

As I was going to St Ives...



A family holiday in Cornwall is not quite the relaxing break **Richard Barr** had in mind



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As I was going to St Ives, I met... No, wait. Those who are familiar with the Barr family's departure on holiday will know that these things are not straightforward. Our trip to Cornwall in early June was no exception.

First there were the arrangements – never easy when you have the needs of 13 sheep a-bleating, eight cats a-miaouing, five snakes a-hissing, and two horses a-whinnying, along with a holiday cottage to equip for four guests a-riving. Then there is our lovely special daughter and step-daughter, who needs 24-hour care, and the planning that had to be in place for her. And the wonderful clients who strive to keep me at the standard to which I have become accustomed, despite the efforts of the defendant firms.

But somehow or other I managed to shut down my computer, hurl some inappropriate clothes into a bag, and toss in a toothbrush (but no

toothpaste), my electric razor (but not the charger), and my contact lenses (but not the fluid).

Two hours late we set off. 'We' this time included our rehomed guide dogs, Nia and Daisy, who were going on their first holiday together and were slightly troubled by the thought they were going to be returned to guide dog duties.

We had travelled 20 of the 400 or so miles from Norfolk to Cornwall when the car started lurching and belching. I am no mechanic, but under the bonnet I could see that a large hose had become detached. I popped it back on and we set off again. This time we lasted only five miles before the lurching and belching started. By now we were on a dual carriage way and traffic was impatiently racing by at 70 miles an hour as we limped to the nearest layby.

For the next two hours we sat admiring the roadside litter while waiting for help to arrive. When it did, the mechanic took just a few minutes to fix the problem. Our sat nav was predicting arrival at about 9pm, but it did not know what the motorways had in store for us. One traffic announcement followed another, telling of broken-down buses, lorries on their sides, contraflows, contradictions, contraptions, and contraventions, as we constantly tried to reroute to avoid the obstructions put in our way.

Eventually we arrived at the farmhouse we had rented for the week, and collapsed in a heap.

On our list of places to visit was St Ives, voted seaside town of the year in 2013 by *Guardian* readers. We travelled by train, to admire the panorama of one of the most scenic railway journeys in the country. Except that it wasn't. Yes, you could occasionally see stretches of sandy beaches, but mostly the overgrown trackside foliage obscured the view.



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We soon arrived at the end of the line – and at St Ives in all its glory. At no stage did we meet the man from the nursery rhyme with seven wives, or all the other 2,394 items with which he was accompanied. That was a pity because it might have redeemed the place.

We climbed a steep hill into the town, stopping by at a small café called the Hub. It was a pity we went there first, because it was probably the best part of our visit. We sat outside, with the dogs under the table, and watched men on the opposite side of the road hard at work maintaining the town's lifeboat in pristine condition. Food downed, we set off in the

crowds to explore. There were so many people that it was hard to get a good view of the harbour. Despite the narrow streets, traffic persisted in trying to push through. The shops were just tourist shops, with prices varying according to the impressiveness of the shop front.

Weary and footsore after two frustrating hours we made for the train, leaving with the distinct feeling that the man had seven wives because there was nothing else to do in St Ives. Besides, with 49 cats and 343 kittens to care for, he had plenty on his plate.

The rest of our stay was a delight. We found many rocky coves and could look down on clear blue waters and watch local people pottering around in boats against backdrops of abandoned tin mines reminiscent of *Poldark*. It was over all too soon.

The return journey was easier – except for a little hold-up before we left the Cornish border. A tall, gaunt man in a top hat was striding forward in the middle of the road ahead of seven women who were struggling to carry large numbers of sacks. As we drew level we could hear (above the complaints of the women that the man was doing nothing to help) a distinct plaintive mewing from the direction of the sacks. But perhaps I misunderstood. He could well have been on his way to London to deliver a petition about legal aid to the Lord Chancellor. **SJ**