

## Trip to Devon and Dorset August 2008

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Taking our life in our hands we risk a 3 week holiday in Devon and Dorset. It's a choice of risking British Summer weather versus French crowds. Will we survive the experience?

New to this holiday we launch Tony & Wendy's Travel Blog, so that reading long emails can be avoided and we have a more permanent archive of our travels. Although the way the weather is in the UK we may not want to remember it! Reading the Met Office weather report ... "The unseasonably unsettled weather is set to continue across for much of the period, courtesy of low pressure systems..." and it almost makes it sound like the weather systems are doing us a favour.

Well we shall see.

## 06/08/2008 Supermarket Highlights

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Well it's day one and the weather is pretty cloudy with the odd rain shower.

After a leisurely morning we set off to the inevitable supermarket. At least it's stopped raining.

First a quick trip into Barnstaple to the Tourist Info office – suitably well hidden to avoid having to deal with too many tourists. And for some obscure reason we need a butchers, so being logical sorts we set off down butcher's row – you guessed it not a butchers shop in site.

Then the highlight of the day a trip to Tesco. Fortunately I'm armed with my trusty laptop and 3G modem so I get to spend a pleasant 2 hours on the Internet. Great this 3G modem it's even faster than being at home, just a pity that there is no free coffee.

Well that's enough excitement for one day.



## 7/8/2008 Lynton & Lynmouth

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Days starts off overcast and we've no idea of the weather forecast so we set off to explore Lynton and Lynmouth.

Get there and purchase our exorbitant parking ticket and the heavens open up. Opportunity to dine Alfresco in the car whilst the rain passes. Weather then brightens up so we have a walk around Lynton and then drive up to Lynmouth to explore. We did try walking up but as the couple we encountered coming down we're covered in mud from slipping and sliding down the path we decided to give it a miss and use the car.

Railway down the cliff top is very eco friendly. There are two trains on a steel cable and the one at the top is filled up with water so that it is heavy enough to descend and pull the other one up. Now ain't that smart. As to how they get the water up to the top well that's another matter. It's a toss up between pixies ferrying loads of buckets of water back up the cliff over or just using water from a local stream at the top?

Sit in a local café drinking coffee and people watching. Is this the obese capital of Europe? So many people are obese it just puts you off eating, it's nearly as bad as the USA. How do the French manage to stay so thin?

Overall a very pleasant afternoon and the weather remains good.

**08/08/2008**  
**Woolacombe**



Well it's a good forecast for today so we set off on a bike ride down to Woolacombe.



Pleasant day and we end up riding along the coast. Stop for a gourmet picnic on the cliff tops, all very pleasant. The beaches are teaming with people and thankfully we're not amongst them. Sea is full of bathers and budding surfers, while the sky is teaming with hang gliders and parachutists. Woolacombe has very little to offer but is heaving with holiday makers. Great thing about the bikes is there is no parking fees – can you believe it £5 to park a car.

Unfortunately the rolling Devon hills get the worst of Wendy and she ends up walking a lot of the way. Then to avoid a busy road we take the longer route home, what they don't tell you is that it's also the longest hill ever. You just think you've got to the top and there can't be any more and lo and behold there is more. At one stage it's left to me to push two bikes up a hill. I quite enjoy the hills as it gets the old heart pumping and gives you some real exercise – not boring like the gym – but then I end up waiting around for Wendy to walk up. Finally Wendy gives up. We still haven't seen the top of this hill, so she goes off to a campsite to get a drink and I cycle home to pick up the car and get her.

A good weather day and good bike ride. But they still play at cycle paths in this country, there are too many stretches on busy narrow roads. Looking forward to South Devon with fewer hills.

## **09/08/2008 DIY SOS**

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The weather is that good they've issued a severe weather warning. There's a howling gale, lashing down with rain and cold – lets get back to France it was never this bad.

So it's a day in the caravan. Reading, playing on computer, relaxing and watching the DIY genius of our host.

