

More than meets the eye

VAST, VARIED AND RIPE FOR EXPLORING, THE SCOTTISH BORDERS OFFERS A HUGE RANGE OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY. HERE'S OUR PICK OF SIX OF THE BEST



PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTTISH VIEWPOINT

1: Walk this way

THERE IS NOTHING quite like a long-distance walk to get a real flavour of a region and walkers in the Borders really are spoiled for choice. You can even pick a themed walk based on personal interest, be it literary (John Buchan *Way pictured*), Borders history (Borders Abbeys Way), or a religious journey (St Cuthbert's Way).

And then there's always the big one: the Southern Upland Way, which runs coast-to-coast for 212 miles from Portpatrick in Galloway to Cockburnspath in Berwickshire. The Borders section of the route (roughly 82 miles) includes wild and beautiful areas such as the Ettrick Valley, St Mary's Loch, Traquair, and Lauder. On the higher ground, you won't see a soul.

FURTHER INFO: John Buchan Way A 13-mile

jaunt from Peebles to Broughton, best finished with a celebratory ale from the excellent Broughton brewery.

Borders Abbeys Way A 64.5-mile circular walk that visits the abbeys at Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso and Jedburgh. Where you start is up to you.

St Cuthbert's Way A 62.5-mile cross-border walk that ends on Lindisfarne (Holy Isle) in Northumberland.

Southern Upland Way One of the toughest backpacking challenges anywhere in Scotland.

www.visitscottishborders.com
www.southernuplandway.gov.uk

2: Underwater marvels

IT MAY NOT BE LONG – just 32 miles from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Cockburnspath – but the Borders coastline nonetheless has much to offer, particularly for scuba divers.

The tiny fishing village of St Abbs serves as a hub for the sport as divers come to enjoy the clear waters and impressive marine life within the St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve – the only one of its kind in Scotland. The reserve extends along five miles of coastline from Hairy Ness in the south to Thrummie Carr in the north and out about a mile from the shore.

The diving here is unbelievably scenic with renowned underwater rock formations close to shore – including the famous Cathedral Rock. Meanwhile the meeting of cold and relatively warm waters results in an unusually diverse mix of underwater life.

FURTHER INFO:
 St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve
www.marine-reserve.co.uk
 St Abbs village
www.stabbs.org

3: Learn to fly-fish

THE THOUSANDS of mountain bikers that now flock to the Borders may disagree, but for those who love a more traditional pursuit, the area is still about just one thing: fly-fishing.

A place of pilgrimage for anglers from around the world, the Tweed and its main tributaries are of international renown. Salmon is the main quarry, but with the river system rarely having been in such good health (see *River wild*, page 38), it is now also known for the quality of its trout and grayling.

The good news is that the Tweed is not just the domain of the experienced (or well-heeled) angler. It's a great place to learn and, if you pick your beat carefully, needn't break the bank. Even if you only catch a branch on the other side of the river, fly-fishing is a wonderful way to spend a whole day immersed in the outdoors.

FURTHER INFO: Friendly local guiding companies can help you get to grips with rod and line.

FishWild
www.fishwild.co.uk
 Tweed Guide
www.tweedguide.com



PHOTOGRAPH: FISHWILD/ROBERTON-JONES

4: Mountain biking nirvana

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to talk of the Borders and not mention mountain biking. What was once a slightly quirky sport enjoyed by a few has become a mainstream sensation – thanks in large part to the seemingly endless growth of mighty Glentress, near Peebles.

Part of the 7Stanes network of mountain bike trail centres, Glentress draws riders of all abilities from far and wide, although dedicated downhillers and those who prefer a quieter patch for cross-country trails head for Innerleithen (*pictured*), a little further along the Tweed Valley.

Both are fantastic places to ride, but don't forget to explore elsewhere. The 7Stanes centre at Newcastleton near the border with England is different again, although better still are the wild rides that can be enjoyed on the many tracks and drove roads that criss-cross the hills. Such off-piste adventures are the best way to appreciate the beauty – and sheer scale – of the Borders landscape.

FURTHER INFO: Glentress, Innerleithen and Newcastleton are all part of the 7Stanes network of trail centres in southern Scotland. www.7stanes.gov.uk

Mountain biking infrastructure has grown enormously in the area and a variety of local operators offer tuition, guiding and tips on self-guided routes in the hills.

