



Maidencombe Coves bouldering

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Bouldering in the coves north of Maidencombe, Devon

Welcome to some out-of-the-way bouldering on the Permian breccia you've discovered you love so much from going Nudey. The original concept was to chill out on wave-washed boulders above sand, far from the Maidencombe crowds. Well in Mackerel Cove, Herring Cove, and Badger Cove there *are* such boulders, plus a concave wall with (nails) potential at the former. Don't forget your swimsuits, but please wear them. Lots of bird life musing and squawking around too. All in all, a great place for shags on the beach.

During peak season Maidencombe hamlet and its (pay) car-park get very busy, especially if the excitable coasters are psyching up for their corporate plunge. If you're lucky you can park for free towards the bottom of Steep Hill, which is the access road from the A379 – considerably, of course.

After a winter's recce, I climbed the problems in June and July 2021. I've no idea whether anyone has climbed here before. If I've unwittingly stumbled over consecrated ground, you can always stuff my route names, unleash the forums, and summons a re-write. I'm cool with that – all of it.

A plastic sheet/tarpaulin is useful to keep your feet sand-free. Take a bouldering mat for the Mackerel Cove stuff; a few of your gran's cushions will suffice for Herring Cove and Badger Cove.

During the action, flotillas of boats will no doubt pass you, their captains marvelling: 'How the hell did they get there?' Makes you feel like Red Rob, right?

There is a little film of some of the problems on YouTube, embedded in www.martincrockerclimbing.com.

Approach to the coves

To the astonishment of beachgoers lug your mat into the boulders north of Maidencombe beach and disappear. You have the choice of picking your way up the ugly acned cliff onto a platform or careering about on tidal boulders to the reef beyond. Best option, so far as I'm concerned, is (at around 60m right of the beach) to climb the cliff (Diff) above a big flat block – good landing – while remembering the route you took for the way back. This option provides you with the freedom to gallivant for 2 ½ to 3 hours either side of low tide, subject to sea conditions, interjecting lockdowns, or regressing to a Permian Synapsid. A 10-minute scramble leads into the first cove, Blackaller's Cove and its jammed pink cesspit. Just seaweed covered boulders here so carry on to Mackerel Cove, just 100m around the next headland.



Sand Height

When I returned a month after my first visit, on my way to smoke herrings, the sand level in the coves was two to three feet higher and had buried the sit starts on The Cod Liver Oil Capsule. To avoid terminal disappointment, bring a shovel.

Mackerel Cove

At the back of Mackerel Cove is the concave wall moistened by a slobbering waterfall, which is less steep to the right. It lies above a flat wave-washed platform for which you'll need a mat or a rise in sand level (a couple of mats are advised for the projects).

The problems are described from left to right.

1 *Bonito V2 (5c) Two rounded black blocks under the bulge precede a little hand-ramp; hand-traverse right along the top of the band to finish off.

2 Queen Mary 2 V1 (5c) Sit start and climb direct via a square block above the bulge for left hand.

3 Mass Extinction Rebellion V1 (5c) The rightward-rising flake to the right.

4 Perfection in the Permian V3 (6a) A tough fish to fry which passes a triad of limestone pebbles above the bulge. Mind the block behind (i.e. feels a bit gripping).



The Cod Liver Oil Capsule

This is the fine beach-side boulder. At suitable sand levels further sit starts await those who've consumed sufficient Omega-3 to keep knee arthritis at bay.

5 Seven Seas The left arête from standing (V0-) or from kneeling (V0+). Lower still, the sit start awaits.

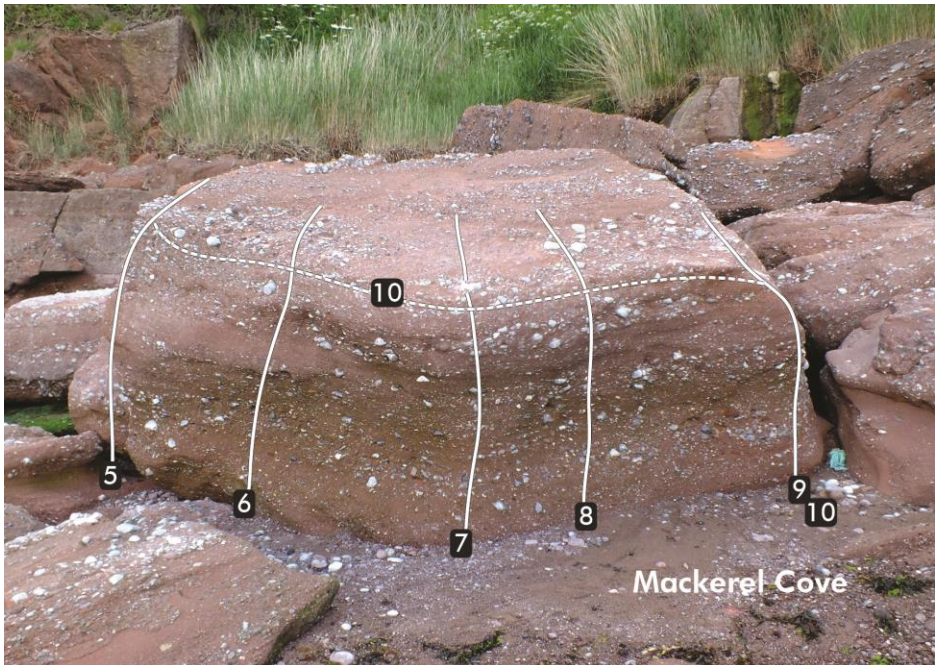
6 Tuna Fork V2+ (6a) An uncontrived sit start with right hand in square pocket, followed by an easy mantel.

7 **Omega-3 V4 (6b). Mantel the projecting limestone block on the cusp of the little rib. Easier for the more flexible/short-legged. A sit start looks possible, but might reduce the quality (enjoyment!).

8 Knees up Mother Brown V0- (4c) Between the rib and the right arête, mantel past a good juggy block well over the lip. A contorted joint-dislocating sit start with right hand in a layaway looks V5ish but could see you in an MRI tube.

9 *Fatty Acids Forever V3 (6a) Sit start the right arête, using a pebble crimp in each hand.

10 **Lip(id) Trip V3+ (6a) The King Salmon of the bay. Sit start up the right arête, and then hand traverse all the way leftwards to the left arête. The good juggy block set a little further back from the lip (on *Knees up Mother Brown*) is 'out' (Who says so!...*bloody arrogant bouldering rule-makers!*).



The Way to Herring Cove

The *Impasse*: well it's not really, but some awkward climbing or/and boulder-hopping is necessary to transfer from Mackerel Cove onto the wave-cut platform and boulders leading to the coves further north. Best to keep things simple and lightweight and make sure you climb beyond for no longer than 2 hours either side of low tide. However, if you mess the tides up, it does look like you can thrash out of Badger Cove to the coast path through lush, painful jungle.



