

# Lifestyle

## Cooking up a retro gourmet revolution

Vintage vendors are shaking up the fish 'n' chip sellers across Cornwall, writes Craig Blackburn



They travel in old Citroën vans; tow converted horse boxes or vintage caravans – baking, brewing and toasting their wares on the move. They are parents, chefs; former social workers and props designers – and they're cooking up a revolution in street food.

Since the summer of 2013, more than 15 mobile food sellers have set up business in Cornwall, casting off the grind of employment for a new lifestyle which reflects their interests of being outdoors, meeting new people and exploring their creativity.

Helen Grace, a single mum from Falmouth, sells crumpets from her a 1967 Cheltenham Waterbug touring caravan, which she and her friends spent a year restoring.

"My hobbies now are green living, cooking, crafting, festivals and music, so to do what I do now just fits in stunningly with my passions," she says.

Michelle Northcott and Nicholas Daniel, from the Silver Server (a 40-year-old Airstream trailer), say: "We have an interest in vintage vehicles, love camping and we especially enjoy meeting new and interesting people along the way."

"Although vintage paraphernalia has become



by Craig Blackburn

## The curious incidents of things that travel in the night-time ...

Things keep moving in our house. Our daughter blames her teddies who wake up when we're asleep and play with the things in our house.

I have other ideas. When my wife takes certain things out of their native home, she likes to send them on a short weekend break away to another drawer, cupboard or shelf. And worse, she forgets where she's packed these things off to.

Last week she borrowed my book to read, because I stupidly sung its praises. "Where's my book, honey?" I ask.

"In one of the drawers," comes the reply. Oh dear. There are 22 communal drawers in our house, poky as it is. (That's not including either bedroom).

This 'issue' in our house may cause only slight annoyance when the back-packing item is a book, or the honey, but when it's my wife's bunch of car and house keys, it creates an odd and very stressful situation, and kicks off another episode of the Name Blame Game.

It starts quite innocently: "Honey,

have you seen my keys?" she asks. In my mind I rehearse the same phrase like a mantra: "Well, if you followed my advice, darling, and put your keys in the same place every time you came in the door, you wouldn't have this problem."

But my weak, audible response is: "... err, nope."

The game often escalates to a crescendo during which my normally laid-back wife whips herself into a frenzy, and at which point I try to be indifferent (for survival purposes) and keep reminding myself not to voice my mantra.

I try to help by lifting cushions, looking in the fridge and bathroom and asking her when she last had them.

But it's no use, and though I'm not a religious man, I resort to prayer.

I'm asking to be saved. Even though I had no part to play in this game, I am now one of its main players.

Eventually, the blessed keys turn up under a book – my book – which is under an old handbag, in a drawer.

I am saved. And in a whirlwind she is gone, promising to never make the same mistake ever again. I know she will, unless I take action.

So I'm off to Pannier Market to buy a key-hanger thingy.

If I can only find my wallet ....



Seth Richards and Jodi Meenaghan gave up theatre jobs in London and Surrey to buy a vintage Citroën van called Earl and cruise around Cornwall selling tea – based above Tow-an beach on the Roseland, near St Mawes



"We're currently finding a way to strap a kayak to Earl for a postwork paddle.

We have found 'life satisfaction' because every time we go to work during the summer, we are barely 100m from a beautiful sandy beach.

We gave up work for a number of reasons. I was building scenery in Guildford for shows and theatres all over the country and Jodi worked in the West End and on tour in stage management, looking after props and actors.

Our working hours were extremely antisocial and anti-relationship – we would barely see each other once a week.

We also missed Cornwall. I am the son of a dairy farmer from Truro.

I'm also a sailor, I love being on and around the water, and missed this when I couldn't get any time off work over the summer one year.

We wanted to work for ourselves. We knew it would be hard and would mean a life of no paid holidays and working 100-hour weeks, but it's worth it."

extremely popular we did not realise the scale of this until we bought the airstream."

It is hardly a rock star life and it's hard yakka with unsociable hours, but it has its benefits.

"We no longer needed childcare for the holiday season because, when we're out trading, we can do a tag-team of manning the van and taking it in turns to be with the kids," says Rosie and Graham Hoppe, from the Laid-Back Coffee Co, which trades from a 1969 Morris Minor van known as Bert.

Some have given up careers in unrelated trades for life on the road.

"I really enjoy the diversity of where I can go – I enjoy the flexibility of when I work and the creativity involved," says Nicky Abrahams, from Proper Pancakes, a former social care worker. "Each day is very different to the next."

The new street food ranges from wood-fired pizza and smokehouse barbecued meats to pancakes, crumpets, pasta dishes and seafood, as well as 'gourmet' takes on the staunch favourites of sausages and burgers – not forgetting the tea and coffee sellers.

As well as offering a stylish twist to weddings and corporate events and plying their trade at camp sites and festivals, these vintage vendors now park up outside community centres, pubs and on street corners in towns and villages.

Some have worked in the catering trade, others have no business experience whatsoever.

But what they all have in common is the desire for flexibility and freedom combined with a passion for diversity and challenge – as well as the most important bit: the courage to put their values before career ambition.

The explosion in stylish street food says a lot about the Cornish punter, according to Dean Pointon from Bangers On The Go.

"Due to the huge variety of cultures and nationalities that live in the UK and now in Cornwall it has meant that people are more open to trying new things," he says.

The restored caravan is an extension of the Falmouth restaurant which he runs with his brother, Lee, a chef and specialist sausage-maker.

Food consultant and chef, Lewis Cole, from Wild Bake, agrees. Together with wife Claire, the couple were among the first to take the leap into the unknown and embrace a retro revolution, in May 2013, following three years of planning while Lewis worked 70-hour weeks in a restaurant. He now gets weekends off.

