

Walk this way

A weekend in the Peak District suits **Rachel Stothert** and her partner, Andrew, who has a tendency to go mad if not kept occupied...



I hate having my photograph taken but sitting here enjoying the view meant I forgot my camera phobia
Inset: Notice how far from the edge I'm walking: heights are not my thing



Andrew likes to be active. I like a great view and good food. Finding somewhere that suited us both was the task for this weekend away. Unfortunately, this also meant that my legs would, in all probability, get stretched too.

The Peak District immediately sprang to mind. It's only a short drive away from our home in south Lincolnshire – although I've discovered that the most pleasant weekend destinations take about three hours to get to from Bourne.

One of Andrew's favourite places is Edale. Unfortunately, the campsite there is for tents only, so we decided to pitch up further along the valley near Hope.

Hope itself, as we quickly found out, is a sleepy little village. The hikers' café and one other are excellent in that they provide basic grub for a reasonable amount. If you want something a little later, or a little more exotic, there is a Chinese and a curry takeaway or a big brash pub offering the basics. Move a little further upmarket and heading a little further out of the village away from the campsite and you get to the Poacher's Arms. Not cheap but the fish and chips are amazing.

The village deli sells cheese and bread, and the obligatory Bakewell tart and the flower shop also sells vegetables. Anything else you could



probably get from the excellent Spar, with friendly staff.

If you want a little more variety then head for Castleton. If you are a Caravan Club member, you could choose to stay on the (members only) site here as well.

This thriving little market town has plenty of shops as well as being the home to cavern mania. There is one cave (Peak Cavern) on the outskirts, which has good reports. You can also buy a joint ticket for this and the Speedwell Cavern, which it has to be said, is a little underwhelming. The boat ride is dramatic and the tour guide amusing (in possibly the cheesiest way). Ben, our guide for the hour-long experience, told us a little about the history, and essentially that men were paid very little to bring out very little (this mine ended up turning out very small quantities of lead). The tunnels are kept artificially half submerged to allow visitors to travel along its length in boats, bumping along the sides quite gently – remember to keep your fingers in the boat.

So you get to the end and see the bottomless pit (which is 11m deep) and some very ambitious stalactites (they're the ones that hang

Getting there

From M1 J29, take the A617 to Chesterfield, and then the A619 to Baslow. Follow A623 towards Chapel-en-le-Frith. In Calver turn right onto A625. Turn left onto B6055 and then left onto A6187 to Hathersage. Go through Hathersage and straight on at the traffic lights. Laneside is on the left just after the signposts for Hope station. Entry is through the first entrance on the left only, with a separate exit gate. Space to park outside reception.

1

down). And why am telling you all this? Because this tour is a novelty but I certainly wouldn't forgo a trip to the Blue John Cavern for this.

There's actually plenty of parking at Speedwell though, and the views on good days over the Hope Valley are worth a walk or drive up here. You have to pay to park but there's £1 off entry into the cavern with your parking ticket.

So, what if you want to head away from the crowds? Try a walk – there are plenty to choose from in the area, most involving some form of hill.

We decided to try the reservoir at Ladybower. If you're going to drive, arrival by about 9am is your best bet during the weekend as it gets very busy. We parked at Bridge End – a free car park with no height barriers. If you want to park at the visitor centre, you'll need to pay. Alternatively you could get the train from Hope to Bamford and the bus to the visitor centre if you want to leave the motorhome on site.

The plan was to attempt a short half-day walk – planned by the 'Action Man'. He explained that it was roughly a nine-mile walk, circular which involved a bit of a hill climb (but not much).

What he failed to tell me was that we had to climb to the top of the hill in the first half a mile. Steep hills first thing in the morning (and, to be fair, at any time of day, as my parents will attest) do not agree with my system.

I should know to distrust a male route planner when it comes to walks. They were called Stothert miles when I was a child: if you took the actual length of a route and then halved it, this was the mileage we were told. My dad was also quite famous amongst his friends for suggesting a 20-mile bike ride, but then, on further questioning, revealing that he'd rounded the distance down by 'a fair bit'...

And what's my point? Well, I've now discovered that Andrew has the same cavalier attitude to the mile as taken on foot...

However, after that early morning shock to my respiratory system, the walk was incredibly pleasant and fairly level. It offered up amazing views over to Mam Tor, Lose Hill and Snake Pass, as well as back to the Ladybower reservoir.

