A ROCKY PARADOX

International law, Island Studies and the socio-cultural significance of pinnacles and sea stacks (with reference to the Faroe Islands, Channel Islands and Balls Pyramid)

[Received December 11th 2024; accepted March 11th 2025 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.246]

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ABSTRACT: Island Studies, as it has developed over the last 3-4 decades, has been primarily addressed to research and theorisation concerning inhabited, formerly inhabited and/or inhabitable islands. There are several types of terrestrial formations that have fallen outside its evolving purview, including sandbanks, reefs and rocks. The latter have not so much been formally excluded as eschewed, in parallel with international legal definitions of islands and of their differences from other geomorphological forms. The United Nations 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), in particular, carefully seeks to distinguish rocks from islands. But there is something of a paradox here in that various types of rocks have proved significant environmental, socio-economic and/or cultural assets to nations that include them (or seek recognition of their claims for their inclusion) within their maritime borders. This article attempts to highlight aspects of rocks relevant to Island Studies, and to human societies more generally, with regard to two forms, pinnacles and sea stacks, drawing on examples from the Faroe Islands, the (English) Channel Islands and Balls Pyramid in the southwestern Pacific. In doing so, it elaborates their socio-cultural and environmental significance to the regional and national societies whose borders they fall within and, thereby, identifies their validity as objects of analysis within Island Studies and within geography more broadly.

KEY WORDS: Sea stacks, pinnacles, Island Studies, Faroe Islands, Channel Islands, Balls Pyramid

I. Introduction: UNCLOS, Island Studies and the problematic nature of islands

From its inception, Island Studies has focussed on inhabited, formerly inhabited and/or inhabitable islands. Other water-hemmed forms such as rocks, reefs and sandbanks have

rarely been addressed within its journals and conferences.[1] This is credible, in the sense that all fields of study identify a core area of concern and seek means of delineating the periphery of that area. The border they place around themselves often appears hard but, in practice, is often permeable and contestable. In the latter regard, the considerable body of diplomatic, legal and national security related activity that has concerned rocks over the last 3-4 decades suggests that Island Studies might have profitably identified a sub-field addressed to uninhabited/uninhabitable marine isolates from its earliest phases, both as a topic in-itself and with regard to rocks as significant components of archipelagos and aquapelagos. Rocks' exclusion from Island Studies closely parallels definitions offered within international maritime law. Part VIII Article 121 of the United Nations 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines an island as "a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide" and distinguishes islands from rocks, "which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own" (and with both of these being distinct from "low tide elevations" that are identified as a separate category). The distinction between rocks and islands is significant, within the terms of the Convention and subsequent international disputes that refer to it, in that it deems that rocks cannot have "their own continental shelf" – a topic that the UNCLOS pays particular attention to.

As should be apparent, there are major problems with UNCLOS's definition of rocks (and their distinction from islands) and this has led to major international disputes and legal cases. To begin with the first part of the characterisation, it is a moot point as to whether *anywhere* **cannot** "sustain human habitation." An exceptionally resourceful shipwreck victim may inhabit a tiny – let's say, soil and vegetation free - rocky isolate for a prolonged duration with judicious use of rainwater and any marine animal or plant food they can forage. Does that make it habitable? The second UNCLOS phrase is even more problematic, to the point of being meaningless. Can any island "sustain… an economic life of their own"? Surely not, as humans are required to generate economic activity, so the phrase should refer to "human populated islands" sustaining an "economic life of their own." But how low is the bar on the latter? Does *any* economic activity generated by humans on what might otherwise be considered a rock transform it into an island? There are also other complications. The UNCLOS framework implies that such definitions are fixed and that humans are incapable of transforming one type of locale into another. Yet human history has many examples of islands being transformed into rocks by various types of enterprise (such as military or extractivist activities) and of rocks being transformed into islands.

Such definitions are important in international law since, as Matz-Lück (2018) has summarised:

> *The world's oceans are divided into different zones. These are defined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982. Economically important are the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the continental shelf, which extend up to 200 nautical miles from the baseline – the low-water line along the coast of the state. In these areas, the respective state can economically exploit natural resources, such as gas, oil or fishing grounds. Mainland and islands can create these economic zones, but rocks cannot.*

While rocks cannot generate EEZs under UNCLOS, nations owning rocks outside of their EEAs are entitled to territorial sea around them extending to 22 kilometres. The most notable ruling on this matter to date has concerned China's claims for an extensive EEZ in

[1] With the notable exception of Fleury and Johnson's 2015 study of the Minquiers and Écréhous.

the South China Seas that it has based on modifications of various atolls and rocky outcrops. In a ruling handed down in January 2013, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) (an intergovernmental organisation representing 122 member countries), upheld the existing UNCLOS principles and adjudged that whatever China's modification of rocks to make them habitable and/or generate economic activity, these were still rocks in a legal sense and thereby did not allow for the creation of internationally recognised EEZs around them. One notable aspect of the ruling was a terminological distinction between "fully entitled islands" (i.e., islands) and other bodies protruding above the waves (rocky or not). Item 482 is particularly convoluted, identifying that:

> *The result of this interpretation is that "rocks" for the purposes of Article 121(3) will not necessarily be composed of rock. The Tribunal takes the opportunity to note that the name of a feature will likewise have no bearing on whether it qualifies as a rock for purposes of Article 121(3). A feature may have "Island" or "Rock" in its name and nevertheless be entirely submerged. Conversely a feature with "Reef" or "Shoal" in its name may have protrusions that remain exposed at high tide. In any event, the name of a feature provides no guidance as to whether it can sustain human habitation or an economic life of its own.* (482)

Most importantly, regarding states' modifications of rocks in order to make them resemble the "full entitled island" entities specified in UNCLOS, it ruled these out of consideration on the grounds that:

> *If States were allowed to convert any rock incapable of sustaining human habitation or an economic life into a fully entitled island simply by the introduction of technology and extraneous materials, then the purpose of Article 121(3) as a provision of limitation would be frustrated. It could no longer be used as a practical restraint to prevent States from claiming for themselves potentially immense maritime space.* (509)

Two notable aspects missing from UNCLOS and the PCA South China Sea dispute ruling were elevation and the associated topic of non-human inhabitation. The two topics are associated as low-lying rocky formations, despite being permanently above sea-level, may be so frequently washed with sea water and/or sea-spray that terrestrial flora and fauna may not be able to exist there and avian fauna may be deterred from anything but the briefest visit. Rocks with higher elevations may provide areas above wave and/or intense spray height that might sustain vegetation and terrestrial insect, animal or bird populations. While such concerns lie outside the focus of UNCLOS they are nevertheless valid in seeking to distinguish pinnacles and sea stacks from rocks, in general, and offer other points of connection to human perceptions of and identification with such features for a range of purposes other than EEZ determinations. In the discussions that follow, we concentrate less on our case study locations' ability to "sustain human habitation or economic life" and more on their complex cultural and affective dimensions for regional populations.

II. Sea Stacks and Pinnacles

The term 'sea stack' is a geomorphological descriptor for steep columns of rock surrounded by water that result from the erosion of landscape features, such as cliffs or peninsulas (Mitra, 2021). Etymologically, the term derives from the Old Norse term *stakkr* (meaning a

heap or pile) and has been used in Faroese and Icelandic as *stakkur*[2] and in Gaelic (*stac*) to refer to the form known in English as sea-stacks. Reflecting these linguistic bases, the term is principally used in toponymy (place naming) in:

- The Faroe Islands (e.g. Stakkurin/ Tjørnuvíksstakkur)
- The western isles of Scotland (e.g. Stac an Armin and Stac Lee, in St Kilda)[3]
- Off the coast of the Scottish mainland (e.g. the Duncansby Stacks, near Caithness and Stac Thormaid, on the A' Mhòine peninsula)[4],
- Off the coast of Wales (e.g. South Stack, in Anglesey/Ynys Mon),
- Off the coast of Alaska (Stack Island, north of Ketchikan),[5]
- Off the coast of Australia (e.g., Stack Rock, New South Wales and Stack Island, Tasmania),
- In areas of Antarctica mapped and named by British mariners (e.g. Denais Stack and Cutler Stack in the South Shetland islands).

As discussed in Section IV, there are also variants of the related term *etac* in the local languages of the Channel Islands.

A different term, 'needle', is also occasionally used for sea stacks, such as the Needles (off the Isle of Wight, UK) and the Quillayute Needles (Washington State, USA), and for the second type of geomorphic form addressed in this article, the isolated rocky formations known as pinnacles that are usually either remnant volcanic plugs or fragments of eroded or otherwise collapsed caldera rims. The French term for needle, *aiguille*, is also used as a toponym in the case of Les Aiguilles de Port-Coton (off Belle-Île, Brittany), L'Aiguille (near Étretat, Normandy) and in Guernésiais variation – *aiguillon* – to refer to sea stacks off the shore of Guernsey at Jerbourg.

