

THE TRAVEL CLUB



E-ZINE #15: JULY, 2021

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A personal journey into Muslim Europe

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The best trails in the Yorkshire Dales

Wherefore art thou...?

Seeking out unusual masterpieces in Umbria and the Marche

No festival, no problem

How to make the most of 48 hours in Glastonbury

Bradt GUIDES

TRAVEL TAKEN SERIOUSLY

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Glastonbury is so much more than the sum of its festival; see page 4 © ALEXEY FEDORENKO, SHUTTERSTOCK



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COVER IMAGE

Autumn in the North York Moors
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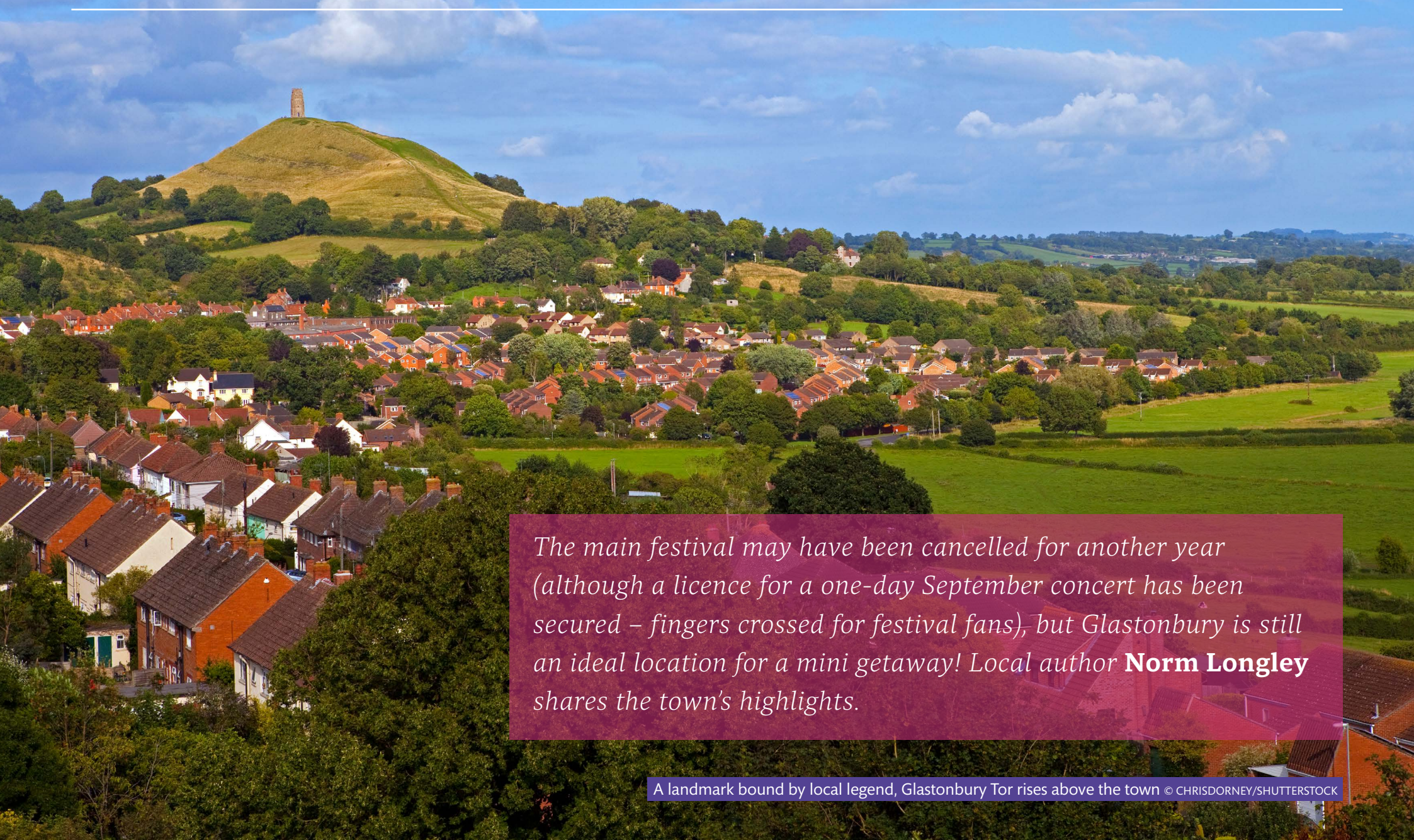
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'THERE'S NOWHERE ELSE QUITE LIKE IT IN SOMERSET': 48 HOURS IN GLASTONBURY



*The main festival may have been cancelled for another year (although a licence for a one-day September concert has been secured – fingers crossed for festival fans), but Glastonbury is still an ideal location for a mini getaway! Local author **Norm Longley** shares the town's highlights.*



Colourful shops brighten up the town's streets

Whatever your preconceptions of Glastonbury, they're probably true. Ordinarily this would be a fairly mundane little market town, were it not for a high street teeming with psychedelically painted shops, cafés and healing centres bearing names like Man, Myth and Magik, The Speaking Tree, and the Chocolate Love Temple, and an assortment of oddball

characters – hippies, druids, knights, pixies (not real ones) – nonchalantly going about their business. But that's really only the half of it. With over 70 different faith groups present, it's little wonder that Glastonbury retains its own unique personality; there's nowhere else quite like it in Somerset, or, for that matter, the country. Central to it all is the abbey, though there's plenty more

to keep you occupied for a day or two if you've got the appetite and the stamina, including the Chalice Well and, nearby, the engaging Rural Life Museum. Not forgetting Glastonbury Tor, which is within easy walking distance of the town centre.

Glastonbury's greatest attractions Glastonbury Abbey

Founded in the 7th century, possibly even earlier, [Glastonbury Abbey](#) can lay fair claim to being the country's oldest Christian site. Enlarged by St Dunstan in the 10th century, it suffered a catastrophic fire in 1184, which pretty much gutted the entire complex and necessitated a complete rebuilding job. The burial place of kings Edmund I, Edgar I and Edmund II, its influence spread far and wide; it's also claimed that Glastonbury had the largest collection of books outside the library of Alexandria in Egypt. Upon the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, many of the buildings were plundered and stripped, leaving the complex to crumble. Above all though, the abbey remains central to the Arthurian story, which, despite the dubious associations, has fired the imagination of pilgrims and visitors for centuries.

Before exploring the grounds, it's worth learning a bit more about the abbey's history in its absorbing **museum**. Many of the objects on display – stone-carved heads, grave markers and effigies of

monks – were either salvaged following the fire in 1184 or retrieved following the dissolution of the abbey. Keep an eye out, too, for some of the smaller exhibits, notably a sublime collection of oyster shell palettes (still retaining some pigment) and fragments of blue stained glass from windows commissioned by Henry Blois,

erstwhile abbot of Glastonbury and grandson of William the Conqueror.

The centrepiece of the abbey complex is the magnificent, roofless shell of the **Lady Chapel**. One of England's finest late 12th-century monuments, this largely Romanesque structure retains an extraordinary sense of grandeur that

not even a few relatively modern accretions can quash. Its stonework, in particular, betrays some wonderful detail, including carved figures of the Annunciation, Herod and the Magi, alongside other richly sculpted ornamentation, bits of which, remarkably, still bear traces of the original paintwork. In an unassuming spot adjacent to



the Lady Chapel, a small sign deems this the **burial site of Arthur and Guinevere**, though in truth it's probably nothing of the sort. Indeed, the claim that it was such, which first surfaced in 1191, was most likely a crude attempt by monks to raise much-needed funds by increasing pilgrim numbers following the catastrophic fire seven years previous. Whatever the truth of Arthur's alleged burial here, what is known is that any remains were lost for eternity following the abbey's dissolution.

You can wander at leisure around the monastic ruins, herb gardens, ponds and orchards – all of which make for tranquil picnicking spots. The free guided tours of the abbey grounds, which take place daily on the hour, are well worth joining.

Glastonbury Lake Village Museum

About halfway up the High Street, wedged between a pair of shops, is the Tribunal. Dating from the early 15th century, this handsomely weathered, two-storey medieval townhouse takes its name (erroneously as it turns out) from the time when it was purported to have been a bishop's court, though there's never been any evidence to support this and it was, quite likely, just a merchant's house. Today, this venerable old building holds the Glastonbury Lake Village Museum (owned by English Heritage), which

recalls the history of the long-since vanished Glastonbury Lake Village, a local Iron Age island settlement discovered by amateur archaeologist Arthur Bulleid in the late 19th century. Among the many items retrieved by Bulleid (most of which were in an excellent condition owing to the preservational qualities of the peat-rich soil), the most impressive was a stash of some Bronze Age bone jewellery.

Rural Life Museum

The splendid [Rural Life Museum](#) occupies the renovated farmhouse and cowsheds of Abbey Farm, a working unit owned by the Mapstones until 1972. A thoroughgoing, and thoroughly entertaining, trawl through Somerset life in its many wonderful guises, themes covered include community trades (carpentry, coopering and gloving among them), social and domestic life,



© KOLLAMAT SOMSRI/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Rural Life Museum offers an entertaining trawl through Somerset life

and a variety of different themes such as celebrations, religion, folklore and the arts (keep an eye out for the Glastonbury bin). But as you'd expect, it's farming and food production that features most prominently, from traditional industries like dairy farming and cider-making (check out the magnificent press from 1792) to similarly well-established but less familiar local practices like willow growing and eel farming. Two of the more curious exhibits I stumbled across were a mummified cat – these were traditionally hidden in walls and chimneys to ward off evil spirits – and Evelyn Waugh's ear trumpet telescope.

The Chalice Well

'A place of great spiritual significance for many faiths' is how Natasha Wardle, project manager at the [Chalice Well](#), describes these tranquil gardens. People from all over the world have been coming to the well for at least 2,000 years, to take the waters and to be healed, and for many it remains *the* most spiritual of all Glastonbury's many sacred sites. The gardens were owned by the poet and playwright Alice Buckton from 1913 to 1944, though it was the visionary spiritualist Wellesley Tudor Pole – probably best remembered for the One Minute Silence, which played out at 21.00 each evening on the BBC from 1940 until the mid 1950s – who founded the Chalice Well



© MARCO FINE/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Chalice Well's healing waters have been attracting visitors for millennia

Trust in 1959. The Red Spring is known as such on account of the blood that flowed from the Holy Grail when it was supposedly brought here by Joseph Arimathea shortly after Christ's death, though more prosaically it's because of its dense iron oxide properties. As it is, the chalybeate water issues forth from the Lion's Head fountain, and flows down to the abbey fish pond; indeed

it may be these iron deposits that have spawned such ginormous fish. The mildly ferrous taste is, as you might imagine, an acquired one, though you're advised not to drink too much – a sip'll do. While the water's source remains unknown, what is known is that there was a covered bathhouse here some time in the 18th century, as evidenced by some shallow remains, into which water

tumbles from a mini waterfall. The well itself, which sits at the top of these ample, beautifully landscaped gardens, invites further opportunities for quiet contemplation.

