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June 2020

Lancashire

& North West magazine

Our Great Outdoors Revealed

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**“What is this life
if, full of care, We
have no time to
stand and stare.”**

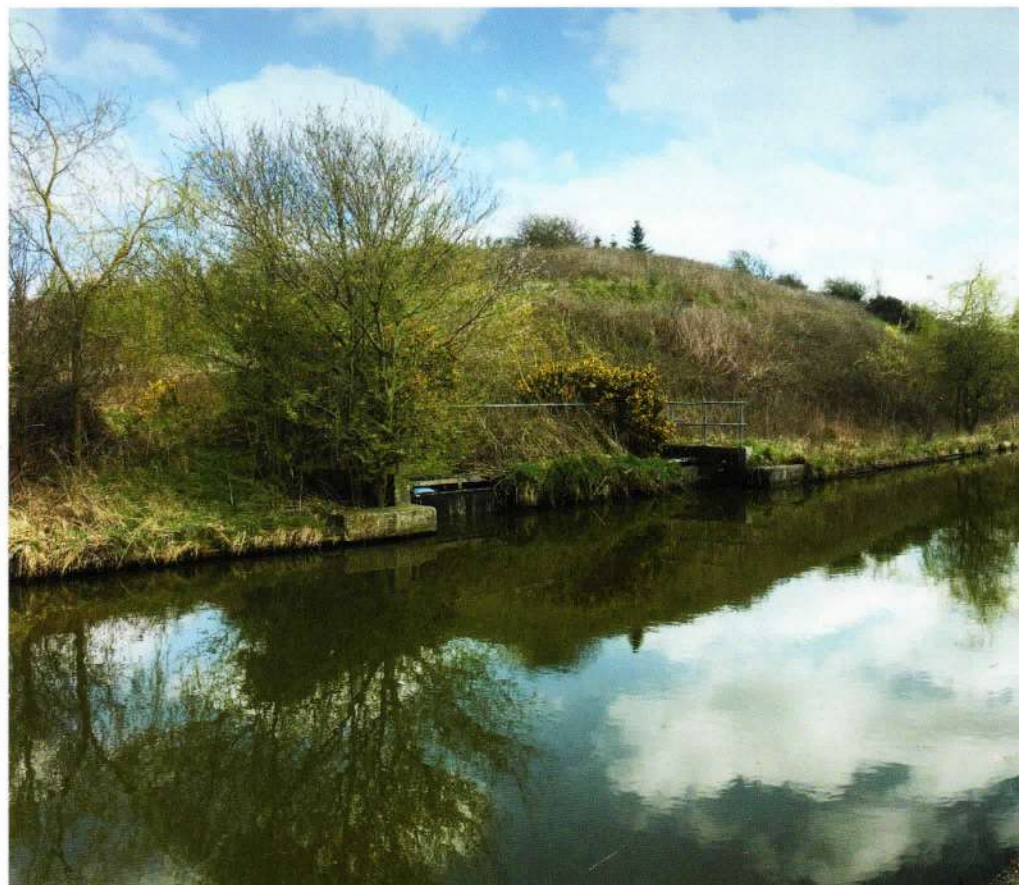
Our Great Outdoors Revealed

From the 1911 poem 'Leisure' by W.H. Davies.
Picture by Michael Heffernan

By Andrew Harris

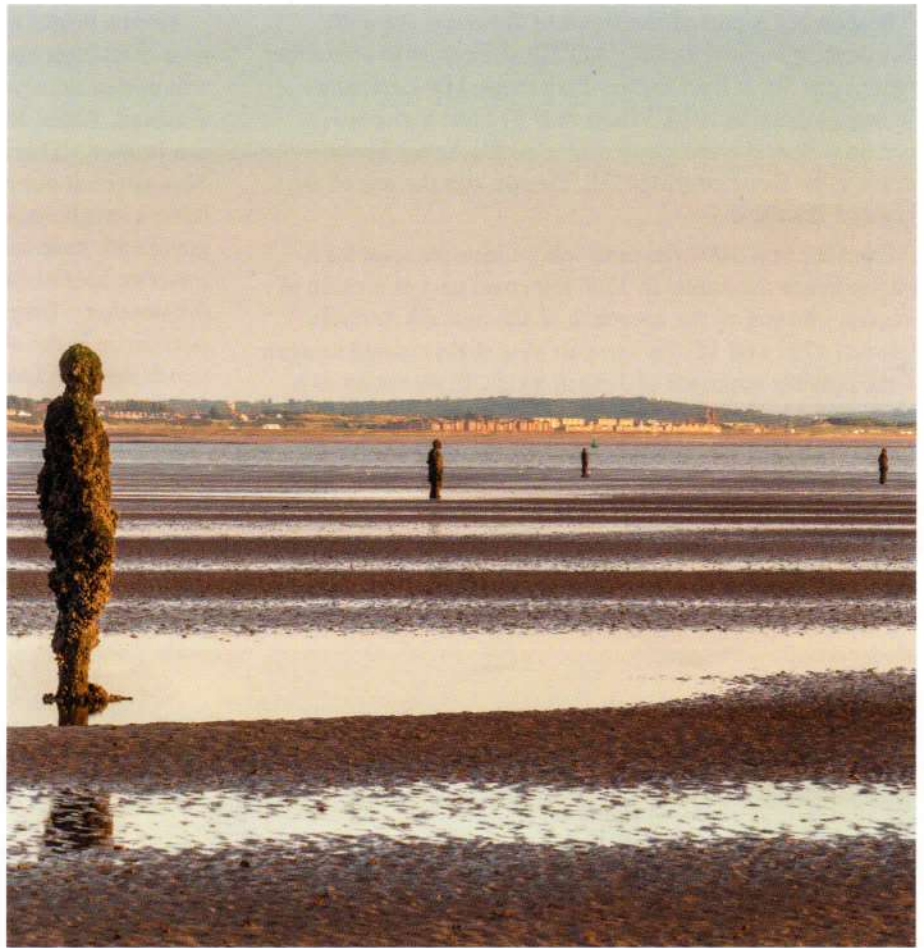
There is something in the human spirit that craves the great outdoors. It is liberating and refreshing - and the views are uplifting. For good reasons we are denied the freedom to visit them for a while but a selection of the top ten varied, dramatic and – when circumstances permit - accessible locations is offered in this article. They are drawn from all five counties in the north west and our neighbour the Isle of Man. We are reminded of the wonderful sights in our region from the Cumbrian mountains and lakes in the north to the gentle countryside in Cheshire; from the Pennines in the east to our varied coastline in the west. We can visit them again one day but in the meantime enjoy these uplifting views from your living room where you can sit and stare.

The Trent and Mersey Canal is tenth in our list. It is probably the most accessible as it cuts across the



relatively flat expanse of lowland known as the Cheshire Plain which is almost entirely within the county of Cheshire. Although the 93-mile canal also runs through Derbyshire and Staffordshire the Cheshire section is the most scenic, accessible and interesting. It was opened in 1777 to link the rivers Trent and Mersey thereby creating an inland route between Hull and Liverpool. It remains the tranquil canal equivalent of the M62. It offers wonderful countryside and the ability to enjoy this by walking or boating along the Cheshire section. Of special interest is the Anderton Boat Lift which was built in 1875. It remains a marvel of engineering and is one of only two working boat lifts in the UK – the other is the Falkirk Wheel in Scotland.

