

autumn/winter 2026/27

yha

YHA's official magazine for adventurers

The Journey

Ideas for winter

How to embrace
the colder months

The Mass Trespass

The 1930s protest
that changed Britain

Going global

A spotlight on
Hostelling International







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Hello

...and welcome to the autumn/winter issue of The Journey. Shorter days, thicker socks, nothing much to do: this is the dreary reality of travel in England and Wales once summer is over. We jest, of course (but you knew that) – the colder months are absolutely primed for adventure, both indoors and out, and in this issue we're looking to underline why.

From ideas for staying cosy in winter to suggestions for great hostel hikes, the following pages contain features, interviews and how-to guides for people looking to make the next few months both memorable and uplifting. Wildlife-lovers, cyclists, walkers, families and history buffs are all well catered for.

We also speak to our Executive Director and Acting CEO Louise Platt about what the future holds for YHA, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It makes for a fascinating and insightful interview.

On top of this, you'll also find the usual news, reviews and competitions, plus Let's Go!, our pull-out section for young readers. Wherever you are, and whoever you are, we welcome you warmly to these pages.

Happy reading, and happy travels.

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Whitby to Boggle Hole

Whitby has a silent guardian. For fourteen centuries the town's abbey has stood high on the East Cliff, 199 stone steps above the wave-bashed port, staring out across the North Sea. In that time, monarchies have risen and fallen, wars have raged, and the abbey's own brickwork has become a skeletal frame. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, a character describes it as "a most noble ruin, of immense size, and full of beautiful and romantic bits". Well, quite.

Today it's the first thing we see after polishing off a delicious cooked hostel breakfast, brushing toast crumbs off our clothes and stepping into the Yorkshire morning. We're bound for YHA Boggle Hole on foot. The day is young and the weather's fair.

There's something profoundly enjoyable about a coastal walk like this. For a start, it's almost impossible to get lost — you keep the sea on one side, the land on the other, and simply let your boots find a rhythm. There are times when the route dips and climbs, turning between gorse bushes or arcing over clifftops, but there's never a risk of misplacing the path.

The ease of navigation is further boosted by the fact that the entire eight-mile, hostel-to-hostel route follows a stretch of the Cleveland Way National Trail, meaning a steady flow of other walkers and regular acorn-embossed signposts to beckon you onwards.

The morning's walk is an invigorating one. A brisk autumn wind occasionally picks up, ruffling our hoods, but the sea is a gleaming metallic blue and the coastal contours are mighty. Gulls race by overhead, riding the breeze. We pass storybook coves and hulking headlands. The hours pass with ease, clouds drifting on the horizon as the miles tick by.

Eventually, some four hours after we set off, it arrives: the long, fossil-dotted beach of Robin Hood's Bay, and with it our end goal. Whitby has a guardian, but YHA Boggle Hole has a fire, and hot tea, and seriously good cake. Boots off, fresh socks on. Right now, this is precisely where we want to be.





Louise Platt

Louise Platt is YHA's Executive Director and Acting CEO. In this interview, Louise talks candidly about the pressures on the organisation and why a stronger YHA means a better experience for everyone.

Q What first drew you to YHA, and what has most surprised you since joining?

There were two things. First and foremost, the mission. I'd loved my time working in social housing, where I saw first-hand what it does to a young person's sense of possibility when opportunities aren't evenly spread. YHA tackles that challenge through a different door: travel, nature, heritage,

independence, and the confidence that comes from stepping outside your comfort zone.

The second was the transformation agenda. I could see an organisation with an incredible purpose that was also ready for significant change. I joined because I wanted to use everything I'd learned throughout my career to make a meaningful difference through an organisation whose purpose I genuinely believed in.

What has surprised me most is the depth of feeling people have for this organisation. I've spoken to staff who've devoted twenty or thirty years of their careers to YHA, and to members and guests who can tell you exactly which hostel they stayed in, and exactly when, because the experience changed how they saw themselves and what they thought was possible. You don't find that kind of connection in many organisations. It's a real privilege to be trusted with something that means so much to so many people. That's why helping shape YHA's next chapter feels so personal to me.

Q YHA has described itself as being in a period of recovery after the pandemic, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. What are the biggest pressures you are dealing with now?

I'd be doing readers a disservice if I called this simply a recovery story. The Recovery Plan did what it needed to during an extraordinarily difficult period – it stabilised YHA's finances and protected our ability to keep delivering impact. But that period necessarily limited what we could invest, and the pressures haven't let up: higher costs, a tougher funding environment, guests and groups with more alternatives and less to spend.

So the work now is two-fold: fixing how we work using better systems, better data, decisions made on evidence rather than instinct, and just as importantly, catching up on the investment in our buildings that the hardest years didn't allow. When I tour our network, I am struck by the history carried within our buildings that deserves preservation through proper investment. That's the work that sits at the heart of this year's priorities.

Q What gives you hope that YHA will continue to impact young people?

There's too much to name here. Every time I visit a hostel and see a school group arrive nervous and leave loud and confident, or watch a Festival of Walking group made up of people who'd never have called themselves walkers a year before, I'm reminded that what YHA offers hasn't gone out of fashion. Young people need it now as much as ever, arguably more, given how much of childhood has moved indoors and onto a screen. The need is there, undiminished.

Q What developments are you most looking forward to?

We're reaching the point where some of the investment and change we've been working towards is starting to be felt in everyday experiences for guests and staff.

We're already seeing early benefits from getting smarter about pricing, rewarding guests who book ahead while helping us plan better and keep costs down. The bigger shift is still to come: new booking technology planned for 2027, designed to take the admin weight off hostel and YHA Partner teams.. For guests, it should mean greater flexibility when booking; for us, better information to guide where we invest next.

Just as importantly, I'm looking forward to colleagues seeing the results of everything they've worked so hard to deliver. People across YHA have carried a huge amount through some genuinely demanding years. Seeing that effort translate into better experiences for guests, stronger hostels and a more confident organisation is something worth celebrating.

A group of young people are hiking on a grassy path through a forest. In the foreground, a boy and a girl are walking away from the camera, holding hands. The boy is wearing a dark t-shirt, black shorts, and a large green backpack. The girl is wearing a pink and white patterned t-shirt, black shorts, and a black backpack. They are both wearing sneakers. In the background, other hikers are visible, some also holding hands, as they walk along the path. The forest is lush with green trees and foliage.

The update

Changing young lives

The No Child Left Behind campaign was launched in 2022 and has so far reached 518 schools and more than 17,500 young people. Its impact has been tangible. Lisa, a teacher at one of the primary schools to receive funding, wrote us the following: “For two days, extremely disadvantaged children could put the worries and concerns they live with daily behind them. To sleep in a bed with bedding, have a warm shower and eat as much as they like for breakfast. I can’t express enough the impact that the experience has had.”

But the campaign requires your help – and every penny is important. Thanks to YHA members, the 2026 summer appeal raised almost £85,000, while Cotswold Outdoor is well on its way to reaching a £20,000 target for No Child Left Behind as part of its in-store Pennies campaign.

This money goes to very good use. Just £25 could give a child the opportunity to get outdoors, while £50 opens the door to a first night away from home for a child from a low-income background. £100, for example, would support a place on a two-night residential school trip.

Ruth Lock of YHA says, “When young people step out into nature or green spaces, you can see the change on their faces and their mood with their body language. And it’s about them becoming awe-inspired by the outdoors and the environment they’re in. So it wouldn’t be just a donation to get them to have a night away. It would be changing their future and their lives.”

The funds we raise will help children like Aaliyah, who along with her classmates was asked to write a postcard to her future self, imagining what an adventure might look like if her school received funding from No Child Left Behind for a YHA residential. She wrote: “I felt brave when I climbed a mountain. I felt proud when I slept away from home. The people I met made me feel at home. This adventure made me feel wonderful. I had fun at Castleton.”

To donate, visit: yha.org.uk/child

The shortlist

Stay entertained – and informed – this autumn/winter with our selection of great things to read, watch and listen



Read

The Path More Travelled: The Secret History of Britain's Footpaths by Nicholas Crane



Nicholas Crane's journey starts in Doggerland, around 9300BC, and ends with the formation of the national trails after the Second World War. Crane proves as amiable on page as he is on TV, with this jauntily written history of Britain that intersects with that of our walking routes, which is to say, almost everywhere. This is a thoroughly enjoyable walk along ancient pilgrim routes, coffin roads and even the first pavements.

Wild Pavements: Exploring Britain's Cities with an Urban Naturalist by Amanda Tuke



On the way to pick her car up from the garage in south London, Amanda Tuke sees a sparrowhawk attack a great tit; proof that life for all animals continues in Britain's cities. Tuke is a naturalist with an "ambivalent relationship" with rural Britain but, as a long-time resident of the capital, turns her attuned attention to the wildlife found in cities. This ever-fascinating book will make you reassess your everyday urban walks, and for that reason alone you need to read it.

See page 14 for an interview with Amanda.

Mapping Britain – The Story of an Island through the Ordnance Survey Archives by Will Millard



If you're reading this magazine, chances are you're as obsessed with maps as we are. Will Millard delves into the archives of our national mapping agency in this beautiful book, full of maps and photographs. In it, Will and the OS archivists talk about disappearing villages, secret smuggling routes, top-secret military plans, and document how our landscape has changed since OS started in 1745.



Watch

Naturewatch BBC iPlayer, BBC Sounds

Naturewatch is a new weekly video podcast for BBC Two, BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds that will offer a round-up of the biggest nature stories of the week. It replaces Winterwatch (Springwatch is still running) and will run year-round.



