

Chillingham Castle and the Chillingham wild cattle

Chillingham Castle

From the outside, Chillingham Castle appears much as you might expect a 12th Century castle to look. Imposing stone walls topped with battlements rise high overlooking the castle grounds (landscaped by Capability Brown in the 18th Century) and the highly manicured Italian Garden (devised in 1828 is by Royal garden designer Sir Jeffrey Wyattville).



By Glen Bowman from Newcastle, England (My Best of 2005 29-08-2005 16-11-39) [CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Inside, things are a little more unusual. The castle is owned and lived in by Sir Humphry Wakefield Bt., his wife The Hon. Lady Wakefield and their family. Sir Humphry has enthusiastically collected and maintained a wide range of interesting historical artefacts within the castle so there is a lot to see.

Not for the squeamish, you can also pay a visit to the castle's Torture Chamber. Torture instruments of times gone by including a spiked chair and stretching rack leave little to the imagination. You can almost hear the screams... in fact, you might well since the castle is said to be haunted and even runs ghost tours!

To find out more about events and visiting the castle, see chillingham-castle.com.

Chillingham wild cattle

A day out with a difference is a visit to the wild cattle of Chillingham. It is a chance not to be missed: these cattle are one of the rarest animals on the planet.

These cattle are completely wild and have been for centuries. They exist in Chillingham Park, in which they were fenced off from the surrounding countryside to provide hunting sport for visiting nobles. Since then, they have been left free to roam, untainted by human contact. They are not vaccinated yet suffer no diseases (bio controls are strict around the Park to ensure no disease is brought in to or carried out of the herd's domain).

The cattle are unusual in colour; a cream/grey for the most part. The large bulls often have a darker speckling/patching around their head and chest, which is not natural colouring but mud and dirt from where the bull has kicked up the ground and rubbed itself in the mud to appear more threatening.

With no human meddling, the herd has a natural hierarchy with the strongest bulls fighting for the dominant position and for breeding rights with the cows. The bulls fight viciously – their large horns point forward for attack (the cows' horns point upwards). Sometimes they fight to the death. The bulls fight all year round as these cattle do not have a breeding season.

No new animals have joined the herd in 300 years, so these cattle are extremely in-bred. Yet they survive year after year in harsh winters, simply grazing from the same land their ancestors have grazed for centuries.

This herd of cattle is so rare that a few animals have been taken to a secret location in Scotland, just in case the worst happened and the Chillingham herd did not survive. They are the only truly wild cattle in the world.



Warden leading the tour

You can visit the cattle for a [walking tour](#) guided by the warden. The cattle are very dangerous as they are not used to humans and can be fiercely defensive, so you won't get up close. But you can hear the fascinating history of these animals and see these rarest of animals with your own eyes.

Tours take place at [set times](#) and the park is closed during the winter (opens Easter). If you drive to the park, after ascending a track to the car park, you must walk a short distance (around 5-10 minutes) across a field to get the warden's hut where the tour begins. It is advisable to take cash to pay the warden. Warning: there are no toilet or refreshment facilities at the park so come prepared!

To find out more about the cattle, visit chillinghamwildcattle.com.

Chillingham Castle and the Wild Cattle have even appeared on Robson Green's Tales from Northumberland (ITV).

Chillingham Castle and Chillingham Wild cattle visits

At the time of writing (Jun 2015), the ticket prices are as follows:

- **combined castle and cattle ticket:** Adults £16, Concessions £13, Children 4-16 years old £6, Family ticket for 2 Adults and 2 or 3 Children £35
- **wild cattle tour only** (click for [ticket information/opening and tour times](#)): Adults £8, Concessions £6, Children 4-16 years old £3, Family ticket for 2 Adults and 2 or 3 Children £16
- **castle only** (click for [ticket information/opening times](#)): Adults £9.50, Concessions £8.50, Children £5.50 (5 to 15 yrs), Under 5's free, Family Ticket £23.00 (2 Adults and up to 3 children)

All tickets can be bought either at the gate or, if you wish, book in advance at any of the Tourist Information Centres in Northumberland and receive 10% off.

Chillingham is just under 20 minutes' drive from Homildon cottage so why not visit these fascinating places.



Chillingham Wild Cattle fighting. "Locked horns" by Kristi Herbert – Flickr: Locked horns. Licensed under CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons