

# From Hadrian to Holy Island

With its magnificent coastline, countryside and castles, Northumberland is a fabulous county to tour, says Jonathan Manning

## THIS MONTH'S SITES



### 1. KIELDER WATER AS

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, see p201 of the 2015/16 Directory. **Facilities include a playground and an indoor heated pool.**



### 2. NUNNYKIRK

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, see p202 of the 2015/16 Directory.



### 3. RIVER BREAMISH

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, see p206 of the 2015/16 Directory. **Facilities include a playing field with netball and football posts.**



### 4. BERWICK SEAVIEW

For the most up-to-date details, see The Club website – alternatively, see p199 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



### Morwick Dairy

This ice cream parlour on a dairy farm just outside Warkworth uses milk from its own award-winning herd to make 34 mouth-watering flavours, including strawberry cheesecake, lemon meringue and chocolate orange.

**Contact:** 01665 711210, royaldouble.com

**Nearest featured site:** River Breamish



### Howick Hall

Enjoy a cuppa at the home of the original Earl Grey tea, blended for Charles, 2nd Earl Grey, using bergamot to offset the taste of lime in the water from the well.

**Contact:** 01665 577285, howickhallgardens.org

**Nearest featured site:** River Breamish

### Carlo's of Morpeth

As a coastal county, Northumberland excels at fish 'n' chips. First among friers is Carlo's of Morpeth, a family business shortlisted in the 2015 National Fish & Chip Awards. Carlo's has a sister shop in Alnwick, too.

**Contact:** 01670 505736, carlosformpeth.co.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Nunnykirk



### Northumberland Cheese Company

This artisan cheese maker on the Blagdon Estate in the south of the county handmakes 16 farmhouse cheeses from the milk of cows, sheep and goats. There's a shop and café on site.



**Contact:** 01670 789798, northumberlandcheese.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Nunnykirk



The rotating Janus Chairs offer peaceful views of Kielder Water

It's hard to believe amid the relaxing calm of Northumberland that this was an area of battle and conflict for much of the last two millennia. Invaders from Rome then Scandinavia coveted these lands, while the English and Scots have bloodily nudged their border north and south over the centuries.

Thankfully, it's a perfect symbol of peace, the outstretched arms of the Angel of the North, that welcomes me to a county whose rugged countryside, magnificent coastline and architectural wonders make it a great place to tour.

I start at Hadrian's Wall, which heads west from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Emperor Hadrian ordered its construction in AD122 to impose control over the Roman Empire's northernmost frontier, and it took 15,000 men six years to build. This epic feat of engineering rollercoasters its way 80 miles across the neck of England

to Solway in Cumbria, and it remains remarkably well preserved in places.

Chief among these is Housesteads Roman Fort, with its barracks, hospital and ancient toilets. English Heritage runs the site, and it's a fascinating place, enriched by a walk alongside the Wall as it swoops and climbs through this dramatic landscape.

#### KIELDER CALLS

It would be easy to spend a week exploring Hadrian's Wall, and it feels a crime not to spend more time in the handsome market town of Hexham before I head north-west to Kielder Water Club site, whose 99 hardstanding pitches have a bird's-eye view of the vast reservoir.

With more than 2,000 acres of water, the reservoir is a real treat for trout fishermen and sailors, while landlubbers have endless trails to walk and cycle. In the skies above, look out for ospreys – there

were three nesting pairs of these majestic birds here last year.

Hopping on my mountain bike, I follow Kielder's 27-mile shoreline trail that's embellished by 20 art installations. I defy anyone not to shriek with glee through the 'eye' window of *Silvas Capitalis*, a huge wooden skull that urges you to get inside the head of forest life. Relaxing on one of the large, rotating Janus Chairs, each big enough to accommodate a family, I spin the seat to the view of my choice, and watch the hypnotic ripples on the water.

Kielder also has a vibrant nightlife, but reassuringly this doesn't involve a thumping bass beat. The absence of light pollution makes this the perfect spot from which to gaze into distant galaxies, and Kielder's own observatory hosts several events each week with experts on hand to aid your astronomy.

Driving east through wild moorland, I vow to return in August when the heather

will be an ocean of purple flowers. I'm heading for Nunnykirk Club site, whose 84 grass pitches nestle in a wooded valley next to the River Font. This site is for "proper caravanners", Maureen and Richard Ord tell me. You have to be self-sufficient as there is no toilet block or showers, but the reward is a quiet site with great wildlife-watching opportunities and a blissful, head-clearing calm.

