

Rural Britain | Walking Small Group Tour

Reading List

The Making of the British Landscape: How We Have Transformed the Land, from Prehistory to Today

by Francis Pryor

This is the changing story of Britain as it has been preserved in our fields, roads, buildings, towns and villages, mountains, forests and islands. From our suburban streets that still trace out the boundaries of long vanished farms to the Norfolk Broads, formed when medieval peat pits flooded, from the ceremonial landscapes of Stonehenge to the spread of the railways - evidence of how man's effect on Britain is everywhere. In *The Making of the British Landscape*, eminent historian, archaeologist and farmer, Francis Pryor explains how to read these clues to understand the fascinating history of our land and of how people have lived on it throughout time. Covering both the urban and rural and packed with pictures, maps and drawings showing everything from how we can still pick out Bronze Age fields on Bodmin Moor to how the Industrial Revolution really changed our landscape, this book makes us look afresh at our surroundings and really see them for the first time.

Wild Kingdom: Bringing Back Britain's Wildlife

by Stephen Moss

Can Britain make room for wildlife? Stephen Moss believes it can.

The newspaper headlines tell us that Britain's wildlife is in trouble. Wild creatures that have lived here for thousands of years are disappearing, because of pollution and persecution, competition with alien species, changing farming and forestry practices, and climate change. It's not just rare creatures such as the Scottish wildcat or the red squirrel that are vanishing. Hares and hedgehogs, skylarks and water voles, even the humble house sparrow, are in freefall.

But there is also good news. In Newcastle, otters have returned to the river Tyne and red kites are flying over the Metro centre; in Devon, there are beavers on the River Otter; and peregrines – the fastest living creature on the planet – have taken up residence in the heart of London.

Elsewhere in the British countryside things are changing too. What were once nature-free zones are being 'rewilded'; giving our wild creatures the space they need – not just to survive, but also to thrive.

Stephen Moss has travelled the length and breadth of the UK, from the remote archipelago of St Kilda to our inner cities, to witness at first hand how our wild creatures are faring, and offers us this complex, heartfelt and often unexpected response.

A Natural History of the Hedgerow: and ditches, dykes and dry stone walls

by John Wright

It is difficult to think of a more quintessential symbol of the British countryside than the British Hedgerow, bursting with blackberries, hazelnuts and sloes, and home to oak and ash, field mice and butterflies. But as much as we might dream about foraging for mushrooms or collecting wayside nettles for soup, most of us are unaware of quite how profoundly hedgerows have shaped the history of our landscape and our species.

One of Britain's best known naturalists, John Wright introduces us to the natural and cultural history of hedges (as well as ditches, dykes and dry stone walls) - from the arrival of the first settlers in the British Isles to the modern day, when we have finally begun to recognise the importance of these unique ecosystems. His intimate knowledge of the countryside and its inhabitants brings this guide to life, whether discussing the skills and craft of hedge maintenance or the rich variety of animals who call them home.

Informative, practical, entertaining and richly illustrated in colour throughout, A Natural History of the Hedgerow is a book to stuff into your pocket for country walks in every season, or to savour in winter before a roaring fire.

The Wild Rover: A Blistering Journey Along Britain's Footpaths

by Mike Parker

Mike Parker, bestselling author of Map Addict, offers a very full, intelligent and witty exploration into a glorious and passionate British subject - footpaths and the history of land ownership.

Mike discovers how these paths have become part of our cultural landscape and why, at the tender age of 44, he suddenly finds himself at a crossroads.

Provocative, funny and personal, this book celebrates Britain's unique and extraordinary network of footpaths. It examines their chequered and surprisingly turbulent history, from the Enclosures Acts of the eighteenth century to the 1932 Mass Trespass on Kinder Scout in Derbyshire; and from the hard-won post-war establishment of great National Trails like the Pennine Way to the dramatic latter-day battles by the likes of Nicholas van Hoogstraten and Madonna to keep ramblers off their land.

The story ranges far and wide, to all corners of the country and beyond, and is filled with the many characters that Mike engages with along the way - the poets and artists, farmers and ramblers, landowners and Rights of Way officers and campaigners, historians, archivists and anyone else who crosses his path (or even tries to block it).

The Ancient Paths: Discovering the Lost Map of Celtic Europe

by Graham Robb

Graham Robb's new book will change the way you see European civilization.

Inspired by a chance discovery, Robb became fascinated with the world of the Celts: their gods, their art, and, most of all, their sophisticated knowledge of science. His investigations gradually revealed something extraordinary: a lost map, of an empire constructed with precision and beauty across vast tracts of Europe. The map had been forgotten for almost two millennia and its implications were astonishing.

Minutely researched and rich in revelations, The Ancient Paths brings to life centuries of our distant history and reinterprets pre-Roman Europe. Told with all of Robb's grace and verve, it is a dazzling, unforgettable book.

The Making Of The British Landscape: From the Ice Age to the Present

by Nicholas Crane

The British landscape has been continuously occupied by humans for 12,000 years, from the end of the Ice Age till the twenty-first century. It has been transformed from a European peninsula of glacier and tundra to an island of glittering cities and exquisite countryside.

