



WALK BRITAIN

90 INSPIRATIONAL CAR-FREE WALKS IN
ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

ELISE DOWNING

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First published in 2025 by Vertebrate Publishing.

VERTEBRATE PUBLISHING
Omega Court, 352 Cemetery Road, Sheffield S11 8FT, United Kingdom.
www.adventurebooks.com

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-83981-144-9 (Paperback)
ISBN 978-1-83981-145-6 (Ebook)

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Edited by Helen Parry; cover design, layout and production by Jane Beagley.
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Printed and bound in Slovenia by Latitude Press.

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If the matter needs to be taken further then please take it up with the relevant authority.

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Foreword

Almost everyone will encounter a few barriers when it comes to getting into the countryside. In some cases, these are very easily resolved. If all that's standing in your way is checking your map to find out where the trail starts, then you'll be out there in no time. But some people can nurse this ambition for years without finding a way of realising it – because of safety concerns, because they lack the skills and don't know where to get them, or because they've somehow been led to believe that the outdoors is not for them.

In my case the barrier was logistical. I knew I'd love walking in the hills, because I'd spent years exploring remote corners of the world by bike, racing across continents, and seeking out quiet Alpine meadows to camp in. Quite often, as I pedalled up the switchbacks towards a pass, I'd see people with backpacks and walking boots who were going even higher than me, for whom the pinnacle of my ride was merely their starting point. So, this was what a hiking holiday must look like, I thought to myself. I wanted to follow them and see what it was like up there – but I couldn't, because what would I do with the bike?

Back in the UK, I once or twice experimented with cycling to the bottom of a mountain, sleeping in my tent, and then hiding bike and camping gear while I hiked up and down. This worked, but it felt too risky and wasn't really practical. Most guidebooks were no help – they just told me where the car parks were, and this was irrelevant to me because I'd never learned to drive. So, I developed the conviction that hiking was only for proper grown-ups, and left them to it.

Little did I know that someone had read one of my periodic social media pleas for advice, and was busy working on a solution.

I first met Elise partway through her run round the UK coast, and was struck both by the magnitude of her expedition, and the

modesty with which she went about it. She didn't seem to think she was anything special – but the rest of us felt differently, and watched with increasing admiration over the next few years, as she took on more running challenges, became an accomplished route-planner, and built herself a career as an author and speaker.

She may at some point have realised that she *is* something special, but I'm not so sure, because she still has the attitude that anyone else could do what she does, and puts considerable effort into showing them how. There are no secrets with Elise, as far as I can tell: if she discovers a useful hack, she'll share it with you; if she finds a good trail, she'll tell you about it; and if she figures out a way to get there and back using public transport, she'll definitely let you know.

Her generosity and enthusiasm have already inspired countless real-world adventures, and this book will launch many more. And you don't need to be a non-driver like me. *Walk Britain* will help you avoid overflowing car parks on a bank holiday. It'll show you how to plan adventures with a lower carbon footprint, and it'll mean you can enjoy as many post-walk pints as you like.

Following a recommendation from Elise, I once took the bus that runs between Kendal and Windermere. Almost everyone else on the top deck was dressed for a day out in the hills (I even saw a couple of ice axes), and before long I had got chatting to an old man. He asked where I was planning on going for my run, told me he had grown up not far from there, and spent the rest of the journey reminiscing about the decades he had spent in these hills that I was only just discovering.

I wouldn't have had that lovely encounter if I'd driven here, I thought, as I set off up the hill, already hoping I'd run into him again on my homeward journey.

Emily Chappell



Introduction

The idea for this book was born from a Twitter (now X) thread that Emily Chappell started back in April 2021.

The reason I don't do more hiking and mountain running is the difficulty of accessing trailheads without motorised transport ...

Reading the responses to this thread, it occurs to me that there is a very good market for a guidebook for car-free hiking/walking/trekking in the UK. Any publishers interested in commissioning one?

I didn't have a driving licence at the time. My mum had offered to pay for a few driving lessons for my eighteenth birthday present, but I'd traded them in for an Interrail Pass (very on-brand for this book, now I think about it) and so, more than a decade later, all of my adventures were still car-free. I was desperate for the book Emily was suggesting to exist and immediately forwarded her Tweet to Kirsty Reade, commissioning editor at Vertebrate Publishing, with a plea something along the lines of: 'Please get Emily to write this book, I'll buy it.'

