Don Jolly finds a raft of ideas for those seeking an activity break in Teesside – from watersports to birdwatching.

### Stock Options

Stockton-on-Tees doesn’t sound like the sort of place to go for an activity break. It was founded in an industry, iron, steel and shipbuilding among its cornerstones, and the first passenger train ran on rails from here to Darlington in 1825, hauled by George Stephenson’s Locomotive No 1.

In recent years, however, industry has declined considerably and given way to a greener landscape, in the midst of which lies the Club’s White Water Park site. Whereas it’s close to the nearest outdoor activity on hand.

### Touring: Activity Breaks

Main image: white-water rafting at the Tees Barrage is a thrilling sport.

Inset: the area is a haven for twitchers.

### Information

#### Contact
- **Portrack Marsh nature reserve** – see teeswildlife.org/new/portrack
- **Tees Barrage International White Water Centre** – call 01642 678000 or see tbiwwc.com
- **Infinity pedestrian and cycle bridge** – see teeswildlife.org/new/portrack

#### Did you know?
- Team GB won two medals – a gold and a silver – in canoeing at the 2012 Olympics.

### Catch of the day

“...At Portrack Marsh about 100 bird species are recorded annually...”

### Watching the birdies

‘O activities easily accessible from the site include birdwatching, Fishing and walking. Just beyond The Tarpole is the 50-acre Portrack Marsh nature reserve. A round 90-100 bird species are recorded here annually, including numerous wildfowl and waders, warblers, tits and finches. Occasionally, real rarities show up, such as the vendee (inset). There are also a large and varied butterfly population. In the distance, you can see Middlesbrough’s Transporter Bridge, one of only a handful still operating around the world. Fishing is possible from the banks of the Tees nearby, with bream, dace, roach, perch and pike possible catches. Head further upstream for cleaner waters.

You could also head upstream as a walker or cyclist, following the Teesdale Way. Within yards you pass under the curvaceous Infinity pedestrian and cycle bridge, opened in 2009, and at Catterlegate, just beyond the Tarrilium footbridge at Stockton centre, is moored a replica of HM Bark Endeavour (visits by prior arrangement), a ship used by Captain James Cook on his first voyage of discovery to Australia and New Zealand in 1768-71.

You need to go beyond Yarm to leave the urban landscape behind and, if you want to avoid it altogether, drive farther inland, beyond Middletton-in-Teesdale, to walk more interesting sections of the river around High Force waterfall.

Alternatively, you could drive to Great Ayton for a walk in the Cleveland Hills, perhaps to the summit of Rosebery Topping, only eight miles from Stockton. Barely at hundred feet high, it is visible from the Tees. It’s a short, fairly steep climb from the village of Newton-under-Roseberry, longer and rather easier from Great Ayton, but the reward is magnificent all-round views from the summit, it often hinged to the North Sea, south across the North York Moors, west to the Pennines, and north to Middlesbrough and beyond.

### Walking the white-water

Don’t hang up for a run on the Diamond course, only the next run and, as you progress, more water is released to increase the level of excitement. As a finale to, you might be up for a run on the Placid course, only 95m long but with a drop of 3.7m, making it one of the steepest in the country. Two hours of adrenaline-pumping activity costs £50, including use of waterproofs, buoyancy aid, helmet and, of course, splashability.

If you want to go kayaking, you need to be experienced to British Canoe Union (BCU) Grade 3 to use the white-water courses. Then you can take your own kayak. Otherwise you can hire demo vessels from Northshore Watersports’ shop at the reception building.

If you are a complete novice, you can take part in one- and two-day courses for Grade 1, 2 and 3, starting from £75 per person. Courses take place on the Placid Flat Water Lake, where you will learn basic moves like a water roll. For white-water kayaking you must be able to complete a moving water roll.

After a couple of hours on the water, refreshments wouldn’t go amiss and you can either use the café at the reception building. The Tarpole, alfresco pub and restaurant overlooking the facility, is rated one of the best in the UK. Following recent redevelopment, the NorthShore Watersports’ shop at the reception building is open from 9am to 6pm and has everything you need to go kayaking, from waterproofs, buoyancy aids, helmets and other equipment.

Don’t forget the souvenir shop and on the way to go kayaking, you need to go beyond Yarm to leave the urban landscape behind and, if you want to avoid it altogether, drive farther inland, beyond Middletton-in-Teesdale, to walk more interesting sections of the river around High Force waterfall.

### Sites

Full details of White Water Park Caravan Club Site can be found on p144 of the Sites Directory & Handbook 2011/12. To book, call 01342 327690 or see caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook.