

# *Bordering* on the *mountainous*



The crags on Stiperstones are a good excuse to keep stopping to enjoy the view



# Carol and Anthony explore the English-Welsh border in their Blue Bus, and find plenty of hills, castles and good pubs...

WORDS & PHOTOS Carol Kubicki

I picked blackberries as I ambled around the splendid moat and stone walls of Montgomery Castle, occasionally stopping to take in the awesome view. The castle sits high above the pretty Welsh town of Montgomery and I could see Offa's Dyke and the Welsh-English border below and the Shropshire Hills beyond. I love exploring castles and past conflicts have left a string of them along this border country.

Montgomery itself nestles below the castle and has a pretty main square with just too many parked cars to be truly picturesque. Baskets of flowers and flags brighten up the town and there are quaint side streets. The model car museum was closed so we sauntered around the shops and attractive buildings.

## Crossing borders

We drove back and forth over the England-Wales border to get to Daisy Bank campsite, annoyingly missing the turning for Kerry Vale Vineyard that has a café and shop (maybe next time). At the campsite reception I spotted a promising and tempting sign for 'Cake of the Day' and, while walking to our pitch with the friendly campsite owner, I asked, 'Are we in Wales or Shropshire?' He laughed and said, 'We are in a small Welsh bubble here.' I checked the map later and a bubble describes perfectly this bit of Wales that juts out into Shropshire.

I had promised Anthony a walking break in the Shropshire Hills but our first day's walk was mostly in Wales. We set off from the campsite to climb the prominent Corndon Hill. I love walking in the UK but sometimes get frustrated when a footpath is neglected and overgrown as this makes route finding tough. Just across the road from our busy campsite we found just such a path that made me wonder if we are the only campers who take a walk.

We spent some time searching the field boundary for the footbridge we needed and I soon regretted wearing shorts as my legs were covered in nettle stings and scratches from brambles, not a good look! As we hunted we could hear the sound of clanking metal and a sheep bleating in distress. Eventually we tracked down the bridge and crossed to find a field of lovely Jacob sheep. One of these piebald sheep had its head stuck in the wire fence and as it tried to get free was banging against a corrugated iron sheet. Keen to end its ordeal we grabbed its thick soft fleece and managed to stretch the fence enough to get the sheep's horns through the gap. The sheep ran free without as much as a glance back to say thank ewe!



This border country is good for sheep farming

Pretty towns, rolling hills and a patchwork of fields sum up the Wales-England border country





## Border shepherd

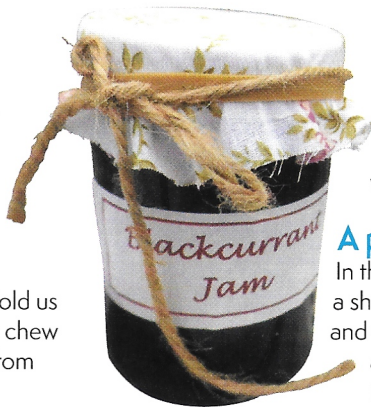
We were still less than half a mile from the campsite so we felt we should crack on but were waylaid again in a delightful sunken green track. This time it was a chatty sheep farmer leaning on a gate who held us up.

He had been feeding his large flock and proudly told us they were Ryeland and Texel sheep and was keen to chew the fat about the extra work and expense resulting from the dry summer.

Along narrow lanes with high hedges packed with blackberries and dotted with pretty cottages the only traffic was Postman Pat who rushed by with deliveries. Our route took us under the craggy Roundton Hill that was once topped with an Iron Age fort and the steep path up to the top of Corndon Hill passed two Bronze Age burial cairns. These hills are a landscape that would have been familiar to our ancestors.

It might not be one of the Shropshire Hills and is only 1,683ft high, but Corndon Hill is a proper hilltop and we put layers on against the chilly breeze while we admired the views to the mountains of Wales in the west and the real Shropshire Hills to the east.