This has to be the worst site we've ever stayed on. Showers and toilets are basic but the whole place is just a load of botched workmanship. Tiles all out of line; glue daubed everywhere to make up for the screws that haven't worked; wiring that looks like one of those steady hand games, snaking everywhere; holes plastered over with dollops of pollyfilla; no sign or understanding of a spirit level.

We also spent an entertaining hour watching mine host lay some chippings (could be handy for the Japanese garden!). Well this was a masterstroke. He turns up with his ex PO van full of stone chippings and a wheel barrow. Then proceeds to dig up mud; put it in the wheel barrow; wheel it to the van 25 yards away; put mud in van; put chippings in wheel barrow and then wheel chippings 25 yards to soak up the mud. Having discharged the chippings onto the mud he then proceeds to ignore his spade and use his foot to spread out the chippings. And to top it all never once did he think to move the van to save the 25 yard trek. Now I know why this place is such a botch.

Well the toilets and showers are not a problem as we can use the ones in the caravan, but the real disaster is that there is no Internet and my 3G modem does not work here. All well I suppose at least I can console myself that its cheap and we'd been wanting to try some certified locations. All we really need is water supply mains hook up and chemical waste disposal.

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## **10/8/2008 Wallace Arnold Village**

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Another blustery day with showers forecast.

We decide to make the most of it and set off for a walk down the Tarka trail to Ilfracombe (Wallace Arnold capital of the UK). This must be where all those Wallace Arnold coaches full of pensioners (yes I know where one of them) come. Over 60% of the inhabitants are pensioners complete with zimmer frames, walking sticks, plastic macs and giant handbags. At least they don't walk around the place with mobile phones glued to their ears and the remaining 40% of the population are too busy walking around with ice creams, chips or homemade fudge in their hands. Typical English seaside resort complete with crap weather to go with it.

As to Ilfracombe what can we say. Well we've never been there before; it has a harbor but hardly any beach; ferry to Lundy goes from there. But the piece de resistance is municipal gardens complete with genuine brass band playing – are we on the slippery slope to the Wallace Arnold booking office?

Fortunately we escape any showers until the walk back and then the monsoon begins and I start to understand why you shouldn't go walking in jeans. The Tarka trail is along an old railway line which has been tarmaced over. Whilst a very easy walk there we hadn't realized it was all downhill so it was a long steady uphill slog back. Overall a pleasant 4 hour walk.

## **11/08/2008 The Tarka Trail**

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Very overcast day.

Drive down to Braunton to pick up the Tarka Trail from Braunton into Barnstaple. The trail is an old railway line that has been tarmac over to create a great flat cycle and walking path.

Get to Barnstaple for a walk around the town and our luxurious lunch of a banana and apple, but the rain starts to come down. After a coffee in the most expensive coffee shop in the world and its aptly named – Costa. I leave Wendy to explore the shops whilst I have a fast ride back to Braunton to pick up the car.

Then disaster strikes. I have to use almost a minute on my Orange Pay as you go phone in order to locate Wendy – this is the kids inheritance being squandered away all because Wendy's phone has a poor signal.

## **12/08/2008 To South Devon**

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Sunny day, but as look would have it we have to move on.

What a shame to have to leave the DIY SOS site. After leisurely breakfast – everything's leisurely these days – we set off to our next site near Kingsbridge. Not a bad trip apart from one minor mistake which takes us down one of these wonderful Devon country lanes – just about room for a racing bike.

Get to site and thanks to a misleading and obscure sign end up turning into farm track that is too tight for a caravan. Then have the joy of trying to back up and extradite a caravan from a narrow Devon country lane. Proper turning is 50 yards further on. Complain about the misleading sign and then get set up. This is followed by arrogant owner getting stroppy because I've had the temerity to complain. If it wasn't so late in the day we would have moved on. Never mind every dog has his day.

Despite the problems it is a great site and they even have free WiFi.

## **13/08/2008 Kingsbridge**

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Overnight it's a howling gale but we are warm and dry. Over cast morning but by lunchtime the sun comes out even if it is still very windy.



After yet another exotic lunch – 2 tangerines – we set off to Kingsbridge for a wander around and to do the weekly shop. Bit of a supermarket disaster; no 3G signal and no coffee shop so have to go around the supermarket with Wendy. Shop is completed in record time, just goes to show that smaller supermarkets with less choice have a lot going for them.