Sadly, Emily wasn't able to take on the project at the time which meant that I was lucky enough to end up with it (and she has kindly written the foreword). Although I have since learned to drive, it's still a topic I'm hugely passionate about.

I feel strongly that the UK is one of the best countries in the world for walking and running. We have so much variety packed into

a relatively small area: rugged coast, towering mountains, expansive moorland, quaint country villages, truly excellent pubs. And while it might not be perfect, we actually have a pretty vast public transport system to access our countryside compared to some places. In contrast, I was shocked by how impossible it was to explore the Great Smoky Mountains without hiring a car when I visited America earlier this year.

There's no denying that you sacrifice a little bit of convenience when you decide to travel by public transport (mainly in the packing area as you can't just chuck every single thing you own into the car boot). Car-free adventures should be approached through the lens of what you gain though. It's reading your book on the train instead of sitting on the motorway, it's having a leisurely breakfast in your holiday cottage because you don't have to arrive at the trailhead at the crack of dawn to secure a parking spot, it's enjoying a post-walk pint of local ale without worrying about driving home.

Researching and writing this book was both a lot of fun and a little stressful. It felt like a big responsibility essentially saying to people: 'these places are great, and you should spend your precious annual leave and hard-earned cash visiting them.' But I truly believe that everywhere I've suggested is well worth visiting and, whether you can't drive or choose not to, I hope the following pages will facilitate some amazing adventures for you.

Elise



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Cornish Coast

BASE LOCATION **Penzance**

WHERE TO STAY **Wide variety of B&Bs and self-catering options in Penzance, plus YHA Penzance (2km from Penzance railway station; local buses available). Closest campsite is Ponsandane (summer only, 1km from station).**

HOW TO GET THERE **By train to Penzance. Direct line from London or change in Bristol or Birmingham for connections to the North.**

It's hard to put your finger on what exactly makes Cornwall so special. Sitting at the very south-western tip of the country, there's no denying that it can be a bit of a faff to get there from many areas further north, especially as the motorway only goes as far as Exeter, 60 kilometres from the Cornish border. Luckily the train goes a little farther and will take you to the western corner of the county, with sleeper services even available from London.

And once you're there, I'm certain that every hour spent on the train will have felt worth it. Here's just a tiny fraction of what you can expect to enjoy on the Cornish coast: rugged coast paths, clear blue water, unique customs, strong communities, postcard-worthy fishing villages, mouth-watering local produce, some of the best beaches in the world, cream teas, pasties, lush green landscapes, wild flowers, seals, seabirds ... the list truly does go on and on. I'm sure once you've visited, you'll have many more things to add to it.

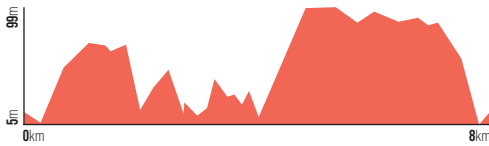
Unsurprisingly, the routes in this chapter largely centre around the coast which is undoubtedly Cornwall's biggest attraction. I'll take you inland too though, giving you the chance to follow in the footsteps of pilgrims and explore sacred sites. Whichever route you choose to do, I recommend taking your time. One of the most wonderful things about Cornwall is the slower pace of life, which feels almost palpable as soon as you step off the train.

Penzance will be our base for this section, mainly for the purpose of showcasing a variety of routes. It might not be quite as picturesque as some of the tiny fishing villages you're used to associating with Cornwall, but it's got excellent public transport links, so you can get around easily and see more of the area. If you're less bothered about darting around, try picking the route you like the sound of best and base yourself near that instead (for example, Porthleven is lovely, with great coastal walking). If you do stay in Penzance, check out Jubilee Pool, the UK's only geothermal seawater lido.

