BIRMINGHAM MAIL SATURDAY, AUGUST 16, 2014



TRAVEL



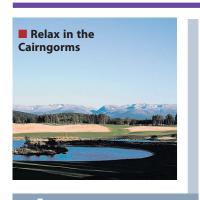
BEST BRITISH BREAK . . .

ENJOY a two night break in Devon, price £50 per person, based on four sharing, at Woolacombe Bay Holiday Parks, from August 23. Call 0843 208 0368 or click www.woolacombe.com/bp

Snowdonia's many attractions







short stays

ESCAPE to the Scottish Highlands staying at the newly refurbished four-star Macdonald Highlands Hotel, in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park, with their exclusive summer short break deal.

Guests can enjoy a two night stay from £89 per room. per night, and indulge in a fresh cream tea on your first day and full Scottish breakfast each morning. Children under 12 can stav

free, including breakfast! To book visit MacdonaldHotels .co.uk/summer-online or call 0844 879 9000.

This break has to be booked by August 31 for stavs until September 7.

late breaks

SPEND August Bank Holiday camping on the Cote d'Azur for £265 (saving

The deal on a seven-night getaway, starting on August 24 with Venue Holidays includes a fully-equipped Espace tent sleeping two adults and up to four children at Camping Les Pins Parasols at Frejus, a campsite offering sporting facilities for all ages including a swimming pool.

Ferry crossings can be arranged by Venue and cost, for example, £118 for a weekend P&O Dover/Calais saver ferry crossing for car and passengers. Call 01233 629950 or click www.venue holidays.co.uk

■ Campsite at Les Pins

T'S a tale to melt the heart of every dog owner. One day back in the 13th century, the Welsh prince Llywelyn The Great went hunting, leaving his faithful hound Gelert at the castle with his baby son.

On Llywelyn's return, Gelert sprang into his master's arms - but his jaws were smeared with blood. Alarmed, the prince rushed to his

son's room. The cot was empty, the bedsheets also bloodied. Believing he'd been betrayed,

Llywelyn thrust his sword into Gelert's side.

The dog's dying yelp, however, was answered by a baby's cry. The sound led Llywelyn to his unharmed son. Lying nearby was the lifeless body of a great wolf which Gelert had killed to protect the infant. The prince, realising his terrible mistake, is said to have never smiled again.

Of course, it's probably just a shaggy dog story. Nevertheless, in the pretty Welsh village of Beddgelert (meaning Gelert's grave) stands a large rock marking the supposed final resting place of Llywelyn's pet.

Just across a field from the rock is Coed Gelert, a small group of five-star cottages where my wife and I, and our three-year-old daughter Cerys, enjoyed a long weekend.

Beddgelert has a range of amenities, including inns and cafés serving a la carte meals, bar snacks, fresh pizzas, fish and chips and award-winning local ice cream.

Located in the heart of Snowdonia, where the rivers Glaslyn and Colwyn meet, the village is the perfect base for keen walkers, as well as cyclists and canoeists.

Within walking distance is Sygun Copper Mines, where you'll find winding tunnels and colourful chambers with stalactite and stalagmite formations.

Beddgelert is also a stop on the route of the Welsh Highland Railway. The steam-hauled trains travel 25 miles between Caernarfon station (a stone's throw from the historic castle) on the north coast to Porthmadog on the west coast.

Discounted fares are available for Coed Gelert guests.

The WHR's western terminus is shared with the Ffestiniog Railway, built in 1836 to carry quarried slate the 13 miles from the mountains at Blaenau Ffestiniog to the sea.

Unfortunately, these two great little railways were still closed for winter during our visit but we were able to get on track elsewhere in Snowdonia at Llanberis, to be precise.

The village sits at the foot of Snowdon, the highest peak in England and Wales, but owes its existence to a mountain called Elidir on the opposite side of Lake

> The slopes of Elidir once formed the Dinorwic slate quarry - the second largest in the world -and the scars are still very evident today. In 1842, a railway was opened to take the slate to a

> > port on the

re-opened as a tourist attraction, using the same steam engines.

Today, the Llanberis Lake Railway runs along the shores of Lake Padarn, passing the 13th century Dolbadarn Castle built by Llywelyn. The hour-long, five-mile return journey is a leisurely way to enjoy

The other small railway in Although the train was operating during our visit, the snow-topped hero of every tea-drinking Coronation Street fan in the land Why? Well, the mountain was

chosen as the site for a new fast response power station and work began on Europe's largest excavation project, taking 10 years and costing £425m.

Dinorwic slate quarry

was closed. Elidir

became the unsung

A chamber 51m high, 180m long and 23m wide was dug deep into the mountain to house the power station, along with 10 miles of tunnels. Water from an reservoir high up on Elidir is discharged

■ THE Snowdon Sherpa bus

other areas of the national

of the cottages

formation call

■ FOR more

Joan Firth on

01766 890880

snowdonia-

cottages.net

■ Coed Geler

service, offering easy access to

park, stops within a few vards

The electricity generated can meet the demands of millions of kettles being switched on during the ad

another of Llanberis' many Another fascinating day was spent

at Greenwood Forest Park, near Caernarfon, home to the world's first people-powered rollercoaster.