Glastonbury Tor

Rearing up sharply from the iron-flat Levels and visible for miles around, Somerset's giant mystic hill (518ft) is yet another local landmark bound by legend – among them that the hill

was home to one Gwyn ab Nudd, Lord of the Celtic Underworld. The best way up the tor is via a circular walk starting in the town centre: at the top of the High Street, turn right on to Chilkwell Street then left up Dod Lane; cross the field and walk along Stone Down Lane before turning right along a path through a field, where you begin the ascent (in any case it's all well signposted). Return down on the exact opposite side, which brings you out near the Chalice Well – you can of course

do this in reverse. Although it's not an exacting climb, a reasonable level of fitness (and some half-decent boots) helps. Crowning the hill is St Michael's Tower, which is all that survives of the original 14th-century church. But of course you come here for the views, which are stupendous: on a clear day it almost feels as if there's not a single part of Somerset that you can't see. Expect to take quite a buffeting from the wind, however; it blows hard up here.



© ALEXEY FEDORENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK

The views from Glastonbury Tor are stupendous



Levelling up: exploring outside of town

With the glorious Somerset Levels right on your doorstep, it's understandable that you may want to spend some time exploring the area further. Fringing Glastonbury and extending across parts of the north and centre of the county, the wholesale transformation of the deeply rural, pastoral

landscape of the Levels over the last 30 or so years has been nothing short of remarkable. Where once it was intensively worked for peat, today it's an area of pristine chequerboard fields, extensive wetlands and languid rivers. Above all though, the Levels are home to some of the finest **birdlife** anywhere in the country and, whatever the time of year, there's more than enough here to satisfy even the most

ardent twitcher. In fact such is the importance of the Levels' biodiversity that 13% of the Levels are designated either as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas or Ramsar sites. Easily accessible from town are Westhay Moor, [Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve](#) (which is synonymous with murmurations), Catcott Nature Reserve, and [Ham Wall National Nature Reserve](#).



The historic George and Pilgrims hotel

Wildlife-watching aside, the Levels afford ample but undemanding **walking** opportunities, with the flat, wide open spaces providing ideal terrain for **cyclists** with an aversion to hills. Another way to appreciate the fragile beauty of the Levels is to get out on to the water itself, with several local outfits offering **water-bound activities**.

Historically and **archaeologically**, too, the Levels are of national significance, manifest in some of the country's most ancient discoveries, including Iron Age and Roman settlements and timber trackways, though these have long since been buried deep within the old peat bogs. There are, however, more obvious reminders of the

county's illustrious past, such as the Fish House in Meare (the country's sole surviving monastic fishery) and Muchelney Abbey.

Where to stay, eat and drink in Glastonbury

Magdalene House

Occupying a former convent, this handsome [Grade II-listed building](#) opposite the abbey has three beautiful, light-filled rooms. No children under seven.

The Parsonage

The three delightful rooms [here](#) are each named after the views they afford. Guests are free to avail themselves of the dining room and library.

The George and Pilgrims

[The George and Pilgrims](#) is an imposing 15th-century public house and hotel whose graceful stone frontage, bearing fine mullion windows, conceals a delightful warren of Gothic-like alcoves. The snug bar serves up a tip-top selection of draught beers, and the food ain't half bad either. Some say the place is haunted...

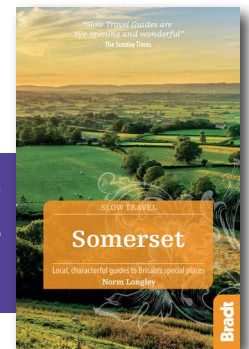
Norm Longley is a Somerset local and author of our [Slow Travel](#) guide to the county. The Travel Club members can get their copy for just **£6.99** with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.

Rainbow's End Café

Family-run for more than 30 years, this friendly old place tucked away down a tight alley is [the original Glasto veggie café](#); a colourful salad bar is complemented by regular favourites such as spicy carrot and dahl soup and daily specials like cannellini bean casserole. In warmer weather there's a lovely little suntrap courtyard out back.

Getting to Glastonbury

Thanks in part to its relatively central location within the county, Glastonbury is well served by buses. The principal route is the Mendip Xplorer (service 376), which runs between Bristol and Glastonbury via Wells along the A37 and A39. Other useful services include bus 77, which starts in Wells before passing through Glastonbury and then continuing south down to Somerton and Yeovil, bus 29 southwest to Taunton, and bus 75 east to Bridgwater, which also passes through Ashcott, Shapwick and Catcott on the Levels.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE INDEPENDENT: MUDDY BOOTS



Muddy Boots Walking Holidays was set up in early 2020 by Matt and Helen Coppin. They arrange self-guided walking holidays and guided 'Discovery Walks' around the Yorkshire Dales, both of which are designed to take people on the paths less trodden and uncover their favourite secret spots. We caught up with Helen, who shared some insights into the best walking trails in her local area.

When Matt and I met as junior lawyers in a large law firm in the City, it never crossed our minds that a few years later we would find ourselves living in the Yorkshire Dales, running a business that turned our favourite hobby, countryside walking, into our livelihood.

But it didn't take us long to realise that we wanted to have a different lifestyle. Having grown up in Yorkshire, the Dales were top of my list of places to relocate to, and Matt didn't take much convincing.

Initially we ran a self-drive holiday business, bringing holidaymakers from overseas to explore our favourite spots around Britain, but we were keen to move into something that allowed us to focus on our own interests (nature and walking) and work with other businesses in the local area. And so Muddy Boots was born.

Launching at the beginning of 2020, it's fair to say that our first year wasn't what we had envisaged. But the effective closure of the travel and leisure industries actually gave us the time and space to develop the business more quickly than we thought we would be able to; as the international customers for our self-drive business completely vanished overnight, we realised that we needed to focus our energy elsewhere.

Since launching, we have expanded our range of self-guided walking holidays (which are all along routes we have designed ourselves, rather

than following well-known long-distance trails) and developed a collection of guided 'Discovery Walks' – private guided walks designed for people who want to experience less well-known parts of the Dales and learn about the history, geology and nature of the area. Matt was able to take some time during lockdowns to become a qualified Mountain Training 'Hill and Moorland Leader' and leads all our guided walks.

Running Muddy Boots has also given us the chance to connect with lots of other small, local businesses – from the village inns and small hotels that we use for accommodation on our holidays, to cafés and food producers who supply the

contents of our Discovery Walks picnics, as well as the independent businesses that provide the little gifts of local products that we include in our 'Walkers' Survival Packs'.

It also meant that we spent a large proportion of 2020 walking around the Yorkshire Dales, which will always be my favourite part of Britain. So if you're planning a summer holiday here, these are some of my absolute favourite walks – perfect for getting your boots muddy!

Gunnernside Gill

The northern Dales have a wilder and remoter feel than the gentle hills and valleys in the south



© HELEN & MATT COPPIN

Evidence of the area's mining heritage is still visible at Gunnernside Gill

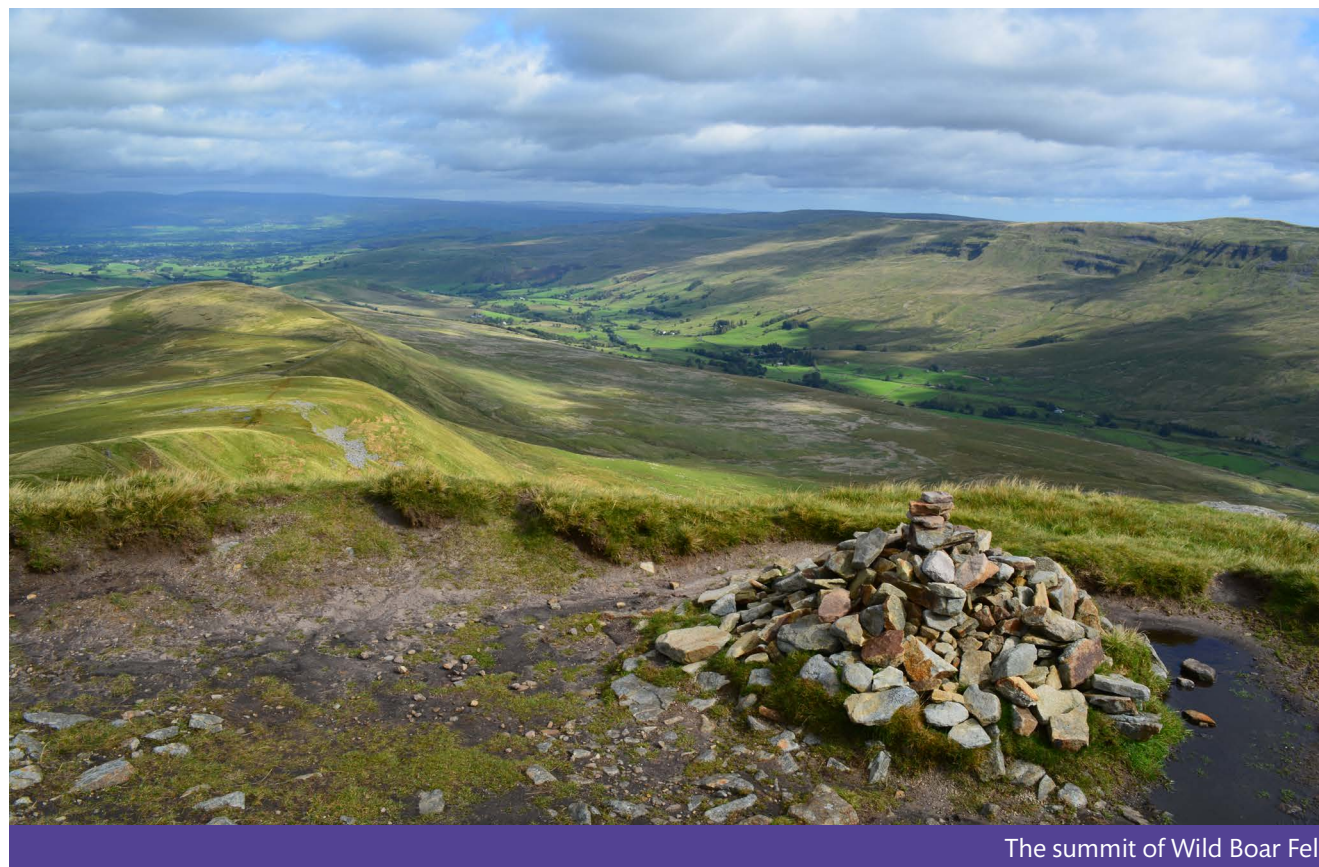
and walks into the gills and moors here give a real sense of exploration. Nowhere is this truer than Gunnerside Gill, a small valley just north of Gunnerside village where, over 200 years ago, the mining industry boomed. Given the peace and beauty here today, it's hard to imagine the noise and pollution that once engulfed this quiet corner.

