

Places to Paddle in Cornwall Part II

The North Coast



Low tide at Portreath

This stretch of coast probably accommodates the most well known surfing beaches in the UK. This is one of the things that attract visitors to Cornwall, yet when it comes to kayaking a swell is a mixed blessing.

Paddling in a decent sized swell near to the rocks is an exhilarating experience, the downside being the difficulties in landing and the confusing seas created from the backwash, magnified and distorted in tidal races on the headlands. Furthermore a swell can get up in a few hours, sometimes with little warning; after all the water stretches from here across to the Americas and down to the Antarctic.

Thus apart from one or two areas which will be highlighted, and the attractions of the beaches with a small swell; this is not a piece of coast for the inexperienced.

What this guide sets out to do is to describe where, and how you can access the sea and estuaries around Cornwall.

What it cannot do is to tell you if it is safe to do so. Where to paddle is dependent on paddling ability and conditions - which can change within the hour, and what may have been safe is no longer so.

Although the author has tried to ensure the accuracy of the information below mistakes will inevitably be made; furthermore we live in a world that is constantly changing and inevitably some information will become outdated before a revision of the material.

Location of car parks is given through Ordnance Survey Grid Reference and the reader will need a copy of the relevant sheet when planning the trip. Alternatively car parks can be identified using Google Earth at the particular location described – they come up very clearly in the picture (and should not be confused with caravan parks – cars being smaller and less regularly placed).

The author has identified that a beach is life-guarded where known- some that are will have been missed.

Location, Description	Access and Egress	Degree of difficulty & effect of conditions	Other factors
Sennen to St Ives	Access at Sennen (SW263352) is best from the small harbour being sheltered from the swell. It is possible to drop the boats off here then park	Gwynver (Life Guards in summer) takes more of a swell than Sennen (Life	Find out the sea state in this area, conditions recorded at the Seven Stones Light vessel approx half way out to the