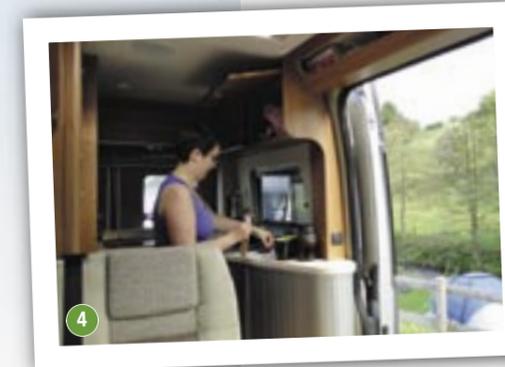
The route took us to Rowlee pastures, where signs tell you to look out for short-eared owls, skylarks (heard squealing quite loudly while walking through this area) plus other birds. They don't highlight that if you carry onto Alport Castles – not a man-made structure but impressive craggy cliffs – you'll find a camouflaged hide open to all for bird watching.

And the birds in question are peregrine falcons. And suddenly the squealing skylark fighting off a much larger bird made sense: there was obviously a chick involved.

The skylarks themselves are amazing creatures, throwing their tiny bodies into gusting winds, almost unmoving for short periods before diving down the hillside.

From the castles you can descend (very quickly) down into the valley below and Howden reservoir. This is the first of three reservoirs built to supply the growing populations of Sheffield and Manchester with water. The impressive dam structure arrests your eyes as you follow the road around the edge of the water.

There is a road right to the top of the Howden reservoir, which is closed (north of the visitor centre) to public vehicles at the weekend. It's the domain



of walkers, cyclists and the welcome bus that runs up and down the valley picking up and dropping off passengers at various points along the route. Handy if you've walked further than you meant to.

If you want to drive this route, then plan it during the week, but remember, parking and places to turn round get fewer the further up you go.

But carry on walking and as you get closer to civilisation there are a few more info boards explaining who built the reservoir, how they lived and

how each reservoir was created. It's pretty intriguing stuff, especially when you find that the water companies tried to restrict the navvies' intake of alcohol by building a bar, and the navvies' reaction to lower drinking limits...

As previously mentioned, you've got pay and display parking at the cycle hire centre and a little snack bar selling sandwiches, paninis and hot and cold drinks. Stop here for refreshments, the toilets or just for a rest on the benches, before returning to the camper.

All in all then, a good weekend: I got my food fix and Andrew managed to get me to do some exercise. But it's my choice of destination next time... ■

1 On the way down to the reservoirs: it looks like a steeper drop than it is
2 The impressive rock formations at Alport Castles **3 The first dam is not only impressive, it's pretty too** **4 Pitched up at Laneside, and the first task is to make the coffee**

Where to Stay

Recommended campsites in the area

- ▲ **Laneside Caravan Park**
 Hope, Hope Valley S33 6RR
 Tel: 01433-620215 Web: www.lanesidecaravanpark.co.uk
 Open: from mid-March to early November
 This is a large, busy site in the heart of the Peak District. It offers an excellent, clean toilet and shower block, washing up areas, a laundry and a reception that offers basic camping spares and a whole host of tourist information for the surrounding area. 80 pitches have electric with separate camping for tents. The drive-over motorcaravan waste water point is easily accessible. There is a small sports field as well as a new area by the river that offers picnic benches and boules. If you can do so, avoid the school holidays and busier periods.
- Other sites in the area
- ▲ **Losehill Caravan Club Site**
 Castleton, Derbyshire S33 8WB
 Tel: 01433-620636 Web: www.caravanclub.co.uk
 Members only site with top-notch facilities, with all the usual filling/emptying points, hook-ups, a fully specified toilet block and luxuries such as a drying room, and internet connection in the site lounge. A bonus is the railway station a mile away, making Manchester and Sheffield quickly accessible without the hassle of parking.
- ▲ **Hardhurst Farm Campsite**
 Aston, Derbyshire S33 6RB
 Tel: 01433-620001
 Handy for exploring the Peak District and nearby Castleton, this site offers two touring fields. There are two toilet blocks, one clean but basic and one more recently built that offers decent showers and disabled facilities. There's a cafe on site that is said to serve a mean breakfast. The nearest pub is just a short walk away and also serves food.
- ▲ **Eden Tree House Caravan Park**
 Eccles Lane, Bradwell, Derbyshire S33 9JT
 Tel: 01433-623444 Web: www.edentreecaravanpark.co.uk
 Offers 20 pitches on well-manicured grounds set on the outskirts of Bradwell. Mature trees surround site. Pub 50 yards from site entrance.

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