

Exmoor Coast Bouldering.

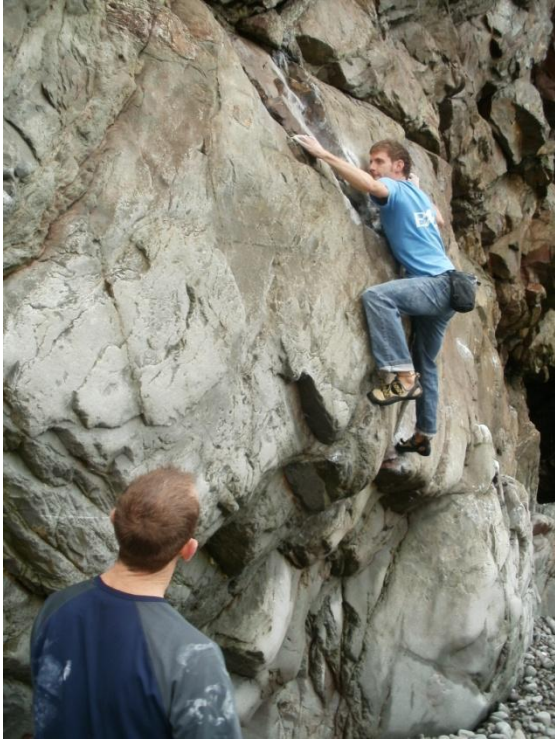
If you own the most recent Climber's Club guide to Cheddar and Avon open the inside cover and sneak a peek at the area map. There you will see the words '*Exmoor Bouldering*' with an arrow pointing the way. It appears that Martin Crocker has dropped a hint to make folk aware of the potential for bouldering in Exmoor National Park. This is something a small number of North Devon/Somerset based climbers have been aware of for a while.



Dave Westlake – On the Slope Traverse Extension – Lynmouth East.

I was fortunate enough to move from landlocked Warwickshire to North Devon in summer 2004. I arrived having previously made a few visits to the Culm Coast to sample the bouldering developed by Simon Young et al. Moving into the area I soon got to know plenty of local climbers through the original 'Barn' climbing wall near Bude. The scene in Devon is completely different to highly populated and high climber density areas like the Peak District. At the time Ache Ball, then confirmed as 8a (now settling at 7c/+ ish), was the coveted bouldering tick for locals and visitors alike. Having never lived so close to quality outdoor bouldering I revelled in the opportunity to project harder problems and soon worked my way through to repeating Ache Ball. Well pleased with myself I soon realised that there must be bouldering in other parts of North Devon a little closer to home (Barnstaple). So I began to walk the coast in North Devon to see what could be found. Some days turned up gems, some turned up loose friable poor quality rock or worse still nothing climbable at all.

At the Barn I was introduced to Mikey Cleverdon then a resident of Lynton at the heart of the Exmoor Coast. I spoke with him about an area in the vicinity of Croyde Bay I'd 'discovered' and started bouldering at. Mike pointed out that this was in fact the training venue of local legend Steve Joslyn whom he worked with at The Calvert Trust. At the time Mikey was starting out in climbing, he went on to mention the fact that he had a little play on some rocks at Lynmouth. Of course I headed out there as soon as I could for a look.



Joe Harris 'spotted' by Neil Empringham and Neil Blom 'spotted' by Chris Goddard down at Sillery Sands.

Arriving at the beach east of Lynmouth and looking at it from a boulderer's perspective I was chuffed to see the potential on offer. This was the beginning of a period of bouldering development on the Devon side of the Exmoor Coast which has continued to present. This is not to say that folk hadn't climbed here before but I am fairly certain that the coast has not been scoured so thoroughly with a view to bouldering. More of the history of Exmoor Climbing can be discovered through Terry Cheek's website: <http://www.exmoor92.fsnet.co.uk/Exmoor%20Coast%20Climbing/>

A big doff of all our caps should go to the Exmoor Coast pioneers James Hannington, Edward Arber, Clement Archer, Cyril Manning and Terry Cheek. The traverse of the coast is rarely repeated; has anyone repeated it since Terry's team in 1978? It's a serious proposition given extreme tides, the inaccessibility, inescapable sections and unpredictable weather conditions.

The wave washed rock on the Exmoor coast gives up amazing boulder problems and there is a special low frictional property to the holds. In this area it is typical for the innocuous looking problems to be desperate and for the desperate looking to be sick hard or close to impossible.

It has been a real pleasure to spend time out on the Exmoor coast playing on the boulders and exploring the coastline with friends. I am still exploring after 7 years, as are others and future classics are still being discovered. This element of exploration, seclusion and adventure is the essence of Exmoor bouldering. Of course with it being my local bouldering playground I'm bound to talk the place up. However, I do genuinely believe the quality of the best problems matches up to the best anywhere else.

So rather than continue to talk the place up, here are some places to visit between Combe Martin and Minehead so you can make up your own mind...



Jake Surman on Monster Tide 7b – Lynmouth East

Lynmouth East and West

A free to download guide is now available for these areas situated next to the coastal village of Lynmouth. East is quickly accessed from Lynmouth with plenty to go at right through the grades. Reaching West is a little more involved but you will find a scattering of high quality and highball problems.