<p>Magnificent, challenging coastline for the experienced.</p>	<p>in the car park by the beach (263355). Going north it used to be possible to access and egress at Gwynver the next beach (a continuation of Whitsands bay at low tide); but it is a long way up the steep hill to the top and needs researching as the car park no longer appears to be there. Not much of an option with a heavy or loaded boat. There are two campsites near to Gwenver, Treveda, due east the nearest, and another to the West. This is a very exposed coastline, picking up pretty much any swells or sea from the south to North East, there are few landing places and north of Priests Cove, pretty much no access or egress until St Ives. Tidal flows are strong and complex; thus this is a stretch of coast for experienced well-equipped parties. The rewards are great – an abundance and diversity of sea birds and mammals including whales, plus basking sharks backed by a beautiful granite coastline. There is restricted parking at Porth Navern (SW308358) that is very near the sea There is parking in the National Trust car park at Priests Cove (SW317353) and access to the sea about a hundred yards further on down quite a steep slope. The slipway (which is extremely slippery) is the property of Priest Cove Boatman’s Association. When the author asked permission to launch it was given. However I doubt if they would be very happy if a canoeing party obstructed their own operation of the slip. Portheras Cove (SW357387) (north of Pendeen) is a satisfactory landing place subject to swell. There are also reputed to be jagged pieces of metal in the sands from a wreck which was dynamited on the beach, but the author did</p>	<p>Guards in summer) and is generally bigger which although good news if you want to surf; will create escalating difficulty for landing or departing from the beach in a sea kayak. The coast northwards from Gwenver although not backed by cliffs would pose difficulties in landing on the rocks should there be a significant swell running. About a mile or so north of Gwenver past Porth Nanven – the cliffs drop straight down to the sea until Priests Cove. Beyond that the coast line is sheer until Pendeen where there is landing & access – see left. Beyond that although the cliffs are high, they are regularly indented and although you might not be able to get your kayak out easily, at least it might be possible to make some kind of landing. There are overfalls on all of the headlands around the Atlantic coast of the Penwith Peninsula, particularly Pendeen. Porthmeor beach St Ives (Life Guards in summer) is not an option for launching or landing if there is a decent</p>	<p>Scilly Isles: http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/station_page.php?station=62107 It will even tell you how cold the water is. It is wise to have knowledge of the sea state before traveling – avoiding a wasted journey. Think carefully about your options for landing if the wave height is greater than 2ft.</p> <p>With regard to tides the reader is referred to Reeds Small Craft Almanac (Tidal Gates – Lands End p 192) which observes that around Penwith, whatever the direction of the main tidal flow (as depicted in a tidal atlas) there is often a contra-flow inshore during a considerable proportion of the flow and parts of the ebb tide, this also varies according to location on this coastline.</p> <p>All the Atlantic Beaches are a long walk to the waters edge at Low tide. The waves on these beaches break much more powerfully at low tide.</p> <p>With regard to St Ives, of the car parks which are easy to get to- such as the one above the Tate Gallery the carry is likely to be too long or too uphill, to be of use.</p> <p>The best option is to launch and land from Carbis Bay (SW388527) which is only a mile further on. Here you can park right by the beach.</p>
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	<p>not come across any on the one visit to the beach. Egress from this beach would be a very long carry. However the fishing cove just to the south and under Pendeen (SW358384) gives access to the car park by the Pendeen light (SW358380), subject to the good will of the fishermen at the cove.</p> <p>Other possibilities for landing but not access or egress are:</p> <p>Pendour Cove (north of Gurnards Head), Porthzennor cove - The author does not have experience of either other than passing them quite a way out. However from the map they do appear to be potential landing points – but not access points, should there be problems.</p> <p>St Ives</p> <p>St Ives is a real pain for parking particularly in the summer when is difficult to make your way through the streets. It is a town designed for people not cars.</p> <p>Carbis Bay has a car park by the beach – recommended (SW388527)</p>	<p>swell running.</p> <p>Carbis Bay is probably the safest place on the North Coast of Cornwall to paddle. Beginners should be safe here unless there is a big swell running. The beach is sheltered from the Atlantic by St Ives and only a very big swell or sea will get in there – unless of course it is blowing hard from the North or North East.</p>	
Location, Description	Access and Egress	Degree of difficulty & effect of conditions	Other factors
<p>Carbis Bay - Perranporth The author's home patch - known to surfers as "The Badlands" In the right conditions one of the least</p>	<p>Hayle Harbour Although right by major roads and parking abounds it is an option which needs to be carefully considered. Not recommended –see right hand column.</p> <p>The Bluff(Life Guards in summer), outside the entrance to Hayle Harbour (SW385555) can be accessed from the car park across the small road by the pub named the Bluff. You can go past the pub through the pub car park and down the small cliff – hazardous with a heavy</p>	<p>The notes on size of swell often being the determining factor on trip feasibility is relevant here also as all of the is section of coast line is exposed from the South West to North.</p> <p>In particular the section from from Godrevey to Perranporth is particularly committing due to the predominance of sheer cliffs with few landing places.</p>	<p>Hayle Harbour is not recommended for the following reasons: The major factor is the activities of the harbourmaster and the owner of the land around the harbour. Neither are well disposed towards canoeists who will be charged if they enter from the slip and harangued if they enter from else where. Cars not paid for in the official car park will be ticketed – this is pursued by the landowner. The only alternative is to become a temporary member of Hayle</p>

