



TIME *for* TEES!

Tales from the riverbank of waterfalls, wildlife, amazing engineering and a quaint seaside resort

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



Carol Kubicki...

...and her husband, Anthony, use their Devon Tempest to pursue their hobbies of walking and cycling while exploring historical and natural environments

I broached the idea with my husband, Anthony, of a motorhome trip following a river, thinking that this might give us a sense of purpose we don't always have, as well as to steer us towards new places and experiences. Of the many English rivers, the Tees isn't the longest, widest or deepest, but its 85 miles has distinctive sections.

The river frolics around the rugged hills of the North Pennines, meanders through the County Durham farmland and becomes a navigable river in industrial Cleveland, before flowing into the North Sea at the Teesmouth National Nature Reserve. These temptations were enough to persuade Anthony and we set off for the northeast.

We began at High Force and Low Force, perhaps the best known sights on the river. With the river in spate after heavy rain, the

car park at Bowlees was jam-packed with visitors who had come to see these two spectacular waterfalls.

My ears filled with the roar of the falls as we approached Low Force through the trees. Low Force doesn't have a long drop but the falls are wide and impressive. Numerous photographers were clambering over the rocks, riskily documenting the torrent.

After taking photographs from a safe distance we headed for the Wynch Bridge that spans the dolerite gorge. The instructions are to cross one at a time but many people ignore this, abandoning caution and bouncing across in groups, giving the crossing a frisson of excitement.

The path to High Force follows the river for about two miles and, whatever the weather, it is a beautiful scenic walk ➤

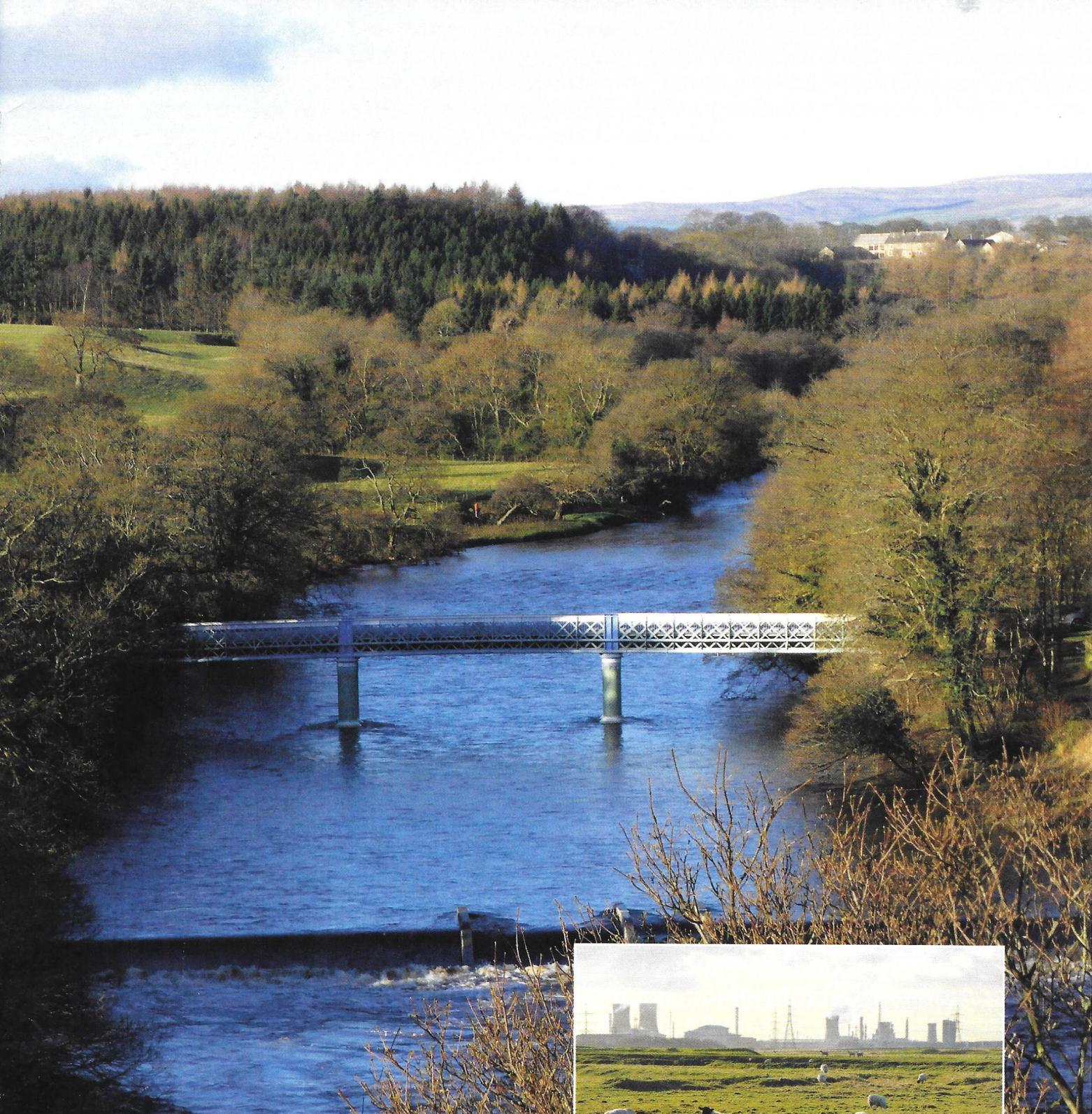
FAR RIGHT Looking down on the River Tees from Barnard Castle; Teesmouth National Nature Reserve

