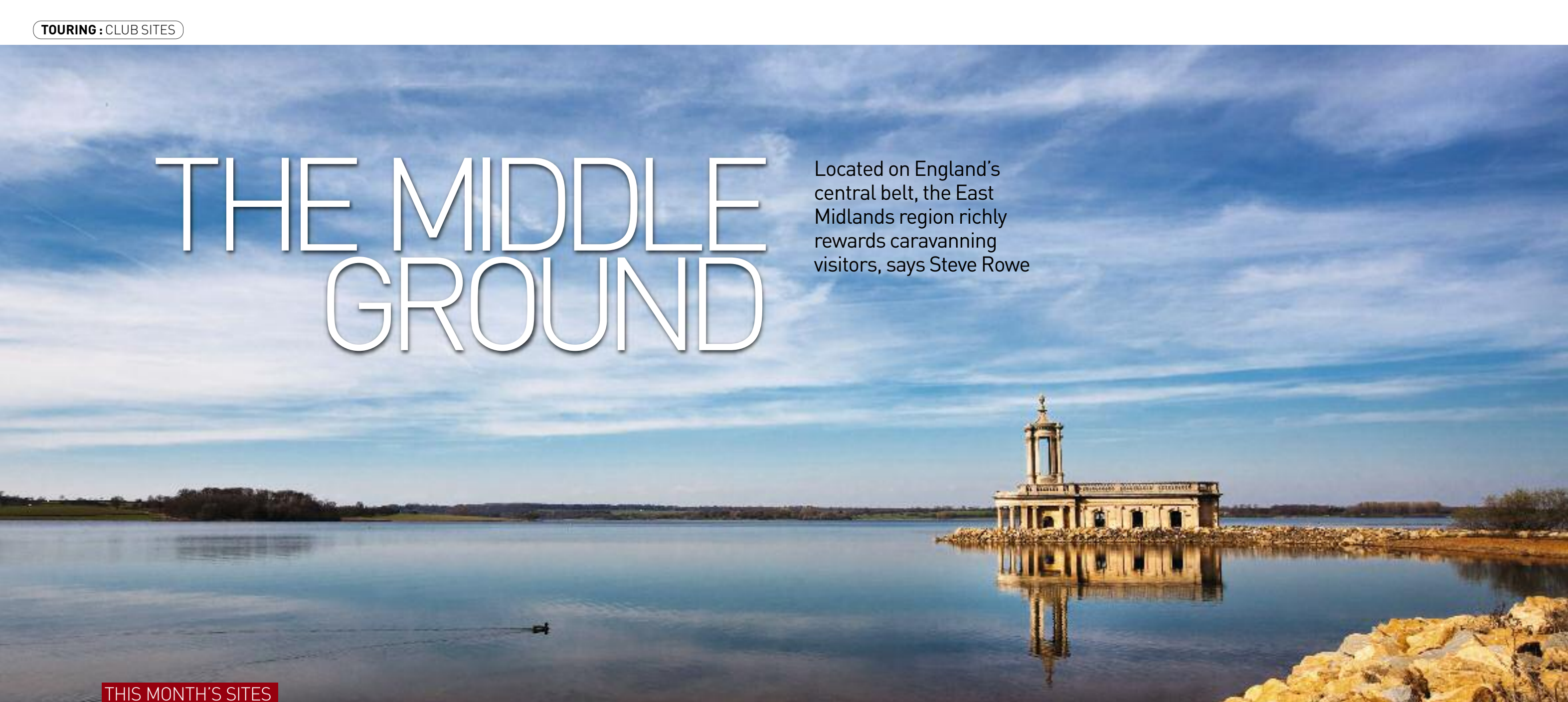


# THE MIDDLE GROUND

Located on England's central belt, the East Midlands region richly rewards caravanning visitors, says Steve Rowe



## THIS MONTH'S SITES



### 1. RUTLAND CARAVAN & CAMPING SITE AS

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, turn to p161 of the 2015/16 Directory. **Facilities include a playground, games room and, from early 2015, swimming pool.**



### 2. CLUMBER PARK

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, turn to p156 of the 2015/16 Directory. **Facilities include a playground.**



### 3. WAGTAIL COUNTRY PARK AS

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, turn to p166 of the 2015/16 Directory.



### 4. THE FIRS

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, turn to p165 of the 2015/16 Directory.



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.



## FOOD + DRINK



### Everest Inn

You know when somewhere is the best place to eat in town when it's the only place that's jam packed on a Monday evening, as was the case with this Grantham restaurant where I enjoyed a stunning curry.

**Contact:** 01476 567294, everestinngrantham.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Wagtail Country Park

### Fresh Ground

In the centre of Belper on King Street, this stylish café serves some superb light meals, with a great selection of loose leaf and herbal teas plus fresh ground coffee.



