



Get away for... THE WEEKEND!

Spring is the time for an enticing short break to Teesdale

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki

Spring was in overdrive as we pulled into Doe Park Caravan Site in the Tees Valley; the sun was shining, birds were twittering and lambs were gambolling. We received a warm welcome in reception and, after checking in, it doesn't take much prompting for one of the friendly staff to tell you the story behind their imposing house.

In the seventeenth century James Ledgard, a supporter of the Roundheads in the English Civil War, was in the process of building an elegant mansion. Unfortunately, before he could complete his project, he was brutally killed by Royalists on the village green in nearby Romaldkirk.

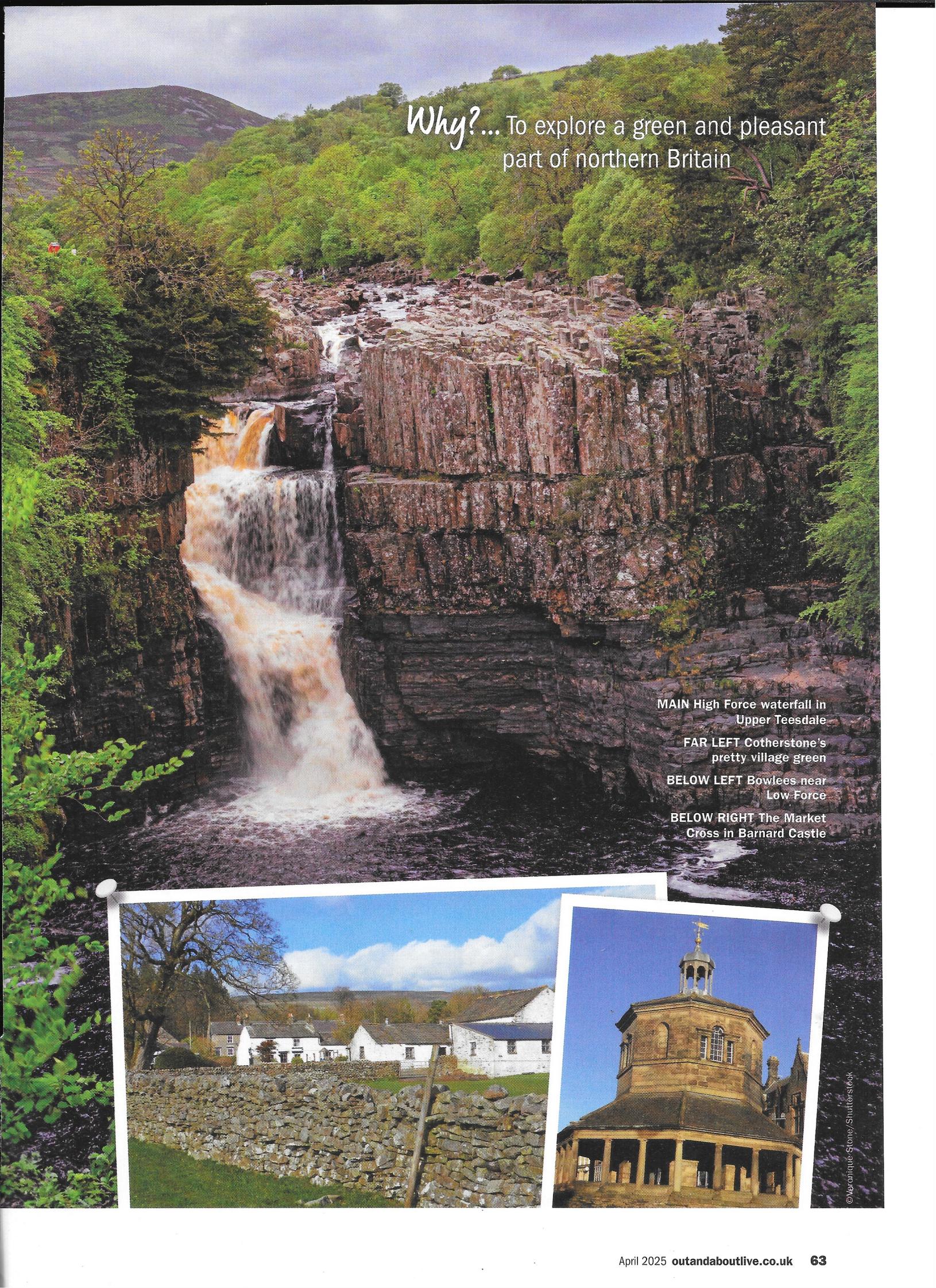
His bereaved relatives were left with very little money and a building site. Needing somewhere to live, they decided the tall and narrow unfinished house with an odd staircase could be made habitable, popped a