Ninth in our list is Crosby Beach in Merseyside. For anyone wanting the 'great outdoors' it is spectacular rather than beautiful as it extends over 2.5 miles without being commercialised like so many resorts. Its main claim to fame is the 'Another Place' cast iron statues of men by Anthony Gormley. They are all 6 feet 2 inches tall, weigh 650 kilograms, are modelled on the sculptor's own body and are spread along the beach between Waterloo and Blundellsands. As the tide ebbs and flows they are revealed and submerged. The figures were controversial because they are naked but they attracted many more tourists. Gormley paid Crosby



Crosby Beach and 'Another Place'

Beach a very back-handed compliment when he explained that he chose the site because he thought the beach "the opposite of pretty. It is terrific and brutal and is a working beach". If you

visit don't stray too far towards the sea; people have been caught out by the incoming tide and soft sand.



The Trent and Mersey Canal in Cheshire

Beacon Fell is part of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and comes in at number eight in our list. It is a Country Park created by Lancashire County Council in 1970. Whilst only 873 feet above sea level on a clear day the views extend to Blackpool Tower, Morecambe Bay, Longridge Fell, Preston and the rest of the Forest of Bowland.

From the year 1002 the peak was an ideal location for a beacon hence the name. In 1588 it formed part of a chain of beacons warning of the approach of the Spanish Armada. Between 1795 and 1815 it was part of a chain created to warn of the possible approach of French forces. In recent times it has featured in chains of beacons lit to celebrate coronations and jubilees. Nowadays it is a popular with visitors who are well catered for with good roads to access the site and a one-way single-track circular road within it. There is a network of footpaths through woodland and the on-site Bowland Visitor Centre provides information and refreshments.

