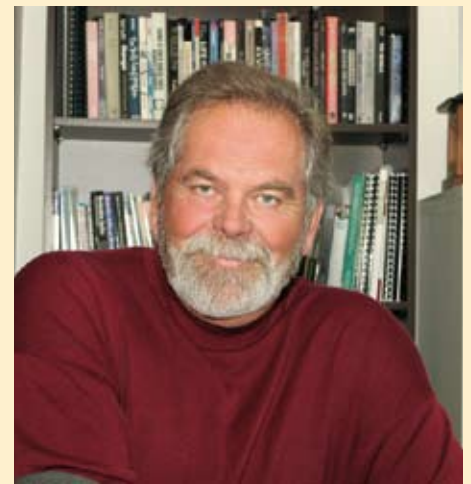


Dr. Rob Gordon

# Welcome to Devon: Some Survival Notes



**T**here are difficulties arising from regional terminologies in Britain.

Most of my family lives in the County of Devon where the word “grockle” is in frequent use amongst the locals. A grockle is a tourist, particularly a twit in a car with several screaming kids who gets stuck in the local lanes (most of which are about 5 feet wide) and who does not understand the “rules” about backing-up to the last lay-by he or she has passed.

Grockles are an irritant to locals because there are a lot of them between May and September and because they slow down commercial and social activity in the County. The fact that they are important for the local economy is usually overlooked.



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A couple of years ago, a member of my family tried to start a “Hug a Grockle” campaign, complete with bumperstickers, but was ridiculed and had to go live with one of her sisters in Exeter for 2 months.

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To avoid being labelled a grockle and, therefore, being treated with universal contempt, visitors must conduct themselves in particular ways and be properly clad. If at all possible, a visitor’s car should be small, crowded with junk, and covered in a fine layer of red mud. The soil is red in Devon. Having a dog with a red undercarriage is also very useful if you are hell-bent on “passing.” A bridle or some other piece of rural hardware, slung across the rear windowsill of the car, will help, as well.

There is an art to applying/acquiring the mud . . . it must look authentic. Real locals will spot a grockle in disguise very quickly if the mud is incorrectly applied. Disguised grockles are dealt with quite severely, so much so that it is far easier to simply leave the County or go live with a sister in Exeter.

Mud acquisition occurs naturally, often mysteriously, and sometimes overnight while the car is parked and the pixies are on the rampage. (More likely, a passing tractor towing a flat bearing milk churns.)

Some measure of success is achieved by driving at speed down a narrow lane in the rain—this gets the mud onto the roof of the car—and by deliberately driving in and out of a farmer’s field. A good buildup of mud and other stuff will occur if you follow a herd of cows heading back to the field after a good milking and a heavy meal.

Rubber boots—gum boots or wellies—are also a requirement, covered with several layers of red mud, of course, and a blob of cow poop on each toe. Again, they must be suitably layered. The natural look is essential.

If you can extend the mud to an oiled raincoat or rain jacket, so much the better. Gortex is definitely out . . . that is a dead giveaway because only grockles wear Gortex. The mud carries an aroma that adds an aura of authenticity.

Language is important, but should not be overdone, again because of detection issues such as too many “ooh-ahhs” coming from someone who clearly does not come from the appropriate social class. The full-blown Devonian brogue should come only from the mouths of members of the rural classes, not the farming classes (the new landed gentry) or

the “new Devonians,” those who have retired to the County from London and other undesirable places and who live in nice little cottages that, prior to “renovation,” used to be someone’s pig barn, stable, or outside toilet.

Likewise, brogue-laden terms such as “proper job” (translated as “well done” or “good thing”) sound silly coming from someone obviously not a genuine member of the correct social strata.

Two more things to note.

- If at all possible, travel with a genuine local such as a resident relative at all times. Among other things, this person will have the

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vehicle and the equipment—as well as the clothing—you need to move smoothly through town and village, and over field and beach.

- Emphasize or acquire a North American accent. This invokes pity: “Oh . . . it’s okay, he doesn’t understand. He’s an American.” Relatives also can use this to good advantage: “This is my brother Robert. He lives in Canada at the moment.”

This suggests you are only temporarily misguided in your choice of domicile and that, deep down, you continue to be built from hardened red mud. Being misguided carries an element of respect that is preferred over the scorn that can be heaped upon grockles in disguise.

All in all, the County of Devon, like other regions of Britain, can be a perilous place for the unwary and unknowing traveller. ▲

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