RIGHT High Force waterfall

INFORMATION

-  exploreteesdale.uk
-  **RSPB Saltholme**
-  rspb.org.uk/saltholme
-  middlesbrough.gov.uk/transporterbridge
-  northpennines.org.uk
- Piercebridge Roman Bridge**
-  english-heritage.org.uk/piercebridge
- Piercebridge Fort**
-  darlington.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/head-of-steam/piercebridge-roman-fort
- Saltburn-by-the-Sea pier and cliff lift**
-  redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/clifflift





Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

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

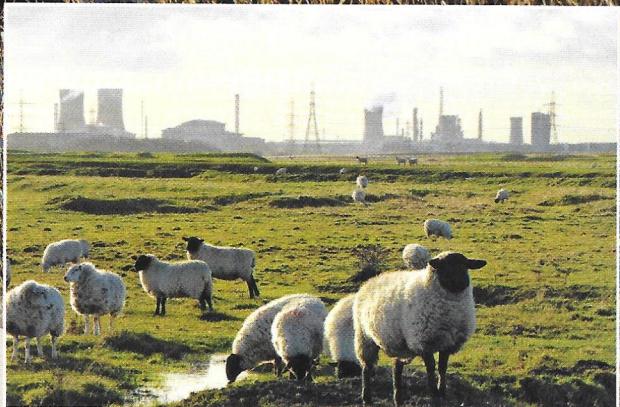


2015 Devon Tempest

THE JOURNEY

We travelled from our home in Salford up the M6 and on the A685 and A66 to **Barnard Castle**, then the B6277 along the **River Tees**. We spent four nights on sites in December

333 miles



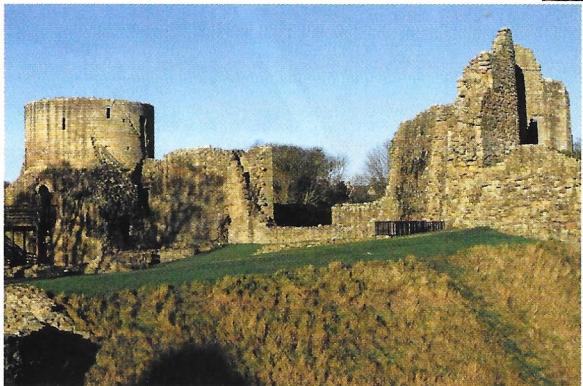
THE COSTS

| | |
|--|--------|
| Fuel average 34mpg | £46 |
| Site fees | £69.60 |
| Entrance fees two adults: Barnard Castle, Head of Steam Museum, transporter bridge pedestrian return | £21.70 |
| Parking Saltholme RSPB Reserve | £5 |
| Public transport two adults: bus and train return, Thornaby-Darlington | £7.80 |
| Total £150.10 | |

