

THE hidden heart of England

From the stunning scenery of the Peak District to ancient cathedral towns and the endless sands of the east coast, the East Midlands promises some of the country's best-loved landscapes, says Mark Sutcliffe



THIS MONTH'S SITES



1. STAMFORD
See p153 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14*.



2. CARSINGTON WATER
See p144 of the *Directory*. **Facilities include a playground.**



3. MARKET RASEN RACECOURSE
See p148 of the *Directory*. **Facilities include a playground and a play area.**



4. SUTTON-ON-SEA
See p154 of the *Directory Supplement*. **Facilities include a playground.**



Stanage Edge Rocks – a jewel in the Peak District's crown

FOOD + DRINK



Kings Head

This Stamford inn offers an intimate atmosphere and high-quality traditional pub fare. On chilly days, get there early and grab a spot by the wood burner.

Contact: 01780 753510

Nearest featured site: Stamford

The Barley Mow

This pub in Bonsall, Derbyshire, has excellent ales, live music and the considerable honour of hosting the World Hen Championships every August.



Contact: 01629 825685, barleymowbonsall.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Carsington Water

Wold View House

It's easy to miss, but Wold View House near Tealby in the Lincolnshire Wolds has one of the best tea rooms in the region. Take in the wonderful Wold views while supping your cuppa.

Contact: 01673 838226, woldviewhouse.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Market Rasen Racecourse



The Beck

This bar, grill and restaurant in Mablethorpe serves up a delicious carvery every day of the week and has a wide selection of dishes from the grill including lamb shank and sirloin steak.

Contact: 01507 472999, thebeck.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Sutton-on-Sea



Traditional fun at Mablethorpe

Quintessential England is a long sought-after place, but it often pops up where you least expect it. If by 'quintessential England' we mean bucolic pastures, sylvan hills and historic, stone-hewn towns, then the East Midlands has it all. Because they are often overlooked in favour of the Cotswold Hills or quaint Oxfordshire hamlets, the little-explored counties of Northamptonshire, Rutland and Lincolnshire have an authenticity about them which is charming and refreshing.

The Peak District is far more famous, and for good reason – its magnificent landscapes are the picture-postcard scenes which attract many visitors to England.

But whether you're discovering a half-timbered tea room for the first time or revisiting your favourite hilltop view, a tour of this English heartland will lack in neither interest nor beauty.

Our first site, eight miles south of Stamford, lies on the cusp of the East Midlands where the agricultural flatlands of the Fens give way to pleasant hills and sheep-studded pastureland. Situated next to peaceful Fineshade Wood, the 84-pitch Stamford Club site offers a mix of hardstanding and grass pitches within a

tranquil tree-edged meadow. There's no toilet block, but that makes it quieter than more well-equipped sites and most caravanners come here for a restful, nature-inspired break.

The pleasures of the great outdoors are always close at hand. Fineshade Wood offers miles of accessible footpaths through ancient broadleaf and conifer woodland, and the surrounding country lanes are perfect for cycling – bikes can be hired at the shop just 200 yards from the site. Red kites were successfully reintroduced to nearby Rockingham Forest in 2000 and the fork-tailed raptors are now regularly seen circling above the site. Bird-lovers will also enjoy a trip to Rutland Water, only one of two nesting sites in England for ospreys.

The tranquillity of the Stamford site is only disturbed during the Burghley Horse Trials (4-7 September this year). If you don't mind a busy site though, you may like to combine your stay with a day at this equestrian event, which ranks as one of the leading three-day horse trials in the world.

Burghley House, where the trials are set, is a magnificent attraction in itself. Just outside Stamford, the grand Elizabethan house boasts more than 100 rooms, beautiful gardens and a fine restaurant.

"Most caravanners come to Stamford Club site for a restful, nature-inspired break"

A stay on the site wouldn't be complete without a trip to Stamford itself, a wonderful Georgian town crammed with pretty stone townhouses, artisan gift shops and fantastic pubs.

