

Yorkshire's Rural Riches

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Uphill and down dale

Gillian Thornton explores Herriot country and the national parkland of North Yorkshire

Standing on top of Sutton Bank in North Yorkshire, I'm soaking up a countryside view made famous by one of England's best-loved writers.

Before me, the Vale of York stretches in a patchwork of fields to the horizon, a view once described as the finest in England by veterinary surgeon Alf White, better known to his millions of international readers as author James Herriot.

Look up at Sutton Bank from the flat land below and you're treated to yet another iconic view. Carved into the steep limestone escarpment of the Hambleton Hills, the

vast White Horse of Kilburn is Britain's most northerly turf-cut figure, visible for miles around. The brainchild of Victorian schoolmaster Thomas Taylor, the White Horse today marks the south-western boundary of the North York Moors National Park.

A mix of heather moors and pastoral dales dotted with market towns and heritage sites, the Park covers more than 550 square miles, stretching eastwards from Sutton Bank to the holiday resorts of Scarborough and Whitby on the North Sea coast.

Park at the Sutton Bank National Park Centre for a



The White Horse of Kilburn

gentle three-mile circular trail past the Yorkshire Gliding Club to the White Horse. Or walk down to Lake Gormire, the only natural lake in the National Park. You can also hire bikes to explore a range of routes graded for families as well as experienced mountain bikers.

Just five miles from Sutton Bank, the bustling market town of Thirsk makes a great

base for exploring, nestled between the North York Moors and the Yorkshire Dales. A wealth of heritage sites, walking routes and visitor attractions cluster within an hour's drive in every direction. One of Britain's most historic cities, York is 45 minutes by car and as little as 18 minutes by train.

Alf White wrote his first book as James Herriot from

his veterinary practice on the marketplace in Thirsk, now The World of James Herriot visitor attraction. Time your visit right, and you can enjoy a fun day at the races in Thirsk or nearby Ripon.

Don't miss Ripon Cathedral. The father of author Lewis Carroll was a canon here and Lewis was inspired to create some of the scenes in *Alice in Wonderland* by carvings on the choir stalls, including the unforgettable White Rabbit!

The World of James Herriot

In 1992, I was lucky enough to chat with Alf White over lunch at The Golden Fleece in Thirsk on the publication of his final book, *Every Living Thing*, that year. Alf's son Jim took over his veterinary practice, moving into purpose-built premises, and today the original family home has been restored as The World of James Herriot. See the family rooms, office and dispensary as they looked in the 1940s and enjoy touchscreen games based on Channel 5's two series *All Creatures Great And Small* and *The Yorkshire Vet*, which features Alf's former trainee Peter Wright.



Where the real James dined...



... and practised

Relax In Ryedale



Helmsley Castle

Found just 15 miles east of Thirsk, Helmsley is one of four market towns in Ryedale, a rural area popular with enterprising chefs and food producers, artists and craftspeople. I can never resist a wander round Helmsley's ancient castle nor the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey, one of the most powerful Cistercian monasteries in medieval England, both now maintained by English Heritage.

Kirkbymoorside is famed for its antique dealers, while nearby Malton – dubbed Yorkshire's Food Capital – is renowned for its festivals celebrating local produce. Drop into Talbot Yard Food Court, recently visited by the King and Queen, and don't miss nearby Eden Camp, a former prisoner-of-war camp that is now an interactive museum.

Pop into Pickering to buy a ticket to ride the North Yorkshire Moors Railway to the seaside resort of Whitby, or maybe disembark at one of four intermediate stations to enjoy a walk on the moors. Not brought the right gear? No problem – you'll find plenty of outdoor shops in the town centre.



The North Yorkshire Moors Railway

Fact File



Explore on two wheels

◆ Visitor information on the North York Moors from northyorkmoors.org.uk, including the Sutton Bank National Park Centre. For bike hire, go to suttonbankbikes.co.uk
◆ In Thirsk, visit The World of James Herriot worldofjamesherriot.com and stay or eat at The Golden Fleece, a historic coaching inn with 26 rooms, restaurant

and coffee house goldenfleecehotel.com
◆ For Ryedale, see visithelmsley.co.uk; visitmalton.com; welcometopickering.co.uk; edencamp.co.uk; and for the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, mymr.co.uk
◆ Rievaulx Abbey and Helmsley Castle are both at english-heritage.org.uk
◆ The delights of York are at visityork.org