



Yorkshire rolls out in front of us for a week of motoring with the promise of moors and dales, villages, abbeys and tearooms in England's biggest county. We are with English friends on a trip devised by our committee of four and we meet at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, near Wakefield. The first of its kind in the country, it covers more than 200ha and you would need two days to thoroughly explore all its trails and galleries. A couple of hours here lets us roam the home paddock while unhurried sheep wander across the rolling hills. Sturdy shoes are needed because this is free-range sculpture of the best kind, where art meets weather meets nature.

Yorkshireman Henry Moore is a large presence, his pieces embedded in the landscape, as permanent as primeval rocks. There are visiting sculptures, too, by Damien Hirst, Sean Scully and the marvellous *Tree in the Wood* by Guiseppe Penone. Andy Goldsworthy's *Shadow Stone Fold* is a foretaste of endless miles of Yorkshire's dry stone walls.

Our friends tell us we are in the Rhubarb Triangle, famous for its deep-flavoured stalks grown in winter in heated sheds. In the late 19th century its fame took it to the markets of London and Paris and later, pre-war trains were known as Rhubarb Specials. While the fortunes of rhubarb have declined, challenged by more exotic fruits, an annual rhubarb festival is held in February and Wakefield Council erected a sculpture of the plant in 2005.

We move on to Hebden Bridge, a former mill town on the Rochdale Canal whose barges plied the waterways to Manchester. In its 19th-century heyday, cotton from Lancashire and wool from Yorkshire were blended here and in surrounding valleys to produce fustian, the term for hard-wearing fabrics such as corduroy and moleskin. This area produced so much it became known as Fustianopolis. A stylish town, its canal winds pleasingly through it, and the railway station has a piano and library in the waiting room and a cafe. A folk music festival is in full cry with buskers, a Maypole and Morris dancing in the town square, a reminder that *Midsomer Murders* is not historical fantasy.

Nearby is Heptonstall, a town to be reckoned with. It has sombre granite buildings, the imposing St Thomas a'Becket church (and its earlier ruins), steep cobbled streets and, beyond, the moors. Film producers love Heptonstall, which featured most recently in the TV series *Gentleman Jack*. Its museum has a story to curl your hair. Nearby were the headquarters of the Cragg Vale Coiners, a gang of fraudsters led by David Hartley who filed minuscule edges from silver and gold coins and smelted them with base metal to make counterfeit coins. Local publicans put them into circulation. The gang's activities were said to be so damaging they threatened to wreck Britain's currency; a particularly gory murder is among their crimes. Executed in 1770, Hartley lies in the same cemetery as poet Sylvia Plath, her grave heavy with spring flowers. A cheery waitress in the White Lion pub gives us a warm welcome, and our lunch is served on paper placemats with lines from the poetry of Plath and Ted Hughes.

We call into Haworth, where the Brontes lived in later life. It is Monday and the town is quiet after the weekend crowds. Many cafes are in recovery mode and closed, so there's a cheerful throng in the ones that are open. Photographs and paintings in a small art gallery show the stark beauty and drama of the countryside that inspired the landscape of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. The Bronte Parsonage



On the road through the Yorkshire moors

JANE SANDILANDS



Yorkshire Dales, main; Bronte Parsonage, Haworth, top left; St Thomas a'Becket Church, Heptonstall, above; the village of Haworth, below



where the family lived was acquired in 1928 by The Bronte Society and has a rich collection, much of which came from Philadelphia author and publisher Henry Houston Bonnell. The society's website reports that Emily had a brief moment teaching at Miss Patchett's School in Halifax. She left, "reportedly having told her pupils she preferred the school dog to any of them".

We are in the Dales now, soft rolling hills neatly carved into parcels with dry stone fences and dotted with black-faced sheep and their lambs. Wool was a key industry here in the 12th century, and Cistercian monks were the first to develop large-scale sheep farms. A cluster of monasteries — Fountains, Jervaulx, Byland and Rievaulx — all had farms. They

sold wool abroad and helped to create the wealth needed for their ambitious building projects.

Of these, the grandest is Fountains Abbey, a few kilometres west of Ripon and the largest of its kind in Europe. Now a National Trust property and UNESCO World Heritage listed, it is a glorious ruin, its many buildings in various beautiful states of decay. Sacked by Henry VIII, the abbey was acquired later by the Georgians, who shaped the wooded valley into a formal garden with an elegant water feature. There are springtime bluebells under the trees, forget-me-nots in the shade, buttercups under craggy cliffs and squirrels leaping through the grass. Later, we have cake by the lake at the tearoom.

MORE TO THE STORY

We would have missed Sheffield had it not been for Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* (where male dancers take the part of the swans) being performed in the city's historic Lyceum Theatre. We catch a performance and discover a city, once synonymous with steel, transformed. The award-winning Peace Gardens are an inner-city haven of fountains and sculptures, while next door is the Sheffield Winter Garden, a soaring temperate glasshouse that holds 2500 plants from around the world. The nearby Millennium Gallery pays tribute to the city's industrial roots with its huge array of metalwork (13,000 pieces), including modern works and the collection of Victorian art critic John Ruskin.

Sheffield honours its past in other ways. Kelham Island was a centre of metalwork for nearly four centuries, and the whole "Made in Sheffield" history can be seen here in a museum. Thousands of workers toiled in the cutlery and toolmaking trades, including many women and children. The "buffer girls" polished cutlery in their red headscarves, which is the reason Sheffield United FC chose red for their kit.

"We sell nowt but tools" was the mantra of Ken Hawley, who built up a world-class collection of 100,000 tools, mostly objects rescued from Sheffield's metalwork businesses as they closed over the years. The collection is owned by a charitable trust and on display at the Kelham Island Museum.

■ welcometosheffield.co.uk
■ sheffieldtheatres.co.uk
■ sint.co.uk

In Helmsley, at one edge of the vast North Moors National Park, which has the largest tract of heather in the country, is the National Centre for Birds of Prey. Here, in the grounds of Duncombe Park, we watch owls, eagles and smaller raptors come from their night shelters into the sun and star in a flying show. The day before, a falcon had a mini-holiday for four hours, hovering on the thermals and only returning in time for tea.

After a week on the road, so do we.

■ yorkshire-sculpture.org
■ bronte.org.uk
■ dalescountysidemuseum.org.uk
■ nationaltrust.org.uk/fountainsabbey
■ ncbp.co.uk
■ northyorkmoors.org.uk