

NORTHERN SOUL

The charming towns, characterful history and colourful scenery of England's biggest county, North Yorkshire

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



Looking down on the River Nidd gorge and the Knaresborough Viaduct

Trip summary

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

2015 Devon Tempest



Carol Kubicki...

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



THE JOURNEY

We travelled from Salford, via the M62 and A1(M), driving up and returning via Skipton and the M66. We spent three days exploring in August

THE COSTS

Fuel average 34mpg	£29
Site fees	£40
Entrance fees two adults: Nidderdale Museum, Mother Shipton's Cave and Plumpton Rocks	£23
Parking Brimham Rocks	£5

195 miles

Total £97

The Celtic stone head in a corner of the Nidderdale Museum in Pateley Bridge looked at me across 3,000 years of human history and gave a fleeting insight into the life of the stonemason. An age-old trade, stonemasons have shaped lumps of rock into something useful or decorative since tools were developed.

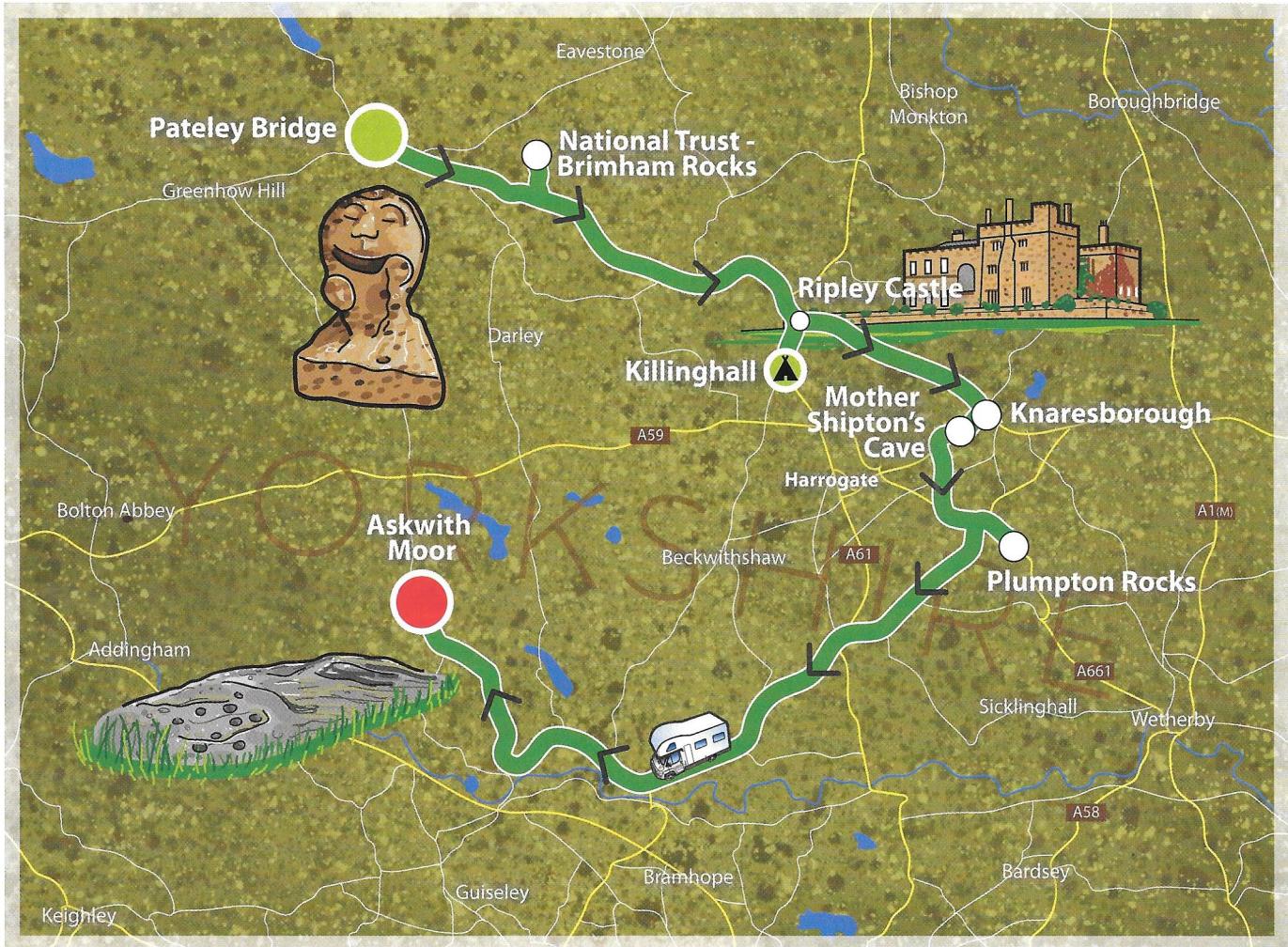
I had been inspired to visit the Yorkshire town of Knaresborough and the Nidd valley after reading about the Forest of Knaresborough; not woodland, but a massive tract of moorland and exclusive royal hunting ground between the rivers Nidd and Wharfe. Established around the twelfth century, it wasn't until 1767 that 49 round-topped stone markers were placed around the boundary to formally mark it; 30 of these stones survive today.