Listen

Naturebang BBC Sounds

In 2026, immersing yourself in nature feels like an escape from the busy, technologically defined world. In this BBC podcast series, Becky Ripley and Emily Knight explore our human lives within the context of the natural world. Asking questions including "Can plants help us unravel the mystery of consciousness?" or "Can we take notes on democracy from a pack of sneezing wild dogs?"

The update

Historical Image: YHA Archive

Then and now YHA London Earl's Court

If you've ever stayed at YHA London Earl's Court, you'll know its Bolton Gardens location is a prestigious one. Several of the capital's most time-honoured attractions stand close by, including the Natural History Museum and the Royal Albert Hall. Step back in time to 1881, however, and this air of distinction was even more pronounced. Many of the houses on the street were occupied by the great and good of Victorian London, often with attendant butlers.

This made it a fittingly upmarket spot for Strathallan House School, an exclusive "finishing school" for young ladies. Doing business on and off for more than four decades – and undergoing various name changes – the school trained its female pupils in social etiquette, European languages, elocution and other matters deemed vital for entry into society. There are thought to have been between 20 and 25 young ladies enrolled in the school at any one time, with an even greater number of staff and servants.

From 1924 onwards, the same building became the Strathallan House Hotel. It wasn't until 1952 that a 99-year lease on the property was signed by YHA, for an initial annual rent of £300 per year. It originally had 150 beds (an amount that prompted calls for closure!), but from 1954 onwards had reduced its bed-count to a more manageable 60.

YHA London Earl's Court has now been welcoming domestic and international hostellers for more than seven decades and still boasts a courtyard garden, dorms and various private rooms. We can't guarantee you'll be waited on hand and foot, as the well-spoken young ladies of yore were accustomed to, but a relaxed, informal approach to conversation is positively welcomed.

yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-london-earls-court

Find out more about the history of youth hostels at duncanmsimpsonwriting.com





Make a change

For more than a decade, Janet, Sue, Don, Dave, Peter and Ian have been meticulously maintaining the grounds of YHA Whitby, making a welcoming space not just for guests, but for local wildlife. Along with other volunteers, the group meets every Wednesday to cut the grass, weed the beds and create planted borders. Over the years, they've brought in plants to attract birds and butterflies, installed eco-log piles and created wildflower borders. Other more routine jobs have been on the to-do list too: the path behind the hostel is no longer overgrown with nettles, for example. And that elderflower tree blocking the light? Well, you'll be pleased to hear it's been cut back.

When asked why they volunteer, they speak about their love of gardening, the enjoyment of the fresh air and exercise, the companionship of working together as a team, and the satisfaction of hearing positive feedback from guests and visitors.

You, too, can get involved. At the beginning of September, YHA's volunteer gardeners page had opportunities at YHA Hartington Hall, YHA York and YHA Liverpool Dock, and it's always worth keeping an eye on current options.

On a related note, The Big Help Out is a volunteer initiative launched in 2023 for King Charles III's coronation weekend. YHA is proud to be a founding member of the event, which this year took place in June and saw volunteers build paths at YHA Castleton Losehill Hall, pick up litter near YHA Snowdon Pen-y-Pass and tidy the grounds at YHA Liverpool Albert Dock.

We're also involved with other projects that rely on the help of volunteers. In the Lake District, conservation volunteers help with the Hardknott Forest restoration project, which aims to restore 630 hectares of native woodland and other wildlife-rich habitats in the Duddon Valley. At an event in the summer, volunteers planted 400 wildflower plugs.

To learn more about volunteering opportunities, working parties and hostel placements visit jobs.yha.org.uk/pages/volunteering-with-yha



Amanda Tuke

© Louise Rose Photography

Naturalist Amanda Tuke has spent years hunting out wildlife and wild plants in the UK's cities. She talks to Daniel Neilson about her book, *Wild Pavements*, and why the cracks in the pavement are worth a second look.

Q Tell us a little about the genesis of the book. How and why did it come about?

There were two strands: my interest in urban nature and urban ecology, and my desire to start nature writing. I did a PhD in plant ecology on the islands of St Kilda, off the Outer Hebrides. When I came back to my home, I'd look at the plants growing in my area of London and barely recognise any of them. Then two decades later I took a course in nature writing at Bath Spa University that the wonderful bird writer Stephen Moss led, and which I now teach. I absolutely loved it.

At the time, during Covid, we were very much confined to our area, so I thought, now is the time to start looking at all of the birds and the plants around me in South London and to write about them. Then those two things came together, and I just had the most fun time for a couple of years exploring different cities. This led to writing the book.

Q Give us the premise of the book, since you focus on different species and different areas of the country.

The premise was that you can go anywhere in an urban area and come across interesting wildlife and wild plants. My argument is that anyone can open their door; you don't have to go somewhere else to find nature, interact with it and connect with it. It is literally outside your front door.

In London, I'd start at St Paul's Cathedral and walk in all directions of the compass, being drawn into different areas depending on what looked interesting when I looked down side streets, or if I could hear birds singing.

Q As well as your walks in London, you also explored urban nature in cities like Newcastle, Liverpool and Cardiff. How do you know what looks interesting?

Urban botanists absolutely love messy patches; that's where you find the most interesting things. The plants are incredibly tenacious, and their spores and seeds are raining down on our pavements all the time, and some of them can get a root hold.

They tend to be plants well adapted to, for example, dry limestone or volcanic slopes, so they find something in our cities that's an analogue of that – in the same way that peregrine falcons find analogues of cliffs on tower block roof ledges. That's all nature is doing. It's not making a judgment; it doesn't care what it looks like; it just needs enough to survive. That's what's so fascinating to an ecologist.

Q How do you get people to start looking at urban nature?

When I take people out, we'll often look at just a single road, and find plants from all over the world – from Africa, from South America, or from Southeast Asia – living alongside each other. I always say to people, start really small. Learn what the plants are on your garden path, look at pavement plants in your street. I believe it's really important for humans to know the names of things and their stories. For example, there's a common pavement plant called Oxford ragwort, which was introduced from the slopes of Mount Etna and now grows all over the UK. It was brought to England by a plant collector in the 1700s and planted in the Oxford Botanic Garden. It then spent a hundred years crawling along the walls of Oxford, getting to the rail station, and then it has now spread throughout the rail network and into city centres. Next time you're at a train station, if there's a sort of yellow ragwort-looking thing growing alongside the railway, that will most likely be Oxford ragwort.



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Q How do you inspire young people to engage with nature?

There's a huge surge in interest in birdwatching among Gen Z at the moment, and I think AI has something to do with that too – the Merlin app has given people access to identifying birdsong. I often use plant ID apps for street trees and escaped garden plants, too. Nature knowledge is so much more accessible nowadays.

Q In the context of urban nature, what are the key problems, and what can the average person do about it?

What I've used the book to do is point out that all the big conservation questions play out in cities – everything from how you create a meadow to the effects of using herbicides to the impact of climate change to water pollution. For many people, the idea of making big, nationwide changes is just too hard to think about, whereas protecting that bit of verge along your own road feels far more manageable.

Part of my secret agenda is to get everybody interested in botany, simply because plants are the foundation of all terrestrial ecosystems. It seems bizarre to me that most people see plants as just a green smudge or only value garden plants. I really want to get people excited about our amazing wild plants. Once you've started noticing them, it's very hard to stop looking. It becomes an obsession.

Amanda's book *Wild Pavements: Exploring Britain's Cities with an Urban Naturalist* is available now on Flint Books.





Staying busy clearly comes naturally to Ellis Price. An activity leader at YHA Boggle Hole, she's also a surf instructor and an RNLI lifeguard – and what's more, she's got hostelling in her blood. "My family and I always stayed in hostels growing up, so they've always felt like part of exploring and travelling," she says. "And at 16 I did my Duke of Edinburgh Gold residential at YHA Ambleside."

She's been employed at YHA Boggle Hole for the past two years, in a job that gives her the chance to take young hostellers exploring. "One of my favourite parts is taking groups along the beach to fossil hunt, finding things that are literally millions of years old. I love that sense of discovery and being able to share it with the school groups."

Amazingly though, this is just one of three roles she has on the Yorkshire coast. As a surf teacher, she helps visitors and locals enjoy the wonders of the sea in a different way. "There's something special about people catching their first wave and watching them grow in confidence," she explains. "It's such a happy environment to be in – smiles all around, whether it's standing up or face-planting!"

But most impressively of all, Ellis is also a qualified RNLI lifeguard, where her duties can mean the difference between life and death. "As a lifeguard, you're there to keep people safe on the beach and in the water. You need to understand the conditions, spot potential problems before they happen and be ready to respond when it does go wrong. It's a big responsibility, but also incredibly rewarding."

Balancing these three roles has given her a deep knowledge of the coastline around YHA Boggle Hole. So when work's done for the day, what's her favourite way to relax? "Watching the winter sunrise when the swell's huge, then heading out for a big beach walk with the waves crashing and wind blowing. Then back to the hostel, wrap up warm and have a fully loaded hot chocolate by the roaring stove."

Ellis to the rescue



Walk of the season YHA Ravenstor

Squirrelled away in the green, tree-clustered folds of the central Peak District, YHA Ravenstor is one of those hostels that seems to belong another time. The River Wye tumbles past nearby, the high-sided Miller's Dale winds away to the east and the flora-rich Bellamy's Bank — a hillside named after legendary botanist David Bellamy OBE, this being where he first fell for the natural world — is virtually on the hostel doorstep. As a place to begin and end a walk, the hostel has considerable appeal.

In very simple terms, the Peak District is split into two distinct parts: the limestone-dominated valleys and hills of the White Peak, and the gritstone moorlands of the Dark Peak. YHA Ravenstor, and the landscapes around it, very much belong to the former category.

