

NEED TO KNOW

WHERE WE STAYED

■ Crossways Caravan Club Site, Moreton, Dorset www.caravanclub.co.uk/caravanclubapps/applications/uk-caravan-sites-and-parks/Details.aspx?csid=21862

■ Henry's Campsite, The Lizard, Cornwall www.henryscampsite.co.uk

■ Westermill Farm, Exford, Dorset www.westermill.com

HOW MUCH?

■ Total miles covered: 700

■ Fuel cost: approximately £150

■ Campsite fees ranged from £40 per night at Crossways Caravan Club site to £20 per night at Westermill Farm in Devon (this was for a family of two adults and two kids, a VW Camper, a large drive-away awning and electricity hook-up, where offered)

MUST SEE / DO

■ Dorset's Jurassic Coast, including Lulworth, Durdle Door, Chesil Beach and Poole Harbour

■ Riverford Field Kitchen, near Buckfastleigh, Devon

(three course lunch is £22.50 per adult, £11.25 per child) www.riverford.co.uk/restaurant

■ Kynance Cove, Lizard Point

■ Lizard Lighthouse Heritage Centre

www.trinityhouse.co.uk/lighthouses/lighthouse_list/lizard.html?tab=visitor



Getting to know you...

Ed Hardy gets closer to his VW California over a snatched half-term break in the south west of England

Words and photos Ed Hardy

We had an old Bay Window Camper when I was a kid, and we used it all the time for impromptu camping weekends. I'd naively expected the same would apply when we took delivery of our VW California last year. As it turned out, I couldn't have been more wrong. I think child rearing was a little more relaxed in the '70s. Whereas the 10-year-old me was left to take each weekend as it comes, my kids have practically every minute of their Saturdays and Sundays accounted for, every week. The impromptu weekend away has therefore turned out to be pretty much a figment of my imagination.

As a result, our new California didn't get any camping action for a full nine months after we got back from our mammoth four-week 'shakedown'

tour of Europe last Summer. The Van got plenty of use as a car through the winter though and, before we knew it, it was the spring and we were starting to think about holidays again. The summer half-term break looked like the perfect opportunity to take the California off somewhere interesting,

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and so a plan was hatched – a flying tour of the South West of England, taking in Dorset, Cornwall and Devon, ending up visiting family in Bristol.

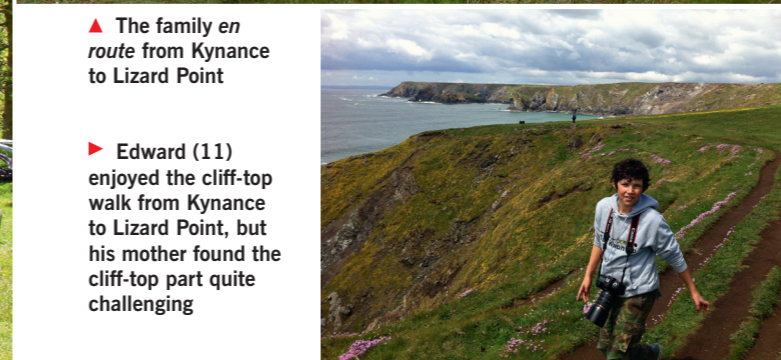
First stop was the Crossways Caravan Club (CC) site at Moreton, near Dorchester. I'm not a member of the Caravan Club, and normally avoid their sites if I can – the relentless neatness makes me depressed – but

this time we'd arranged to meet up with friends who were members, so we swallowed hard and made our way there. The Crossways site is actually a lot less upsetting than most CC sites, taking the form of a single-track road winding its way through some woods, with the odd grassy clearing for caravans and motorhomes every now and then. The end result is there's considerably more privacy than on most Caravan Club sites, and fewer sets of net curtains twitching away when you pitch up. After checking in and scattering some rubbish around the pitch

to upset our neighbours, we drove off to have a look at an old favourite of ours, Lulworth Cove, before moving on to Corfe Castle, from where we took the steam train to Swanage. That reminds me: the other good thing about the site at Moreton is it's got its own railway station so, if you can't be bothered to pack everything up to use the Van during the day, you can



▲ The family en route from Kynance to Lizard Point



▶ Edward (11) enjoyed the cliff-top walk from Kynance to Lizard Point, but his mother found the cliff-top part quite challenging



▲ Low tide at pretty Porlock Weir, North Devon



▼ The California meets its spiritual ancestor, on Minehead's seafront



▼ Looking out to sea from the beach at Kynance Cove



▲ Kynance Cove: it's easy on the eye, but careful if you're going paddling as that water has some force to it



▲ The now-abandoned Lifeboat Station at Lizard Point

► Prepping supper at Henry's Campsite, The Lizard



◄ They're relaxed about barbecues at Henry's Campsite (they're relaxed about everything, come to think of it)



▲ The family at the Lizard Point Lighthouse Heritage Centre



Cornish Pasty for me, ice cream for them: seems like a fair trade



just jump on the train and quickly be in Dorchester or Weymouth in one direction, or Wareham (from where you can catch a bus connection to the Swanage Steam Railway), Poole and Bournemouth in the other

Untidy gusset

Before we left home I'd treated myself to a new awning – a Vango Sapera, with inflatable beams. As we got back to the site I put it up for the first time, just as the rain started. I'm pleased to report it's a properly thought out bit of kit, with loads of clever little touches like a sewn-in groundsheet, flyscreens on every opening and Vango's 'structural support system' that's supposed to stop it blowing away in a gale. Slightly less impressive was the 'gusset' that adjoins the Van. It attached to the awning's 'kador strip' easily enough, but I couldn't for the life of me work out how to get the side panels to look tidy. However I tried tensioning it, strapping it up or pegging it down, I always ended up with something that looked like a giant pair of pants flapping around the side of the Van. In the end, I gave up and sat inside the thing, from where I couldn't see the offensive part.

