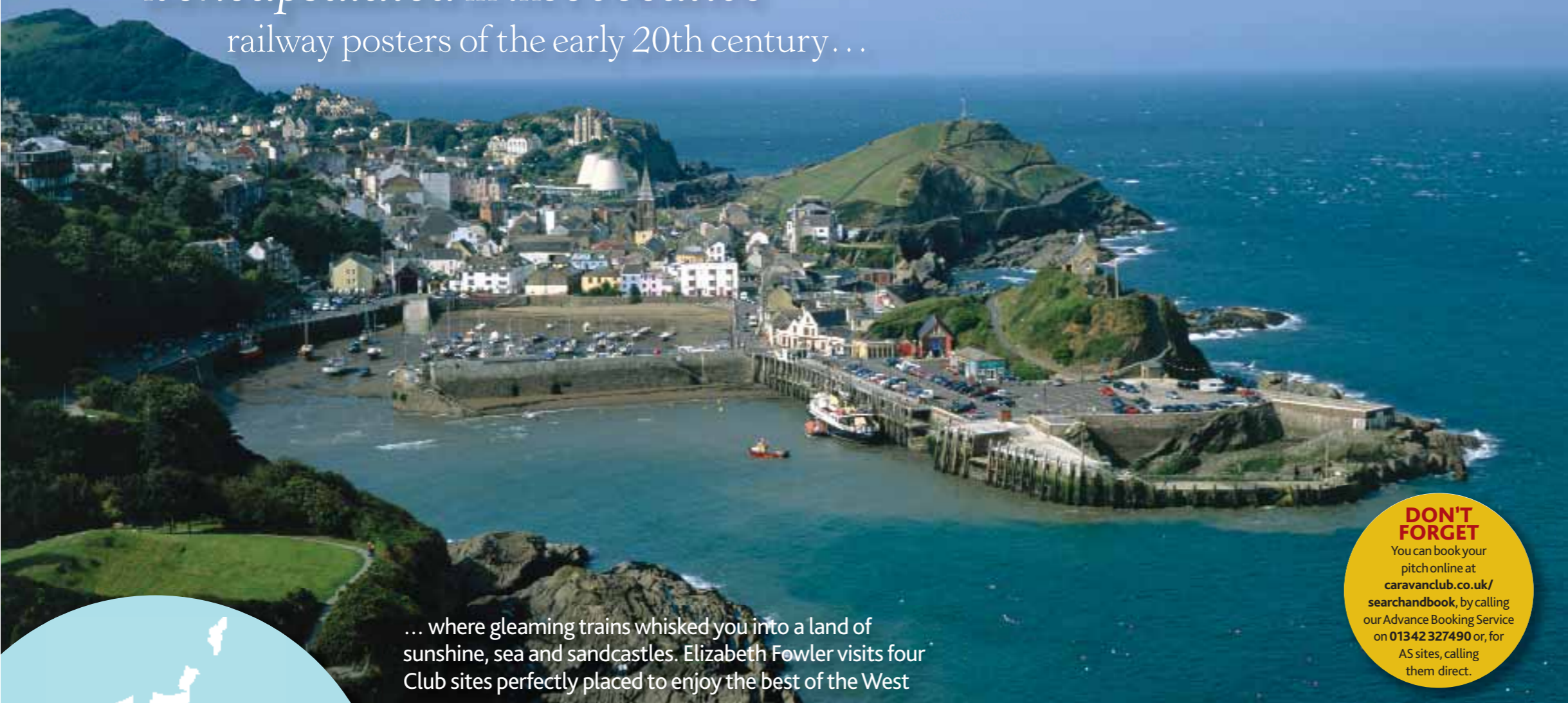


Possibly, *like me*,  
your image of the *West Country*  
is *encapsulated* in the *evocative*  
railway posters of the early 20th century...

Ilfracombe, with its natural harbour, makes for a lovely day out



... where gleaming trains whisked you into a land of sunshine, sea and sandcastles. Elizabeth Fowler visits four Club sites perfectly placed to enjoy the best of the West

**DON'T FORGET**

You can book your pitch online at [caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook](http://caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook), by calling our Advance Booking Service on **01342 327490** or, for AS sites, calling them direct.



YOU ARE HERE

**D**evon is still the perfect destination for caravanning families looking for wonderful seaside holidays, bounded as it is on two sides by coastlines which are a mix of golden sands, craggy cliffs, tiny bays and lovely fishing villages, separated by gentle rural landscapes and the dramatic range of Dartmoor.

The Club has several great sites in this holiday mecca offering a splendid range of opportunities for different tastes.

In the north, Brook Lea, a small rural site, has huge views out over the north coast and south, on a clear day, to Dartmoor. The site itself is on a gentle slope and at the lower end a path leads down to a lovely natural stream walk offering plenty of opportunities for fun. Just three miles inland from Ilfracombe, this is a peaceful place from which to set out exploring the coast.

