



Get away for... **THE WEEKEND!**

Beautiful Northumberland is the natural choice for a refreshing break near Stonehaugh and Kielder Forest

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki

What I needed was to be immersed in the countryside, with miles of footpaths to explore from our campervan's door. Heading north is our default and the hamlet of Stonehaugh and Kielder Forest in Northumberland turned out to be the perfect short break to recharge our batteries.

Leaving the M6, we headed east along Hadrian's Wall, looking for somewhere to stop for coffee. Walltown Country Park, a former working quarry now planted with wildflowers and trees, was a great choice. The whinstone quarried here was part of the Great Whin Sill, the dramatic geological feature the Romans took advantage of when building Hadrian's Wall.

We strode out along the well-surfaced paths around a pond and below crags, spotting – from a high point – the expanse

of Wark Forest, our destination that evening.

Hexham's shops, clustering prettily around the splendid medieval abbey, were convenient for restocking our cupboards before we continued to nearby Corbridge Roman town. This excavated site by the River Tyne began as a military base and steadily grew into a busy civilian settlement. Artefacts and information in the small museum helped me make sense of the outdoor ruins. Walking along the remains of the high street, I stepped back in time, listening to the hubbub of traders selling goods to weary soldiers on leave from postings on Hadrian's Wall.

Thoughts of Romans soon took my head to Italy! I persuaded Anthony that it was sunny enough for ice cream and we walked into the smart town of Corbridge and found the amazing Emporium Ice Cream Parlour. ▶

Why?... To renew your connections
with the natural world and breathe
in some clean air

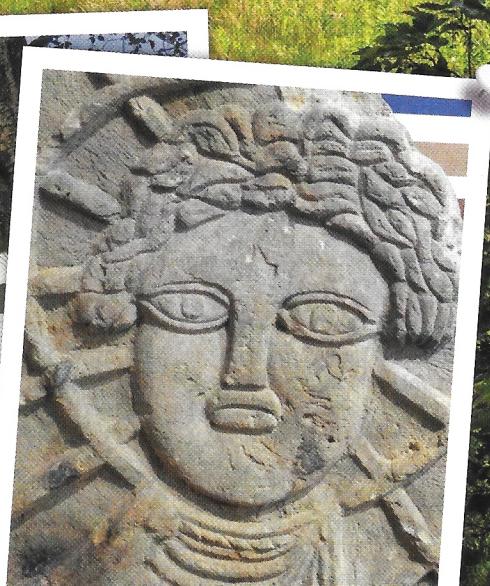


MAIN Stonehaugh totem poles.*

FAR LEFT Exploring around Stonehaugh, we found this waterfall

BELOW LEFT The former forestry workers' houses at Stonehaugh sit around a green

BELOW RIGHT A Roman find at Corbridge Roman Town



US AND OUR 'VAN



Carol Kubicki...

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



2015 Devon Tempest on a Renault Master MWB 2.3-litre. This is our third blue campervan and we have called them all the 'Blue Bus'

You might meet a timber lorry on the narrow road to Stonehaugh, but there are few cars. Stonehaugh feels as remote as anything in Scotland; the nearest shop is six miles away. The grassy site has a simple sanitary block almost completely run by sustainable energy generation.

Stonehaugh (pronounced stone-hoff) sits in Wark Forest, the southern area of Kielder Forest and within the Northumberland National Park. The village was built for forestry workers in the 1950s and was originally planned to be larger, with a church and pub. Mechanisation meant that workforce requirements reduced.

Today, Stonehaugh is a tidy village with neat rows of houses, some in pretty pastel colours, around a village green.

Haugh means a meadow by a river and the tumbling waters of Warks Burn wind around the village on their way to the North Tyne.

Northumberland National Park is renowned for its dark skies, thanks to low levels of light pollution. Walking down to the burn, we found the Stargazing Pavilion, a wooden circular shelter designed for comfortable stargazing.

Below this are three tall totem poles reaching for the sky. I walked up to the poles to see the detail of the carved animals and

figures. These totem poles are not a superficial art project; they are meaningful to the community. (The first poles were a village project in the 1970s and the tradition has continued each time they needed renewing.) The poles are carved from locally grown larch trees and are designed and carved by local people.

We picked our way carefully along a boggy path by the stream to a small waterfall to find our way back to the road. Along with the forestry and moorland that surrounds Stonehaugh there is still farming in this rugged landscape and signs of the past linger. Ruined shielings, old field boundaries and stone circular sheepfolds lie in surrounding fields.

