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Pilgrims bear crosses on annual Easter trek to Holy Island

By Kristin R. Jackson

After a week of trudging 100 miles through the countryside of northeast England, the religious pilgrims bearing wooden crosses finally approach Holy Island — their Easter destination.

This lonely islet in the North Sea has been a cradle of Christianity since Saint Aidan founded a monastery here 1,400 years ago.

Generations of monks have prayed and toiled on Holy Island, just a few square miles of wind-scoured land that's also known as Lindisfarne.

Modern-day tourists walk in the medieval monks' footsteps, past the ruins of a thousand-year-old priory and a little castle perched on a rock outcrop. Other sightseers walk the shores, binoculars in hand, to spot the abundant bird life of the island's dunes, salt marshes and tideflats.

Only 200 people live year-round on Holy Island, sustaining themselves on fishing and tourism. And everyone truly runs on island time. The three-mile-long causeway that links Holy Island to the mainland is submerged by the sea twice a day at high tide, cutting it off.

Miscalculate the tide? There's no ferry, no way to beat the tide unless you want to risk losing your car in the sea. So slow down and wait a couple hours over a glass of ale in one of the island's cozy, low-ceiling pubs until the causeway re-emerges.

The pilgrims, however, don't bother with the causeway. Each Easter, the dozens of Christians who walk on the Northern Cross pilgrimage take an ancient route. They plod the final few miles across glistening tideflats to the island. This Pilgrims Way was used for centuries before the modern causeway was built. For some, it's still the way to reach this Holy Island.

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Check it out

Holy Island: www.lindisfarne.org.uk Easter pilgrimage walk: www.northerncross.co.uk/

Lindisfarne Castle: www.nationaltrust.org