One of my favourite places is Lee Bay, which offers a small beach surrounded by towering cliffs and a great, old-fashioned pub tucked into the village. Here, you can eat well >>

**THIS MONTH'S FEATURED SITES**

**BROOK LEA**  
See p107 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2011/12*

**WILLINGCOTT**  
See p119 of the *Directory*

**EXETER RACECOURSE**  
See p106 of the *Directory*

**BROAD PARK**  
See p109 of the *Directory*



Brook Lea Club site

**FOR THE FAMILY**



**Fab farm**

A great place for a happy, family day out is **Pennywell**. This excellent farm park features demonstrations, play areas, a café and attractions such as quad bikes and trampolines – so there's something for everyone.

**T 01364 642023**  
**W pennywellfarm.co.uk**

**Beach bonanza**

Take your pick from a host of wonderful beaches on Devon's coastline. You could try **Ilfracombe** and its tidal pools in the north or **Torbay** in the south.

**W visitdevon.co.uk**



**IN FULL SWING**



**Castle capers**

Watermouth Castle's gardens hide old-fashioned swing-boats, a helter skelter, the Dungeon Labyrinths, Gnome Land and the Water Show Extravaganza.

**T 01271 867474**  
**W watermouthcastle.com**

**Track star**

The **South Devon Railway** runs through seven miles of the beautiful River Dart Valley. Steam trains and heritage rolling stock are a delight for all ages.

**T 0843 357 1420**  
**W southdevonrailway.co.uk**



# FOOD + DRINK



## Well and good

Step into the **Well House Tavern** in Exeter for food that tastes as wonderful as it looks. A visit to the cellar is a spooky experience.

T 01392 223611  
W michaelcaines.com/taverns/exeter

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Exeter Racecourse is known locally as Haldon Racecourse due to its location on the Haldon Hills

## TASTE SENSATION



## Field day

Opened in 2005, the **Field Kitchen** restaurant at Riverford Organic Vegetables, Buckfastleigh has a great reputation – so book in advance.

T 01803 762074  
W riverford.co.uk

## Barnstorming

In the heart of Barnstaple is the **Pannier Market** where you will find Devon food produce and crafts as well as antiques and collectables.



## Station surprise

In an historic station building on the riverside in Bickington, the family-run **Fremington Quay Café** serves great food in an idyllic location.

T 01271 268720  
W fremingtonquay.co.uk



Dartington Hall's fabulous gardens

and enjoy local music in the evenings. The valley was once the haunt of smugglers and there are many tales of nefarious deeds. The walk along the high coast path into Ilfracombe was glorious, if a little breathtaking, and coming down into the town took me over the famous Tunnels Beaches. Reached through rock tunnels carved in 1820, these were renowned for their tidal bathing pools and once had wonderfully-exact rules for segregated swimming. The pools are still a perfect place for safe swimming and rockpooling is also a favourite pastime on the beach. You can even get married here.

## IDYLIC ILFRACOMBE

Round the corner, so to speak, is the town. This is where to go for a full programme of entertainment in the theatre, to see the harbour and board the *Oldenburg* for a trip to Lundy, eat in Damien Hirst's restaurant or browse in the maritime museum.

If you bring your golf clubs to Devon, you can easily spend a fortnight playing wonderfully-diverse courses across the county. Willingcott Club site is just next door to a course (Willingcott Valley) set in a lovely rural basin featuring small lakes at the centre. And while the golfers play, the rest of the family can enjoy miles of sand at nearby Woolacombe.

You will find everything you need here – safe swimming, surfing and surf schools, seaside shops and loads of great places to eat. The site also has a wetsuit wash – essential after a full day of salt water and sand.

Food always features large for me on a good holiday. Wandering south, I headed for the little waterside village of Instow, where I discovered a tiny ferry across to Appledore. This operates when the tide is



Exeter Racecourse Club site



Willingcott Club site

display maritime decorations on their doors. In a side street, I joined a small queue for the best fish and chips I've ever had; cooked fresh to order in Sylvesters. These were eaten on the waterside, followed by a Hocking's ice cream – incredibly tasty and made in the village.

In South Devon, the English Riviera of Torbay is a much more cosmopolitan area, while the cities of Plymouth and Exeter are wonderfully different but each offers good theatre, marvellous shopping and is surrounded by lovely countryside.

The Club site, on Exeter Racecourse south of the city, has great views, is clean and peaceful and has splendid wardens according to guests I spoke to. As I drove to the site, an intriguing white turreted building could be seen on the skyline which I discovered was Haldon Belvedere, an imposing three-storied tower. This had to be explored!