One of the other notable things about the Peak District is that, despite its name, it doesn't generally have peaks in the classic sense, more a series of wooded dales and spectacularly looming plateaux. This walk does a fine job of showcasing what makes them special. It's an 8.4 mile (13.5km) hike — so one to save for a day when the weather's relatively benign — although be aware that you'll also find details of two shorter loop walks from the same hostel at yha.org.uk/breaks/walking/self-guided-maps.

This longer route wastes no time in immersing you into your surroundings, leading you straight down to the banks of the River Wye. Not to be confused with the far bigger waterway on the England-Wales border, this Wye is a chuckling limestone river renowned for its population of trout and grayling. It rises just a few miles to the west, on the outskirts of Buxton, and makes for an attractive companion on the early stages of this walk.

You'll soon pass the buildings of Litton Mill and Cressbrook Mill, two water-powered 18th-century textile mills harking back to the days when the larger-than-life Richard Arkwright and his groundbreaking spinning frame played a key part in accelerating the Industrial Revolution. These days, however, the countryside around here is more about tranquillity than toil, and this becomes even more apparent as the path leads you north through woodland to reach lovely Cressbrook Dale.

This is a textbook example of a so-called dry valley, having no surface water but boasting a spectacular, steep-sided, grassy profile, allowing you to feel like you're wandering inside your own bucolic world.

After reaching the much shorter Tansley Dale, which spurs off to the west, you'll then arrive into Litton, the first of two

Peak District villages you'll pass through. It's a small place but has several points of interest, including a set of old stocks and a traditional log-fire pub, The Red Lion, which serves food from midday daily.

The second half of the walk is dominated by wide-open countryside. There's some road walking involved – stay alert – but you'll soon reach the second village along the route, the larger Tideswell. It's home to the Grade I-listed St John the Baptist Church, an impressive medieval structure better known as the Cathedral of the Peak, as well as a decent selection of shops, cafes and pubs for refuelling.

From here, the longish closing parts of the walk are all about enjoying the views. You'll follow the Limestone Way for part of this, before joining the similarly waymarked Monsal Trail to lead you back to the hostel.



Visit yha.org.uk/breaks/walking/self-guided-maps for more information and for walks from other hostels.

Walk details

Distance: 8.4 miles (13.5km)

Ascent: 379m (1,243ft)

Time: Allow 4h to 6h 30m

Rating: Moderate –
Longer walk, requiring
a morning or afternoon.

Start/finish: YHA Ravenstor



View more details and download the map
yha.org.uk/experience/cressbrook-dale-litton-and-tideswell-self-guided-walking-route

YHA guide to a cosy winter

14 ways to make the most of the colder months

See the Northern Lights

Scandinavian skies in Britain.

The famous aurora borealis – typically associated with more northerly latitudes – can be regularly glimpsed in Britain, even along the south coast. Winter 2026 will continue to see higher-than-average geomagnetic activity thanks to the declining phase of the current solar cycle. You'll have the best chance of seeing this spectacular natural phenomenon the further north you are and the more removed you can get from light pollution. Check aurorawatch.lancs.ac.uk for updates and the likelihood of catching the Northern Lights near you.

Hire out a youth hostel with friends

The perfect base for a walking weekend

What could be better than having the run of a hostel as a base for a few days of hill-bashing with your friends? During the winter months, many YHA hostels are available for Exclusive Hire from £350 a night. Just enter your dates and party size, then select 'Entire place' on yha.org.uk to see what's available.

There are properties across England and Wales, of course, but a few particularly choice options include YHA Broad Haven, YHA Boscastle, YHA Snowdon Llanberis and YHA Wasdale Hall.

Hunt out a cloud inversion

A spectacular sight more common in winter

Seeing a cloud inversion – when mountain peaks protrude like islands above a sea of cloud – is one of the highlights of hillwalking. Although relatively rare, they tend to occur more often in winter. The science is bewildering, but in brief terms, they generally happen when the atmosphere heats up or stays the same the higher you go, as opposed to getting colder. This creates a temperature inversion. Cooler, low-lying mist is then trapped beneath a layer of warm air during a high-pressure front. The spectacle is most common in the early morning after a still, clear night overlooking a sheltered valley.



Learn a new craft

It's time to sloooooooooow down

A hostel stay in winter, with long, dark evenings, offers the perfect opportunity to learn a new skill without the distractions of everyday life. Take a little craft kit with you: perhaps lino-cutting, quilt-making, embroidery, watercolour, macramé or crochet. All take up very little space in your bag, and offer hours of relaxation. Now is your opportunity. With kids, try things like Minecraft mosaics, salt dough shapes in the hostel self-catering kitchen, or making friendship bracelets.

Take a winter skills course

Safety first on the snowy hills

The winter hills are beautiful, but can be dangerous. The best way to enjoy the mountains with confidence, and in safety, is to learn the basics of winter walking. You'll cover things like kit choice, crampons, ice axes, winter navigation, avalanche awareness and emergency techniques. All are taught at Plas y Brenin in Snowdonia and Glenmore Lodge in the Cairngorms. See glenmorelodge.org.uk and pyb.co.uk.

Find a pub with a real fire

Real ale, muddy boots, log fires

There's no better way to finish off a cold day in the mountains than in a proper regional pub, drinking good beer next to a hot fire. Some of our favourites include The Old Nags Head in Edale, The Queen's Head in Hawkshead, The Wasdale Head Inn for its climbing heritage, and the Old Dungeon Ghyll in Langdale for the ultimate cosy pub experience. You may even hear someone fiddle with a fiddle.

Visit a coastal hostel

Try storm-watching and winter walks

There's a visceral thrill to watching a storm come in, especially if there's a pane of glass between you and the precipitation. When the weather relents, a blustery coastal walk is refreshing at worst and life-affirming at best. Controversial, perhaps, but we'd argue a cold winter walk by the sea is better than a summer one. Sea-watchers can stare at the waves from YHA Treyarnon Bay in Cornwall, YHA Broad Haven in Pembrokeshire and YHA Boggle Hole in Yorkshire, among others.

Visit a Dark Sky Park

Shooting stars

Having short days and long nights holds various benefits, especially for star-gazers. Northumberland National Park is a Gold-tier International Dark Sky Park, while six other National Parks have been awarded International Dark Sky Reserve status: Exmoor, Brecon Beacons, Moore's Reserve in the South Downs, Snowdonia, North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales. Dark Sky Discovery (darkskydiscovery.org.uk) suggests visitors' centres across the country that host astronomy events.

Fill your flask

Winter warmers

Traditionalists may want to look away, but gallons of tea can sometimes get a little boring. Instead, try a spicy Chai. Pop a couple of Chai bags in your flask, along with a muslin bag packed with what you have in your spice drawer: cardamom pods, a cinnamon stick, a whole clove, a couple of peppercorns, allspice berries and star anise. Another option is hot lemonade, made with water, a cup of lemon juice, grated lemon peel, a tablespoon of honey and a cinnamon stick.

Make the ultimate flapjack

The best homemade hill snack

The flapjack is God's own food, and here we've given it a savoury-sweet twist with toasted hazelnuts and a hint of rosemary for a forest refuelling. Swap hazelnuts for toasted pecans or walnuts if you prefer, and a squeeze of orange juice into the syrup mix can add a little extra tang. They keep well in an airtight tin for up to five days, ideal for packing on a walk.



Ingredients

175g unsalted butter
3 tbs golden syrup
100g light soft brown sugar
250g porridge oats
75g hazelnuts, roughly chopped
1 tsp fresh rosemary
1 pinch flaky sea salt
1 orange, zested

Toast the hazelnuts: Chop roughly in a pan over a medium heat until golden and fragrant. Set aside to cool.

Prepare the tin and oven: Preheat the oven to 160°C fan and line a 20cm square tin with baking paper.

Melt the base: In a large saucepan, gently melt 175g unsalted butter, 3tbs golden syrup and 100g light soft brown sugar together, stirring until smooth.

Add the twist: Take off the heat and stir in 250g porridge oats, the toasted hazelnuts, 1 tsp fresh rosemary, finely chopped, 1 pinch flaky sea salt and 1 orange, zested. Mix well so every oat is coated.

Press and bake: Tip into the tin and press down firmly and evenly with the back of a spoon. Bake for around 20 minutes until golden at the edges but still soft in the centre.

Cool and cut: Leave to cool completely in the tin before cutting into 12 squares. This keeps it from crumbling.



Switch on to night walking

Don't let long, cold nights get in the way

Walking under the stars (if you're lucky) or at least the cover of nightfall can have an appeal of its own if you prepare correctly. Visibility is, obviously, decreased, it's colder, and navigation can be a conundrum, but with care the rewards are great. Take a headtorch and you may well spot animal eyes peering back at you, too. Try it out first on a good, clear night, walking somewhere you know well.

Make a movie with the kids

Get out your phone or action cam

Making a short film has never been easier (and besides, some people have a TikTok following to please, right?). It adds a new dimension to walking and makes for a particularly fun activity to get the kids out in winter. Think of the narrative first: are you filming a first ascent, a spoof, a horror, or just a fun video to pop on your daily WhatsApp channel?

Cosy up your stay

Bring familiar favourites

A notebook for sketching, a familiar blanket, your favourite tea: these are the simple things that make hostelling feel restorative. Bring an unexpected board game to the social lounge and make new acquaintances, or download an audiobook for a serene evening on the top bunk.

Saunas near YHA hostels for a winter wellbeing escape

The ultimate warming

"Baby, it's cold outside" – but it's bloomin' warm in here. Saunas have popped up across the country and are understandably becoming hugely popular. Some are very close to hostels, among them Sawna Bach in Llanberis; Whitby Wellbeing, which has pop-up sessions at Whitby and other nearby locations; Sea Sauna at Sheringham, Norfolk; and La'al Sauna near Coniston Water, Lake District.