roof on it and moved in!

In County Durham, in the North Pennines, Doe Park is just a few miles from Barnard Castle. Cotherstone, the nearest village, is only a 10-minute stroll from the campsite on a grassy path by the River Balder, which flows into the Tees.

Walking to the village under trees waking from their winter slumbers, I noticed leaves of the brightest shade of green and hanging blush-pink blossoms. We sauntered around Cotherstone's pretty village green, where daffodils were just finishing blooming, and crossed a stream on a stone bridge.

A sign along a lane took us to the Friends Meeting House. This modest single-storey place of worship sits within a walled woodland burial ground. A secluded eighteenth century stone building, it represents a long history of Quakers ➤



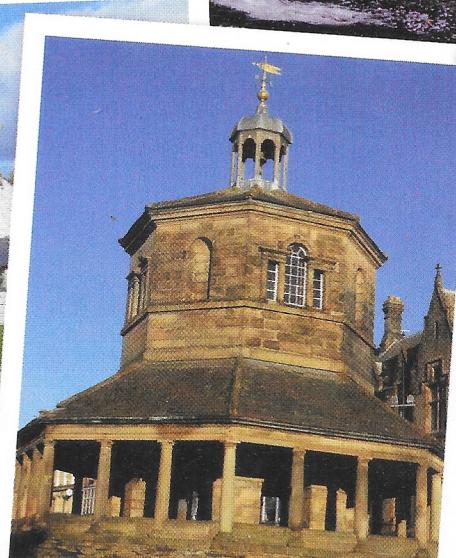
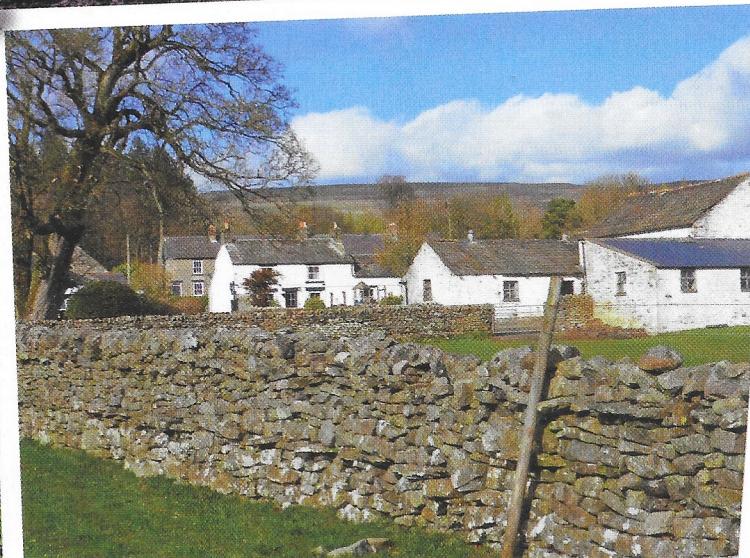
Why?... To explore a green and pleasant part of northern Britain

MAIN High Force waterfall in Upper Teesdale

FAR LEFT Cotherstone's pretty village green

BELOW LEFT Bowlees near Low Force

BELOW RIGHT The Market Cross in Barnard Castle



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ABOUT US...