1 Walking between Pendeen Watch and Zennor © Peter Turner Photography/Shutterstock.com
 2 St Ives © Marcel van den Bos/Shutterstock.com 3 Coastal path at Zennor © Holly Auchincloss/Shutterstock.com
 4 Mousehole Harbour © Ian Woolcock/Shutterstock.com 5 Coastline near Sennen Cove © Jon Barton
 6 Pendeen Watch from Geevor Tin Mine © Roger Driscoll/Shutterstock.com

1 Mousehole to Lamorna

CATEGORY **Short** DISTANCE **8km** ASCENT **170m** START/FINISH **Mousehole** PUBLIC TRANSPORT
Both ways: buses between Penzance bus station and The Old Coastguard, Mousehole (20 minutes)
 MORE INFORMATION www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk



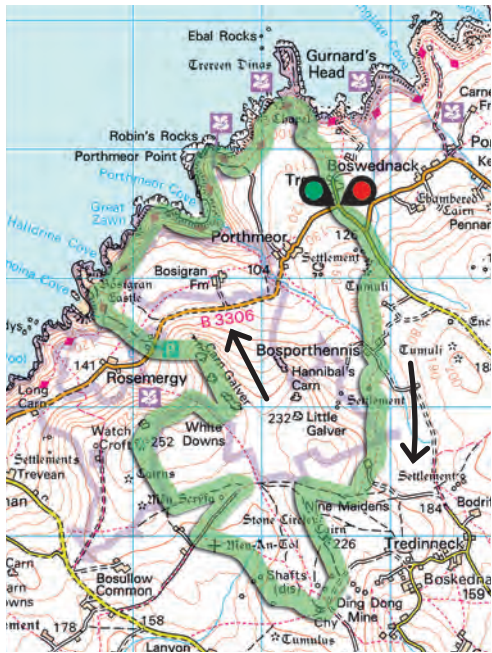
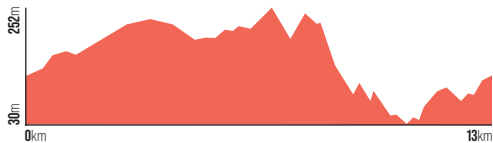
Mousehole is 5 kilometres from Penzance and while you could walk there, it's not the most exciting bit of coast so I'd recommend getting the bus and saving your energy for the more inspiring trails which take you further south. Mousehole itself is an interesting place known for, amongst other things, reputedly being named after a cave the size of a large mouse and the place from which stary gazey pie originates, an unusual delicacy which involves fish heads sticking out of a pastry crust. Not for the faint-hearted visually, stary gazey pie is served up each year on the 23rd of December; Rick Stein has a recipe if you fancy trying it at home.

Small caves and large pies aside, Mousehole is the starting point for this walk out to Lamorna and back. The coast path goes through the Kemyel Crease Nature Reserve, taking you beneath a canopy of low branches. In the summer especially, this area is rich in fungi including the impressive earthstar mushroom. At Lamorna Cove you can stop at the cafe for a snack before heading back to Mousehole (good cakes and cream teas) or the sheltered cove makes it a good stop for a dip. The return to Mousehole is via clifftop trails through farmers' fields overlooking St Michael's Mount.



2 History and Hills Loop

CATEGORY **Medium** DISTANCE **13km** ASCENT **280m** START/FINISH **Gurnard's Head Hotel, Porthmeor**
PUBLIC TRANSPORT **Both ways: buses between Penzance and Gurnard's Head Hotel, Porthmeor (30 minutes)**



Cornwall might be best known for its coastline, but the National Landscape stretches to cover lots of inland ground too. This includes West Penwith, the area around the Land's End peninsula which hugs Penzance. Venture inland a little and you'll find granite moorland hills, medieval farmland and a huge array of megalithic monuments, which this route allows you to explore a good selection of.

Take the bus to Gurnard's Head Hotel to begin, then from there it's really just a case of working your way through the long tick list of sights on this walk. Heading clockwise you'll first pass what was once Bosporthennis Sacred Well, known for its healing properties (admittedly it currently just looks like a damp patch in the ground, as it's in the process of being restored). From here the sights get a little more obvious and impressive: Nine Maidens Stone Circle, the Ding Dong Mine, Mên-an-tol rocks, Watch Croft hill and Carn Galver Mine. At 252 metres, Watch Croft qualifies as one of only five Marilyn's (summits with an independent peak – or prominence – of at least 150 metres) in Cornwall and gives you a fantastic vantage point over the rest of the peninsula. It's a chance to really appreciate why this area deserves its National Landscape status, with views across Mount's Bay to the Lizard.

To complete your circuit, you'll drop down to Bosigran Castle on the coast path and follow it north to Gurnard's Head, before heading inland once more. The bus stop is conveniently located right by Gurnard's Head Hotel, winner of various awards and a good spot for lunch.