The extensive mining remains – smelt mills, peat and ore stores, blacksmiths and the like – now give us a real insight into what life must have been like for those working in the mines and it is fascinating to see how nature has slowly been reclaiming the landscape over the last couple of centuries.

There are various versions of this walk but our favourite – which is actually the route of one of our guided '[Discovery Walks](#)'! – is a 7½-mile circuit up the eastern side of the gill (a narrow, steep-sided gorge similar to a ravine) to reach the best-preserved remains at Blakethwaite Smelt Mill, returning on a higher path to enjoy great views back into the gill and over the classic Yorkshire scenery of Swaledale.

Wild Boar Fell

The summit of Wild Boar Fell just sneaks over the county border into Cumbria but is part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park (following the 2016 extension) and, due to its location in this lesser-visited area, must be one of the most underrated



The summit of Wild Boar Fell

© HELEN & MATT COPPIN

mountains in the country. In fact, we like it so much, that it features both on one of our self-guided walking holidays – '[Food and Fells of the Cumbrian Dales](#)' – and one of our guided walks!

Its striking silhouette just begs to be climbed but you are never likely to see more than a handful of people on the vast summit plateau, even on a glorious summer's day. As with most mountains, there are various routes to the top, but our favourite

circular route (12 miles) starts in the lovely village of Ravenstonedale and heads up a clear and easy track (part of the Pennine Bridleway) to gain the ridge, from where it is a short slope up to the 2,323ft summit. A reasonable level of fitness is required to make it to the top, but the path is well-marked and easy to ascend.

After spending some time exploring the summit and soaking up the views over much of the western

Dales, the Howgill Fells and the mountains of the Lake District, you take a more off-road descent across Access Land over Wharton Fell, overlooking the verdant Eden Valley. The route ends with a couple of miles along country lanes to return to Ravenstonedale for a well-earned drink in one of the village's two fantastic pubs.

Malham Landscape Circular

Probably the best-known walk in the Dales and certainly not one you're likely to have to yourself,

this is one worth sharing with the crowds (although you may well find some solitude on the quieter stretches, especially if you head out early or late).

This absolute classic full-day route begins in the popular village of Malham, winding northeast to pass the pretty little falls of Janet's Foss before heading into the imposing gorge of Gordale Scar. From here, the route heads straight up the side of the waterfall and a little scrambling is required (although there is a nice detour if you don't fancy it or after heavy rain), before you emerge on the

quiet moors above the gorge, strewn with sections of limestone pavement.

You soon reach peaceful Malham Tarn, a National Nature Reserve and home to one of only eight upland alkaline lakes in Europe as well as colourful plant species like round-leaved sundew and devil's-bit scabious, before heading through the fascinating 'dry valley' of Watlowes to find yourself on the justifiably famous limestone pavement at the top of Malham Cove, where the views stretch for miles.

From here, steep steps take you to the bottom of the cove, where its scale can really be appreciated, before a gentle walk back to the village, either along the most direct but very busy path or, our preference, over the little clapper bridge and through fields, which conveniently brings you out at one of our favourite pubs – the [Lister Arms](#).

Kisdon Gorge and Swinner Gill

This 7-mile circuit between the villages of Muker and Keld in upper Swaledale is another Dales classic and for good reason – two pretty villages, countless wildflower meadows, gentle riverside walking, a curiously named ruin and, in our version, a surprisingly quiet and remote gill to explore.

Starting in Muker, the route takes you through the famous wildflower meadows – at their best in June and early July – before a gentle stretch

© HELEN & MATT COPPIN



Walking on Malham Cove's iconic limestone pavement



The spooky ruins of Crackpot Hall

along the River Swale. Rather than continuing to Keld on the main route, we like to take an easily missed (and unsigned) path up Swinner Gill. The narrow steep-sided path takes you high above the beck for lovely views over a string of small waterfalls before emerging on to a track at the head of the gill.

From here there are stunning views along the gorge and you are soon at Crackpot Hall. Originally a shooting lodge, this farmstead was abandoned in the 1970s due to subsidence caused by the mining industry in the area and is today a forlorn but atmospheric ruin.

A short walk from here takes you to the tumbling waters of East Gill Force, where you drop down to cross back over the River Swale and visit the remote village of Keld. Our preferred return route is the higher path along the slopes of Kisdon Hill, which affords fantastic views throughout, both back over your earlier route and along upper Swaledale.

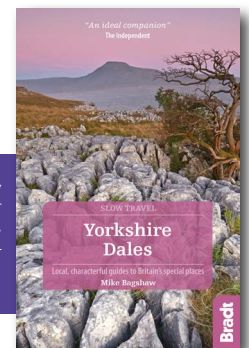
Full route notes for this walk are available to download on our [blog](#).

The Travel Club members can enjoy a **10% discount** on Muddy Boots' 'Discovery Walks'; go to page 47 for details. For more on the Yorkshire Dales, check out our [Slow Travel guide](#) – available for just **£6.49** with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.

Head of Wharfedale

This delightful 7-mile walk is part of our '[Wharfedale Ramble](#)' walking holiday – one of our gentlest routes, allowing plenty of time for soaking up the scenery and pottering around villages. It takes in two lovely villages, three excellent country pubs, one of the most picturesque farms in the Dales, and a charming stretch of riverside walking along the Wharfe, where we have spotted kingfishers, deer and wild orchids. The views from the ridge between Cray and Yockenthwaite down upper Wharfedale are outstanding.

The route starts in the handsome village of Buckden with a climb up the slopes of Buckden Pike to reach Cray, but all of the climbing is out of the way early and the flat path around the head of the valley is a real joy, passing through fields and woodland, crossing becks and meandering across limestone pavement. You drop down to picture-perfect Yockenthwaite Farm (which produces some delicious granola) before enjoying a relaxing stroll along the river through tiny and wonderfully named Hubberholme and back to Buckden.



WILD SCRAN: THE BEST CAMPING RECIPES

*Whether you're a seasoned hiker or first-time explorer, the food you eat when you go wild can disappoint: dehydrated camping meals crammed with preservatives and colourings. There is another way. [The Wilderness Cookbook](#) is packed with mouth-watering options that can be prepared quickly from a limited number of lightweight ingredients on a single stove. Author and wilderness expert **Phoebe Smith** shares some of her favourite recipes from the book.*



• BREAKFAST •

⇒ BERRY BLAST PANCAKES ⇒

With fruit for slow-release energy, and pancakes for a bit of a treat these are the pseudo-healthy way to begin a watery adventure.

INGREDIENTS

1 egg	Large knob of butter or splash of cooking oil
250ml milk (or 250ml water mixed with 3 tbsp powdered milk)	1/3 x 400g canned or fresh mixed berries
350g self-raising flour	Clear honey, to serve

METHOD

1. Mix the egg, milk and flour together in a bowl to form a smooth batter.
2. Stir in two-thirds of the berries – the mixture will turn a lovely shade of purple.
3. Turn on the camping stove and heat some of the butter or oil in a frying pan until sizzling hot. Place two spoonfuls of the mixture into the pan, to make two pancakes. (You should be able to cook two small American-style pancakes at a time in most camping frying pans.)
4. As the batter starts to bubble, flip the pancakes, to cook on the second side.
5. Once cooked, transfer to a plate and cook a further two pancakes with the remaining batter. Serve with a scattering of berries and a drizzle of honey.





⇒ WILD MUSHROOM SOUP ⇒

Light but flavourful, and the chance to add your own foraged mushrooms, make this a simple dish for the hills.

INGREDIENTS

Knob of butter	Handful of chestnut mushrooms, sliced
3 shallots, sliced	1 vegetable stock cubes
Handful of bought or foraged wild mushrooms, sliced	20g dried potato flakes

METHOD

1. Turn on the camping stove and melt the butter in a saucepan until it starts to bubble. Add the shallots and fry until they start to brown.
2. Add the mushrooms and fry until they begin to soften.
3. Pour in 250ml water and crumble in the vegetable stock cube over a medium-high heat and stir well.
4. Stir in the potato flakes, bring to the boil, simmer for a couple of minutes, then serve.



⇒ QUORN COWBOY CHILLI ⇒

Packed full of protein – this meat-free hot dish will refuel the fire after a long day spent heather and bog bashing.

INGREDIENTS

Knob of butter or splash of oil	½ x 415g can Heinz Five Beans
100g Quorn mince (can substitute with meat if desired)	Dash of Tabasco sauce
	Pinch of paprika
2 mini-peppers or 1 regular pepper, deseeded and sliced	1 x 30g bag of tortilla chips

METHOD

1. Turn on the camping stove and heat the butter or oil in a frying pan.
2. Once the butter or oil is sizzling, throw in the Quorn and cook until it starts to brown nicely, around 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. When the mince is browned, add the pepper slices and stir for a couple of minutes until they start to soften.
4. Add the beans, Tabasco and paprika and stir well. Simmer for 4–5 minutes or until the beans are heated through and bubbling slowly.
5. To serve, pour the chilli into your camping bowl. Crush the tortilla chips while still in their bag, then open and sprinkle over the chilli.





• DESSERT •

⇒ CHOCOLATE ORANGES ⇐

Fun for adults and kids alike – these fire-cooked chocolate cakes combine with vitamin-C rich fruit for a treat you only have to feel half guilty about.

INGREDIENTS

½ x 400g pack chocolate sponge cake mix
1 egg

3 oranges (navel are best)
Foil

METHOD

1. Place the cake mix in a bowl, add the egg and 60ml water. Mix all the ingredients together, until smooth. Set aside.
2. Cut the top of each orange and reserve the tops for later. Hollow out the flesh of the oranges, removing any rind, pith and seeds, and add the flesh to the chocolate cake mix and stir well.
3. Pour the mixture into each of the orange shells, they should be about three-quarters full.
4. Replace the lids and wrap each orange in foil and place on to the Kelly Kettle fire.
5. The mix normally takes 10–15 minutes to rise. Check after 10 minutes by sticking your spork into the cake; if the mix is done then it will come out clean. When ready, serve to enjoy your very own chocolate orange.

IN PICTURES: EXPLORING BRITAIN'S WILD PLACES

*Established in 2006, **RJB Photographic** is a husband-and-wife team comprising of Richard and Janet Burdon. Based on the edge of the glorious North York Moors, they are drawn to wild and remote places in their local area, though often venture to even more isolated destinations like the Western Isles of Scotland and the Arctic regions of Norway and Greenland.*

Their photography ranges from dramatic coastal sunrises and sunsets to subtler subjects like a misty dawn over a lake. But their true passion lies in the simple, atmospheric, almost minimal winter monochrome images shot locally. For them, the stark simplicity of a lone tree in a field of snow is a work of art. Using light as the fundamental element, their work tries to convey the feeling of the ever-changing seasons across this sometimes harsh but diverse and beautiful landscape. Here, they share some of their favourite captures from Britain's wild places.





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The warm evening light of a summer sunset illuminates the marram grass on the dunes at Balnakeil Bay, near Cape Wrath in mainland Scotland's far northwestern corner.

Left

From late August to mid-September each year, the North York Moors are ablaze with a glorious carpet of purple heather. On this particular evening, the warm light of the setting sun illuminated the moor beautifully and the heather took on the most vivid purple colour we had ever seen. Just getting out of the car was like opening a jar of honey and both the colours and smells were a riot for the senses.



Left

We love the simplicity of our images when it's snowy, so as soon as the snow comes we are out working our hardest. This is an image that we'd had an idea for, but it proved much harder to capture than expected. Sheep make terrible models, so it actually took us three years from idea to capture to get this shot.

I (Janet) was walking up a snowy hill at Cawthorne, just a few miles from home, when the sheep rushed over, presumably thinking I might feed them. They stayed only for a few moments, moving on after realising I had nothing for them, but that was just long enough to capture a few frames. I love the grouping of the sheep with the trees disappearing into the mist in the background – this really gives the image depth. And for once, all the sheep were posing for me!



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Living on the southern edge of the North York Moors, we are also within easy reach of the Yorkshire Wolds, a little-known but fascinating area of rolling hills and glacial valleys that have a unique character so different to the Moors in the north and Dales to the west.

Recently brought to the attention of the public by the work of artist David Hockney, the Wolds offer miles of empty roads and numerous walking trails, and this area is a magnet for the few walkers and cyclists that have discovered the area.

Our world as photographers is governed by the changing seasons, and as late spring eases towards summer we are drawn to the Wolds to capture the colour of the cherry blossom, set against the vivid yellow of the oilseed rape, at Cherry Blossom Grove near the pretty village of Huggate.



Above

We were travelling home from the Lake District on a dull, uninspiring winter's day, when we suddenly ran into some hoar frost near the northern end of Ullswater. As photographers, we search out locations as we travel and note them for future reference, and on this occasion I (Richard) knew exactly where to go. I've often passed Brougham Castle and remarked how photogenic it looks, but on this day, with the heavy frost and a hint of mist, it looked truly magical.



Left

Glen Coe is about as wild and sparsely populated area as you can get in mainland Britain, and is a magnet for lovers of the great outdoors any time of year. The dramatic waterfall at Buachaille Etive Mòr draws photographers from all over world to try their hand at capturing this iconic scene.

I (Richard) rarely stop to photograph Glen Coe, but on this occasion I was travelling back from the Western Isles one late summer's morning and the light was so beautiful that I just had to stop and capture the scene.

Following page

As lovers of wild, remote places, our travels often take us further afield to the Western Isles of Scotland, and the Isle of Harris is one of our particular favourites. The simplicity and unspoilt beauty of the white sandy beaches and turquoise waters are a perfect setting for us.

I (Richard) walked down on to Traigh Mhor beach on what proved to be a dull, overcast evening, but just as the sun was setting, the clouds miraculously cleared over Toe Head to give this beautiful shot.





Left

After years of travelling to the beautiful islands of Mull and Harris, we decided that it was time to try some of the smaller islands in the Hebrides and so spent a few days on the Isle of Eigg. It's a fascinating little island, with a population of only around 90 people, and we found it most welcoming.

We stayed in a small guesthouse overlooking Laig Bay with a fine view over the neighbouring Isle of Rhum. We were treated to meals of fabulous local venison and lovely homemade desserts, after which we sat over a leisurely coffee while we waited for the sun to sink in the sky, before racing down on to the beach to shoot the sunset.

Here, the last rays of light from the setting sun illuminate Rhum in the distance and are reflected on the wet beach. The orange afterglow faded a short while after I had taken this shot, but it's wonderful moments like this that make me realise why I enjoy being a landscape photographer.



Left

Situated 40 miles due west of the Outer Hebrides, the archipelago of St Kilda is just about the remotest place you can visit in the British Isles. Living on a crowded island we rarely get to experience true 'remoteness', so when the opportunity arose in 2017 to camp for a few nights on Hirta, the main island, I (Richard) jumped at the chance. I wanted to experience that feeling of being truly alone.

I'm not really into history, but this place definitely has an aura about it - a truly stirring landscape. Watching the boat I'd arrived on sail away and knowing that I really was all on my own (save a handful of hardy locals) was something I'd never experienced before, but I'm so glad I got the chance to try it.



RJB Photographic sell high-quality mounted and framed prints on their [website](#) and also in selected galleries around Yorkshire including the Art Café in Whitby, the Chapel Gallery in Hawes and Court House Framers and Gallery in Helmsley. They also run workshops and photo walks on a one-to-one or small-group basis to ensure individual attention.

For more of their work, follow them on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF AN OTTOMAN

To celebrate the release of his new book, **Tharik Hussain** shares some memorable moments from his journey through the western Balkans, following in the footsteps of the 17th-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi.

There is something wonderfully joyous about retracing the footsteps of a historic traveller. As writers we love the literary colour and vibrancy their accounts bring to our own; as adventurers we love going in search of the enchanting places they speak of; and as historians we love how their words help us make sense of the past, showing us connections we didn't know existed between historical events, people and places.

It is a truly magical feeling to arrive in a place and recall the thoughts and words uttered at

that very spot by someone else several centuries before you, when the world was a vastly different place; it is like opening a window into the past, or, as a well-known travel writer once told me, 'the nearest thing to time travel'.

Wandering through the western Balkans in the footsteps of the 17th-century Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi was exactly that.

Evliya was born in 1611 and spent almost his entire adult life journeying around the Ottoman Empire – and sometimes beyond. Written at a

time of great prosperity in the Muslim kingdom, which saw huge patronage of the arts, music and literature, Evliya's accounts offer a glimpse of the region's most flourishing 'Muslim' years. For me, as a Muslim writer, that is truly tantalising. And so, in the summer of 2016, guided by the great man, I set off on a road trip with my family to visit some of these places myself.

The most enchanting place Evliya led us to was in Bosnia, at the foot of a sheer cliff by the mouth of a bubbling aqua-blue river. The **Blagaj Tekke's** monastic setting is apt, for it is a Sufi lodge – a retreat for Muslims of a spiritual persuasion, which is exactly why the great Ottoman was drawn to it. The name Evliya is derived from the term *awliya* (meaning 'friends of God'), a mystical and honorific title reserved for those said to have a special relationship with Allah. Dating from the 15th century, and still a functioning space of worship, the historic lodge, with its hanging balcony overlooking the River Buna, retains a serenity we did not experience anywhere else on our journey.

Earlier on our trip, in nearby **Mostar** I had stood atop the city's famous hump-backed bridge recalling Evliya's time there. While his description of the imperially commissioned **Stari Most** enhanced its aesthetic appeal, it was his account of the bridge's famous divers that added

© THARIK HUSSAIN



The dramatic setting of the Blagaj Tekke, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Diving from the Stari Most, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

real colour and vibrancy to the moment. Today, they are highly trained, skilled swimmers, wearing Speedos that expose every rip and muscle of their lean, chiselled bodies. Like Olympic divers, they launch themselves from the bridge's apex and slice through the water below without a ripple. Evliya, though, spoke of a more innocent and naïve time when the young boys of Mostar would leap off the bridge in twos and threes, screaming

'Ya Allah!' (Oh God!), sometimes holding hands or embracing as they plummeted towards the blue Neretva below. Watching pashas would applaud before handing the giggling boys a few coins for entertaining them – a far cry from the polished performances witnessed today.

Later, in the mountains of Albania, we marvelled at the remarkably well-preserved Ottoman buildings of **Berat** and **Gjirokaštër**, beautiful



A beautiful wooden door in Ottoman Berat

white stone- and wood-built houses cascading down the towns' hillsides. Once upon a time, as Evliya tells us – and long before the Communist era, when Albania was declared the world's first atheist state – both towns were home to Muslim scholars and poets; places brimming with educational institutions. It's hard to imagine today, their streets now filled with domestic tourists and many locals that barely observe any faith at all.

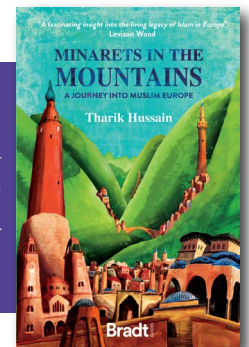


A metalworker in Sarajevo's Old Town

Albania wasn't the only place where Evliya's account turned the popular narrative on its head. I recall the excitement I felt before our journey at the prospect of visiting **Sarajevo** because it was once referred to as the 'Jerusalem of Europe'. The Muslim European town – Sarajevo was founded by the Ottomans in 1461 – was a place where, as recently as the 20th century, Muslims, Jews and Christians lived side by side in relative harmony. Yet, within days Evliya had tempered

my excitement, albeit for the right reasons. The more I read his eye-witness accounts of life in Muslim Ottoman Europe, the more I realised that the co-existence of communities in Sarajevo was

Tharik Hussain is an author, travel writer and journalist specialising in Muslim heritage and culture. His new book, *Minarets in the Mountains: A Journey into Muslim Europe*, is the first English travel narrative to explore indigenous Muslim Europe in the 21st century, and is out this month. The Travel Club members can get their copy for just **£4.99** with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.



not exceptional at all. It had been the norm during Evliya's time.

