

Penzance Drugs Gang Jailed After Beach Chase

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A dramatic sea chase ended on a Cornish beach when a drugs gang attempting to smuggle cocaine worth £18.4 million into the United Kingdom was intercepted by police and Border Force officers. The pursuit, which stretched around 28 miles at sea, culminated at Gwynver Beach near Penzance, leaving holidaymakers stunned by one of the country's most striking drug busts in recent years.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) released footage showing two smugglers racing a rigid-hulled inflatable boat (RHIB) across the sea, closely pursued by Border Force vessels. After a high-speed chase, the RHIB ran aground on the sand before the smugglers attempted to flee on foot. Officers fanned out across the beach, swiftly capturing the men and recovering six bales of cocaine from the water.

Two men at the centre of the operation were handed lengthy prison terms. Scott Johnston, 38, from Havant, received 24 years, while his accomplice, Edwin Yahir Tabora Baca, 33, from Barcelona, was jailed for 17 years and seven months.

Five others were also prosecuted for their roles in the smuggling scheme, which occurred on 13 September 2024. Michael May, 47, and Terry Willis, 44, both from Essex, organised the collection of the drugs and were sentenced to 19 years and 21 years eight months respectively. Peter Williams, 43, received 16 years nine months, while Bobbie Pearce, 29, was given 15 years four months. Alex Fowlie, 35, who purchased the vessel, is awaiting sentencing on 5 September.

In total, six bales containing around 230 kg of high-purity cocaine were seized, preventing what authorities estimate would have been millions of pounds' worth of illegal drugs from entering UK streets.

NCA Senior Investigating Officer Barry Vinall said the sentences reflected the crime's gravity. "These are substantial sentences for six men who didn't care about the misery cocaine causes; they just wanted to make a profit," he stated.

"Cocaine is one of the most harmful illegal drugs in the UK, linked to thousands of deaths and fuelling violent crime that wrecks communities and lives. Working together, Border Force stopped cocaine worth millions from entering UK streets and the National Crime Agency ensured that the group behind its importation faced justice."

The comments underscore the wider impact of cocaine smuggling, which officials say not only funds organised crime but also drives violence and long-term harm in communities across Britain.

The pursuit demonstrated the skill of Border Force maritime units. Officers tracked the smugglers for approximately 28 miles at sea, despite attempts by the criminals to discard evidence along the route.

Duncan Capps, Senior Director of Border Force Maritime, praised the coordinated response: "It is the job of Border Force to protect our border and keep communities safe. Our officers were fantastic and displayed immense skill during the 28-mile pursuit, despite the suspects' attempts to dispose of evidence. Border Force will continue to work alongside the NCA to prevent dangerous drugs from reaching our streets and will ensure that criminals caught smuggling face the full force of the law."

Onlookers at Gwynver Beach were left shocked as the smugglers ran across the sand, pursued by officers. Families enjoying the late-summer weather saw police fan out across

the beach to prevent escape. Witnesses described shouts and confusion as the dramatic chase unfolded prior to the suspects being brought under control.

The incident underscores the challenges faced by UK authorities in combating maritime drug smuggling. Criminal gangs often use fast boats to land drugs on secluded beaches, relying on speed and surprise. In this case, the combined efforts of the NCA and Border Force foiled the plot, resulting in arrests and convictions.

The successful operation highlights the effectiveness of coordinated law enforcement and border protection in tackling organised crime. With sentences ranging from 15 to 24 years, the case illustrates the severe penalties faced by those who attempt to smuggle drugs into the United Kingdom.

Authorities have confirmed that investigations into related networks remain ongoing, and additional individuals connected to the scheme may yet face prosecution.

The Cornish beach chase will be remembered not only as a dramatic encounter witnessed by unsuspecting holidaymakers but also as a powerful example of UK agencies' determination to shield communities from the destructive consequences of cocaine trafficking.