

# Floating like a dragonfly

Wildlife and colour on an epic multi-centre trip through the South West

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki

## ABOUT US...



**US** Carol Kubicki and husband, Anthony. We explore beautiful places in our Blue Bus whatever the season, being keen walkers, fair weather cyclists and improving birdwatchers

**OUR 'VAN** A 2021 Devon Firefly on a Ford Custom Transit SWB 2.0-litre. This is our third Devon Conversions campervan and we love the layout that packs so much into a sub-five-metre van

**G**lastonbury, in the Somerset Levels, might bring to mind crystal healing and ley lines, but away from the town wildlife flourishes. Our campsite was perfectly placed, close to both the RSPB's Ham Wall reserve on the Avalon Marshes and the town centre.

On the easy walk to the reserve, swallows danced alongside us through the fields, insects buzzed among the flower-rich wetlands, and birds warbled and chirped in the June sunshine. In the reserve, we were astonished by the profusion of flitting dragonflies as we meandered among a horde of electric blues and fresh greens. Later, a warden helped us identify the four-spotted chaser dragonflies as we were mesmerised by a marsh harrier hunting over the reeds and charmed by the swans with an astonishing seven fluffy cygnets.

We spent an afternoon browsing Glastonbury's shops packed with psychedelic tie-dye clothing and throws. Outside, vivid eye-catching murals brightened up gable ends. I was enjoying the explosion of colour and hoped our whole trip around the South West would be as kaleidoscopic.

The low-lying Somerset Levels are broken up by hillocks that were once islands among the flooded marshes. The Glastonbury Way (seven and a half miles) took us over the best known of these, Glastonbury Tor, and to most of the



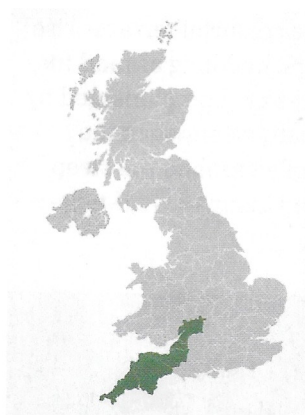
important sights in the area. Its figure of eight shape led us through the town twice, meaning we could have coffee in the morning and a beer later in the day.

The teasing route took us towards and then away from Glastonbury Tor, to include Gog and Magog, two ancient oak trees. When we eventually climbed Glastonbury Tor it was as busy as you would expect, everyone crowded along the sheltered and sunny side of the fourteenth century tower, enjoying the views over the fertile Somerset countryside.

We skipped visiting the Chalice Well and instead circumnavigated the abbey, stopping for a beer in the George and

ABOVE RIGHT Rock stacks and cliffs near Tintagel





## THE ROUTE

Follow our journey, go to...  
[W motorhome.ma/southwest2026](http://www.motorhome.ma/southwest2026)

Pilgrims Inn, a pub dripping with antiquarian atmosphere. Originally, this was the hospice for the abbey and it oozes medieval charm, with snugs, worn stone floors and ornate windows.

The grassy ridge of Wearyall Hill gave us more panoramas before the route dropped down to an overgrown path by the River Bure, skirting Bride's Mound, an early Christian site. A good trail on a disused railway line lined with willow trees took us back to the campsite.

In south Devon, we pitched up at Widdicombe Farm and, from our terrace, had views to fields of deep-red soil and yellow mown grass. A service bus from the

nearby village of Marldon carried us to the sea at Paignton.

Heading for the prom, I was faced with a rainbow of colours. The coral-hued sand led to a brilliant-blue sea. Beyond were brick-red sandstone cliffs, rocks strewn with lime-green seaweed and Torquay's white houses.

Walking around Torbay, a sign for the historic village of Cockington sparked a memory with Anthony of childhood family holidays and, on a whim, we turned away from the coast. It was a good call!

A winding path through a water meadow with a babbling stream led us to a pretty village with thatched cottages ➤

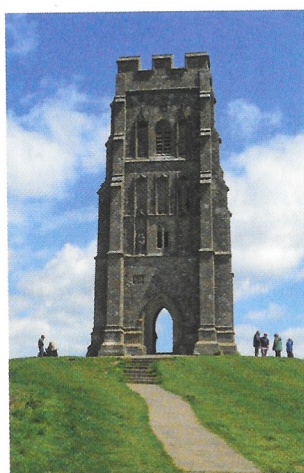




ABOVE Looking over Glastonbury

BELOW The fourteenth century tower on Glastonbury Tor

BELOW INSET Vivid Glastonbury mural



and parkland. Anthony remembered the church's unique pulpit, so we peered in. The ornate wooden pulpit, thought to be salvage from a Spanish Armada warship, was still there.

