



# *Cosy up to* **THE BORDERS**

Don't let the cold weather put you off!  
A trip to the north can be exhilarating ...

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



*Carol Kubicki...*

... and her partner, Anthony, use their 'van to pursue their hobbies of walking and cycling, while exploring historical and natural environments

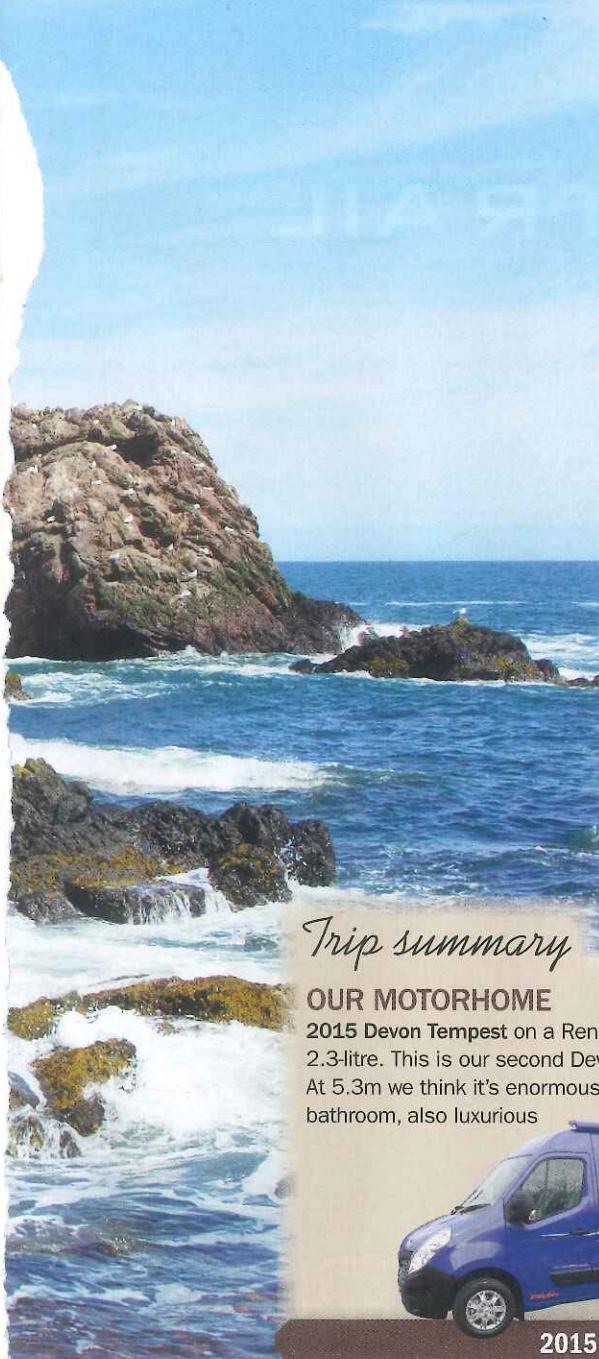
**T**en years ago, shivering under layers of blankets in below-freezing temperatures when the leisure battery drained, we learned the hard way how to make sure we were comfortable and cosy during winter camping trips in our 'van. Nowadays, we embrace the exhilaration of the cold and use our 'Blue Bus' all year round – although we continue to carry spare blankets just in case. So, with a frosty spell forecast, we headed up the M6 towards the Scottish Borders.

The shorter winter days do restrict us, though. I like to get to a campsite in daylight as I find arriving in the dark disorientating, so we reached our first stop – the charming village of Newcastleton, in the Borders – in the mid-afternoon. This planned village, set on the banks of Liddel Water, was created in 1793 at the request of the Liddesdale people as a focus for the community.

The Lidalia campsite uses the former goods yard of the Edinburgh to Carlisle railway line, which was closed in 1969. A protest against the closure was organised, with people and vehicles obstructing the last train through Newcastleton. The local clergyman was arrested, but the protesters refused to move. A young MP, David Steele, who had lobbied against the closure of the line and was a passenger, was woken from his slumbers and asked to negotiate through the cold January night. He succeeded in securing the release of the cleric and an end to the protest.

It is good news that 30 miles of this route is now being re-established from Edinburgh to Tweedbank, near Melrose.