After descending we nipped across the border into England to find Mitchell's Fold Stone Circle, a moorland circle of 15 stones. There isn't much to see but one of a



**ABOVE** Yummy home-made jam bought at the gate

**BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT** Meeting old friends at the campsite was unplanned; A drawbridge once crossed the moat at Montgomery Castle

**RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM** Find your inner child on a tyre swing; The garden at Small Batch campsite

pair of tall stones that formed the entrance remains to give a clue to the impressiveness of this circle when it was in use.

## A pub on the edge

In the nearby village of Priest Weston we sheltered from a short shower in the Miner's Arms. This is a charming and welcoming border pub that is in England and has a car park in Wales.

Enjoying a pint of good local beer we browsed the photographs on the wall; Anthony recognised Ronnie Lane and Bill Wyman and locals tell tales of their impromptu concerts here in the 70s.

Back at the campsite, after walking at least 11 miles, we felt we deserved a slice of the campsite's cake of the day with our brew.

The next morning we took the campervan out to the riverside village of Clun (firmly in Shropshire). We set off walking and, knowing we were running short of jam for breakfast crumpets, I was pleased when I spotted a house on the edge of the village selling gate-side jam and eggs. Approaching the gate their dogs came bounding over barking and I backed off, deciding I wasn't that desperate for jam. Further on we found another cottage with a selection of home-made jam and no dogs, so I left money in the honesty box for a jar.



2015 Renault Master MWB

### CONVERSION

TYPE Devon Tempest

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

OWNED SINCE 2015

**LAYOUT** Rear kitchen/ washroom with twin sofas in front lounge that convert to single beds

**TRAVEL SEATS/BERTHS** 3/2

### WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT IT

It's great just being able to pull over, any place, any time, throw the side door open and enjoy the vistas with a cup of tea in hand. That's the beauty of touring in a campervan!





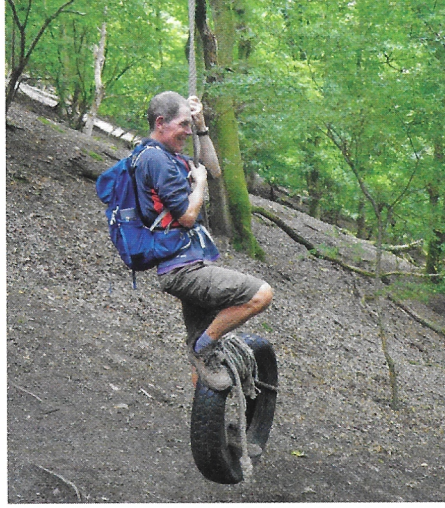
## At the top of their game

Bury Ditches is an Iron Age hill fort surrounded by pine trees that fill the air with a sweet smell. It was a humid day and mist hung around the trees as we reached the fort's clearing. There is generally little remaining of UK hill forts but, at Bury Ditches, the scale of the ditches and mounds are impressive. The flowering rosebay willowherb and heather provide colour and an orientation table points out the views. A child was counting up to a hundred and dad rushed by to hide in the bushes, his finger to his lips as he asked us to not give the game away.

Returning to Clun, two locals stopped and asked about our walk. Hearing where we had been they described a magical Christmas day when they had visited Bury Ditches under clear blue skies with frost hanging on the grass. As we chatted it became clear that they were from the house with the jam, eggs and dogs; we both kept shtum about buying from the competition!

Clun has a small ruined castle that I couldn't resist exploring and a fiercely fought bowling tournament being held in the shadow of the tower distracted me for a while. We found the picturesque packhorse bridge in the centre of the village before climbing back into our campervan. Driving through sunshine and showers, a brilliant rainbow arched across the valley.

Bishop's Castle disappointingly no longer has a castle



but it is home to the Three Tuns Brewery, the oldest brewery in the UK. They have been brewing here since 1642 and, in the old-world inn, I had a glass of Clerics Cure, a wonderful Indian Pale Ale; tasting of spicy honey, this is a perfect summer beer. Bishop's Castle is a quirky town with character, colourful buildings, arty gift shops and a museum called the House on Crutches! This remarkable medieval timber-framed building has crutches, or wooden posts supporting the upstairs extension.