Other languages have modern geomorphological terms for sea stacks and/or pinnacles that are largely not used in toponymy, such as:

French: *pinacle* or *pilier* (pillar)
German: *meeresstapel* (*meere* [sea] + *stapel* [stack])
Italian: *faraglione marino* (*faraglione* [stack] + *marino* [sea])
Japanese: *kaishokuchū* (*kaishokū* [tidal erosion] + *chū* [pillar])
Portuguese: *pilha do mar* (*pilha* [stack] + *dor mar* [of he sea])
Spanish: *pila da mar* (pila [stack] + *da mar* [of the sea])
Mandarin Chinese: *hǎishízhù* (*hai* [sea] + *shi* [abrasion] + *zhu* [pillar])

Common to all these toponymical and geomorphological terms is a lack of precise definition of the degree of height and/or steepness necessary for a rock to be classified as a sea stack or pinnacle. The most obviously vertical forms (such as Tasmania's Totem Pole or Japan's Sōfu-iwa) are clearly a sea stack and a pinnacle, respectively, but there is a degree of

[2] The term is present in other Nordic languages (e.g., Danish: *skær*, Norwegian: *skjær* and Swedish: *skär*) to refer to rocky features but it is not specifically used to refer to sea stacks.

[3] The name *stac* has a somewhat flexible application in Gaelic, also being used to refer to an elevated landscape features such as the promontory on the Isle of Lewis named Stac Dhòmnuill Chaim and the northwest Highlands peak, Stac Pollaidh.

[4] For a more comprehensive list see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sea_stacks_in_Scotland

[5] While there is a Stack Island in the Mississippi, it does not have the same sharp, elevated form as marine sea stacks.

arbitrariness to prescribing such a status to less sheerly vertical and/or lower elevation forms.

As a result of their spectacular appearance, stacks located close to shore (such as the Twelve Apostles[6] in south-eastern Australia) often attract tourists to adjacent cliff-top viewing points, or else, when further out to sea (such as the Faraglioni, off the isle of Capri, in Italy) prove attractive destinations for boat trips. The steep and isolated nature of pinnacles and stacks also makes them attractive to recreational adventurers. While they have been climbed by islanders for sea bird and egg gathering in various locations for centuries (see Hayward, 2024 and Section II of this article, below), recreational stack and pinnacle climbing appears to have begun in earnest in the 1960s when mountaineers began to turn their attention to them. While not strictly a sea stack (in that it is tethered to the adjacent coast by a low rocky platform, the 137 metre tall Old Man of Hoy (in the Shetlands) became something of an icon for climbers in the mid-1960s when four radio microphoned adventurers ascended it in 1967 for a BBC outside broadcast program entitled *The Great Climb*. Reflecting this, there are various print publications, websites and online videos detailing spectacular stack climbs.[7] The Old Man of Hoy remains one of the most frequently climbed British stacks and there are a variety of videos about climbing expeditions on it online. Similar climbs have been undertaken and documented internationally in subsequent years,[8] resulting in a significant increase in the public perception of and interest in stacks and pinnacles. More than this, the activity established a socio-cultural significance for these rocky outcrops in terms of human endeavour upon them and in the audio-visual representation of this for public consumption (Gilchrist, 2007). Canadian climber Will Gadd, who has scaled a number of sea stacks and pinnacles in Newfoundland has identified the appeal as follows:

> *They're just really beautiful things. They stick up out of the ocean, they take the pounding of the waves and they're like desert towers… The best forms of climbing to me are the most beautiful and unlikely.* (Lavingne, 2013).

Devotees of the pursuit are also prone to characterising the activity in spiritual terms. Commenting on climber Ian Miller's scaling of Irish stacks,[9] for instance, American climber Stefani Dawn has characterised that:

> *There's something about climbing a sea stack. It's like a monastery made for all but one person gets to touch base with the Divine for that summit moment.* (Common Climber, 2024).

Similar themes are explored in *Les piliers de la mer* (2025), by French writer-adventurer Sylvain Tesson, best known for travel stories such as his 2021 account of his trek to Tibet in search of the snow leopard. His latest book approaches sea stacks and pillars from both physical and symbolic perspectives and describes a highly physical enterprise, setting out

[6] When originally named there were 12 stacks but while the name persists, there are now only eight, as the others have been eroded and collapsed. (NB there are also other similar stacks nearby, but the Twelve Apostles are the most well-known and have had an adjacent marine park named after them.

[7] Chris Mellor's *Stack Rock* (subtitled "an illustrated guide to sea stack climbing in the UK and Ireland"), for instance, ran to four editions in between 1994-2020 and included details of over 200 UK sites identified as stacks (although only a few have the term stack in their placenames).

[8] See, for instance, Pritchard (2018), for an account of his climb of Tasmania's Totem Pole in 1998.

[9] See Miller (2024) for a detailed description and visual representations of various Irish sea stacks.

with an experienced mountain guide to climb an impressive itinerary of 106 stacks and pillars from remote locations such as Cape Horn to those in the heart of the "Disneyland des Gringos locos", just in front of a 2400-room resort in Cabo San Lucas (Mexico). Reflecting on the latter experience, he introduces resilience as the ultimate symbolic function of such peaks. Expanding on their geomorphological base, he interprets their resistance to being conquering by humans as political and existential, evoking the pronouncements of Victor Hugo (whose work is discussed below) in his characterisation that "any stack is a refusal and, therefore, a utopia" (p.145, authors' translation).[10]

While stacks and pinnacles are not entitled to EEZs, they are useful pivots for claims over marine resources in disputed areas, as in the case of Rockall. Located 370 kilometres west of Scotland's Outer Hebrides (Figure 1), Rockall was claimed by the United Kingdom (UK) in 1955 and was incorporated into Scotland under UK Law in 1972. British claims of sovereignty over the pinnacle are contested by Eire and Iceland, largely – it seems – due the 1521 square kilometre territorial sea space it generates for exclusive fisheries and exploitation of seafloor resources. While the UK has never claimed Rockall as habitable (i.e., as potentially being an island, with an EEZ), rather than a rock (without one), there have been two brief inhabitations of the pinnacle or, rather, its top, which was flattened in 1971 to install a light beacon on it. In one of the few Island Studies articles to address pinnacles, Stephen Royle (2014) provided an account of former soldier Tom McClean's 40 day stay on Rockall in 1984, relying on food he brought with him and an accommodation pod he tied to the rockface, and another by a three person Greenpeace team who occupied the top of the rock in a similar manner for 42 days in 1997. The Greenpeace team also attracted publicity by declaring Rockall an independent state, under the name of Waveland, in an attempt to block exploration and exploitation of oil reserves in the area.[11]

While Rockall appears never to have been used for human livelihood activities (let alone been inhabited, in any conventional sense), the multiple pinnacles and stacks of the nearest British territory to Rockall – the St Kilda archipelago (Figure 1) – were visited and occasionally inhabited for short durations by the members of the population that exited the area *en masse* in 1930. As Hayward (2024) details, the pinnacles and stacks (*stacs* in St Kildan Gaelic) were essential resources for the islanders who lived on the central island of Hirta and who travelled to and ascended the formations to gather seabirds and their eggs, which were the community's primary food source. Although not islands in conventional uses of the term (Figure 2), they were key elements of the aquapelagic assemblage that sustained human life in the region for many centuries and thereby merit Island Studies' inclusion of them within its purview.

[10] See for example Hugo's statements "Personne n'est tombé tant qu'un seul est debout" ('No one falls until they have stood') or "Affrontez l'orage, affrontez l'écume, Rochers et proscrits" ('Face the storm, face the foam, rocks and outcasts') (both 1882, p. 161 – authors' translations.)

[11] Which have not eventuated, to date.