Exclusively yours this Christmas

Make this the year you all come together. Big tables, cosy nights, and plenty of room for everyone.

Whether it's a castle, a countryside retreat or a dramatic coastal escape, our Exclusive Hire properties give you the space to celebrate your way. No stress, just good times with your favourite people.

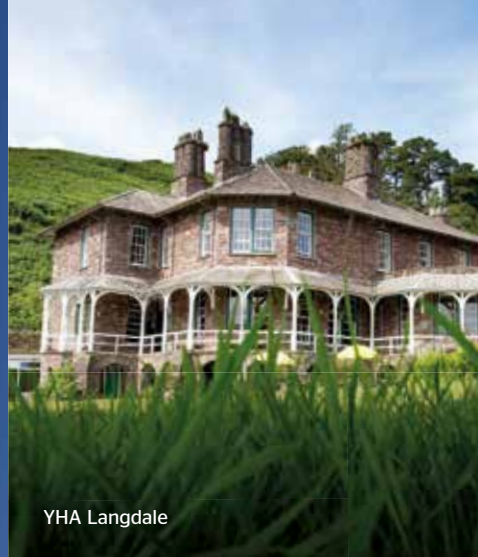
Book your festive group stay now at
yha.org.uk/exclusive-hire



YHA Whitby



YHA St Briavels Castle



YHA Langdale



YHA Ravenstor



YHA Conwy

Let's go!

How you can help birds in winter

When temperatures start dropping in autumn and winter, it can be tough for birds to survive. They need warmth and energy – and you can help!

In the colder months there are fewer daylight hours for birds to find food, and fewer things for them to eat. By hanging a feeder in your outside space, you can give them a supply of nuts and seeds and help them stay strong and healthy.

Birds need water, too! If you have a bird bath, keep it ice-free and top it up with clean tap water. This gives birds something to drink and wash in.

Make sure the food you're leaving out is good for birds. Things like seed mixes, good quality peanuts, nyjer seeds and sunflower seeds are all popular options. Don't leave out dried coconut, cooking fat, salty food, milk or cooked porridge oats.

The RSPB, a bird charity, says feeders should only be used from the start of November to the end of April.

It's best to put out a **small or medium portion of bird food, refilling it when you need to.** If you put out a lot all at once and it doesn't get eaten in one or two days, it can get old and mouldy. It's important that you keep your feeders clean.





Simple hostel activities

If you're staying inside on a rainy or snowy day, there are different ways to stay busy. Here are four ideas – all of which need only a few simple items.

Make a cardboard castle

Equipment needed: safe scissors, glue stick, cardboard tubes, a pen or pencil

Can you find any cardboard tubes from loo rolls or kitchen rolls? Or even bits of cardboard from used boxes? With scissors, you can cut them into the shape of castle turrets and glue them together.



Make a memory scrapbook

Equipment needed: safe scissors, glue stick, a blank book, a pen or pencil

Putting together a scrapbook to remember your trip can be a lot of fun. You can include things like fallen leaves, bus tickets and postcards. With a pen or pencil, you can turn it into a diary, too!



Scavenger hunt

Equipment needed: your imagination

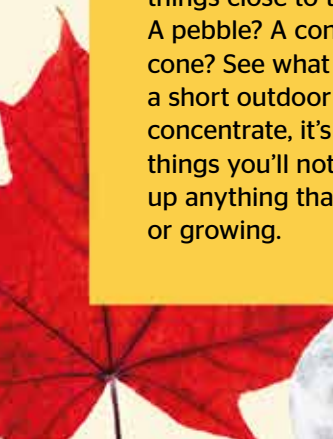
Can you find six different things close to the hostel? A pebble? A conker? A big pine cone? See what you can find on a short outdoor adventure. If you concentrate, it's amazing how many things you'll notice – but don't pick up anything that's alive or growing.



Find the hidden item

Equipment needed: an item, and places to hide it!

This is a game to be played with another person. First, choose something to hide. This could be a small toy, a sauce sachet, or even a book from the hostel bookshelves. Then take it in turns to hide the item for the other person to find: next to a sofa, behind a curtain, under a table – you choose!



Story ideas

Are you good at telling stories?

People have told each other stories for thousands of years. In the olden days, before we had writing, our ancestors would share spoken stories, myths and songs. Why not do the same yourself? Here are a few pointers.

- Think of something interesting or funny that's happened to you. Can you tell the people you're with about it? Try to use descriptive language, and add in some suspense for fun: "And you'll never guess what happened next!"
- Stories don't have to be true. Try making up a story about a young boy or girl who woke up in a hostel one morning and embarked on an epic adventure. Where did they go? What did they do?
- Sometimes it's fun to make a story with someone else. Try inventing a story by saying one sentence each at a time – or even one word at a time! – leading the story wherever it takes you.
- Story starters can help you create an exciting new tale. Try beginning a story with one of the following lines and see what happens! "One dark and stormy afternoon, there was a loud knock at the door..." "On a mountaintop far, far away, there lived a very strange creature..." "It was a normal weekday morning when Ali realised his shoes had magic powers..."
- Ask someone else to name three very different things. Examples could be the king, a sausage roll and a football stadium, or an elephant, a guitar and a swimming pool. Then make up a story that involves all three things!

COMPETITION

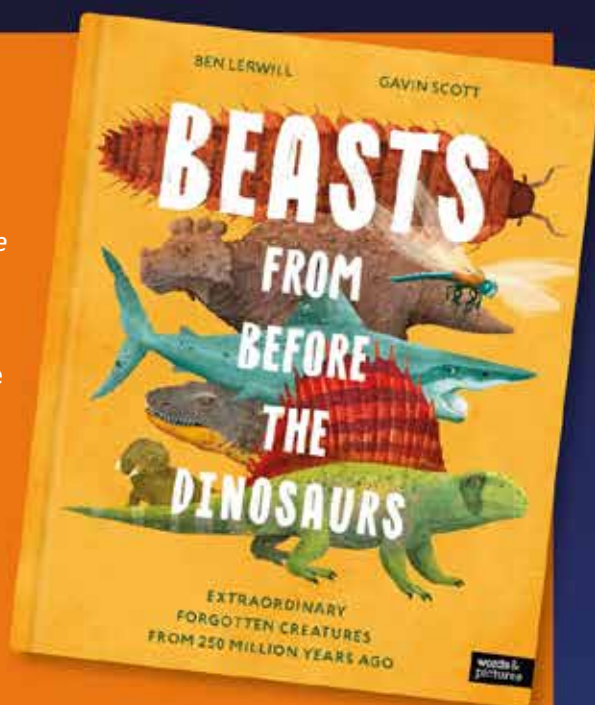
WIN A BOOK!

Were there creatures before the dinosaurs? You bet there were! *Beasts From Before The Dinosaurs* (published by Words & Pictures) looks at some of the amazing animals who lived 250 million years ago, long before T.Rex and Triceratops roamed the lands. We have three copies of this brand new book to give away – to be in with a chance of winning, just answer the following question:

In which London museum will you find the most fossils?

- A** The Tate Modern Art Gallery
- B** The Natural History Museum
- C** The London Transport Museum

To enter, email your answer to magazine@yha.org.uk by 26th February 2027. Winners will be drawn at random.



Prehistoric word search

Fossils help us learn about animals that lived tens of millions of years ago. Can you find these seven words in the grid below?

- ☐ BONES
- ☐ EXTINCT
- ☐ MAMMOTH
- ☐ DINOSAUR
- ☐ JURASSIC
- ☐ FOSSIL
- ☐ ANCIENT

E	R	D	O	T	M	O	F	S	S
X	O	U	M	E	A	I	C	A	L
T	A	X	A	G	M	O	T	F	I
I	N	A	E	S	M	J	R	A	S
N	C	T	I	B	O	N	E	S	S
C	I	R	M	N	T	N	G	N	O
T	E	O	T	D	H	U	I	T	F
A	N	E	I	O	R	A	L	D	O
M	T	C	I	S	S	A	R	U	J

Hostelling International

The world's a big place. There might not outwardly be much in common between Crianlarich in the Scottish Highlands, Casablanca in western Morocco and Cairns in Tropical Queensland, but there's at least one thing that links them. All three are home to Hostelling International (HI) properties, places where travellers can find budget-friendly beds, a plum location and a sense of community.

What is a hostel? It's a simple enough question, but pose it to ten different people and you might get ten different answers. HI define it as follows: "a good quality, sustainable accommodation that offers a comfortable night's sleep in a friendly atmosphere at an affordable price. They provide the perfect way to get to know a country at low cost and meet many like-minded travellers." Which, all told, pretty much hits the nail square on the head.

Not all hostels form part of HI, of course, but those that do can lay claim to a heritage stretching back more than 110 years. It was 1914 when visionary German schoolteacher Richard Schirrmann set up the world's first youth hostel in Altena, Westphalia (his vision being that "it is impossible to squeeze the limitless world into a crowded classroom, so the school must go out into the world").



Richard Schirrmann set up the world's first youth hostel

From these small beginnings, the movement found continent-wide momentum to the point where 18 years later, in 1932, representatives from Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Britain, Ireland, France and Belgium banded together to form the International Youth Hostel Federation.

The organisation was renamed Hostelling International as recently as 2006 and – with more than 2.63 million individual members – now stands as the world's largest international membership organisation. Not bad for an idea that started as the pet project of an impassioned teacher in northwest Germany.