The campsite is in the heart of the village, with shops, cafés and pubs within easy reach and we had just enough daylight to explore. Newcastleton is built in a grid



## Trip summary

### OUR MOTORHOME

2015 Devon Tempest on a Renault Master MWB 2.3-litre. This is our second Devon Conversion. At 5.3m we think it's enormous and, with a bathroom, also luxurious



2015 Devon Tempest

**THE JOURNEY** We travelled to the Scottish Borders from our home in Salford via the M61, M6 and then the A7 to Canonbie, where we turned onto minor roads for Newcastle. We spent four nights on sites and one night wild camping

### THE COSTS

Fuel average 35mpg	£70
Site fees	£93.60
Entrance fees two adults: Jedburgh Abbey	£11
Buses two adults: Melrose to St Boswells	£4.60

Total £179.20

pattern, with an open village green. The smell of coal fires was heavy in the air.

We walked along the river and over the new bridge that joins the village to Newcastle Forest and one of southern Scotland's 7stanes mountain bike areas. As we returned in the dark, we could hear the distinctive call of a tawny owl in the woods.

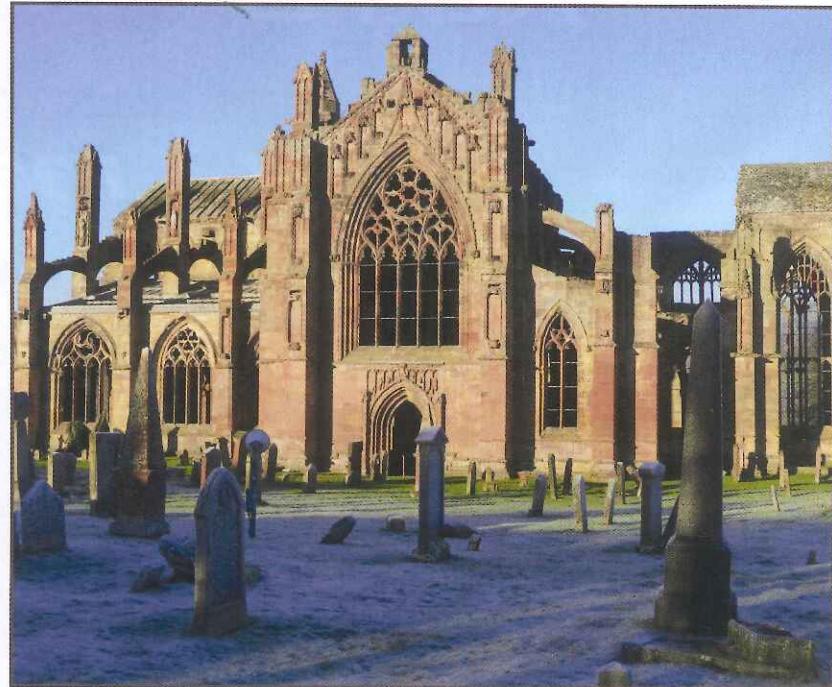
In winter, we generally stay on sites, rather than wild camp, so that we have electric hook-up and showers. Our 'van isn't fully winterised, which means that the water and waste water tanks are underslung and uninsulated. To avoid the risk of frost damage when it is below freezing, we use a 10-litre water container inside the 'van, which is plenty for hot drinks and cooking for a day. We also use a waste water bucket.

The advantage of crisp, frosty weather is clear skies, which means stargazing at night and sunshine during the day. We woke to a

bright, ice-white world, having been snug in our thermals, sleeping bags, duvets and hats. I stretched an arm out into the cold to switch the heating on and then snuggled down for another half-an-hour.

