

THE PERFECT WEEKEND IN...

THE BRISTOL CHANNEL

The route: Swansea, Mumbles Head, Watermouth Cove, Ilfracombe, Porlock Weir

Little-known to South Coast boat owners, the Bristol Channel is full of cruising treats. Its big tides need care – and there are sand banks to watch – but this spectacular gulf between Wales and the West Country has an untouched quality that defies the passage of time. The few marinas it possesses are strategically placed and from Swansea you can cross to the majestic coastline on the fringes of Exmoor.

Set in the city's attractive maritime quarter, Swansea Marina is a sociable place to unwind on a Friday evening. For a convivial bite to eat, head to Gallini's Italian restaurant on Fishmarket Quay, just inside the marina on the south side.

SATURDAY MORNING

Swansea Marina is soothing on a warm summer morning, sheltered by waterside buildings that have become more attractive with the passing years. For a trip across the Channel, choose a tide working towards neaps, with high water around midday. Locking out an hour before high water you'll have the remnants of the east-going stream for the passage, soon falling slack. Watermouth Cove is a good spot to head to – 24 miles at about 194°T. Leaving Swansea Bay you pass

the famous lifeboat house on Mumbles Head. Then it's out into more open water, passing well west of the Scarweather Sands. On a quiet day, it's a glorious run across to Watermouth as the magnificent North Devon coast gradually takes shape.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Making your approach, the cliffs become bold promontories etched by light and shadow, as patchwork fields and ancient woods roll away towards Exmoor. Enter the cove between dramatic Widmouth Head to the west and the lower spur of Burrow Nose, where an old pillbox perches. Not far west of the mouth, at Rillage Point, there is a conspicuous row of Coastguard cottages.

Arriving soon after a neapy high water, anchor just inside Burrow Nose, a snug spot for lunch with magnificent scenery all around. As the tide falls, you'll be increasingly sheltered. You'll see many local boats moored further up the cove and a half-tide breakwater marked by two yellow spars and a green. Beyond the head of the inlet, Watermouth Castle stands in 50 acres of parkland.

PROFILE

THE AUTHOR
Peter Cumberlidge

knows these waters well and started exploring the Bristol Channel when on cruising trips here as a youngster aboard a converted Scottish MFV.



The fantastic sweeping coastline of Lynmouth

1 SATURDAY MORNING



Yachts bob on the calm water off the Swansea coast



Set fair: Swansea Marina

The Bristol Channel, that spectacular gulf between Wales and the West Country, has an untouched quality that defies the passage of time



The famous lifeboat house at Mumbles Head



Rocky approach: Mumbles Head

2 SATURDAY AFTERNOON



Sitting pretty: the cove and castle at Watermouth



3 SATURDAY EVENING

Sunset at the traditional seaside town of Ilfracombe

4 SUNDAY MORNING



Lynmouth's dramatic coastline makes for some wonderful day cruises

5 SUNDAY AFTERNOON



Inner harbour at Porlock Weir

SATURDAY EVENING

Towards low water, when the streams have eased, hop west around Rillage Point to the timeless Devon harbour of Ilfracombe, keeping a quarter mile offshore until opposite the entrance. I've always thought there should be a marina at Ilfracombe, but the locals have never been keen. As a result, Ilfracombe remains a traditional Bristol Channel haven and one of the safest, most accessible bolt-holes on the south shore. Around neaps you can anchor and stay afloat at the harbour entrance, between the outer pier and Larkstone beach. It's best to lay out a kedge astern to stop you swinging.

Ilfracombe is delightful on those long summer evenings, with the friendly atmosphere of an old-fashioned seaside town. On the south side of the harbour near the lifeboat slip, sit outside the S&P Fish Shop and tuck into superb fresh seafood and white wine. Or stroll up Fore Street for a pint of Betty Stoggs and a traditional bar supper at the George & Dragon, Ilfracombe's oldest pub.



SUNDAY MORNING

Ilfracombe starts the day slowly as holidaymakers stroll the quays and fishing boats prepare for the day. Behind the lifeboat slip, you'll get a cracking full English breakfast at Adele's Café. After you've had your fill, cruise east for some of the finest views in the Channel. Beyond Watermouth, curve into Combe Martin to see its picturesque village and keep outside Copperas Rock buoy for a fabulous run along a high shore towards Lynmouth, huddled beneath a looming hill.

In quiet weather you can leave Lynmouth Bay inside Sand Ridge bank, keeping close round Foreland Point and its lighthouse perched on the cliff. You soon reach Porlock Bay, a sweep of shingle beach backed by low Somerset farmland. On the west side is the tiny drying harbour at Porlock Weir, overlooked by wooded slopes, the Anchor Hotel and some charming old cottages. Drop the hook over a sandy bottom just opposite these cottages, using Admiralty 1160.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

In the days of sail, pilot cutters anchored at Porlock Weir, waiting for business, the tide or both. Now you see yachts leaving the harbour through a narrow channel marked by withies. But beware – as the tide falls, this cut through the shingle is left high and dry. You can land at the beach to explore the village, maybe calling at the Ship Inn for a refresher. For fast boats, an hour before low water is a good time to head back across the Channel, with the streams falling slack. In summer, Swansea Marina lock operates until 2200 so you can take your time and enjoy an easy pootle home. **MBY**

FAVOURITE MARINAS

Swansea Marina (Tel: +44 (0)1792 470 310): outer lock VHF 18, marina lock VHF 80. **Ilfracombe Harbour** (Tel: +44 (0)1271 862 108): VHF 16/12/14.

HANDY FUEL BERTHS

Swansea Marina has diesel pumps by the marina lock. **Ilfracombe** has a berth on the south side of the inner harbour above half-tide.

FAVOURITE PUBS & RESTAURANTS

Swansea: Gallini's Italian restaurant on Fishmarket Quay is always reliable (Tel: +44 (0)1792 456 285).

Queen's Hotel is a proper pub, near the marina in Gloucester Place with good beer and old maritime photos (Tel: +44 (0)1792 521 531).

Watermouth Cove: The Sawmill Inn is a ten-minute stroll from Watermouth landing slip (Tel: +44 (0)1271 882 259).

Ilfracombe: George & Dragon is a lovely old pub on Fore Street – dating back to

1360 – with cask ales and classic food (Tel: +44 (0)1271 863 851).

Porlock Weir: next to **The Anchor Hotel**, the welcoming **Ship Inn** has quayside tables (Tel: +44 (0)1643 863 288).

NAVIGATION NOTES

Neap tides give gentler tidal streams and easier anchoring. When leaving or approaching Swansea, the main dangers to be aware of are Scarweather Sands and the smaller Hugo Bank and Kenfig Patches between Scarweather and the coast. On passage to Watermouth, a direct track of 194°T leads two miles clear of the West Scar buoy guarding Scarweather Sands.

Returning from Porlock in quiet weather, locals would head for West Nash W-cardinal buoy and then Kenfig E-cardinal buoy before turning north-west into Swansea Bay. Use Admiralty charts 1165 and 1160, plus Peter Cumberlidge's *Bristol Channel and River Severn Cruising Guide*, published by Imray.