Incidentally, if you're a member of YHA England and Wales – and membership starts at just £10 a year for under-25s and £20 a year for over-26s – then you're already one of the millions mentioned above. Your YHA card automatically grants you HI membership, which in turn gives you discounted stays at more than 2,000 hostels worldwide. And with properties in countries as varied as Japan, Jordan, the UAE, the USA, Bolivia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, it means you're not short on travel options. There are 80 in France alone.

With 58 member associations around the globe, in fact, HI isn't just a major player in world tourism but an ethical one too.



Your YHA card automatically grants you HI membership

The organisation is Quality & Sustainability certified and a signatory of both the Global Tourism Plastic Initiative and the Glasgow Declaration of Climate Action in Tourism. In 2013 it was given the Ambassador for Peace Award for encouraging young people to break down cultural barriers, and since 2014 has been a member of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation Affiliate Members Organisation. In other words, it puts its money where its mouth is.

And just as YHA England & Wales has a range of unique accommodation – remote shepherds' hut in the Lake District, anyone? – the wider HI also offers a whole host of extraordinary hostels in eye-opening settings. Among the more unusual locations are a sailing ship on a Swedish island, a former prison in Ottawa, a 16th-century castle in Switzerland, a lighthouse in California, an old train in Sydney and a set of cuboid houses in Rotterdam. If you're in search of identikit chain properties, look elsewhere.

The profound financial impact of Covid and other upheavals are still being felt in many countries, the UK included, so HI's sense of working collectively towards common goals feels more relevant and important than ever. It's an ongoing truth that similar-minded associations are stronger when pulling together.

You only have to cast your eyes at the news, meanwhile, to see the vital importance



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of one of HI's other objectives: facilitating inter-cultural exchange. HI-Connect is a programme which has been running since 2013, with the aim of giving staff, young people and volunteers the chance to gain meaningful experience of life and work in other countries. Its overall goals include creating new friendships and promoting the mobility of people across boundaries. It's fair to say that no two hostels anywhere are exactly the same. When you step through the door of one, you'll be greeted by a layout, a location, a heritage and a set of people that can never be replicated from one place to the next. Some hostels are all about coastal majesty, or mountain adventures, or woodland explorations. Others are about exploring world-famous cities, or delving into the past, or providing a secure stopover where a journey most needs one. Some are big, others are small. Some are conducive to playing board games by the fire, others better suited to sharing coffee on a sun deck. The organisation's umbrella covers more than 2,500 of these special places. Each one of them has a tale to tell. For well over a century, HI has been working to promote a set of truly important causes. We're proud to be a part of it – and here's to at least a hundred years more.

Four things you might not know about HI

1

Its 58 member associations around the world all operate as not-for-profit organisations, existing to help young people travel and discover the wider world.

2

Some of these associations are also called YHA (including YHA India and YHA China), whereas others have very different names, such as Danhostel (Denmark), Movijovem (Portugal) and Stayokay (Netherlands).

3

According to data from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, hostels in the HI network are responsible for around 37 million overnight stays each year.

4

From its beginnings in 1932, HI's mission was to "provide youth hostels or other accommodation in which there shall be no distinctions of origins, nationality, colour, religion, sex, class or political opinions and thereby to develop a better understanding of other people, both at home and abroad."

hihostels.com

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The walk that changed Britain

The 1932 mass trespass of Kinder Scout eventually led to the opening of the outdoors to everyone. Daniel Neilson travels to Manchester and on to Kinder Scout in the footsteps of Benny Rothman, the leader of the famous trespass.

Through the headphones comes a crackly voice, full of the accent that you'd expect from a man from Cheetham Hill, Manchester. "The only grass we saw was that growing through cobbles," the late Benny Rothman is telling the interviewer, Alec Greenhalgh, recalling his younger years. He goes on to describe his childhood. Born in 1911 to a Jewish family from Romania, he later made a bike from spare

parts and cycled to explore the Peak District and Snowdonia. Benny died in 2002, aged 90, but his legacy and that of his friends have had a profound effect on our lives today as outdoor enthusiasts.

I'm listening to this evocative interview in one of the Sound + Vision pods in the Manchester Central Library. A simple search for 'Kinder Trespass' has presented me with various audio files to appear, including this two-and-a-half-hour interview with Benny Rothman, one of the leaders of the trespass. In the conversation, conducted in 1989, Benny tells the story of what Lord Roy Hattersley later described as:

"The most successful direct action in British history"



The mass trespass of Kinder Scout, a largely peaceful march, ultimately led to the establishment of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. This act allowed public rights of way and access to the countryside in England and Wales for the first time. Should you have hiked in the Peak District before this time, you would have been trespassing, just like Benny Rothman and his band.

In the library, I flick forward through the interview. “We had a bit of a pow-wow at a camp,” Benny says, “and the thing that came out of it was that if there’d have been about 20 of us, they wouldn’t have turned us back. We decided that we’d have a big group, a mass trespass, and onto the hills in Derbyshire.”

This was a time when there weren’t any public rights of passage, public footpaths, or national parks — but workers from Manchester, Sheffield, Stockport, Liverpool, Huddersfield would walk or cycle to the Derbyshire Hills to explore the countryside. Among the organisations of the day was the British Workers’ Sports Federation, which the National Clarion Cycling Club

established with Labour Party activists and trade unionists (although, as it became more aligned with the Communist Party, Labour and the trade unions split). Benny Rothman was the federation’s secretary.

A date for the mass trespass was set: 24 April, 1932, and they met in Hayfield, a town below Kinder Scout. Some got the train. Benny, aged 20, cycled because he couldn’t afford the train fare. “We decided we’d slip out before the meeting started, a bunch of ramblers. And we just went out. ‘Follow us, lads and girls’. We led the way, and the rest just came along and off we went. Singing, very, very cheerful. And the police just fell in behind us.”

The walkers numbered around 400 in total. As they approached Kinder, the police and others — sometimes described as ‘gamekeepers’ — stopped the group.

Scuffles broke out, and several people were arrested, Benny among them. “We didn’t offer any resistance, because it was more or less futile. It was just daft; we weren’t out to battle with the police.”

Back in Manchester, pondering all this, I walk into the Science and Industry Museum and Industry to learn about life at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution. An interpretation board reads: “Thousands flocked here to work in the city’s new factories and workshops. Nobody had planned for such rapid urban growth. Sprawling and swarming, Manchester became known as one of the filthiest, most overcrowded and unhealthy places in the country. The world’s first industrial city faced a human crisis.”

Then something remarkable happens. I fall into conversation with a volunteer at the museum, an exuberant man, perhaps in his 60s. We chat about the museum, about walking on Kinder – he’s a keen walker, it transpires – and then Benny Rothman. “I met him in 1982,” he says to my astonishment. “I was there when he unveiled the commemorative plaque at Bowden Bridge Quarry.” The plaque is still there. We chat about the political effects of the trespass, how Benny and the others imprisoned became almost a cause célèbre, garnering huge public interest, partly for their lengthy sentences (two to six months) and the realisation for many that you mostly couldn’t just ‘go for a walk’.

From the dock at Derby Assizes following his arrest, Benny gave the following speech: “We ramblers, after a hard week’s work, in smoky towns and cities, go out rambling for relaxation and fresh air. And we find the finest rambling country is closed to us... Our request, or demand, for access to all peaks and uncultivated moorland is nothing unreasonable.”

This eventually led to the National Parks legislation in 1949 and the establishment of the Pennine Way, an idea first mooted by journalist and Rambler Tom Stephenson, and much later, as the new millennium arrived, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which gives people in England and Wales the ‘right to roam’.



On the Pennine Way

The next day, we jump on the Hope Valley Line to Edale, for a ramble of our own. The Manchester walkers of the mass trespass started from Hayfield, but as we're staying at YHA Edale, we drop our stuff and start our ascent.

Kinder Scout is always an adventure.

For my money, this great moorland plateau provides one of the best days out in Britain: the sense of adventure comes from the sense of remoteness, the glorious panoramas of northern England and across to Wales, and the fact that plunging across in bad weather can also pose one of the most challenging navigations in the country.

Today, the weather is clear and bright. We walk up Grindsbrook Clough, a fun, scrambly way to the top. Kinder Scout has a nomenclature all of its own: cloughs, groughs and grikes all feature. We follow the clough as water tumbles down it.

There's plenty of stepping-stone action as the path crosses the stream (be aware that after heavy rainfall it can be tricky in places, and know too that it's a long, rocky path, so boots are recommended — there are still a few places where you need to put a hand down). The final push is along a rock staircase to the top.

Kinder Scout is a vast hulking mass of Millstone Grit covered in heather and peat. Its highest point is 636m — Kinder is a moorland plateau, but it seems anything but flat once you're on it. At the top of Crowden Brook, we cut across the plateau. The main problem with navigation is that the groughs, as the deep channels that cross the peak are called, are deeper than a human is tall. A map and compass are essential.

It's all too easy to follow the random swerving of a grough and become completely disorientated and lost, as people

very frequently do (on one occasion I met with Kinder Mountain Rescue on an exercise, who on that day alone had found two groups of people utterly lost on top!). Fortunately, a new path with slabs to protect the land makes it almost impossible to get lost for at least half the crossing. At Kinder Downfall, we meet the Pennine Way along part of its 267-mile (431-kilometre) journey between Edale and Kirk Yetholm on the Scottish Borders. The Pennine Way section follows the edge of the plateau; it's a well-worn path, and reassuringly busy when we visit.

From here, you can see Manchester.

No longer billowing smoke, but my day in Manchester compared with a day walking in the Peak District couldn't have been farther apart. I mentally thank those of the Kinder Trespass and all those who came before and after to fight for my right to be up here and experience these views. I think about YHA and its mission to get young people out here, an organisation that was a year old at the time of the Kinder Trespass. Indeed, YHA were a fundamental part of the conversation that led to the formation of the National Parks, along with the Ramblers and other organisations.