#### CREATING HISTORY

Just to the north, the tops of the Simonside Hills offer views that far outweigh the effort to reach them, and I replenish my hill-climbing calories with a mouth-watering slice of cake at Tomlinson's café in Rothbury. This is a fine-looking town built from sandstone, with the River Coquet flowing through its heart.

Barely a mile to the east, the tumble of water created history at Craggside, >>

## FOR THE FAMILY



### Alnwick Castle

Harry Potter fans get ready for broomstick training in Hogwarts' quidditch stadium. Dress up as a medieval knight or princess, or simply enjoy the magnificent battlements and sumptuous staterooms of this spectacular castle.

**Contact:** 01665 511100, alnwickcastle.com

**Nearest featured site:** River Breamish



### Farne Islands

Hop aboard a boat in Seahouses for a trip out to the beautiful Farne Islands where you'll see grey seals, guillemots, razorbills and thousands of puffins.

**Contact:** 01665 720308, farne-islands.com

**Nearest featured site:** Berwick Seaview

### Heatherslaw Light Railway

Take a ride on this 15in gauge railway along the banks of the River Till, from Heatherslaw Station to Etal Castle (a ruined medieval castle run by English Heritage). You'll enjoy stunning views of the countryside from the train.

**Contact:** 01890 820317, heatherslawlightrailway.co.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Berwick Seaview



### Go Ape Matfen

Thrill your inner monkey at this tree-top adventure, with high ropes, vertiginous crossings, bridges, tunnels and zip wires. It's scary but safe and set in 300 acres of historic parkland.

**Contact:** 0333 331 7680, goape.co.uk

**Nearest featured site:** Kielder Water





The River Breamish flows through the Breamish and Ingram Valley

## “Planting on a monumental scale has made Alnwick Garden one of the nation’s finest”

the first house in the world to be lit by hydroelectricity. It was the home of Victorian inventor and industrialist Lord Armstrong, who also oversaw the planting of seven million trees in Cragside’s grounds. The house and gardens, managed by the National Trust, make a wonderful day out, especially when the rhododendron bushes are in full flower.

Planting on a monumental scale has also made Alnwick Garden one of the nation’s finest gardens in little over a decade. It’s easy to while away hours here, and the huge water cascade, Poison Garden and splash-filled water features of the Serpent Garden will thrill children. It’s a short walk from the Garden to Alnwick Castle (a joint ticket saves a little money), and if the castle resembles a toy fort with its towering, crenellated walls, inside there’s a real sense of a family home, albeit one where Canalettos hang side-by-side with paintings by Titian. My children are more interested in a broomstick-flying lesson in the castle grounds, the backdrop for quidditch matches in the Harry Potter films.

### BREAM OF THE CROP

With so much to explore it’s time for a new base, so I drive to The Club’s River Breamish site at Powburn, where 53 of the 75 pitches are on hardstanding. A clever layout gives a real sense of freedom, and a small group of children are having a whale of a time in a play area away from the caravans.

River Breamish is ideally located for exploring the achingly-pretty Breamish and Ingram Valley, the brooding Cheviot Hills and Northumberland National Park, but it’s the coast that’s calling as I head for the fishing village of Craster. There’s smoke in the air from Robson’s kipper house, and it’s tempting to nip into the Jolly Fisherman for an early lunch of local crab, but a walk to the haunting ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle beckons, a breezy mile up the coast.

Pressing on beyond Dunstanburgh, I leave my bootprints in the damp sand of Embleton Bay before nipping into the Ship Inn, at Low Newton-by-the-Sea. With its idyllic location, own brewery and simple, tasty food, it is, as Mary Poppins would say, practically perfect in every way. >>

## CULTURE



### Hadrian’s Wall

It’s difficult to comprehend the scale of this epic feat of construction until you’ve stood by it. Head to Housesteads Roman Fort for a fascinating insight into the 2,000-year old history of the Wall.

**Contact:** 0191 440 5720, [visithadrianswall.co.uk](http://visithadrianswall.co.uk)

**Nearest featured site:** Kielder Water



### Cragside

The first house in the world to be lit by hydroelectricity, the National Trust property of Cragside also holds a fabulous collection of art, furniture, ceramics and natural history exhibits. Outside, the gardens and parkland are spectacular.

**Contact:** 01669 620333, [nationaltrust.org.uk/cragside](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/cragside)

**Nearest featured site:** Nunnykirk

### Lindisfarne Priory

From the haunting crossing of the causeway to the other-worldly atmosphere of Holy Island, Lindisfarne is a magical place to visit. Explore the Priory and Castle, stroll round the island... and make sure you leave enough time to cross the causeway before the tide comes back in!