From Novi Pazar in Serbia to Skopje in North Macedonia, Evliya spoke about Muslims, Jews and Christians co-existing in the most matter-of-fact and unremarkable manner. It soon became obvious: this *convivencia*, to borrow the Muslim Spanish term, or *komšilik* (good neighbourliness) as the Bosnians refer to it was what he expected to find in these places. Accounts by travellers from the Christian West described this *komšilik* in exotic terms, as bizarre and highly unusual, because for them, it was. I realised that this was the reason I too had viewed the Jerusalem of Europe as unusual and exotic, when the only thing that was *really* exotic was having a perspective of it like Evliya's. An Ottoman's perspective.

I made Evliya Çelebi my literary companion on our trip through the western Balkans because I wanted to see this part of Europe through the eyes of another Muslim. I wanted Evliya to show me a Europe not written about in other books. The great Ottoman did not disappoint.

THE GREAT, THE GOOD AND THE QUIRKY

Dana Facaros takes you on an art treasure hunt with a difference in the hill towns of Umbria and the Marche in central Italy. Awe, astonishment and a few smiles await...

The last time I was in Orvieto Cathedral I heard that gut-twisting thud of a body hitting the floor; behind me, a woman lay on her back. Fortunately, my first-aid lessons weren't required as more useful people sprang forward to assist, and as the medics arrived all present breathed a sigh of relief to see her regain consciousness before being whisked away on a stretcher.

Ever since then I've wondered: did she fall prey to the infamous Stendhal syndrome – swooning like the Swiss writer, from an overdose of art and

beauty? Or were **Luca Signorelli's** vivid frescoes on the Apocalypse just too terrifying? Michelangelo studied them before painting the *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.

But Signorelli's, begun in 1499, are even more harrowing, immediate. We see the Antichrist (a unique cameo appearance in art!) preaching to a crowd that includes Dante, Petrarch and Columbus. In the next scene, the newly re-fleshed dead pull themselves up out of the ground in a powerfully surreal scene; next the sinners are

herded into hell, among them a special airborne delivery of Signorelli's mistress who jilted him. It is one of the most gripping nude studies of the entire Renaissance, dominated by the prominent, muscular blue bottom of a demon.

No-one has ever painted bottoms better than Signorelli! Orvieto's San Brizio chapel has the *crème de la crème*, but you'll find other mighty *derrières* in his *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* in Città di Castello and in the *Flagellation* in San Crescentino in little Morra north of Perugia, where our man lingered because he fell in love. A perky Signorelli bum is like a double espresso to the senses.

Umbria and the Marche boast some of Italy's most sublime art but also some of the quirkiest. Every tiny hill town has its treasure, or something to make you marvel or smile or wonder 'Lordy, what were they thinking?'

Even their ancient ancestors can make you giggle. Take the polychrome mosaic from the Roman baths of **Urvinum Hortense**, now in Cannara's museum. It's a frolic of little fishermen in ancient baseball hats, using their penises as fishing rods, to carry a bucket of bait; one's member has painfully caught a crab. Elsewhere they surf on top of amphorae, chasing or being chased by crocodiles and bears.

You can find unusual scenes banned by the Council of Trent which somehow escaped the

© PIERUSCHKA, SHUTTERSTOCK



Detail of Luca Signorelli's wall frescoes in Orvieto Cathedral

Counter-reformation thought police, such as a charming 14th-century *First Bath of Christ* in San Francesco in Offida in the Marche, and in Sant'Agata in Perugia, a kooky three-headed depiction of the Trinity with one set of eyes in the three heads of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Another really bizarre one in San Pietro, as a three-headed woman (presumably because 'Trinity' is feminine in Italian).

Perugia's National Gallery of Umbria is full of masterpieces by **Fra Angelico**, **Piero della Francesca** and, of course, local man **Perugino**, who was reputedly a miser and atheist but could paint shimmeringly transcendental religious scenes, often with Perugia's Lake Trasimeno in the background. But among them is **Taddeo di Bartolo's** *Descent of the Holy Ghost*. Usually in art when the little flames of the Holy Spirit descend on the heads of the Apostles, they look beatifically pious, but Taddeo couldn't resist a more down-to-earth response: one Apostle is definitely feeling the heat and saying 'ouch!'

Perugian **Benedetto Bonfigli** painted the frescoes in the National Gallery's Cappella dei Priori – scenes of 15th-century Perugia when it looked like Manhattan with all its medieval skyscrapers. It looks gorgeous, but the city was such a nest of pirates that it was dangerous even for popes to visit; three, including the greatest

medieval pope, Innocent III, suddenly dropped dead there under suspicious circumstances.

The citizens of Perugia were bad and they knew it. For kicks they would meet in front of the cathedral and stone each other in a game called the 'Battaglia de' Sassi'. But God was constantly punishing them with plagues and epidemics, and in 1259 a local hermit had a vision that self-flagellation was the only cure. The bishop of Perugia thought it was a splendid idea and ordered a two-week whipping orgy.

The Perugini formed brotherhoods and wore long white robes split open down the back and anonymity-preserving hoods with two ghostly eyeholes – and their kinky, creepy figures often appear in art, nearly always sheltering under the cape of a giant Madonna superwoman. Bonfigli painted their gonfalons, or processional banners, which they would hold during the flagellation walkabouts, and they pop up in several churches in the area. The gonfalon in Santa Maria Nuova is one of the best, with its vengeful Jesus flinging down arrows on wicked Perugia, in spite of a whole clutch of saints begging him to stop. It was such a hit among the locals, the brotherhood had to protect it with a metal grille.

But my favourite super-Madonna is by **Tiberio Assisi** in Montefalco: Our Lady holds a club like Hercules, about to wallop a little doe-footed devil



who came to nab a naughty boy after his mother exclaimed 'May the devil take you!' The look on the devil's ('Hey, lady, I was just doing my job!') face is priceless.

Montefalco also boasts one of many fresco cycles in the region based on the legends of St Francis, all inspired by the extraordinary ones by



Madonna del Soccorso by Tiberio Assisi, Complesso Museale di San Francesco, Montefalco

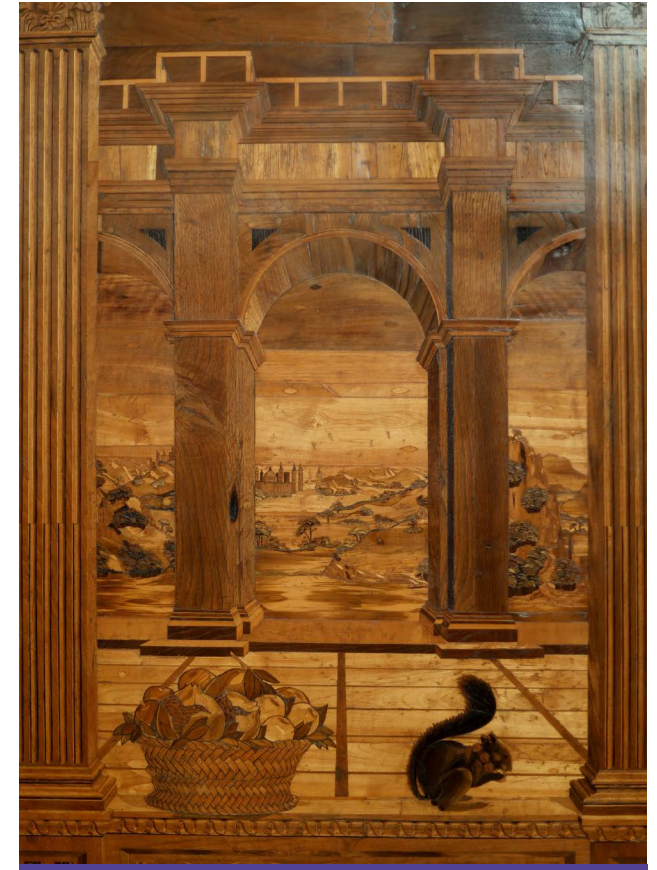
Giotto (or not – it’s the longest controversy in art history) in Assisi’s Basilica of San Francesco. The deeds of the beloved patron saint of Italy, animals and ecology, here by **Bonozzo Gozzoli**, are full of delight: who can resist the gentle Francis preaching to the birds and fish, shushing the noisy ass, and shaking paws with Brother Wolf in Gubbio – where, by the way, no-one was surprised during

the restoration of a church when they found the skeleton of a large wolf. It’s all true!

Even in the **Palazzo Ducale in Urbino**, the ultimate Renaissance dream house in the ultimate little Renaissance city, home to Raphael’s melancholy portrait of *La Muta*, and Piero della Francesca’s haunting, uncanny *Flagellation*, there’s an unforgettable little squirrel nibbling a nut – perched on a balustrade, in Duke Federico da Montefeltro’s Studiolo, with its mesmerising trompe l’oeil intarsia.

I’m always subject to onset Stendhal syndrome in Urbino, and after drinking in my favourites I usually tend to race through the rest, but last time on guidebook duty I made an extra effort to look at everything and went upstairs, straight into a nasty piece of late 16th-century work by Mannerist **Federico Zuccari** called *Porta Virtutis*.

What the heck? Here we see The Artist (represented by virtuous, wise Minerva) standing in a triumphal arch, while horrid Envy sprawls on the floor, covered in vipers as she grabs the ankle of a man with donkey ears – a certain Paolo Ghiselli of Bologna (and relative of Pope Gregorio XIII) who refused to pay Zuccari for an altarpiece. The other demons have the faces of other Bolognese artists that Zuccari didn’t like. The pope, furious, sent our man into exile, and only let him back into the Papal states thanks to the good offices of the Duke of Urbino, which is why this crazy painting hangs here.



Intarsia detail from the Studiolo, Palazzo Ducale, Urbino

Other works in the Marche have stories we’ll probably never uncover. Seek out Castignano, where the church of SS Peter and Paul has an anonymous ruined but bizarre early 15th-century fresco of the *Last Judgement*, dominated by a blond Christ with eyes out of the *Children of the Damned*. Gymnast angels dressed in red perform loop-de-loop stunts on the mandorla that surrounds him.