PEAK VIEWING

Moving further north and west, The Club site at Carsington Water brings you to the edge of the Peak District and some of the most beautiful scenery in Britain. Set among a pine plantation, the site feels smaller than its 130 pitches thanks to the trees which offer a degree of privacy and quietude. The toilet block and washing facilities were refurbished a couple of years ago and the place is now spotlessly clean and modern – you'll even be serenaded in the shower by BBC Radio 2. Families are well-catered for with two playing areas, a laundry room and an on-

site shop which sells essentials such as milk, bread and eggs as well as maps, newspapers and ice creams.

The site enjoys a fantastic location next to Carsington Reservoir, where watersport enthusiasts can choose between sailing, kayaking and windsurfing. Those who prefer land-based activities can cycle or walk around the reservoir's shores, or settle down for a spot of trout fishing.

If it's walking you're after, you'd be best advised to head a few miles west into the Peak District National Park. Here you'll find an exquisite landscape of willow-green dales, clear-water streams and dramatic hills. Famous Dovedale with its iconic stepping stones and cliffs dotted with caves is only 12 miles away from the site and will be a guaranteed hit with all connoisseurs of the great outdoors.

On rainy days, the towns of Ashbourne and Matlock offer good shops and cafés, while Chatsworth House – known to some as Mr Darcy's Pemberley in the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* – is one of the finest stately homes in the country.

Sir Richard Arkwright's Masson Mills, just six miles north of the site, also offers a fascinating glimpse into the heritage of the area with its working textile museum. >>

FOR THE FAMILY



Top Lodge, Fineshade Wood

The adventure playground here will keep kids entertained for hours, and the whole family can explore the forest on pushchair-friendly footpaths and safe cycle tracks.

Contact: 01623 822447, forestry.gov.uk/toplodge

Nearest featured site: Stamford

Crich Tramway Village

Take a trip on a vintage tram with glorious views of the Peak District's Derwent Valley. There are lots of indoor activities for kids, too.



Contact: 01773 854321, tramway.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Carsington Water

Great Days Out member offer:

two for the price of one – not valid on premier events; only one voucher per party (see caravanclub.co.uk/gdo)

Woodside Wildlife and Falconry Park

This park north-east of Lincoln has the UK's only white wolves, and it will acquire its first tigers this spring.

Contact: 01522 754280, woodsidefalconry.com

Nearest featured site: Market Rasen Racecourse



Mablethorpe Seal Sanctuary and Wildlife Centre



This sanctuary specialises in rescuing seals and reintroducing them into the wild but it also looks after birds of prey and seabirds such as guillemots, razorbills and puffins.

Contact: 01507 473346, thesealsanctuary.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Sutton-on-Sea

