

MORE

Great Outdoors Revealed

At the end of the article 'Our Great Outdoors Revealed' in our July edition readers were invited to nominate other 'Great Outdoor' attractions for a later article. Many did and this is it.

By Andrew Harris

As before we were looking for a combination of grandeur – splendour and impressiveness – with accessibility. Interestingly, more of one usually results in less of the other. The process has become much more democratic so here are the top ten new locations culminating in our winner.

In 10th place is Brockholes Nature Reserve which is owned by the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire and is next to Junction 31 of the M6 at Preston. The Reserve combines many attractions in its huge and accessible site. The most visible is the award-winning Brockholes Visitor Centre which floats and features

shops, an exhibition area, an activity room for schools and community groups, a conference centre and restaurant. The site is a former quarry which has become part of the great outdoors as it has been regenerated as a mosaic of key habitats such as pools, reedbeds and woodland. It attracts huge numbers of people from the urban areas of the north west rather than just dedicated bird-watchers and nature lovers. Brockholes has more than 250 acres of trails and hides and record numbers of breeding wading birds plus visitors such as osprey, otter and bittren. With many and varied

events throughout the year and an outdoor children's playground it is a big hit with families. Car parking is easy but remember to pay before you leave as there is number-plate recognition system in operation.

For more information visit www.brockholes.org



Brockholes Nature Reserve near Preston



Leighton Moss RSPB Nature Reserve near Carnforth

The Leighton Moss RSPB Nature Reserve is in **9th** place. It is near Carnforth and in the Arnside and Silverdale AONB - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Leighton Moss contains the largest area of reedbeds in the north west and is home to a wide range of spectacular wildlife including otters, bearded tits, marsh harriers, egrets and red deer. Habitats for many species of wildlife are better established than Brockholes as it has been in the care of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds for more than half a century. There are nature trails and seven observation hides – one of them named after Eric Morecambe. Entry is via a Visitor Centre with a tea room, education centre and shop. The reserve is open daily except Christmas Day and is free for RSPB members and half-price for visitors arriving by public transport, bicycle or on foot from the nearby Silverdale railway station. Entry to the café and Visitor Centre is free for everybody. Leighton Moss is less easily accessed than Brockholes but with greater appeal for dedicated bird watchers and nature lovers.

For more information visit www.leightonmoss.org.uk



Below: Red Deer at Tatton Park

Tatton Park near Knutsford in Cheshire is **8th** in our top ten. It combines Tatton Hall (a Mansion), Tatton Old Hall (a medieval Manor House), ornate gardens, a farm and a deer park of 2,000 acres. It is owned by the National Trust and operated jointly with Cheshire East Council. It is a popular visitor attraction and has hosted the Royal Horticultural Society's annual north west Flower Show for the last 20 years. The historic building and gardens are major attractions but it is the 2,000 acres of parkland – of which about 1,000 acres are open to the public – which take Tatton Park into our top ten. The deer park was created by royal charter in 1290 and deer have been present since then. The two species are red deer and fallow deer of which about 400 are for breeding. There

are also two rare species of sheep in the park – Hebridean and Soay sheep. Visitors to the park are able to walk, ride horses, sail, fish and ride cycles which are available to hire. There is also a children's adventure playground near the main car park. The long history of Tatton Park includes it being the British parachute training centre in the second world war. About 60,000 allied parachutists were trained in Tatton Park including special agents who were dropped into enemy occupied Europe. Visits today are less challenging and more enjoyable. It is an easily accessed part of the great outdoors.

For more information visit www.tattonpark.org.uk

WALKING AT GISBURN FOREST

EXPERIENCE NATURE FIRST HAND AS YOU EXPLORE THE FOREST & STOCKS...

Gisburn Forest is an amazing place to discover wildlife, amazing views over the Bowland Fells and Stocks Reservoir, and find peace and tranquility amongst the woodland glades.

The walking trails will take you into the heart of the forest, along historic trackways, former railway lines. You'll maybe see some of the forest's extensive wildlife from the wildlife hides on the Birch Hills Walk.

Most of our walking trails start from the Stocks reservoir car park you can reach them on foot by following the Gisburn Forest Hub Link Trail. Our car parking tickets are valid at both sites on the day of purchase.

Caring for Gisburn Forest
The Forestry Commission care for Gisburn Forest. We look after forests and woods across England for people, wildlife and timber.