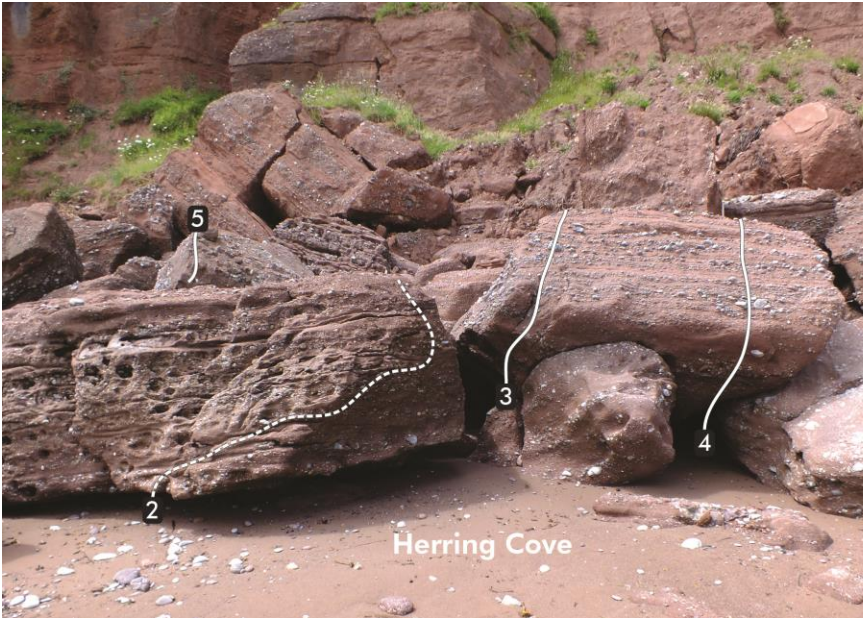
Herring Cove

There is a group, if not a shoal, of boulders above the left (south) side of the beach.

1 **can't Rap it, so Slap it V3+ (6a) A fine boulder with a sea-facing lip traverse. Sit start far right, gain the lip and take it leftwards before using a series of pebbles in a runnel under the lip (not-to-be used big limestone jug above) to snatch the left arête. Romp along the easy continuation around the corner for fun.



2 What a (bum) Drag V0+ (5b) Lovely rock. Make an ultra-low lip traverse of the juggy oblong block starting as far left as the sand and your sagging bottom allow.



3 With this Herring I Thee Wed V0- (4c) Scale the rib of the adjoining boulder with a few quick moves.

4 Hard of Herring V2 (5c) Eliminate: avoiding both small supporting boulders, pull hard up the leaning wall and fish around for good pebbles to pull over.





Behind is a hanging rib, above rocks this time.

5 Landslide Leap V1 (5c) The rib, with a quasi-dynamic start.

Marooned in the right-hand side of the bay is the hull of a long boulder upturned on the sand with a project lip-traverse that's *One for Tom* (V8?). It looks like its deck will need to be dry (rare) for any chance of success. Consolation prizes are two sit starts: route **7** uses the limestone block just left of a vertical crack (V0+) and route **6** starts 2 metres further left on two good limestone blocks (V1). Not ideal for old stiffs held together with scar tissue: the bastards left me with a bad back for three weeks.

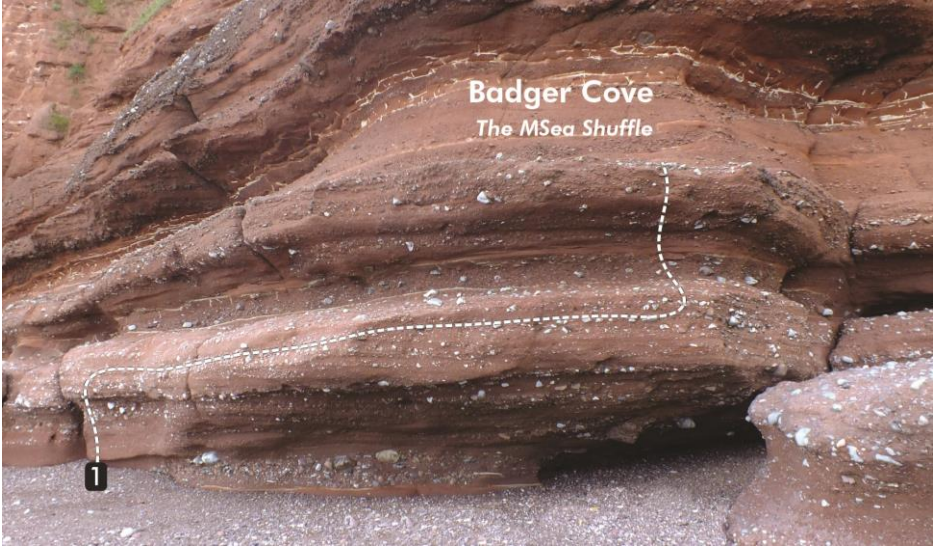


The Way to Badger Cove

It's plain sailing now to Badger Cove. Easy boulder-scrambling leads onto and past Border Cove (reverse that for *Red Rob*), where sadly there's nowt to climb yet peace to swim.