On one side are records of eclipses. Like many Marchigiano towns, Castignano had a Templar commandery (did those mumbo-jumbo-loving knights have something to do with it?).

Anything by the brush of Carlo Crivelli and Lorenzo Lotto, the Venetians who spent most of their careers in the Marche, is worth seeking out, not only for the sumptuous gorgeousness of their colour but the good chance of finding something quirky.

Carlo Crivelli was a master of exquisite 15th-century refinement, clear lines and rich colours. Almost inevitably he painted his sweet, sad-eyed Virgins under garlands of fruit and flowers – in which his signature trick was to insert a large phallic cucumber. You'll find Carlo's 'cuke' in the Pinacoteca Civica in Ancona, and another in his gorgeously luminous Sant'Emidius polyptych in Ascoli Piceno's cathedral (although the best is his *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* in London's National Gallery where he didn't even bother hiding it in a garland, but left a big old warty cucumber lying front and centre on the pavement by an apple, as if someone spilled their shopping).

Why? As far as I know no-one else, except perhaps his artist brother and follower Vittore (who also left numerous fruit-and-veg-adorned works in the Marche), ever painted them. They are not on anyone's list of canonical religious symbols. I wonder if they were a memory of his misspent



Annunciation by Lorenzo Lotto, Museo Civico, Recanati

youth? Carlo, after all, had to leave Venice after serving time for kidnapping a sailor's wife.

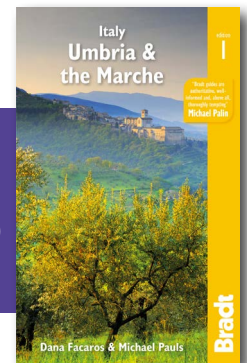
And I will drive many a twisty kilometre to see anything by **Lorenzo Lotto**, renowned for

For more on the marvels of the art and architecture, and other sights, of Umbria and the Marche, take a look at Dana's [guide](#) to these regions, co-authored with Michael Pauls, which is out this month. Travel Club members can get their copy for just **£7.99** with the code **TRAVELCLUB50**.

psychologically insightful portraits, but who also painted some of the finest and quirkiest Renaissance religious works in the Marche. Jesi has some in the first category in the wonderful Palazzo Pianetti, including his uncanny *Annunciation* of 1526 with a Virgin-startling angel hovering in a private whirlwind, dressed in the gauzy drapery that reveals – yes, in case you were wondering, angels do have one – his belly button.

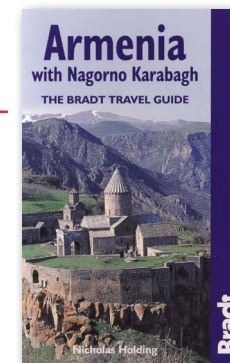
Now drive less than an hour to Recanati, where the Museo Civico has an *Annunciation* that Lorenzo painted eight years later, during which time he had a bit of a rethink. Now God the Father, off stage in Jesi's *Annunciation*, dives like an Olympic swimmer through the doorway; the angel, down on one knee behind the Virgin, seems to be frightened himself, gesturing 'Look out!' Mary, unusually, in Annunciation scenes, is looking straight at the viewer. She seems calm, wise, maybe a little scared, accepting her destiny.

But it's her little cat, annoyed by all the ruckus that upset her nap and jumping out of the scene as fast as she can, that always makes me laugh out loud.



FROM THE ARCHIVES: ARMENIA

In 2001, **Deirdre Holding** and her husband, Nicholas, spent three weeks exploring Armenia – which was, back then, not your average holiday destination. Little did they know that they would go on to write the first guidebook to the country, now in its fifth edition. We asked Deirdre about her experiences and the changes she’s witnessed in Armenia over the years.

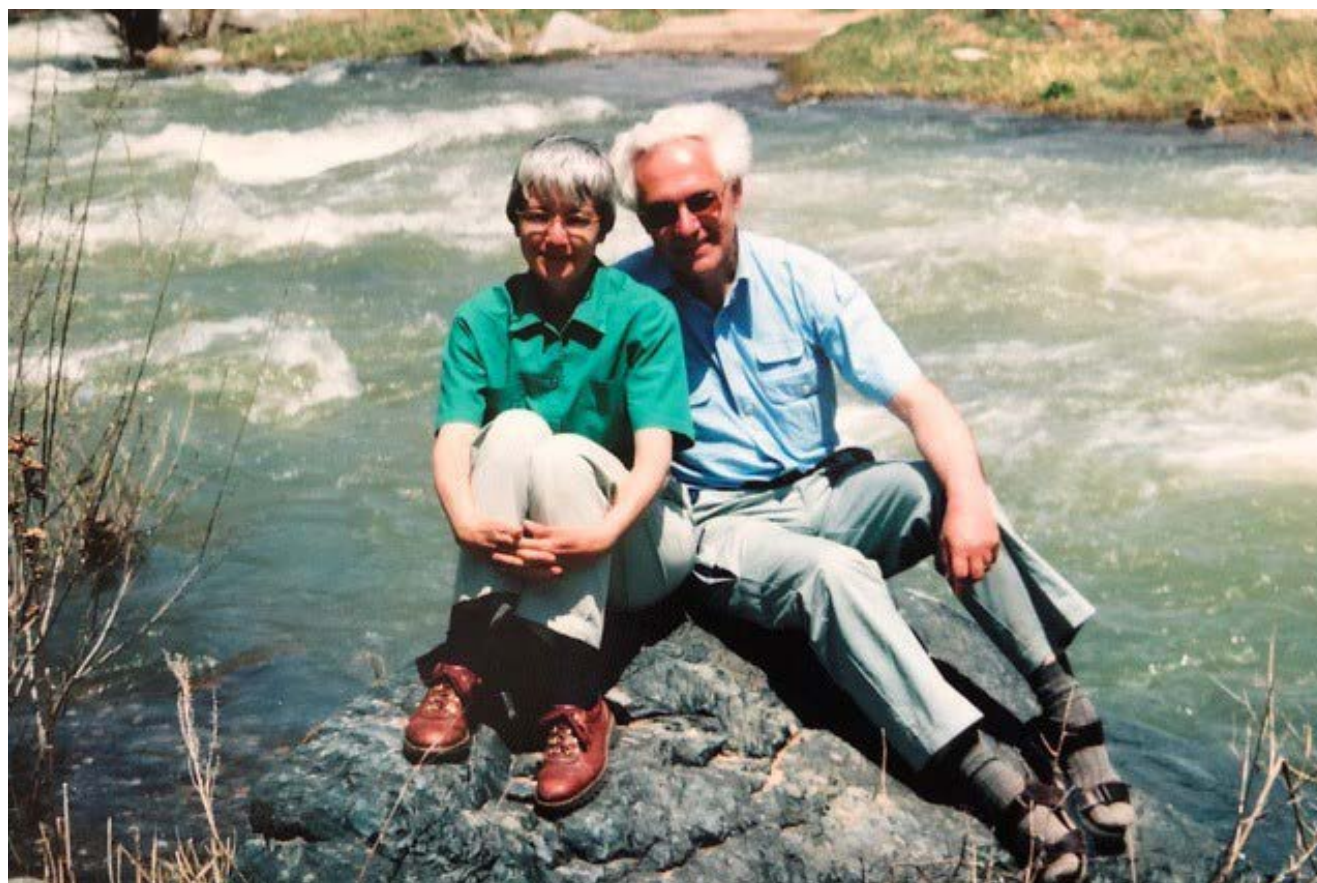


It started with a holiday

In 2001 we (my husband, Nicholas, and I) went to Armenia on holiday – simply on holiday. That in itself was unusual; relatively few tourists visited Armenia in those days. Even more unusual, according to our guide and interpreter, was that we went for three weeks. Most visitors stayed only a few days.

We wanted to see as much of the country as possible so asked our Armenian travel agent to book accommodation in all four corners of the country. Apparently this was another unusual feature of our visit.

Our first experience of things Armenian was on the flight (and, in those days, a direct flight from London was possible). Other passengers included a large group of typical American teenagers from Los Angeles, all speaking fluent Armenian! This was our introduction to the importance of the huge Armenian diaspora. Our second experience



Deirdre and Nicholas in Armenia in 2003, beside the River Sisian in Syunik province

© DEIRDRE HOLDING

confirmed the pilot's warning that Yerevan's Zvartnots airport had the bumpiest runway in the world. It has since improved.

We had arranged for a 4x4 with driver, and for a guide/translator to accompany us throughout our stay, a wise move in many respects. Most of the roads were in appalling condition, there were very few road signs and maps were inadequate. We spoke no Armenian, only very little Russian (the second language) and few people in Armenia spoke English.

We had a truly wonderful and interesting holiday. We were enthralled by Armenia from the start – the hospitality and helpfulness of the people, the spectacular scenery with its mountains, gorges and wildflowers, the abundant ancient sites, the superb quality of seasonal fruit and vegetables and the very long history of a country, then newly independent again after having been part of the Soviet Union. Its long Christian history (the first to declare Christianity as the state religion in AD301) was visible in the many churches and monasteries (most in ruins on that first visit after the years of officially atheist Soviet rule) and the hundreds of *khachkars*, carved cross-stones, a conspicuous and beautiful feature of Armenian decorative art. The similarity of the intricate interlacing patterns on the *khachkars* to those in Celtic art struck me immediately. Armenia's other great contribution

to world art is its painted illuminated manuscripts – another fascinating similarity to Celtic art.

Armenia had been a relatively prosperous part of the Soviet Union, but – with the devastating earthquake in the northwest of the country in 1988 (25,000 deaths; 20,000 injured; 500,000 made homeless) followed by the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 (with the loss of most of Armenia's industry) and the first Nagorno Karabakh war (1988–94) with Azerbaijan – this prosperity vanished almost overnight. When we first visited only 20–30% of the population was in paid employment. Many people had to return to subsistence farming, much being done by hand. In urban areas many sought to become small-scale vendors of some kind of goods to try to make a living. I met a highly qualified engineer, whose job disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union, who created wonderful embroideries to sell to tourists to support her family. Her son likewise made beautiful wooden carvings.

