

A truly unique sport is played at Rossall.

Jacqueline Morley reports

Rossall beach is still wild at heart. Neighbouring Cleveleys may have been manicured into a showcase seafront, an award winning triumph, but Rossall is still a bit of rough.

That's in spite of having one of Britain's best, but far from elitist, independent schools virtually on its shoreline.

At this time of day there's no better place to be, it's early evening, we're on the beach, and the sun has just emerged from cloud cover.

More than 100 boys and girls, juniors and seniors, from Rossall School, have made their way to the sands for a sport with a difference, Rossall Hockey.

Play will end, as the sun sets, and sports director Katie Lee blows her horn, and calls the sea to wash over the lines of play for another year.

There is no fixed time of play. Local lore has it that one game lasted two days. There's a sense of anticipation, as locals in the know, old Rossallians, parents and supporters gather, mascots to hand for the various houses at play. It's like Hogwarts at quidditch tournament time

Pupils painstakingly mark out what looks like a hockey-cum-rugby pitch on sand. They measure the pitch in paces, marking the lines with what looks like a cross between a hockey and lacrosse stick, older ones in ash, modern ones in lighter hickory.

Katie, on the sidelines, uses the bugle to lightly tap the shin guards of players, to ensure all are sufficiently padded up for the matches.

Rossall Hockey, RosHoc, is only played here, and only during the Lent term. It's history come to life, truly unique, played by 200 pupils at the school, more than half of them on the sands now, relishing the rough and tumble. The sand cushions a brutal cross between rugby and hockey, created in 1897, when pitches were too wet for rugby. Delightfully archaic rules, drawn up in 1873, emphasise skill, dribbling, regimentally straight line - and no "pirouettes".

It's up there with Harrow football, Winchester football, and the Eton wall game, and played by girls, too, at this famous independent school, near Fleetwood.

Some players are part of Rossall's U16 hockey team which competes in the National Schools Championships for Boys, against Kingston, Trent, Woodbridge, and South Dartmoor colleges, at Cannock Hockey Club, on April 19 and 20.

For Katie, widow of former Blackpool corner Sam Lee, the last RosHoc game of Lent term is one of the defining moments of life at Rossall, for staff as well as pupils.

"It's one of the reasons I love this place," she adds. "I'd never want to work anywhere else. Where else would you see this?"

In September she becomes head of Rossall Juniors, Infants and Nursery Schools, having previously worked as head of girls sport, head of house for junior and senior pupils, past chairman of Rossall Common Room and former head of pastoral care. Will she forsake RosHoc? "Not a chance! Even the youngest children are interested."

She's a popular ref too. Not one to wrap kids

Giving it some stick

BEACH BALL: A game of RosHoc on the sands



RULES OF THE GAME

- The 11-a-side game begins with a bully, formed by eight players, first three sticks per team at the ball, no scrum-contact or pushing from back players.
- There are two flies either side of the back, and one nearer goal.
- Players aim to drive forward in lines, to get control of the ball from the other team.
- The ball is played to the right side of the body, with front of stick, kept under control.
- If the ball travels more than three yards a free hit is awarded.
- Passing is not allowed.
- If a player loses the ball and runs ahead, another must take it on.
- The ball is approached from the rear, otherwise players are offside.
- Scoring occurs when the ball is pushed over the line by a player with the "D".
- Dangerous play includes striking a player, throwing a stick, hacing the ball with "malicious intent", tripping, deliberate body check, or holding one's stick above head height.

in cotton wool, the senior players like the way she turns a blind eye to an occasional step out

of line, to let play flow on, rather than falter. "I'll come down hard on dangerous play,

obstructions or off-sides though," she warns.

Katie reckons RosHoc, as part of the school's culture, helps underpin the holistic approach to education. "There's a real sense of family here." The school recently became the first independent in the North of England to win authorisation to teach the prestigious International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme to infant and junior school pupils, embracing the ethos of education, physical and emotional development.

For Jake Gartside, 16, and Isobel Marshall, 14, both of Poulton, RosHoc is no anachronism. "It's fantastic to get on the beach to play," says Jake. "You get some stick but it's safe." Isobel concludes: "It's a big change from other sports. I think the girls' game is a lot faster, too."

jacqui.morley@blackpoolgazette.co.uk

Camping is back, so the staycation fraternity would have us believe.

The ongoing impact of the recession, or a sudden unfathomable willingness to "get back to nature", has seen a rush on canvas in our nearest branches of Millets and now even B&Q.

Yes, the shop famed for its tungsten-tipped screws and large power tools for the inadequate alpha-male has branched out into the world of stoves, guy ropes and kettles you plug into your car's ciggy lighter.

Thanks, but no thanks.

I'm becoming something of a bah humbug figure in the Happy Rhodes Homestead because there is a consensus view we should head into the country for nights under the stars and damp canvas.

I, of course, am more at home in a

five star hotel and love nothing more than soft goose-down pillows, a well-stocked mini-bar and breakfast cooked for me and served on fine bone china.

Hotels were invented by civilised man right after they realised they did not have to live in caves or follow the bears into the woods.

Camping on the other hand, well it fills me with utter dread just thinking about it.



I've been, many times, and suffered for the ex-

TOMORROW: Look at it this way, with Jacqui Morley

Jon Rhodes

A word in your ear



perience. The last time I used a tent in anger was at one of the countless music festivals I went to in my mid-90s heyday.

The fact it has not been out of its waterproof wrapper since probably has something to do with the fact I got older, could not take the

round-the-clock strong continental lager diet anymore and suddenly found myself with two rugrats who require 10 holdalls full of stuff just to leave the house.

The other reason is I reckon I lost a sock at Leeds '98 and there is a very real chance it may still be in there.

I did, briefly, do a couple of non-gig related camping trips around this time.

Myself and the Put Upon Wife ended up in Stratford - Shakespeare's gaff - and found the whole experience a little less cultural than we had hoped.

The other saw me foolishly pitch up between Three Locks in Gallopway. It was beautiful, the scenery magical. Shame I had not accounted for the midges and had to basically shower in TCP to lessen

the blight of those 3,000 bites.

I've not even touched on the rain and dodgy food that takes too long to cook. As I said, bah humbug to the whole concept.

Of course, I, like most men, am all mouth.

I know full well I will soon have to face the fact I am horribly outnumbered at home and admit it would actually be great for the kids to experience some of the things I did as a nipper.

So I will have to find that sweaty sock, defumigate the old tent and get out into the great outdoors.

That or inform the rugrats London's Savoy hotel re-opens this summer and then persuade them its power showers are more of an educational and holistic experience than sleeping next to squashed slugs and cow pats.