

ON THE ROAD

NEWS FROM OUR EXPERTS AROUND THE WORLD

This month ● Cantering across the Scottish Borders ● Tom Hall ● Tony Wheeler ● Human pyramids in Catalonia ● Britain's surfing heritage ● Circumnavigating the M25 ● The *Lonely Planet Magazine India* awards



Ride along with the Common people

Scotland's Common Ridings see border-dwellers commemorating battles of old

It all starts at dawn on the first Friday of the first full week in June. Nobody in Hawick goes to work or school, the townsfolk are roused from their beds at 6am by a pipe band, and the clip-clop of horses' hooves echoes through the cobbled streets.

This may sound like a scene from times of old, but the Hawick Common Riding takes place every year in June. It dates back to the days of lawless raiders and battles between Scotland's Stewart kings and England's Tudor dynasty. More specifically, it commemorates the victorious homecoming of townsfolk who captured the flag of some English looters in 1514.

The cavalcade are more numerous but less orderly than their predecessors as they

ride out to the old parish border, honouring the centuries-old tradition of making sure that neighbouring Scots – or Englishmen from across the border – are not encroaching on the town's territory.

This festival has been going on since the early 1700s, making it the oldest event of its kind, but 10 other Scottish Border towns have similar annual pageants. Ten miles away, the town of Selkirk holds the record for the largest mounted cavalcade in Europe. It marks the Battle of Flodden Field in 1513 from which only one Selkirk man returned, waving an English flag about his head to spread the bad news around town.

Whether or not these annual celebrations fuel anti-English sentiment may come to

light in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Sceptics say that First Minister Alex Salmond wants to lower the voting age to 16 because he is counting on votes for independence planted in the history room – and, who knows, perhaps in celebrations of bygone routs of the English. The people of Hawick deny any such link.

'There's no anti-anything,' says Hawick resident Cameron Reith. 'It's a festival. If anything you'll get more inter-town rivalry between Hawick and Selkirk. Don't get me started on that!'



Gabriel O'Rorke is a freelance travel writer and a producer for *BBC World News*. She is based in London.



TRAVEL PUNDIT
Tom Hall

The editor of Lonely Planet's website, lonelyplanet.com, shares his latest insider news and tip-offs

Take a trip to little-visited Algeria, board a Megabus to the Continent, size up Google's smart glasses and find out what became of NASA's retired shuttles



ALGERIA AFTER TOURISTS

The largest country in the Arab world is seeking more visitors. Algeria's principal attractions are spectacular stretches of Sahara and Roman ruins on its coast. Although the FCO currently advises against non-essential travel to parts of the country, its government hopes one day to rival neighbouring Morocco as a destination for tourists.



EUROPE WITH MEGABUS

Low-cost bus travel firm Megabus has arrived on cross-channel routes, offering fares as low as £1, or €1, for services from London to Amsterdam, Boulogne, Brussels and Paris. The cheapest fares are getting snapped up quickly, but I found a few £4 tickets online. That's quite a deal to reach the Continent (megabus.com).



SMART GLASSES FOR TRAVELLERS

The latest invention from Google's boffins: smart glasses. A video released by the tech giant showed how these 'augmented-reality' specs could revolutionise exploring the world around you, allowing you to check directions, meet friends and get instant travel updates - all without a phone. The jury's out on this one.



BMI JOINS THE BA FAMILY

BMI has become part of International Airlines Group, the parent company of BA and Iberia. The carrier has been sold by Lufthansa in a deal which will net BA a slew of valuable takeoff and landing slots at congested Heathrow airport. Expect route changes and some new long-haul destinations from BA later in the year.



WHAT'S A FAIR FLIGHT PRICE?

If you're frustrated by flight offers that you then can't find, try fly.com's Fair Flight Price Guide. By examining fares paid to travel to popular destinations, the search engine aims to suggest reasonable prices to help a comparison across carriers. It provides some interesting food for thought (tinyurl.com/flycomprice).



ALL CHANGE FOR SPACE SHUTTLES

NASA's space shuttle *Discovery* has arrived at the National Air and Space Museum's Steven F Udvar-Hazy Center near Washington Dulles airport. It replaces the shuttle prototype, *Enterprise*, which is boldly going to New York's Intrepid, a floating museum on the Hudson River (nasm.si.edu/udvarhazy).



MOST TRAVELLED MAN
Tony Wheeler

The ongoing adventures of Lonely Planet's co-founder - the man who can't stop exploring

Backdoor to Bougainville

Tony goes island-hopping across unofficial borders in the South Pacific

It's always a pleasant surprise to find that 'old-fashioned' travel, where you can cross unofficial borders and your transport can't be booked on a website, still exists. In February I travelled up to the remote Shortland Islands, the northwesternmost of the Solomon Islands, before hitching a ride on a boat to make the crossing to the island of Bougainville - an outlying part of Papua New Guinea.