US Me and my husband, Anthony, explore beautiful places in our Blue Bus whatever the season. I'm a keen walker, fair-weather cyclist and an improving birdwatcher

OUR 'VAN A 2021 Devon Firefly on a Ford Custom Transit SWB 2.0-litre. This is our third Devon Conversions campervan and we love the layout that packs so much into a sub-five-metre van

among the farming community in Teesdale.

From here we followed our noses downhill, breathing in the pungent wild garlic that grows abundantly along the Teesdale paths at this time of year. Lanes dotted with charming cottages and colourful gardens, each more desirable than the next, eventually led us back to the bridge over the River Balder and the campsite.

Our campervan was converted by Devon Conversions, a company that is confusingly based in County Durham. It therefore felt appropriate to be in our camper's home county for a get-together of Devon campervan owners; 25 'vans were dotted around the small campsite. These gatherings are relaxed occasions, with no organised activities, but in the early evening everyone braved the still-bracing spring weather with a chair and sat sharing travellers' tales snuggled in winter coats and under blankets.

Doe Park is both a campsite and a sheep farm and in spring the sound of lambs calling their mum punctuates the rural tranquillity. The next morning tracks took us around fields full of sheep with their little ones to a sturdy metal footbridge over the River Tees.

From Cotherstone, ramblers can hike the Teesdale Way on both sides of the river towards Barnard Castle. A round trip of about 10 miles, with a lunch stop in one of

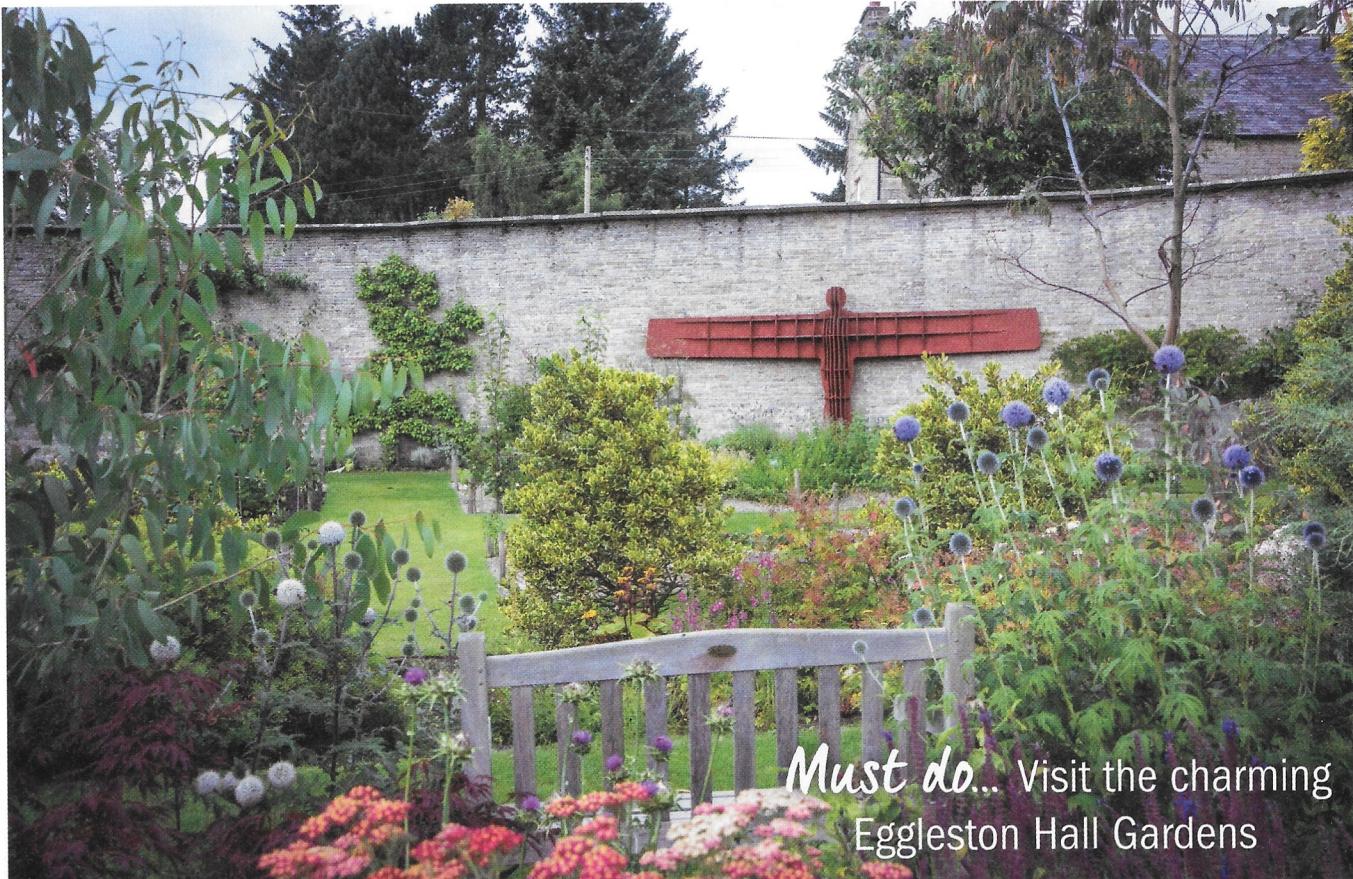
Barnard Castle's many cafés, this is an unbeatable way to spend the day. There are also buses if you prefer to halve your walking distance and spend more time visiting the castle or shopping in the town.