**Contact:** 01773 828800, freshgroundbelper.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** The Firs



### The Herb Nursery

This small, family-run nursery specialises in growing herbs, wild flowers, cottage garden plants and scented-leaf pelargoniums, so it's a great place to buy herbs to use in the caravan or take home with you.

**Contact:** 01572 767658, herbnursery.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Rutland

### Lime House Café

This charming café is attached to the Harley Gallery near Worksop and offers a great selection of cakes, light meals and coffee. There's outside seating for sunny days.



**Contact:** 01909 542704, harleygallery.co.uk/visit/lime-house-cafe  
**Nearest featured site:** Clumber Park



Steep Hill in the historic city of Lincoln

**M**y journey of discovery in the heart of England takes in parts of Rutland and Nottinghamshire, touches Lincolnshire, and ends in the Peak District in Derbyshire.

My first stop, the Affiliated Rutland Caravan and Camping Site, is run by friendly staff and boasts well-kept facilities to rival those at many of The Club's own sites. Of particular interest to families, a new indoor swimming pool is set to open early in 2015. The site offers 132 pitches, 66 of which are hardstanding, and has a security entrance barrier for peace of mind. Pets are welcome and the reception has a well-stocked shop (I can recommend the fresh free-range eggs!).

The main focus in this part of the world is Rutland Water, a man-made lake that is home to a host of attractions, including a nature reserve, sailing clubs, fly fishing centres and rock climbing.

For the less active, a number of historic towns and villages, including Oakham and, slightly further afield, Stamford, are

waiting to be explored. I'd also suggest a visit to the Rutland Falconry and Owl Centre, especially if you have little ones. Here, you can watch exciting flying displays, then spend some of your hard-earned in the gift shop and café.

#### PARK LIFE

Next stop on my Midlands tour was Clumber Park Club site, not far from Worksop. Large and spacious (it covers 20 acres within 4,000 acres of glorious parkland), it boasts 178 pitches (87 of which are hardstanding) and all the usual Club facilities, including a couple of heated toilet blocks. The only frustration here is a rather poor mobile phone signal, probably owing to all the surrounding trees, but that's actually a good excuse to just relax and enjoy your time here with no distractions!

The park, owned by the National Trust, has a visitor centre and café, and is perfect for keen walkers and cyclists.

If your kids become bored with playing in and exploring the woodland surrounding the site, then take them to Creswell Crags

near Worksop. This limestone gorge, with a museum and heritage centre, is home to Britain's only known Ice Age cave art.

For families with older children, Mr Straw's House in Worksop is well worth a visit – preserved by the National Trust, this modest semi-detached house has remained virtually unchanged since the Straw family moved here in the 1920s. They lived here for over 60 years and changed very little in the house in all that time. A fascinating glimpse of post First World War life.

While in Worksop, do pop along to the Harley Gallery (the car park here is suitable for motorhomes). As well as the gallery itself, which puts on changing displays of craft and visual art, there is a large garden centre and the Lime House Café, which serves a tasty selection of home-made cakes, beverages and light lunches.

#### WILD IN THE COUNTRY

My next destination was another Affiliated Site, this time the tranquil Wagtail Country Park near Grantham in Lincolnshire. Boasting 76 generously-proportioned

pitches, many of which are screened by shrubs and borders to offer privacy, this lovely site attracts an abundance of wildlife including birds, hares and the occasional deer. Recently earning a David Bellamy Conservation Gold Award, the country park has its own fishing lakes, stocked with rudd, perch, carp and more.

If you're staying here with the kids, one of the big local draws is Ancaster Leisure Enterprises, an outdoor activity centre near Grantham – try your hand at go-karting, quad biking, paintballing and more.

For the less active, the National Trust's Woolsthorpe Manor, also near Grantham, should be on your itinerary. This is the birthplace and family home of world-famous physicist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton. Born in 1642, Newton made many of his most important discoveries about light and gravity here.

Other local attractions include Belton House and Belvoir Castle, while the historic cathedral city of Lincoln and the aforementioned town of Grantham are also nearby. I spent a wet Monday evening in >>

## FOR THE FAMILY

### Ancaster Leisure Enterprises

In a perfect rural location near Grantham, this family-run business offers a host of activities including go-karting, quad biking, paintballing and 10-pin bowling.

**Contact:** 01400 230306, ancasterkarting.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Wagtail Country Park



### Clumber Park

Surrounding The Club site that shares its name, this lovely National Trust country park boasts 3,800 acres of stunning woodland – perfect for an active family day out.

**Contact:** 01909 544917, nationaltrust.org.uk/clumber-park  
**Nearest featured site:** Clumber Park



### Heage Windmill

A Grade II listed building, this is the only working stone-towered, multi-sailed windmill in England. Set in the Derbyshire countryside, it offers scenic views towards the Derwent Valley.