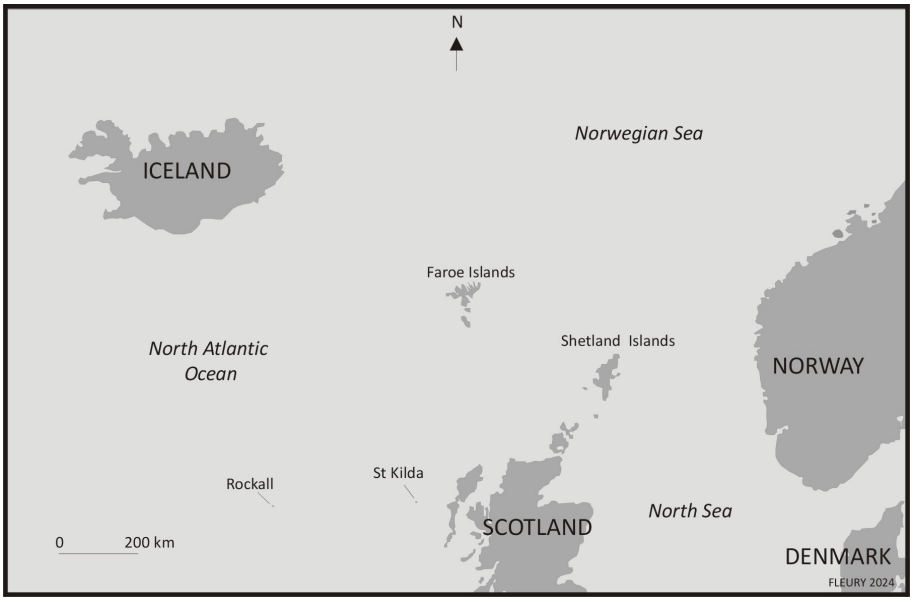

Figure 1 – The position of the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Rockall, St Kilda and the Shetland Islands in relation to Scandinavia.

Figure 2 – (Left to right) The north-western edge of Boreray, An t-Sail, Stac Lee and Stac An Armin (with Hirta in the distance), St Kilda archipelago (photo by Philip Hayward, June 2022).

Building on the studies identified above, this article now turns to three notable locations – the Faroe Islands, the (European) Channel Islands[12] and the singular example of Balls Pyramid – analysing the manner in which the stacks and pinnacles are linked to and integrated with the broader communities of the regions in question. The Faroe Islands represent an example of one of the most densely 'stacked' and 'pinnacled' areas of the planet, in which these formations have been utilised by the human population and inscribed in local language and culture in various ways. While Channel Island stacks and pinnacles have not been tightly woven into the archipelagic community of the region, one – Ortac – has been notably represented in literary and visual culture and merits consideration in that regard. By contrast, Balls Pyramid is significant for being both the tallest and one of the most spectacular ocean pinnacles and by having a somewhat ambiguous relationship with its national and regional administration. In what follows, we focus on the nomenclature and socio-economic and cultural uses, perceptions and characterisations of the terrestrial isolates. To that end, we include reference to our subjective engagements with the subjects of our analyses. Case study #1 is informed by co-author Gaini's long-term residence in the Faroes and his research on that archipelago,[13] case study #2 is informed by co-author Fleury's experience in traversing the English Channel/La Manche and his research on the islands of the region[14] and case study #3 is informed by co-author Hayward's research in the LHI archipelago over several decades.[15]

III. The Faroe Islands archipelago

> *As a child, I travelled the 'old route' to the Faroes with my family every summer: the Bergen-Tórshavn passenger liner journey via the Shetland Islands. The last hours of this North Atlantic trip were used to sit in deep concentration by the large windows in the cafeteria looking for the islands. We were waiting like you do when you have found your seat at the movie theatre and the film that you have been looking so much forward to seeing is about to start. Then, finally, something broke the even line between sea and sky in the horizon. Like small dark pyramids rising out of the sea, the first islands came into view. They looked like the peaks of huge, submerged mountains. The land was growing and the details on the rocky shores became visible. Paris and Saint Petersburg are cities that should be observed from their canals and rivers. That is where you get the best vista of the urban landscape. The Faroes should be observed from the sea. What you can see from the passenger liner, and that you easily forget while located on dry land, is that the coastline – especially on the west side of the islands – is dotted with stacks, rocks, skerries and islets. There are 827 of them in total and most of them are located very close to the 18 main islands. Sailing in small boats between islands and rocks, as well through caves and sea grottos in the cliffs, is a spectacular adventure that can be realised in good weather conditions.* (Firouz Gaini)

Located in the north-west Atlantic (Figure 1), the Faroe Islands is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark (West, 2024). The archipelago is the eroded remnant of a larger volcanic basalt plateau formed in the Paleogene Period that has mostly subsided.

[12] As distinct from the Californian Channel Islands.

[13] See, for instance, Gaini (2015).

[14] See, for instance, Fleury and Johnson (2015).

[15] See, for instance, Reis & Hayward (2013).

Alternating glacial and marine erosion severely affected the remnant plateau, leaving the highly fragmented landmass that currently occupies the area (Figure 3). The imposing sea stacks and islets surrounding most of the major Faroese islands (especially on their wind-swept, rocky, western sides and along the shores facing the open ocean) represent an important part of the economic, cultural and mythological history of the archipelagic community. Faced with limited food resources and grazing land, stacks and pinnacles have been utilised by the islands' population for various livelihood purposes. Many of the archipelago's stacks, pinnacles and islets have been (and to some degree continue to be) the home of enormous colonies of sea birds that, up to the mid-late 20th century, were harvested by men from the villages on islands around them who brought birds and/or eggs home to their families. On large islets and stacks, like Tjørnuvíksstakkur (also known as Stakkur and discussed further below), small numbers of sheep can also be transported up to small grassy areas for grazing (and the meat from these remote areas is often deemed to be of superior quality by islanders).

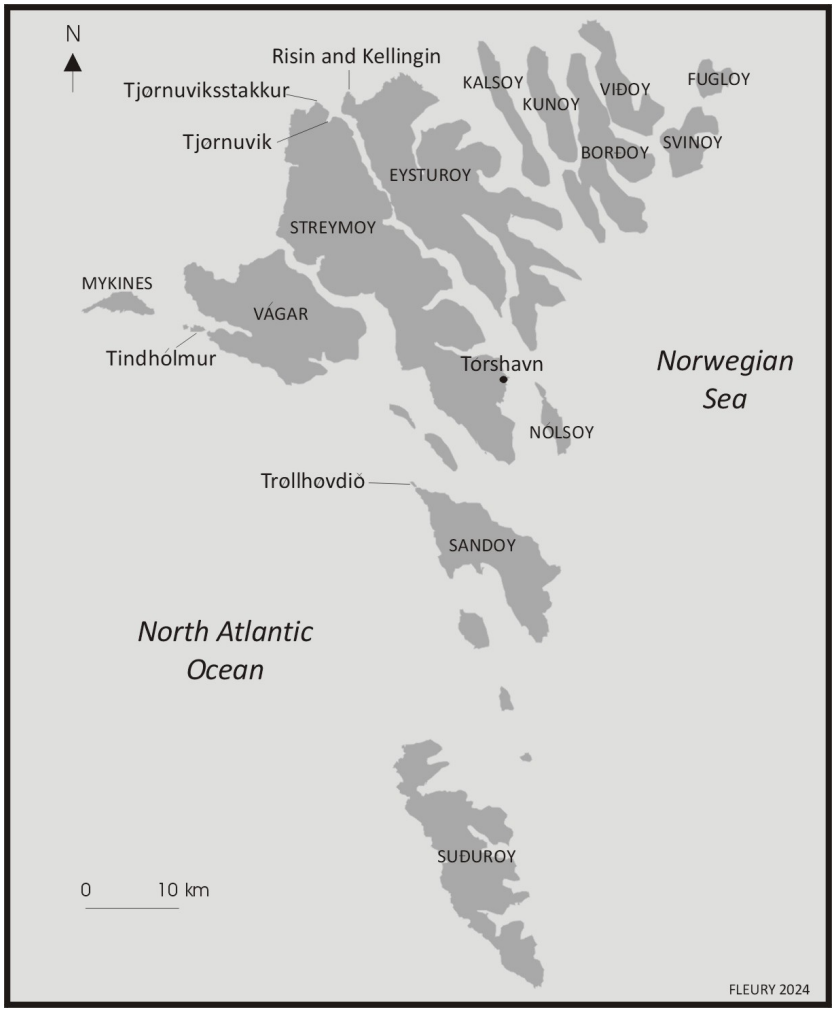

Figure 3 – Map of the Faroe Islands.

Reflecting the familiarity of the Faroese with their archipelagic environment and their engagement with a number of small terrestrial features, Faroese language has a rich typology of rocks, stacks, pinnacles and islets that demonstrates sophisticated local knowledge of and deep interest in uninhabited areas of the archipelago. These terms include:

- *Stapi*: A pointed rock in the sea.
- *Sker*: A rock or skerry, which reaches just above the surface of the sea.
- *Fles*: A very small rocky skerry (similar to a *sker*).
- *Flúrur*: A sunken skerry/reef.
- *Steinur*: Permanently exposed rocks. (Sometimes used like a *sker*).
- *Stakkur*: A high rock in the sea, often with grass on its (usually) flat) top.
- *Drangur*: Like a *stakkur*, but more pointed and with minimal vegetation.
- *Hólmur*: An islet with limited vegetation that may support sheep or cattle habitation.