We picked up the wooded path on the left bank of the Tees. The river has cut a deep and steep-sided valley as it meanders to the sea from the Pennines and we accompanied the lively water through trees full of birdsong, spotting clumps of white wood anemone.

There are some spring sounds that are particularly special and I grabbed Anthony's hand when I heard our first cuckoo. This bird had successfully made its journey from Africa and was animating the valley with its distinctive call.

You might expect a downhill walk following a river to the sea, but this section of the Tees is characterised by ups and downs. Our path soon climbed steeply to the open fields above the valley and we had views across Teesdale as we passed pretty farmhouses.

The descent was via a hazardously muddy path that fell sharply back to the river and I was relieved to reach the bank having stayed on my feet. Back among the wild garlic, the woodland path was broad until we reached an interesting section by cliffs where narrow stone steps appeared to hang over the water.



Must do... Visit the charming Eggleston Hall Gardens

The ornate Victorian Deepdale Aqueduct, a combined footbridge and aqueduct, is the perfect spot to enjoy your first view along the Tees to the castle perched over the gorge. This is Barnard Castle, built for Bernard de Balliol in the twelfth century and gives Barnard Castle its name. Still an imposing ruin, we decided to climb the paths around its solid walls to the gatehouse.

Barnard Castle was bustling with visitors in the spring sunshine. We didn't have much time, so focused on wandering along the main street and stopping to see the Market Cross or Butter Market.

Currently treated as a roundabout, this distinctive and unusual octagonal building has a colonnaded veranda around its base where dairy products were sold. It has played an important role in the life of Barnard Castle since its construction in the eighteenth century and has been called upon to be the local courtroom, fire station and other uses.

We then managed to get a lift from friends to Eggleston Hall Gardens. Slipping money into the honesty box, we ambled through these delightful Teesdale gardens. As well as unusual plants, in a tranquil corner sits a ruined private chapel and a couple of Victorian glasshouses have been restored. After being inspired by the garden walk, visitors can browse and buy plants in

the large, well-stocked nursery.

Following the River Tees higher up the valley with our friends, we stopped at Low Force, the baby sister waterfall of High Force. In the evening sunshine the tumble of different cascades made an exuberant roar and, crossing the swaying bridge over the rocky ravine, I didn't even notice the one-at-a-time safety recommendation. Near the sculpture of two sheep on a dry stone wall, we stood on the bank watching the water and took photographs to remind us of happy days with friends.

