A walk to the sea

PRAWLE POINT, DEVON

Tom Hoblyn is an award-winning landscape and garden designer who trained at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He is renowned for his classical landscape designs and historical restoration and has won several medals at RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Where do you walk? "I head for Prawle Point, at East Prawle near Kingsbridge, Devon. Car or bus is the best way to get there and from the bus stop, you walk past the telephone box and down the hill. After half a mile, take the footpath signposted to Prawle Point. When you come to the cliffs, take the coast path and head west to the most southerly tip of Devon. It is hilly and strenuous going, best for the fairly fit and agile. It's not suitable for bikes and buggies, but livestock-respecting dogs will love it."

How did you discover it, and why do you like it? "I've been going there since early childhood, initially on family holidays, then later, when we moved there. In winter, I love it for its bleak, dramatic, rocky coastline, sheer cliffs and sheltered coves; you can really feel the power of the sea as it crashes against the rocks... the area is littered with shipwrecks."

What sort of walk is it? "At this time of year, it's a wild, solo walk best suited for meditative purposes as the weather doesn't often allow for conversation. Take binoculars, as this is a stronghold for the rare cirl bunting, hunting for seed in the fields of stubble."

How long does it take? "Allow at least four hours, especially if you want to do a spot of rockpooling. The longest and most dramatic route is approximately four and a half miles."

Wellingtons or walking boots, use a map or just follow the signs? "Waterproof walking boots or shoes are best; good grip is needed if you detour onto the rocks. This stretch of the coastline is clearly signposted, making it difficult to get lost."

Urban landscape PUTNEY BRIDGE TO HAMMERSMITH, LONDON

Simon Gill has lived in London for 30 years. He studied architecture at the University of Westminster and in Rome, as well as living in Spain for a year before returning to London. He established Simon Gill Architects in 1997, the offices of which overlook Putney Bridge.

Where do you walk? "From Putney Bridge to Hammersmith. Start at Putney Bridge tube station and simply follow the river to The Dove pub at Hammersmith. The walk suits all ages and dogs, and can be done on a bike but is much better on foot."

How did you discover it, and why do you like it? "I found it piece by piece, having visited many of the different riverside locations on separate occasions. I then realised it would make a very enjoyable walk if you simply linked them all together."

What sort of walk is it? "A walk of striking and enjoyable contrasts, for stimulation and relaxation. It is urban on the side you are walking, with a relaxing view of a surprisingly natural bank on the far side. There are elegant Georgian houses, decaying industrial wharves, beautiful trees and high-tech architecture, all looking onto a powerfully tidal river that sometimes smells of the sea."

How long does it take? "It is about two miles in length, so about forty-five minutes if done in one go. It's best taken at a leisurely pace, with plenty of stops. Start with a stiffener in The Eight Bells, the last remaining traditional homely pub in Fulham. See All Saints Church in Bishops Park and recall the film scene from *The Omen*, when the lightning conductor falls and impales Father Brennan, played by Patrick Troughton. Spot the many rowing clubs on Putney Embankment, and pass Craven Cottage, home of Fulham Football Club, the most attractive of all the London football grounds. Look into the windows of Rogers Stirk Harbour, Richard Rogers' architectural practice. Also look upward and see the high-tech, lightweight vault of the upper office that has been added to the main Victorian building. Stop for an espresso at Riverside Studios, home of many TV programmes, then pass under Hammersmith Bridge, London's prettiest river crossing. Avoid the temptation to stop at the Blue Anchor and the Rutland Arms – side-by-side pubs – and be enchanted as you squeeze through a little alleyway and enter The Dove. Walk through and take a seat on the river terrace for some well-earned refreshment."

