

On the road: NORTH YORK MOORS

Take a road trip around the gothic moors and wind-battered coastlines of Yorkshire's eastern flank and you'll find starry chefs turning their hand to stand-out rustic dishes such as fall-apart pork belly or rhubarb and custard crumble cake

Words CLARE HARGREAVES

There can't be many chefs catapulted to culinary fame on the back of a warty-skinned beetroot named after a toad. But Tommy Banks, the 28-year-old head of the kitchen at the Michelin-starred **The Black Swan at Oldstead**, is no ordinary chef. And his food, flavoured with seeds and leaves foraged from the hedgerows, is no ordinary food.

I'm sampling the eight-course tasting menu in the Banks family's honey-stone village inn on the south-western corner of the North York Moors National Park (blackswanoldstead.co.uk). Its climax is not a meat dish (though meat makes an appearance in the form of Dexter beef and venison) but a slice of beetroot, crowned with creamy clouds of cod's roe and horseradish. The beetroot is an ancient French parsnip-shaped variety unfortunately named Crapaudine after its toad-like skin and, in Tommy's signature dish, it's been cooked in beef fat for four hours. Close your eyes and you'd think its robust flesh was meat. Indeed, the chefs dub it 'meatroot'.

The dish, like the pudding of foraged hogweed seed, honey and elderflower custard, and sheep's yogurt ice cream that follows it – and Tommy himself – is firmly rooted in the Yorkshire soil. In this case the soil of the family farm and kitchen garden surrounding the pub, where the Crapaudines are grown, as well as delicately flavoured alpine strawberries and even lemons. Like any good gardener-cook, Tommy also preserves and pickles so produce can be enjoyed in the fallow months – as the jars decorating the restaurant shelves testify.

After staying overnight in one of the inn's nine bedrooms (there are four in the pub itself and five in a house just up the road that once belonged to Tommy's grandmother), I pass the romantic 12th-century ruins of Byland Abbey on my way to the market town of Helmsley. Here, below the remains of the town's castle, the **Cinnamon Twist** bakery (01439 772115) does a brisk trade in teacakes, monster cheese straws and the sourdough loaves »

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM STAPLES



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that owner Mark Lazenby often works all night to produce (don't leave without one of his exquisite mini lemon curd tarts, lined with dark chocolate and burnt brown sugar). If you're on the hunt for picnic provisions, pick up a chubby hunter (Yorkshire's answer to rock cakes) and a pot of rhubarb and tomato chutney at **Hunters** deli in the town's market square (huntersofhelmsley.com).

Next stop is the **Vine House Café**, inside the refurbished Victorian glasshouses that overlook Helmsley's walled garden, for a rustic lunch (vinehousecafehelmsley.co.uk). Beneath a sprawling vine, I try the homegrown spinach and pea soup, served in vintage crockery. I'm tempted by one of the scones but I manage to hold firm, saving space for a second course of wild mushrooms on sourdough with kale, duck egg and mushroom ketchup at **Mannion and Co's** café-deli (mannionandco.co.uk). Owner Andrew Burton used to cook in the Michelin-starred kitchen of the Star at Harome, not far from here. At Mannion the menu is more relaxed and Mediterranean, inspired by Andrew's regular charcuterie- and wine-sourcing trips to Italy and Spain.

Heading north-east, to the North York Moors proper, I pass pretty Hutton-le-Hole as I climb to a bleakly beautiful heather-clad plateau before dropping into Rosedale Abbey, and the **Graze on the Green** tea room (grazeonthegreen.co.uk). Here, I find another high-flying chef who has decided to follow a more simple path: co-owner James Appleton was formerly the pastry chef at the Lake District's Sharrow Bay then at Helmsley's Feversham Arms. Unsurprisingly, there's a killer cake selection here (don't miss the Yorkshire rhubarb and custard crumble cake) but the lunchtime menu also stretches to a seductive-sounding Yorkshire rarebit made with Great Yorkshire Brewery ale and mature cheddar.

There's more cheese – gouda, cheddar and comté-style varieties – at nearby Botton village. Run by the Camphill Village Trust, the site is a working community village housing adults with learning difficulties, and producing cheeses using milk from its own Shorthorn and Ayrshire cattle (cvt.org.uk/communities/botton-village). Botton runs a bakery too, and it's well worth adding breads, cheeses and homemade chutneys from its shop to your picnic.

Following the Esk river downstream, I reach leafy Egton Bridge. It's normally a sleepy place, but each August it reverberates with applause as the winners of the village's gooseberry show, which has been

going strong since 1800, are announced (egtongooseberryshow.org.uk). In summer, you can taste the fruits in full glory in the fool served at the village's friendly **Wheatsheaf Inn** (wheatsheafegton.com). In winter, order the sticky oxtail and fall-apart pork belly instead, then wander over to the **Lickerish Tooth** distillery to pick up some of its unusual wax-sealed gins (thelickerishtooth.com).