That evening we had a convivial meal in the Fox and Hounds, a Cotherstone pub that serves hearty pub food with good humour; they made dealing with a large group of campervan owners seem the easiest thing in the world. Leaving other Devon owners to party the night away, we walked back to the 'van in darkness that blanketed every feature.

We were glad we had been prudent and brought torches, but were surprised and impressed when two other campers loomed out of the darkness towards us with no lights between them! Maybe they were regulars who knew the path like the back of their hand.

The next morning, we set off on foot to the disused railway line by the campsite, stopping to take in the view from the ▶

ESSENTIALS

HOW LONG

Three nights

WHEN

Spring

HOW MUCH

Fuel Morecambe to Cotherstone return (130 miles) Average 40mpg. £22

Site fees £93

Entrance fees Two adults: Eggleston Hall Gardens £5

TOTAL £120



BELOW We stood on the riverbank mesmerised by the falls

BELOW FAR LEFT Eggleston Hall Gardens are so beautifully kept*

TOP TIPS

The approximately five-mile walk along the River Tees between High Force and Low Force is a great introduction to this area

Weardale Travel currently runs the Barnard Castle to Middleton-in-Teesdale bus (95/96) throughout the day.

There is no service on Sundays and bank holidays

You can walk to Eggleston Hall Gardens from Doe Park. This would be a six-mile round trip or longer if you meander