In this geographical journey through time, we discover the ancient relationship between people and place and the deep-rooted tensions between town and countryside.

The twin drivers of landscape change - climate and population - have arguably wielded as much influence on our habitat as monarchs and politics. From tsunamis and farming to Roman debacles and industrial cataclysms, from henge to high-rise and hamlet to metropolis, this is a book about change and adaptation. As Britain lurches from an exploitative past towards a more sustainable future, this is the story of our age.

Tiny Churches

by Dixe Wills

While travelling all over Britain on his pushbike, non-flying travel writer Dixe Wills is forever popping into old churches to look around, grab a moment of tranquility or just to shelter from the elements. Extending his love of all things tiny into yet another area, this book is his guide to 60 of the loveliest and most diminutive churches that Britain has to offer, many of which are known only to locals or tourists who are simply lucky enough to stumble across them. Representing a unique slice of British local history and attitudes, tiny churches are the great survivors of the world. Unlike grand cathedrals, they were built to serve more humble ends, but they withstood centuries of religious unrest (and the Victorian 'church improvers') to survive into this most irreligious of centuries. Today, scattered all over Britain, these atmospheric places retain the essence of what they were when the stonemasons, labourers, smiths, carpenters and glaziers were corralled together to build them.

Bread for all

by Chris Renwick

Today, everybody seems to agree that something has gone badly wrong with the British welfare state. In the midst of economic crisis, politicians and commentators talk about benefits as a lifestyle choice, and of 'skivers' living off hard-working 'strivers' as they debate what a welfare state fit for the twenty-first century might look like.

This major new history tells the story of one the greatest transformations in British intellectual, social and political life: the creation of the welfare state, from the Victorian workhouse, where you had to be destitute to receive help, to a moment just after the Second World War, when government embraced responsibilities for people's housing, education, health and family life, a commitment that was unimaginable just a century earlier. Though these changes were driven by developments in different and sometimes unexpected currents in British life, they were linked by one over-arching idea: that through rational and purposeful intervention, government can remake society. It was an idea that, during the early twentieth century, came to inspire people across the political spectrum.

In exploring this extraordinary transformation, *Bread for All* explores and challenges our assumptions about what the welfare state was originally for, and the kinds of people who were involved in creating it. In doing so, it asks what the idea continues to mean for us today.

The English Village: History and Traditions

by Martin Wainright

The village remains a quintessential and much-loved treasure of the English countryside. This rural idyll has inspired generations of great poets, novelists and artists including the likes of Constable, Hardy, Wordsworth, as well as providing the picturesque setting for modern TV series such as "Lark Rise to Candleford and Cranford". "The English Village" celebrates all that is unique and loved about a typical village - the pub, the green, the school, the church, the pond, the local shop and more - as well as exploring how the village has changed over the centuries. Also includes fascinating information on the origins of village names - Siddington, for example, means the farm of the valley (sidd: valley, in: belonging to, ton: farmland). Filled with facts, figures, customs and lore, there is a wealth of fascinating information to be discovered in this charming book.

Return To Akenfield: Portrait Of An English Village In The 21st Century

by Craig Taylor

Ronald Blythe's 1969 book *Akenfield* - a moving portrait of English country life told in the voices of the farmers and villagers themselves - is a modern classic. In 2004, writer and reporter Craig Taylor returned to the village in Suffolk on which *Akenfield* was based. Over the course of several months, he sought out locals who had appeared in the original book to see how their lives had changed, he met newcomers to discuss their own views, and he interviewed Ronald Blythe himself, now in his eighties. Young farmers, retired orchardmen and Eastern European migrant workers talk about the nature of farming in an age of computerization and encroaching supermarkets; commuters, weekenders and retirees discuss the realities behind the rural idyll; and the local priest, teacher and more describe the daily pleasures and tribulations of village life. Together, they offer a panoramic and revealing portrait of rural English society at a time of great change.

Life in a Medieval Castle

by Joseph Gies & Frances Gies

From acclaimed historians Frances and Joseph Gies comes the reissue of this definitive classic on medieval castles, which was a source for George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* series.

"Castles are crumbly and romantic. They still hint at an age more colorful and gallant than our own, but are often debunked by boring people who like to run on about drafts and grumble that the latrines did not work. Joseph and Frances Gies offer a book that helps set the record straight—and keeps the romance too."—*Time*

A widely respected academic work and a source for George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*, Joseph and Frances Gies's bestselling *Life in a Medieval Castle* remains a timeless work of popular

medieval scholarship.

Focusing on Chepstow, an English castle that survived the turbulent Middle Ages with a relative lack of violence, the book offers an exquisite portrait of what day-to-day life was actually like during the era, and of the key role the castle played. The Gieses take us through the full cycle of a medieval year, dictated by the rhythms of the harvest. We learn what lords and serfs alike would have worn, eaten, and done for leisure, and of the outside threats the castle always hoped to keep at bay.

For medieval buffs and anyone who wants to learn more about this fascinating era, *Life in a Medieval Castle* is as timely today as when it was first published.
