



Meals on wheels

Captivating countryside, wonderful wildlife and outstanding local produce... the Scottish Borders is irresistible. And the best way to sample it? On your bike. **Kate Chambers** gets into gear

Clockwise from above Get up close to the Scottish Borders by bike, at Glentree forest, near Peebles, Tweed Valley; and Eildon Hills from Scott's Viewpoint; feast on local salmon

I was intrigued and not a little bit cynical to hear that the area south of Edinburgh, known as the Scottish Borders, was now being packaged as the Larder of Britain. I first visited the region 20 years ago and the culinary climax on that trip was a 'fish supper' from a chippy in Peebles. Good though this was, it evoked no gastronomic memories. It was time to revisit and so I signed up for a cycling foodie tour of the Scottish Borders from Peebles, along the Tweed Valley, up into the Southern Uplands and on to the town of Kelso. Would I have the stamina to cover the 50 miles or so in two days? Who knows, but that larder had better be full.

Our group was met at Berwick by two hearty chaps from Go-where (go-where.co.uk), an ingenious company who tailor-make such tours, provide bikes, transport luggage between resting posts and act as guides along the route.

After a pit stop at the Tontine (tontinehotel.com), a traditional hotel with a contemporary twist, it was off to Cocoa Black (cocoablack.co.uk), a cookery school where the exuberant owner Ruth Hinks runs chocolate-making workshops. Resembling a sixth-form chemistry class, we poured, dipped and stirred with a constant eye on the temperature to

avoid greasy textures or, more unappetising, a white sheen. Two hours later, we left, proudly clutching a bag of our very own honey and caramel truffles.

Back at the Tontine, we tried not to overindulge in them (and the hotel's killer cocktails) as we sat mesmerised by a rainbow that shimmered above the Tweed. But time to put the sweeteners aside and prepare to get on our bikes the following day.

Next morning, toggled out in layers that would lay claim to any climactic eventuality, we listened as Andy and Steve talked us through the route and gave simple pointers on cycling safety. And then we were off. Fortunately, the roads were empty and the bikes top-notch so once we mastered the 27 gears, we relaxed and with the scent of wild garlic in our nostrils, ospreys wheeling overhead and the mighty Tweed rolling along to our left, we were hooked.

On to the town of Innerleithen and elevenses at Caddon View (caddonview.co.uk), a homely guesthouse where we nibbled on a delicious confection of pastry and mixed fruits known as Border Tart. Meanwhile, the owners filled us in on how the area is reinventing itself as a centre for mountain biking, walking, golf and fishing, in the wake of a once-thriving cashmere industry. And >

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with the last mill having closed this year, outdoor tourism is now vital for the region.

But onwards and upwards. Did I mention the hills? Or 'wee inclines' as Steve preferred to call them. Personally, I wasn't too proud to push if the going got tough. But then the 'rescue' bus was only ever a phone call away for the defeatists among us. And I had the number on speed dial.

We glided on through the misty grounds of Traquair House (traquair.co.uk, open April to October), the oldest inhabited castle in Scotland dating back to 1107 and now functioning as a (very grand) B&B. Time for a lunch of sole and delectable homemade chips at Clovenfords Hotel near Galashiels (clovenfordshotel.co.uk) before soldiering on to sample the organic ice cream at Overlangshaw dairy farm (overlangshawfarm.co.uk). Twenty or so flavours later, it was Cranachan, a traditional Scottish dessert made from honey, cream, raspberry and whisky that got our vote.

Now, flagging a bit – from our calorie intake – we made it to Melrose, the birthplace of rugby sevens, and checked in to the chic Town House Hotel (thetownhousemelrose.co.uk), a comfort zone of fluffy white towels and crisp bedlinen. After a hot bath, we rallied to explore the town's excellent bookshops and boutiques selling lush cashmere.

The next morning brought a change of landscape as we headed up onto higher ground giving majestic views across to the Eildon Hills. With a piercingly blue sky and the freshest of air, the steep descent to Kelso was exhilarating, if a tiny bit scary. A quick tour of Floors Castle (floorscastle.com, open May to October), the lavish ancestral home of the Duke of Roxburghe, was followed by a moreish lunch of smoked salmon at the family-run Teviot Smokery (teviotgamefaresmokery.co.uk).

Then, too soon, it was time to bid our bikes farewell, agreeing that the Scottish Borders' glorious mix of stunning scenery and outstanding local produce was definitely worth all the huff and puff.

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Fit for a (biking) king
Make a pit stop at local monuments such as Floors Castle in Kelso

AND THE WINNER IS...

highlife
TRAVEL
PHOTOGRAPHY
COMPETITION



Congratulations to our second-round winners: Hoang Long Ly for the above image of Yen Bai in Vietnam, and Marko Novakovic for his image of the Assembly building in Belgrade. Both have won a Nikon D3000 digital SLR camera, worth £500, and go through to the grand final for the chance to win the trip of a lifetime – an assignment with a *High Life* photographer. But the competition is still on and, in three months' time, we will be choosing the third-round winners. So if you've just taken some amazing photos – we want to see them. All you need to do is upload them to bahighlife.com/photocompetition. The final closing date is 30 November. Good luck.



VOTE NOW

Entries can be seen in our online gallery at bahighlife.com, where visitors can vote for their favourite photographs and see who is winning. At the end of each three-month period, the image with the highest number of votes will win a Nikon camera. A second winner will be chosen by our judges, who include travel photographer Jonathan Gregson and *High Life* editor Kerry Smith. All winners of the quarterly prizes will go through to the grand final when the ultimate two winners will be chosen.

Go to bahighlife.com/photocompetition