It's about 20 miles by sea from the Shortland Islands to Bougainville, so it's a bit like crossing the English Channel, only with a 30-horsepower outboard motor. I tried not to think about the habit that outboard motors have of failing at critical moments in the Pacific, leaving you to drift for weeks until a passing

Taiwanese fishing boat rescues you. After we landed I reported to the police station where, after a very mild telling off for arriving unofficially, they stamped my passport.

Almost 60 years before Osama bin Laden was tracked down, a different US enemy number one met his end on Bougainville. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto planned the attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in 1941, and in 1943 took to the skies, not realising that the Americans had broken the secret Japanese naval code and planned to intercept him as he flew over Bougainville. Yamamoto's twin-engined Mitsubishi G4M, or 'Betty bomber', was shot down and crashed into the jungle. The wreckage is still there all these years later.



The wreck of Admiral Yamamoto's 'Betty' bomber in the jungle

PHOTOGRAPHS: GARY CAMERON/REUTERS, HEMIS/ALAMY, JOHNER IMAGES/ALAMY

Towering ambitions

Summer weekends see daring 'castellers' constructing extraordinary human castles in Barcelona's city centre

Castells have been a fixture of Catalan summer festivals for more than 200 years. However, this year will see the first programme of regular castell constructions in Barcelona, with performances taking place in the cathedral square on Saturdays throughout the summer. Here are some of the logistics that go into building a castell:

1. First, the 'cap de colla' – the boss of the colla, or group – arranges everybody in position. He gives the most important instruction to the 'pinya' – the people, sometimes in their hundreds, that form the giant scrum that holds the tower steady – of: 'Don't look up!' Anyone who is reasonably healthy can join the pinya as long as they're aware that, on occasion, the tower will collapse abruptly on top of you. Luckily, serious injuries are extremely rare.

2. The 'baixos' – that's the men at the base – link arms and gird themselves to take a weight of up to 450 kilos on their shoulders. This enormous strain is one reason why a 10-storey tower with three men in the base was only managed for the first time in 1998. The small town of Vilafranca's colla did it again in November of last year. They are currently the team to beat in the competitive world of castellers.

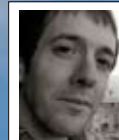
3. Another important level are the 'manilles' – literally, the handles. These people provide a kind of human

walkway, allowing the smaller, lighter members of the tower to climb up.

It's crucial to do this as quickly as possible, because the baixos won't be able to carry the weight indefinitely.

4. When all the layers are in place, the 'enxaneta' – a child who can be as young as six – scrambles all the way to the top. Until recently they didn't wear helmets but, after a 12-year-old girl died in a fall in 2006, enxanetas are now given spongy protective headgear. Despite the risks, castellers insist that their sport is as safe as many others and a great way to develop Catalan virtues – hence the castellers' motto 'Força, equilibri, valor i seny', or 'Strength, balance, courage and common sense.'

● See the castells at Avinguda de la Catedral, Barcelona, at 7pm on Saturdays from 19 May–15 September, except in August



Trevor Baker writes regularly for *The Guardian* on travel, food and music. He is based in the Spanish city of Alicante.

Time and tide

A new museum reveals Britain's role in the history of surfing

Surfing may be a pastime synonymous with swaying palms and jangling Californian guitar music, but what's little known is the role that Britain's own surfing pioneers have played in the development of the sport. The Museum of British Surfing recently opened in North Devon, with exhibits spanning Captain Cook's encounters with Polynesian surfers in the 18th century – the first time a European witnessed the sport – through to a small flotilla of historic surfboards.

Britain's surfing pioneers were very different from the tousled-haired stereotypes of today. Agatha Christie was among the first, taking to the shores around South Africa and Hawaii in the 1920s. She recalled that there was: 'Nothing like that rushing through the water at what seemed to you a speed of about two hundred miles an hour... until you arrived, gently slowing down, on the beach, and foundered among the soft flowing waves.'

British surfing has even had Royal approval – Edward Windsor, the future King Edward VIII, carried the distinction of being the first surfer from Britain to be photographed on his first trip to Hawaii in April 1920.

Peter Robinson, the founder of the museum, talks us through some of the key milestones in British surfing history.

All of the items pictured here are on display at the Museum of British Surfing in Braunton, North Devon.

● museumofbritishsurfing.org.uk

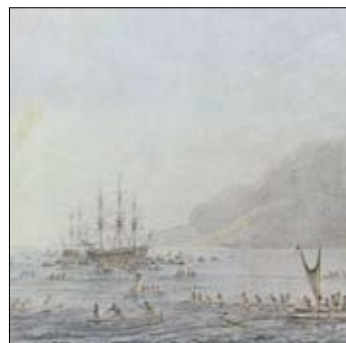


Peter Robinson is the founder of The Museum of British Surfing. His favourite board is the 1968 Tiki surfboard.