Wringcliffe Bay

You'd think that all the action would be in 'The Valley of the Rocks' but, whilst there is some climbing fun to be had in the valley, the place to be is on the beach beneath it. Developed by Rob, Dave Westlake, Jake Surman and co. Problems have been named and there may even be a project or two to go at. I also think it's a great place for swimming on a hot summer's day.

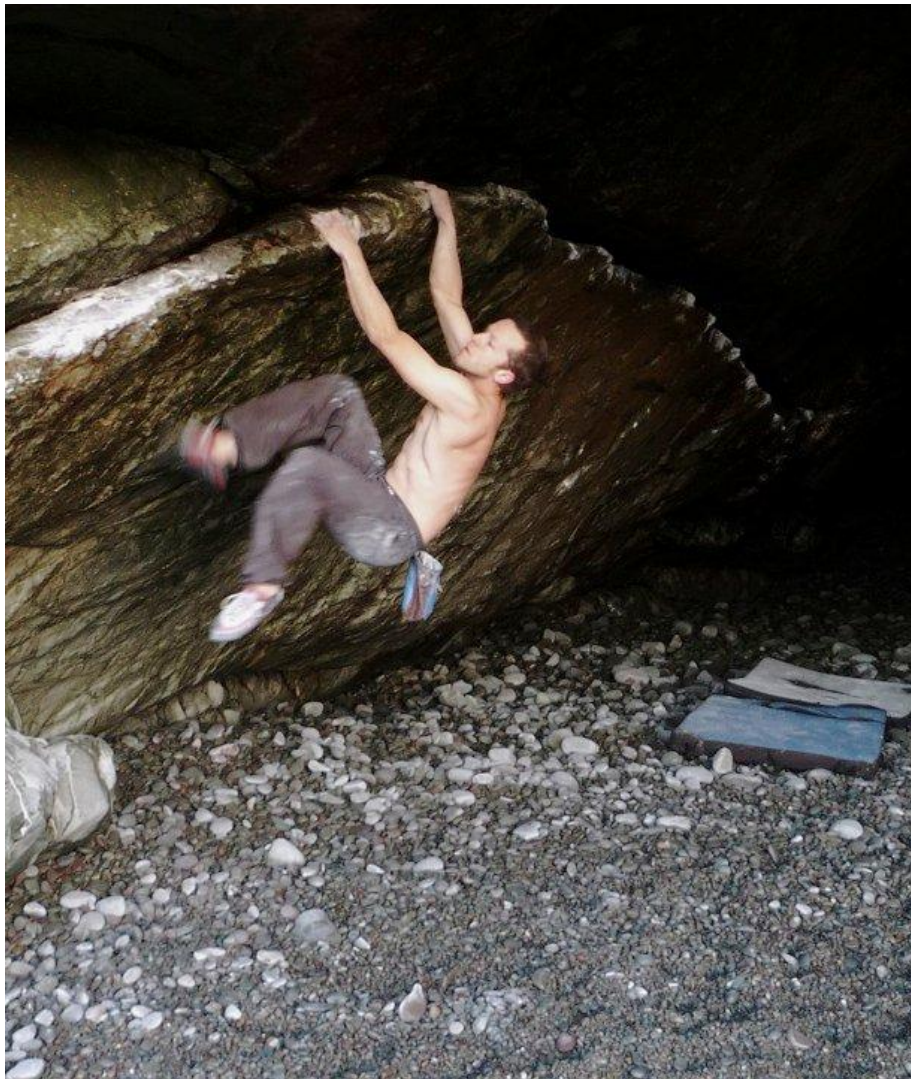
Sillery Sands/ Foreland Point

Despite the calf burner of a walk out, this place is very much in vogue with the few of us that boulder regularly on this coast. The wave washed cliff base forms a range of walls, caves and roofs that are consistently giving up new problems. It's still developing down here and there is so much to go at that I have almost always done something new on each visit.

Hurlstone Point – Bossington

On the Somerset side of the coast Hurlstone or Hurtstone Point is home to some fun traditional climbing. It is also home to a non-tidal piece of rock which faces west and provides shelter from the rain. The steep wall that holds the route Raindancer is a favourite winter warmer venue and a good choice if the weather's looking dodgy or the tides are out of synch with your visit.

For the adventurous there is the whole stretch of coast between Foreland Point and Bossington to explore. Should the venues above become tedious places such as Heddon's Mouth, Woody Bay and Selworthy Sands are well worth a look. Who knows what might be found around the next corner.



Mike Adams on his traverse Xanthos 7a – Sillery Sands

A final word of advice and warning on tides! The Exmoor Coast has the 2nd highest tidal range in the world. This has the benefit of giving most of the bouldering a good clean twice a day and removing all traces of chalk from problems. Access to a lot of the climbing is limited by the tides and the possibility of being cut off with no escape option is high. Low tide is the preferable time to boulder but remember the sea will come in very quickly. Please be sure that if you are exploring the Exmoor Coast that you are very aware of the tide. It is worth arriving at mid-tide (or earlier) on the ebb so you can follow the tide out and see exactly where you could get cut off when it comes back in. Locals have a good knowledge of cut off points and escape routes. You're not likely to see many other people in these places it's always wise to bring a friend or two. Ensure you have an option to stay safe, even if it means sitting and waiting for the tide to go back out again. Alternatively, you could go climbing somewhere very popular that's not by the sea.