North Cornwall’s coast is lined with rocky bays between craggy cliffs. For centuries it has been lashed by Atlantic storms that have wrecked ships and drowned smugglers.

Today it can be bleak, cold and even dangerous. The Bedruthan Steps are a good example; storms and fierce tides can put the bay off limits to visitors.

Yet in the summer crowds of people come here; and have done for around 200 years.
Look closely at the rock surfaces and you can make out horizontal bands. This is slate, which forms in layers like sheets of paper. These layers are densely packed so they break down slowly. The waves that batter the cliffs wear away the softer rocks first, leaving the slate standing in arresting gnarled stacks.

The dramatic scenery inspired a dramatic story. A legend developed that the stacks were stepping stones used by the devil or a Cornish giant called Bedruthan. The myth was encouraged to attract tourists.

The first visitors explored here for less romantic reasons. The stacks are nine miles from Newquay; when Newquay became a resort, early holidaymakers travelling to and fro stopped here to rest their horses.

Today most people visit the stacks by car - the rocks have changed too. The smallest, pointiest stack is called Queen Bess Rock as it is said to look like Queen Elizabeth I. If this isn't immediately obvious don't worry – the likeness has faded as the rock has eroded. In fact the Queen has lost her head!

Visitors come here for the heady mix of danger, intrigue and mythology. These are the result of both physical and cultural processes. So though we're at the same spot as the first tourists, we are not seeing the same view.

**Profit and loss**

While danger attracts tourists it has very real consequences. Right of Queen Bess Rock is Samaritan Island, named after a ship that struck it in 1846. Some locals profited from looting shipwrecks, while smugglers probably carved the steps to the beach to take advantage of fast tides and secluded coves.

The cliffs were also mined for metals including copper and lead. The clifftop café and shop are converted mine buildings. The shop was a 'count house', an office where miners were paid.