A visit to the Haldon Gateway Centre, which was swamped with happy cyclists, provided an excellent map of walks in the woodland. The three-mile Raptor Trail included a birds of prey viewpoint (fortunately, I always carry binoculars), then on to the tower. From up there, it felt like I could see all of England! This delightful, creamy, fairytale building had hosted a wedding the day before; abandoned on a romantic bench was a champagne glass. >>

## Dartmoor – heaven for walkers



# OUTDOOR FUN

## Cycling

From Brook Lea and Willingcott: Check out the nearby Tarka Trail, which is part of the Devon Coast to Coast route, for a traffic-free ride towards Ilfracombe.

W [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk)



PEDAL POWER



## Glorious garden

A beautiful spectacle all year round, **Marwood Hill Gardens** was first developed by a local doctor in 1949. Look out for the lovely tea room.

T 01271 342528  
W [marwoodhillgarden.co.uk](http://marwoodhillgarden.co.uk)

## Striding out

Devon is a **walker's paradise** offering diverse landscapes from wild, open moorland to steep cliff paths or gentle, winding lanes.

W [devon.gov.uk/where\\_to\\_walk\\_and\\_ride](http://devon.gov.uk/where_to_walk_and_ride)



## Golfing gems

North Devon is home to classic golf courses such as **Saunton** and **Royal North Devon**, England's oldest links. Further south, you could pitch up at **Yelverton** on Dartmoor.

W [golfindevon.co.uk](http://golfindevon.co.uk)



# CULTURE

## Art searching

Beaford Arts has been bringing top-quality music, theatre and entertainment to North Devon communities for 45 years in pubs, village halls and outdoor venues.

T 01805 603201  
W [beaford-arts.org.uk](http://beaford-arts.org.uk)



## Gothic treat

Exeter Cathedral is one of the most visited places in the West Country. Started in 1114, it features the longest medieval gothic vaulting in the world.

T 01392 285983  
W [exeter-cathedral.org.uk](http://exeter-cathedral.org.uk)

## Moor mysteries

Inhabited from at least 2500 BC, Dartmoor is rich in prehistoric remains. A Bronze Age settlement at Merrivale, mysterious Hound Tor and the remains of houses at Grimspound are all ripe for exploration.

W [dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)



## Court appearance

A Regency house containing a variety of treasures gathered by the Chichester family, Arlington Court is surrounded by picturesque 19th-century gardens and wonderful woodland.

T 01271 850296 W [nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)



## MOOR FUN

From the west side of the Belvedere, Dartmoor could be seen in the distance and that was my destination for a full day out. On a packed day, I visited Medieval Hound Tor and the truly ancient clapper bridge at Postbridge, walked part of the Two Moors Way and visited the Bronze Age Grimspound settlement. The latter consists of 24 hut circles surrounded by a stone wall. It was amazing to discover how populated the now-barren expanse of moor has been in the past. Look at the OS map – it is covered with indications of ancient remains.

I was told that Totnes was a must-visit for steam railway fans, so I headed in that direction and by chance found Riverford Organic Vegetables of Buckfastleigh. This is a really good local farm shop where I stocked up before indulging in more shopping at Dartington. A sign to Dartington Hall diverted me and I found a glorious stone-built house where the beautiful gardens are free to wander through. So I wandered, and then sat in the sun with a glass of cider from the White Hart pub which is in part of the hall.

Broad Park Club site, half an hour south-west of Dartington, is a great family base where the pitching areas are separated by mature shrubs and trees, a field for play, a boules pitch and play equipment.



Broad Park Club site

The town of Modbury is close for all your basic shopping and there is a good pub for eating out, too. Broad Park is ideally situated for exploring the lovely district known as the South Hams, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This encompasses one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline in the UK as well as a rich and lovely rural inland landscape. In fact, it is a great example of the variety to be found in this extraordinary county. Whether you're after sedate villages, wild moors, rugged coast, sandy beach or rolling farmland – just look westwards. ■



**The Muir-Gamble family and friends** (above) from Somerset were visiting Brook Lea. "This is an ideal location for all the beaches as we all enjoy surfing and body boarding. With a good forecast, we just grabbed everything and came down. We've visited Lynton and Lynmouth, walked the Tarka Trail and Clovelly was interesting."

## MEMBERS' VIEW

Matt and Rachael Smith (below) from Bristol were at Willingcote with sons Ben and Harry. "We've been coming for the last three years. It's a stunning area with great walks and beaches. Croyde is a pretty village, there are lots of lovely pubs and Woolacombe has just got better and better for families. The site is immaculate with a lovely woodland walk where the boys go paddling in the stream."



To read even more member views, see our fantastic online forum at [caravanclub.co.uk/together](http://caravanclub.co.uk/together)



Bill Jelly was on the Exeter Racecourse site with his wife, Jean. "We have spent lots of time here as we really like this area. There is so much to do within half an hour and the site is nicely uncrowded, clean and friendly. We both enjoy the walks through Haldon which is just across the road."