From a height of 873 feet and views across Lancashire we go to 2,037 feet above sea level from where Manx folklore tells us that the seven 'kingdoms' of the Isle of Man, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Manannan (the sea) and Heaven can be seen. This is the Snaefell Mountain on the Isle of Man which is our number seven. It can be climbed on foot using a rough track which reaches the summit but it's heavy going with steep inclines, gravel, slate stones, grass and rock to traverse. Special climbing equipment is not needed but beware the weather – Snaefell is Manx for 'snow mountain'. The alternative is the electric Snaefell Mountain Railway which crawls up from Laxey Village to the summit which offers a café and bar as your reward. The summit also has a weather station which recorded a gust of 150 mph in 1970 which was one of the highest wind speeds ever recorded in the British Isles. The views and the weather can both take your breath away!

Beauty takes many forms and the Eskdale Valley in the western – less well known – part of the Lake District is one



Beacon Fell in Lancashire





of the best. It ranks number six in our list. The valley is unusual in the Lake District for having no lake although the River Esk runs through the valley to the sea at Ravenglass and there are several tarns – small mountain lakes - perched high in the valley sides. The main access to the valley is from the western end but from the east the visitor must negotiate

the steep Hardknott Pass. The road over Birker Fell to the village of Ulpha offers beautiful views. The Eskdale Valley is less accessible than the eastern parts of the Lake District but the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway runs through the valley and is a tremendous experience.



Above:
Snafell on the Isle of Man

Below:
Autumn near Boot in Eskdale





The view from Pendle Hill in the Trough of Bowland

Pendle Hill is number five. It is an isolated Pennine Hill which is part of the Forest of Bowland AONB albeit the detached southern part. It is also a majestic landmark of great significance to the Quaker movement, witchcraft and Lancashire history. In 1652 the Quaker George Fox had a vision on Pendle Hill. He wrote "As we travelled, we came to a very great hill, called Pendle Hill, and I was moved of the Lord to go up to the top of it; which I did with difficulty, it was so very steep and high. When I was come to the top, I saw the sea bordering upon Lancashire. From the top of this hill the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered". Pendle Hill continues to be linked to the Quakers who use the name for the Pendle Hill Quaker Centre for Study and Contemplation near Philadelphia in the USA. Following the story of the Pendle Witches the hill continues to be associated with witchcraft. Large numbers of visitors climb it at Halloween despite being discouraged by the authorities. It is number five because of the amazing view from the summit which is 1,827 feet above sea level.

Number four in our list is the A686 which runs from Haydon Bridge near Hexham in the north to Penrith. The AA named the A686 "One of the Greatest Drives in Britain" because of the dramatic scenery of the Pennine hills which can be seen along this route. For probably different reasons the BBC programme Top Gear voted it the 9th best drive in the country. For your columnist there are two stunning features of the road which make it the fourth best example of the great outdoors. Heading south from Alston the road twists and turns amidst beautiful scenery and driving reverts to what it used to be years ago. Winding the windows down, playing Glen Miller loudly and negotiating endless 'S' bends is the antidote to motorway driving in a straight line. Excessive speed is not needed but beware of motor bikers who think it is. The second stunning feature is the panoramic view of the Lake District and Cumbrian Mountains as you lose height on that magical road. Stop at the lay-bys and soak up this experience.

Man and nature can occasionally work together to create something amazing. So it is with Dovestone Reservoir – our



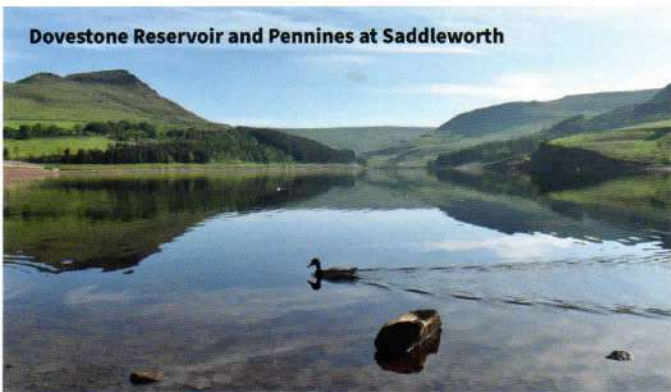
The Lake District from the A686 south of Alston



number 3. It is the largest and newest of three reservoirs in the Greenfield Valley to the east of Saddleworth which is part of the Oldham Metropolitan Borough – an urban borough where two-thirds of its area is pennine landscape. The dam at Dovestone is 38 metres high and 550 metres long. It is thought to be the largest dam in Britain to be built with a conventional puddle clay core. But the most striking features of Dovestone is its grand setting as it nestles beneath the hills and Saddleworth Moor above. The A635 to Holmfirth skirts the reservoir high above and to the south. The surrounding moorland attracts walker and hikers and the reservoir is used by the Dovestone Sailing Club. There is a “Life for a Life” memorial plantation and the RSPB help to manage the environment by providing a habitat for birds. It is a spectacular achievement by all involved and a lovely place to visit.

