

# Borders Railway opens with steam specials

As if the opening of the Borders Railway wasn't exciting enough, plans have been announced for a celebratory steam service pulled by a veteran locomotive.

The Borders railway is the longest new domestic railway in Britain for over 100 years, running from Tweedbank to Edinburgh Waverley. Services start on this over 50km long line on Sunday 6 September. To celebrate its [opening](#), ScotRail are laying on special steam services this Autumn – hauled by 60009 Union of South Africa. This imposing locomotive was built in Doncaster in 1937 and is one of only six remaining LNER Class A4 steam locomotives in the UK.

## Tweedbank to Edinburgh

Taking the new train service looks like becoming one of the most [beautiful ways](#) to begin a day trip to Edinburgh. Although Tweedbank is worth a visit in its own right – not least [Abbotsford](#), the home of Sir Walter Scott.

Through the day there are trains every half hour, with the journey up to the centre of Edinburgh taking a little less than an hour ([Borders Railway timetable \[PDF\]](#)). For those up at the crack of dawn, trains start at 5.20am on weekdays with the last train back from Edinburgh at 11.54pm. So there's plenty of opportunity to make a day (and a night!) of it. As with all ScotRail services, you can take your bike for free and disabled assistance can be arranged.

The route follows the old Waverley Route which linked Edinburgh and Carlisle before its closure in 1969. A campaign continues to extend the new Borders Railway along more of the

length of this old route [on to Hawick and Carlisle](#).

## **Catch a steam train**

The special [steam journeys](#) will run on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday between 10 September and 18 October 2015. The steam leg of the journey departs from Edinburgh shortly before 11am. Each special service will feature both first (£75) and standard class (£40/20) carriages and will be steam hauled on the journey from Edinburgh to Tweedbank only. It is diesel hauled to return to Edinburgh. The service arrives at Tweedbank at quarter past twelve, so there's a great opportunity to greet the train watching this steam classic pull in before lunch.

Jacqueline Taggart of ScotRail said: "These steam journeys will give people a chance to appreciate the new Borders Railway from the wonderful setting of a vintage steam train. This is a fabulous opportunity to showcase the country's newest railway line, and in such a romantic style."

To get a taste of what's in store, here is some footage of the steam locomotive 60009 Union of South Africa in action:

Scottish Transport Minister, Derek Mackay, said: "There can be few railway journeys which match the outstanding scenery on this new route, and I look forward to it being extremely successful. Steam services running on the reopened Borders Railway really will recapture the golden age of Scottish rail travel."

The last word should go to Madge Elliot, who campaigned against the local railway's original closure in 1968 and has since pushed for reinstatement. She told [BBC Scotland](#): "This is wonderful. Mind you, I never had any doubt it would come back again. It was such a daft thing to do, to close our railway. The scenery is absolutely beautiful. We can attract

visitors from all over the world to this part of the country.”

*Tweedbank station is just under an hour’s [drive from Homildon Cottage \[Google map\]](#), and has free car parking facilities. The regular train services take 55 minutes into Edinburgh Waverley.*

Pic: Alan Wilson [[CC BY-SA 2.0](#)], [via Wikimedia Commons](#)

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## Duddo Stone Circle

**For a spine-tingling trip back in time, a visit to the stone circle of Duddo is not to be missed.**

Located just 20 minutes’ drive from Homildon Cottage to the north of Ford & Etal, Duddo Five Stones is Northumberland’s answer to Stonehenge (albeit on a slightly smaller scale!)

After crossing a field along a mud track, the Neolithic monument appears on the horizon ahead of you, atop a small mound. The view takes in not only the Cheviots but also the Eildon Hills in nearby Scotland.

The prominent local archaeologist Roger Miket describes the [circle](#) as, “Undoubtedly the most complete and dramatically situated in Northumberland”.

Certainly the five standing stones are striking to see. Fairly flat and tapering toward the ground, the soft sandstone monoliths have been inscribed with deep vertical grooves from the centuries of Northumbrian rain and wind. The largest is over 2m high. There once were six stones (as recorded in 1811) but there is now a gap where the sixth stone stood.

In 1852 the antiquarian and topographer [Canon James Raine](#) investigated the stones, "On an eminence in the middle of a field a mile north west of Duddo stands a time and weather worn memorial of the Druidical period... The situation of this hillock is of a peculiar nature; it rises as it were, in the middle of a large natural basin two miles in diameter and might have been seen at one and the same time by thousands upon thousands of assembled devotees."

A late 19th Century excavation of the site discovered a central pit "six to eight feet in diameter" with charcoal and burnt fragments of bone, suggesting the circle may perhaps have been used for cremations. By this time, only four stones were still standing although one of missing two was later discovered intact and re-erected.

It is a mysterious and almost eerie feeling to stand at the centre of this circle of stones placed so long ago by our ancestors. No one knows the exact age of the stone circle, but it dates back at least some 4,500 years. You can almost picture those humans from long ago performing their sacred rites in this most wild and lonely of landscapes.

### **Getting to the Duddo Stones**

Visiting the Duddo Stones is free. Approaching Duddo from the south, turn left and follow the road until you see a sign beside a field gate on the right-hand side of the road. Park here to walk about 1km along a permissive path.

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# 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 Wyatville).



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](http://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](http://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