The weather next morning held memories of summer and we packed the rucksacks for a day-long hike along lanes and footpaths around Stonehaugh.

Leaving the village, we crossed the Pennine Way (which bypasses Stonehaugh) and followed the lane to Ravensheugh Crags.

We always look for something to climb and, with few actual hills in this undulating countryside, this line of crags delivers a marvellous and airy viewpoint in every direction for little effort.

Hadrian's Wall was to our south, marking the edge of an empire. We gazed over a rural



ABOVE The splendid medieval abbey at Hexham

RIGHT Warks Burn flows prettily around Stonehaugh

INFORMATION

For things to do and places to visit, including Stonehaugh

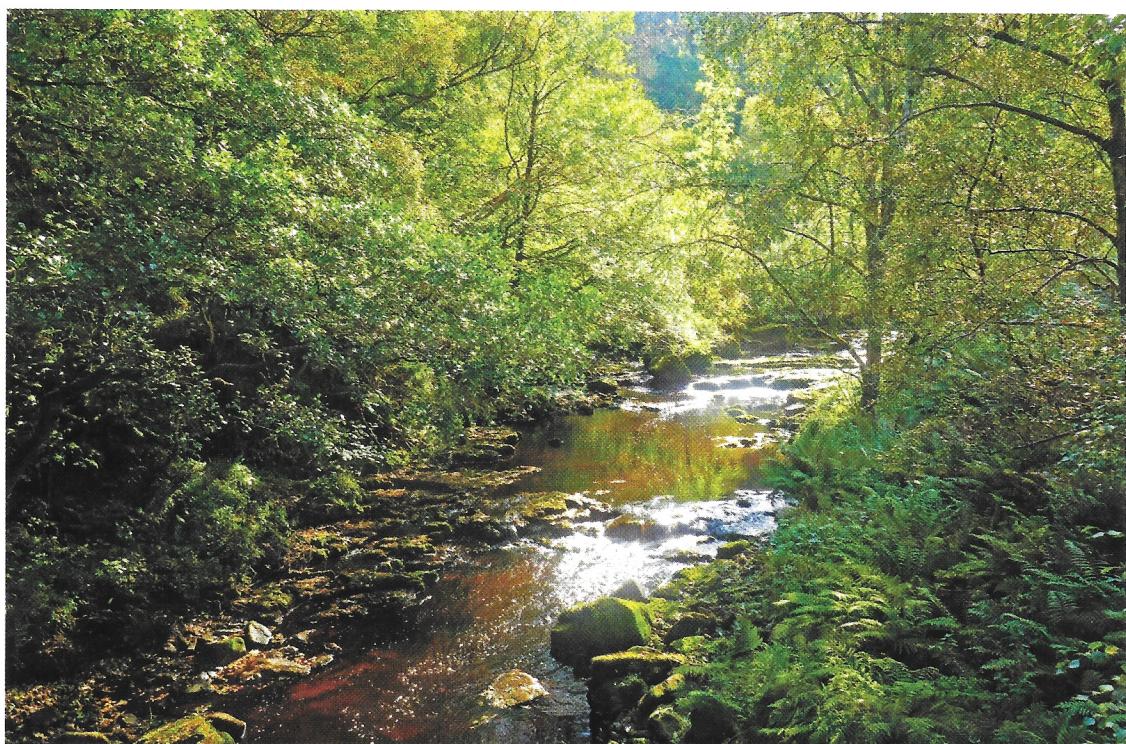
 northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk

Trail guides for Kielder Water and Forest Park can be downloaded from

 visitkielder.com

English Heritage manages Corbridge Roman Town and other historic sites on Hadrian's Wall

 english-heritage.org.uk



Must do... Find your own space in the woodland, moorland, river or crags around Stonehaugh

landscape dotted with stone walls and farm buildings and massive Kielder Forest spreading to the horizon.

A little-used lane took us towards Warks Burn where we picked up a grassy path alongside old and bent hawthorn trees heavy with berries. We had spent the day in glorious isolation but, as our route rejoined the Pennine Way to cross Warks Burn, we met a couple who appeared lost. Asking if they needed help, they almost sheepishly admitted, "We had just stopped to take in the scenery." I gazed around at the splendid views and gave an understanding nod.

This is a remote section of the Pennine Way and a makeshift sign announces that the owners of Horneystead Farm have recognised this and become a legendary Good Samaritan for long-distance walkers. Inside their barn is a not-for-profit self-service pit stop, with hot and cold refreshments, comfy chairs, a shower and even a tumble dryer.