Total £150.10



“Summerhill Force plunges over the rocks in a shimmering curtain”



ABOVE CLOCKWISE The restored Gainford Spa is on the banks of the Tees; approaching Summerhill Force through the woods; the ruined Barnard Castle

TOP TIPS

The car park at **Bowlees** Visitor Centre for Low Force and Summerhill Force generally has spaces big enough for motorhomes up to 6m long and for larger 'vans at quieter times

Market day in **Barnard Castle** is on Wednesdays and the farmers' markets are generally on the first Saturday of the month, but check at barnardcastlefarmersmarket.co.uk

The Tees Transporter Bridge has a weight limit of three tonnes. There is parking on both sides of the river for larger 'vans

To see the **Gainford Spa** spring, park in a layby with an information board and a footpath sign on the southwest side of the A67 about half-a-mile from the centre of the village

across upland dotted with white farmhouses.

The Tees here is a lively river, heavy with brown, peaty soil after the rain. From a high vantage point you get an excellent view of High Force plunging 70ft in a thundering veil of white water to the pool below.

Back at Bowlees we sought some quiet from the crowds and took the woodland path to Summerhill Force and Gibson's Cave. Bowlees Beck tumbles energetically through the woodland and we took the time to watch a tiny wren searching for food in the roots of a fallen tree and admire ancient wave patterns worn in the stones.

Summerhill Force plunges over the rocks in a shimmering curtain and I lost myself in the rhythm of the deluge. Gibson's Cave is a rocky overhang that would have given the outlaw scant shelter, but offers visitors the opportunity to walk behind the fall – if you are prepared to climb a wall and run the risk of falling rocks from the overhang.

To be honest, I was wondering about the sense of tearing myself away from the dramatic beauty of the upper Tees. However, I couldn't abandon the plan so soon and we pointed our 'van downstream towards the open plain of the middle Tees.

It will come as no surprise that Barnard Castle has a castle; built high on a crag above the river with stunning views, it was top of my to-do list. With an impressive round tower, a complex of inner, middle and

outer wards and a moat, the castle didn't disappoint and I had soon forgotten the draw of the Pennines. We had fun looking around this imposing structure, with the sun picking out the warm colours of the stone, as well as enjoying the extensive views over the river to the Pennines.

We walked downhill to admire the impressive market cross of Barnard Castle town, built as a butter market with a covered veranda from where dairy produce was sold. The blue plaque trail gave us a structure for exploring the town's wide shopping streets and narrow alleys and created a picture of a prosperous town inhabited by intellectuals, professionals, soldiers and industrialists.

As well as learning that Charles Dickens stayed here while researching *Nicholas Nickleby* and that John Wesley preached here, I appreciated reading about less well-known residents. Who knew that Cyril Northcote Parkinson was born here and discovered Parkinson's Law, which states that, 'work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion'?

The attractive riverside village of Gainford is only a short drive from Barnard Castle and, just before the village, is a short steep path from a layby down to the wooded riverside path. Here we found a restored nineteenth century fountain for a sulphur-rich spa spring, the spring water gushing ►



ABOVE The historic Locomotion No. 1 in the Head of Steam Railway Museum in Darlington; the dynamic World Cup winners' statue in West Auckland

BELOW The Infinity Bridge in Stockton-on-Tees

into an upper bowl before flowing into the Tees. Despite the rotten-egg smell, I decided to sample the water. Anthony declined and laughed as I pulled a face at the disgusting sulphurous taste! Along the riverbank we spotted tracks in the mud that we like to think belonged to otters, but the prints may have been from mink.

Chancing upon unexpected stories is one of the things I enjoy about travelling in the 'van, so I happily explored the village of Piercebridge whilst humming the old song 'My Grandfather's Clock' after one such moment of wonder. A sign outside Piercebridge's George Hotel told an old tale about an upright clock that stopped 'never to go again' when a former landlord died at the age of 90.