Pateley Bridge lies just outside the forest boundary and is a picturesque town on the River Nidd, northwest of Knaresborough. As we walked up the steep and narrow main shopping street, I admired the attractive stone buildings.

Popping into the small cave-like shop that claims to be the oldest sweet shop in England, I was engulfed in the saccharine smell that has permeated the floorboards. After drooling over the jars of sweets that line the walls, many of which I hadn't seen since childhood, we left with a nostalgic bag of chocolate mice.

The Nidderdale Museum, where I met the Celtic stone head, is in the old workhouse and resembles a neatly arranged flea market, with an abundance of objects that tell the story of the working people in the dale. You would have to spend days here to see everything, so we split up and picked out individual favourites.

Anthony was interested in the old ►



INFORMATION

Visit Harrogate includes information about Knaresborough

visitharrogate.co.uk

For information on finding The Tree of Life Rock at Snowden Crag

stone-circles.org.uk/stone/treeoflife.htm

ripleycastle.co.uk

mothershipton.co.uk

knaresborough.co.uk

plumptonrocks.com

nidderdalemuseum.com

photographs of the nearby valleys and the workers who created the reservoirs there in the nineteenth century, while I went further back to the Celts. These stone heads are not uncommon in Yorkshire and, although few facts are known about the Celtic period, some historians think that the Celts valued the head as the location of the soul.

Whatever your interest you will find something here: a recreated Victorian living room, a 1950s hairdressers and a chock-full cupboard of old toys are among the exhibits. I felt satisfied to know that someone is keeping all these diverse objects safe.

Following the Nidd towards Knaresborough, we stopped at the dramatic landscape of Brimham Rocks. This natural playground is delightful to explore, particularly in late summer when the brilliant purple heather is flowering.

The maze of naturally sculpted and

strangely shaped rough gritstone rocks means visitors can find ledges to scramble up, a sheltered corner or an extensive view. We followed the grassy paths to the outcrops on the edge, picking bilberries as we walked and found a crag with views across the Nidd to the white golf balls of RAF Menwith Hill listening station.

Picturesque Ripley was built as a model village in the nineteenth century by the Ingilby family of Ripley Castle, after the previous village was demolished. Today, it has a cobbled square overlooked by a pub, rows of flower-decked stone houses and a church, parts of which are older than the nineteenth century improvements.

Ripley Castle welcomes visitors to the grounds for free during the week. This left sufficient pocket money for delicious ice creams from the World Famous Ripley Ice Cream shop. ▶

“This natural playground is delightful to explore, particularly in summer when the brilliant purple heather is flowering”



The castle is a stone castellated building, which has been in the same family for over 700 years. We went onto the terrace for the lovely views over the lake and parkland before setting off for a walk.

Passing old gnarled trees and with swallows swooping around us, we stopped to watch a large flock of greylag and Canada geese feeding on the grass. As we moved on, something spooked the geese and they rose up together and made noisy circles in the air before landing on the lake.

Ripley's walled garden has a magnificent herbaceous border and the owners have created a welcoming space with outdoor games laid out on the lawn. A gardener was quietly watering plants in the greenhouse.

Yet the kitchen garden was my favourite space: the lovely mix of herbs, vegetables and fruit trees and a spectacular border of flowering purple catmint, busy with bees and butterflies, was a dazzling mixture of sound, smell and colour.

We headed over to look around the church and, on the outside wall near the altar, found the remains of musket ball holes. As I ran my hand over the holes in the dressed stone, I thought about the Royalist prisoners from Marston Moor who had been

shot on this spot some 400 years ago.

The next morning we walked from our campsite in Killinghall above the River Nidd, following footpaths through the fields to the picturesque packhorse bridge at Knox. We continued to the wooded Nidd Gorge, the riverside path inviting in the dappled sunlight. The Nidd is a lovely and lively river, draped on each side by drooping trees which provide plenty of resting spots for the kingfisher that followed us, flying low along the river in a flash of blue-green.

After our peaceful walk, we arrived in Knaresborough to find the town buzzing – thanks to the annual festival. In the attractive market square, circled by charming old brick buildings, a small crowd was listening to music by the market cross.

A celebrated Knaresborough resident is remembered in this square. Jack Metcalf, known locally as Blind Jack, has a lovely atmospheric pub to his name, as well as a statue and a window mural.

