

Powerkite Places Westward Ho!

Any plans for the autumn? Go west for great traction kiting on hard sand with clean winds in a fantastic location - once the summer holiday crowds have packed their bags and gone home...



Head for the West

Devon and Cornwall are well known for their miles of golden beaches, so what makes Westward Ho! so popular with local kite-flyers? In the words of one newcomer, "I'm a bit of a virgin at this bugging, but learnt more in the last six hours than over four weeks in my local field!" And that basically sums up the experience you get at this beach. It is down to a combination of amazingly clean wind and a vast hard-packed beach, meaning kite sessions are unhindered by having to fight the equipment all the time.



The Scene

Most people who have spent time at Westward Ho! agree that it is a very friendly beach. Everyone talks to each other to swap stories and experiences, allow others to trial their kites and help each other out. If you are not careful you can spend too much time talking and not enough flying! At the end of the day, many people leave the beach more knowledgeable than they were at the beginning. Others have been helped out with problematic kites not being set up properly. Everyone seems keen to pass on their enthusiasm for the sport. The X-Zone Autumn Games were held at Westward Ho! last year and there are plans to hold them again this September.

How to find it...

Westward Ho! is in North Devon, four miles from Bideford and easily accessible from the A39, on the opposite side of the Taw/Torridge estuary to Saunton Sands where the beach is very similar. This area of Devon has been highlighted as being very suitable for wind farms, which just goes to show how reliable the wind is here. For kilters, the beach is accessed through the Northam Burrows Country Park. Kiting tends to take place further up the beach, away from the town, which keeps the activity separate from most other beach users.

The town of Westward Ho! is popular with families and is home to camping and caravan sites, amusement arcades, a putting green, playground, beach shops, surf shop, snack bars and seaside pubs. As with all seaside resorts, everywhere in the town is open and busy during July and August. That creates its own problems. Kite-powered wheels on the beach are not a great idea during the peak holiday season – there are likely to be too many holiday makers and not enough beach for a good run when the tide comes in. When the tide goes out there are probably just a couple of hours of good riding to be had. The bottom line is that during July and August, the beach can only be safely recommended for evening rides at low tide – but it's back to allround kite use once the summer holidays are over.



THE BUGGIER

One kiter who rates Westward Ho! among his top kiting spots is Nick Morecroft:

What makes Westward Ho! special for you?

The clean wind mainly. When it's blowing in the right direction which is on or offshore, the ability to buggy the full length of the beach can be quite a trip!

So why do you find the clean wind here such a great deal?

It allows me not to worry about the kite suddenly trying to rip my arms out. You can have a good session at some of our other spots, but if the wind is gusty you have to pay more attention to what the kite is doing. One example is when I launched my 4.5m Razor in 16mph winds at Westward Ho! I had only had the kite for three months and was still getting used to  lower. We unpacked the kite, and then I got a mate to 'bear-hug' me while I  slowly started letting the brakes out. The kite rose gradually to the top of the window and did not feel too bad. I wove it about a bit, then some more, and was soon doing full figure-eights without my mate needing to hold onto me. I guess the fact that there was no chance of a sudden gust gave me a load more confidence.

What kind of bugging do you do at Westward Ho?

Well, it's a great beach for clocking up the miles. If the wind is right you can go for ages. There are a few softer patches of sand which can slow you down, but you soon learn where they are. As the wind is so clean, and the surface being flat, it is a good place for learning tricks such as backwards bugging. There is less chance of being launched out of the buggy when you're facing the wrong way. I have also had success with buggy surfing – riding my buggy into the sea. You can really start pumping the kite to get yourself out again, without worrying about a gust overpowering you or a lull dropping the kite in the ocean. The downside is the extra buggy maintenance!

Name: Nick Morecroft

Home: Devon

How long flying? 18 months

Kit Bag: Ozone Razor 4.5m, Blad  n, Flexifoil Sport Buggy, Helmet.

Customisations: Back rest on bu  RipStop covered pipe lagging for side panels, Tandem kit, Speedo.

Specialities: Sea bugging; taking kids for rides in the tandem and scaring them silly.



KITE BIKER & KITE CAM PHOTOGRAPHER

Paul Burton is another regular face at Westward Ho! Paul has made a conversion kit for his Flexifoil buggy to change it from 3 wheels to a 2-wheeled Kite Bike, inspired by an article about kite bikes on www.surf-wax.co.uk. There are not too many of these mean machines around at present, but if you can imagine riding a Harley Davidson whilst flying a kite, you've got the idea.

What makes Westward Ho! special for you?

I always used to go to Saunton Sands, but now that they have banned kite buggying I popped over the river to Westward Ho! To my surprise the beach is a whole lot bigger than I thought. The whole beach is open to the wind with only low sand dunes and the famous pebble ridge behind the beach. When the tide goes out, it leaves the sand hard and flat which makes it ideal for kite powered mountain boards, buggies and the odd kite bike. It has easy access from the car park too. It's the perfect location, but don't tell too many people!

What's this Kite Bike?

The kite bike is my newest toy. I had it made by an engineering company just in time for Middle Wallop Buggy Festival. It is designed to fit straight onto the back of the latest Flexifoil buggy and uses a big foot wheel, but as I still have the original back wheels and axle I can change between the two. It only takes ten minutes to make the change-over. Kite Biking looks difficult, but once you are moving you forget you are on two wheels!

And the Kite Cam?

The camera I use to take aerial pictures is an Automatic Compact 35mm camera which is lifted to the sky on a single line Sutton Flow Form soft kite. The shutter is fired by a radio controlled servo, the type found in model cars, boats and planes.

Name: Burt

Home: Devon

How long flying? 3 years.

Kit Bag: Blade I 2.6m, Blade I 3.3m, Blade I 4.9m, Blade I 7.2m, Blade II 9m (vps), Helmet, Harness, Flexifoil 2002 Buggy, Kite Cam.

Customisations: KiteBike back wheel addition.

THE LANDBOARDER

E Hancock has been kiting for a few short months and is now learning to combine kite flying with landboarding.

Why do you rate Westward Ho! so highly?

Clean winds, flat sands and loads of space make excellent conditions for a beginner. I have been trying to learn on some of the South Devon beaches, but they are not so big and the sand can be softer and bumpier. I can come here for the day and get six hours of flying around the tides – three hours before low tide and three after. That really consolidates everything I learn.

What have you achieved at Westward Ho?

Well, I was here last weekend alone. My mates backed out because they said the wind was not strong enough. But for me – a beginner with a Blade II 4.9m and a brand new landboard – the wind was perfect at less than 10mph. I was soon zooming up and down the beach. I just locked the kite into position and took off. One buggier who was just about able to catch and overtake me said he was going at 35mph, so I must have been topping 30mph!

Name: Rob Hancock

Home: Devon

How long flying? 3 months.

Kit Bag: Blade II 4.9m, Scudda ATB, Helmet and padding.

Report: Jo Morecroft, Nick Morecroft

Photography: Nick Morecroft, Jo Morecroft

Aerial Photography: Paul Burton

Website: www.surf-wax.co.uk