## Boundary stones

Stiperstones is one of the most popular of the Shropshire Hills and it is easy to see why. Its long ridge is dotted with a series of quartzite rocky outcrops, each with its own name and we walked by Cranberry Rock, Manstone Rock and Devil's Chair. The ridge was dazzling with purple heather, bright yellow gorse flowers and the russet-red leaves of bilberry bushes. Mixed into this palette were colourful painted lady butterflies and in the sky were red kites and black ravens.

The outcrops act as markers along the path and I noticed that everyone paused at each crag. They might scramble to the top, picnic among the heather, chat to other walkers or just enjoy the panoramic views.

Small Batch campsite sits in a peaceful Shropshire valley at Little Stretton, a small village with two pubs and an adorable timber-framed thatched church, all ideal for popping in during an evening stroll. The campsite is a family-run business and we received a warm welcome from grandma and three grandchildren who were keen to learn the ropes and show us around their lovely site.







**DAISY BANK TOURING CARAVAN PARK** Montgomery, Powys SY15 6EB  
[daisy-bank.co.uk](http://daisy-bank.co.uk)

**SMALL BATCH CARAVAN & CAMP SITE**  
 Little Stretton, Shropshire SY6 6PW  
[smallbatch-camping.co.uk](http://smallbatch-camping.co.uk)

## Bordering on the idyllic

One of the wonderful things about Small Batch campsite is that you can walk straight into the stunning Ashes Hollow valley. This is a truly lovely green valley with a meandering stream of small waterfalls and pools, and berry-laden rowan trees. On a sunny day I suggest you pack a bag with your favourite picnic food and wander into the valley, throw your rug on one of the many grassy spots and relax. We lingered in this special place, sitting on a rocky knoll to enjoy our coffee, and found a meadow to practise tai chi in the sunshine. All we could hear over the babbling of the stream were the buzzards mewing overhead.

Once on the upland ridge of the Long Mynd we were on top of the world and there is a real sense of being on a mountain, rather than a hill. There were plenty of other walkers and we joined them on the path to the orientation table at the highest point to enjoy the 360° views.

We descended through the picturesque Carding Mill Valley spotting some of the wild horses among the bracken and around the car park, joining families enjoying holiday fun. We bought ice creams at the pavilion and watched children cheerfully playing with boats and stones in the stream while the adults relaxed on blankets.

Maybe it was watching the children playing that drove Anthony to jump onto the tyre swing we found on the path back to the campsite.

He did check no one was in sight before happily swinging out over the slope and finding his inner child. Two walkers came over the hill and laughed as he sheepishly climbed off.

**ABOVE** Ashes Hollow valley is a peaceful idyll and perfect for a picnic

**BELOW** The Knife Angel is a moving symbol of peace and remembrance

## Crossing paths

Just occasionally fate plays us a generous hand. Serendipitously two friends from Manchester and their dog were also booked into the same campsite that night. By the time we returned they were pitched next to us and had the kettle on.

We opened crisps and a jar of olives and sat outside catching up over nibbles. In the evening we all had an excellent meal in the dog-friendly Green Dragon in Little Stretton. Returning to our pitches it was dark enough for stars so I opened up the SkyView app and together we tried to identify constellations and planets.

Next day, after a shared breakfast we left the Shropshire Hills, breaking up our journey home at the British Ironwork Centre near Oswestry. This popular and quirky tourist site has plenty of parking and entrance is by donation. I had come to see the stunning *Knife Angel* sculpture. Constructed in cooperation with police forces, the 2ft-high sculpture is made up of 100,000 knives that were either confiscated or handed in. This symbol of peace succeeds in bringing home the pain of losing a loved one to knife crime.

It turned out there is more to the British Ironwork Centre than the *Knife Angel*. As well as a café and gift shop there is a collection of sculptures dotted around the gardens and children were excitedly racing around the safari of figures from giraffes to elephants. We finished our stroll at the massive gorilla statue that is made from 40,000 spoons. Two happy campers headed home after a wonderful holiday.

Good times.

