only take place on full stomachs.

Henry sets up the wood burning stove and soon the smell of frying bacon

Of course, the real prize here is The Wash itself. It's a remote and wild

As we're eating, however, we see the waters begin to rise. Colin jumps into

the shallows and wades across to Roger Sand but the tide is coming in fast

and eggs mingles with the salty air.

area of astonishing beauty

- within minutes, the 500m-long stretch of sand is submerged, leaving only a patch of foam and a bob of seals that seem to float on the surface. Witnessing the speed with which the tide rushes in, it's easy to see just how King John's treasure was lost in the first place.

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Norfolk's sandbanks can come and go in an instant (Katja Gaskell)

Of course, the real prize here is The Wash itself. It's a remote and wild area of astonishing beauty. The landscape of salt marshes and mudflats are some of Britain's most important winter feeding grounds for birds. Seals swim freely in the open waters or laze on sandbanks that magically appear and disappear within minutes. The shallow waters are ideal for wild swimming - although you might want to wait until temperatures rise once more – and the sandbars are the perfect place for a picnic, or even an over of cricket. And, of course, The Wash is home to buried treasure – which I'm confident we'll find next time. **Travel essentials** The Coastal Exploration Company runs seafaring adventures throughout

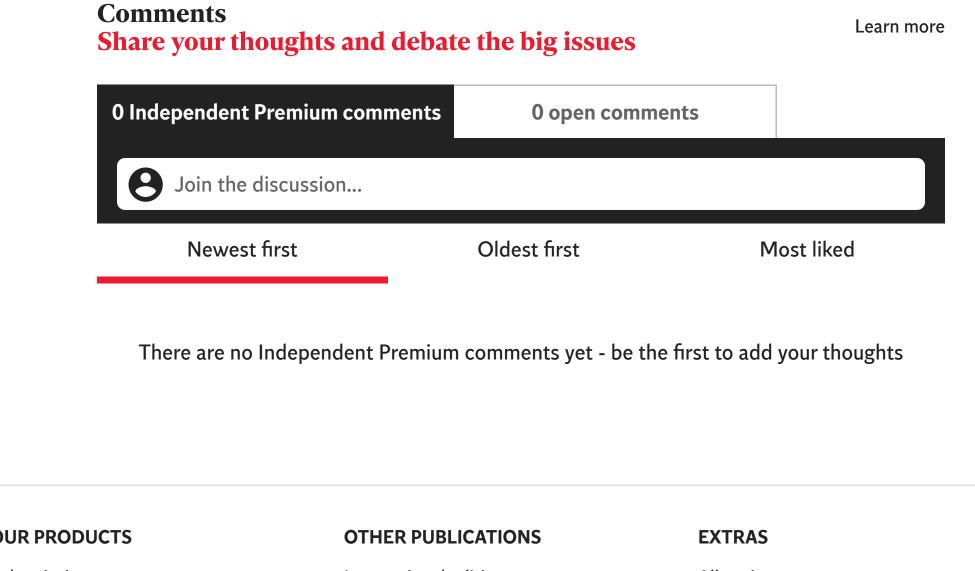
includes breakfast, lunch and plenty of hot drinks and snacks throughout the day.

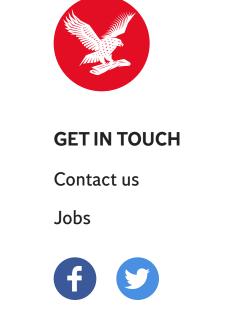
England is currently on national lockdown, which means all but essential travel is banned MORE ABOUT: THE WASH | NORFOLK

the year from its base at Wells-next-the-Sea in Norfolk. The Hunting for

Royal Treasure trip is a full day sail and can accommodate a maximum of

eight people. It costs £980 on a private tour, regardless of numbers, and





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