"The public are much more opened minded about buying food from a stall or trailer now," he says. "Food vans have always been tarred with that brush of greasy burgers for trucks or something you would find at a car boot."

"Eating good food, learning about food, writing about and talking about food is a big part of our culture these days."

Seth, from The Thirstea Co, says: "I think this appeals to the public now, as it is still quite new and interesting, and those two qualities will always draw the masses."

Helen from Truly Crumptious adds: "It's really wonderful to see new businesses blossom in vintage vehicles, a fabulous way of upcycling and reinventing."

"Cornwall's producers and restaurants are top notch so mobile catering has to follow, we have a haven of artists and creativity so it makes sense to see a growth of interesting outdoor catering."

### on the trail

Each fortnight, we'll be printing a Cornish walk for readers to cut out and enjoy at your leisure.

St Ives circular walks (two options) Map Ref: SW 515, 4.08  
Via The Carracks (Seal Island) – 7 miles (4 hours)  
Via Hellesveor Cliffs – 3 miles (1.5 hours)

From the START (at Porthmeor Beach car park), join the coastal footpath, go past the bowling green, continue on and through the kissing gate at Clodgy Point. Follow yellow waymarks uphill, slightly left by some stone walling.

At the next waymark take the direction of the right arrow ignoring the right-hand paths.

Eventually you will arrive at Hor Point and Hellesveor Cliffs, marked with a National Trust sign (A on the map).

#### SHORTER WALK

If you wish to do the short walk, turn left here up the track (towards C on the map).

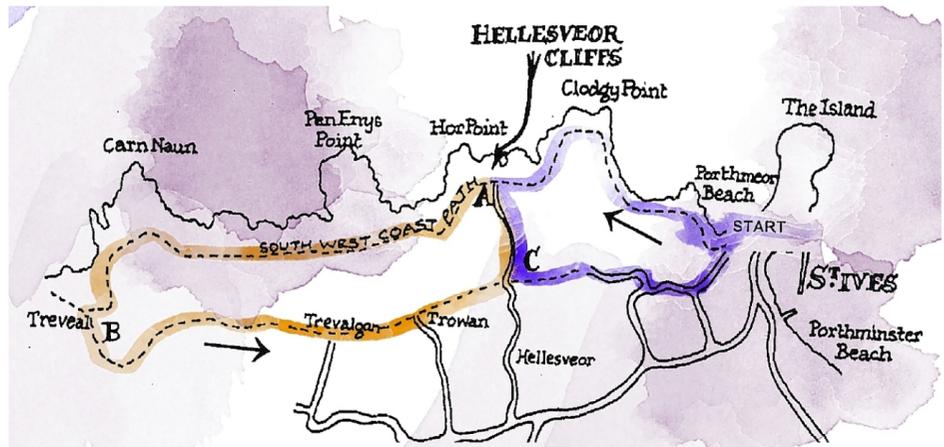
When you reach a left-hand stile marked with a black and white post it will lead you back into St Ives with markers all the way. At the road turn right and rejoin the main road and go left to reach the car park.

#### LONGER WALK

For the longer route, at Hellesveor Cliffs turn right onto the track and coast path.

Continue for two miles and cross the gully over the granite bridge, a short uphill to view Carrack Rocks.

The footpath to your left is the start of the inland return across fields. Usually there are seals to be seen around the Carracks, so this is a good spot to stop for a break.



Walk up the valley until you reach a concrete road. Turn left over the cattle grid and pass in front of Trevail Mill and through the gate marked with a footpath sign.

An uphill section is waymarked as it levels out and leads to a left-hand stile marked with a black and white post.

The way back to St Ives over many stiles is clearly waymarked or stripe-posted through several farms.

Keep straight until you reach the lane (C) from Hellesveor Cliffs. Cross over and follow the posts into St Ives as for short walk directions.

## 11 free things to do on a rainy or windy day ...without switching on a TV, tablet, phone or computer

These days it's just too easy to switch on – and switch your brain off – or get your wallet out and go for lunch, the cinema, or a tourist attraction. Finding free things to do is not rocket science – although studying a science course could be included here – but it often takes a bit of thought and planning.

- 1 Go for a walk**  
It's not raining razor blades out there, so get rugged up. It's really not as bad as you think.
- 2 Fly a kite**  
Just for windy days.
- 3 Play games**  
As well as cards, jigsaw puzzles, Scrabble and Cornish Monopoly, there's a seemingly unending array of board games (including Cornish Smuggler and Waggle Dance). Okay, they won't blow your mind, but with the right company they can be more than fun – you might even learn something.
- 4 Treasure hunt**  
Probably just one for the kids, but watching a loved one try to work out your rubbish, cryptic clues can be priceless.
- 5 Holiday research**  
Plan a holiday in a place where it's not windy or rainy (... and pay for it later).
- 6 Talk**  
As long as you have someone to talk to that is, ask them something you've never asked before to try and find out something you never knew about them. Or challenge them to a debate.
- 7 Cook**  
Even if you're no good, or never even tried, the

enjoyment is all in the making – cookies and cakes are firm favourites, which leads us onto:

- 8 Get 'creative'**  
I hate this expression, but if you enlist the help of a child – or someone equally creative – it can be less painful and quite 'rewarding' (another expression I hate when talking about 'getting creative'). OK, some ideas ... erm ...
- 9 Have a nap**  
If you have some spare time it's a great way to waste (I mean spend) some of it. Don't sleep too long though, as you feel terrible. Best time is 15 to 20 minutes, from 1pm to 3pm.
- 10 Read a book**  
If you've fallen out of love with this, you'll find it's all in finding the right authors. Go to the library (if there is still one near you) and rediscover.
- 11 Do some DIY**  
If all else fails, get busy on the house (it's probably avoid the garden though).