We keep moving south again along the edge, heading for the trig pillar, now very nearly at the highest point of Kinder. There are expansive views of the Vale of Edale and across the southern fringe of Kinder Scout, including the distinctive Woolpacks stone formation, and soon we're clambering down Jacob's Ladder back towards Edale.

Had we been descending Jacob's Ladder on 24 April, 1932, we would have passed a group of cheerful young ramblers from Sheffield who had set off to meet their Manchester compatriots on Kinder Scout. The two groups never did meet. The police stopped one group — and you know that story.

How to... ...watch wildlife in the colder months



Spring might be bursting with birdsong and summer full of bees and butterflies, but autumn and winter offer plenty for wildlife-lovers, too. Even when the leaves have fallen and you're reaching for the thick jumpers, the natural world holds some tantalising treats. Here are some of the most notable.

Migrating birds in Yorkshire

As the days grow shorter, Yorkshire's coastal cliffs and inland reserves come alive with migratory and wintering birds. Hotspots along the coast include RSPB Bempton Cliffs and the Spurn National Nature Reserve, but there are also rich rewards to be had at Wheldrake Ings Nature Reserve, just a few miles from York. As water levels rise on the River Derwent, the reserve becomes a wetland paradise, pulling in huge numbers of waders, gulls, ducks, geese and swans — usually with various avian rarities tucked in among the feathered crowds.

Hostel suggestion: YHA York

Starling murmurations on the Somerset Levels

The mesmerising sight of thousands of starlings twisting and flowing through the air before settling into a communal roost is one of winter's great birdwatching spectacles. Arguably the best place in the country to witness the event is at Ham Wall RSPB Nature Reserve on the Somerset Levels, where numbers usually reach their peak in December and January. The murmurations take place as dusk begins to fall – try to arrive before 3.30pm – and tend to be at their most impressive on chilly, calm evenings without much rain or wind.

Hostel suggestion: YHA Street



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Red squirrels on the Isle of Wight

Relatively few parts of England and Wales are still home to red squirrels, but there are still places to spot these charismatic tree-climbers in the wild. In Wales, Clocaenog Forest near Eryri (Snowdonia) hosts a conservation project dedicated to looking after its small red squirrel population – it's also a great place to spot crossbills prying open pine cones among the conifers. In England, meanwhile, the Isle of Wight acts as an offshore haven for somewhere in the region of 3,500 red squirrels, with no grey squirrels present. As with the greys, the endangered, bushy-tailed reds don't hibernate, meaning they stay active through autumn and winter.

Hostel suggestion: YHA Isle of Wight Totland (Partner)

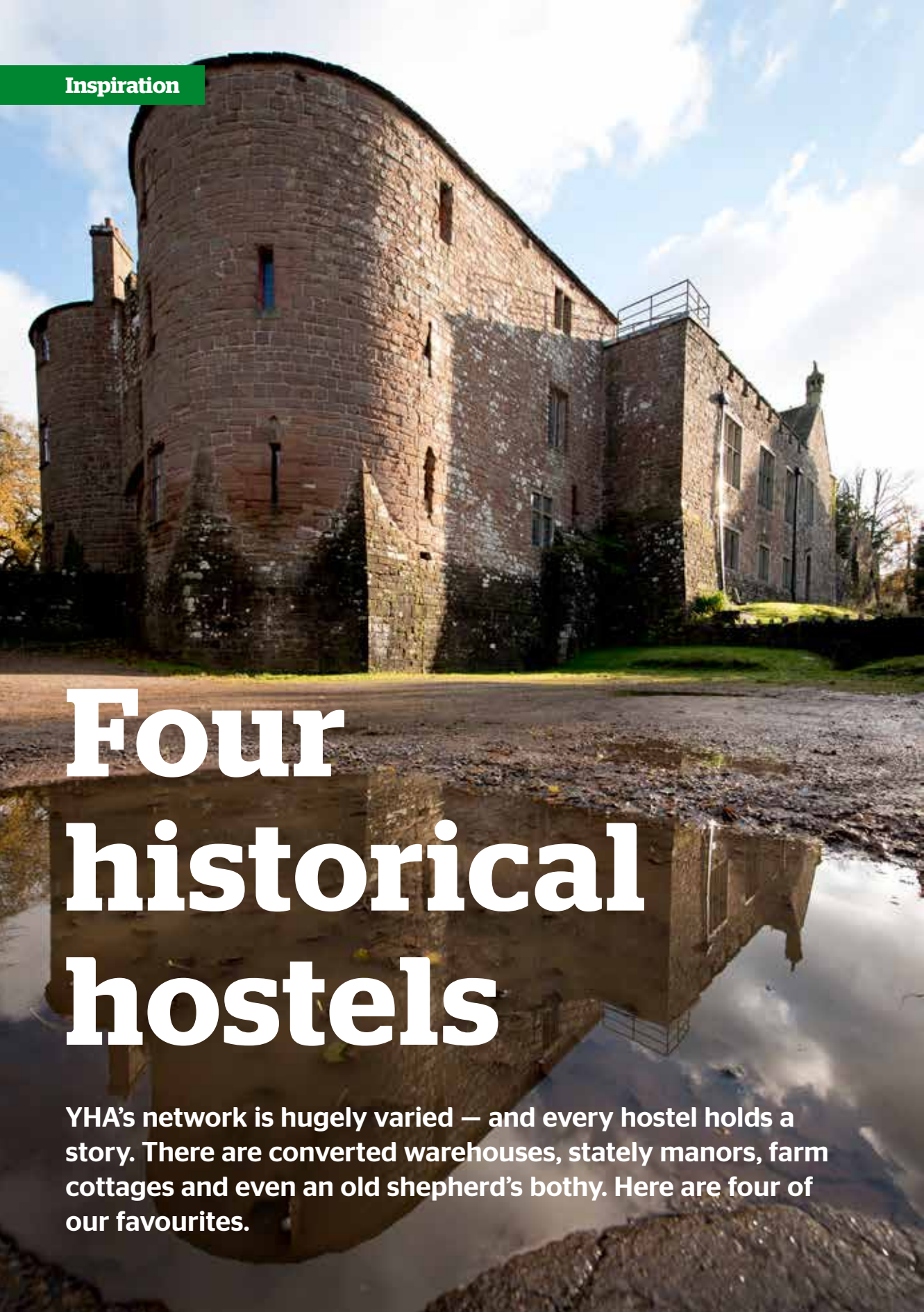
Red deer rut in Richmond Park

Richmond Park has had deer living freely inside it since 1637. Now a dedicated National Nature Reserve, it's the largest of London's Royal Parks and covers around 1,000 acres, with more than 630 red and fallow deer calling it home. The reds are Britain's largest native land mammals, and during the mating season from late September to November the males embark on a thunderous, roaring, antler-clashing bid for dominance known as the rut. Dawn and dusk are your best bets for watching them in action, but they can weigh up to 200kg, so it's vital that you keep your distance.

Hostel suggestion: any of the London YHAs



© AdobeStock/Wayne

A large, historic stone building with a prominent rounded tower, reflecting in a body of water. The building is constructed from reddish-brown stone and features several windows, some of which are small and narrow. The tower has a flat roof and a small balcony. The building is situated on a grassy bank, and the water in the foreground is calm, creating a clear reflection of the structure. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

Inspiration

Four historical hostels

YHA's network is hugely varied — and every hostel holds a story. There are converted warehouses, stately manors, farm cottages and even an old shepherd's bothy. Here are four of our favourites.



YHA Port Eynon (Partner)

This seafront hostel, overlooking a sandy beach and the waters of Port-Eynon Bay on the Gower Peninsula, Wales, is a dreamy spot: you can actually fish from the outdoor tables at the back. Yet this very location - perfect for a youth hostel - underlies the true reason for the building's existence. YHA Port Eynon used to be a lifeboat station.

The station first opened in 1884 in the same building the hostel now occupies. From it, the first lifeboat - a rowing boat called 'A Daughter's Offering' - was launched using horse-drawn carriages. The crew of the boat are credited with saving 39 lives. Twenty-two years after its first use, the lifeboat was replaced with 'Janet', which saved 15 lives. However, on January 1, 1916, 'Janet' set out in a gale to rescue sailors from 'SS Dunvegan', which had run aground. On the return, the boat capsized twice with the loss of three men. Two are buried at Port Eynon's church and Billy Gibbs, whose body was never recovered, has a statue in the same churchyard. YHA took over the building in 1950, and it's been a hostel ever since. Today, YHA Port Eynon is a stylish retreat in an idyllic coastal village.

▲ yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-port-eynon



YHA Bristol

The docklands where YHA Bristol now sits would have looked unrecognisable even 20 years ago. Yes, the red-brick buildings and warehouses would have been similar, but today the area is lined with coffee shops and bars, shops and attractions, making it one of the buzziest parts of a very buzzy city. When YHA Bristol opened in 1989 as a modern hostel in a renovated grain warehouse, however, there were various derelict warehouses and nightclubs around it.

Opening a hostel here was a forward-thinking move, and a risk. According to YHA volunteer archivist, John Martin, £1 million was needed. There had been a hostel in Bristol since 1949 - first as a 74-bed property in a pair of semi-detached mansions, then in the 1980s as a seasonal hostel in a university hall of residence. For YHA, it was proof that there was a demand for affordable accommodation in cities other than those with obvious heritage appeal such as Canterbury, Oxford and Winchester. With support from the Department of Education, English Tourist Board and help from Bristol City Council, the renovation of the quayside building began.