Badger Cove

In the southern corner of the beach and set above narrow-gauge gravel is a long low-level lip-traverse, probably the best problem in the coves. The rock is wave-washed and the best quality I've experienced here so far, which is as far as I'm going.



1 *The MSea Shuffle V5 (6a)** Start at a short wide crack far left. Strenuously shuffle right on rounders and make the infernal decision when to bring a heel up. Fortunately jugs take over where the lip becomes increasingly undercut. Save some strength for the punishing mantel at the far end of the overhang. If you can do yoga, lick your wounds.



Labrador Bay Area

There is nothing of any significance hereabouts, though the area is worth a visit to get away from it all. You won't need a mat for the following problems, though you will for various projects in and beyond Cherry Red Cove. But take a plastic sheet to keep your feet dry. All the problems are accessible between low and mid-tide.

Park in the main Shaldon car-park (as for the zoo), or find a free place adjacent to the A379 above. Approach the shoreline using the tunnel under The Ness which leads onto the northern end of Ness Cove. Head south around Bundle Head (tedious boulders for 'the Mrs') into Smugglers' Cove. Cherry Red Cove is the small bay and beach beyond the next minor headland (more tedious boulders) to the south.

The problems are described from south to north.



One that Got Away
(as yet)

Cherry Red Cove

1 Project: **One that Got Away**

The unattempted boulder lip-traverse just south of Cherry Red Cove that may yet get its comeuppance.

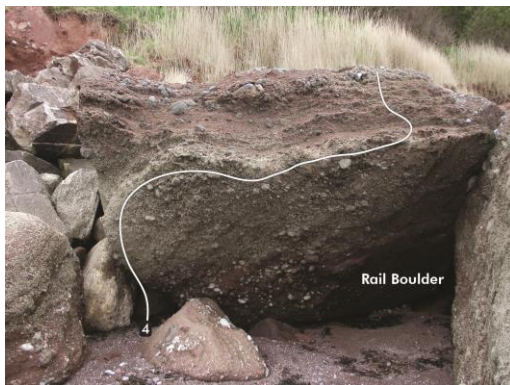
Barnacle Boulder

2 Barnacle Bob V0+ (5b) The left side of the sharp arête; don't pull too hard on the finishing holds otherwise you may come unstuck.

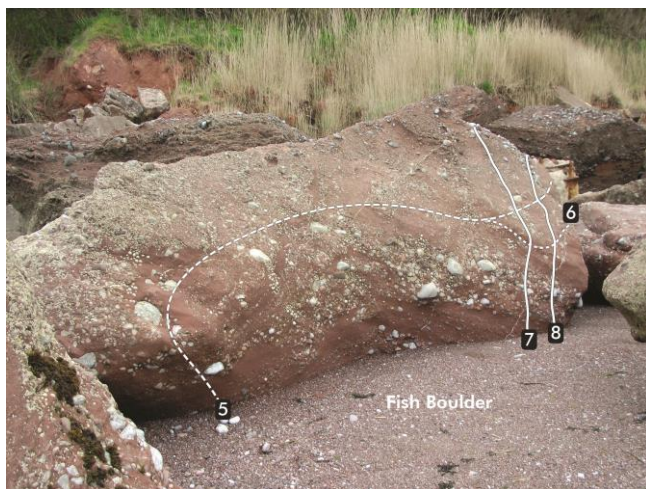
3 Barnacle Bess V0 (5a) The right side of the arête.