A cricket match was under way in front of Cockington Court and we watched the game with drinks from the café. The art gallery had some interesting pieces but the activity of the workshops appealed more. Here we admired glassblowers, blacksmiths, and other artists at work.

On a blue-sky morning we picked up the John Musgrave Heritage Trail in Marldon. Set up by local Ramblers, this turned out to be a delightful route to Berry Pomeroy Castle. The toughest section was the thigh-busting, almost-vertical lane by Marldon Church.

From the top, our path wound between high hedges, through shady woodland and

along gravel tracks across pastoral Devon. Eventually, the stones of Berry Pomeroy Castle peered over the trees beyond a dazzling meadow.

We walked through the impressive twin-towered gatehouse listening to the audio guide explaining the complicated history of the ruins. The building evolved from a fortification to an Elizabethan mansion that sat within the walls. Lord Seymour inherited Berry Pomeroy at the end of the sixteenth century and had overambitious plans to build something palatial on the restricted site but this was never completed.

In Brixham, the colourful terraces rise attractively in tiers, huddling around the harbour. The vistas are complimented by multicoloured boats, gleaming in the sunshine. We strolled around the steep narrow streets and along the half-mile- ➤



## THE JOURNEY

We travelled from home in Morecambe to Somerset via the M6 and M5, then returned from Gloucester on the same motorways, a return distance of **620 miles**. We spent 19 days touring with 17 nights on sites in June



## THE COSTS

Fuel: 620 miles at an average 40mpg.....	£88
Ferry: Dartmouth Higher Ferry .....	£8.90
Campsites.....	£541.10
Attractions: Two adults: Berry Pomeroy Castle, Arlington Court, Slimbridge Wetland Centre .....	£75.18
Bus and train: Bus to Paignton .....	£2
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>£715.18</b>





## INFORMATION

Glastonbury Information Centre

**W** [glastonburyinformationcentre.co.uk](http://glastonburyinformationcentre.co.uk)

Avalon Marshes

**W** [avalonmarshes.org](http://avalonmarshes.org)

Berry Pomeroy Castle is run by English Heritage

**W** [english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)

The South Devon Ramblers has details of the John Musgrave Heritage Trail

**W** [southdevonramblers.com](http://southdevonramblers.com)

Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

**W** [field-studies-council.org/locations/slaptonleynnr](http://field-studies-council.org/locations/slaptonleynnr)

Arlington Hall is owned by the National Trust

**W** [nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)

Slimbridge Wetland Centre

**W** [wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge](http://wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge)

long breakwater. Facing the breeze at the lighthouse, we could see Torquay across the sea.

The ferry at Dartmouth broke up our journey through the Devon countryside to Stokenham near Slapton Sands. After settling our silver machine on the campsite, we walked to the beach.

We joined others paying respects at the memorial to the hundreds of soldiers who were killed here in April 1944 while training for the D-Day landings. Thousands of residents were temporarily evacuated from the villages around Slapton Sands to ensure secrecy during the D-Day preparation and these villagers, who must have felt so disorientated, were in my thoughts, too.

Today the three-mile-long shingle and sandy Slapton Sands is perfect for strolling. The next morning, we carried our sandals and felt the many-hued pebbles shift under our steps. Bright wildflowers and a road fill the shingle bar that separates Slapton Ley, a freshwater lake, from the beach.

Surrounded by reed beds and trees, Slapton Ley is a nationally important

nature reserve and we followed the meandering paths around the waterside, the sunlight peeping through the leaves. At a viewpoint we rested and were lucky to see a pair of hobbies gracefully manoeuvring over the still water.

Reaching Slapton village, we relaxed with a beer in the pretty garden behind The Queens Arms, watching jackdaws hopping between the thatched roofs. We walked through the narrow streets of handsome properties and spotted the ruined tower that is all that remains of a previous chantry college. We strode back along quiet narrow lanes, pressing ourselves against the high hedges when an occasional vehicle came by.