Forestry Commission England is recognised and respected as an international leader in sustainable forestry.

We are proud to be working together with United Utilities to look after this special place. Enjoy your time in Gisburn Forest & Stocks.

For more information go to forestry.gov.uk/england

Forestry Commission England

WALKING TRAILS

STOCKS CIRCULAR PATH
Grade: Moderate
Length: 2.5km (1.5 miles)
A great loop all the way round Stocks Reservoir. Great views of the forest, reservoir and the old trackway of Bowland Landrigo. For your own safety please do not swim in the reservoir. Please do not feed the waterfowl.

BIRCH HILLS WALK & TRAPPER TRAIL
Grade: Easy
Length: 2.3km (1.4 miles)
An easy path through mixed woodland with views over the reservoir. The old trapline path is also a great wildlife hide and picnic area. This trail has been adapted to be tramper friendly.

EGGBURY TRAIL
Grade: Moderate
Length: 2.5km (1.5 miles)
Passing through mixed woodland this route follows an old railway line through the forest. There are views over the reservoir and the Bowland Fells.

DALE HEAD RAMBLE
Grade: Strenuous
Length: 2.5km (1.5 miles)
A steady climb through Birch Hills followed by a descent to the reservoir. The trail follows the course of an old railway line through the forest. The views of Park Wood and Stocks Reservoir are fantastic.

GISBURN FOREST HUB LINK TRAIL
Grade: Easy
Length: 1.5km (0.9 miles)
A short trail from the Stocks Reservoir car park, with views over the reservoir. Look out for the old railway line and the old bridge.

Key to map
Car park, Toilets, Café, Cycle trail, Walks, Picnic area, Bird hides, Viewpoint, Gravel road, Forest rides

Waymarkers
Permissive footpath, Public footpath, Walking Trails, Biking trail

Emergency info
Gisburn Forest is a remote location. In an emergency call 999. For more information visit forestry.gov.uk/gisburn

forestry.gov.uk/gisburn

In **7th** place is Gisburn Forest which is a confusing location. It used to be in Yorkshire – and some people think it still is – but has been part of Lancashire since 1974. It is north east of Slaidburn but nowhere near the village of Gisburn. It is the largest forest in Lancashire and offers different experiences for different people. You can explore on foot, horseback or bikes which can be hired. Gisburn Forest has a network of waymarked forest walks and cycle trails. These are based on existing forest roads and offer a variety of routes – with an amazing total length of 16 kilometres. It is within the Forest of Bowland AONB and is a working and dynamic forest created and managed by the Forestry Commission – and a wonderful place to visit. Apart from current issues with Covid 19 the forest and recreational facilities change from time to time.

For more information first visit www.forestry.gov.uk/northwestengland

In our previous article Lake Windermere – the largest and busiest of the lakes in Cumbria – was our runner-up in 2nd place. Many people prefer a more tranquil alternative and voted Coniston Water into **6th** place this time. It is 5½ miles long, up to ½ mile wide and goes down to 184 feet deep. With many jetties and places to berth is accessible for sailing and has a 10 miles an hour speed limit converted to knots by all sailors. The setting of Coniston Water is spectacular with the Old Man of Coniston mountain as a backdrop – the highest



Coniston Water and its mountainous backdrop

peak in Lancashire before the area became part of the new county of Cumbria 46 years ago. The lake is best known for many attempts to break the world water speed record in the 20th Century. These culminated in Donald Campbell's 1960 attempt to exceed 300 miles per hour. He achieved a speed of 320 mph on his first run but lost control and died on the return leg. Coniston Water is now ideal for kayaking and canoeing at more leisurely speeds.

To know more visit www.lakedistrict.gov.uk

Number 5 in our top ten is the easiest way to visit and view the best of the great outdoors. It is the Settle to Carlisle railway which can trace its origin to the 1870s. It is the 72-mile link between Leeds and Carlisle but the Settle to Carlisle section takes all the prizes for spectacular scenery. It is also considered to be a masterpiece of Victorian engineering achieved through a turbulent process. It is famous for its stunning route that cuts through the beautiful scenery of the Yorkshire Dales, over the 24 arches of the breathtaking

Ribblehead Viaduct, through the Blea Moor Tunnel, before scaling the heights of the Ais Gill in the Mallerstang Valley. Notices to close the line were issued in 1984 but a campaign to save the route won the day. Today the Settle to Carlisle railway is thriving and carries a combination of passenger and freight trains. Special package trips are available and attract tourists and railway enthusiasts from around the world.

