

Hall's on tour – Proctor Stead Campsite, Craster

A sunny Friday afternoon in June and we set off to go further north from home – up to Proctor Stead campsite in Craster on the Northumberland coast. www.proctorstead.co.uk



The campsite is a small family run site just outside the small fishing village of Craster – famous for both Craster smoked kippers and for being the location where ITV 'Distant Shores' was filmed.

The location of this site is great for visiting the local area. You have Craster, Embleton and Dunstanburgh Castle within walking distance, all on good coastal paths. A little further afield you have Bamburgh, Seahouses, Lindisfarne (Holy Island), Alnwick Castle and Alnwick Gardens all within a short drive or bus ride away.

There are plenty of coastal walks to enjoy around this campsite and it is a very relaxing place to be.

When travelling to this campsite you turn off the A1 at the second turn for Alnwick, turn Right at the crossroads and then at first follow the road signs for Craster then follow the BROWN signs for the campsite. If you do follow the wrong signs you end up at a very low archway over the road, just large enough for a car to squeeze through but way too small for a motorhome!

Mr and Mrs Davidson run the site along with a small field of static vans and a couple of holiday cottages for hire. The welcome is very friendly as you book in at the porch of the Davidson's bungalow. There is the offer of milk, eggs and orange juice for sale on the porch step and you can order a morning paper for the following day.

We were charged £19 per night for two adults, one teenager and our puppy in mid-June with electric hook-up.

The facilities are better than basic and very practical, easy to use and very clean at all times but cannot be described as luxury. The showers are 10p for a long, hot shower. There is plenty of fresh water taps dotted around and they have the all important motorhome drainage point for use before you leave.

There are hard standing pitches as well as plenty of grass pitches all with electric hook-up. There were lots of tents camping the weekend we were there which was nice to see, as many sites don't accept tents now, or certainly don't mix them in with us motorhomes anyhow!

The nearest shop is approx 1.5 miles away in Embleton. You can walk to this along a pleasant well maintained coastal path going through a couple of farms or you can easily drive there. It stocks bread, milk, papers and most things you would need for a weekend. Embleton also has a couple of pubs that both serve food all day.

Craster itself is a lovely little fishing village with a tea room, pub, fish restaurant and the Craster Kipper smokehouse. The views are stunning whatever the season but it's the Jolly Fisherman public house that makes it all the better for us.

Not only is our daughter welcome inside the Jolly Fisherman but so is our puppy. They serve evening meals as well as wonderful 'light meals' at lunchtime. These lighter meals include crab soup made with whisky and fresh cream, a selection of sandwiches (including Craster crab), and a selection of toasties. The chips are fantastic and are a must as a side order. All can be enjoyed with a good selection of drinks including Black Sheep Ale for those beer drinkers amongst us.

In the winter you enjoy the real fire crackling away and in any season you can sit in the full length conservatory (no dogs allowed) and enjoy the view out to sea watching the seals play with the seagulls. The pub also offers free Wi-Fi internet if you just can't leave the laptop at home.

Just over the lane from the Jolly Fisherman is the famous Craster smokehouse - L Robson and Son's. Often you can smell and see the smoke bellowing out of the smokehouse roof preparing another batch of Craster Kippers. Robson's have a counter to sell all their products to the locals – well worth a purchase if you happen to visit.

A short walk from Craster along the coastline brings you to the ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle. Again this landmark is well worth a visit if you are in the area.

Other places to visit.

Beadnell, Seahouses and Bamburgh are all nice places to visit. If you are feeling fit you can walk there and get the bus back or you can go by bus or car/van.

Going slightly further north the Holy Island of Lindisfarne is simply not to be missed. You have to watch the tide times so that you don't get stuck on the island but if you are visiting in your van would it matter that much?

There are lots to do and see on the island and places to eat if you enjoy tea and cake as much as us. It is here that they also brew the Lindisfarne Mead.

Lindisfarne Mead the oldest alcoholic drink in the world first created in Ancient Greece. It contains honey and famed for its restorative and aphrodisiac properties. Drunk in Britain since the Celtic times Lindisfarne Mead is now produced exclusively on the beautiful Holy island of Lindisfarne. The island is known as the 'Cradle of Christianity' in England. In the year 634 AD Oswald, King of Northumberland bought St. Aidan from the island of Iona to establish a Monastery here.

Visit www.lindisfarne.org.uk for further details.

Travelling a few miles inland brings you to Alnwick with its' castle and beautiful gardens. This medieval market town originally prospered as an ideal staging post, being only a day's ride from Berwick-upon-Tweed in the north and Newcastle upon Tyne in the south. It still retains many of its cobbled streets, narrow alleys and fine stone buildings which now house a range of specialist shops and family businesses as well as some of what once totalled over 50 inns.

Visitors can still enjoy the atmosphere of a thriving medieval market town in Alnwick's lovely Market Place; also the centre for local events including Alnwick's International Music Festival, local and continental markets and the Farmers Market is held on the last Friday of each month.

Visit www.visitalnwick.org.uk/explore/alnwick.htm for more details.

If you are in to gardening at all a visit to Heighley garden centre is a treat to be had. Set in the spectacular Northumbrian countryside north of Morpeth, 25 miles south of Craster just off the A1, Heighley Gate is the North East's largest garden centre. Originally a tiny independent pig and poultry farm, Heighley Gate began life in 1963 when the owners, the Lishmans, sold eggs to passing motorists. Regular customers spotted the vegetables growing in their greenhouse and a prolific business was born. More and more greenhouses were added and Heighley Gate grew from a small scale nursery and garden centre into the award-winning growing and retail operation of today.

It now lies in 40 acres of immaculately tended grounds and is renowned for both the excellence of its nursery-grown plants and its all-round appeal to gardeners and families alike. More than half the plants are home grown and the selection of hardy nursery stock is the most extensive in the North East.

The nursery remains at the heart of the business however there is also a wide variety of shopping and entertainment on offer, indoor and outdoor children's play areas, as well as a great restaurant and a couple of 'tea and cake' cafes. Whilst the emphasis rests on top quality plants and gardening products, the genuinely warm welcome extended to every visitor remains Heighley Gate's trademark, ensuring a day spent here is one never to be forgotten.

Visit <http://www.heighleygate.com> for further details.

I hope this gives you inspiration to travel further north for one of your trips even if you simply call in on your way up to Scotland.

Phil, Dawn, Sophie and Rosie (the puppy) Hall.