Born in 1717, Jack was a remarkable man. He lost his sight at six years old after smallpox, but was an accomplished fiddler and worked in the army and as a coach driver before becoming England's first professional road builder. He constructed >

ABOVE Ripley Castle across the lake is a family home

BETWEEN The colourful walled garden at Ripley Castle



around 180 miles of turnpike road in the north of England, specialising in using rafts to construct roads across boggy ground.

We explored the streets of Knaresborough, searching out the colourful murals painted in bricked-up windows and on walls. These vibrant paintings use a *trompe-l'œil* technique to fool the eye into seeing something real.

As well as Blind Jack playing his fiddle, the paintings remember other local characters. I spotted Beryl Burton, a champion cyclist, leaning out of a window. On a stone wall in a courtyard I found a painted cottage door; on the doorstep was a cat so real that I wanted to stretch out and stroke it!

Knaresborough was always outside the forest that bore its name and has a long history. It's mentioned in the Domesday Book and, from the sixteenth century, was popular among visitors when its now larger neighbour, Harrogate, was just a village.

The town is situated around a deep and spectacular sandstone gorge, at the bottom of which is the River Nidd. The ruined castle, originating from Norman times and rebuilt in the fourteenth century, overlooks the river and was destroyed by the Parliamentarians in the Civil War.

We bought ice creams and walked to the castle where the crowds were enjoying a medieval fair among the stone ruins.

TOP TIPS

Bilton Park Village Farm, Bilton Lane, Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG1 4DH is another campsite option, alongside the Beryl Burton cycle route

 biltonpark.co.uk

Mother Shipton's Cave parking has height barriers. There is suitable parking for motorhomes over the bridge at Conyngham Hall

The parking for **Plumpton Rocks** is tight for motorhomes. The layby on the A661 about five minutes' walk away might be easier

In **Pateley Bridge**, larger motorhomes will find it best to use the Nidderdale Showground's car park over the bridge by the river

I sat on the castle ramparts enjoying the picturesque view into the gorge, crossed by the high and spectacular railway viaduct and the river busy with rowing boats.

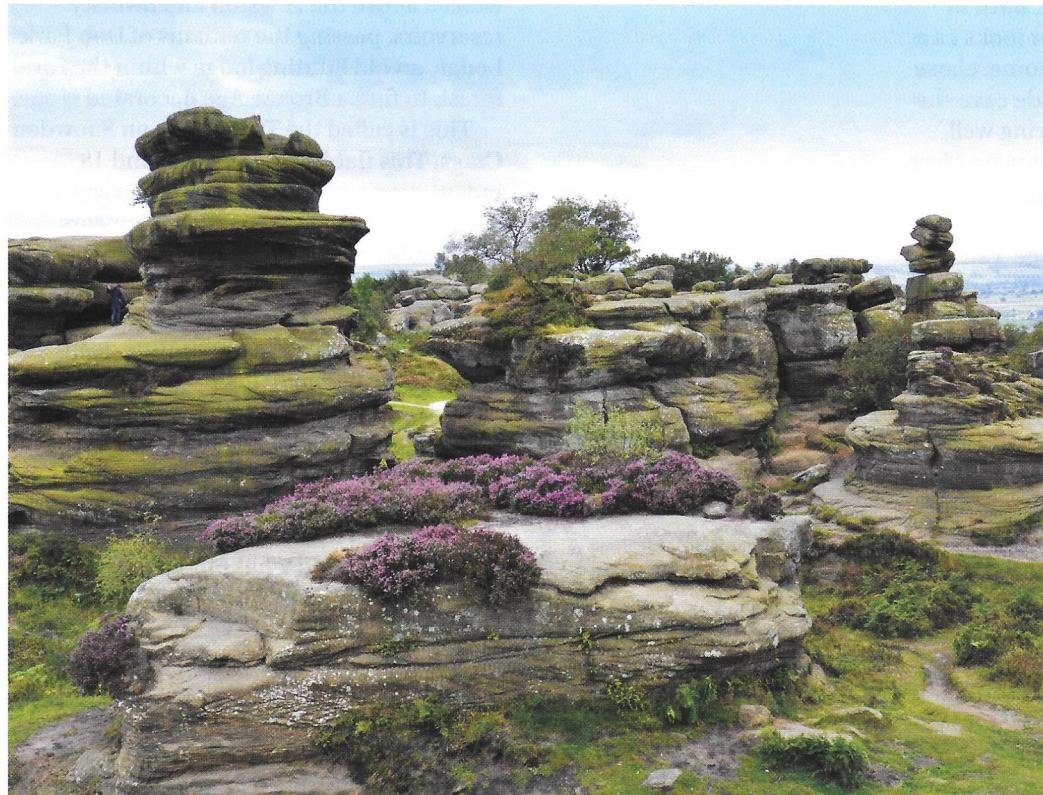
Taking the steps through Bebra Gardens to the gorge, we were out of the summer breeze and the air was hot. At the Chapel of Our Lady of the Crag a mass was finishing. A crowd had been attracted by the chance to worship in the sunshine and the congregation was now strung out down the steps that zigzag through the gardens to the chapel. This roadside chapel, cut into the crag, was the work of the castle's master stonemason in 1408, continuing a Christian tradition of using caves for worship. The charming shrine has a small window, a cross above the door and a carving of a life-size knight guards the entrance.