Many of the famous stacks and pinnacles have legends associated with them. Risin and Kellingin (the 'Giant' and the 'Witch'), located in the north of Eysturoy, for instance, are the main characters of a legend about Iceland attempting to drag the Faroes towards it. This involved a giant and his wife travelled down to the Faroes to take care of the project. They struggled to move the islands during the night, but the base of the mountain was firm and before they managed to return to Iceland, the sun rose from the sea. As dawn broke, a shaft of sunlight put a stop to their efforts by turning them to stone on the spot. They are still there, transformed into pillars, perpetually looking towards Iceland yet unable to move. Trøllhøvdið ('The Troll's Head'), a 19 hectare islet located roughly 100 metres north of the island of Sandoy, also has a colourful myth-of-origin. Legend relates that a troll wanted to couple Nólsoy and Sandoy by pulling a rope through the rock cave in Nólsoy and a corresponding rock cave in Sandoy. But unfortunately, the noose had also settled around his neck, decapitating him when he tightened it. The head became Trøllhøvdið.

Enhancing their prominence in national consciousness, sea stacks, pinnacles and islets have been depicted by canonical Faroese painters such as Samuel Joensen-Mikines and by more contemporary artists such as Zacharias Heinesen. A number of these paintings, such as Heinesen's 2000 work 'Úr Vágunum,' have been featured on postage stamps in a manner that indicates stacks' value as visual-picturesque assets (Figure 4a). Stamps have also represented pinnacles and stacks in original works that have even deployed them to commemorate specific occasions, such as the montages produced to mark the United Nations Year of Astronomy in 2009 (Figures 4b and 4c). In recognition of the appeal of these images to international consumers, the official Faroese postage stamp magazine *Posta Stamps* reproduced the image of Drangarnir and other rocky formations from one of its stamps as the front cover design for its October 2023 issue (Figure 5). This image was also significant for another reason, with a stamp of the image being released with superimposed caption that identified it as a "filming location." This referred to the use of Faroese locations as landscape images in Disney's *Peter Pan and Wendy* (directed by David Lowery) in 2020. The film, released in 2023, featured aerial sequences that showed Tindhólmur, Risin and Kellingein, along with Mykines and Trælanípan. The commemorative stamp represents an attempt to gain traction from the film's connection with the archipelago in a similar manner to the attempt to promote tourism to Kalsoy, which is featured in the film *No Time to Die* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2021) as the place where James Bond's grave was located. Islanders subsequently erected a James Bond tombstone as photo opportunity to lure visitors there. The story of the local invention was also promoted in the online *Guide to Faroe Islands* site in an item that also identifies "the sense of joy that Faroe Islanders feel as they see footage

of their homeland in the iconic 007 series" (a "sense of joy" that presumably also extends to the images of the archipelago shown in the Disney feature).

Figures 4a, 4b, 4c – Faroese stamps featuring pillars and stacks.

Figure 5 – Cover of *Posta Stamps* October 2023.

In terms of cultural significance, Tjørnuvíksstakkur is among the most famous formations in the Faroes and is significant for being integrated with an island community in a manner that combines livelihood activities and socio-cultural ritual in a contemporary context. Located off the north-east corner of Streymoy island, north of the remote village of Tjørnuvík, the rocky outcrop is 133 metres high and has a distinct, triangular wedge shape, with a thin covering of grass and numerous rivulet channels on its longest slope. While there is no historical or archaeological record of any formal settlement on it, there have been two houses on it in recent times, the first being built in the late 1940s (later destroyed by a storm), with a second being constructed in the early 1970s. The houses were used by men visiting to catch puffins (*Fratercula arctica*) and northern fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) and to tend sheep grazing on the island at different times of the year. Transport to and from the island was made easier in 1937 by a zip line connecting the sea stack to the island and in 1993 a new (manually driven) telpher (suspended platform) was introduced, providing easier transportation of sheep and people to and from it. The crossing takes place in a small rocking box with space for 3-4 persons that runs on steel wires roughly 130 metres above the sea, stretched out between vertical peaks (Figure 6). As described and photo-documented by Mifsud (2024), locals and visitors volunteering to participate in a sheep gathering event cross-over to Tjørnuvíksstakkur, construct a fenced area on it, shepherd the sheep into it and then transport them over to Tjørnuvík. The main aim of the day is to take the sheep, normally around 10-12 in total, down to the village where most are slaughtered and cut into pieces to be sold at auction, with the money going to community projects and with the day concluding with a feast and dance. While Tjørnuvíksstakkur is not habitable on anything else but a temporary basis (and, thereby, is not an island in UNCLOS terms), it does sustain and generate economic activity and also serves a socio-cultural role for the inhabitants of Tjørnuvík who regard it as an offshore annex to their community. Indeed, the event has been highlighted in recent years through extensive video documentation on a dedicated Tjørnuvíksstakkur Facebook page that currently has 1300 (mostly Faroese) followers,[16] reflecting an internal audience for the audiovisual representation of the archipelago's stacks and traditional lifestyles, despite an increasing concentration of the archipelago's population in the capital, Tórshavn (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2021).

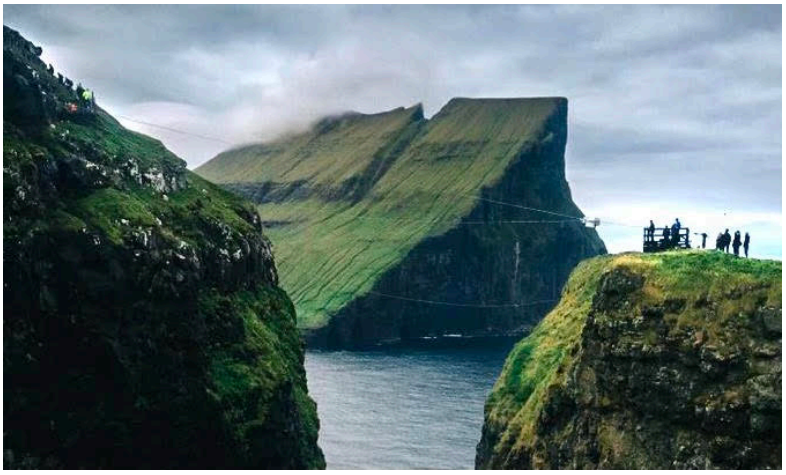

Figure 6 – Tjørnuvíksstakkur (centre of image) (Rannvá Joensen/ Visit Faroe Islands, 2018).

[16] Thanks to Jógvan Heinason Krosstein for information about group members.

In addition to interest in traditional access to and climbing of stacks and pinnacles in the Faroes, there has also been a burgeoning interest in the archipelago as both a recreational climbing destination and as the subject of spectacular climbing videos. The two are often combined, with climbs producing spectacular footage that is posted online, encouraging both climbers and more passive tourists to visit the islands.[17] An online website entitled 'Why the Faroe Islands is the perfect climbing destination', for instance, discusses a site that has been modified to suit climbers:

> *those who are looking for a really unique experience should try reaching the top of Øldan, a 71-metre-high sea stack on the Northern coast of Kunoy island. This one isn't for the faint-hearted but according to experienced guides it is not a physically demanding tour. A 30-minute boat ride will take you on the foot of the sea stack and once tied in the necessary climbing equipment all you have to do is follow the bolted anchors along the vertical cliff.* (Steferou, 2018).

Other sites, such as Geitisskoradrang, are more challenging and have not been modified for ease of climbing.[18]

There is no sense in any climbing websites or social media posts that the stacks and pinnacles are anything other than freely accessible. Despite this, land ownership and rights of access in the Faroes are complex (Niclasen, 2015). 46.3% of the archipelago is privately owned freehold land and the remainder is copyheld Crown land, which tenants have the right to use. In the case of privately held land, 92.2% is outfield (*hagi*), which is commons (*feli*) – a spatial resource shared by the community for purposes such as grazing. Sea stacks with small, grassed areas capable of being used for grazing (such as Tjørnuvíksstakkur, which is associated with the village of Tjørnuvík, and the Drangarnir stacks, which are associated with Sørvágur), fall under a similar land use regime. The rules that effect their access and use by visitors are mainly outlined in 'Hiking Guidelines' published by Visit Faroe Islands (2024).[19] Recognising the appeal of the archipelago's stacks and pinnacles, their guidelines page features a photographic image of the Drangarnir stacks at its head and proffers particular guidelines for accessing them, specifying that there are guided tours of them three times a week between April and October (costing 80 Euros per person), that the "hike can only be done with a guide" and that fines apply for those not following this "guideline." There is no reference to accessing the rock formations by sea and climbing them and the current official position on this is unclear.[20]

[17] See, for instance, *Kellingen 2013 – Faroe Islands*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ua5bvyyzaX0&t=7s

[18] See Kernow Coasteering (2024) *Rock climbing in the Faroe Islands: Climbing a 120m Sea Stack*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxbPDMEb1bM&t=974s

[19] In May 2024, the Faroese Parliament passed new laws on sustainable tourism that emphasise "the importance of organising tourism sustainably to safeguard nature, resources, and traditions, strengthen local communities, culture, and heritage, and provide guidance for responsible behaviour in nature and tourism management" (Government of the Faroe Islands, 2024). At time of writing, it is too early to see whether this will have a particular impact on climbing on stacks.