Lake Windermere is 5.63 square miles in size, 11 miles long and nearly 1 mile wide at its widest point. It is the largest natural lake in England and our second best attraction. It has been one of the country’s most popular places for leisure and

holidays since the new railways made it accessible in 1847. It is fed by rainfall and the rivers Brathay, Rothay, Trout, Beck and Cunsey Beck and lesser streams. It is drained by the River Leven to the south. Its appeal is complemented by the walks and attractions in the surrounding foothills of the Lake District. With marinas, ferries, passenger steamers, five large boating clubs, shops, holiday chalets, hotels, restaurants and pubs it has huge appeal for tourists and this is reflected in traffic congestion. Since 2005 the Lake District National Park Authority has enforced an absolute speed limit of 10 knots – and 6 knots on the middle, upper and lower sections of the lake - with mixed success. It is difficult to manage this level of demand but Lake Windermere remains hugely successful. ▶



Dovestone Reservoir and Pennines at Saddleworth



Lake Windermere representing all the lakes

LEISURE

*“What is this life if, full of care,
 We have no time to stand and stare.
 No time to stand beneath the boughs
 And stare as long as sheep or cows.
 No time to see, when woods we pass,
 Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
 No time to see, in broad daylight,
 Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
 No time to turn at Beauty’s glance,
 And watch her feet, how they can dance.
 No time to wait till her mouth can
 Enrich that smile her eyes began.
 A poor life this if, full of care,
 We have no time to stand and stare.”*

By the Welsh poet WH Davies in 1911.

Our number one example of the great outdoors is Helvellyn – a Cumbrian Mountain with a flat summit 3,120 feet above sea level. On a clear day the whole of the Lake District, the Solway Firth, the hills of south-west Scotland, the Cheviot and Pennine Hills to the north-east, Blackpool, Morecambe Bay, the coast of North Wales and the Irish Sea can be seen. Scafell and Scafell Pike – at 3,162 and 3,209 respectively - are slightly higher but less accessible. The summit of Helvellyn is unique: it takes the form of a broad plateau which slopes gently. Amazingly, a small plane landed on the summit plateau of Helvellyn in 1926. A ground party had cleared and marked a landing strip. On his third attempt Bert Hinkler – an

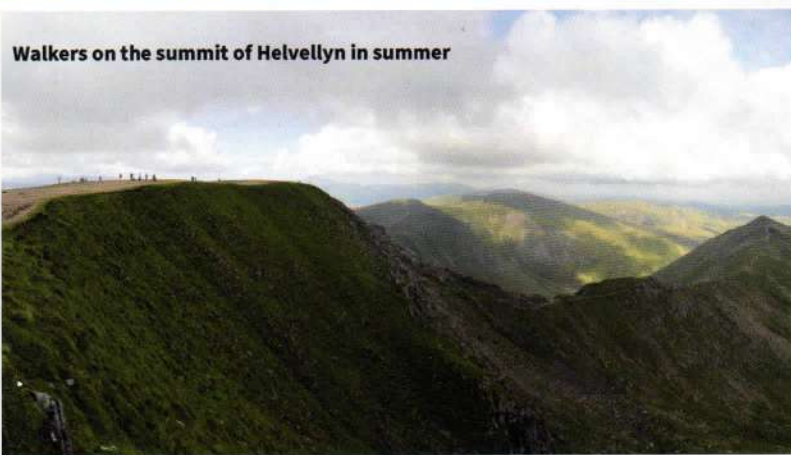
A.V.Roe test pilot based at Woodford – successfully landed his 2-seater Avro 585 Gosport biplane. His take off was precarious and he narrowly missed Striding Edge – see our picture – but he returned safely to Woodford. Striding Edge is a route to the summit for walkers. It involves some scrambling to reach the summit along a sharp arête but it is an accident black spot and can be dangerous in winter conditions. Several hikers and scramblers have died as recently as 2017. Routes from Glenridding and Patterdale are longer but easier and safer. Whether climbers want a challenge or just to get there, Helvellyn is challenging but accessible for many and hugely rewarding. It is our winner. ■

We hope you enjoy this article while you Stay Home, Protect the NHS and Save Lives.

The Striding Edge route up Helvellyn



Walkers on the summit of Helvellyn in summer



Andrew E. Harris invites readers to nominate other 'great outdoor' attractions for a later article by visiting www.andrewharris.co.uk and going to 'Contact'. Illustrations have been procured via Shutterstock. The 'Leisure' panel is by Bridge Graphics of Southport.