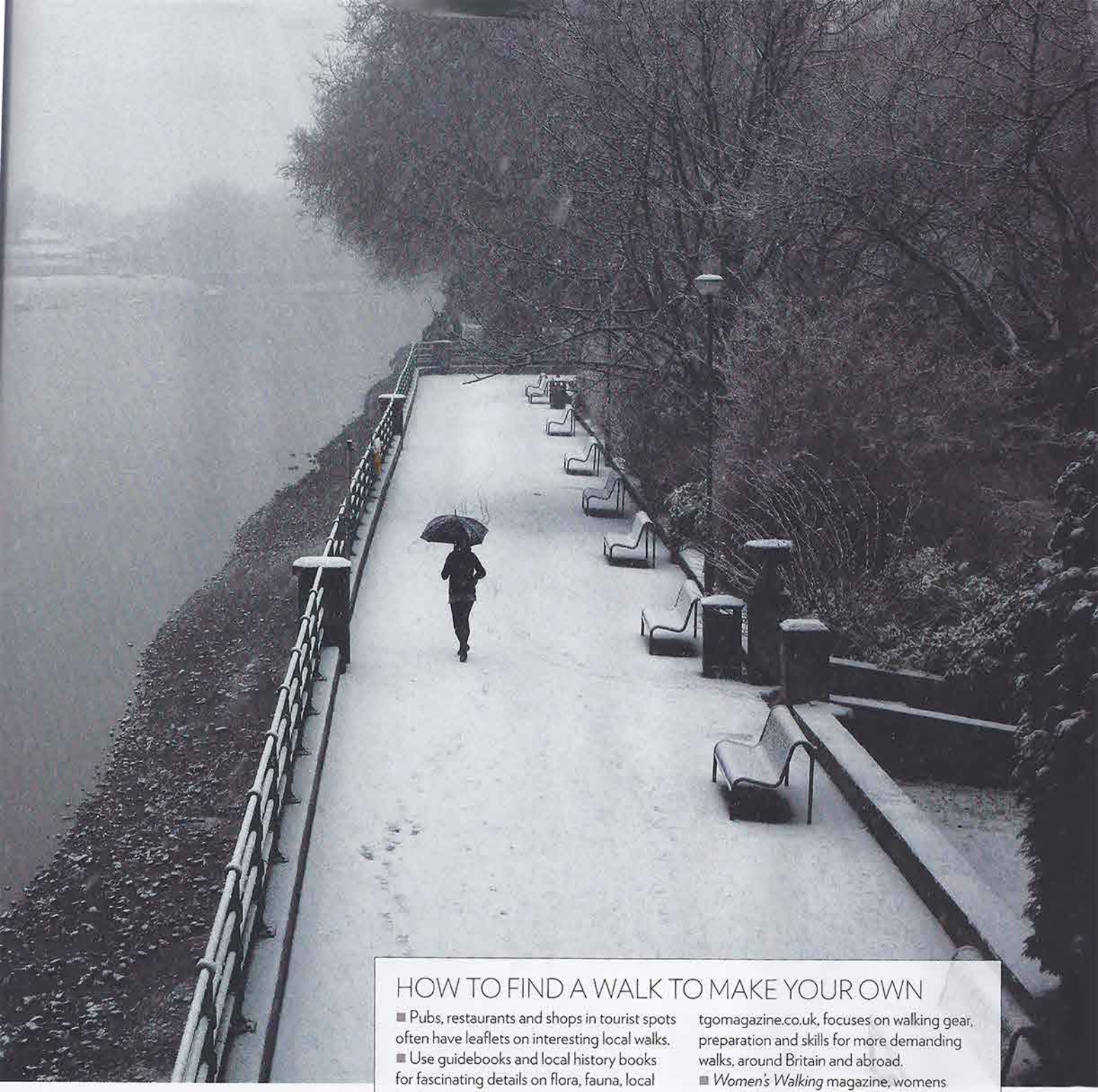
Wellingtons or walking boots, use a map or just follow the signs? "Any footwear is fine and just follow the river; on the odd stretch where you have to leave the riverbank, the way back is well signposted."

Mountain trail CNICHT, SNOWDONIA

In 1997, Alistair Hughes and his business partner purchased the firm that made beds for the Savoy Hotel, and built on its traditions of craftsmanship and luxury materials to create Savoir Beds, which now has showrooms worldwide. Alistair lives in London, and travels to the bedworks in Wales.

Where do you walk? "My favourite winter walk is in Snowdonia and involves a mountain called Cnicht, which is frequently called the Welsh Matterhorn, on account of its splendid peak. From the village Croesor (off the A4085, south of Beddgelert), you'll need an OS map (either Explorer OL17 or Landranger 115) but you follow a circular route round the village that provides breathtaking mountain scenery and views of Cardigan Bay, and takes you past old slate quarries. Our dog Spooky, a Boston terrier, and our daughter, Octavia, who was almost nine when she first did it, have both managed the walk although I did pop Spooky in my rucksack when the snow was deep."

How did you discover it, and why do you like it? "We love North Wales, and discovered it when looking for something in Snowdonia away from people. We love it because it is very



dramatic, but actually not as high or hard as many of the other peaks in the area, which is good for both dog and daughter."

What sort of walk is it? "You feel like an explorer. One attraction is that it's not crowded; last winter, in the snow, we saw no one else. It's the perfect way to put life in perspective."

How long does it take? "The route is about seven miles, but the ups and downs and walking with a ten-year-old mean it takes around six hours."

Wellingtons or walking boots, use a map or just follow the signs? "Walking boots and waterproofs are essential, as is a map."

HOW TO FIND A WALK TO MAKE YOUR OWN

- Pubs, restaurants and shops in tourist spots often have leaflets on interesting local walks.
- Use guidebooks and local history books for fascinating details on flora, fauna, local landmarks and geology.
- Walking groups may advertise their contact details at libraries and tourist offices.
- The Great British Walk map, on the National Trust's website at nationaltrust.org.uk, includes walking events, guided walks, two-day walks and dog walks nationwide.
- The walking charity Ramblers, ramblers.org.uk, has details of group-led walks and advice on rights of way and healthy walking.
- Walking Britain, walkingbritain.co.uk, specialises in footpath walks in National Parks, including the Lake District, Snowdonia, the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales.
- Monthly magazine *The Great Outdoors*, tgomagazine.co.uk, focuses on walking gear, preparation and skills for more demanding walks, around Britain and abroad.
- *Women's Walking* magazine, womenswalking.co.uk, has information on the health, fitness and beauty benefits of walking, as well as good advice about kit to buy on a budget.
- *Trail* magazine, liveforthеoutdoors.com, offers hillwalkers all they need to know about routes and kit, while *Trail Running*, trailrunningmag.co.uk, is for hill-running enthusiasts.
- TV and radio programmes, such as BBC1's *Countryfile* and Radio 4's *Ramblings* with Clare Balding, suggest routes for all levels.
- Many special interest groups arrange walks for those who share a passion, such as bird watching (rspb.org.uk), architecture (londonarchitecturewalks.com), foraging (ipsophyto.com), or ghosts (ghostwalkyork.co.uk). ■