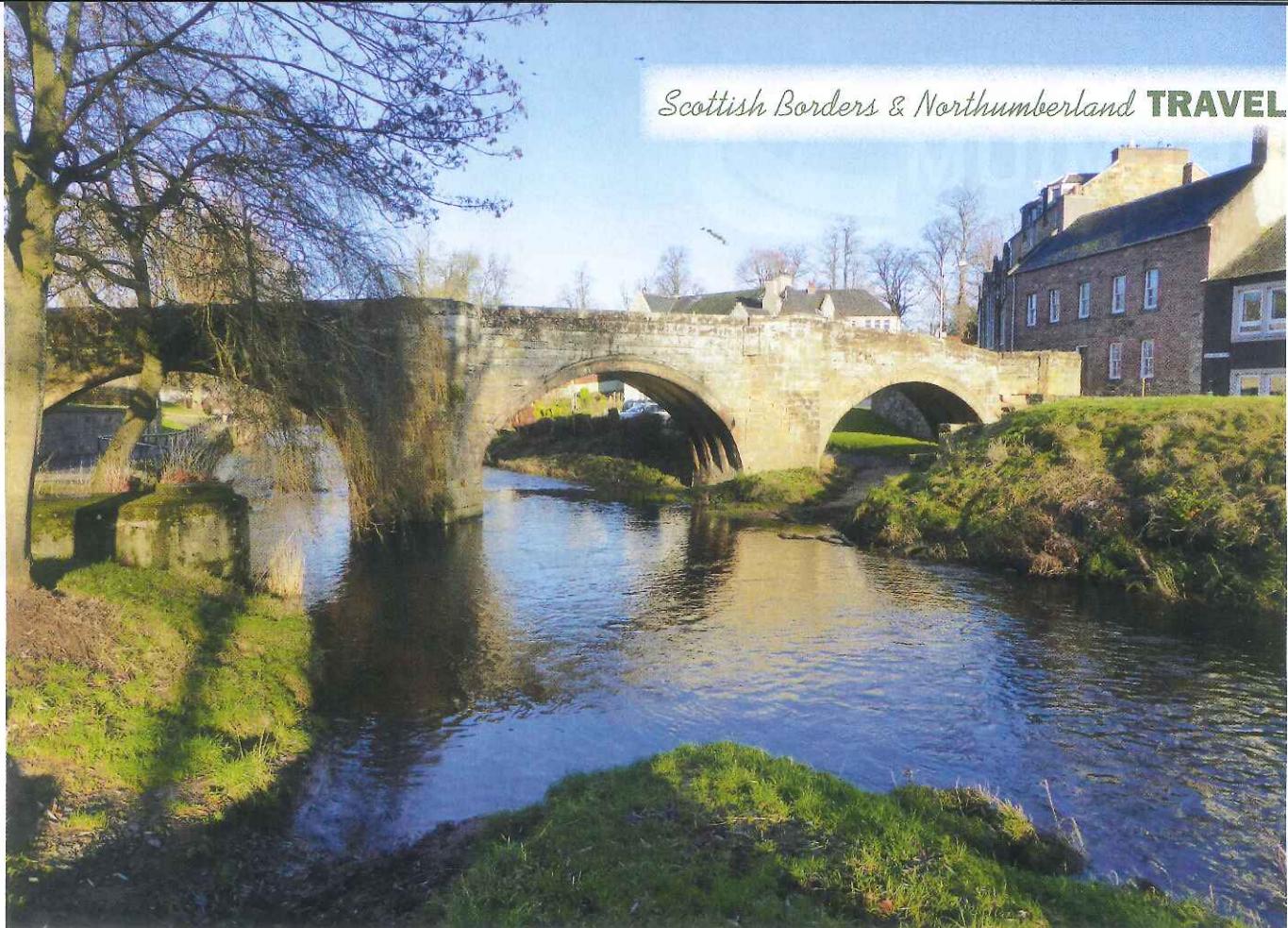
We headed towards Melrose, only 50 miles away, which gave us plenty of time to explore on the journey, even in the limited hours of daylight. After stopping to enjoy the spectacular view from the cemetery just above Newcastle, we continued to Jedburgh to begin a search for sites relating to James Hutton, the founder of geology.

Scotland has a strong tradition of scientific study and James Hutton was part of the Scottish Enlightenment. In the eighteenth century, he noticed layers of rocks near Jedburgh that seemed incongruous; vertical beds of rock were topped with horizontal layers and he called this an 'unconformity'. This site is on ►



ABOVE LEFT Surf and rocks at St Abb's Head

ABOVE Melrose Abbey in the evening sun

**TOP TIP**

You can walk about three miles to Siccar Point from Cockburnspath or park in the layby off the A1107, leaving a 2.5-mile return walk to the point. The road down to Pease Bay is unsuitable for motorhomes. There is also a small car park provided by the vegetable processing factory where the path leaves the track

private land, but is celebrated in a sinuous stone sculpture by the river below the abbey.