<p>explored, wild and most beautiful parts of the Cornish coast. Wild life abounds. A coast for experienced paddlers away from the beaches, and when a swell is running.</p>	<p>boat, or walk down the road to the south west of the pub and down the path to the beach, quite a long carry. Even longer carry at low tide to the water's edge.</p> <p>Phillack Towans (car park SW393567) give access to the beach but its really too far to carry the boats.</p> <p>If you are camping at St Ives Bay Camping site there is access from their car park at SW 397368(Life Guards in summer), however the dunes are high at this point – a very long carry at low tide</p> <p>Gwithian(Life Guards in summer) is OK for access if you have a light boat or are surfing as it's a long walk from the car park at SW 413578 to the beach. However the car parks at the far end of Godrevey(Life Guards in summer) (National Trust) at SW432582 are right by the beach and are recommended. This is not a beach for beginners – many people have drowned here.</p> <p>There is little access to & from the coast between Godrevey and Portreath. Fishing Cove (SW586429) has a small beach to land, but access up the steep cliff path with a kayak would be dangerous. Beyond that there is no access until Basset Cove but again unsuitable for carrying a kayak. In a low swell it is possible to take a break at low tide on the small beaches which appear below North Cliffs. Once past the next cove, the cliffs are sheer and spectacular to Portreath (Life Guards in summer) where there is access via the car park right next to the beach. It is also possible to launch and land from Portreath Harbour on the north east side of the beach. The road from Portreath to Redruth</p>	<p>This is a section of coast for experienced paddlers in well led parties.</p> <p>Apart from access Hayle Harbour is a nice safe place to paddle, except near the entrance when the tide is running strongly. The West of the harbour past Lelant is a designated nature reserve in which paddling is not permitted.</p> <p>The Bluff, outside the entrance to Hayle Harbour (SW385555) is a well known surf spot . Although the swell here will be smaller than more west facing parts of the North Coast it is still significant. There are strong tidal flows in and out of the harbour.</p> <p>There is a large seal population at Godrevey. You can see them on the beach beyond Navax Head by taking the path from the top corner of the top car park. If you are not sure just ask – it is a well known attraction of the area.</p> <p>The long runs of sheer cliff in this area pose two problems for paddlers in a swell –</p>	<p>Canoe Club, which has been effectively forced into this position by the landowner. If having successfully negotiated all of the above you launch at low tide you will find the entrance of the harbour completely blocked by the bar. Trying to walk across it is treacherous – it's like quicksand.</p> <p>All of the West/North West-South West Facing beaches in this area are dangerous in a sea or swell, which due to size or period produce strong rips. The rips in this area are particularly difficult as they can take the form of Cross Currents i.e. they may run parallel to the beach for a distance before heading out to sea. Rips are not constant, but dynamic – they change in accordance with the sets of waves breaking and the amount of water flowing from them, and the changing bottom contours resulting from the changing tide.</p> <p>The National Trust bans kayaks and other small craft from within 50 metres of Godrevey Island and the Rocks around Navax Head and the cove just beyond it. This is to avoid harassing the large seal population.</p> <p>Western Cliff and Ralphs Cupboard just to the west of Portreath are spectacular and worth a look.</p>
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Location, Description	Access and Egress	Degree of difficulty & effect of conditions	Other factors
<p>Perranporth to Newquay A wild deserted coastline for experienced paddlers and groups. Along with</p>	<p>There is a car park right by the beach at Perranporth (Life Guards in summer)– but has a bar above the entrance which excludes high vehicles.</p> <p>Once past Perranporth beach the cliffs are sheer to Holywell Bay(Life Guards in summer) with no landing places. The Car Park at Holywell bay is a long walk from the beach – not recommended for launching or landing.</p> <p>The cliffs are again sheer to Porth Joke, or</p>	<p>This stretch of coast is as exposed as all mentioned so far and is for experienced paddlers only, in well led groups, and as described earlier, in addition to the normal weather considerations, the swell must be taken into account.</p>	<p>Perranporth Webcam: http://www.the-wateringhole.co.uk/webcam.htm</p> <p>The Watering Hole isolated on the beach about half a mile up the beach from the town is a well known drinking spot where you can hear a band.</p> <p>The actual “Holy Well” is in a cave to the north of the beach accessible on a low spring tide</p>

