

My coast

Actor *Timothy Spall* has spent six years sailing around the coast of Britain in his narrow boat, but he almost made the idyllic Helford River a permanent mooring

INTERVIEW *Catherine Butler*



Trying to choose a favourite part of the British coast is like trying to pick a favourite child – I just can't. But ever since my wife Shane and I spent six weeks stranded on the Helford River, I do have a fondness for Cornwall. We've

explored the British coastline for six years now in our little narrow boat the *Princess Matilda*. But back in 2009, we were just embarking on the leg of our journey that would take us around Land's End, when the tail of Hurricane Bill kicked up the ocean in such a bluster, there was no way I even contemplated testing my circumnavigation skills out at sea.

'So we had to sit tight until it all died down, and unlike most enforced stays, it turned out to be quite idyllic. We were on a swing mooring, and bobbing along on our buoy was like having our own little kingdom, with no one to disturb us. We spent our days taking the dingy out to remote little inlets where we could explore the beaches, and catching the taxi

boat – run by a bloke called Nick – for a short chug up the river to the Ferry Boat Inn to eat fish and chips and enjoy the fantastic views across the Helford Passage. It was August, but what a lot of people don't realise about Cornwall is that it doesn't get its summer proper until about September, so it would rain rather a lot but clear quickly. It was also very windy, and some nights we'd get woken up as the boat got knocked about on the swell of the Atlantic rising up the estuary.

'After we'd been there a few weeks, people began rowing out to us and inviting us to their barbecues. One day, I heard, "Ahoy!" and looked down to see a man in a little wooden rowing boat. "Since you're resident here now, I thought I'd better invite you over for coffee," he said. He was a local artist who lived on a houseboat down the river. "I don't know about a coffee," I said, "But I'd certainly like a drink."

The Spalls' account of their journeys afloat, The Voyages of the Princess Matilda by Shane Spall (Ebury, £11.99) is available for the special price of £11.49 including p&p at allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk.



PHOTOGRAPHS: PAUL CROMPTON, GETTY IMAGES