Henry Clay Work, an American songwriter, visited Piercebridge in the 1870s and, on hearing the story, was inspired to pen the song 'My Grandfather's Clock'. This song became so popular it led to all tall clocks being called grandfather clocks.

The George Hotel's car park is large and visitors are welcome to use it while exploring the village and the Roman bridge and fort. The bridge is now marooned in a field south of the Tees and there isn't much to see except monumental stones. However, the foundations and surviving street pattern of the vast Roman fort, most of which

remains hidden under the village green, have a timeless quality.

The next morning, after a night in a quiet spot away from the river, we drove through West Auckland and spotted an animated stone monument showing a footballer and miner. Intrigued, we stopped to find out more and discovered another local story.

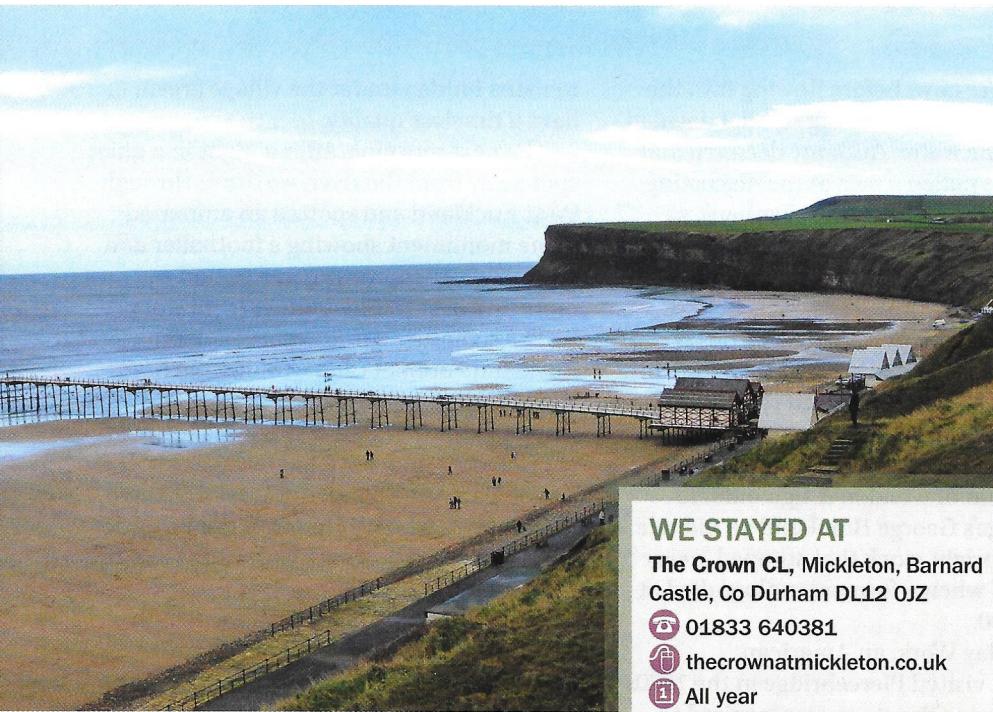
The sculpture commemorates West Auckland Football Club winning the first World Cup Championships in 1909 and 1911 when the tournament was played between clubs, rather than national teams.

The part-time players of West Auckland were miners who had to pawn their belongings and borrow to afford the trip to Turin in Italy where the games were played.

After stretching our legs in the winter sunshine along the Teesdale Way and through the attractive Preston Park, we headed for the nearby Caravan Club site in Stockton-on-Tees. This site is only a half-hour walk from Thornaby Station along the river and letting the train take the strain to visit Darlington's railway museum seemed only right.

Along the redeveloped Stockton-on-Tees quayside, little of the working port remains, but there was plenty to detain us. We stopped to marvel at the Tees Barrage International White Water Centre, admired the elegance of the Infinity Bridge and ►





spotted the replica of Captain James Cook's *HM Bark Endeavour*.