Jedburgh is a pleasant market town with a large car park below the abbey. After warming up with a coffee, we walked along the Jed Water in the sunshine, stopping to watch a dipper and four goosanders on the river and a red kite overhead.

We strolled through the town, passing the pink clock tower, to the dominant abbey ruins. Open throughout the year, the Romanesque red sandstone stonework of the abbey church is mostly intact; I marvelled at the masons' skills.

Just a few miles north of Jedburgh is Harestanes Country Park, an attractive area of parkland with parking, a craft centre and teashop that are open in winter. High on the hillside, the Waterloo monument tantalised us. But, evening was approaching and we settled for a brisk walk on the hard, frosty ground along one of the many marked trails through native and exotic trees, with buzzards mewing overhead.

We woke to another icy day in Melrose. The town is dominated by the twin bumps of the Eildon Hills and, in winter, these obscure the sun from the campsite all day. With no sign of a thaw, the paths were icy.

We took the bus to the nearby pretty village of St Boswells on the River Tweed and, from there, followed St Cuthbert's Way along the river to the suspension bridge for Dryburgh Abbey. Sunlight glistened on the river and the hoar frost on the bushes and a heron fished in shallow water. The world was bright and cheerful despite the cold.

We were disappointed that Dryburgh Abbey was hidden in trees and the only way to see it was to pay the entrance fee. However, we were compensated by finding the charming Temple of the Muses, a memorial to the poet, James Thomson, who wrote the words to *Rule Britannia*. This provided a lovely view along the Tweed.

Leaving the river, we came to Newtown St Boswells where, after a drink and a warm welcome in the pub, we followed the steep old road over the shoulder of the Eildon Hills. We have climbed these fine hills before but, if you haven't, you could include them in this walk.

The old road gives spectacular views over the countryside. To the south, I could see the Cheviots covered in snow. We stopped at the Rhymer's Stone, which tells the legend of Thomas Rhymer, a thirteenth century laird with a reputation for prophesies. ▶

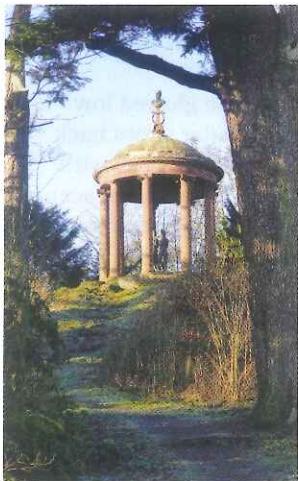
ABOVE Canongate Bridge over Jed Water in Jedburgh

**“The advantage of **crisp**, frosty weather is clear skies, which means **stargazing** at night and **sunshine** during the day”**



**ABOVE CLOCKWISE** The sculpture representing James Hutton's geological unconformity near Jedburgh; woodland walks in Harestanes Country Park; the suspension bridge over the River Tweed

**BELOW** The Temple of the Muses memorial



One of Rhymer's predictions was that there would one day be a bridge over the River Tweed visible from this spot. That would have seemed an unlikely prospect in the thirteenth century and yet, in 1863, the impressive Leaderfoot Viaduct opened to carry the railway. With 19 spans and 126ft (38m) high, this can indeed be seen from here. A good path took us to Newstead and along the valley back to Melrose, passing by the striking sandstone abbey.

Melrose is a lovely, small town with lots of upmarket shops and plenty of places to eat. We were tempted and so treated ourselves to a slice of Italy. The excellent food and wine at the Monte Cassino Restaurant was just what we needed in the freezing weather.

We left Melrose, continuing on the trail of James Hutton, to his most famous unconformity at Siccar Point, where the junction between the older and younger rocks is clearly visible. We parked above Pease Bay and followed the track towards the farm, before which the path across the fields is clearly marked.

Passing a dramatic ruined church, we headed along the cliffs. Looking back, I could see the sweep of Pease Bay and Torness nuclear power station and Bass Rock in the distance. Ahead was a geological formation that triggered enormous leaps forward for science. In the eighteenth

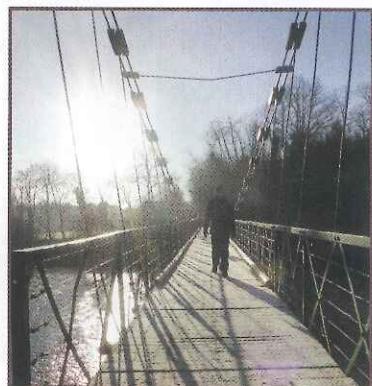
century it was thought that the earth was just a few thousand years old. James Hutton's observations of a cycle of rock formation over millions of years changed scientific thinking.

