

LIVE

Teaching Through Nature



How has human activity in the past resulted in Puffin numbers falling on the island of Burhou?

The Torrey Canyon Oil Tanker Disaster

The Torrey Canyon was shipwrecked while trying to take a short cut between Cornwall and Scilly, when 36 million gallons of crude oil was spilt.

It was on the 18 March, 1967 that the Torrey Canyon super tanker struck Pollard's Rock between the Scilly Isles and Land's End. The oil spill leaked and spread along the sea between England and France. The massive slick killed most of the marine life it touched along the whole of the south coast of Britain and the Normandy shores of France; it subsequently blighted the region for many years. Unsuccessful attempts were made to float the ship off the reef, and one member of the Dutch salvage team was killed.



The ship broke apart after being stranded on the reef for several days.



The Fleet Air Arm bombed the wreck in an effort to sink it, burn off the slick and reduce the oil spilling from it. Although the operation was declared a success, the Navy came in for criticism for months as around a quarter of the 42 bombs dropped on the stationary target failed to hit it.

The bombing was followed by Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm aircraft dropping petrol and napalm to try to burn the oil.

Around 120 miles of Cornish coast and 80 kilometres of France were contaminated and around 15,000 sea birds killed along with huge numbers of marine organisms before the 270 square mile slick dispersed.

Further damage was caused by the heavy use of detergents to break up the slick. Some 42 vessels sprayed over 10,000 tons of detergents onto the floating oil to emulsify and disperse it - but as these substances were extremely toxic to many marine organisms they caused even further damage.



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Questions

- In which year did the Torrey Canyon Oil Disaster take place?
- Were the crew of the tanker responsible for the accident?
- Which coast lines were affected by the oil spillage?
- What does “blighted” mean?
- Why did the RAF Fleet Air Arm bomb the Torrey Canyon?
- Following the bombing petrol and napalm was dropped on the wreck.
 - What is napalm?
 - Why was this action taken?
- How many sea birds do Ecologists believe the oil slick killed?

Research

Why do Authorities today believe they are better prepared to deal with Oil disasters?

BBC – Torrey Canyon lessons learned

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/6469059.stm>

Is the oil spilled from the Torrey Canyon still a danger to wildlife on the Channel Islands today?

BBC – Oil filled quarry disgraceful

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/guernsey/8297406.stm>