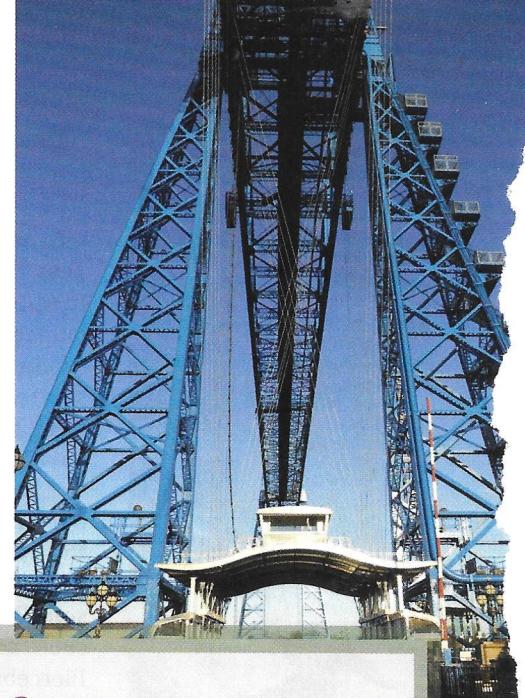
We were then heading to Darlington's Head of Steam museum. While it is true that the museum doesn't have the scale of the York's National Railway Museum, the opportunity to see Locomotion No. 1, a beautiful and historic engine that pulled the first ever passenger train on the newly opened Stockton and Darlington line, shouldn't be missed. We took full advantage of the many opportunities for fun, games and learning the museum offers while the rain thundered on the roof.

Both George and Robert Stephenson worked on the Stockton and Darlington railway and Darlington's pride as an engineering town brimming with skilled workers was evident.

A sight that's familiar from TV and film is the beautiful blue Middlesbrough Tees Transporter Bridge. This fantastic landmark has carried vehicles and passengers across the Tees on a gondola for over a hundred years. The bridge has a weight limit of three tonnes so our 'van was too heavy.

Having parked on the north riverside we ran to catch the gondola ride as pedestrians, while the friendly staff waited. The gondola is wound above the river on 30 cables in just a few minutes, but I challenge you to get as much fun for 60p anywhere else.

As we travelled across the river, we had views to the Riverside Stadium, Middlesbrough's football ground, with the strange Temenos sculpture of giant hoops beside it. The Cleveland Hills were on the horizon and, to my delight, a large ship



WE STAYED AT

The Crown CL, Mickleton, Barnard Castle, Co Durham DL12 0JZ

01833 640381

thecrownatmickleton.co.uk

All year

Two adults, pitch and electric:
From £20 (Caravan Club
members only)

White Water Park Caravan Club Site,
Tees Barrage, Stockton-on-Tees TS18
2QW

01642 634880

caravanclub.co.uk All year

Two adults, pitch and electric: From
£16.40

ALTERNATIVE SITE

Doe Park Caravan Site, Cotherstone,
Barnard Castle, Co Durham DL12 9UQ

01833 650302 doepark.co.uk

3 March – 31 October

Two adults, pitch and electric: £18

ABOVE LEFT Saltburn-by-the-Sea with its fantastic beach, restored Victorian pier and cliff lift

ABOVE RIGHT The Tees Transporter Bridge at Middlesbrough – the most fun you can have on a bridge

leaving its berth sounded its horn loudly to warn the bridge that it was coming through.

At Teesmouth, we pulled into the generous parking area for the national nature reserve and headed for the shoreline. I wandered along the limit of the high tide searching through the flotsam and jetsam, optimistic that I might find treasure but only finding interesting pieces of driftwood. We sat in the sand dunes in the sunshine looking over the river mouth, the industrial chimneys behind us and a constant flow of ships coming and going before us.

We stopped at Saltholme RSPB reserve and followed the well-made paths around the pools and reed beds, spotting Canada, greylags and barnacle geese, tufted ducks and red-breasted mergansers as well as little egrets and a pair of black swans.

The benefit of following a river downstream is you finish at the sea. We completed our trip at Saltburn-by-the-Sea, a lovely Victorian resort. We stopped on Marine Parade with a view down to the most delightful pier, although a shadow of its former glory at only 681ft long.

We'd travelled our own path along the Tees, one of variety and stories and it felt fitting to end our trip in a quaint seaside town that could be a million miles from the Pennine grandeur of the upper Tees. **mmm**

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