THE HERRIOT TRAIL

around Wensleydale and Swaledale

taking in locations from

‘All Creatures Great & Small’
When Alf Wight first put pen to paper little did he know that he would become the world's most famous vet. He is better known as James Herriot whose tales of country life have captured the imagination of readers and viewers around the globe.

James Herriot was fifty and still working as a full time vet, when he began writing. His first novel, 'If Only They Could Talk', was published by Michael Joseph in 1970, followed a couple of years later by 'It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet'. They were published together for the American market - and its title 'All Creatures Great and Small' was the one used for the TV series.

But it was the BBC TV series that saw the stories successfully transferred to the screen. Between 1978 and 1983 forty-nine episodes were broadcast, bringing vividly to life the vets' practice of James Herriot, Siegfried Farnon and his brother - the happy-go-lucky Tristan.

James Herriot's 'parish' actually extended from Hawes in the west to Yorkshire's east coast, but most of the locations were filmed in the beautiful valleys of Swaledale and Wensleydale. The northern Dales have now become synonymous with the evocative tales.

The Herriot Trail will introduce you to many of the places that fired James Herriot's love of this landscape. Perhaps you will be encouraged to return and explore them more fully. One thing is for sure - you will not be disappointed.

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When James Herriot got married it was to the Wheatsheaf Inn that he took his wife to for their honeymoon. The village hall was once filmed as the venue for a village dance.

Take a detour to Bolton Castle, where the formidable battlements overlook the village of Castle Bolton. These romantic surroundings emboldened the real James Herriot to propose marriage to Joan Danbury (Helen Herriot in the books) while on a visit here. Mary Queen of Scots stayed here too, but not from choice. The castle was her prison - albeit a comfortable one - before she was executed at Fotheringhay Castle.

Several Herriot episodes were filmed in Redmire (including in the Bolton Arms) and its surroundings.

When the location finders were looking for a place to represent Darrowby for the Herriot series, Askrigg’s old world charm and Georgian houses gave it a head start on its rivals. Take away the modern cars and the village seems to return to another era. But Askrigg is no mere film set, it is handsomely authentic. The parish church at the bottom of the sweeping main street is worthy of investigation. The handsome Georgian house opposite the many stepped market cross became Skeldale House in the series and still retains the name today. The nearby Kings Arms has had its moments of television fame too, as Darrowby’s Drovers Arms.

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Middleham Castle was home of the powerful Neville family, who ruled their fiefdom almost like royalty. This village of handsome Georgian houses - many built with stone salvaged from the castle - is known today for the training of racehorses. The cobbles resound daily to the clatter of thoroughbred hooves as steeds are lead onto the gallops.

Appearances can deceive - East Witton’s picturesque cottages were actually built last century, following a 16th century pattern

Alf and Joan Wight spent many holidays in West Scrafton and a number of episodes were filmed here and elsewhere in Coverdale.
WEST WITTON

The unfenced road climbs to the shoulder of Penhill, then winds down very steeply into West Witton. James Herriot contemplated this scene, years ago, knowing that his car had no brakes. He decided to tackle the descent in first gear…and lived to tell the tale. The Wensleydale Heifer in West Witton was where James and Helen enjoyed many a meal.

When James Herriot created the town of Darrowby in his books, he combined features from Richmond, Thirsk, Leyburn and Middleham…and some from his fertile imagination too.

Richmond’s narrow streets, known as wynds, are fascinating to explore. Tucked away down Ryder’s Wynd is the Richmondshire Museum, where you will find among many other exhibits, a recreation of James Herriot’s surgery. Find time to visit the Green Howards Museum and the exquisite Georgian Theatre. If you climb to the top of the castle keep your efforts will be rewarded by panoramic views of the town and River Swale - a fitting end to the Herriot Trail.

LEYBURN

This bustling market town boasts a large market square. Leyburn is the real life equivalent of Scarsburn, where Ewan Ross (Frank Bingham in real life) had his practice and is the fictional home of Granville Bennett. Thornborough Hall was used during filming as the home of the Ministry of Agriculture, a building that Herriot always visited with trepidation!

RICHMOND

James Herriot found Richmond ‘an embarrassment of riches’ - and with very good reason. With its ancient castle overlooking the huge cobbled market place, this is one of the loveliest towns in England.

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