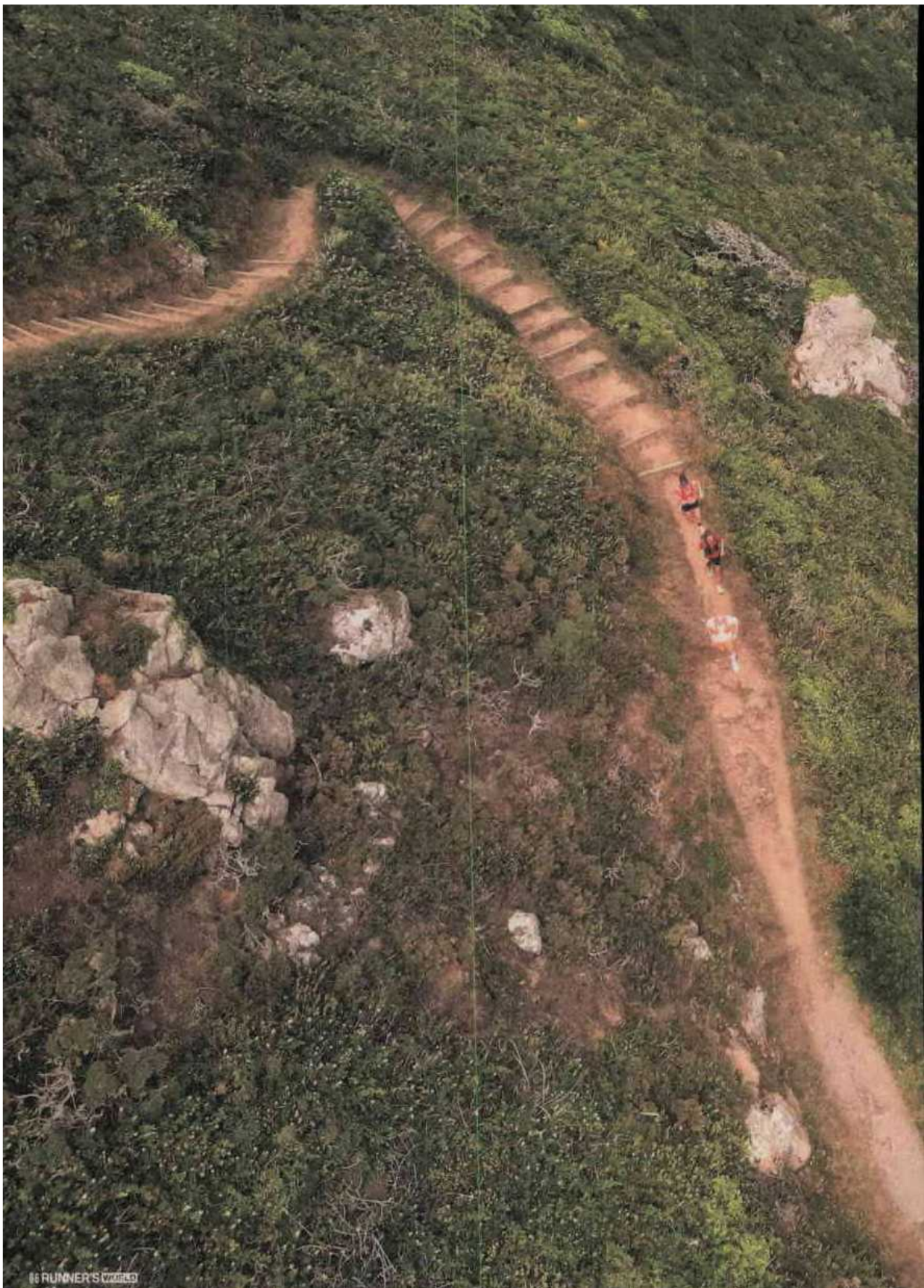








Once the mist clears from the shores around Guernsey, the views become visible. 'You have to remind yourself to stop and drink them in,' says Matt

The Channel Islands aren't the first, second or probably even third destination that comes to mind when you think of trail running, but Guernsey has a surprisingly rich running culture. The annual GU36 Ultra loops around the whole island, making good use of its beaches and the stunning cliff-top paths on the island's rugged southern coast with its towers of rusty-red stone that march out into turquoise seas.

Despite being just nine miles long and three miles wide, Guernsey has a varied landscape with long, sandy beaches on its western side contrasting with the high cliffs of the south and east coast. These inspired Pierre-Auguste Renoir to compose some of his most beautiful paintings, of the views from Moulin Huet Bay, back in 1883.

The Guernsey Coastal Path runs for 39 miles around the entire island, starting and finishing in its capital, St Peter Port. The marked trails are well defined and