The Green Dragon uses the funicular system developed in the Welsh mines. Riders walk up a hill

> slides down a track. raising the empty system, to a top station. The riders then climb the hill again to board the coaster, with gravity doing the rest.

home to lots more eco-friendly fun including karts. canoes, treehouses, a barefoot trail and the longest sledge run in Wales. On the Sunday we went to church, as you do. This was no ordinary church, though. No prayers or

Llanberis Lake Railw

hymns, but it was a heavenly place for Cervs. The church in question has been turned into The Fun Centre, an enormous soft ■ Gelert's grave play area in Caernarfon.

There are the usual ball pools and rope bridges but what really separates the toddlers from the teens here are the 25ft drop vertical slides. They are such a thrill that the centre hosts adults-only evenings.

No break in Snowdonia is ever

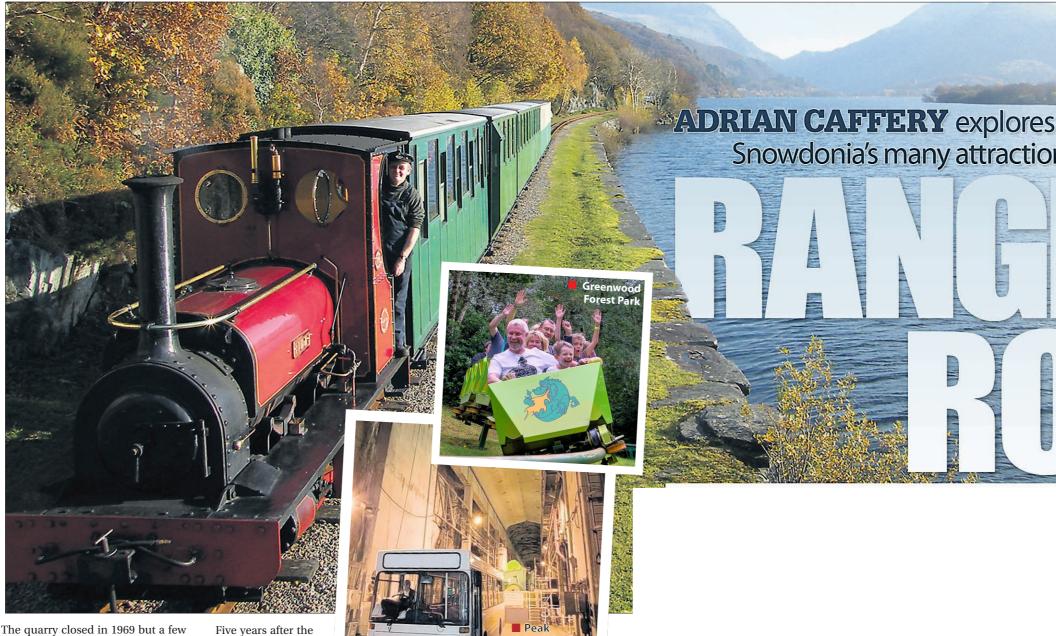
complete without a visit to the fairytale village of Portmeirion.

The mix of contrasting classical, palladian, arts & crafts and gothic styles somehow gel perfectly. With its fountains, grotto, lighthouse and

Italianate bell tower, it's a magical place. Our guide regaled us with tales of celebrities

who have stayed in the self-catering cottages, including George Harrison, Brian Epstein and Noel Coward, who wrote Blythe Spirit in five days there.

And he told us how the pet cemetery was established by one of Portmeirion's eccentric tenants, who preferred the company of dogs to humans and read The Bible to them from behind a screen. Unlike in Gelert, there's no reason to suspect they were sent to doggy heaven with the errant thrust of a sword.



years later part of the line was

views of the Snowdonia range.

Llanberis runs up Mount Snowdon. summit (where the café has been transformed in an £8m project) was out of reach so we decided to leave that until next time.

NEED TO KNOW

■ ADRIAN CAFFERY was a

places he visited can be found

■ THE family stayed at Coed

three two-bedroomed cottages

enclosed garden and parking.

guest of Attractions Of Snowdonia. Details of all the

Gelert in Beddgelert, a purpose-built developm

and two three-bedroomed

cottages, each with its own

The owners live onsite to

ensure a warm welcome.

through turbines in the chamber and into Lake Peris, then pumped back up during off-peak times.

breaks of popular TV shows. The power station has become

attractions, dramatically rebranded Electric Mountain. Stepping off the bus which took me on a mind-blowing, hour-long tour of the cavern was like entering the lair of a super-villain in a James Bond movie

to a cabin which then

Snowdon mountain range has 11 peaks over 600m high