Today YHA Bristol is a large, modern hostel with a cycle store and library. It's close to some of Bristol's top attractions, including SS Great Britain and M Shed Museum.

▲ yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-bristol



YHA Ilam Hall

YHA Ilam Hall has a history that offers an insight into British life over the past 1,000 years. The wonderfully named Wulfric Spott gave the land known as 'Hilum', now in Staffordshire, to the Benedictine Abbey of Burton on Trent in 1004. Records show that within 100 years there was a church and a mill. After Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1529, however, it was given to William Paget, principal secretary to the King, who promptly sold it to John Port. It was Port's family who built the original Elizabethan manor and began to shape the estate, even diverting the River Manifold. In 1809, Ilam Hall was sold to Jesse Watts-Russell, who pulled down most of the existing building and built the one that stands today in the Victorian Gothic style. After the death of Watts-Russell in 1875, it changed hands several times, enjoyed a stint as a hotel and restaurant, and opened fully as a 100-bed hostel in 1934, then the largest in the country. Nowadays, YHA Ilam Hall retains its Victorian grandeur while sitting within 84 acres of National Trust land. It's a 25-minute walk to Dovedale Stepping Stones.

▲ yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-ilam-hall



YHA St Briavels Castle

We couldn't write about historical hostels without including St Briavels, by some distance the oldest building in the network. Historians know that in the 1160s Henry II ordered the rebuilding of an existing castle, which served as the administrative centre of the strategically important Forest of Dean. Not only was it near the border of Wales but it was an important cog in the medieval iron industry, with crossbow bolts, among other weaponry, being made in the castle. These bolts were widely used by crossbow-wielding mercenaries employed by Henry's son, King John (yes, the bad one) and subsequent monarchs. By the 15th century, however, the wars with Wales were no longer dominating the region and the castle lost its importance, becoming a prison. The castle was still being used as a prison until 1842. It became a hostel in 1948, and today feels, well, exactly like you're staying in a 900-year-old castle. The fireplace, walls and ceiling beams are all original. You can even stay in King John's bedchamber, which retains many of the features of when he used the castle as a hunting lodge in the 13th century. Bet the duvets weren't so good back then, though.

▲ yha.org.uk/hostel/yha-st-briavels-castle

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A guide to winter cycling

Mud, rain, ice, puddles, snow, more mud. Winter cycling is a joy. Honestly. Whether you're on a road, a gravel track or a mountainside, riding in winter is always more of an adventure – but you do need a bit more preparation. Here's how to keep cycling through the colder months. And remember, most hostels have a bike station for maintenance, and spraying off that mud.

Cycling gear

To keep warm and dry, the key is layering well. You'll need a baselayer, a midlayer or softshell and a waterproof jacket. Road cycling tends to involve a steady effort, often with a continuous wind chill, so the gear tends to be tighter, with insulation built into a single piece such as a gilet, then paired with a windproof shell and a waterproof. Mountain biking is stop-start, so the best set-up is a baselayer plus a zip-up softshell. Mountain gear tends to be more durable too (because rest assured, you will get attacked by a bramble).

Always carry a lightweight waterproof jacket too, and again, for mountain biking, a rip-stop jacket makes sense. Gloves and overshoes are essential, as cold feet and fingers can ruin a ride, and it's also worth considering visibility on the road. Many garments come with reflective fabrics.

Bike set up

Decent lights are essential, not just for your own visibility but for lighting up mountain bike trails on those early evenings. On a road bike, you'll want to add small mudguards, wider tyres and wet lube on the chains. It can be very muddy out there on a mountain bike, so winter-specific tyres with more aggressive knobs are vital, and remember to lower pressure in the tubes too. Again, a wet or wax-based lube will keep the drivetrain moving. And do clean your bike afterwards; most hostels have a bike station.

Bike skills

More care is required in winter. On wet or icy roads, you need to be incredibly careful when braking and cornering (as this writer knows too well; black ice + road bike = broken collarbone). On a mountain bike, you're unlikely to be moving as quickly, but you will need to consider line choice and muddy descents. Ice when you're on a mountain bike is a double-edged sword. On some terrains it's treacherous, but on frozen ground it can almost be like cycling on hard summer trails, and way more fun than deep mud. And a bit of self-care: don't forget to stay hydrated even in the cold and wet, and to stay well-fed. As all keen cyclists know, cold weather shouldn't make much difference to your cycling cadence – just be prepared.



WIN the Altura Nightvision Typhoon Insulated Jacket worth £150

Altura's range of Nightvision products is a staple for after-dark cyclists, delivering weather protection and high visibility. The top-of-the-range Insulated Typhoon Jacket (£150) is available in men's- and women's-specific versions and combines a waterproof, breathable outer fabric and a lightweight insulated lining to add warmth without bulk. There are two zipped hand pockets and a zipped chest pocket, ideal for storing essentials. There is a snug-fitting fixed hood, and reflective rear panels ensure great visibility.

For a chance to win the Altura Nightvision Typhoon Insulated Jacket just tell us: **Which of these cycle trails — the longest, traffic-free cycling route in the UK — is named after a fictional otter?**

**A Camel Trail | B Granite Way
C Tarka Trail | D Drake's Trail**

To enter, email your answer to magazine@yha.org.uk by 26th February 2027



Altura Esker Cargo and Airstream Jersey

These supremely comfortable shorts come in two sections: a padded liner (with a foam seat pad) and then the main shorts. You'll find secure pockets for things like allen keys and jelly babies, as well as a phone. The fabric is stretchy and, crucially for mountain biking and gravel riding shorts, durable, especially around the seat pad. Pair the shorts with Altura's Airstream Jersey. The men's has a full-length zip, with comfort guard, three open rear pockets, a zipped security pocket and reflective prints. Great gear at a great price.

altura.co.uk



Changing gear

Staying (really) warm

Outdoor jackets for winter

How to stay warm and dry

Two things make you cold: air temperature (worsened by wind speed), and whether you're wet or dry. Outdoor clothing needs to balance these factors, but no single garment can manage it, which is why, in winter, you need a layering system. Against the skin you need a synthetic baselayer or merino baselayer — long-sleeve baselayers are more versatile. A midlayer, a fleece or softshell, will keep you warm while allowing some ventilation through to regulate your temperature. When it's really cold, add an insulated layer: down or synthetic. It's OK for synthetic insulation to get wet, but it does make it heavier and bulkier. Finally, a waterproof jacket when it's raining: the more breathable, the better. With a pair of walking trousers, a pair of waterproof trousers, gloves, a hat and waterproof boots, you'll be set for winter.

Buffalo System Belay Jacket

Buffalo Systems is one of those brands that almost has a cult status, as a certain generation may say 'IYKYK'. It's hugely popular among mountain rescue teams and military forces (particularly those with a propensity for wearing black) thanks to its no-nonsense functionality. The company was started by Hamish Hamilton in Sheffield in 1979, and most garments are still being manufactured (and repaired) in the city. It was recently bought by Ben Fogle and James Sleater. This Belay Jacket has a super-warm, thick-pile lining and a Pertex Quantum outer with a water-repellent treatment. Tested in the Lake District under perfect conditions, it proved to be a versatile workhorse.



buffalosystems.co.uk

Montbell Superior Down Jacket

There still isn't a better warmth-to-weight ratio for insulation than down. If you want a seriously lightweight insulation piece, down is what to buy. The disadvantage is that getting it wet will clump the down, making it less effective. The Superior Down Jacket from Japanese brand Montbell adheres to the brand's philosophy of kinobi: function is beauty. Remarkably, it weighs a mere 243g and packs into a little bag about the size of an orange. It achieves this weight by using 800-fill down. Notable is the slim tailoring. Not only does that make it a more efficient warmer, but it also fits comfortably under a waterproof for layering.

montbell.co.uk



Craghoppers Compresslite Fleece Hybrid Jacket

This new jacket from Craghoppers uses a hybrid construction. Over the arms and shoulders, it employs a wind- and water-resistant overlay that keeps off the worst of the weather, especially when wearing a backpack. Around the torso and under the arms is ThermoDuo fleece that keeps you warm while offering some stretch and breathability. This kind of intelligent design – mapping the body's requirements onto the garment – makes for more efficient and versatile apparel. It's also exceedingly light at just 345g and very packable. It's not for freezing conditions, but it's designed for those mountain days when the weather is changeable and the clouds are moving fast.

craghoppers.com



YHA gear discounts

All YHA members receive the following benefits (log in to find your discount codes)

15% off outdoor clothing and accessories at **ACAI Outdoorwear**

15% off outdoor clothing, equipment and more at **Blacks**

15% off full-priced items with a **Cotswold Outdoor Explore More membership**

Extra 10% off the discount card price* at **Go Outdoors**

15% off outdoor clothing, footwear and equipment at **Millets**

15% off the perfect running kit with a **Runners Need Explore More membership**

15% off uncompromised kit with a **Snow+Rock Explore More membership**

20% off all products at **Water-to-Go**

All this, plus many other discounts with brands such as **OS Maps**, **Columbus Insurance**, **Go Ape** and **Bradt Travel Guides**.

*full-priced items, excluding bikes

Readers' pics

Share your adventures by tagging us on Instagram @yhaofficial or emailing your photos to magazine@yha.org.uk Don't forget the hashtag #LiveMoreYHA

Went to stay at Oban with my YHA card. Took this shot from the harbour before the ferry to Mull!
Mike

Ruby and Jasper having a blast in the grounds of YHA Hartington Hall.