Armenians are generous to a fault. I remember many instances of desperately poor people insisting on welcoming us into their homes and serving homemade bread, cheese and fruit. One such was an elderly couple who had brought their

flock up to the summer pastures in the mountains. We were walking up to a monastery (Armenian monasteries were often hidden in the mountains to protect them and their precious manuscripts from invaders) and they insisted we call in on our way down. Over refreshments they recounted how their guard dog had been attacked and killed by a bear.

In those early days one did not travel with portable access to the internet. Even if we had had a smartphone or laptop, it would have been of little

use as internet availability, like mobile phone coverage, in Armenia was very limited. Only the capital, Yerevan, and three other towns had mobile phone service. From these few towns international dialling was available from

landlines but otherwise one had to go to a post office to make an international call or indeed to call another Armenian town. I remember our guide making such a call to Yerevan from Alaverdi in the north. It was a cumbersome process: one filled in a paper form, handed it to a telephonist on duty who made the connection manually and indicated which booth to enter to take the call. Technology is a sphere which has changed out of recognition since that first visit. Armenia

“When we first visited only 20–30% of the population was in paid employment.”

leapfrogged over other countries and by later visits was far more technologically advanced than most western countries.

‘What this country needs is a decent guidebook’

Another enormous change is the amount of information within Armenia itself. When we first went there was virtually no information on the ground – nothing about the historic sites we visited, no information boards, no booklets, poor labelling in museums. Our guide worked with handwritten notes she had made from Soviet era Intourist information. It was frustrating, especially given the vast amount of information online and in scholarly tomes. Many times we bewailed the absence of a practical and informative guidebook, such as the Bradt guides we had used elsewhere. As I said in the *Authors’ story* section of Edition 3, ‘how many print-outs can be packed before a suitcase is overweight?’ During the many hours we spent over meals discussing Armenia with our guide and driver, our oft-repeated refrain was ‘what this country needs is a decent guidebook’. So when Nick was asked some months later if he would consider writing Bradt’s travel guide to Armenia, he couldn’t really say anything but ‘yes’.

At that time Bradt was looking into producing a guidebook to each of the countries of the former

Soviet Union. They asked Neil Taylor, author of their guide to Estonia, if he knew anyone who might be interested in writing the guide to Armenia. We first met Neil in 1976 on a tour in China with Neil’s travel company, and knowing that Nick had just been on holiday to Armenia he thought he might be just the person.

By then Nick was retired so had the necessary time. Although he was used to writing lengthy

reports for work he had never written anything like a guidebook. Of course, it required a huge amount of research – our house was taken over by books and printouts – and we arranged several more trips to Armenia before the first edition could be written. We had always said we would like to go back to the country and get to know it better, but had never envisaged such a project! The first edition (2003) had 216 pages, of which



Nick on the walk up to Spitakavor Monastery, Vayots Dzor province, in 2002

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11 were on Nagorno Karabakh. Notwithstanding Hilary's comment about Bradt publishing the first full travel guide to Armenia, we soon realised how little we knew and had written about the country. We both delighted in getting to know the country even better during subsequent trips. Our increasing knowledge of the country was demonstrated, in a crude way, by the number of pages which crept up steadily. Edition 5 (2019) now has 420 pages, with 28 devoted to Nagorno Karabakh.

Nick wrote the first two editions of the guidebook. Shortly after Edition 2 was published in 2006 he developed a serious illness and he died in 2008. Some months after his death I put my head above the parapet and offered to write the next edition if Bradt wanted me to. I still don't know if I was brave or foolhardy. It was a steep learning curve, not least because my computer skills were basic and minimal. Although we had travelled together for all earlier trips, the next would be the first without Nick. I was thankful that our guide and interpreter for all previous visits was able to come with me, despite the fact that by this stage she was working in London. After that I was happy to go alone accompanied just by my driver in Armenia. Much of Nick's text had been based on my diaries and photographs and I had always proof read the texts at all stages, but I hadn't been involved with any of the editorial aspects.



Deirdre at Amberd, Aragatsotn province, in 2010

For this third edition (2011), my first, I left Nick's text largely unchanged, just altering and deleting where necessary and adding new material. It was particularly hard emotionally to change his words or to omit passages where I could hear his voice and his dry sense of humour, but in places it had to be done. By the time of the fourth edition (2014), it was easier to put my own stamp on the text. I especially enjoyed writing some of the passages which aimed to give very practical advice (such as how to find an address in Armenia – not always straightforward!) or to tell a story (such as that of the snakes of Ardivi) or a boxed text on something

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in which I had a particular interest, such as Armenian sundials.

There were, of course, some things I did not enjoy researching. Chief among them was the buses. Trying to make sense of Armenian buses was a nightmare. There were no timetables (minibuses tended to depart 'when full') and there were multiple small stations from which minibuses could depart, which changed place frequently.

After Edition 4, to which I felt I had given everything I could, I knew I did not have the stamina to do another edition. This presented me with a dilemma. Travel guides are living things which need regular updating. One undertakes a guidebook, such as the one to Armenia, for love not money. I was happy to do so, feeling privileged to be in a position to do this. It meant a lot to know that I was contributing in some small way to a country I had got to know and grown to love. However, at the same time as knowing I did not want to write the fifth edition, I felt I could not, at that stage, hand over the copyright of a book which had been a joint venture with my much-missed late husband.

Fortunately, Bradt presented me with a solution – the possibility of finding an updater who would do all the necessary research and writing for a new edition while at the same time I could see and have some input into the text. I was delighted

when Tom Allen agreed to be updater. He seemed ideal. Not only was he much younger than I was (so could perhaps deal more comfortably with subjects such as nightclubs), but he also lived in Armenia (far better for writing a guidebook than simply visiting), he spoke Armenian (I was envious given my minimally successful efforts to learn the language!) and he could also bring to the book his expert knowledge of hiking and other active pursuits which were gaining much popularity among tourists and Armenians alike. I was even more delighted when I saw the final product. With that, and the passage of time, I now feel able to relinquish what was a very important part of my life, one which helped to fill the enormous gap left by Nick's death.

For the next edition of the guidebook to Armenia much will have to be updated, not only because of the passage of time but because of the second Karabakh war in late 2020, which has altered the situation not just in Nagorno Karabakh, but also in Armenia itself.

Measuring change

So much has changed in Armenia since we first went in 2001. For one, road signs were almost non-existent in 2001. Even our experienced Armenian driver kept having to ask the way to a particular town or village. Signs gradually

appeared, at first in Armenian and Russian and then more frequently in Latin script also.

While petrol itself was easily available, unleaded petrol was unobtainable. Today it is everywhere. On our early trips, petrol stations in rural areas were few and far between so petrol was often dispensed in cans from roadside tankers. The need for this has gradually disappeared.

Water supply has improved enormously. When we first travelled to Armenia, the supply even in towns was very poor due to leakages. It could often be cut off for days, even in the capital. Most houses had methods of storing water, the bath sometimes being used for this purpose rather than for bathing. In remoter villages, water still had to be drawn from a spring or well.

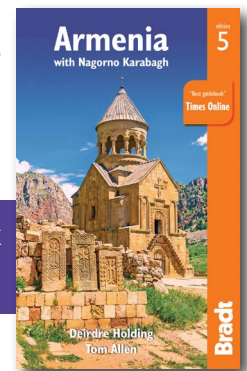
On our first visit most of the many churches and monasteries in the country did not function as such, having been closed or used for other purposes in Soviet times. Many were simply ruins. However, this had the advantage that most were open all the time making it easy to visit. Since independence many churches have become

active again, meaning that at night they may be locked but the vast majority are open all day. There has been much restoration; some of it well done, some not so felicitously.

I last visited Armenia in 2015, just after the publication of Edition 4. I had a wonderful time doing as I wanted without the constraints of guidebook research, although one never loses the impulse to jot down new and useful facts. Since then a broken ankle (mine), the illness and death of Nick's mother (my only remaining relative), the need to catch up with neglected things at home and now the Covid-19 pandemic, have all meant that I have not been back to Armenia. I would like to return one day. There are places I would like to revisit, new developments to see and new paths to walk. I often feel 'homesick' for *lavash*, Armenia's flatbread, and for Armenia's delicious apricots. Nowhere else have I enjoyed apricots so luscious that the juice runs down my arm.

“Nowhere else have I enjoyed apricots so luscious that the juice runs down my arm.”

The Travel Club members can get their copy of the [fifth edition of Armenia](#) for just **£8.99** with the code **TRAVELCLUB50** at checkout.



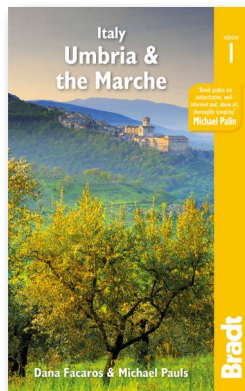
OUT THIS MONTH!

The Travel Club members can claim their exclusive **50% discount** on ALL our books by using the code **TRAVELCLUB50** at checkout. This month's new titles are:

Italy: Umbria & the Marche

Dana Facaros & Michael Pauls

£15.99

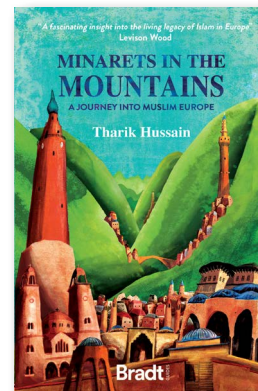


Bradt's *Umbria & the Marche* is the most detailed guide to combine these two small central Italian regions, which offer all the beauty, history and culture of neighbouring Tuscany without the crowds, traffic or eye-popping prices. Expert authors Dana Facaros and Michael Pauls provide insider information on the best places to sleep, eat and drink, and are the perfect guides to the region's landscapes, hill towns, and art and architecture.

Minarets in the Mountains: A Journey into Muslim Europe

Tharik Hussain

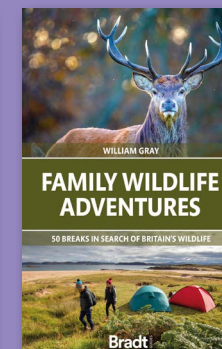
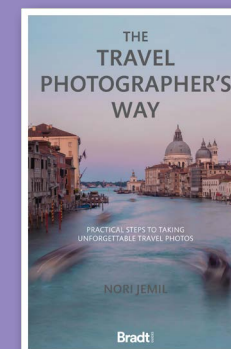
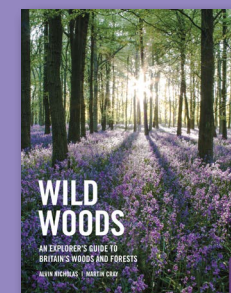
£9.99



Intimate and engaging, *Minarets in the Mountains* is the first English travel narrative to explore indigenous Muslim Europe in the 21st century, and the first to look at its living 600-year-old culture and heritage through the eyes of a Muslim writer. Accompanied by his wife and two young daughters, Tharik Hussain journeys around the western Balkans, through countries with centuries of Islamic history and long-established Muslim communities. Along the way, he finds mystical Islamic lodges clinging to the sides of mountains, prays in mosques older than the Sistine Chapel, and meets those who, despite persecution and war, have never relinquished their faith.