Get back late in the afternoon and sit out for a coffee. Then whilst Wendy does dinner I take a bike ride down to Beesands beach where I see the Fish

Gallows. Steep ride back up but good exercise.

## 19/08/2008 Melpesh, Dorset

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Arrive on our last site of our 3 week trip in the UK. Driving in Devon was a nightmare with a caravan in tow but Dorset roads are a good bit better. New site is an adults only site and is excellent. Fantastic shower rooms; great pitches; even a pub and restaurant on site; yet not too big.

20/8/2008

Weather a bit overcast but at least it's not raining. Have a pleasant walk around Bridport and the market. It's a great market town, not too big yet has everything you need. Even a café that sells Hofbrau, unfortunately it's on draught and not in bottles. We then set off for a pleasant walk down to West Bay on the coast. Pleasant little seaport with harbor. Walk back to the car in Bridport but get caught by the rain in the last mile.

21/8/2008

Off to Portland and go for a great walk along the coastal path around the Island all the way up to Portland Bill – he even waved to us from the coastal observation post. We're out for a total of 4.5 hours, Wendy is exhausted. Overall a great walk and the weather was sunny all the way and fortunately not too hot.

22/8/2008

Well at long last it's a blue sky day although quite windy. Finally we get a lazy day around the caravan. Very relaxing and I even get a bike ride around the Dorset country lanes. Nice quiet lanes but there are plenty of hills. Still it's good exercise and not as boring as the Gym bikes.



23/8/8

Reasonable looking day so we set off for a walk around Dorchester and to make us feel better they have laid on a French market. Quaint little town populated by wasps – I think they've come for the French market.

Then it's dinner around the caravan followed by a walk into Bridport. Wendy does the window shopping whilst I go to Morrisons. No I've not quite lost it yet, but you can sit in their café all day and play on your computer and nobody bothers you. Mind you really swelled their profits and bought a cup of coffee – no wonder retail sales are up.

Then to finish a great day we have Thai curry for dinner.

24/8/8



Over cast sort of day but we're off to Lyme Regis – sounds rather grand – and planning on doing the coastal path to Charmouth. But bad news the coastal path is closed and there is a

massive diversion inland all due to landslides. Instead we fully explore Lyme Regis. It being bank holiday Sunday it is heaving. Every man and his dog – despite sign forbidding them – is on the beach trying to enjoy themselves. Ice creams, fish and chips and mobile phones are in abundance.

One enterprising individual is balancing rocks on the beach. Eh! And you can take a photograph if you buy a £2.50 post card. There's a lot to be said for telephoto lenses! Could this be an addition to my Japanese Garden or would it attract too many tourists to the narrow streets of Belthorn – I've already tipped off the Council that there's going to be an opportunity to put parking meters up in Belthorn ready for the number of tourists that will be coming to view my Japanese Garden!

Not the best of days but at least it stays dry.

And tonight it's candles on the Cob – 5000 candles lit on the cob (harbor wall) – you can even buy one to remember somebody by. Only £2.50 – do you get your money back if it gets blown out? What will that do to global warming?

#### Summary

Well this will be the last time we holiday in the UK for any length of time. The weather has been crap. Out of 3 weeks we get only one day suitable for lazing around the caravan. We make the most of it though and get out most days but it's far from ideal. And of course everywhere is very busy, roads are crowded and campsites are full. On top of that Devon is a money grabbing area, everyone has their hand out, no free parking and everything expensive. There are hardly any traffic free cycle routes and if you want walks then the money grabbing tourist information offices sell you books, no free leaflets. They've just got it too easy. Not a bit like the Dumfries area where they want to encourage tourism. Camp sites in the UK are disappointing, not as good as French sites and the roads are appalling. Next year we'll stay at home for August, at least if the weathers bad it won't be such a waste, or if we're really desperate risk some obscure area of France that is not so busy. And next year I must lookout for and avoid bank holidays – Outlook Calendar doesn't seem to bother – but too many times this year we have been travelling on or around a bank holiday.