If this appeals to you visit www.settle-carlisle.co.uk



The Settle to Carlisle Railway crossing the Ribblehead Viaduct

The Lancaster Canal which links Preston to Tewitfield near Carnforth is in **4th** place. Apart from the spur to Glasson Dock – with 6 locks - it is without locks and completely level for the 42-mile route. Originally planned to run from Westhoughton in the south to Kendal in the north money ran out to achieve a bridge over the Ribble and the M6 motorway cut the canal in the north. There is a campaign to extend the canal beyond Tewitfield but the physical and financial obstacles are huge. The surviving Lancaster Canal offers much with breathtaking scenery and berthing places near many wonderful pubs. For serious canal boaters there is the Ribble Link to the River Ribble and beyond. For more information visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/lancastercanal.

Our June 2016 article ‘The Lancaster Canal – a hidden gem’ can be found under Maritime Topics at www.andreweharris.co.uk.



The Lancaster Canal in Preston before it emerges into open countryside

The winning location in our previous article was Helvellyn mountain in Cumbria but this is upstaged by Scafell Pike which at 3,209 ft above sea level is the highest mountain in England. There are practical ways to climb Helvellyn but Scafell Pike is a bigger challenge. For those who are up for it Scafell Pike has many walking and rock climbing routes to the summit. The best routes are from Seathwaite in the north, Langdale in the east, Mickledore or Eskdale in the south west, Wasdale in the west and Lingmell Col in the northwest. The shortest route is from the Wasdale Head Inn where more than 100,000 people a year have climbed Scafell Pike in recent times. In 1826 Scafell Pike was used by the Ordnance Survey to fix the relative positions of Britain and Ireland. In 1919 it was donated to the National Trust by Lord Leconfield in memory of the men of the Lake District who had lost their lives in the First World War - then known as the Great War. Nowadays it has a majestic presence and there is a general wish to recognise this by making it the **3rd** best of our outdoor locations.

To learn more visit www.scafellpike.org.uk

The rocks of Wastwater looking towards Scafell Pike and Great Gable



In **2nd** place is the Pennine Way which runs for 268 miles and is sometimes known as the backbone of England. For much of its length it could well be an alternative boundary between the counties of the north west and Yorkshire and County Durham to the East. The Pennine Way is popular with walkers and the Countryside Commission reckon that no fewer than 12,000 long-distance walkers and 250,000 day walkers use at least part of the trail each year. This is welcome but creates problems as part of the Pennine Way has been eroded. The response has been to divert sections of the path onto firmer ground. The Pennine Way links with many Youth Hostels, camp sites, bed and breakfast establishments and pubs but upland sections are unaffected. 535 other rights of way connect with the Pennine Way which is a public footpath not suited to horse riders, motor bikes or bicycles. It is now 55 years old and probably the ultimate way of visiting our great outdoors. It defines our region.

For more information visit www.nationaltrail.co.uk and click on Pennine Way.



The Pennine Way as it crosses Saddleworth Moor



1

Hadrian's Wall east of Carlisle in Cumbria

The winner - by a big margin – in our top ten locations is Hadrian's Wall. It has history, splendour and is accessible for everybody with splendid new facilities east of Carlisle. Running for 73 miles from the River Tyne in the north east to the Solway Firth and the Irish Sea it marked the northern extremity of the Roman Empire. It was begun in AD 122 and largely completed 6 years later. There was a fort about every five miles and the structure consisted of the wall and ditches with gates thought to be customs posts. In 1987 UNESCO designated Hadrian's Wall a World Heritage Site. A significant portion of the wall still stands and can be followed on foot along the adjoining Hadrian's Wall Path. With echoes of present-day Europe, the main purposes of Hadrian's Wall are thought to have involved immigration, smuggling – not respecting their single market - and customs.

For more information visit
www.hadrianswallcountry.co.uk

All these locations are worth visiting depending upon your interests and mobility. Many arrangements for visits are affected by Covid 19 but most of their websites give advice about these changes. Sooner or later we can all make the most of our great outdoors. Meanwhile let our pictures and descriptions do your walking.

Andrew E. Harris gratefully acknowledges the help of readers who responded to his invitation. The images are procured from Shutterstock. The previous article 'Our Great Outdoors Revealed' can be viewed at www.andreweharris.co.uk under Environmental Topics.