After skirting plantation forestry along a short stretch of road, we turned back onto moorland, following a tiny stream back to Warks Burn.

Above the burn sits Low Roses Bower, a group of abandoned buildings; look carefully and you will spot that one relic of the past has been carefully restored.

This is the Long Drop, an old toilet or 'netty' as they are known in these parts. This smallest room sits on the crag edge about 40ft above the burn. According to local people, this draughty perch was in use until the 1950s! Crossing the river again, we peered through the trees back towards the Long Drop, getting a sense of the height of the crag and what it would have been like to use the netty.

The tranquillity and countryside around Stonehaugh had restored my equilibrium and, next morning, we moved on from this idyll, driving deep into Kielder Forest and to Kielder Water. After Stonehaugh, pretty much anywhere would seem crowded and Kielder is a popular visitor attraction that we were unlikely to have to ourselves.

The season had changed, too. Summer had left and a damp autumn day had set in.

A leaflet showing parking areas, footpaths and attractions around Kielder Water helped us to choose Kielder Waterside and a walk around Bull Crag Peninsula to stretch our legs for a few hours.

Somehow we missed Freya's Cabin, an ornate shelter that is one of the many sculptures around Kielder Water.

Instead, we followed wide paths through towering trees that became quieter the further we walked from the car park. ▶

ESSENTIALS

HOW LONG

Three nights

WHEN

We visited in September

HOW MUCH

Fuel Average 34mpg (290 miles). From home in Lancashire-Northumberland return..... £46