Coming soon!

We've got a whole host of new and inspiring titles coming in the autumn, from guides to Britain's best wild spaces and family wildlife adventures to the ultimate handbook for taking outstanding travel photos. Stay tuned for more!



THE TRAVEL CLUB MEMBER BENEFITS

Our aim for The Travel Club is not only to entertain and inspire, and to bring together like-minded travellers, but to save our members money!

10% off Discovery Walks with Muddy Boots

Launched in 2020, [Muddy Boots Walking Holidays](#) run self-guided walking holidays and guided 'Discovery Walks' in the Yorkshire Dales. Living and working in the Dales, Helen and Matt Coppin are a fountain of local knowledge, and their walks are designed to discover the paths less trodden

and uncover the stories and characteristics that define this remarkable area.

The Travel Club members can enjoy 10% off any of their guided Discovery Walks by using the code **THETRAVELCLUB** at checkout. Walks range from 2½ to 8 hours, with routes suitable for all ages and abilities. For more information, go to their [website](#).

Free subscription to Dog-Friendly Weekends

There's a new title coming to the Bradt list in 2022: *Dog-Friendly Weekends: 50 breaks in Britain for you and your dog*, written by award-winning travel writer and canine lover Lottie Gross. Before the book comes out, Lottie wanted to share some of the great destinations, hotels and pubs she has found to help dog owners have some brilliant adventures this year – especially since so many new ones have joined the ranks since the pandemic began. So, Lottie has launched a regular newsletter with trip ideas, hotel recommendations and shout-outs to lovely pubs and restaurants worth travelling for – all suitable for dogs, of course.

The Travel Club members can get their subscription for free (normally £40); just click this [link](#) to sign up.

Free Plus membership with Bidroom

Founded with the mission to make the hotel industry fair for both travellers and hotels, [Bidroom](#) is the first membership-based marketplace for travel lovers. Hotels get bookings with no

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Explore the best of the Yorkshire Dales on a guided walk with Muddy Boots

commission, and instead, they offer discounts and added perks to members.

Members can save up to 25% on hotels compared with other online travel platforms, but also enjoy additional benefits such as free room upgrades, complimentary welcome drinks, free parking and discounts on spa treatments and dining experiences.

The Travel Club members can get a one-year Plus membership for free (normally £49) to unlock bigger discounts and a wider selection of hotels and partner extras. [Click here](#) to sign up.

Aardvark Safaris: 5% off all tours

Aardvark Safaris specialise in tailor-made, high-quality African safaris away from the crowds. Just email mail@aardvarksafaris.com and mention that you are a Travel Club member when booking.

The Adventure Creators: 10% off all Pyrenees tours

This [adventure outfit](#) based in the Pyrenees specialises in tailor-made, outdoor holidays in the region. To claim, quote **Bradt10** when enquiring.

Adventurous Ink: get your first month free

[Adventurous Ink](#) is a unique subscription service. Each month you'll receive a new book

or journal featuring writers, photographers and illustrators who really 'get' the great outdoors. Get your first month free with the code **BRADTINK** (valid when purchasing a two-month subscription).

The Cook's Place: 10% off cooking courses

Based in North Yorkshire, [The Cook's Place](#) is an independent cookery school offering a range of courses. Enter the code **BTG21** at checkout (valid on all half- and full-day courses until 30 November 2021).

Feast Box: 30% off plus a free bottle of wine

Taste the world in your kitchen with [Feast Box](#), the UK's top-rated recipe box specialising in over 50 of the world's tastiest cuisines. Enjoy 30% off your first two boxes plus a free bottle of wine; just use the code **BRADTFEAST** at checkout.

HÔRD: 10% off everything

Yorkshire-based [HÔRD](#) create meaningful and high-quality gifts and apparel for the adventurous and wild among us. Just use the code **HORDXTRAVELCLUB10** at checkout.

Inertia Network: 5% off any booking

[Inertia Network](#) run immersive expeditions that support local communities in remote and threatened regions. Enter the code **Bradt2021** in the 'How Did You Hear About Us' box when making your enquiry.

Lupine Travel: 5% off all tours

UK-based Lupine specialise in unique and off-the-beaten-track destinations, from Chernobyl to North Korea. Just email info@lupinettravel.co.uk and mention that you are a member of The Travel Club when booking.

National Geographic Traveller (UK): three issues for £3

With a reputation for compelling storytelling and a focus on off-the-beaten-track travel, *National Geographic Traveller (UK)* is a favourite with intrepid travellers. [Click here](#) to get your first three issues for just £3.

Native Eye: 5% off tours

[Native Eye](#) specialise in small-group tours to some of the world's most adventurous destinations from Chad and Congo to Saudi Arabia and Iraq. For 5% off any bookings made until 31 December 2021 (for tours in 2021 or 2022), contact them on

01473 328546 or info@nativeeyetravel.com and state you're a member.

Natural Britain: 10% off

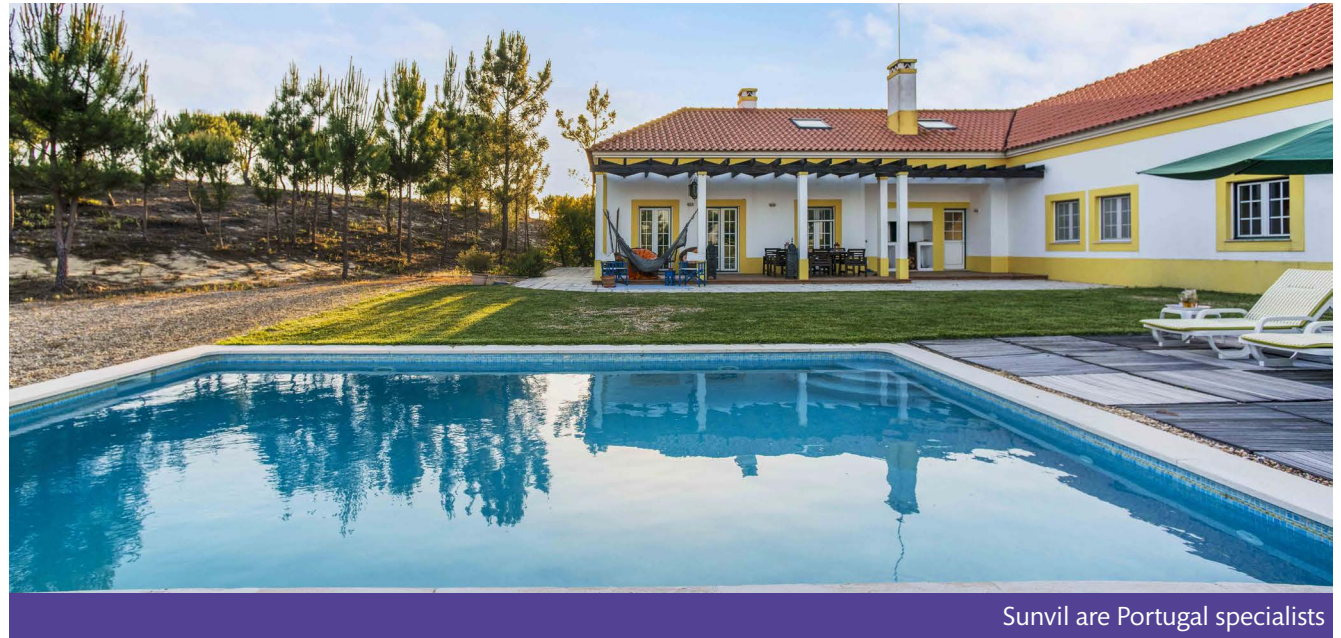
[Natural Britain](#) are a new UK-focused tour operator with a focus on slow and sustainable travel, and are the first operator in the country to introduce carbon labelling for every trip. Enjoy 10% off two brand-new tours, [Hidden Hampshire](#) and [Champing in Natural Northants](#); just use the code **BRADTNB** at checkout.

Safari Drive: 10% off vehicle and equipment hire

[Safari Drive](#) are a UK tour operator who have specialised in creating bespoke self-drive safari holidays in Africa since 1993. Just mention that you're a Travel Club member when booking.

Sunvil: 5% off Alentejo bookings

Award-winning holiday specialist [Sunvil](#) is offering The Travel Club members a 5% saving on any new booking to Portugal's Alentejo for travel before 31 December 2021. This is in addition to the two free PCR tests per person for stays of five nights or more (saving £120pp). To book, visit their website or call 020 8758 4722.



Sunvil are Portugal specialists

Tonic: 10% off subscriptions

[Tonic](#) is a brand-new biannual drink and travel magazine. Simply use the code **BRADTTC10** at checkout to redeem your discount, which currently also includes free UK and EU shipping.

Travel Africa: 20% off subscriptions

Founded in 1997, *Travel Africa* remains the only international magazine dedicated to exploring Africa's attractions, wildlife and cultures. [Click here](#) and enter the code **BRADT2020** at checkout.

Untamed Borders: 10% off group tours

Adventure travel company [Untamed Borders](#) runs bespoke trips and small-group adventures to some of the world's most interesting and inaccessible places. Use code **BRADT10** to receive 10% off any 2021/2022 group departure.

Wanderlust: £10 off subscriptions

This legendary travel magazine is still going strong after nearly 30 years, offering issues packed full of articles on wildlife and cultural travel. [Click here](#) and enter the code **WLMAG20** at checkout.

COMING NEXT MONTH...

In AUGUST's issue of The Travel Club...

How Bex Band went from nervous hiker to leading a national adventure community, on the road in Bhutan with Bharat Patel and a sneak preview of Brian Jackman's brilliant autobiography, *West With The Light*.



The largest Buddha statue in Bhutan lies on a hill near the capital, Thimpu © BHARAT PATEL