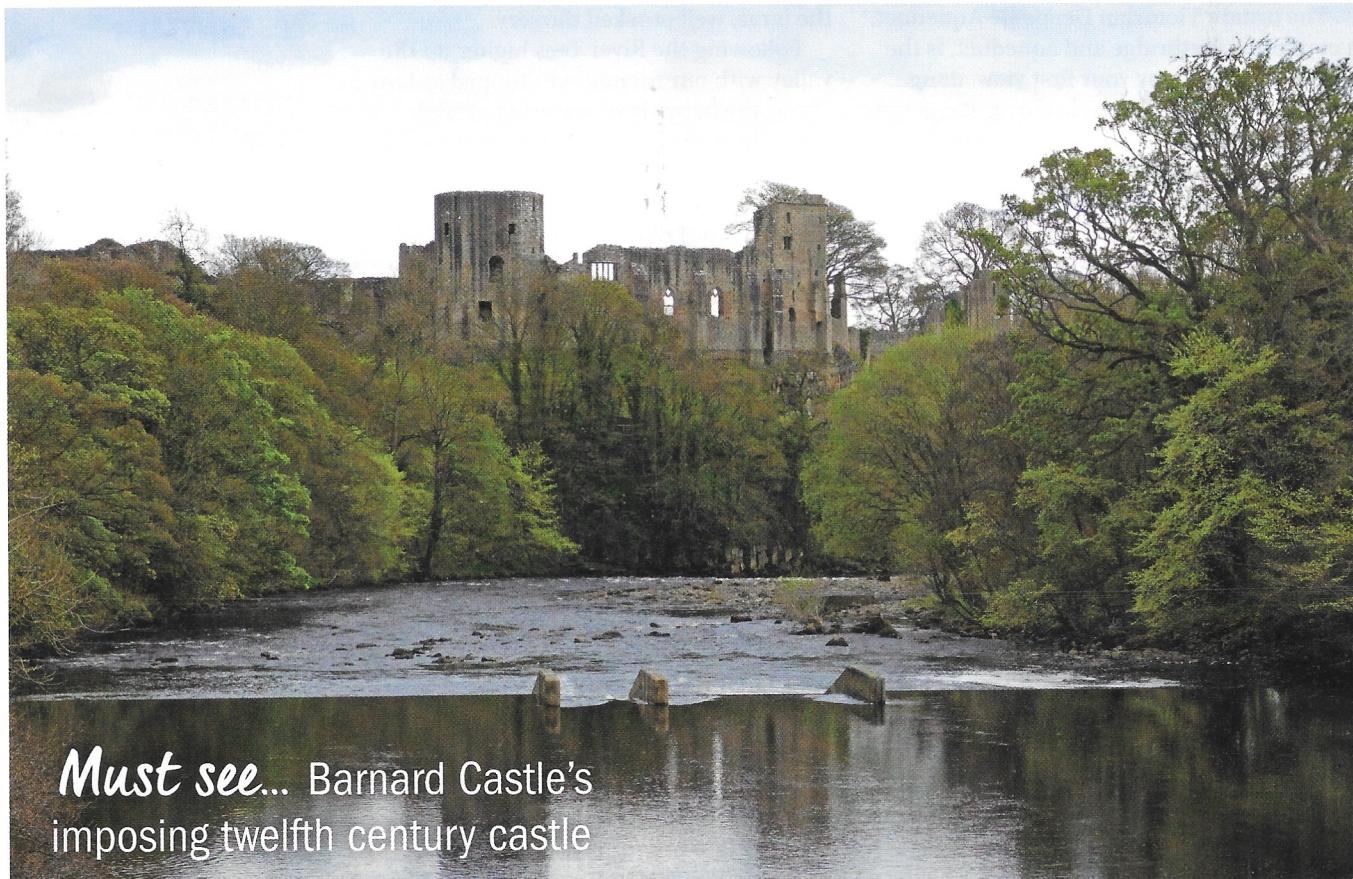
INFORMATION

Visit Teesdale has ideas for things to see and do
visitteesdale.com

Barnard Castle information
english-heritage.org.uk

Eggleston Hall Gardens
egglestonhallgardens.co.uk





Must see... Barnard Castle's imposing twelfth century castle

nine-arch viaduct that crosses high over the River Balder before heading towards Romaldkirk. In spring the banks of the line are prettily colonised by colourful primroses, cowslips and wood anemones. Six miles of this disused track are accessible to walkers and cyclists through the green Tees Valley, providing an easy way to explore.

Crossing the village green in Romaldkirk where James Ledgard from Doe Park lost his life, we looked around the impressive church. With stone cottages and a handsome coaching inn, Romaldkirk is another picturesque Teesdale village.

We returned to the railway line and headed to Mickleton where we turned off the almost-flat railway and faced Stoop Hill, a steep lane that climbs up to Romaldkirk Moor. The hill was a bit of a slog until we spotted three hares in a surrounding field. Spring was certainly in their legs and mating on their minds as two males fought for the attention of a female. They leapt through a gate and raced and bounced up the lane ahead of us. We were now too busy enjoying the show to notice our uphill puffing and panting, but the hares were oblivious to us and hurtled out of sight.

At the top of the hill the panorama encompassed acres of countryside. We had left the tidy walled fields and farms of the

valley and were now in an upland landscape of heather and soft rushes; the map called this Swarthy Mere, so we were expecting bogs.

It lived up to its name and we had to jump over sodden ground, trying to pick out the drier patches. The messy going underfoot was a small price to pay for the sense of space and the birdlife, including a curlew posing on a wall.

Looking up, soaring skylarks sang their evocative rising and falling warbles. But the prize for springtime high spirits must go to the acrobatic male lapwing tumbling through the air and calling 'peewit'.

We eventually reached the solid ground of Botany Road with a sense of achievement and muddy shoes. I had noticed this arrow-straight green lane on the map and had been intrigued. Stopping for snacks, I took in the dry stone walls, the heather and breathed in sweet spring air.

It was downhill from here on lanes that descended to Hunderthwaite. We were soon striding out along the disused railway line once again and turning into Doe Park.

Driving our campervan home over the Pennines after our short break in beautiful Teesdale, we agreed that spring was definitely here and that could only mean one thing, summer was just around the corner! **mmm**

ABOVE The view of the castle from Deepdale Aqueduct

B BELOW The 'unfinished' house at Doe Park; Doe Park campsite



THE CAMP SITE

Doe Park Caravan Site
Cotherstone, Barnard Castle
DL12 9UQ
Open 15 March - 31 October
[W doepark.co.uk](http://doepark.co.uk)