<p>crowded beaches in the Newquay area on which landing a laden sea kayak could be hazardous, particularly in summer.</p>	<p>Polly Joke as it is often known. A beautiful place to walk to for a swim, it is too far to carry a kayak, for the car park is a long way back – National Trust.</p> <p>The cliffs are again sheer for the short distance round to Crantock(Life Guards in summer).</p> <p>Although there is jump in access for surfers on the north and south sides of Crantock Bay, the only safe access for kayakers is from Crantock Beach Car Park (SW788608), accessed through the village of Crantock. This gets very crowded in the summer and it is a long carry (over 200m) from the car park (particularly if you are unable to park at the seaward end) to the Gannel.</p> <p>There is a small car park (SW807608)half way up the Gannell and could be a useful access if you were prepared to come and go or just explore the gannel on the high tide.</p> <p>There is access to South Fistral Beach(Life Guards in summer) from Esplanade Road (SW797617)(see right hand column). Access to the north end of Fistral(Life Guards in summer) from the Fistral Beach Car Park (801623). Very popular in the summer. Note that it is a long carry down the beach at low tide</p> <p>With regard to Newquay Harbour, although there are some car parks in the vicinity the author has not found a safe convenient means of access (the steps on the West harbour-side are Very slippery at low tide).</p>	<p>Holywell Bay has a reputation as a dangerous beach where there have been fatalities.</p> <p>Kelsey Head, between Holywell Bay and Porth Joke has a large conical rock to seaward called the Chick. There is a strong tidal flow between them.</p> <p>Re Crantock At high tide, particularly springs there are strong tidal flows in and out of the Gannel – surges with the sets on a big swell.</p> <p>With regard to all paddling from Newquay, the size and frequency of the waves is the limiting factor, check conditions before going there: http://www.fistrallive.com/ Also be aware – particularly at low tide that the waves are always bigger than they seem on the web cam, worth double checking with the seven stones wave buoy http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/station_page.php?station=62107</p>	<p>Re: South Fistral The problem with Esplanade Road is that it fills very quickly as there are only about twenty spaces or so on the side of the road and it must be a 300m or so carry down a twisting path to the beach – not really suitable for a kayak carry.</p> <p>The North and South ends of Fistral Beach are crowded in Summer</p> <p>The Gannel is a long Creek to the south of Newquay and can be seen on the approach road from the south. It dries out to a small shallow stream at low tide.</p> <p>With Regard to a take out point in Newquay; Stuart Fisher in “Inshore Britain” suggests: “A small beach to the west of Towan Head at SW800627 has limited parking and gives a possible landing point if conditions permit.” <i>(note that this is on the exposed Atlantic side of Towan Head and parking is unlikely to be readily available in the summer – but is a possible collection point)</i></p> <p>Be wary of Towan Head in a big swell. The Cribbar breaks there – on banks with the potential to crest a rogue swell up to 2nm out to the North West.</p> <p>Newquay becomes extremely busy in the summer. Consider going very early in the morning if this is necessary.</p> <p>Provided you get the tide right, Porth</p>
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	<p>Towan Beach(Life Guards in summer) is accessible from a small car park (SW808607) at the bottom of Beach Road – which fills very quickly. Facing North East Towan Beach gets less swell than others and is the safest beach on this part of the North Coast. It is also an easy carry, but will become very crowded in the summer.</p> <p>Tolcarne and Great Western Beaches(Life Guards in summer) are accessible, but down steep roads cut into the cliffs to which there is no vehicular access, making any carry very hard work, and there are no convenient car parks. Lusty Glaze Beach has similar access problems to Tolcarne & Great Western, as well as being private.</p> <p>If you get the tide right, i.e. high tide, Porth Beach on the northern boundary of Newquay (SW 843628 - Alexandra Road, St Columb Minor) gives good access as there is a car park above to the landward side of Alexandra Road. Otherwise it is one of the longest beaches in Cornwall at low tide.</p>		<p>Beach has, in the author's opinion the most convenient access in this area, swell permitting.</p> <p>It is advisable to consult the lifeguard before launching from one of the crowded Newquay beaches with regard to the safest place to launch.</p>
Location, Description	Access and Egress	Degree of difficulty & effect of conditions	Other factors
<p>Newquay to Padstow A mixture of wild Atlantic cliffs and beaches plus a grand estuary. Due to the</p>	<p>There is are two car parks near the beach at Watergate Bay(Life Guards in summer) – on each side of the B3276 as it U turns hard to miss (SW842648). At high tide the carry is short.</p> <p>For Mawgan Porth Beach,(Life Guards in summer) (SW850672) The car park is at Trenance on the south side of the bay near the river. At high tide the carry is not too bad and the stream may give some assistance.</p>	<p>As with all of the North Cornwall Coast, what you can achieve safely in this section is dependent on swell and sea state, and also once past on Trevoze Head, on the strength and state of the tides. Reference to a tidal atlas is recommended for the Camel estuary and</p>	<p><i>Although the author has paddled to seaward of the approaches to the Camel and also the upper reaches of the estuary, the lower reaches have not, as yet been paddled.</i></p> <p>The cliffs from Watergate Bay to Park Head are spectacular and beautiful, particularly Bedruthan Steps, and apart from Park Head and Mawgan Porth to Bedruthan Steps, bordered by narrow</p>