**Contact:** 01773 853579, heagewindmill.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** The Firs

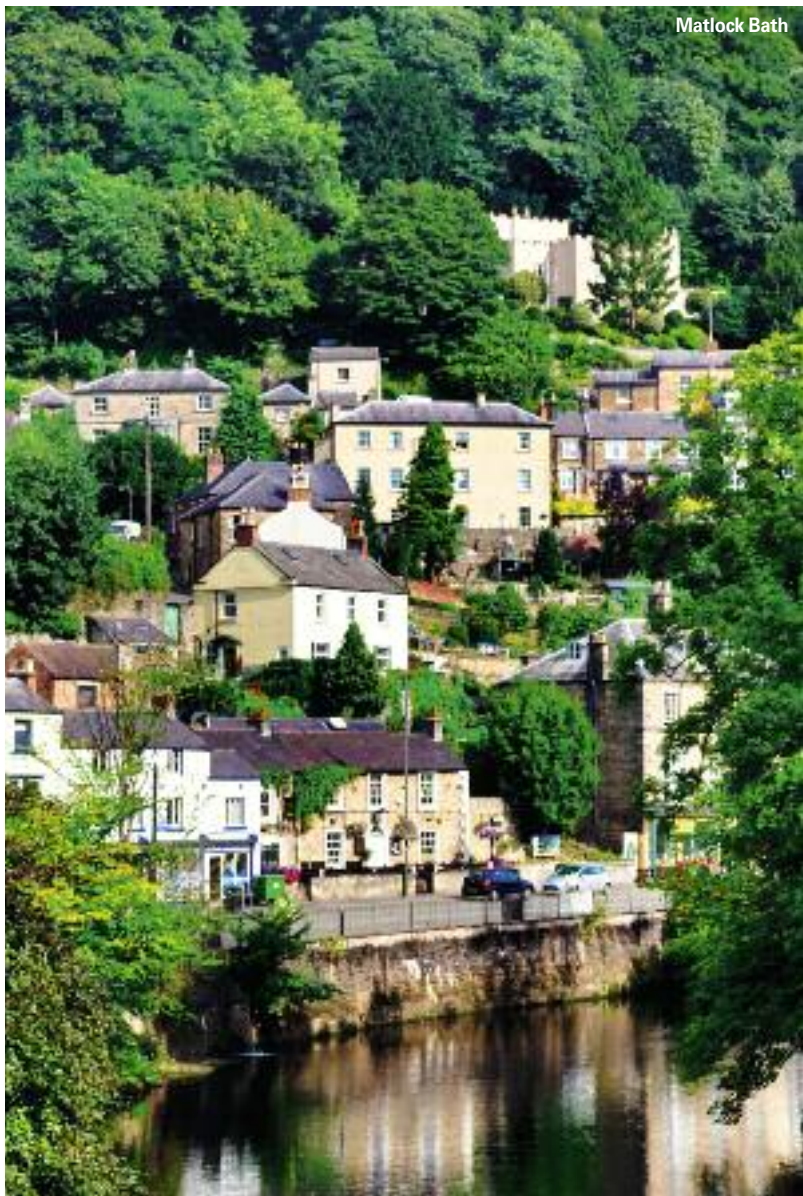
### Rutland Falconry and Owl Centre

Set in a charming woodland location near Exton, Oakham, this fascinating attraction is home to more than 200 birds of prey. Do make sure you watch one of the frequent flying displays.

**Contact:** 07778 152814, rutland-falconry.com  
**Nearest featured site:** Rutland







Matlock Bath

“The Firs Club site is undergoing a complete revamp this winter based on member feedback”

the centre of Grantham and stumbled upon the Everest Inn, a Nepalese and Indian restaurant. The town centre and many of its other restaurants were fairly deserted, but this place was packed with diners. I managed to get a table and soon found out why – the food is super and good value.

My final destination was the Peak District town of Belper, famous for its role in the Industrial Revolution – it was one of the first ‘mill towns’. The Club has a lovely site here called The Firs, which offers great views out over the Derbyshire hills. The site is undergoing a complete revamp this winter based on member feedback. The pitch layout is being restructured to

provide more space and make the site feel less crowded. At the same time, 17 of the existing grass pitches are being converted to hardstandings to lengthen the touring season and roads on site are being widened to make navigation easier. Once complete, all serviced pitches will be on an all-weather surface.