18TH CENTURY



When Captain James Cook arrived in Hawaii aboard HMS *Resolution* in 1779, he found that surfing was already a developed, mass-participation board sport. Some of his crew jumped overboard to have a go on these massive wooden surfboards – they would have been hand-carved, as tall as 20 feet (6m) and weighing as much as 150 pounds (68kg).



19TH CENTURY



Two Hawaiian princes taught their English guardian to surf in the seaside resort of Bridlington in Yorkshire in 1890. It is likely that they would have taken a solid wooden surfboard of around eight to 10ft (2.4m–3m) long. They waded out into the chilly North Sea wearing cotton bathing suits – it would have quite a spectacle for genteel Victorians!



1920s



Tom Tremewan, a coffin maker from the Cornish town of Perranporth, found a niche market when surfboards were in demand at the end of WWI. Tremewan made boards five feet in length, using two wooden planks joined together. For those in woollen bathing suits, surfing in the 1920s would have been a quite a bruising experience.



1960s



Modern surfing culture bloomed in Britain in the Sixties. Flower power was all the rage with surfboards and surf clothing, and surfers were inspired by seminal documentary *The Endless Summer*, which followed two surfers on a round-the-world trip. This Tiki surfboard was shaped in 1968 and decorated with a roll of paisley pyjama cloth!



1970s



Surfing became an underground cult in 1970s Britain with the introduction of the six- to seven-foot shortboard – more manoeuvrable than traditional longboards. Along with them came a hedonistic lifestyle, for many fuelled by drugs and booze. The art on this Tris surfboard from Cornwall describes the era perfectly – it's a fine piece of British craftsmanship.



1980s



Surfing culture exploded into the mainstream in the 1980s. We had our first pro-surfers, our first glossy surf mags, surf films and surfing adverts. Black wetsuits were ditched in favour of bright, garish colours, and surfboard graphics reflected a new, edgy approach to this ancient pastime. This 1981 Karma surfboard from Cromer features period art.



PRESENT DAY



Big-wave surfing is the new frontier for a dedicated band of British and Irish surfers, who ride giant surf generated by deep Atlantic storms. To ride the realm of 50ft-plus waves, surfers use tiny boards filled with lead weight for stability, and are towed in by watercraft. This board, used by big wave surfer Andrew Cotton, is made by Gulf Stream of Devon.



PHOTOGRAPHS: JIM WILKMAN, MBS/ALEX WILLIAMS, MBS/BISHOP MUSEUM, MBS/PERRANPORTH MUSEUM, MBS/TONY COPE, MUSEUM OF BRITISH SURFING

Road to nowhere

It may be Britain's most despised motorway, but a new coach tour promises to uncover the hidden delights of the M25



People call the M25 the nation's biggest car park for good reason. Its tailbacks have scuppered many a bank holiday weekend, and it even inspired Chris Rea's 1989 Top Ten hit *The Road to Hell*. Yet Brighton & Hove Coach Company's new tour of the ring road has been an unexpected sell-out. So, one morning, I buckled up for the six-hour drive and found myself an M25 convert.

MILE 1: Junction 8, Reigate

We join the M25! And climb 200m to its highest point, Reigate Hill. 'Oxygen masks will drop shortly,' grins our tour guide Nigel.

MILE 13: Junction 10, Cobham

Fellow passenger Mark Weston from the RSPB tells me that the M25 is surprisingly rich with wildlife. 'You can spot red kites

and kestrels,' he confides. 'And of course you see the odd rat in the service stations.'

MILE 26: Junction 13, Heathrow

'There are two good reasons to visit Heathrow: to leave the country or come home,' winks Nigel as we pull into Terminal 5. We're here to do neither. We must be a surreal sight as we roll through departures.

MILE 41: Junction 18, Rickmansworth

There is cheering as it's announced that there's an incident ahead! What could it be?

MILE 46: Junction 19 for Watford

It's a lorry parked on the hard shoulder. Nigel dishes out more M25 trivia gold – last year's longest tailback stretched for 49 miles, between junctions 5 and 19.

MILE 93: Junction 30

We pass Lakeside Shopping Centre and Thurrock Services, 'Where you'll find the only Taco Bell in the UK', beams Nigel. Actually the third one has just opened.

MILE 112: Junction 5, Sevenoaks

We crane our necks to see Chevening House – the official country residence of the foreign secretary, William Hague, and the deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg.

MILE 125: Junction 7 for the M23

Our orbit draws to an end and certificates are dished out to beaming passengers. 'I want to do it every week,' sighs Nigel, looking hopefully at our driver Graham. 'Find another driver,' Graham snarls back.

● bookings.buses.co.uk



PHOTOGRAPHS: DENNIS CHANG/ALAMY, DK ALAMY, JUSTIN KASE ZTWOZ/ALAMY, ROB ROTHWELL/ALAMY