Rail Boulder



4 *Jubilee Rail Line V2 (5c) From sitting steam along the rail in the overhanging wall to its end, whereupon a rock-up left gains the top. (Drop a grade if you finish on the boulder on the right.)



Fish Boulder

5 Fishy Traverse 1 V0+ (5b)
Traverse from left to right without using the top. A fun romp across big lime puddings before a thin move at the end.

6 Fishy Traverse 2 V3/4 (6b)
From the last pudding, drop down right using a vague sandstone crimp and ballet sketchily onto the right arête.

7 *Platinum Standard V3 (6b)
Start under the far right of the slab, a metre right of the right-most pudding, and make very balancy moves straight up on marginal nicks and micro-knobbles.

8 Harry & Meghan Show V2 (6a) Smear up immediately left of the right arête; contrived, and not true royalty.



Project Boulder

9 The rounded lip-traverse needs a good left shoulder. Looks about V7, and quality.

Fin Boulder

The triangular boulder, the tip of a giant buried shark in the sand.

10 **Fin 1** V0- (4c) Hand-traverse the lip before rocking over near its right-hand end.

11 ***Fin 2** V4 (6b) High intensity crimping.

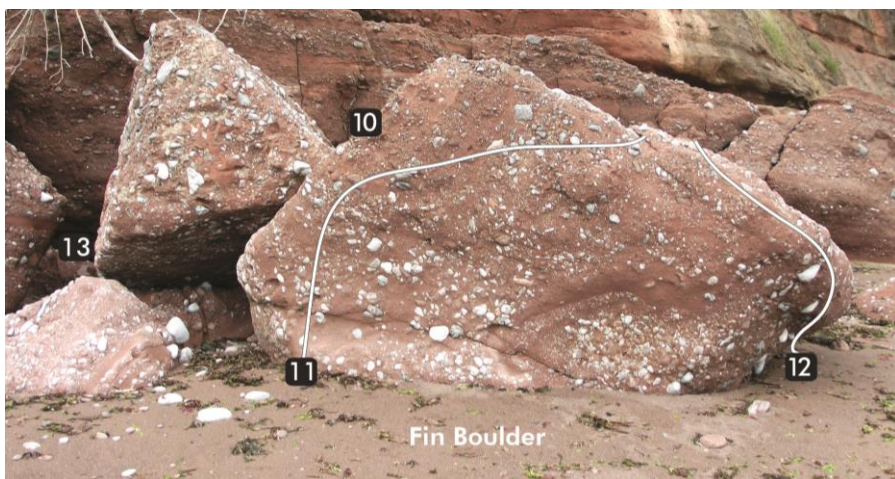
Sit/crouch start at the left-hand end and use an arête hold to get started. Now limit yourself to the three pebble crimps: sandstone, limestone, and limestone again before stretching horizontally right for a grey limestone pebble on the lip. Rock over to finish.

12 **Fin 3** V4 (6b) Sit start on the right below an overhang. Right foot on large white pebble, lip traverse awkwardly round left onto the face. Finish to suit.

In the gully behind is a crunchy arête.

13 **Crunchy Arête** V2 (5c) Sit start with right hand on monster pebble, and away you go – mind the boulder behind you as feet start popping off the crunch.

Lots of other esoteric and snappier climbing is possible in the cove, but you'll soon learn to know where to draw the line!



Smugglers' Cove

An occasional nudey beach, the other thing going for it is a block erupting from the sand at its northern end. Here you will rejuvenate following rotator cuff surgery and then segue to a nice picnic.



Rehab Boulder

14 Rapture V0- (3b) Swing along the top from right to left and exit before things get bulgy.

15 Rapture V2 (5c) As for Rapture but drop low under the bulgy section and top out beyond on pebbles.

16 Keep to Feet V4 (6b) A low left to right traverse (no top), which is super-thin to start.