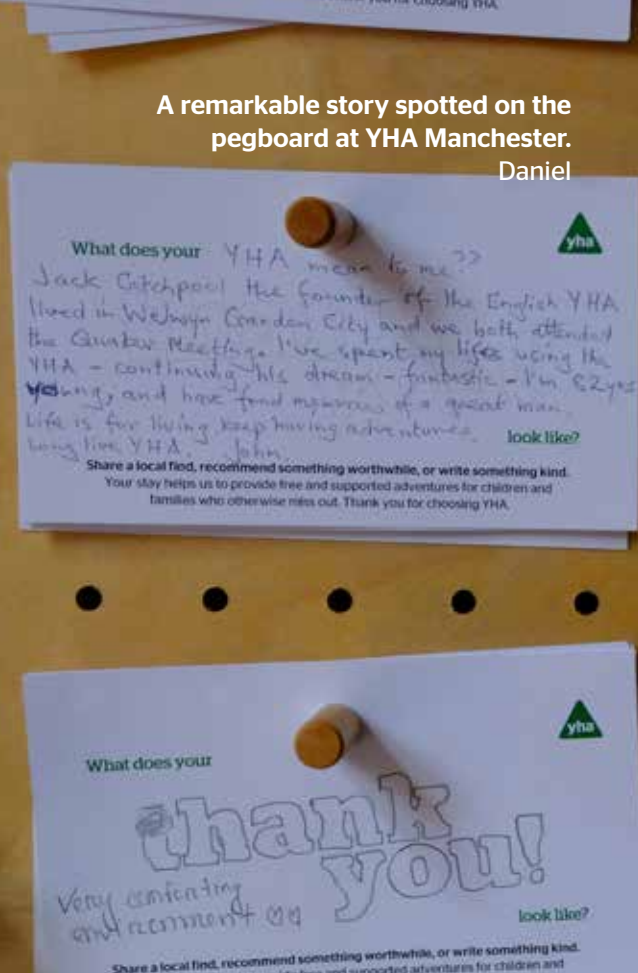


We had a lovely time recently staying at YHA Whitby. This is us by the Whitby Whalebone Arch with the Abbey and YHA in the background on a lovely sunny day.
Nigel

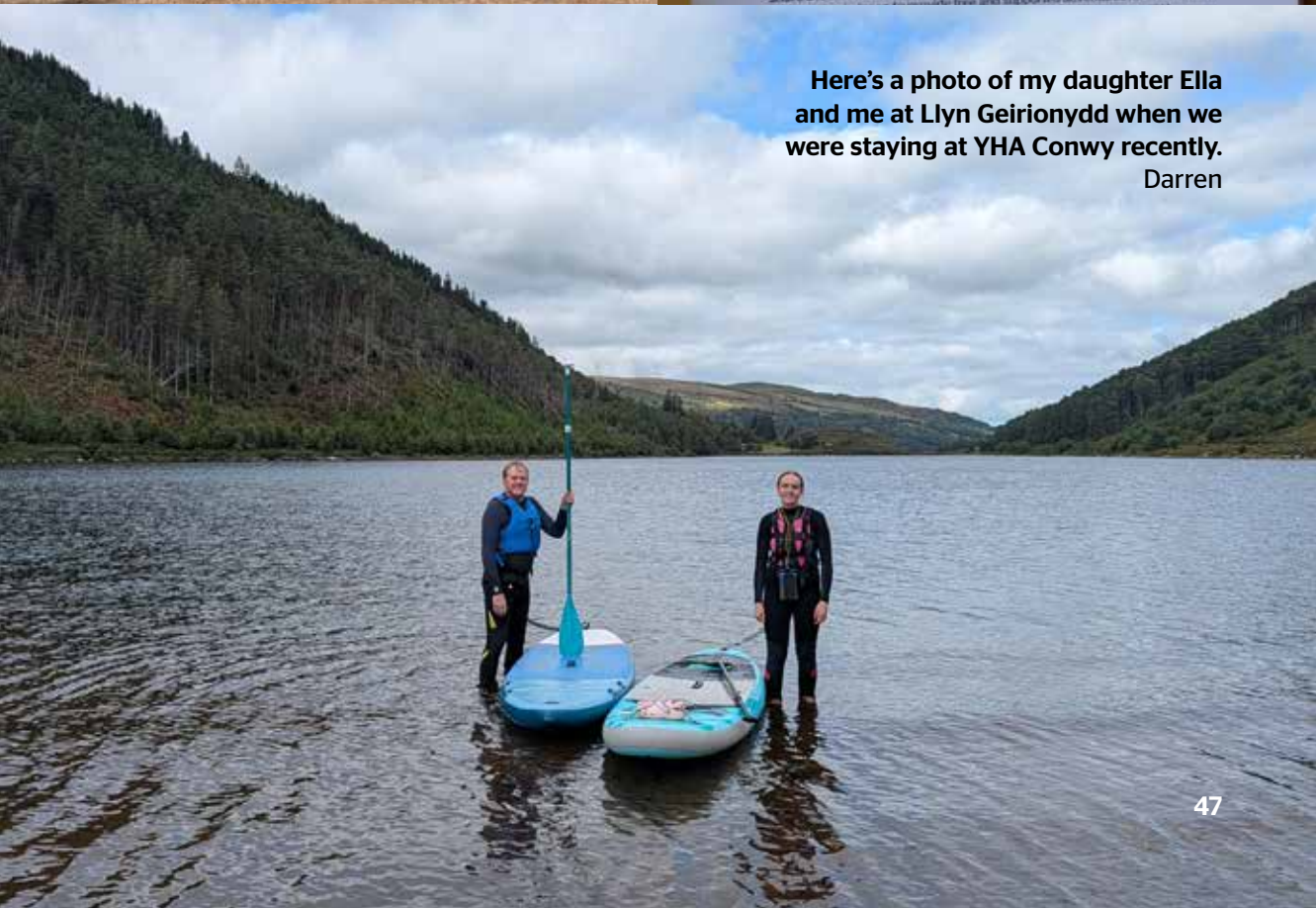




A big thumbs-up from my sons at YHA Ironbridge Coalport at the start of their summer holiday.
Dan



A remarkable story spotted on the pegboard at YHA Manchester.
Daniel



Here's a photo of my daughter Ella and me at Llyn Geirionydd when we were staying at YHA Conwy recently.
Darren

YHA membership

Big value, big impact, big adventures

Why become a YHA member?

- You'll get 10% off every stay (including pre-booked breakfasts), allowing you to make the most of our unique and affordable accommodation in incredible locations across England and Wales. From the Lake District to London, we've got you covered.
- You'll be supporting our vital work as a charity, ensuring everybody has the opportunity to connect to nature, heritage and the great outdoors – for the first time and a lifetime – regardless of their background.
- You'll also enjoy exclusive discounts on top outdoor brands.
- You'll automatically become a member of Hostelling International, giving you discounted stays at more than 2,000 hostels worldwide.
- You'll become part of our 96-year-strong movement. Our members have always been at the heart of what we do, strengthening our voice and shaping our future.

How much does it cost?

- If you're aged between 16 and 25, membership starts at **just £10 per year** – or £20 per year if you're aged 26 or over.
- If you'd like to become a life member, with lifelong benefits for a single one-off fee, it costs £500. We also offer a 25% senior discount on life membership.

Find out more at
yha.org.uk/membership



Get more involved in YHA's governance

Our governance starts at grassroots level, enabling members to influence things in various ways.

- YHA's Board of Trustees are volunteers who hold overall legal responsibility for the charity and oversee the delivery of our strategy.
- By ticking a box in the 'My Profile' area of your online account, you can adopt the special role of Company Member. It's free. You'll receive updates from the Chief Executive.
- Prior to each AGM, YHA members are invited to vote on motions and the elections of new Trustees.

To get involved, first register for an online account at yha.org.uk/user/login and remember to opt in to receiving emails.

Hostel map



▲ YHA hostel

Δ YHA partner hostel

Book now
yha.org.uk



Into the archive

Notice in YHA magazine The Rucksack, May/June 1951

"Offers are wanted from members living in the Greater London area who can lend their bicycles to hostellers from abroad for two weeks or more. Substantial touring machines preferred to lightweight sports models, age no disqualification. Machines will be insured by YHA and a nominal rental of 7s 6d paid."

Extract from an article in YHA magazine The Rucksack, July/August 1950

"There is a tendency to coin polysyllabic phrases to describe simple things; eating becomes 'intake of nutrition', cafes become 'catering establishments', and we suppose that youth hostels should be called 'temporary dwelling places for non-mechanized peregrination!'"

Extract from an article in the Birmingham Post, 1935

"Some would propose (for YHA) a wide and costly advertising campaign similar to that employed by a model railway company... but its funds are almost entirely devoted to the benefit of lovers of the open air, especially young people with slender purses. It must therefore rely for its publicity upon personal efforts made by its members and many friends who are in sympathy with its ideals."

Win a Craghoppers bundle worth £195

We're giving away a men's or women's waterproof jacket and a hybrid fleece jacket worth £195. To enter, just answer this question:

In which year did England's first National Trail, the Pennine Way, officially open?

A: 1945 | B: 1955 | C: 1965 | D: 1975

To enter, email your answer to magazine@yha.org.uk by 26th February 2027. We'd love to hear your thoughts on the magazine too.



About the prize

British adventure travel brand Craghoppers is giving away a new Compresslite Fleece Hybrid Jacket in which the ThermoDuo fleece teams with wind-resistant, H2OShield water-repellent overlays to deliver balanced warmth and weather defence in variable conditions. They're also giving away either a women's Zohra Waterproof Jacket or a men's Ponsa Waterproof Jacket. The pared-back design of these jackets emphasises the streamlined AquaDry Membrane stretch construction – perfect for active pursuits in changeable conditions.



We are YHA.

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Because where you go changes who you become.

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