[20] Inquiries to Visit Faroe Islands, for instance, were unsuccessful in gaining information on this topic.

IV. Channel Islands/La Manche

> *I first learned of the existence of Ortac in the mid-1980s when reading the book* Promenade dans les îles de la Manche avec un guide nommé Victor Hugo *by Gérard Pouchain, in which a drawing of it by Hugo is reproduced.*[21] *The pinnacle's massive shape, its isolation, and the accompanying illustration of its name flapping like a sail in the wind, along with its location as a sentinel at the entrance of the Swinge (a treacherous strait between Burhou and Alderney) all contributed to make it an appealing place for me. The Channel Islands are a great playground for seascape lovers but my numerous incursions into this maritime labyrinth of rocks, islets and islands corseted by violent currents did not allow me to visually encounter Ortac for a long time. It is very difficult to see it from anywhere on the islands and impossible from the mainland. The only exception is from the extreme southwest of Alderney. Unfortunately, the two times I have been there, the weather has been so bad that I could hardly see further than Les Étacs, other sea-stacks located some 300 metres off the coast. Ortac therefore long remained a dreamed, imagined, almost ghostly place for me, as Victor Hugo had rendered so well in his drawings and water colours. It was eventually during a ferry crossing between Ireland and Cherbourg in May 2015 that I watched for its appearance and finally saw it to the south in the early morning. Paradoxically, the easiest way to see it at the northern end of what Victor Hugo called the Channel Archipelago - which his work surrounded with mystery - was to discover it in reverse, by following one of the busiest maritime routes in the world.* (Christian Fleury)

In the Norman French languages of the Channel Islands, variants of the term *etac* refer to sea-stacks, pinnacles and elevated coastal features (Figure 7). There are a number of *etacs* around Jersey: a pyramidal coastal feature on the coast at St Ouen's Bay, on the west coast, now commonly known as L'Étacq (but formerly known as Grand Étaquerel); a smaller feature to the south, known as Petit Étaquerel and Étaquerel headland on the island's north coast, which is also the location of L'Étaquerel fort. There are also several offshore features in the Channel islands termed *etacs* including L'Etac – a small, pyramid-like pinnacle located off the south coast of Sark and a group of rocks immediately off the west coast of Alderney known as Les Etacs.[22] The largest *etac* in the Channel Islands is Ortac, a small, 24 metre high sandstone pinnacle (Figure 8) that protrudes from a subsurface ridge that also supports Alderney, Burhou islet and the Casquet rocks, Covering an area of 3,500 square metres, there is no vegetation or fresh water source on it and no evidence of any historic or contemporary human inhabitation. While the pinnacle falls under the jurisdiction of Alderney, it does not have the close integration with Channel Island livelihood activities, folklore or culture that the Faroese formations have with the archipelagic community around them. Despite this, Ortac is one of the best-known sea pinnacles internationally by virtue of its representation by 19th century French author and sometime painter Victor Hugo.

[21] Poucahin (1985, p.165)

[22] Les Etacs are significant for being home to a sizeable colony of gannets that currently numbers around 5000 pairs (Ramsar annual review figures supplied to the authors by Alex Purdle from Alderney Wildlife Trust – p.c. December 12, 2024).

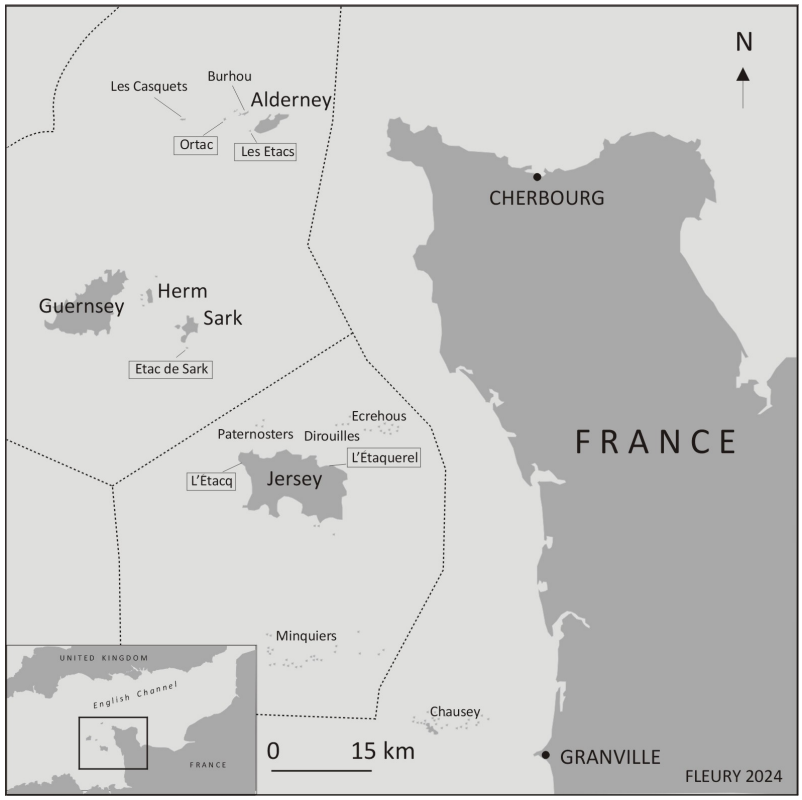

Figure 7 – Map showing position of Ortac (top right) and *etac* placename locations in the Channel Islands

Hugo lived in Guernsey from 1855-1870, while in exile from France.[23] He resumed international travel in 1861, taking annual boat trips to northerly locations that carried him passed Ortac. He appears to have been immediately captivated by the pinnacle since he wrote the following imaginative reflections on seeing it in his 1861 travel diary (published posthumously in 1887):

> *There is no one who has not noticed the similarity between rocks and clouds. All visions are mixed together. You are at sea, you are approaching a coast. Look at this rock: it looks like a man sitting there, a monk; he is reading a book. The ship is moving. No, it is not a man, it is a tower. We are approaching. It is an enormous elephant, then a church, then nothing, a rock; everything has vanished. Like clouds. There are ghosts in granite as in smoke. What is most immobile is transformed and deceives us like what is most floating.* (Hugo, 1861,[24] - authors' translation).

[23] He was exiled in 1852 for opposing the rule of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (also known as Napoleon III). After an initial stay in Jersey, he relocated to Guernsey in 1855.

[24] Quote from an unpaginated version of the published book text in Bibliothèque Nationale de France - https://essentiels.bnf.fr/fr/image/6619c9f0-7098-4881-907b-5a8d0c640141-rocher-ortach-2

Figure 8 – Ortac (photo by John Horton, Warden, Alderney Bird Observatory, 2017)

In following years Hugo engaged with the subject repeatedly in pencil and ink sketches and, later, water colours (NAF 13462, f. 12), producing a vivid impressionistic painting of it in 1864 entitled 'Le Rocher Ortach' (Figure 9) that represents the rocky outcrop extending beneath the waves and protruding above them mysteriously in swirls of dark mist against the blue sky. The painting was very much in line with his neo-Gothic Romantic sensibility (Prodger, 2022) and general approach to land- and sea-scapes, which were often imbued with primeval power.