**Contact:** 01289 389200, [english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)

**Nearest featured site:** Berwick Seaview

### Warkworth Castle

Northumberland spoils visitors with its outstanding castles. The impressive fortress of Warkworth is one of the county’s finest, its well-preserved walls towering over this lovely town on the River Coquet.



**Contact:** 01665 711423, [visitsnorthumberland.com](http://visitsnorthumberland.com)

**Nearest featured site:** River Breamish

## OUTDOOR FUN



### Kielder Water & Forest Park

This vast inland water has 20-plus extraordinary sculptures around its perimeter, including this giant wooden head. It's a 27-mile cycle around the lake.

**Contact:** 0845 155 0236, [visitkielder.com](http://visitkielder.com)

**Nearest featured site:** Kielder Water

### Cycling

For cycling in the North East of England, try National Cycle Network Route 1. It's a long distance route that can be broken down into smaller sections. The section from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Lindisfarne is a highlight. National Cycle Network Route 68, the Pennine Cycleway (North Pennines), takes in some spectacular landscapes, including the Kielder Forest National Park.



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



### Alnwick Gardens

There's a spectacular water cascade at the heart of these sweeping gardens that include a rose garden, woodland walk, poison garden and a breathtaking treehouse restaurant.

**Contact:** 01665 511350, [alnwickgarden.com](http://alnwickgarden.com)

**Nearest featured site:** River Breamish

### Bamburgh Beach

Offering miles of pale sand, dunes and blue sea, this is an impressive beach. The water could be a little warmer, but dramatic Bamburgh Castle, which towers over the beach, surely compensates.

**Contact:** [visitnorthumberland.com](http://visitnorthumberland.com)

**Nearest featured site:** Berwick Seaview



Back in the car, the coastal road takes me past Bamburgh Castle, perched on a cliff above a beach of staggering beauty, north to Seahouses, for a birdwatching boat trip to the Farne Islands. Seal spotting is virtually guaranteed, but through the nesting season of late spring and early summer these inhospitable rocks play home to gannets, guillemots, kittiwakes and 70,000 puffins.

The most mysterious of the islands is Lindisfarne, or Holy Island, cut-off twice a day as the high tide floods the causeway – I double-check the tide times before crossing. Lindisfarne Priory and Castle clamour for visitor attention and, at less busy times, there's an intriguing other-worldly atmosphere to savour while meandering on foot around the island.

It's not far from Holy Island to Berwick Seaview, a Club site that lives up to its name. Of the 93 pitches, 86 have

hardstanding and almost all have grandstand views of the waves.

Walking into Berwick, I peer from the arched, stone bridge into the fast-flowing waters of the River Tweed and reflect on the local legend that Berwick-upon-Tweed found itself at war with the mighty Russian empire! It's based on the fact that Queen Victoria declared war on Russia in 1854 under her full title, 'Queen of Great Britain, Ireland, Berwick-upon-Tweed and the British Dominions beyond the sea,' but that when peace was declared the British diplomats forgot to include Berwick in their treaty. As a result this north-east outpost was apparently left at war with the superpower.

Conflict, battles and war – they never seem to be that far away in this most peaceful of counties! Isn't it time you discovered its beauty?

## MEMBERS' VIEWS

**Maureen and Richard Ord** have been regular visitors to Nunnykirk since 2004. "We only live 45 minutes away in Blyth," said Richard. "This site is so peaceful, there's no mobile phone reception or Wi-Fi. It's just peace. And it's a nice crowd – we come out for a half-hour walk and three hours later we are still talking to someone! It's for proper caravanners; there are no facilities, so you use your own toilet and shower. There are



loads of walks and we sometimes go to Thrunton Wood. Cragside is lovely, especially when the rhododendrons are out in June."



**Stuart Wallace and Teresa Black** from Anglesey were staying at River Breamish. "We went to Kielder last Easter and had a great time, and thought the area looked really interesting, but we hardly moved off the site to do any exploring, so we came back," said Stuart. "We've been to Cragside, which was brilliant, and the boys (7 and 9 years old) loved the labyrinth." Teresa added, "The boys can get out on their bikes and, for once in your life, you feel you can let them out of sight. They're away from screens, living in the real world, making dens... we'll have to drag them away."



**Colin and Tiffany Sparks** from York were staying at Berwick Seaview. "We do not tend to go to town sites, and usually go to places in the middle of nowhere, so this is a change for us and we're looking forward to exploring new places," said Colin. "We're going into Berwick, then tomorrow we'll drive to St Abb's Head [a National Nature Reserve], and then maybe go to Bamburgh and Lindisfarne. We love the beaches and Bamburgh is beautiful."

## 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)