Hub in the Forest
www.thehubintheforest.co.uk
Transcend Trail Academy
www.transcendtrailacademy.com
MB7
www.mb7.com
Dirt School
www.dirtschool.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDY MCCANDLISH/STICS





PHOTOGRAPH: ALBA-BALLOONING

5: Up, up and away

TWEED VALLEY RESIDENTS are well used to the roar of hot air balloon burners as people take to the air for a unique view of the surrounding landscape. Set against a clear blue sky, the balloons are an amazing sight as they appear almost to skim the rooftops before rising gently over the hills. Trips are wind and weather dependent, but generally

run from mid-March to late-October, with passengers actively encouraged to participate in pre-flight preparations.

FURTHER INFO: Edinburgh-based Alba Ballooning operates flights from launch sites that include West Linton, Eddleston and Peebles.

www.albabillooning.co.uk

6: Horsing around

AS ANYONE WHO has witnessed the Common Ridings festivals that take place in many Borders towns each year will know, this is a region with some serious horsey history. It is no surprise then that the Borders are home to the Buccleuch Country Ride – Scotland's only fully way-marked long-distance horse riding trail.

Ideal for more experienced riders, the route starts near Selkirk and takes riders on a 57-mile trek through the rolling Cheviot and Lammermuir hills. Most riders complete the whole route in three or four days, with plenty of

well-equipped accommodation for horse and rider along the way, but it can also be broken up into several smaller rides if time is against you.

FURTHER INFO: If planning to ride the route during the winter months, it is advisable to first contact the Bowhill Estate office (**t.01750 20753**) as the trail crosses ground used for shooting and other activities.

www.tinyurl.com/bowhill

Harvey Horseriding Map, Buccleuch Country Ride

www.harveymaps.co.uk

Essentials

GETTING THERE

The Scottish Borders is within one and two hours' driving time from Edinburgh, Newcastle and Carlisle railway stations (www.travelinescotland.com). If travelling from the south of England, the rail trip from London to Berwick-upon-Tweed (the nearest access point) takes just four hours. All the major Borders towns are linked by First Bus (www.firstgroup.com), while local services are also provided by Munro's of Jedburgh (www.munrosofjedburgh.co.uk) and Perryman's (www.perrymansbuses.co.uk).



PHOTOGRAPH: CO-WHERE

GO ANYWHERE

An Innerleithen-based entrepreneur has launched a new transport and support service venture that whisks groups – and their gear – to and from Scotland's best outdoor locations. Although ideal for visiting mountain bikers, the venture is also aimed at road cyclists, walkers, kayakers, or anyone with an interest in exploring the outdoors. www.go-where.co.uk

GET INVOLVED

If you want to give something back to mountain biking, why not join the Tweed Valley Bike Patrol? Staffed entirely by volunteers – all of whom are skilled riders – the team provides visitors to Glentress with expert local knowledge, bike repair skills and emergency assistance. For more details, contact Andy Weir, Tweed Valley Bike Patrol Coordinator (andy.weir@forestry.gsi.gov.uk). You can also volunteer for trail building and maintenance work through the Glentress Trailfaires. For details, contact Mountain Bike Ranger Andy Wardman (andy.wardman@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

ACCOMMODATION

The quantity – and level – of accommodation in the Borders has grown dramatically in recent years, with many places geared to accommodating visiting mountain bikers, anglers, walkers and others with specific outdoor interests. At the budget end, mountain bikers can try the new wigwam development (www.glentressforestlodges.co.uk) recently opened by a local farmer at Glentress.

For smarter accommodation – plus excellent food – try Caddon View (www.caddonview.co.uk) or the Traquair Arms Hotel (www.traquairarmshotel.co.uk), both in Innerleithen, while the Tontine Hotel in Peebles mixes style and warmth (see competition on page 17). The luxury end of the scale is catered for by Barony Castle (www.devere.co.uk/our-locations/barony-castle) and Cringletie House (www.cringletie.com), both off the Edinburgh Road.

Away from the Tweed Valley, The Wheatsheaf at Swinton (www.wheatsheaf-swinton.co.uk) and self-catering cottages at Hendersyde Farm near Kelso (www.hendersyde.co.uk) both come highly recommended.

FURTHER INFO

Scottish Borders Walking Festival
www.borderswalking.com

Tweed Valley Tourist Consortium
www.visittweedvalley.co.uk

For comprehensive details on all activities in the Scottish Borders, visit www.visitscottishborders.com