He produced similarly intense characterisations of Ortac in in his novels *Les Travailleurs de la mer (Toilers of the Sea)* (1866) and *L'Homme qui Rit (The Laughing Man)* (1869). Hugo's description in the latter relates an encounter with the rock by the crew of a damaged vessel during a storm that imbues it with a colossal solidity:

> *But suddenly something terrible appeared to them in the darkness. On the port bow arose, standing stark, cut out on the background of mist, a tall, opaque mass, vertical, right-angled, a tower of the abyss. They watched it open-mouthed. The storm was driving them towards it.... The Ortach, all of a piece, rises up in a straight line to eighty feet above the angry beating of the waves. Waves and ships break against it. An immovable cube, it plunges its rectilinear planes apeak into the numberless serpentine curves of the sea. At night it stands an enormous block, resting on the folds of a huge black sheet. In time of storm it awaits the stroke of the axe which is 'the thunderclap'.* (1869, C. XIV-XV)[25]

[25] He also compares the treacherous rocks and shoals off the west coast of Alderney and Ortach to the fabled rocks in the Straits of Messina (between Sicily and Italy), believed to be the haunt of monsters, "Charybdis and Scylla are but two; the Caskets, Ortach, and Aurigny are three" (CXV).

Figure 9 – 'Le Rocher Ortach' (Victor Hugo, 1864 – Wikimedia Commons)

Some three years earlier he provided a very different perspective. After outlining a pervasive belief in Satanic infestation across Europe and amongst the populations of the Channel Islands and Normandy in particular,[26] and he singled out Ortac as exemplifying such tendencies:

> *The Norman fishermen, who frequent the Channel, have many precautions to take at sea, by reason of the illusions with which Satan environs them. It has long been an article of popular faith, that Saint Maclou inhabited the great square rock called Ortach, in the sea between Aurigny and the Casquets; and many old sailors used to declare that they had often seen him there, seated and reading in a book. Accordingly the sailors, as they passed, were in the habit of kneeling many times before the Ortach rock, until the day when the fable was destroyed, and the truth took its place. For it has been discovered, and is now well established, that the lonely inhabitant of the rock is not a saint, but a devil. This evil spirit, whose name is Jochmus, had the impudence to pass himself off, for many centuries, as Saint Maclou.* (Hugo, 1886/1911, pp. 4-5)

There are several significant aspects to this. One is a general characterisation of deep-rooted belief in Satanic infiltration in the region, which seems, at very least, exaggerated. The second is the reference to a belief that Ortac was home to/haunted by 6th century Welsh monk Maclou, a disciple of legendary Irish cleric and adventurer St. Brendan the Navigator, who is reputed to have explored the north-western Atlantic (Mackley, 2008). While Hugo identifies this association as an "article of popular faith," it is ambiguous whether this is a literary invention or whether Hugo encountered the tale in oral folklore or an (as yet

[26] "The rural and maritime populations are easily moved with notions of the active agency of the powers of evil. Among the Channel Isles, and on the neighbouring coast of France, the ideas of the people on this subject are deeply rooted." (Hugo, 1886/1911, p. 4.)

undiscovered) written source from an earlier period. The same issues arise regarding the presence of the evil spirit Jochmus[27] on the pinnacle. It is not insignificant that, aside from Hugo, the only other 19th century reference to such quasi-religious folklore concerning the Ortac occurred shortly after Hugo's novel was published in an unattributed item in a Guernsey magazine from 1872 that appears based on Hugo's account.[28] Alderney-based folklore and paranormal researcher Ulysses Black (co-author of *Alderney: The Devil's Rock* [2010] and its related podcast series[29]) has identified that modern Alderney folklore about Ortac "essentially involves a core story of a monk or a devil living on the rock that mariners give gifts to, greet etc.," which thereby either supports or derives from Hugo's fictional account and/or his initial impressionistic notes on the stack (Hugo, 1861).

Ortac is best known today for its colony of gannets. These go unmentioned in Hugo's accounts for the not insignificant reason that the colony was only established around 1940, in the early days of the German occupation during World War Two.[30] The population expanded (with fluctuations) over the following 60 years and rose to over 2500 pairs by 2015 before declining by 46% in 2021 due to the impact of Avian flu.[31] Ortac's gannet population comprised an asset that was identified in Alderney's successful 2005 application to have its west coast and adjacent Burhous islands (which it forms part of) designated as wetlands of worldwide importance within the terms of the Ramsar Convention, requiring the States of Alderney to develop a framework for the conservation and wise use of the area. While landing on Ortac is prohibited during the gannet breeding season (February to October), there are one to two organised bird monitoring visits on average per year.[32] Summer cruises also allow visitors close access to it and ample opportunity to produce video representations, several of which are available on platforms such as You Tube,[33] allowing islanders and visitors alike the opportunity to observe it and its avian population.

[27] We have not been able to locate any reference to an evil spirit named Jochmus prior to Hugo's mention of him and it may well be an invention of Hugo's.

[28] "Steaming—in the early morning of Sunday, 29th of August, are two small rocky islands, called the Casquets, between which and the island of Alderney, a little farther out, appears the great square rock Ortach, which formerly was believed to be abode of the holy Maclo —but man has since discovered—pray, do not scream —that it was inhabited by the devil." (Unattributed, 1872).

[29] Available at: https://open.spotify.com/show/1NcRPrEkSrHY048Xuss7MM

[30] The German occupation of Alderney seems unrelated to the gannets' occupation of Ortac, the latter is more likely due to shifts in marine currents and the related movement of fish stocks. It should also be noted that the Germans used Ortac as a target for artillery practice during their occupation of the Channel Islands, so the birds showed some tenacity in persisting in their roost there.

[31] Ramsar annual review figures supplied to the authors by Alex Purdle from Alderney Wildlife Trust (p.c., December 12, 2024).

[32] Despite difficulties in scrambling onto the rock from boats, Alex Purdie from Alderney Wildlife has commented that he "would not be surprised if other people do climb the island for fun from time to time outside of the breeding season" (p.c. 12.12.24). John Horton, Warden of Alderney's Wild Bird Observatory, has also commented that "if you are able to land it is reasonable easy to climb without any climbing gear and it is possible to do a circuit of the rock" (p.c. 2.12.24).

[33] See, for instance, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV5KFxyzr08,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMl-Cogpsek and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kfvRgSrPuI

V. Balls Pyramid

> *Unlike many pinnacles and stacks in the Faroes, Ball's Pyramid (BP) is not visible from any settled part of an adjacent island and has never been close to regular shipping routes. I haven't managed to land on (let alone climb) it. Relatively few people have. But I remember laying eyes on it for the first time, from the eastern side of the mountainous southern section of Lord Howe Island. It was an arresting sight - a narrow needle of rock rising 572 metres out of the ocean. It was too much like a CGI rendered feature in a Sci-Fi/Fantasy film or video game to be entirely believable. I am not the only visitor to have reacted in such a manner. Recalling his first visit to BP in 1965, cinematographer and climber John Davies described how "in the distance it's a fairy tale castled wreathed in clouds… a medieval fortress, protected by an ocean moat and guarded by a ridge of towering battlements" (Smith, 2015, 89). Reviewing a boat trip around it fifty-five years later, Australian visitor Andrew P. commented "it looks like some computer-generated dragon roost from* Game of Thrones.*"*[34] (Philip Hayward)

Less fancifully, BP is a steep basalt outcrop, the remnant of an eroded volcanic island, located 23 kilometres south-east of Lord Howe Island (LHI), which is located 590 kilometres due east of the Australian continental mainland (Figures 10 & 11). LHI is a fragment of another volcanic island that is 22 square kilometres in size. It has a low-lying northern area and two high peaks, Mount Gower (875 metres) and Mount Lidgbird (777 metres) to the south that support a fragile cloud forest on their upper slopes (Hayward, 2022) and a low-lying area to the north where the population of c410 reside. The northern part has several fringing islets, including the Admiralty group, located approximately two kilometres north of the main island, which comprises eight rocks and islets.