That night it rained with a vengeance. I drew the short straw and slept in the awning, while everyone else slept in the Van. In the morning, I woke up perfectly dry, even though it was still chucking it down. It also happened to be my birthday, so I sat watching my kids opening my presents and cards before I got on with the job of packing the by-now thoroughly soaked awning back into its bag. This was not how I'd hoped to be spending my birthday but, as it

▲ Picture-postcard St. Ives, home of the heaviest concentration of Cornish Pasty shops in the Northern Hemisphere

turned out, it was easy enough – let out the air, squish it all into the bag, job done. Don't underestimate the size of the bag though. It takes up a lot of room in the back of the Van, and weighs 20+kg too, or more if you pack it up while it's sopping wet.

How I had envisaged spending my birthday was driving to the very wonderful Riverford Field Kitchen near Buckfastleigh in Devon and stuffing my face with their fantastic picked-from-the-fields-that-morning produce. They do a lunchtime and a dinner sitting, and you have to book in advance. You sit on refectory-type tables and share big dishes of whatever's on the menu that day with your neighbours. On

cliff-top location. The crowd was friendly and the kids soon found some friends to play with as I stood under the umbrella with the slightly damp barbecue. Next day, and after consulting the nice lady in what passes for Henry's reception area (which is actually Henry's kitchen), we walked the couple of miles across country to Kynance Cove. This was an easy walk and, after an hour or so, it even stopped raining and the sun started to show its sorry face. Kynance Cove is spectacular and the café there does good ice creams, as well as the obligatory Cornish Pasty. The cliff-top path back to Lizard Point takes a little longer, but the scenery is jaw-dropping the entire way, while the

How I had envisaged spending my birthday was driving to the very wonderful Riverford Field Kitchen

the day we visited we enjoyed beef stew with butter beans and spinach, asparagus with slow-cooked tomato, new potatoes with wet garlic, and beetroot cooked with red onion and basil oil. My tip if you fancy following in our footsteps is to leave room for pudding, they're pretty good, too...

I was placed in the back of the California after lunch and snoozed quietly away as Sophie drove us to our next stop, the fabled Henry's Campsite at The Lizard in Cornwall. We were first timers at Henry's, but it came on recommendation from numerous friends, all of whom had enthused about the site's relaxed atmosphere and its beautiful, near-

Lizard Lighthouse Heritage Centre at Lizard Point is a great way to spend an hour, whatever your age.

Just for a change, that night it blew a gale, so I was pleased the awning was still there when I woke up in the morning. We stuffed it back into its bag and broke camp, heading first to St. Ives – pretty, pretty place but how many ice cream shops and / or Cornish Pasty shops can one town possibly need? From there it was on to North Devon, via a quick dip in the sea at the very classy and impossibly beautiful Watergate Bay, a few miles north of Newquay. Our last destination was Westernmill Farm campsite near Exford, right in the



▲ Now where are we going to put that soggy wetsuit when he gets back to the Van?

▼ On site at Henry's: don't be fooled by that blue sky – the heavens opened that night





middle of Exmoor National Park. This made for quite a bit of driving that day – we must have covered around 180 miles – but, as usual, the California made it completely painless. The kids sat in the back beaming tunes from their iPods via Bluetooth to the really quite good sound system, while Sophie snoozed to my left and I watched the world go by.

Westermill Farm is very close to my idea of the perfect campsite. It's basically just a field (or, to be accurate, four fields), next to a small

▲ **Heading out to the surf at beautiful Watergate Bay**

“That was our small-but-perfectly-formed holiday. The bills were pretty miniature, too”

river, adjacent to a working sheep farm. There are a few toilets and showers for those who need them, but no electricity. We chose a spot next to the river, set up camp and sat down with a beer. In the following 48 hours we managed to fit in a trip to the coast at Porlock Weir and some good fish and chips in Minehead, but mostly we just sat around at Watermill Farm doing nothing in particular, while the kids played in the river and on their bikes. It cost us about £20 a night and was deeply relaxing. I'd recommend it like a shot. By the time came to head for Bristol, our last stop, I was practically comatose.



Late May is heaven for wildflower spotters in Cornwall

And that was our small but perfectly-formed holiday. The bills were pretty miniature, too. We cooked most of our own food, using our trusty Campingaz twin burner rather than the California's built-in stove, or we barbecued, generally in the wind and the rain. We're too tight to pay to enter most out-and-out tourist attractions, but I'm pleased to report we found we could easily fill our days regardless. Happily, the main attraction of the region – the jaw-droppingly beautiful scenery, from beaches and cliffs to moorlands and hills – is all completely free of charge. And although we were pretty

familiar with the California when we started, I think it's true to say we saw a new side of it this trip. As a tool for touring when the weather's less than Mediterranean perfect, it works very well. There are plenty of places to stash bad weather gear, the hard-wearing plastic floor doesn't mind getting covered in mud, and it's great to sit in and get a brew on while outside the weather does its worst. And, to be fair to the British weather, it really didn't rain all the time. We only scratched the surface of the South West of England in our 700-mile trip, but we'll certainly be back as there's a lot more to discover.