Tales of the unexpected

Surprises await round every corner during Elizabeth Fowler’s four-site tour of North-East England and Scotland’s Border country.

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**TOUNING: CLUB SITES**

**THIS MONTH’S SITES**

1. **TEESDALE BARNARD CASTLE**
   - Facilities include a playground.

2. **DURHAM GRANGE**
   - See p189 of the Directory.
   - Facilities include a playground.

3. **OLD HARTLEY**
   - See p192 of the Directory.

4. **LIDALIACH**

You can book your pitch online at [caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook](http://caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook) or by calling our Advance Booking Service on 01342 327490.

Please call Affiliated Sites directly.

Deserted sandy beach – a typical out-of-season Northumberland scene.
FOOD + DRINK

Situated in Seaton Sluice overlooking a picturesque estuary, this hotel/restaurant/bar boasts an interesting and tasty menu – a black good. The building dates from the 1830s.

**T Elliot & Sons**

Contact: waterfordsarms.co.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Telford

**Green Café on the Green**

This delightful café, which serves fresh home-made food, is located in the 15th-century almshouses between Durham’s castle and cathedral.

Contact: 0191 334 3688

**Nearest featured site:** Durham

**Waterford Arms**

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erryness – ‘making unexpected and delightful discoveries by accident’ – aptly describes many moments of my wonderful tour of North East England (including a brief dash across the Scottish border).

Wherever you turn, this region is steeped in dramatic history. This rugged and spectacular landscape was the centre for learning and art in England in the 6th and 7th centuries – scholars from all over Europe would come to Northumberland’s religious houses where monks were creating some of the most beautiful documents in our nation’s history. The amazing illuminated Lindisfarne Gospels, now safely encased in London’s British Library, are believed to have been created in honour of St Cuthbert whose shrine can be found in Durham Cathedral.

This once powerful and wealthy region boasts more castles than any other in Britain – indeed, there are 70 castles in Northumberland alone. It can also boast more battle sites than anywhere else in the country – much of the damage being done by the infamous Border Reivers (whose ranks comprised both Scottish and English families who raided the border country from the late 13th to the early 17th centuries). Borderers from Scandinavia also turned up here to wreak havoc.

**CASTLE KING**

All of course, is much quieter now and I started my regional tour at Barnard Castle, where the eponymous fortress sits majestically above this small, idyllic town full of individual local shops – and, handily, a couple of small supermarkets. The Club’s Teesdale Barnard Castle site is not a pleasant 10-minute walk from the centre of town. The site, which is located in a designated area of High Landscape Value, is laid out in terraces and its 76 well-spaced-out pitches all offer lovely views. On-site amenities include baby changing facilities, a playground and a play area, so this is a good location for members with children. It’s also a popular venue with walkers, the glorious surrounding countryside ideal for a ramble or two.

On the evening I arrived, the sun was shining and I enjoyed a delightful walk around town, one of the highlights of which was a visit to The Bowes Museum. An eye-catching French château housing a renowned collection of art, The Bowes Museum also boasts beautiful grounds – including an immaculate formal garden, lovely woodland walks with a Nature Trail and a new children’s play area. A perfect start to my holiday.

En route to the historical city of Durham, my next destination, I collected some tourist information and discovered that there was to be a special opening with music, song and dance at Beamish Museum (which tells the story of Life in the North East during three eras – the 1820s, 1890s and 1940s), that evening – and what a splendid event it turned out to be!

Wandering this fascinating open-air living museum’s little streets, there were musicians and dancers everywhere. A group of young women performed an astonishing sword routine where, at speed, they clog-danced and weaved intricate moves that saw the swords they held form complex patterns. Great fun.

Having pitched up at The Club’s Durham Grange site – an open and level location covering 12 acres and, like Teesdale Barnard Castle, offering 76 pitches – I found myself enjoying more dancing entertainment the following evening. There just happened to be a single space seat (erryness at work again) at Durham’s Gala Theatre for a performance by the excellent Birmingham Royal Ballet.

TOURING + CLUB SITES

**TOURING**

**Bowes Museum Café**

With free parking and access to the Barnard Castle located museum’s lovely grounds, this hotel/restaurant/bar boasts an interesting and tasty menu – a black good. The building dates from the 1830s.

Contact: 01833 600606, thebowesmuseum.org.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Telford Barnard Castle

**FOR THE FAMILY**

**Barnard Castle**

This magnificent ruined fortress stands guard over the town on a rocky outcrop, offering fascinating views over the Tees gorge.

Contact: 01833 636312, englishheritage.org

**Nearest featured site:** Teesdale Barnard Castle

**Beamish Museum**

This fascinating outdoor living museum, set in 360 acres of Co Durham countryside, tells the story of life in North East England during the 1820s, 1900s and 1940s.

Contact: 0191 370 4000, beamish.org.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Durham Grange

**Segedunum Roman Fort, Baths & Museum**

Head to Wallsend at the eastern end of Hadrian’s Wall for a wonderful ancient history lesson. The bath house will be closed until 2015 owing to maintenance work.

Contact: 0191 336 5347, segedunumromanfort.org.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Old Hartley

**Rock UK Whithaugh Park Adventure Centre**

Set in 110 acres of the Scottish Borders, this centre enables you to try your hand at activities including rock climbing, abseiling, gorge-walking, archery, canoeing and grass-skiing. There is also a 300m zip wire and swimming pool here.

Contact: 01387 375394, rockuk.org

**Nearest featured site:** Lidia

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I have stayed at Durham Grange before and do so enjoy it. It is very easy to get into the city by bus – there’s a stop just 3/4 mile from the site. You can also stroll into the centre if you wish. Durham, though compact, has such a lot to see, but I’d pick out the following as musts – the cathedral and castle, Crook Hall Gardens, the Oriental Museum (displaying Asian art and culture) and a cruise on the River Wear. You may need to allow a few days here to take in all Durham has to offer.

BESIDE THE SEASIDE
Mingling on over the River Tyne, Old Hartley Caravan Club Site is right by the sea, just a stone’s throw from the 19th-century St Mary’s Island lighthouse. Now under the ownership of the National Trust, the lighthouse was completed in 1898 and is well worth a visit – the island itself also has appeal as a nature reserve with a bird population of national importance. Offering 64 pitches, Old Hartley slopes towards the sea – so you’ll need levelling blocks (and steel pegs if you’re taking an awning). There’s a good pub just 100 yards or so from the site entrance, while buses run from nearby to Wooler and Alnwick.

“Old Hartley is the ideal site from which to enjoy all the traditional sandy seaside fare on offer at Whitley Bay”
Walking

The countryside around Barnard Castle offers an abundance of walking opportunities. If you don’t fancy a hilly route, take a gentle riverside stroll below Egglestone Abbey.

Nearest featured site: Teesdale Barnard Castle

The glorious woods around the site are home to owls, roe deer and red squirrels, while overhead you may spot a flying harrier, buzzard or merlin. Not only is this an amazing and unspoilt area for wildlife, it’s also a paradise for those who love outdoor activities – you can enjoy fantastic country walks, cycle the 7 Stanes Mountain Bike Trail and fish on Liddel Water, while a visit to Rock UK will satisfy those who have a thirst for something a little more thrilling.

Short drives from the site will take you to Hadrian’s Wall, the historic border towns and the Mary Queen of Scots Visitor Centre (in Jedburgh).

I love this part of Britain and always find wonderful new things to experience, many of them unexpected discoveries – I’m sure good fortune will be with you as you tour this delightful region, too.

Cycling

There are numerous cycling and walking routes in North East England. For a coastal ride, try the Coast and Castles South Route (National Cycle Network Route 1). Waly to Wear (MCR07) is another popular route, or cross the region east to west on the Reivers cycle route.

Contact: sustrans.org.uk

Northumberland: The Lady of the North

A unique land sculpture of a reclining female figure set in a 46-acre community park with free public access near Cramlington. She measures 100ft high and a quarter of a mile long and boasts four miles of wheelchair-accessible footpaths.

Contact: 0191 284 6884, northumblandia.com

Nearest featured site: Old Hartley

The online community that just keeps growing

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

Eoin and Barbara Nolan from Derbyshire were staying at Teesdale Barnard Castle. “This is our second visit as we so enjoyed our first. We really like the area. Barnard Castle is an old-worldy town with lots of nice small shops and you can enjoy a lovely stroll down by the river.”

Jacqueline Campbell and Elizabeth and William Snee were staying at Lidalia. “This is a most relaxing, pretty and quiet site with very helpful and friendly owners. We’ve been coming here for years and have just joined in a great 25th anniversary party for the site. There are lots of lovely walks and a useful new bridge over the river that leads to the forest area.”

Michael and Helen Shaw are from South Devon. “Old Hartley is a lovely site with fabulous views of the sea and lighthouse. The pub above the site has lots of good real ales on tap. One interest of ours is industrial archaeology and there is so much fascinating history around here.”

MEMBERS’ VIEWS

Prince Bishop River Cruise

Cruise along the River Wear and enjoy fabulous views of historic Durham – a full commentary tells you everything you need to know.

Contact: 0191 386 9525, princebishoprc.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Durham Grange

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