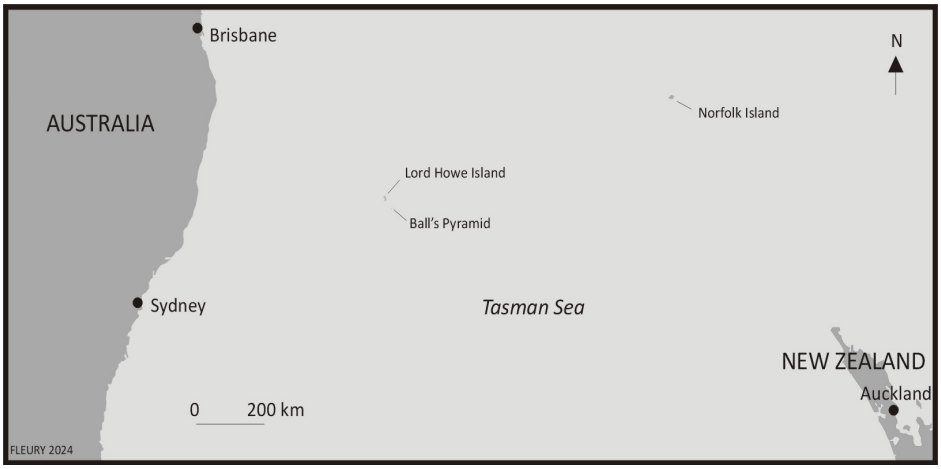

Figure 10– Position of Lord Howe Island and Balls Pyramid in relation to Australia, New Zealand and Norfolk Island

[34] Tripadvisor review 16.12.2019 - https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g528988-d13348064-r733843592-Ball_s_Pyramid-Lord_Howe_Island.html

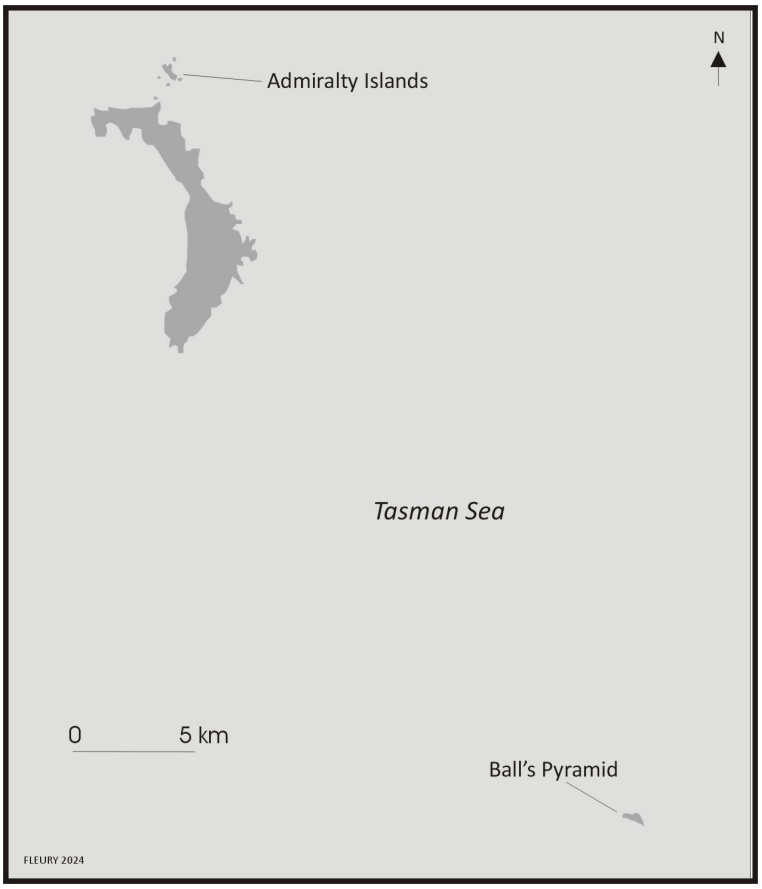

Figure 11 - Map showing position of Lord Howe Island, the Admiralty Islands and Balls Pyramid

BP and LHI were first sighted by Europeans and claimed as British territory by Lieutenant Henry Lidgbird Ball, captain of *HMS Supply*, in 1788, who encountered them while sailing between Sydney and Norfolk Island. LHI was subsequently included within the formally established British colony of New South Wales in 1853 (under the terms of the NSW *New Constitution Act*[35]) and thereby became part of the independent (and federated) Commonwealth of Australia when that was proclaimed in 1901. In 1913, the NSW state government appointed a Sydney-based board of public servants to administer LHI in conjunction with a local consultative committee. In 1953 the NSW Government passed the *Lord Howe Island Act*, and subsequent amendments resulted in a managing board that currently consists of four elected local members and three NSW Government appointees

[35] Complicating this characterisation, LHI was included within initial colony of NSW established in 1788, which then comprised the eastern part of the Australian continent, Tasmania (then known as Van Diemen's Land) and Norfolk Island. The initial colony was subsequently partitioned during the 19th century, creating the territories that form the present-day states of the Australian Commonwealth and with the term NSW being retained by the area bounded by Queensland to the north, Victoria to the south and South Australia to the west.

(Reis & Hayward, 2013). Section 3 of the *LHI Act* specified that that its provisions applied to "the island known as Lord Howe Island and all adjacent islands and coral reefs situated within one marine league measured from low-water mark on the coast of Lord Howe Island." While it appears to have gone unnoticed and unremarked at the time, this specification notably did *not* include BP, which lies outside the one marine league area considered to constitute adjacency to LHI within the Act. In parallel with this exclusion, prior to the 1960s the Board appeared to have little interest in BP. Similarly, there has been limited cultural engagement with BP within the LHI community. For instance, while there is a LHI song about Elizabeth Reef (150 kms north of LHI),[36] there are none about BP and the principal cultural recognition of it is via the islanders' colloquial name for it, "The Rock," which reflects their sense of awe at its monolithic form.

Referred to collectively as the "Lord Howe Island Group", LHI, BP and their surrounding waters became a UNESCO listed World Heritage (WH) site in 1982, an aspect that has become significant factor in subsequent regional management, with only 400 visitors allowed on the main island at any one time (in addition to its resident population)[37] in order to limit environmental disruption. The WH status was granted on the grounds of the group being:

> *an outstanding example of oceanic islands of volcanic origin containing a unique biota of plants and animals, as well as the world's most southerly true coral reef. It is an area of spectacular and scenic landscapes encapsulated within a small land area, and provides important breeding grounds for colonies of seabirds as well as significant natural habitat for the conservation of threatened species.* (UNESCO, 1982).

In order to support the UNESCO listed area, and to extend environmental protection to a broader region that included Middleton and Elizabeth reefs, to the north, the LHI group is at the centre of a 465 square kilometre marine park that restricts fishing activity in waters adjacent to BP, although commercial charters operating from LHI are allowed to fish and snorkel close to it (and thereby generate economic activity related to it). As Figure 12 makes apparent, BP is difficult to land upon, with no clear shallow approaches, and too steep to be habitable by humans without significant structural engineering. But while Figure 12 gives an impression of the peak being barren, there are tufts of *Cyperus lucidus* (leafy flat-sedge) on various parts of it and several salt-spray resistant *Melaleuca howeana* (tea tree) shrubs that have rooted in organic debris in small wet crevices.

The first persons reported to have landed on BP were NSW geologist Henry Wilkinson and two colleagues, who went ashore and collected plant and insect specimens in 1882. An unattributed report in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* (March 1965), identified that eight unsuccessful attempts to climb BP were made prior to the first successful ascent in 1965, while Smith (2015, p. 4) lists five. One of the unsuccessful ones was an expedition that the latter author – entrepreneur and adventurer Dick Smith – made with fellow geologist David Roots and Sydney students and rover scouts[38] in November 1964. A number of the expeditioners made substantial progress towards the peak before the attempt was called off.

[36] 'North to Elizzy,' written by LH Islander Mick Thompson c1972 about a ship wrecked while sailing to Elizabeth Reef to fish.
[37] None of the other islets in the LHI group are inhabited nor have type of buildings on them.
[38] The Rover Scout movement caters for 18-25 year olds who wish to pursue outdoors activities such as bushwalking and climbing.

The venture was covered extensively in the (Australian) *Daily Telegraph* newspaper and footage of the expedition was subsequently edited into an 18-minute film, directed by John Kingsford-Smith entitled *Assault on Balls Pyramid*.[39] In February 1965, five Sydney-based climbers successfully reached the peak accompanied by *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter Ben Sandilands, securing substantial coverage for the expedition,[40] sparking further public interest in BP and its precipitous climbing slopes. A second and similarly successful ascent followed in 1969, with its climbers including two freelance film journalists provided with film stock by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The footage they shot was edited into a short TV current affairs item entitled *The Second Ascent of Balls Pyramid* shortly after the expedition returned to Sydney. In all, fourteen successful and three unsuccessful ascents were undertaken in 1970-1986.

One notable aspect of the climbing expeditions was the frustration most experienced in getting permission for climbing the stack from the LHIB and a willingness to challenge that. The LHIB was particularly concerned with and its inability to provide the necessary rescue services if climbing expeditions got into difficulties. This resulted in its attempts to deter teams from overnighting on BP and, as climbing expeditions became more frequent, through not granting them permission (based on the assumption that the Board had the right to issue this in the first place). This resulted in various forms of resistance, such as organising expeditions that travelled to BP direct from Sydney (and thereby bypassed LHI) or by simply ignoring the directives. Sometime in 1978-79 the exclusion of BP from the 1953 *LHI Act* appears to have become known by climbers and an Australian team that successfully ascended BP on January 8th claimed it for an organisation entitled Climbers International and World Ecology[41] in an attempt to keep it open for public use. Reflecting some concern about its status within NSW, a subsequent team, which included the aforementioned Dick Smith, planted a NSW state flag, provided by the state premier Neville Wran, on the summit on January 21st and claimed the pinnacle for NSW.[42] In 1981 the NSW Parliament passed the *Lord Howe Island (Amendment) Act*. Schedule I 2b of the Act specified that the territory covered by the Act comprised: "the island known as Lord Howe Island and all adjacent islands and coral reefs situated within one marine league measured from low-water mark on the coast of Lord Howe Island together with the islands known as Ball's Pyramid, Wheatsheaf Island, Observatory Rock and South-East Rock and the unnamed islands in the vicinity thereof." This specification cleared up an ambiguity as to whether BP and the three nearby islets identified above were formally part of NSW within the Commonwealth of Australia declared in 1901 and is also notable for referring to BP as an "island."

With BP being specified as part of NSW under the *Amendment Act*, the NSW Government adopted a plan of management for LHI as a Permanent Park Preserve that stipulated that recreational climbing was not permitted on BP. This resulted in a prolonged dispute between those who wished to keep BP open as a climbing location, led by Dick Smith, that was opposed by the NSW Government and LHIB, which were determined to restrict access,

[39] Online at: https://dicksmithadventure.com.au/assault-on-balls-pyramid/

[40] See these reproduced in Smith (2015, pp 69-74).

[41] We have not been able to find reference to the organisation in any other context and its existence may have been purely rhetorical and connected to this particular expedition.

[42] While Smith (2015, p.7) characterises the claim as a "mock" one, expedition member John Davis later noted his perception that, "prior to this Balls Pyramid was an unclaimed rock. It then came under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife" (2019). This ascent was also covered by the ABC, with director David Flatman editing the footage into a thirty-minute long documentary entitled *Hands upon the Rock* which was broadcast by the corporation in their *Big Country* series.

with the latter succeeding in their aims (see Smith, 2015, pp. 203-230). Institutional determination to prevent recreational climbing on stack increased considerably following an (approved) expedition to BP by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Rangers in 2001 that found living specimens of the Lord Howe Island stick insect (*Dryococelus australis*), which was once found on LHI's main island but had been deemed extinct for over a century.[43] The insect was relatively easy to spot on LHI at the time of first settlement and was collected as fishing bait. While this had some impact on the size of the population, the most serious intervention resulted from the rats that swam ashore from the wreck of the *S.S. Makambo* off the main island in 1918. The rats proved to have an appetite for the stick insects and within two years, the population had been eradicated. The discovery of a dead stick insect on BP during the successful 1964 ascent was noteworthy and raised hopes that there might still be a living population there. But while several other dead specimens were found by subsequent climbers it was not until the 2001 expedition that a small colony of the insects was found at around the 100-metre level living in a small area under a *Melaleuca howeana* shrub. Despite initial assumptions that this was the only remaining population, a team of unauthorised climbers visiting in 2014 sighted live specimens at a lower level, at around 65 metres, in a patch of sedge plants. The discovery of a population of large and distinct insects formerly deemed extinct attracted international media attention and enhanced BP's status as locational asset within the archipelago's WH environment.[44]

Figure 12 – Ball's Pyramid (Harry Gottschalk, 2015).

Despite BP's uninhabitability, unvisitability and, thereby, lack of potential to generate economic activity, it is not *just* "a rock," with the lack of character that such a description suggests. Indeed, it is multi-facetted as a landscape feature, as a site of human endeavour (in terms of its history as a tough climb) and as a biological refuge for a charismatic insect species. In these regards, it forms part of Australia's cultural imaginary as a remote archipelagic territory, part of a broader tourist imaginary (premised on its exotic unvisitability), as a natural reserve that has not been significantly disrupted by human activity, and as an asset that has to be managed by the LHI Board (if only in terms of

[43] The size of the six-legged insect – which reached lengths of up to 12 centimetres – and its hard exo-skeleton led early European settlers on LHI to refer to it as a "land lobster."

[44] It also offered the prospect of specimens being bred to help restore the population on the main island (and/or other islets), although his has not yet been attempted). Melbourne Zoo has bred a small number of the species from a pair it obtained from the stack (and Bristol and San Diego Zoos now also have small breeding populations).

restricting access to it). The waters around BP have also been a significant summer fishing ground in that yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*), a popular catch for local consumption, are limited in number around LHI during warner months but still plentiful around BP and have been fished by LH Islanders there since small boats with outboard motors began to be used for offshore fishing in the 1970s (allowing Islanders to travel out and return during extended summer days).

BP's economic impact of the asset is difficult to assess, in that while it has been regularly promoted as an attraction for visitors, there is no evidence that its presence attracts tourists to the LHI archipelago who would not have otherwise visited, and infrequent commercial boat trips from LHI to the waters around the stack for fishing and snorkelling (when sea conditions permit) are one of the only direct economic benefits to the local community. The principal exception to this has been its attraction for birdwatchers who have visited the waters around BP on cruises from LHI to view species seldom seen around the main island, such as the Kermadec and Providence petrels (*Pterodroma neglecta* and *Pterodroma solandri*) that breed on the pinnacle. BP's role and significance within LHI's archipelagic and WH space is not therefore primarily economic but, rather, it exists as a less quantifiable – but nevertheless highly distinct – asset that is inscribed in various published accounts (e.g., Smith, 2015 and Smith & Bell, 2016), in audiovisual material and in a model display at the Lord Howe Island Museum, that includes accompanying historical documentation (Hutton, 2014).

Conclusion

The general discussion of sea stacks and pinnacles, and of examples of these in the Faroe Islands, Channel Islands and Balls Pyramid, have offered notably different characterisations of how sea stacks can be significant territories for the archipelagos and/or nation states that they are located within. In the first case, the Faroese stacks are components within realm of islets and rocks inhabited by a long-established archipelagic society that has resulted in them being classified by a sophisticated linguistic typology. They have a range of cultural associations, including mythological ones, and a range of livelihood functions, such as egg and bird gathering and sheep grazing. In the contemporary context, they are frequently represented in visual media and form part of the archipelago's portfolio of landscape attractions and, more recently, have served as climbing sites for intrepid tourists. In these regards, they have both socio-economic and cultural functions. They may not be islands within the UNCLOS definition but this, arguably, reveals more about the arbitrariness and inflexibility of that definition than it does the character of the stacks concerned. The various *etacs* around the coasts of the Channel Islands lack the high socio-economic integration with main islands that mark the Faroes but are, nevertheless, linguistically acknowledged and – in the case of Ortac – have been the subject of notable cultural interpretation and related contemporary folklore. Balls Pyramid, by contrast, has a more limited socio-cultural connection with the (historically recent) population of LHI, whose management body, the LHIB, only has a recent (and contested) jurisdiction over it. Indeed, in terms of those parties who have climbed and expressed strong interest in access to and the management of the pinnacle, these have – in the main – comprised individuals from Australia's continental mainland who were primarily active in the 1960s-1990s.[45] This group not only inscribed human experience on and knowledge of the stack by naming parts of it[46] but, as significantly,

[45] No LH Islander (to date) appears to have climbed BP.
[46] See examples in Smith (2015, pp. 114-115).

developed a narrative of the stack as a testing ground for (overwhelmingly male) fortitude and determination in climbing a precipitous peak at the inaccessible, furthest western edge of Australian territory.[47] In this context, BP has a greater significant within the contemporary mythic space of continental Australia than it does within the archipelagic space around LHI. But, similarly to the Faroese and Channel Island stacks, it *has* this status and, thereby, cultural value and significance. In the case of all these examples, they are not only rocks; they are also cultural landscapes. UNCLOS is largely a functional mechanism for providing frameworks for nation states to operate within with regard to disputes about their claims over marine areas and the terrestrial specks that help them justify these claims. But it is clearly deficient for any other purpose and, to the extent that it has influenced Island Studies to delineate its field of study in key ways, it has been an impediment to holistic perspectives within interdisciplinary studies of terrestrial isolates.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Heritage Jersey, Richard Hocart, Gang Hong and Jun'ichiro Suwa for discussion of place names and geomorphological terminologies; to Ian Hutton and to Claudia Huertas and Adam Fennell from the NSW Government Department of Planning for their discussion of and information on the status of Ball's Pyramid; to Francesca Bihet and Ulysses Black for comments on Ortac folklore, to John Horton and Alex Purdie for information about Ortac, and to Henry Johnson for his comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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[47] Norfolk Island is actually further 450 kilometres further east than BP but was, in the period in question, a self-governing external territory of Australia, rather than a remote part of a mainland state, as LHI was within NSW.

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