I spent a fascinating day exploring the historic town of Belper, starting out at an unusual attraction on the banks of the River Derwent. Originally attached to the town’s Cottage Hospital, Beaurepaire Garden was bought and restored by local entrepreneur Peter Davies a few years ago. The land had become overgrown and neglected over >>

## CULTURE



### Harley Gallery

This charming countryside gallery at the Welbeck Estate near Worksop offers changing displays of contemporary craft and visual art, alongside historical exhibitions. The Gallery Shop sells work by leading craftspeople and designers.

**Contact:** 01909 501700, harleygallery.co.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Clumber Park

### Mr Straw’s House

Take a step back in time in this National Trust property in Worksop. This ordinary semi-detached house boasts original interior decoration from 1923 and was the home of the Straw family for 60 years.

**Contact:** 01909 482380, nationaltrust.org.uk/mr-straws-house

**Nearest featured site:** Clumber Park



### Ritz Cinema

Enjoy a film at this Belper cinema from the comfort of a luxury seat or sofa as you enjoy a slice of homemade cake washed down with a glass of wine or beer.

**Contact:** 01773 822224, ritz-belper.co.uk

**Nearest featured site:** The Firs

### Strutt’s North Mill

Built in 1804 by William Strutt, this iron-framed, ‘fire-proof’ cotton spinning mill is said to be the forerunner of the modern skyscraper. It now houses a museum that celebrates the Strutt family’s contribution to Belper at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

**Contact:** 01773 880474, belpernorthmill.org.uk

**Nearest featured site:** The Firs





## OUTDOOR FUN



### Creswell Crags

This limestone gorge near Worksop has a lake and caves which are home to some fascinating Ice Age cave art. There is also a museum and heritage centre on the site.

**Contact:** 01909 720378, [creswell-crags.org.uk](http://creswell-crags.org.uk)

**Nearest featured site:** Clumber Park



### Beaurepaire Garden

A beautiful garden which was formerly attached to a cottage hospital. It's free to explore and is opposite Strutt's North Mill, by the river in Belper.

**Contact:** [belper-research.com](http://belper-research.com)

**Nearest featured sites:** The Firs

### Cycling

Cycle routes in the East Midlands include National Cycle Network Route 64 from Market Harborough to Newark-on-Trent. Visitors to The Firs site can ride the Tissington Trail, a traffic-free route along the former Buxton to Ashbourne railway line which features a dramatic limestone ravine.

**Contact:** [sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk)



### Rutland Water Nature Reserve

Not only is this a great place for those who enjoy outdoor activities such as sailing, it is also home to a nature reserve with visitor and birdwatching centres.

**Contact:** 01572 770651, [rutlandwater.org.uk](http://rutlandwater.org.uk)

**Nearest featured site:** Rutland



many decades, but you wouldn't guess it as you stroll around today. Free to enter, Beaurepaire Garden also has a miniature railway during the summer.

On the opposite bank of the river is a complex of old mill buildings with visitor centre which traces the rich industrial history of this part of the world. The 1804 Strutt's North Mill is an iron-framed building said to be the forerunner of the modern skyscraper.

You can walk into the town centre from here, where you'll find a collection of shops and eateries, including quite a few interesting charity shops – one of which seemed to specialise in motorcycle clothing! For a bite to eat, I can recommend Fresh Ground, which not

only serves some great light lunches but also has a good selection of teas and freshly-ground coffee.

Opposite this café is the Ritz cinema, which not only has extra-comfortable seating (including sofas!), but also allows you to enjoy homemade cake and a glass of wine or beer while you watch a movie.

Other local attractions include Crich Tramway Village, plus the 'inland resort' of Matlock Bath, a fascinating spot with interesting shops and places to eat.

I enjoyed England's 'middle ground'. There is such a wide variety of things to do, which proves that you don't have to head to the coast to enjoy a great family holiday – nor do you have to fly to Nepal to enjoy some great Nepalese cuisine!

## MEMBERS' VIEWS



### Ray and Jenny Hodges and their children

**Emma, Katie and Lucy**, from Aylesbury, were staying at Clumber Park. "We came here in the autumn half-term deliberately so that we could see the park with all the golden leaves on the trees," said Ray. "It's also perfect for our dogs, Jess and Brambles, who just love the open space in the park."

**Leigh and Claire Drew and their children Thomas and Elizabeth**, from Lincolnshire, were staying at Clumber Park. "We have stayed here before and absolutely love it," they enthused. "This is a great place for the kids and we've just been walking in the park kicking up the autumn leaves. There's also a café and visitor centre in Clumber Park."



**Katrina and Keith Bradley**, from Nottingham, were staying at The Firs. "We're here for five nights, mainly so that we can enjoy some fell walking in the Peak District hills," they told me. "We enjoy walks that are between eight and 15 miles long, giving us some good exercise. This is a great site, with good access to the town. We also plan to visit places like Matlock and Dovedale while we're in the area."



## 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](http://caravanclub.co.uk/together)