Site fees..... £57

Parking Walltown Country Park and Kielder Water.. £11

Entrance fees Two adults; Corbridge Roman Town. £18

TOTAL £132



BELOW LEFT Autumnal mushrooms grow in Kielder Forest

BELOW The Victorian railway viaduct is a good viewpoint over Kielder Water

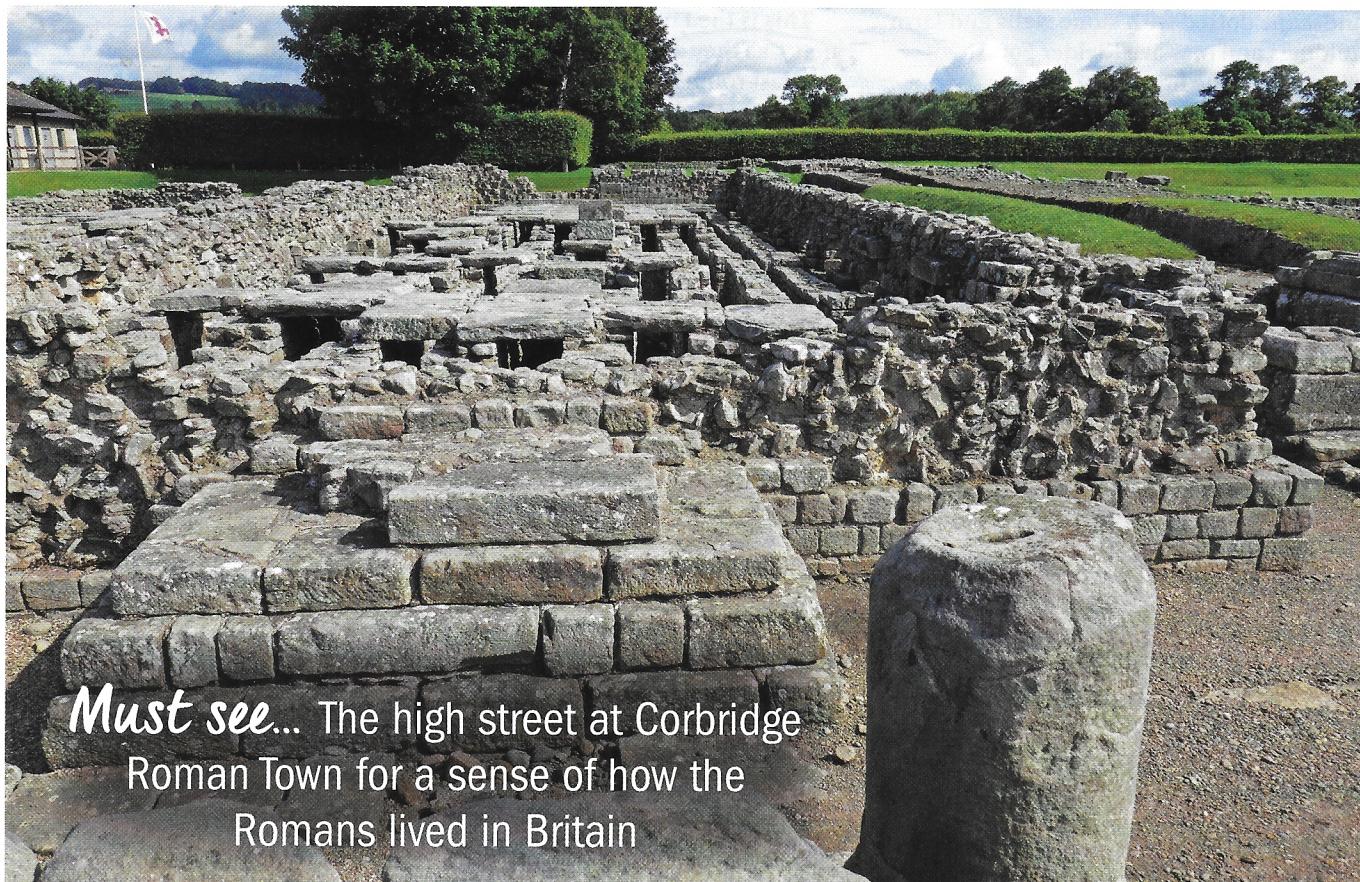
TOP TIPS

National Cycle Route 68 passes Stonehaugh and the area would also suit anyone who likes undulating road cycling and quiet lanes

There are a number of wheelchair and buggy-accessible paths around Kielder Water, including the path from Kielder Castle to Kielder Viaduct and the path from Matthew's Linn car park around the Lewis Burn inlet.

Some of the paths at Walltown Country Park are also wheelchair and buggy-accessible





Through the trees I caught occasional glimpses of the water and misty outlooks across the reservoir.

We planned to overnight in one of the car parks available to motorhomes around Kielder Water. As we drove up the track to Elf Kirk Viewpoint, gusts of wind accompanied the rain at this exposed spot and we sought somewhere more sheltered. Tower Knowe car park, by the visitor's centre was, not surprisingly, busy. Fortunately, our third attempt at an overnight spot proved just right at Kielder Castle car park, which is at the furthest end of Kielder Water and sheltered among trees.

As the rain eased, we explored around Kielder Castle, a former hunting lodge and now a visitor's centre, and found the large Minotaur construction. This creative maze is constructed of gabions (wire mesh baskets filled with stones). It has a glittering stone room as the goal and, as nobody else was there, we played around in our navigation of the labyrinth with me insisting on taking only right turns and Anthony trying a different strategy. Soon we were both lost and had lost each other.

Peeking through unexpected windows in the stones, I eventually found a flight of stairs going nowhere and, looking down on Anthony, was able to guide him. It was with

much laughter and many dead ends later that we finally managed to escape the maze.

A brighter morning greeted us and we left the 'van at Kielder Castle to walk to the river, joining the track of a former railway that disappears under the reservoir. From the high castellated parapet of the Victorian Kielder Viaduct I looked along the North Tyne to the reservoir and admired the decorative ironwork panels of animals and plants. These were inspired by local children's drawings and created at a 'forge in', involving around 60 blacksmiths in 2004.

Heading back through the trees, we paused to admire mushrooms near the path. I don't know a fly agaric from a puffball, but I enjoy seeing these colourful signs of autumn.

Before leaving Kielder Water, we stopped at Matthew's Linn car park and walked around the mouth of Lewis Burn and onto quiet woodland trails. There was nobody else in sight as we leaned on the elegant suspension bridge over Lewis Burn, watching a heron patiently searching for fish in the still water.

Northumberland is such a beautiful county and, after a few days of bathing in its woodland, nature and fresh air, I returned south down the M6 feeling mellow and considerably refreshed. **mmm**

ABOVE Looking across the remains of the granaries at Corbridge Roman Town

THE CAMPSITES

Stonehaugh Campsite, The Old Farmhouse, Stonehaugh, Hexham NE48 3BU

01434 230798

stonehaughcampsite.com

1 April (or Easter if earlier) – 30 September

Two adults, pitch and electric: From £26

Forestry England allows overnight parking at four car parks: Kielder Castle, Elf Kirk Viewpoint, Anglers Arms and Tower Knowe Visitor Centre

03451 550236

visitkielder.com/visit/know-before-you-go

All year

£10