Lincoln Cathedral

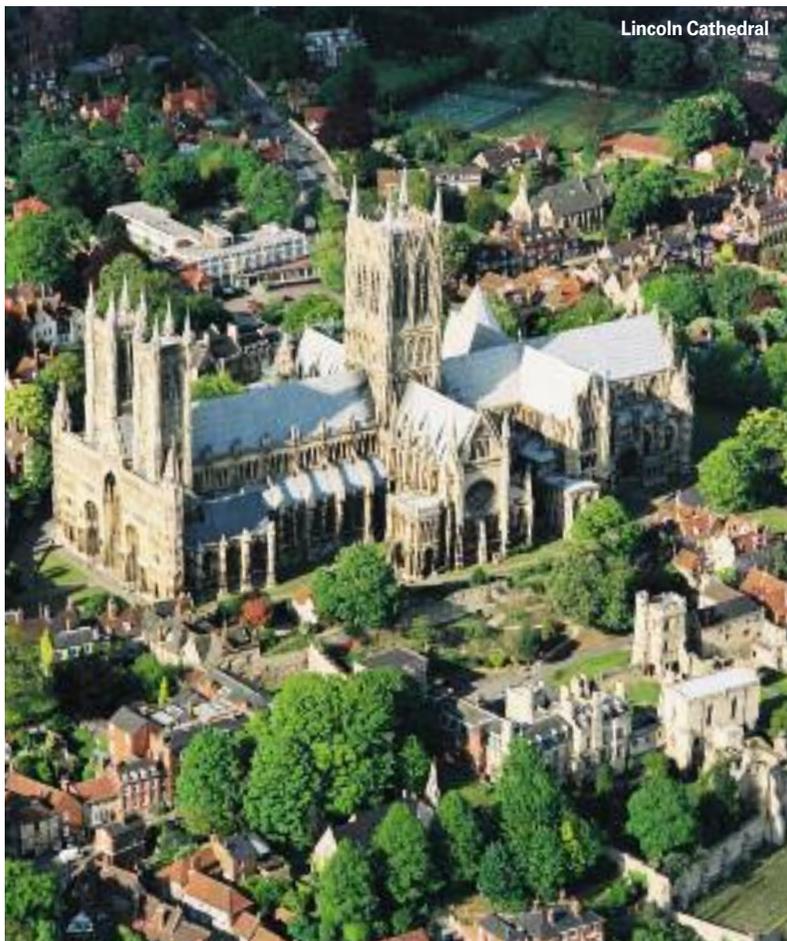


Photo: Visit Lincoln

For our third site, we move northwards from one of the most famous landscapes in Britain to one of the most underrated and little known. Market Rasen Racecourse Club site lies on the edge of the Lincolnshire Wolds, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty comprising gentle rolling hills and quiet farmland. In the otherwise low-lying lands of Lincolnshire, this undulating escarpment is one of the prettiest spots in eastern England, offering fine views and plentiful opportunities for walking and cycling. One of the most beautiful walks starts from Tealby, only four miles from the site, and

“Visible even from the Wolds, Lincoln’s jewel is its cathedral, a masterpiece of Gothic architecture”

features the pretty village of Walesby and its handsome Ramblers’ Church – so called due its popularity as a meeting point for walkers in the 1930s.

MARKET FORCE

The site occupies a pleasant spot next to the racecourse and a nine-hole golf course. With 55 grass pitches, it’s mostly a quiet and relaxed spot, except on race weekends when things get more lively. The toilet block isn’t as modern as the one at Carsington Water, but you can’t fault the cleanliness or the constant supply of hot water.

The small market town of Market Rasen, with its huddle of small shops and restaurants, is only a one-mile walk away, but if you only have one day for a town visit, Lincoln is an absolute must. Visible even from the Wolds, the city’s jewel is its

Race day at Market Rasen



CULTURE



Rutland Open Air Theatre

Every summer Tolethorpe Hall outside Stamford transforms its gardens into a Shakespearean drama-fest. This year’s plays include *As You Like It* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Performances run from June to August.

Contact: 01780 756133 (box office), stamfordshakespeare.co.uk
Nearest featured site: Stamford

Gunby Hall

A handsome 18th-century country house with eight acres of walled gardens and 100 acres of parkland. Its collection of art and crafts include wallpaper by William Morris and paintings by Sir Joshua Reynolds.



Contact: 01754 890102, nationaltrust.org.uk/gunbyhall
Nearest featured site: Sutton-on-Sea



Lincoln Cathedral

In medieval times, this cathedral was the tallest building in the world – it’s still an awe-inspiring sight today. Inside, admire the soaring ribbed vaults and unique rose windows.

Contact: 01522 545458, visitlincoln.com
Nearest featured site: Market Rasen Racecourse

Masson Mills

Located at Matlock Bath and dating from 1783, this is the best-preserved example of a Richard Arkwright cotton mill.

Contact: 01629 581001, massonmills.co.uk
Nearest featured sites: Carsington Water



OUTDOOR FUN



Photo: Visit Peak District/Rod Edwards

Dovedale

Even reluctant walkers will fall under Dovedale's spell. The path follows the River Dove as it carves its way through lovely limestone hills, exposing dramatic rock architecture and yawning caves along the way.

Contact: 01335 343666, visitpeakdistrict.com

Nearest featured site: Carsington Water

Lincolnshire Wolds

Quiet and understated, the Wolds' comely hills still capture the imagination. Walk the footpaths around Tealby or explore the 69-mile Lindsey Trail on horseback.

Contact: 01507 609740, lincswolds.org.uk

Nearest featured site: Market Rasen Racecourse



Photo: Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service



Cycling

For cycling in the Peak District, The Pennine Cycleway includes the popular traffic-free Tissington and Longendale Trails. In the East Midlands, National Cycle Network Route 1 is a long-distance route that passes through Boston and Lincoln and heads north up to Hull.

Contact: sustrans.org.uk

Lincolnshire coast

Little ones will be content with a bucket and spade and maybe a donkey ride on the beaches at Mablethorpe and Skegness, while adults can spot birdlife in the Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes.

Contact: 01507 601111, visitskegnessandmablethorpe.com

Nearest featured site: Sutton-on-Sea

cathedral – a masterpiece of Gothic architecture displaying both grandeur and subtle intricacy. Its castle and Dickensian-style shopping street, Steep Hill (its name doesn't deceive!), complete Lincoln's magical medieval ambience.

The final stop on this East Midlands tour brings us to the seaside. The spacious Sutton-on-Sea Club site has 113 pitches (two-thirds of which are hardstanding) spread over more than eight acres of grassy, tree-fringed meadow. Thanks to its enviable location near the coast, the site can fill up over the summer months but there are ample toilet and laundry facilities to cope with the numbers.

It lies one mile south of town at lovely-sounding Sandilands. Only three-quarters of a mile from the site, the beach is the same

empty, golden type that you find in north Norfolk and Northumberland – walkers will revel in the vast expanse of sand and salty air. Sutton-on-Sea itself only has a traffic-free promenade and a handful of shops, but nearby Mablethorpe has a host of family attractions, including the Seal Sanctuary and Wildlife Centre, a fairground and the obligatory crazy golf course.

Away from the coast, the charming town of Alford still holds a market every Tuesday (the fish stall is particularly good) and its unique five-sailed windmill is a wonderful relic from the 19th century. Built in 1837, it has been fully restored to working order and visitors to the tea room can now enjoy a cream tea with scones made from locally milled flour – a very civilised way to round off a tour of England's eastern heartland.

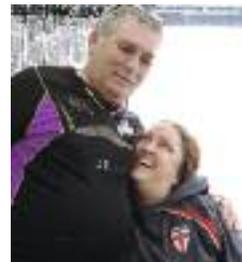
MEMBERS' VIEWS



William and Joan Stanley from Warwickshire were staying at Stamford. "We're country folk at heart and we like coming here to walk through the woods and enjoy the wildlife. The birds are wonderful – especially in spring time – and you get to see so many different species. We come here three or four times a year."

Chris and Julia Scrimshaw, with Millie the cocker spaniel, were also enjoying a stay at Stamford. "We only live a few miles away, but it might as well be another country. You are straight out into the woods from your pitch and we take the dog for about three walks a day. We're usually happy just to relax on the site, but Rutland Water is only a short drive away and the unfinished stately home of Lyeveden New Bield, near Oundle is a really fascinating place."

Kenneth and Sue McIlwaine from North Yorkshire were pitched on the Sutton-on-Sea site. "If you are disabled like me, it's a great site," said Sue. "The pitches are really generous, so you can keep the car close to the caravan, and the facilities are roomy with special disabled pitches really close by. It's really peaceful and quiet here, but you can have a little drive into Sutton and Skegness is only a short drive away."



Also on site at Sutton-on-Sea were **Susan and Alan Ashby** from South Yorkshire. "This is such a nice, peaceful site. We've been coming here for years. We pitch up on a Friday afternoon and after a cup of tea, we enjoy a walk

along the prom in Sutton and get an ice cream on the way back. You can get straight onto the beach from the site and Mablethorpe is just a short drive away with plenty of shops and pubs."



Club Together

The online community that just keeps growing

To read even more member views, see our fantastic online forum at caravanclub.co.uk/together