From here, I head south to Goathland (or Aidensfield, as fans of the *Heartbeat* TV series know it) to stay at **The Farmhouse**, a stylish b&b (thefarmhouseyorkshire.co.uk) that also has two luxurious self-catering cottages (our pick is the Instagram-worthy Potting Shed, a cute timber-framed building with sheepskin-draped sofas and a table out on its terrace that's made for breakfasting outdoors). If you've somehow managed to resist the local farm shops, bakeries and delis on your way here, owners Clare and Chris Carr, or their Cordon Bleu-trained daughter Sarah, will cook you a locally inspired candlelit dinner if you order in advance. On the night I stay there's a menu of Whitby crab with prawns, Granny Smith apple, root ginger and fennel, followed by game pie, whose pot-roasted pheasant and partridge (dispatched by Chris) are bathed in a brandy and chestnut sauce. Queen of puddings and handmade sloe gin truffles round off proceedings. It's simple, gutsy homecooking at its best.

The coast is only 20 minutes' drive away but feels like another world. I join it at sleepy Sandsend, with its spectacular views of Whitby's skeletal abbey a few miles south. Unsurprisingly, seafood is the star at **Estbek House**, a restaurant-with-rooms in an 18th-century mansion a pebble's throw from the beach (estbekhouse.co.uk). North Sea lobster, Whitby cod and diver-caught scallops delivered fresh that morning jostle for a place on the menu created by co-owner-chef Tim Lawrence. I go for the signature seafood pie – not your usual potato-laden affair but a stack of lobster, cod, shrimps and scallops on a cream sauce. It's elegantly paired with a Xanadu Semillon Sauvignon Blanc from the antipodean wine list assembled by co-owner David, who over the years developed a passion for the regional wines of Australia and New Zealand, and now imports many of them direct from their producers. There's a standout cheeseboard, too, featuring Sandsend, a kelp-infused cheddar made by Elizabeth Snowden at **Whitby Cheese** (whitbycheese.com).

Across the beck is the **Bridge Cottage Bistro** (bridgecottagebistro.com). In its seaside location you might expect paninis and jacket potatoes but »



PREVIOUS PAGE: NORTH YORK MOORS RAILWAY. ABOVE (LEFT TO RIGHT): SHEEP'S EYE GIN AT LICKERISH TOOTH; WILD MUSHROOMS WITH DUCK EGG ON SOURDOUGH AT MANNION AND CO; BRIDGE COTTAGE BISTRO. OPPOSITE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) TEA CAKES AT CINNAMON TWIST BAKERY; WHITBY; THE FARMHOUSE'S STARTER OF WHITBY CRAB; CRAPAUDINE BEETROOT AT THE BLACK SWAN AT OLDSTEAD

PHOTOGRAPHS: CLARE HARGREAVES, TONY BARTHOLOMEW

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chef-owner Alex Perkins produces a much more imaginative range of dishes. First, though, I meet Steve. Steve, as regulars know, is Alex's sourdough starter. It has just celebrated its eighth birthday and produces a superb loaf, with just the right degree of spring in its step. Served with home-cultured roasted yeast butter, it's so good it would make a meal on its own. But I dive into a plate of scallops paired with parsley root purée, then lemon sole with burnt butter and capers. If you're visiting on the Sabbath, book in for the slow-cooked Sunday menu, when you can relax over a comfortably slow-cooked main and pudding for a bargain £15.50.

I wind up my tour at Whitby – weird and wonderful in equal measure. Among its many claims to fame are being the port from which Captain Cook took his first seafaring steps, in 1746, and being the setting for *Dracula*. Another is herrings, and in the cobbled old town you can still taste kippers in the hut where **Fortune's** has been smoking for five generations (fortuneskippers.co.uk). Grab one to fortify you before tackling the 199 steps to Whitby's ruined 7th-century cliff-top abbey.

Serenaded by seagulls as I cross the swing bridge over the Esk, I climb the streets on the other side to reach the **Whitby Deli**, where the Extraordinary Garlic Pickle is a locals' favourite and you'll find Yorkshire cheeses, craft beers and gins galore (thewhitbydeli.co.uk). But the newest arrival on Whitby's food scene is chef Andrew Pern's vast, nautical-themed **The Star Inn the Harbour** (starintheharbour.co.uk). Its lengthy please-all menus, and adjoining ice-cream parlour are a far cry from Pern's more formal Star Inn. My lobster cassoulet with a lovage herb crust is a mix of posh and homely. It certainly scores for novelty, but the delicate flavours of lobster are slightly eclipsed by the grain mustard.

Time your visit right and you'll coincide with a goth weekend, when the black-clad tribe parades the streets in regency dress and top hats, and attends a vampire's ball. Whether you happen on them or not, the food in this bleakly beautiful corner of Britain is certain to bewitch you.

HOW TO DO IT

Clare travelled to York with CrossCountry Trains (crosscountrytrains.co.uk). Double rooms at The Farmhouse in Goathland cost from £120, b&b (thefarmhouseyorkshire.co.uk). For more information visit northyorkmoors.org.uk. Follow Clare @larderloutUK.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: WHITBY DELI'S GARLIC PICKLE; SCALLOPS WITH PARSLEY ROOT PURÉE AT BRIDGE COTTAGE BISTRO; WHITBY HARBOUR; GRAZE ON THE GREEN TEAROOM; LOBSTER CASSOULET WITH A LOVAGE HERB CRUST AT THE STAR INN THE HARBOUR; A WHITBY GOTH; CINNAMON TWIST'S CHEESE STRAWS