<p>likelihood of swell and strong tidal flows, this is an area for experienced paddlers.</p>	<p>Although it is possible to land at Pentire Steps and Bedruthan Steps, access is not recommended due to the long carry up the steep cliff paths.</p> <p>Porthcothan(Life Guards in summer) is another of those very long beaches, rather like Porth Beach in Newquay. There is a car park on the east side of the B3276 near the beach (SW859719)</p> <p>Treyaron Bay is dominated by a large caravan park and unless you are camped there, there is not any realistic access by car to the beach</p> <p>Constantine Beach(Life Guards in summer), on the other hand is a well known surfing beach with car parks at the southern end of the beach. The one nearest the water (SW857745) fills quickly and the other on grass (SW861745) results in quite a long carry.</p> <p>To the North Boobys Bay has equally good surf, and vehicular access above the rocks which border the beach(SW857755).</p> <p>There are sheer cliffs round Trevose Head to Trevose which although having a beach for landing, is dominated by a caravan park, and unless you are staying there, Harlyn Bay next door has good access and has a smaller swell in normal conditions than Constantine and the other West/North West facing beaches. There is a convenient car park (SW879755), not too far from the beach.</p> <p>The sea is edged by rocks the next km to Trevone Bay/Beach, which has equally good access to Harlyn with car parks right by the beach (SW891761)</p> <p>Hawkers Cove (SW913775) inside the Camel Estuary does not have car parking but has</p>	<p>approaches. Sheer exposed coastline with no easy landing from 1km south of Park Head to Porthcothan.</p> <p>The author has experienced Porthcothan at low tide on a big swell. It has strong cross currents and rips in those conditions.</p> <p>Conditions at Harlyn Bay http://www.harlynsurfschool.co.uk/webcam.html</p> <p>Trevone Beach via Stepper point to Hawkers Cove inside the Camel Estuary is mostly sheer cliffs with no landing. Strong tidal flows inside the Estuary 3 1/2 knots (full ebb & flow) on springs inside Stepper point.</p>	<p>beaches at low spring tides.</p> <p>With regard to Mawgan Porth; at times there can be a fair bit of water in the River Menathy which flows into the south side of the beach. Although this can be of assistance in launching, one needs to be wary of the strong rips produced in combination with sea/swell. This beach has a reputation for dangerous currents.</p> <p>Mawgan Porth web cam (updated hourly) http://www.bedruthan.com/hotel/surfcam</p> <p>The Camel Estuary can be paddled legally well upstream of Wadebridge to Polbrock Bridge (SW014695). It is a beautiful quiet</p>
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	<p>vehicular access to the beach and could be used as a pick up point if carefully planned. Harbour Cove (SW910770) also gives access and apparently has a car park, but is further from the sea and would necessitate a long carry over sand dunes.</p> <p>The Estuary at Padstow is best accessed from car parks to the north(SW919756) and south(SW920753) of the inner harbour. The latter (by the fish quay) is the best bet being larger with a slipway to the north.</p> <p>There is a Car Park (SW928758) to the North East of Rock which gives access to the beach below. Like all the others in the area it will fill quickly in the summer.</p>	<p>Like the southern estuaries, the Camel Estuary mostly dries at low tide, sand below Cant Hill and mud above. There is a clear deep channel below Rock at all stages of the tide.</p>	<p>paddle best done at high tide. Access can be found from a slipway several hundred metres below the bridge at Wadebridge, and above the footbridge, from Egoshale park (car park) (SW995720) at high tide only.</p> <p>The Padstow slipways, particularly the north one are used by the busy ferry to Rock. Time your entry accordingly. The harbourmaster has the right to charge you for access to the water from Padstow.</p>
Location, Description	Access and Egress	Degree of difficulty & effect of conditions	Other factors
<p>Daymer Bay to Bude Once out of the Camel Estuary, particularly past Tintagel this is a spectacular if somewhat monolithic coastline with little indentation, very high cliffs in places and few landing places.</p>	<p>Daymer Bay (Life Guards in summer) has a reputation as a safe beach, not particularly exposed to the swell. There is a car park at (SW929777) near the beach – its a long way to the water at low tide, and there will be strong currents in the channel.</p> <p>Polzeath (Life Guards in summer) is one of the better known surf beaches on the north coast. There are car parks at (SW933789) and (SW935795).</p> <p>There is a small car park in Port Quinn at (SW971805), but little opportunities for vehicular access in Port Issac and Portgaverne (although the latter could make a pick up point where the road skirts the shingle beach).</p> <p>Trebarwith Strand has two car parks up the valley from which it is approached (SW053865) (SW054865)</p> <p>There is no vehicular access to Tintagel but</p>	<p>Once north of Port Gaverne this coast is very exposed to the swell. The following webcam at Polzeath gives a good indication of prevailing conditions. http://www.annscottagesurf.co.uk/surfcast.aspx</p> <p>All of the previous notes on the difficulties of exposed North Western facing coasts apply to this section too.</p> <p>Although there are extremely high cliffs between Boscastle and Cambeak, there are some beaches below on which to land such as “Little Strand”</p>	<p>There is little opportunity to land and no access from Polzeath to Port Quinn</p> <p>Although there are small beaches on which to land between Port Gaverne and Trebarwith Strand this would be dependent on paddler ability, sea/swell, and rock distribution below the wave breaking line.</p> <p>Trebarwith Strand is most sheltered in a Westerly swell at its southern end.</p> <p>Tintagel Castle looks best from the sea – spectacular.</p> <p>The entrance to Boscastle is easily missed. The harbour dries at low tide.</p>