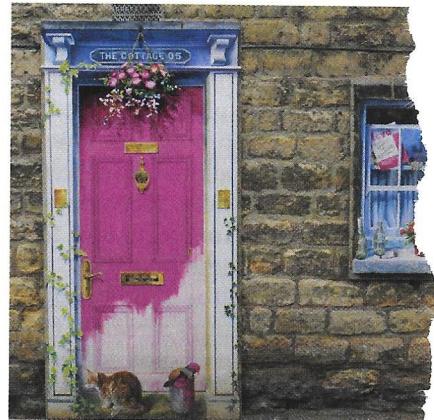
Having waited for the crowds to disperse, I visited the dim chapel. The candles were still lit and the scent of incense hung in the warm air.

It was fitting to finish our trip to Knaresborough with Mother Shipton's Cave, an attraction where objects are turned to stone. I wasn't sure what to expect here but, once we had negotiated the gift shop and wandered along the woodland paths, the cave turned out to be fascinating.

Although more an overhang of rock than a cave, a curtain of mineral-rich water constantly drips down to a pool, creating ▶

BELOW CLOCKWISE Brimham Rocks are a natural playground; the 'oldest' sweet shop in England in Pateley Bridge; Mother Shipton's Well with items petrified in the mineral-rich water





WE STAYED AT

The Cud Life CL, Sprusty Hall Farm, Ripon Road, Killinghall, Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG3 2AU

01423 565855 thecudlife.co.uk

April – October

Two adults, pitch and electric: £20

natural stalactites and also getting caught up in the tiny teddy bears, hats, a teapot and other items that are hung from the rock to become petrified. Apparently, it takes three months of drenching by the minerals to convert a furry teddy into a fossilised bear.

There is commentary, which explains the process and tells the sad story of Ursula Sontheil (aka Mother Shipton). Born in 1488, Ursula was bullied for her looks as a child and, although offered a home, chose to live in solitude in the riverside cave she was born in, near to the petrifying well, which local people feared was magic. Here she made a living from herbal remedies and from telling prophecies.

The following day we took the 'van to Plumpton Rocks, another gritstone outcrop just south of Knaresborough. These crags are privately owned and the natural garden has recently been renovated and an entrance fee is charged.

The garden was created in the eighteenth century with an artificial lake under the crags. This lake is covered in a profusion of water lilies and we watched mallards with late broods of ducklings and coots scampering across the lily pads.

Among the rocks, we followed meandering paths between the boulders and rhododendrons, sometimes through narrow chasms in the rocks and, at other times, on the open crags with views across the lake. Visitors are encouraged to explore

ABOVE LEFT The white golf balls of Menwith Hill listening station can be seen on the horizon over Swinsty Reservoir

ABOVE RIGHT This colourful cottage doorway in Knaresborough looks real but close examination reveals it is a painting

and climb or find a picnic spot or even sit and paint – like JMW Turner, whose first commission in oils was of this lovely spot.

On Askwith Moor, to the west of Knaresborough, you can follow the paths over the moors to find some of the remaining boundary stones for the Forest of Knaresborough. Instead, on a quest, we walked above the Fewston and Swinsty reservoirs, passing the remains of Dob Park Lodge, an old hunting lodge within the royal forest, to find a Bronze Age decorated stone.

This is called the Tree of Life on Snowden Crags. This flat boulder has around 18 indentations, called cup marks, carved in the rock, linked by grooves so it appears to resemble a tree. The rock is on open-access moorland but, even with GPS, the grid reference and instructions, it took time to locate and involved negotiating deep heather, the pollen rising from the flowers as we crossed the pathless moorland.

While Anthony looked for birds, I fingered the patterns in the rock and looked at the view over the reservoirs to the spheres of Menwith Hill gleaming in the sun and wondered what our Bronze Age relatives would think about the changes to this landscape.

Turning back to the rock, I was transported back 4,000 years and sitting next to the mason who was inspired to spend a summer creating this pattern of indentations and lines on this stone. **mmm**

23rd-25th MARCH 2018

THE YORKSHIRE MOTORHOME & ACCESSORY SHOW
HARROGATE

VISIT

The Yorkshire Motorhome & Accessory Show, Harrogate
The first outdoor motorhome show of 2018 has over 250 new and used models on sale

Out&AboutLive
outandaboutlive.co.uk/shows