

Traveller's Diary



Jurassic Coast - By Tim Saunders



Above: Pink tram at Seaton Tramway.



Above: On the beach at Beer.



Heidi, Henry and Harriett Saunders riding tractors at Pennywell Farm.



Charmouth.



The marching band at Bridport Carnival.

Millions of years ago the Jurassic Coast was under water. Creatures that swam in these waters have since turned into fossils. These can still be discovered by a keen eye, making for a wonderful holiday memento.

We have visited the area before, and in fact I grew up here, but it is only now that the children are old enough that our attentions turn to this hugely important aspect of Devon and Dorset. At school Heidi (6) has been learning about famous Lyme Regis fossil hunter Mary Anning. We didn't imagine being able to walk on a beach and find any fossils but at world renowned Charmouth, this is just what we do. There's a fascinating heritage centre that even David Attenborough has visited, and the staff will happily confirm if what you bring back from the beach are genuine fossils. Never before have we visited a beach where so many people are bent double looking for ammonites. The staff at the centre recommend that we walk down the beach for 10 minutes for the best fossil hunting spot, which we duly do and while away the best part of a glorious summer's day carefully sifting through pebbles. At the end of the day we all find something of which to be proud.

Alighting at Seaton Tramway station, Seaton Jurassic shouts out to be visited. We learn that a massive Jurassic landslide exposed fossils and we are taken on a memorable interactive journey through time. The designers have really excelled themselves incorporating period furnishings through to 3D imagery. There are 13 boxes to discover where the children have to answer questions and at the end they receive a gemstone. Harriett (8), Heidi (6) and Henry (3), all avid watchers of TV's Octonauts are instantly drawn to what they call the

Octopod where they can see underwater life. There is also a large outside area that runs alongside Seaton Tramway. Here there is plenty of flora and fauna including dreaded horsetail, which we gain a newfound respect for discovering that this stuff that we have resorted to burning in our garden to eradicate, actually existed before dinosaurs.

After a bite to eat we make our way to the beach where we fly our kite. And then it's time to board the tram back to Colyford. We love this form of transport. Sitting on the top deck with the wind blowing our hair we can really appreciate how it works as the cable above us captures the electricity to power it. The backs of the seats can be pushed forward or back so that no matter which direction it travels, passengers sit the right way round. The journey cuts through wetlands beside the River Axe where there is a nature reserve featuring all kinds of birds including curlews and fields where there are cows and sheep grazing and even rabbits.

Crossing the main road we wave to the traffic. Along the way model dinosaurs have been placed beside the track, guaranteeing to keep the attention of younger passengers. It is such a relaxing and enjoyable form of transport, reminding older passengers of how they used to travel in their childhood.

At Beaminster Museum, Brian is a mine of information. His enthusiasm is infectious and helps bring the wonderful exhibits in the museum to life. So much can be learnt about the area from the fascinating axes used for killing mammoths through to smuggling, crime and the hanging of witches. Henry particularly enjoys the naughty burglar that

a local WI group created. We also learn about the importance of flax to the area, which is further emphasised by our visit to Bridport Museum. "Locals stake claim to winning the Battle of Trafalgar," smiles Brian, adding that sails made in the area, to exacting Royal Navy specifications, were used on the ships in Nelson's fleet.

"You must visit Bridport Carnival," recommends Shige, owner of Hell Barn Cottages in Chideock, where we stay. So we do and enjoy seeing the floats.

Hell Barn Cottages, a complex of five self-catering stone cottages, is only about 10 miles away down a quiet country lane. We stay in Rosemary Cottage. The first thing we notice is that we can park directly outside the accommodation, which is really helpful for unloading. Inside it's well presented, comfortable and clean. Downstairs is open plan given to sitting and dining and off this is a sizeable kitchen. There's a downstairs bathroom and shower. Upstairs are two bedrooms, easily accommodating the five of us. We enjoy relaxing here and there is a very popular games room where the children play and so do the adults, given chance: snooker, badminton and table tennis. There's a go-kart that Henry thoroughly enjoys riding. One evening Caroline, Harriett and I are able to play a game of badminton and it's great to see that Harriett's co-ordination is improving. Heidi and Henry are on the swings. It's an idyllic setting and it's no surprise that Shige, who has run this business for over 20 years and cooks Japanese food for guests, receives many repeat visits. For us, holidays are all about mooching around and trying to relax if the children will let us. Our first attempt is over the border in Devon at Beer where we visit various exhibitions and an antiques centre. And then it's picnic time and the beach. Even though it is pebble, on a warm summer's day, we have to just lie down and savour the view.

The furthest we travel is some 70 miles away to Pennywell Farm near Buckfastleigh. Here the children hold rabbits, very cute piglets and feed the goats. They are even able to walk goats and watch piglet racing. The bamboo maze that leads to a tower gives views across the Devonshire countryside where we see gorgeous brown deer. When we are not admiring the animals the children are playing on the toy tractors and Henry loves the excavator where he can dig sand, returning to this throughout the day. "My favourite thing is cuddling the piglets," he admits. Pennywell is a great day out.

With his local knowledge, Shige recommends a hairdresser for Caroline in Bridport. She is happy with the results. Bridport itself is a busy market town with a good mix of independent and national retailers. For me it is the old bookshop with its tables of books lining the pavement that is a joy to visit. Here I find some gems that at some point I shall enjoy reading.

Bridport Museum is another must to visit. Here we learn that the town is famous for producing nets. So next time you watch a football match the nets have probably been made in Bridport. During our visit the museum proudly exhibits the watercolour that JMW Turner produced of Bridport Harbour and it is a privilege to see it. There's just chance to relax in the Borough Gardens where we enjoy looking at the flowers and spy some butterflies and a dragonfly.

Just over 20 miles away at Ilminster we visit a Creative Coverage art exhibition featuring selected professional artists and craftspeople.

We dine at the Talbot Arms at Uplyme, a busy and vibrant pub run by Wendy and Steve where Caroline, Heidi and I enjoy beef and ale pie with chips while Harriett and Henry have sausages and chips. There's an ice cream dessert for the children. It's a friendly pub at the centre of the community and we have a good chat to Wendy who explains how close knit and supportive the locals are, raising funds for renovating the village hall, which has become well used. From here it is possible to walk cross country from the pub to Lyme Regis. A night time walk here sees us trying to find the grave of Mary Anning. We make it to the beach.

The following day we leave Hell Barn for home at 10am.

For more information visit:

seatonjurassic.org
www.tram.co.uk
www.pennywellfarm.co.uk
www.beaminstermuseum.co.uk
https://talbotarms.com
www.charmouth.org
www.hellbarn.co.uk

Watch the videos at www.travelwriter.biz

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