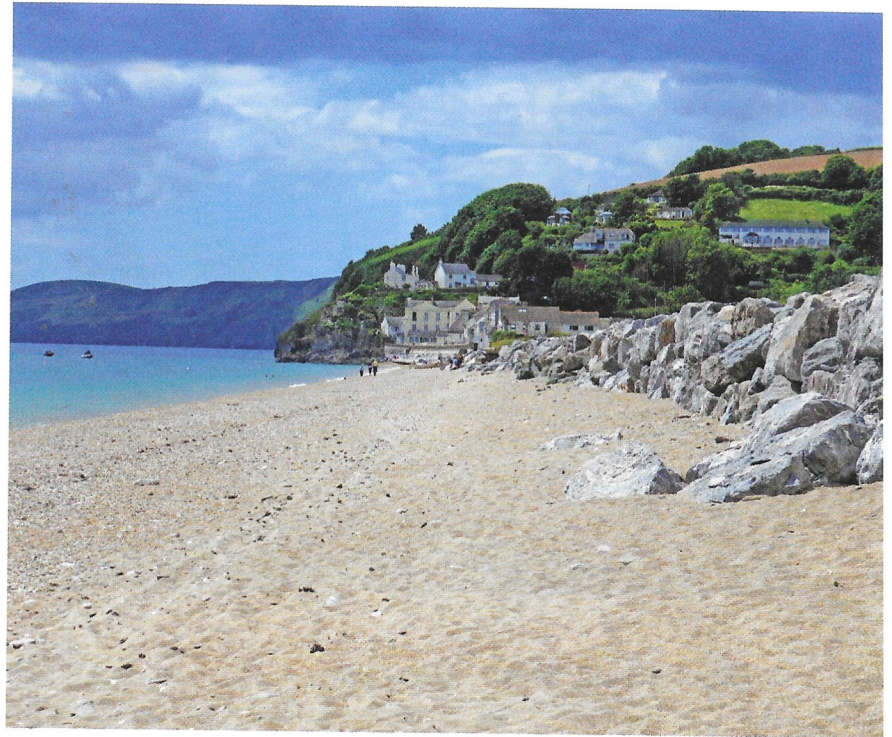
We often stop at farm shops when we are on the road. These usually have parking, good food and a café. Crossing the border to Cornwall, we pulled into the unusually named Tre, Pol and Pen, which is Cornish for homestead, well and hill. After a delicious brunch and coffee, we left with a bag full of gifts and groceries to take to Trewethett campsite that sits on the cliffs of the north Cornwall coast.

With a storm forecast the next day, we

BELOW The harbour at Brixham







## TOP TIPS

Be prepared to reverse on some of the narrow lanes with high hedges in the South West

Slimbridge Wetland Centre has good access for pushchairs and wheelchairs. The latter is provided free of charge and mobility scooters can be hired for £10 a day. The paths are mostly hard surface and the hides are accessible. Full details can be found from this link

**W** [www.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge/plan-your-visit/accessibility](http://www.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge/plan-your-visit/accessibility)

**ABOVE CLOCKWISE** Ladies Window rock formation near Tintagel; Slapton Sands is a short walk away from Start Bay C&MC site; Berry Pomeroy Castle has a complicated history

decided to explore the coastal path that runs alongside the site as soon as we arrived. This spectacular stretch of coast was packed with colour.

Clumps of oxeye daisies bobbed in the breeze, yellow lichen clung to dry stone walls and seabirds swirled around the sea stacks. The high cliffs plunging into the sea were breathtaking.

We clambered down to Ladies Window, a natural archway. Stepping cautiously through the arch, we stood windswept above the crashing waves on a narrow rocky platform, shiny with use.

The rain and strong winds arrived, but we chose to walk to Tintagel, as friends had highly recommended the vegan pasties at The Cornish Bakery. The path along the secluded Rocky Valley was slippery in the downpour and we guessed we were the only people out hiking. However, looking for the rock carvings at the ruined mill buildings, we found them surrounded by a huddle of rain-drenched women learning about the connection between meditation and labyrinths!

Tintagel was busy but at the recommended bakery we queued patiently for a table, glad to be out of the rain. The pasties were worth the effort!

Better weather returned as we drove to north Devon and the idyllic Hallsdown

Farm, our base for a few days. We were soon pitched up with a view across a field with a white-nosed donkey whose thick coat changed with the light from chestnut to ecru.