You don't need to scramble down the steep slope to the sea to see the enormity of geological time written in the stone. The older greywacke rocks can clearly be seen folded like cloth pushed across a table and are almost vertical. Sitting 'unconformably' on top of this are horizontal layers of younger red sandstone.

While I stood on the clifftop looking at the view along the coast to St Abb's Head and watching a group of eider ducks bobbing on the sea, Anthony spotted a fisherman struggling up the very steep path with all his tackle. Rushing down to help, Anthony's gesture was shunned; the fisherman being much too proud to accept assistance, but not too proud to confess that he hadn't caught anything!

I can never resist the lure of a harbour full of fishing boats, so we stopped in Eyemouth for a walk along the front. Eyemouth has long made its money from fishing and as a port for legal and illegal cargoes.

In winter, the stylish, harbourside merchant's house, built by a successful local smuggler is closed. This was a shame because I wouldn't have been able to turn ➤





down the opportunity to see a tea chute that was, apparently, used to hide smuggled tea. The local museum was also shut, so we missed the tapestry depicting the Eyemouth disaster of 1881 when a staggering 189 fishermen lost their lives.

Winter trips often give me ideas for places I want to return to.

Crossing the border, we drove to Berwick-upon-Tweed, pitching up for the night at the Caravan Club's Berwick Seaview campsite in Spittal, a seaside resort just south of the town. It delivered the promised view and also provided indoor washing-up facilities!

Living in Salford, LS Lowry is meshed into my local landscape. Spotting that Berwick-upon-Tweed has a Lowry Trail, I was intrigued to learn about the connection an artist so closely associated with industrial Salford had with this Northumbrian town.

Parking near the town centre, we started the trail on the stone pier at the mouth of the River Tweed. At the end of this dog leg-shaped pier is a lighthouse. Here, an interpretation board showed a Lowry painting of a wild and empty North Sea; a contrast with his paintings of crowded Salford streets. Lowry took annual holidays around Berwick-upon-Tweed and produced many fine paintings of the area.

We looked out to the North Sea, buffeted by the wind on the exposed pier, with the

ABOVE Eyemouth Harbour, where legal and illegal cargoes were once unloaded

#### WE STAYED AT

**Lidalia Touring Caravan Site, Old Station Yard, Moss Road, Newcastleton TD9 0RU**

01387 375587 [lidalia.co.uk](http://lidalia.co.uk)

All year

Two adults, pitch and electric: From £17.70

**Melrose Gibson Park Caravan Club Site, High Street, Melrose, Scottish Borders TD6 9RY**

01896 822969

[caravanclub.co.uk](http://caravanclub.co.uk)

All year

Two adults, pitch and electric: From £17.50

**Berwick Seaview Caravan Club Site, Billendean Road, Spittal, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland TD15 1QU**

01289 305198 [caravanclub.co.uk](http://caravanclub.co.uk)

20 March - 4 January

Two adults, pitch and electric: From £16.50

gusts going through every layer of our clothing. Lowry's desolate painting summed up this spot very well.

The three-hour saunter around the Lowry Trail took us on the remarkable ramparts around the town and through the narrow alleys near the port. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the River Tweed was the Scottish-English border, with Berwick a prosperous Scottish port. Some of the interpretation boards, which appear at regular intervals, show paintings of Berwick in Lowry's familiar style, with bustling streets and yards.

We followed the trail over the old bridge to Tweedmouth. It was from here in 1296 that the English invaded Berwick and it remained the base for further invasions until 1482, when Berwick was captured by the English for the last time.

The evening winter sun glowed low in the sky giving spectacular views back to Berwick over the mudflats busy with waders. I can't paint these beautiful scenes, but my camera was working overtime.

We decided to spend our final night in a quiet corner of the Northumberland countryside.

The next day, warmer and wetter weather made its way across the Atlantic. As we were buffeted south along the M6 in torrential rain, I was happy we had once more been winter camping. **|||||**



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