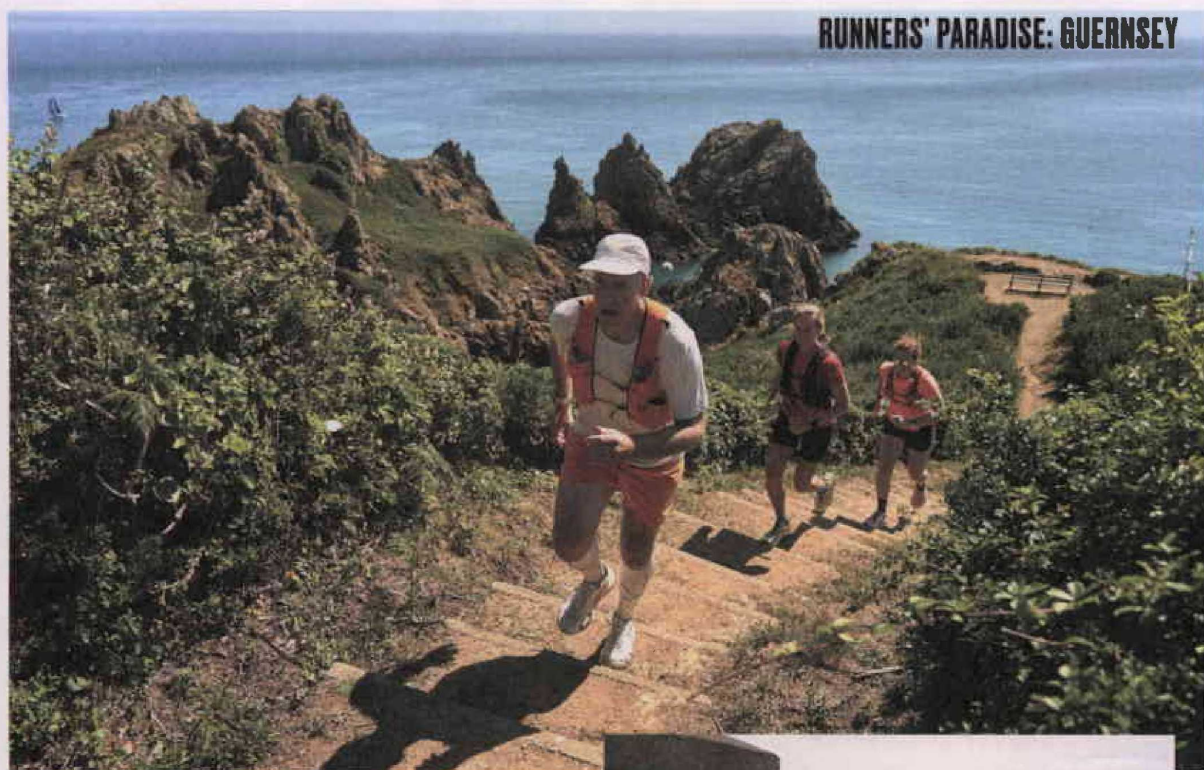


MATT RAY is an adventure journalist and trail runner. He has been seeking rugged, high-altitude trails for two decades and blogs at adventurefella.com and [@adventurefella](https://twitter.com/adventurefella)

the many steep sections are set with steps to make them more scalable.

Aside from the running terrain, the Balliwick of Guernsey is a self-governing British Crown Dependency, with its own bank notes, that includes this island as well as the smaller ones of Herm and Sark, which are visible just offshore to the east, and Alderney further out to the north-east. Because the island is 70 miles from southern England but just 30 from Normandy and almost as far south as Paris, it does feel very different to the UK mainland. The streets, houses and people show their Britishness, but the plants, wildlife and geography have the flavour of a land between lands, which makes trail running here feel like you're exploring somewhere at once reassuringly familiar and beautifully strange.

You can get anywhere on the island in half an hour or so by car, so it's easy to experience running alongside wide open, white-sand beaches as well as up and down steep cliff paths and through quaint country lanes, all within a 48-hour stay.



RUNNERS' PARADISE: GUERNSEY

STAIRWAY TO STACKS

My first sight of Guernsey is from my window seat on the short flight from London City Airport; swathes of golden sand harboured by rocky bays and overlooked by stone towers, surrounded by sparkling blue waves in the evening sunshine.

There's a different mood the next morning as a heavy sea mist coils and rolls around the rocky headlands like a mythical sea serpent come to claim its tribute. We meet our guide for the day by La Valette Bathing Pools, just south of St Peter Port. Louise Smith holds the women's record time for the GU36 Ultra and she's accompanied by running buddies Katie Lowe and Caroline Barby.

After pausing to review our 15km route, we attack the flights of stone steps up to the restored canons of Clarence Battery, built in 1780 to defend the military HQ of Port George, which marks the start of the island's South Coast Cliff Paths.

Soon after diving into the cover of the trees in Bluebell Woods, we climb up over the roots and rocks to the first panoramic, cliff-top viewpoint of the day. The crystal waters of Fermain Bay sparkle invitingly below and I'm sweaty enough to be tempted by a dip, but the climb has been so steep that we're already 60m above the beach.

The terrain opens out as we run the cliffs above Marble Bay (Le Pied du Mûr), one of Guernsey's most secluded beaches, which is famously made of rock pebbles, washed into miniature globes by the sea. There are iconic natural features around every corner. Louise doesn't hesitate for a second when I ask why she loves this rugged run: 'The views! You have to remind yourself to stop and drink them in - they're so beautiful.' And even though it's a warm Saturday morning in early summer, we've yet to cross paths with anyone coming the other way. 'We can be out on the cliffs for hours and not see anyone else,' says Louise.

The cliffs here are made of Tcart Gneiss (pressure-transformed granite), which has been carved into an intricate



What Guernsey lacks in size, it makes up for in hills, so stopping for the wonderful views is a very welcome rest

coastline of deep ravines and bays, with dense vegetation clinging to its steep sides, until it looks like the folded skin of a gigantic iguana. The cliff path resolutely tracks these 'Lost World' gradients, so while we're a long way from the Alps, there's a hell of a lot of up and down. In fact, our route profile looks like the electrocardiogram of an energy drink-addicted ostrich, and my thighs are already screaming.

Running up the steeper, stepped sections is hard enough, but coming back down puts massive impact on my knees. No wonder that the south coast's 15-mile Full Cliffs trail is locally known as 'The Dogbreaker!' 'You do have to prepare for going up and down these steps because it puts a big load on your knees and hips,' says Katie Lowe, a Pilates coach. So, what's the secret? 'You need to lift heavy stuff!' she laughs. 'Lift weights in the gym and do lots of squats and lunges. Your strength reduces over time, so you do have to keep building it up.'