<p>For Experienced paddlers in groups.</p>	<p>there is a sheltered place (beach) to land and explore to the north east of the outcrop (SW051890). Parking for Boscastle is in the village itself – too far really to carry boats, but it would be possible to arrange a pick up as the road does go to the harbour (SW095915) Crackington Haven is a deep beach, and a long walk to the sea at low tide but there is a car park just above the beach (SW142968)</p> <p>Widemouth Bay is a popular surfing beach, where there are gaps in the rocks referred to in the next column. There are car parks at (SW199023). There is a car park above (SW205067), the beach below Bude Harbour with the lock.</p>	<p>below Cambeak. The rocks above Cambeak become much sharper, particularly North of Bude where they constitute a major hazard, to both boats and the paddler too.</p> <p>Although the coast between Crackington Haven and Widemouth Bay is backed by beaches north of Dizzard Point, these are at the back of rocks, and thus would only offer a safe landing on a low swell preferably at high tide.</p>	<p>There is a large colony of seals to the north of Boscastle, at the aptly named “Seals Hole” (SW106926)</p> <p>“Cambeak”SW(127967) dominates the whole of the Coastline, and is worth viewing for the amazing shapes of the folded rock.</p> <p>The beach below Bude Harbour is quite sheltered in all but the biggest swells or a sea from the North or NorthWest. If in doubt follow the inside of the sea wall.</p>
<p>Above Bude -not detailed</p>	<p>To be added at some point in the future when paddled by the author</p>		<p>The reader is referred to Mark Rainsley's guide “South West Sea kayaking” Presda Press 2008 Chapter 41</p>