The campsite was a wildlife haven, the most notable sighting being a pair of striking black and white great spotted woodpeckers. They fed their youngster a few yards from our campervan, the male distinguished by his bright red head patch.

Arlington Court, a National Trust estate once owned by generations of Chichesters, was manageable on foot from Hallsdown Farm. From the lanes, our first glimpse of the property was the family emblem. This statue of a heron catching an eel sits on a cupola on the old stables, now the Carriage Museum.

Visiting the house, we learnt about the last owner, Rosalie Chichester, an animal lover, who managed the estate as a no-hunting haven. She travelled widely and collected curios, from shells to model ships. The two-storey house isn't a palace but the light and homely property does have a magnificent central hall that is larger than our bungalow!

There is something satisfying to the eye about the combination of a golden scone, pale yellow clotted cream and ruby red jam. Maybe it is that you know it will be ➤





ABOVE Arlington Court is surrounded by meadows

BELOW Avocets at Slimbridge

BELOW INSET Tudor Caravan Park – the site is alongside the canal



delicious! After generously sharing scone crumbs with a friendly robin, we picked up the five-mile waymarked trail to explore the wider estate. The land reflects Rosalie Chichester's passions and is managed for wildlife with meadows down to the river, water features and plenty of woodland.

Heading north, we stopped for a final slice of Devon before hitting the motorway. Sitting on the River Exe, the historic town of Tiverton was a good choice for shopping, coffee and general ambling. Interesting buildings remain from its days as a centre for manufacturing woollen cloth and the tidy main street was radiantly bedecked with Devon flags (green with a black and white cross). We bought cake for later and stumbled upon some of Tiverton's jazzy Flock that Rock, a sculpture trail of painted swans.

Tudor Caravan Park is on the doorstep of Slimbridge Wetland Centre in Gloucestershire, so visiting the reserve was easy. Leaving the visitor's centre behind, we strode purposefully to the promisingly named Kingfisher Hide that overlooks a nest.

A member of staff was briskly sweeping the hide and we had clearly arrived at the end of the show. He told us the young kingfishers had fledged and the whole family moved on.

Disappointed, we watched an egret before trying another hide. Here, cute fluffy avocet chicks bumbled over rocks, almost perfectly camouflaged to keep them safe. At the edge of the reserve, we were lucky to see a rare visitor to the UK, a lonely male white-spotted bluethroat.

Wandering back towards the exit, we decided to have a last try to see kingfishers. Often seen as a blue flash along a river, these speedy technicoloured birds can be difficult to spot. We settled down in a hide and almost immediately a blue and orange blur arrived, perching on one of the many branches over the water.

The kingfisher repeatedly dived in the water, until success! It caught a fish which it swallowed, then flew away. We hardly had time to feel elated when a different kingfisher landed on a closer branch and gave us a similar flamboyant performance.

The vivid plumage of the kingfishers was a fitting grand finale to our multicoloured holiday. From showy coastal flowers to Brixham's picturesque harbour; from the shimmering Somerset dragonflies to Torbay's radiant seascape, England's South West had flaunted its riotous palette of colour. **MMM**



## WE STAYED AT

**Isle of Avalon Touring Park**, Godney Road, Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 9AF

**T** 01458 833618

**W** [avalontouringpark.co.uk](http://avalontouringpark.co.uk)



**Widdicombe Farm Touring Park**, The Ring Road (A380), Compton, Torquay, Devon TQ3 1ST

**T** 01803 558325

**W** [widdicombefarm.co.uk](http://widdicombefarm.co.uk)

**Start Bay Caravan and Motorhome Club Site**, Stokenham, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 2SE

**T** 01548 580430

**W** [caravanclub.co.uk](http://caravanclub.co.uk)

**Trewethett Farm Caravan and Motorhome Club site**, Trethevy, Tintagel, Cornwall PL34 0BQ

**T** 01840 770222

**W** [caravanclub.co.uk](http://caravanclub.co.uk)

**Hallsdown Farm Touring Park**, Arlington, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 4SW

**T** 01271 850847

**W** [hallsdownfarm.co.uk](http://hallsdownfarm.co.uk)



**Tudor Caravan Park**, Shepherds Patch, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire GL2 7BP

**T** 01453 890483

**W** [tudorcaravanpark.com](http://tudorcaravanpark.com)